

Ad Infinitum 821

Chapter 821 Old Friend

A faint fog filled the darkness as if it were hiding something.

Shang Jianyao and Genava walked forward silently with their weapons in hand. They had yet to turn on their searchlights; the night-vision capabilities that the military exoskeleton and the smart bot had were still adequate.

After walking for a while, Genava's head which was hidden in the Chameleon bionic artificial intelligence armor suddenly turned 360 degrees, and the red glow in his eyes quickly flickered.

"What's wrong?" Shang Jianyao asked curiously.

Genava replied in a slightly synthetic voice, "I keep having the feeling that something is following us."

The Shang Jianyaos were in an uproar. "Old Ge, you actually said 'feeling!'"

"In such a situation, shouldn't you be analyzing the percentage of the various possibilities?"

"As a smart bot, you have to be precise in your words and be pragmatic when it comes to reconnaissance."

Or

After the Shang Jianyaos finished speaking in a cacophony, Genava calmly replied, "After entering the fog, the electromagnetic interference worsened significantly. My reconnaissance range and abilities have been greatly affected. In such a situation, I sometimes can't even determine if the information I obtain comes from an illusion."

"I understand." Shang Jianyao changed his attitude and expressed his understanding. He then said, "In the café, I secretly tried to use the communications system embedded in the exoskeleton to communicate with Big White, but I didn't receive any response."

“However, we were able to do it between us,” Geneva stated an objective fact.

“What about now?” Shang Jianyao’s voice entered Geneva’s audio processing through the communications system.

Geneva quickly replied, “It’s still relatively clear, but it’s also affected to a certain extent.”

He had relied on the communications system to respond.

At the same time, he warned Shang Jianyao, “It’s unsuitable to stay in an environment blanketed by electromagnetic anomalies for extended periods. It will cause indelible harm to your body.”

Carbon-based humans were indeed more fragile than silicon-based humans.

“Give me two more hours,” Shang Jianyao said.

Geneva was a little surprised this was an emotion he had simulated because such an answer exceeded what Shang Jianyao’s behavior database ought to contain.

“You actually didn’t say: ‘the night is long; the Arbiter of Fate blesses thee.’” Geneva expressed his confusion.

Shang Jianyao sincerely said, “It’s not like we have to finish the exploration this time and can’t enter again in the future. I start work early at 8 and knock off work at noon; Little Red is very envious of that. Besides, we don’t have to worry too much about the effects electromagnetic radiation will have on the body. With the protection of certain devices, it won’t be a problem.

“The Arbiter of Fate’s protection has to be used on important matters, such as guarding against the Heartless disease. We can’t waste it on such trivial details.”

“That’s indeed an idea,” Geneva suggested sincerely, “but there’s no need for you to add a few words from what you learned from the Old World’s entertainment every now and then. It’s not conducive for communication.”

Shang Jianyao smiled. “This isn’t to help communication but to liven up the mood. Old Ge, you’re too serious, blah, blah, blah.”

“What does it mean?” Geneva was no stranger to the Old World’s entertainment, but he still couldn’t understand what this sentence meant.

“To put it simply,” Shang Jianyao replied seriously, “I haven’t thought of what to say next. I’ll replace it with ‘blah, blah.’”

Geneva temporarily fell silent.

At this moment, Shang Jianyao seemed to recall the main point of the discussion. “Old Ge, did you just say that you felt something following us?”

“Yes, but I’m worried that this is only fake information produced by an environmental influence on me.” Geneva spun his head as he spoke, investigating his surroundings.

The Chameleon bionic artificial intelligence armor’s head was almost twisted into a hemp rope. Fortunately, Geneva rotated back again.

Shang Jianyao frankly replied, “Just pretend that there is. I want to see how long he can keep up. According to the current situation, we are getting closer and closer to the source of the problem. The further we go, the more trouble we will encounter.”

He meant that if something was really following them, the environment might not help resolve the problem.

“That’s true.” Geneva didn’t harp on the problem.

On their side, one was a smart bot with outstanding resistance to attacks and wasn’t afraid of Heartless disease infection and most Awakened abilities. The other had ‘the night is long; the Arbiter of Fate blesses thee.’ What was there to worry about?

After moving forward in the foggy darkness for about ten minutes, Shang Jianyao and Geneva passed through an intersection and entered the next street. The reason they didn’t turn left or right was that they realized that there were clearly more corpses ahead.

In the areas they had previously passed through, perhaps the Heartless needed food, or perhaps the Icefield creatures had been here before—almost all the corpses had been cleared, leaving behind only traces of fighting, shooting, and blood splatters.

Here, the corpses on the street and by the roadside were like sandbags strewn across the ground. They had basically been reduced to bones, and they wore clothes of different colors and had varying degrees of decay.

Genava quickly did a simple reconnaissance. “Some of these corpses died from an attack, and some don’t immediately show any cause of death.”

Shang Jianyao nodded and said seriously, “Is this the core area of the Heartless outbreak? It was too chaotic back then. The Heartless killed each other and couldn’t calm down? As for the ones who escaped, they didn’t dare to approach the source of the problem. They would rather starve to death than enter this area to gather food?”

Genava analyzed the situation and said, “This is a guess, but there are still too many possibilities.”

“Yes.” Shang Jianyao didn’t retort.

He switched on the military exoskeleton’s searchlights and checked the corpses with the help of the yellowish light. His focus was mainly on the clothes, items, and the corpses’ possible heights.

Genava knew what he was looking for and didn’t say a word. He quietly followed behind to prevent any accidents.

As they walked, the two of them simultaneously saw a street lamp lit in the distance like a servant welcoming a guest.

“Another New World projection?” Shang Jianyao muttered excitedly.

“Probably.” Genava believed that this was the most likely possibility.

Shang Jianyao didn't speed up his pace. He roughly scanned the corpses along the way at his original pace and didn't discover any humans suspected to be from Pangu Biology.

He and Genava then saw the area illuminated by the street lamp clearly.

Near the road was a tree with dense branches and leaves. Beside the tree was a brown wooden bench.

On the brown bench sat a man in his late twenties. His hair was neatly combed, and he wore a formal gray suit with black stripes and a relatively small pair of round glasses.

At this moment, the man was leisurely reading a newspaper under the street lamps' light.

"Wu Meng!" Shang Jianyao shouted happily.

The man was Wu Meng, who was sealed in Wasteland Ruin 13.

His projection had actually appeared here.

Shang Jianyao then turned his head and sighed with emotion at Genava. "We really met an old friend in a foreign land."

"In a way." Genava didn't give the exact probability and chose an ambiguous term that was closer to human habits.

Wu Meng clearly couldn't hear Shang Jianyao's greeting, but the experienced Shang Jianyao decisively gave up on the Berserker assault rifle in his hand and took out the small jade Buddha.

Green light lit up and silently surged into the surroundings, making the fog seem to subside significantly.

Wu Meng looked up at Shang Jianyao and Genava through his small, round glasses. He slowly smiled. "You guys..."

He still spoke in the Red River language.

“It’s us.” Shang Jianyao asked curiously, “Weren’t you sealed in Wasteland Ruin 13? Why do you still appear in the New World?”

He seemed to treat his previous guess as the real situation and naturally believed that Wu Meng’s appearance here was a reflection of the New World.

Wu Meng’s expression turned a little cold. “Without the New World, how can they seal me?”

“Oh, I see.” Shang Jianyao acted as if he had come to a realization.

Without waiting for him to ask again, Wu Meng folded the newspaper in his hand and smiled. “I know you want to know many things, but I don’t plan on answering you. I can only remind you not to venture deeper. There are dangers there that you can’t deal with at the moment.”

Just as Wu Meng said that, the area illuminated by the street lamps warped.

This scene flickered a few times before completely returning to the darkness that was filled with light fog.

“Why do the New World’s projections get destroyed after just a few words?” Shang Jianyao was extremely aggrieved.

It was the same when he communicated with Flora and Barnard. It was the same when he spoke to Wu Meng.

Genava guessed, “Maybe a certain force is preventing those in the New World from communicating with people in the Ashlands.”

“Just like what the Salvation Army’s earliest batch of New World powerhouses encountered?” Shang Jianyao put away the small jade Buddha and raised his right hand to press the armor on his left chest.

“Probably.” Geneva felt that the two matters were essentially the same, but the way it was presented was different.

He suggested to Shang Jianyao, “Do we return now?”

“Why are we returning?” Shang Jianyao was very surprised.

Geneva replied, “Didn’t Wu Meng just say not to venture any deeper? Isn’t there danger ahead that we can’t deal with?”

Shang Jianyao smiled. “Wu Meng also said that the more dangerous it is, the more one should take risks. He might be hinting at us to continue forward. Yes, he can’t be clear when there’s a force stopping him!”

Geneva was just about to speak when he suddenly spun his head. “I feel like we’re being followed by something again.”

Bang!

Shang Jianyao—who had secretly made preparations—used the exoskeleton’s grenade launcher to fire a flare behind him.

Under the sudden explosion of light, he—who was wearing a helmet—saw a black, cheetah-sized feline creature on the balcony of a distant building.

The creature’s green eyes narrowed from the flare.

Chapter 822 Each

Bang! Bang! Bang!

When Shang Jianyao fired the flare backward, Geneva quickly turned around and pulled the trigger. However, he—who should’ve hit everything he fired at—failed to hit the target.

The bullets struck the edge of the balcony, stirring up sparks.

The cheetah-like feline creature was alarmed. It escaped from the agitation brought about by the flare and jumped into the window corresponding to the balcony.

Boom!

The grenade fired by Shang Jianyao landed on the balcony, producing a blazing fireball that shattered many of the nearby windows.

After the explosion subsided, Genova explained his 'mistake.' "My aiming system has suffered rather significant interference."

Shang Jianyao didn't mock him and honestly said, "My vision was also affected to a certain extent. I originally wanted to bombard the room connected to the balcony and force the large cat to jump onto the street. In the end... Sigh..."

He was a little disappointed about this.

Genava searched for a while but didn't find any traces of the gigantic feline creature. He then said to Shang Jianyao, "This might be the animal Big White warned us to be careful of."

"What's there to be careful about? It only knows how to follow us secretly." Shang Jianyao expressed his indignation. "Be it long-range or close combat, it won't be a problem for me to give it a one-hand handicap."

Genava glanced at his paralyzed left hand and didn't argue with him. He said in a slightly synthetic voice, "I've roughly figured out why Big White said that."

"Why?" Shang Jianyao always asked when puzzled.

Genava answered with the pertinent answer, "I searched through my database and used the term 'feline creature.' I realized that the last time it appeared was in the city ruin covered in snow. Back then, Little White saw a large, white feline creature.

“That place doesn’t have much in common with Ceningmis. The most important thing is that it has a certain connection with the Eighth Research Institute. It’s only a suspicion, but there’s no doubt about it.”

“Are you saying that the large cat just now might be reared by the Eighth Research Institute?”
Shang Jianyao easily understood Genava’s meaning.

He wasn’t surprised at all and wasn’t afraid at all. He looked like he wanted to get one for himself.

“Yes.” Genava’s chameleon-like head nodded.

Shang Jianyao thought for a moment and said, “Then, where should we find the Eighth Research Institute personnel? Sigh, we were too anxious before. Otherwise, we could’ve gotten the big cat to lead the way.”

“It might not be long before that feline creature brings Eighth Research Institute personnel over,” Genava voiced his inference. “It should be one of the Eighth Research Institute’s members in charge of patrolling Ceningmis. Animals aren’t afraid of the Heartless disease, nor are they worried about suffering anything in the core area of electromagnetic disruption.”

Shang Jianyao sighed. “I should’ve spoken to it properly and told it that envoys aren’t killed even when two countries fight.”

Genava had already learned not to answer Shang Jianyao according to his train of thought because of how variable it was. He directly said, “I suggest we evacuate Ceningmis now and rendezvous with Big White and the others to defend against any impending attacks from the Eighth Research Institute.”

“The more dangerous it is, the more one should take risks, Old Ge.” Shang Jianyao replied with Wu Meng’s words again. Following that, he smiled and added, “I really want to see how the people from the Eighth Research Institute can pass through this area that has a certain level of overlap with the New World. I also want to see if they can still find us after you activate the Chameleon bionic artificial intelligence armor’s stealth function.”

“You also need to do something about your scent...” Genava helped find any existing flaws. He then said, “You can’t turn on the searchlights along the way. This way, you won’t be able to check the corpses on the way. What’s the point of continuing forward?”

Shang Jianyao replied without hesitation, “We at least have to figure out the root cause of the problem during this expedition-uh, eliminate or confirm the possibility of a New World node.”

“Then, let’s go deeper quick.” Once he made a decision, Geneva—as a smart bot-definitely wouldn’t be indecisive or hesitant.

“Alright!” Shang Jianyao turned around, bent his back slightly, and assumed a running posture. During this process, he used the biological agent provided by the company to mask his smell.

However, Shang Jianyao didn’t run with large strides; instead, he remained in his spot.

Upon seeing Shang Jianyao motionless for a few seconds, Geneva asked kindly, “Do you need me to shout ‘1, 2, 3’ for you to run?”

Shang Jianyao shook his head. “There’s no need. I suddenly thought of a problem.”

“What problem?” Geneva asked.

“Weren’t we previously attacked by a Superior Heartless?”

Geneva couldn’t keep up with Shang Jianyao’s jumpy train of thought.

“Yes.” Geneva moved his metal neck up and down. “What’s wrong with that?”

Shang Jianyao said seriously, “Back then, I was affected and forgot how to use my abilities; it was like my brain had been hit by an ability similar to Limbs Immobility. It took me dozens of seconds to recover completely.

“If the Superior Heartless is only at the Sea of Origins level, I could’ve escaped the corresponding effects in seconds. Furthermore, the influence won’t be that serious. I suspect that he’s a Superior Heartless at the Mind Corridor level, but how can a Heartless defeat the island of fear and psychological traumas? How can he advance?”

This was something that creatures without intelligence couldn’t do.

Countless data entered Geneva's main module as he did rapid calculations.

After a few seconds, Geneva said, "This was our original guess. Didn't we later confirm that early Awakened didn't enter Star Cluster Hall at all?"

"Star Cluster Hall, Sea of Origins, and Mind Corridor are suspected of being built by some existence or are relics of the Old World's researchers. In other words, even if an Awakened doesn't rely on Star Cluster Hall, clear the Sea of Origins, or explore the Mind Corridor, it's still possible to enhance their abilities. The path is unknown, and the difficulty is greater.

"Since there's no need to clear the Sea of Origins, there's no need to defeat the islands of fear and psychological trauma."

Shang Jianyao came to a realization. "Are those Superior Heartless in such a situation?"

"It's only a guess for the time being." Geneva wasn't sure.

Shang Jianyao cast his gaze deep into the fog again and shouted softly, "One, two, three, run!"

He ran out like an arrow. With the help of the military exoskeleton, he ran stably and fluidly even though one hand was paralyzed.

Geneva followed closely behind.

This time, Shang Jianyao ignored the corpses along the street and headed for the fog's deepest depths. He forcefully controlled his strength, preventing the metal bones under his feet from making any obvious sounds when colliding with the ground.

After running for a while, Shang Jianyao suddenly turned around, held the Berserker assault rifle, and pulled the trigger at a dark alley.

A figure was shuffling over with clear aggression.

At the same time, Geneva also raised his arm and aimed at a window in another building.

There was also a figure there. He seemed to want to break the glass and jump down to attack Shang Jianyao and Geneva.

Bang! Bang! Bang! Shang Jianyao and Geneva fired at the same time. This time, in order to prevent relatively strong electromagnetic interference, they didn't insist on precision and directly covered the area with firepower.

Amidst gunshots, the glass windows shattered. Bullet holes appeared in the walls and cemented ground on the side of the alley.

The two figures were also penetrated by the bullets, but ripples ebbed out from the penetration; they didn't suffer any damage.

"Illusion?" Geneva calmly stopped firing and raised a possibility.

The two figures did their own things.

One pounced to a corner of the alley and nibbled at the darkness as if there was delicious prey there.

The other passed through the window and landed on the street. He swayed a few times and 'died' on the spot.

Shang Jianyao gave a terse acknowledgment. "Illusions similar to those of Flora and Barnard?"

"But this doesn't come from the overlapping of the New World. It's more like some scenes after Ceningmis suffered the disaster." Geneva quickly analyzed the situation. "This was recorded by the chaotic electromagnetic environment?"

Shang Jianyao was delighted when he heard that. "This means that we're in the right direction! We're much closer to the root cause of the problem!"

He meant that they hadn't encountered such a situation prior but did so now because only such situations happened in the disaster's core area.

“Probably,” Geneva replied impartially.

Shang Jianyao waved his right hand that was holding the Berserker assault rifle. “Let’s continue deeper then!”

At the intersection of the western mountains at the edge of Ceningmis.

Jiang Baimian and the others let the jeep park deeper into the forest to prevent it from being discovered by the Eighth Research Institute’s ‘patrollers.’

“We can’t contact Hey and the others anymore.” Jiang Baimian—who was wearing a military exoskeleton—stopped her attempts. “The electromagnetic environment there worsens the deeper they go?”

Bai Chen nodded and said worriedly, “The deeper they go, the higher the chances of them encountering personnel from the Eighth Research Institute. They won’t let anyone investigate what happened in Ceningmiss back then.”

“They can totally do what they did in Tai City and use long-range missiles to bury the city...” Jiang Baimian was perplexed.

“Maybe there’s no way to investigate the problem deep in Ceningmis. The Eighth Research Institute only wants to prevent the problem from spreading, and this can’t be resolved by bombardment,” guessed Long Yuehong

Jiang Baimian tersely acknowledged it. “I only hope Hey and Old Ge don’t encounter personnel from the Eighth Research Institute. We’ll talk about it when we make preparations in the future.”

“That’s right, that’s right,” Long Yuehong quickly echoed.

At this moment, Bai Chen pursed her lips and asked, “Team Leader, don’t you find our surroundings too quiet?”

Upon hearing Bai Chen’s question, Long Yuehong realized that the wind in the forest they were in seemed to have stopped.

It wasn't like that just now.

Chapter 823 Square

Long Yuehong felt his blood run cold as he felt the light in the forest dim significantly.

The problem won't be appearing on our side, will it? he thought.

Jiang Baimian—who was wearing a military exoskeleton—jumped to the top of the jeep and used the momentum to jump to a nearby tree to look around. After a few seconds, she slowly said, “It's not only our forest that's abnormal; the entire Ceningmis is also abnormal. The sky here has darkened significantly, and time seems to have frozen. The closer it is to the city, the worse the situation becomes.”

What froze wasn't time but all kinds of activity.

Bai Chen guessed, “Hey and Old Ge encountered something in Ceningmis City that triggered a certain change?”

“That's possible.” Jiang Baimian once again relied on the communications system attached to the military exoskeleton to contact Shang Jianyao and Genava, but to no avail.

She could only jump down from the tree and say to Bai Chen and Long Yuehong, “Little White, wear the last military exoskeleton. Little Red, wear the Blackmarsh Iron Snake. We have to stay sharp to deal with any deterioration in the situation.”

“Alright!” Long Yuehong immediately replied.

As he walked to the jeep's trunk, he laughed self-deprecatingly. “I thought Hey and Old Ge didn't encounter anyone from the Eighth Research Institute, but it turns out we were the ones who encountered them...”

With a whoosh, Jiang Baimian and Bai Chen cast their gazes at him at the same time.

“Put on the smart armor quickly,” Bai Chen urged him.

Long Yuehong quickly shut his mouth and strode to the back of the jeep.

Shang Jianyao and Genava quietly walked along the street and ventured deep into Ceningmis.

The illusions around them gradually increased. From one to two figures, they appeared everywhere.

They were Heartless, killing each other as if they had gone crazy.

In the outside world, the Heartless wouldn't attack their own kind unless they couldn't find food and were about to starve to death.

“From their dressing, it should've happened sometime after the Old World's destruction.” Genava used the communications system to communicate with Shang Jianyao. This inevitably brought with it the rustling sounds of static, giving off the feeling that the communication would break off at any moment.

“What do you mean by dressing sometime after the Old World's destruction?” Shang Jianyao asked any question on his mind.

Genava replied honestly, “The cloth is old, and the design has a sense of patching that seeks simplicity and pragmatism.”

As Shang Jianyao ran, he moved his neck up and down. “This should be the scene when Ceningmis was destroyed by the Heartless disease. It was recorded by the chaotic electromagnetic environment and constantly replicated.”

The general scene at that moment was naturally reproduced in Genava's main module: Regardless of the reason, a sizable passage opened up between Ceningmis and the New World. The Heartless virus surged out, accompanied by an electromagnetic pulse.

“How tragic...” Shang Jianyao sighed sincerely.

He said in anticipation the next second, “Was the scene of that Old Task Force creating the ‘problem’ also recorded? That way, we might be able to easily investigate what happened back then!”

“Very likely. It depends on which scenes were recorded.” Geneva agreed.

Shang Jianyao instantly accelerated and passed through the Heartless that filled the street. Geneva reacted quickly and followed without leaving a gap.

During this process, Shang Jianyao still hid his human consciousness to prevent the Eighth Research Institute from sensing him from afar.

He and Geneva ran for a while before approaching a square.

The faint fog in the square clearly became thicker, and the darkness was dyed with hints of black.

In such an environment, a lamp was lit; it was located in the middle of the square.

On the stone railing beside the dried-up fountain, there were rows of illusory bookshelves around it. Beside the bookshelf, behind a reading table, sat a man in a black T-shirt.

He had his head lowered and had it buried into his raised palms. His black hair was messy.

Shang Jianyao and Geneva noticed at the same time that the ‘veins’ on this person’s neck bulged like warped earthworms crawling on them. His entire body trembled slightly.

This allowed them to sense the man’s pain without seeing his face.

“Another person from the New World.” Shang Jianyao slowed down, and his voice reached Geneva’s ‘ears’ through the communications system.

“Yes,” Geneva warned, “but he doesn’t seem to be in an okay state. He’s different from the previous ones, such as Flora, Barnard, and Wu Meng.”

The three of them appeared relatively relaxed. Although the first two had their individual problems, they at least didn't show any obvious pain.

Shang Jianyao smiled. "Are you trying to say that I shouldn't communicate with him?"

Genava didn't deny it. "Yes, this place is filled with danger. You've already given up on identifying the corpses for the time being and only plan on quickly confirming the root cause of the problem. There's no need to cause further trouble."

"Understood." Shang Jianyao smiled. "Do I look like such a rash person?"

Genava didn't answer him.

Shang Jianyao then accelerated and crept forward.

His intention was so obvious and simple that Genava could tell at a glance: He wanted to sneak through the square filled with Heartless illusions and not attract the New World man's attention.

In fact, he can't see or hear you. You are even hiding your human consciousness so that he can't sense you... Genava wanted to say that there was no need for that, but he ultimately chose to let him be.

Shang Jianyao—who was wearing a military exoskeleton—jogged to the other end of the square. Genava mimicked him and made himself appear more sociable.

Suddenly, the black-haired man sitting behind the reading table looked up. His expression warped to a hideous state as his slightly red eyes looked at Shang Jianyao and Genava.

At the intersection of the western mountains at the edge of Ceningmis.

Jiang Baimian, Long Yuehong, and Bai Chen wore their equipment and warily monitored the situation in the distance and their surroundings to be prepared against any accidents.

Jiang Baimian casually sighed with emotion as she maintained high vigilance. "I wonder when Hey and Old Ge will return. I feel a chill staying here."

She didn't want her teammates to go overboard and mentally snap.

Bai Chen pursed her lips and said, "It's best to camp in the mountains in the future and distance ourselves from Ceningmis."

In this season, it was still snowing heavily outside the mountain. It wasn't as suitable as the environment in the mountains, so Bai Chen didn't suggest retreating to Icefield.

"Yes..." Jiang Baimian had just grunted when her head suddenly felt heavy.

Although she had never been drunk, she had read the corresponding experimental reports and different books. She had a certain level of understanding of such situations and felt that she was currently in a drunken stupor.

"Enemy contact!" Jiang Baimian forced herself to shout. At the same time, she quickly analyzed the current situation. In such a forest with sparse trees, a hypnotic gas won't be too effective. If not for the fact that the wind has already 'stopped,' it might not have affected anything. Furthermore, I'm wearing a helmet and a visor to protect myself. Although I didn't activate the anti-poison filter system, the situation shouldn't be in such a serious state just as I discovered it...

It should be an Awakened ability, but I can't sense the other party's human consciousness or his bioelectric signals. This means that the enemy is very likely an Awakened at the Mind Corridor level. The range of his abilities far exceeds mine...

How should I respond... In her drunken state, Jiang Baimian's thoughts gradually slowed down. Although she still clearly knew what she was doing and what she wanted to do, her reaction and thoughts turned sluggish.

Seizing the thought that came from experience and inspiration, she shouted at Bai Chen and Long Yuehong, "Hide behind the jeep!"

Long Yuehong and Bai Chen had also sensed the anomaly and followed Jiang Baimian's orders by staggering to the back of the jeep.

They acted as if they were performing drunken boxing.

After two to three seconds, Jiang Baimian and Bai Chen—who had the help of the military exoskeleton’s comprehensive warning system

-turned their bodies at the same time, turned their heads, and cast their gazes somewhere outside the forest.

About 100 meters away from them, a figure appeared.

He wore equipment that was very similar to the Chameleon-type bionic artificial intelligence armor with certain differences. He approached Jiang Baimian and the others.

This concealed his appearance and gender he was about 1.7 meters tall.

Bang! Bang! Bang! Boom! Boom!

Jiang Baimian, Long Yuehong, and Bai Chen fired their grenades and blanketed the enemy with firepower. However, it was unknown if it was because they were in a ‘drunken’ state or if there was another reason, but their bullets and grenades deviated in an astonishing manner. They failed to effectively hit the target at all, only producing bullet holes and cannon holes in the distant mud.

The enemy in the bionic artificial intelligence armor laughed. “From the looks of it, you don’t have any Mind Corridor-level Awakened here. You made me worry for quite some time.”

This person sounded like a woman, and she spoke in the Red River language.

Chapter 824 Abnormalities

He’s indeed an Awakened at the Mind Corridor level... This realization dawned on Jiang Baimian’s increasingly sluggish mind. She then had another question. Why did the enemy take the initiative to close the distance and take such obvious actions? This weakens the camouflage capabilities of the bionic artificial intelligence armor that’s similar to the Chameleon, allowing the military exoskeleton’s comprehensive warning system to detect her.

She clearly could've stayed in the spot where she can undetectably exert her influence and remotely attack from... Could it be that she's not good at weapons, and her abilities are biased toward control? There's nothing fatal?

In her drunken state, Jiang Baimian couldn't come up with the right answer. She could only say to Long Yuehong and Bai Chen again, "Hide on the other side of the jeep!"

The situation just now made her certain that it was very difficult for them to achieve their goal by firing. The only feasible solution now was to avoid the danger and seek out opportunities later.

The spot where the enemy appeared made her change their location from the jeep's rear to the other side.

The three Old Task Force members were beside the vehicle to begin with. Although they were tottering, finding it difficult to balance themselves, and their minds were clearly numb, they quickly moved to the other side of the jeep with the help of the military exoskeleton and bionic artificial intelligence armor. They used the vehicle—which was covered in bulletproof armor and special glass—as cover.

Bang! Bang! Bang! Several bullets slowly but rhythmically struck the jeep's surface, creating a few shallow depressions. It was only then that Jiang Baimian's numbing brain compared the situation to some of her past experiences.

The enemy clearly didn't dodge, and her team had covered the area with firepower, but they still failed to hit the target. The complete deviation from the target reminded her of something she had seen in First City's Apex Gladiator Arena.

Back then, an assassin had attacked a certain noble and was besieged. He was clearly on the ground and couldn't dodge any further, but the subsequent shots missed, brushing past his body and producing a humanoid outline!

It's rather similar... I remember that the assassin's price was that he was afraid of distorted creatures... Jiang Baimian immediately took out her spare hair tie and snapped it without much precision. She then held the short black string in both hands and twisted it.

Following that, Jiang Baimian raised her trembling hands, allowing the short, snake-like black string to escape the jeep's cover and be exposed to the enemy.

With a clang, a bullet mercilessly flew over and hit her hand. If not for the skeletal metal structure protecting her, she would've been hit.

The price isn't the fear of distorted creatures... It's either another price in the same domain or a similar ability... Jiang Baimian quickly retracted her hands.

Upon sensing the enemy's approach and slowly reducing their room for survival, she tried her best to maintain a basic level of clarity in her mind as she cast her gaze at Long Yuehong and Bai Chen.

The two Old Task Force members squatted there with their backs against the jeep's door as if they couldn't stabilize their bodies by themselves.

Jiang Baimian was originally waiting for the other party to come closer, but the enemy stopped moving as if she were preparing a more powerful weapon.

As these thoughts raced through her mind, Jiang Baimian shouted with her engorged tongue, "We have a bomb with a very large yield. If you force us into a corner, I'll use the preset command to detonate it. Believe me; even if you are 200 to 300 meters away, you would still be blown to smithereens!"

She didn't say that her team had a nuclear warhead, but she used its deterrence.

Many of the Old World information she had read told her that the nuclear bomb's greatest might was when it was in its missile silo.

The female enemy in the Chameleon-type artificial intelligence armor didn't react, but she didn't do anything else.

"If you-don't believe us... We can let you take a look... at the bomb." Jiang Baimian was still seriously 'drunk.'

Long Yuehong was the same; he was even a little confused.

Upon hearing his team leader's words, he slowly stood up, hunched his back, and sneaked to the back of the jeep, attempting to open the trunk and show the enemy the nuclear warhead.

Clang! Clang! Clang!

Several bullets struck him.

Fortunately, Long Yuehong had reflexively accepted this 'mission' because he was wearing the Blackmarsh Iron Snake bionic artificial intelligence armor. Its defense was outstanding, and he was unafraid of most firearms.

However, the powerful kinetic energy and his clearly weakened balance still pushed him to the ground.

Jiang Baimian-who was already preparedstretched out her left hand and dragged Long Yuehong back.

The enemy's response confused her. Shouldn't normal humans confirm if the other party really possesses such a powerful bomb to prevent themselves from losing their lives in a situation that might lead to mutual destruction?

Could it be that she has the confidence to prevent me from detonating the bomb-uh, a relatively strong electromagnetic interference?

Jiang Baimian hid there, slung her tactical backpack in front of her, and unzipped it.

If the enemy continued approaching and entered a 100-meter range, she could use Chaotic Right Hand.

The nuclear bomb's deterrence was a response, and the hidden Chaotic Right Hand was another plan. Jiang Baimian rarely only had one plan.

At this moment, she relied on the military exoskeleton's comprehensive warning system to discover that the enemy was retreating.

After retreating a certain distance, the other party activated the Chameleon-like bionic artificial intelligence armor and 'disappeared' from the comprehensive warning system's perception. If it weren't for the fact that the 'drunken' state was maintained and hadn't weakened at all, Jiang Baimian would've suspected that the enemy had already evacuated.

"Let's hide... in the car first." Bai Chen's tongue also showed signs of lolling. "I'm afraid that she'll circle around and fire, or throw something with line of sight."

Jiang Baimian's numb brain from the 'drunkenness' finally thought of a question: "There's no need for us... to stay... here. Get in the car... Storm out... and distance ourselves."

Bai Chen-who was beside the driver's seat immediately opened the door and got in. Although her actions were unsteady and appeared heart-wrenching, she barely achieved her designated goal.

Jiang Baimian also opened the backseat door and signaled for Long Yuehong to get in first. At the same time, she reached into her tactical backpack and grabbed the item named Chaotic Right Hand.

The next second, she felt the cold.

Although the temperature in Ceningmis was higher than in Icefield, it was still at temperatures of early spring. Under the negative price of Chaotic Right Hand, Jiang Baimian couldn't help but tremble.

The cold cleared her mind, making her feel like she was slapped by the cold winter wind after she was truly drunk. This way, her cognition recovered a little.

With the Drunk state still present, she could immediately sense the corresponding human consciousness once the other party entered a 100-meter range!

Jiang Baimian trembled as she sat in the car.

At this moment, a grenade flew over from the area right in front of the car!

Ceningmis, main city area, in a small square.

The warped-face man in the black T-shirt looked at Shang Jianyao and Geneva with bloodshot eyes. Unlike Flora and Barnard, he didn't lock onto a corresponding spot but instead seemed to be able to see the two of them.

Almost at the same time, Shang Jianyao's head throbbed, and he felt intense dizziness as if his soul was about to be sucked out of his body.

He had once experienced a similar feeling-it was a sign that he was about to be infected with the Heartless disease when he faced Doctor with the Salvation Army in Ubei! However, Shang Jianyao's reaction wasn't as intense as last time.

The severity was clearly lacking.

This might be due to the Life Angel necklace's blessing or the fact that the black-robed man had yet to truly return and had only spread the Heartless virus with the help of an excessive overlap. He was still separated by an entire New World.

"Heartless disease!" Shang Jianyao shouted.

Geneva immediately knew his companion's condition and quickly initiated the corresponding plan.

Although the original plans didn't consider the phenomenon of the New World overlapping with Ceningmis, there were similar situations that could be used as reference. Due to the New World node, Shang Jianyao showed precursors of contracting the Heartless disease.

Geneva raised his arm and spewed exaggerated electric arcs at the library illusion where the black-robed man was.

After the high-voltage electric current completely covered the area, distorting and dismembering the illusion, crackling sounds sounded.

Electromagnetism versus electromagnetism!

After the silver-white light subsided, the illusion of the library and the black-robed man disappeared.

“As expected, an overlap is a New World node in another sense.” Geneva gave his opinion.

Shang Jianyao wanted to massage his head, but he rubbed his helmet instead.

“I’m fine.” He didn’t hide his joy. “A high-voltage electric shock can indeed break the overlap between the New World and the Ashlands.”

Shang Jianyao then asked Geneva, “How many more times can your stored electricity dish out such shocks?”

“Not many,” Geneva replied honestly. “Although I brought some spare high-performance batteries, I have to consider the subsequent explorations and the expenditure needed to leave Icefield. I can’t replenish my battery here.”

Along the way, the Old Task Force had already used up most of their high-performance batteries. They had only replenished a little with the manual generators the Rootless team had. As for the usual solar power, it was extremely inefficient because of Icefield’s uniqueness.

Chapter 825 Cat and Mouse Game

Boom!

The grenade landed beside the jeep, stirring up waves and sending shards flying into the bulletproof armor and glass. It made Long Yuehong and Bai Chen in the car feel like they had encountered the unstoppable might of nature.

Jiang Baimian was very glad that closing the car door didn’t require much precision. Even in her ‘drunken’ state, she could finish it relatively easily. Otherwise, she really wasn’t sure if she could’ve done it before the grenade landed.

Without the jeep’s protection, even if she was wearing a military exoskeleton and could ensure that her vital spots weren’t damaged, she probably wouldn’t be spared.

The explosion quelled slightly, and Bai Chen started the car. She then controlled the steering wheel and floored the accelerator.

The jeep zoomed off, and for the first time, Bai Chen understood what drunk driving was.

Her limbs didn't listen to her brain's commands, and her brain's reaction was always one or two beats slower.

When she read the entertainment data of the old world, she actually didn't understand why getting drunk affected driving. After all, as a wilderness wanderer and ruin hunter who had suffered since she was a child, she rarely drank alcohol. Even when she went to Weed City's bars to get information and had to follow the local customs, she didn't indulge herself. At most, she would get a little tipsy.

At this moment, she finally understood how accurate the saying "if you drink, don't drive; if you drive, don't drink" was.

She couldn't control herself. Although the military exoskeleton equipment provided sufficient aid, it was ultimately external equipment that operated according to her various reactions. It was impossible to forcefully modify her movements.

This was just like how the precision aiming system only provided the wearer a reference. It could help adjust the aim and provide the correct posture and direction, but it couldn't force the wearer to shoot anywhere.

Of course, it was also possible if she wanted the exoskeleton equipment to be the primary driver and have the wearer be secondary. It was just like how some cars had the ability to drive automatically.

Unfortunately, this required some tweaking to change the system mode. Bai Chen couldn't complete it in a short period of time in her drunken state, and reality didn't give her enough space.

In addition, the automatic mode of the military exoskeleton device was completely inferior to that of an intelligent robot. The older the model, the more so. If one were to have it be the primary mode, it was inevitable that their movements would be rigid and filled with all kinds of problems.

As Bai Chen floored the accelerator, the jeep sped up.

This was much faster than she had expected because she failed to control the strength needed to step on the accelerator in her drunken state.

And clearly, the forest wasn't a suitable place for racing

In the next second, a huge tree appeared in front of Bai Chen's eyes.

She suddenly changed directions, but it took her a full second for her brain to give the order for her body to react. Therefore, it was an irredeemable situation.

Bang!

The jeep crashed into a tree, causing pin-like leaves to rain down. This caused it to stop.

Bai Chen was about to reverse the car when she suddenly saw the figure wearing a chameleon-like bionic smart armor appear in the distance.

This time, she carried a slightly complicated structure on her shoulder. It looked very heavy and resembled a rocket launcher.

Several members of the Old Task Force recognized this thing: First City's AS-9 single-man anti-tank missile.

"Ditch the car!" Jiang Baimian shouted as she opened the car door and lunged out.

Bai Chen did the same, and Long Yuehong opened the door on the other side because it was closest to him.

Boom!

The AS-9 anti-tank missile failed to hit the jeep and instead hit the tree, snapping it in half and sending it crashing to the ground.

This stunned Jiang Baimian.

With an approximate distance of only 100 meters between the two parties, the enemy actually failed to blow up their team's vehicle -a target as large as the jeep!

Perhaps it was because the recoil from the earlier strike had affected the other party, but Jiang Baimian instantly felt her 'drunkenness' ease. Coupled with the cold brought about by Chaotic Right Hand, her thinking speed increased as she trembled.

Could it be that this is the first time this fellow is using a single-person anti-tank missile? The grenade she used previously deviated from the target by a meter or two... She's afraid of detonating the bomb in the car? No, since she has decided to attack us, she definitely has to choose what she's best at and also the safest method. It's impossible for her to treat this as a chance for actual combat practice...

One of her abilities is to let us enter a 'drunken' state, affecting our reaction speed and mobility. It doesn't lead to direct fatality... In addition, there's another ability that allows our shots to 'take the initiative' to avoid her body. Yes, this might be another manifestation of being 'drunk'...

In short, up until now, the characteristics of her ability are closer to control, and this kind of ability is perfect for firearms... For her to enter the Mind Corridor, it's unlikely that she hasn't fought anyone in the past. Logically speaking, her marksmanship can only be good and not weak...

When I first used the gun, she accurately hit the hand I extended. It didn't seem like a lucky shot...

I had a question from the beginning: Why did she take the initiative to do something and let herself be detected by the military exoskeleton's comprehensive warning system? Back then, her best choice was to hide somewhere further and concealed and use our 'drunken' state to kill one person after another...

Combining all of this, although it's ridiculous, I still think that she might be playing a cat-and-mouse game... She is engrossed in such a battle and isn't in a hurry to finish us off, so she deliberately missed. It's only a threat and coercion...

When she's done playing, she will truly use her full strength and strike ruthlessly... This kind of behavior is difficult to understand, but it's not too unacceptable for an Awakened... Is this a manifestation of her price?

With this in mind, Jiang Baimian's mind became heavy and numb once again. If it weren't for the 'cold,' she would've exhausted all her strength to think through a simple question.

The serious state of 'drunkenness' returned.

Although Jiang Baimian had some guesses and felt that their lives wouldn't be in danger for the time being as long as they maintained a normal level of response, this was ultimately only a guess. It still needed further verification.

And even if the enemy's price was about the same as her inference, she couldn't think of a way to exploit it.

Firstly, her brain wasn't being cooperative. Secondly, the enemy had been very cautious so far, maintaining a sufficient distance from them to prevent herself from being counterattacked.

The range of Chaotic Right Hand isn't enough, and the jeep can't be driven anytime soon. There's no way to help me close the distance... Think of a way to lure her to a distance of 100 meters? Jiang Baimian took advantage of the fact that the 'cold' still had some effect. As she rolled to a nearby tree, she thought about what to do next.

When she arrived at her destination, she stopped. Then, she saw an item in the jeep it was a small speaker with a blue background and black surface.

This item that had fused with Shang Jianyao's aura was originally placed on the armrest, but it had now landed beside the brake due to the collision.

It could complete Thought Implantation through the music. This came from Shang Jianyao himself, and it overlapped with his ability. Therefore, Shang Jianyao left it with his teammates to enrich the measures they could take when encountering an enemy.

Jiang Baimian's eyes lit up as she instantly came up with a solution. At the same time, she felt vexed and wanted to slap herself with her right hand.

She didn't immediately think of the small speaker to exploit it because of her drunken state!

With this in mind, Jiang Baimian shouted at Long Yuehong and Bai Chen—who had already found cover—with her engorged tongue, “Everyone, think of a way to break through. She’s... alone!”

On the surface, she made Long Yuehong and Bai Chen run separately, making full use of the fact that there was only one enemy and that she could only pursue in one direction. In fact, she was using this to deceive the target, allowing the latter to divert her subsequent focus to prevent the three Old Task Force members from escaping. This made it conducive for her to return to the jeep and retrieve the small speaker.

The range of this item’s coverage depended on how far its voice could reach. It wasn’t impossible to hit 100 meters or even 200 meters at maximum volume!

Ceningmis, main city area, in the small square.

Shang Jianyao looked around and said, “Let’s continue deeper. If we encounter the same situation that needs to be flushed with high-voltage electric current twice again, we can consider evacuating.”

“Even if we haven’t discovered the root of the problem here?” Geneva asked.

Shang Jianyao nodded seriously and calmly replied, “It’s what I said it’s not like I won’t enter again after leaving. We can even temporarily leave Ceningmis and head south to enter the White Knights’ sphere of influence. We can then think of a way to charge up the electricity before returning.”

Clang! Clang! Clang! Geneva clapped. Then, the smart robot said in a slightly synthetic voice, “Big White will definitely appreciate your current thoughts.”

Shang Jianyao didn’t respond and pointed forward. “Continue.”

After running for a distance and leaving the square, he suddenly stopped. “What’s wrong?” Geneva asked.

Shang Jianyao looked up and said, “Although I haven’t sensed a New World node, I suddenly feel like there’s a huge vortex in the distance. The vortex is slowly becoming stronger!”

Chapter 826 Why Not Dance

Genava didn't notice any abnormalities, but he fully trusted Shang Jianyao's judgment and asked, "Is it because we're closer to the root of the problem?"

Genava believed that although the possibility of Shang Jianyao joking or pulling a prank at critical moments existed, he or another him would quickly right course without delaying the important matters. Therefore, with Shang Jianyao giving no other explanation, Genava believed his words.

Shang Jianyao stared into the dark depths of the main city district and shook his head. "I didn't feel this way back at the square, and it's only 20 to 30 meters from the center of the square to here."

There was a small fountain and a square with a statue that wasn't large to begin with.

What Shang Jianyao meant was that there was no reason for him not to sense anything ahead, only to detect something after walking only 20 to 30 meters.

Genava didn't agree with what Shang had said: "Almost 25 meters. Although this is indeed insignificant compared to all of Ceningmis, a quantitative change will result in a qualitative change. We've already traveled an unknown number of 25 meters; this might be the last one that crosses the critical line."

Shang Jianyao still shook his head. "I seriously thought about it and realized that the surrounding situation had changed a little after the library projection was destroyed by the high-voltage electric current you released. It's probably from that moment on that the vortex slowly became stronger. It's finally strong to the point I can vaguely sense it from this spot."

"That's a possibility." Genava finished his analysis in a flash. "By attacking the projection brought about by the overlap, it's equivalent to indirectly stimulating the New World, resulting in some changes."

Shang Jianyao's mind raced as he sighed with emotion. "That vortex should be a few kilometers away from me, far exceeding the range of my senses, but I can now sense it a little. Did I become stronger in this special environment?"

Genava, who was focused on listening to him, was nearly stunned by his sudden turn. He hurriedly voiced his opinion, "Firstly, that vortex is too huge and exaggerated. Secondly, similar objects will create a certain disturbance in the surroundings. This disturbance is transmitted layer by layer, and although the corresponding signal is gradually attenuating, it has still reached a level where you can capture it."

These two points complemented each other. It was precisely because the vortex was too huge and exaggerated that the disturbances could be transmitted to this side several kilometers away.

“Is that so?” Shang Jianyao asked in disappointment before saying, “From the looks of it, it’s highly possible that it’s a huge New World node. Secondly, it’s the body of a dormant Kalendaria’s body of descent. Other situations can be eliminated.”

Genava moved his metal neck up and down. “Are we still going deeper?”

Shang Jianyao fell into a dilemma—no, an internal conflict.

It took them a few seconds to reach an agreement and give an answer: “The strengthening of the vortex continues. I’m worried that it will only get worse.”

“Let’s retreat and meet up with Big White and the others. We’ll observe Ceningmis’s situation closely. If the vortex doesn’t calm down and continues to spread out, we’ll launch the nuclear bomb at it to prevent the Heartless disease from spreading to all of the Ashlands.”

“Alright.” Genava’s main module simulated a sense of relief.

The two of them were just about to turn around when they suddenly saw a building covered in thick fog in the distant darkness.

It was a hazy tower.

Upon hearing Jiang Baimian’s orders, Long Yuehong and Bai Chen took a few seconds to understand that there was indeed only one enemy. As long as they split up and fled, at least one of them could escape the other party’s abilities and return to normal. They could then use their equipment and long-range attacks to help their teammates escape their predicament.

This was a very effective plan for the current situation. Of course, the premise was that there was only one enemy.

Long Yuehong—who was in his drunken state

—was much bolder than usual. With the Blackmarsh Iron Snake bionic artificial intelligence armor protecting him, he was the first to rush out.

He hoped that he could lure the enemy away and create an opportunity for Bai Chen and his team leader to escape danger!

Upon seeing this, Bai Chen immediately turned around and ran in another direction. As an experienced warrior, she knew that the only way not to implicate her companions in such a situation was to escape with all her might.

This way, the enemy would hesitate and have a chance of choosing to pursue her, leading to the safety of others. It wouldn't be long before they found an opportunity to counterattack.

The woman in a bionic artificial intelligence armor similar to the Chameleon wasn't angry; instead, she chuckled.

As the sound spread, Long Yuehong and Bai Chen became more 'drunk.' Their body language became increasingly incongruous.

Bang! The two of them fell to the ground almost at the same time like crashing mountains.

Jiang Baimian—who was running toward the jeep—did the same, but she had already expected this. She took the opportunity to pounce forward and roll before finally arriving beside the driver's seat that had the door open.

At this moment, the enemy abandoned the AS-9 anti-tank missile, picked up the rifle hidden behind a tree, and aimed it at Jiang Baimian.

Compared to the duo fleeing on foot, she was more worried about Jiang Baimian—who had returned to the jeep. After all, there was a bomb that the other party had claimed to be very powerful.

For this reason, she had no choice but to choose ordinary firearms to prevent any accidents from happening. This was also one of the reasons why she didn't hit the vehicle previously and only used anti-tank missiles and grenades to scare the people opposite her.

Of course, this was also the reason she did this at the end. Otherwise, she wouldn't have chosen the grenade launcher and the anti-tank missile at all. She wouldn't have even given the three Old Task Force members a chance to get into the car.

She quickly aimed.

She was very confident in her skills in this regard. This was because one of her three abilities was: Firearms Genius!

After entering the Mind Corridor, this was enhanced to that of a Hot Weapons Genius.

Just as the enemy in the quasi-Chameleon armor was about to pull the trigger and let the bullet drill into Jiang Baimian's torso through her unarmored side and rupture the flesh within, a female voice suddenly sounded in her ears. "Look, look.

"Why not dance?

"Chatting? Why not dance[1]..."

The lady was stunned and had a strong urge.

Shooting? Why not dance!?

Fighting? Why not dance!?

Using abilities? Why not dance!?

She then gyrated her crotch, put down the firearm, and waved her hands.

She wasn't the only one. Long Yuehong and Bai Chen—who had collapsed onto the mud also danced on the ground.

Although they had never danced such a dance before, it wasn't like they had never seen dancing. It had to be known that the Old Task Force had an Old World dance master; he was proficient in all kinds of dances.

Yes, he was Genava—this information was stored in his database.

Shang Jianyao often learned from him and requested his guidance. Long Yuehong and Bai Chen felt like they nearly mastered it from watching

Jiang Baimian also danced.

She grabbed Chaotic Right Hand and shook it as a prop. Her body trembled.

She kneeled down from time to time and twisted upward-it was very rhythmic and beautiful.

At this moment, the scene seemed to have entered the routine of films in a particular Old World country. It was absurd and joyous.

However, Jiang Baimian didn't stay in her spot. Wearing the military exoskeleton, she gyrated her body and walked toward the enemy step by step like she was in some Old World movie.

Not only was she—who was holding the small speaker in her other hand-implanted with the idea that it was better to dance, but she was also affected by the negative effects and suffered a certain level of mental problems. This made her seem like a copy of Shang Jianyao.

She was filled with the strange idea of having to fight the enemy and defeat her in a dance-off. Since they were going to dance, they definitely had to close the distance and build up the atmosphere between them.

In just a few seconds, Jiang Baimian successfully reduced the distance between the two parties to less than 100 meters with the help of the military exoskeleton. She then threw the small speaker to the ground as if she were throwing a pair of white gloves.

But as the small speaker left her palm and lost the support it needed from an Awakened, the song became normal. It was no longer imbued with the magic of making one believe that nothing beat dancing.

Of course, the corresponding thoughts implanted in them still existed and wouldn't disappear immediately. However, this was at great odds with the environment. It wouldn't be long before the three Old Task Force members and the enemy realized that the situation was amiss and returned to normal.

Compared to Jiang Baimian, Long Yuehong, and Bai Chen, the influence the enemy-who had already entered the Mind Corridor suffered was clearly weaker. Therefore, her recovery was naturally faster.

This was a conventional development, but reality was often not like this.

Jiang Baimian gyrated her waist and continued dancing, but she no longer had the intention of having a dance-off.

In the 'cold' brought about by Chaotic Right Hand, she suddenly felt stoned. Why dance when it's so cold?

With this contradiction, Jiang Baimian instantly broke free from her implanted thoughts and found the right understanding.

She wasn't surprised by this situation at all. Before using the small speaker, she had already thought of using Chaotic Right Hand's negative effects to help her escape the restraints of Thought Implantation!

She didn't expect that the 'cold could overcome the music and magical powers.

Once her mind cleared up, she was no longer in a drunken state. As Jiang Baimian locked onto the enemy, her eyes turned deep. Then, she raised her arm and aimed the military exoskeleton's grenade launcher at the target.

At this moment, the enemy wearing the quasi-Chameleon armor also found her normal train of thought and stopped dancing.

Her pupils reflected the black muzzle and the reflective metal skeleton.

She knew very well that her armor didn't specialize in defense. Although she wouldn't be seriously injured by a grenade, she would still be affected significantly. This included the damage to her equipment and her own injuries.

Chapter 827 Combination of Abilities

The woman in the quasi-Chameleon immediately wanted to use her abilities.

At this moment, she was suddenly out of her mind and stoned. She didn't have the time to think about what had happened and hurriedly released her channeled abilities.

Human Rubberbanding!

The ability she used was officially called 'Motion Judgment Error,' but she preferred the term 'Human Rubberbanding.' It was a term that was both vivid and filled with imagery. This was because once the target group was affected by this ability, all their movements would be roughly controlled by the Awakened and deviate from their expected trajectories.

This included firing. Therefore, despite the two parties being very close, one party would fail to harm the other even after emptying their magazine.

With a bang, Jiang Baimian's military exoskeleton fired a grenade.

Under the relatively hasty interference of Human Rubberbanding, it deviated from the target slightly.

Upon seeing this, the woman chose not to be careless. Without thinking about why this was different from the trajectory she had expected, she pounced to the other side.

She was afraid that the grenade would land too close and that the ensuing explosion would engulf her and destroy the bionic artificial intelligence armor on her.

After all, a grenade was different from a bullet. Unless one was extremely unlucky and jumped into a bullet's line of firing, it could be ignored. But even if a grenade didn't hit the target directly, it could still deal significant damage as long as it wasn't too far from the target.

Just as the lady pounced into the air, her pupils suddenly dilated, and her gaze froze.

She saw the grenade—it was heading for the area where she was about to land!

How is that possible? Amidst the lady's surprise, she couldn't think too much about it. She hurriedly curled up and reduced her surface contact.

Boom!

The grenade exploded, and the surging flames engulfed the quasi-Chameleon armored figure.

Jiang Baimian wasn't surprised at all. With the military exoskeleton's help, she leaped up and closed the distance by dozens of meters.

The reason the other party 'walked into a trap' and took the initiative to pounce into the grenade was that she had been affected by Jiang Baimian's Spatial Hallucination ability.

The grenade did deviate from the target, but the enemy saw an illusion—a 'projection' in the opposite direction. This was an application of spatial symmetry. Therefore, she made a wrong judgment.

As an Awakened at the Sea of Origins level, Jiang Baimian could clearly influence a Mind Corridor-level enemy because she had used Chaotic Right Hand before casting Spatial Hallucination.

The Chaotic effect produced by this item wasn't too effective on Awakened at the Mind Corridor level either. Be it the duration or the extent of the effects, they were clearly inferior. But although Mind Corridor-level Awakened wouldn't truly enter a state of unconsciousness and go completely crazy because of this, they would still be left a little confused about what was reality or illusion. It was easy to hallucinate, treating the hallucinations as real and carrying out some haphazard actions in response.

Enemies in such a state would naturally be affected more when facing Spatial Hallucination.

In some of the games Shang Jianyao had played, Chaotic Right Hand greatly weakened the enemy's resistance to illusions. Therefore, Jiang Baimian's relatively low-level Spatial Hallucination directly triggered a critical strike.

As an item, Chaotic Right Hand's ability could be used together with Jiang Baimian's abilities.

In addition, the target's reaction when facing the grenade caused Jiang Baimian to make another judgment. She had yet to explore the Mind Corridor's depths, so she could only carry out Electromagnetic Interference and not Matter Interference. Otherwise, in such a situation, it was clearly better to ball up and hope that the bionic artificial intelligence armor's protection could help her avoid most of the damage if she nudged the grenade a distance before landing.

After the explosion subsided a little, Jiang Baimian used the military exoskeleton's comprehensive warning system to determine the enemy's current situation.

A large number of scales on her Chameleon-type artificial intelligence armor peeled off, revealing cracks. Some blood seeped out.

From her perception of human consciousness and bioelectric signals, Jiang Baimian believed that the other party wasn't fatally injured and was only a little weaker.

Without giving the enemy a chance to catch her breath or another chance to get her 'drunk,' Jiang Baimian raised one arm that was covered by the military exoskeleton.

Electricity crackled, but it didn't come from the electric eel-like biomechanical limb. Instead, it came from the electromagnetic weapon attached to the military exoskeleton.

An instant later, a round wrapped in a large amount of silver-white light flew out and headed straight for the target.

The surroundings lit up a little.

The woman had just recovered from the dizziness brought about by the explosion when she found herself in peril.

She didn't have the time to use Human Rubberbanding because the electromagnetic round had just left the launcher. No matter how affected Jiang Baimian was, it wouldn't affect the outcome of the shot.

The woman couldn't react in that split second at all. She could only watch helplessly as the electromagnetic bullet struck her chest.

Silver-white light erupted as the bullet penetrated the quasi-Chameleon and penetrated the target's body.

For some reason-or perhaps it was a hidden effect of some item-Jiang Baimian's attack didn't hit a vital spot. The electromagnetic bullet passed through the enemy's left chest, tearing out with smeared blood.

The intense pain made the woman curl up her body and indiscriminately use Drunkard Transformation.

Almost at the same time, Jiang Baimian exerted Chaos and Spatial Hallucination again.

The woman jumped up and realized that she had 'lost' her weapon. She then looked down at her injuries and felt her life rapidly draining away.

Having lost her weapon, she decisively gave up when she saw that she couldn't eliminate the enemy in a short period of time. She clasped her wound and ran into the distance.

She planned on receiving treatment and stabilizing her injuries before making a comeback.

Upon seeing this, Jiang Baimian hesitated for a moment and stopped Spatial Hallucination and Chaos created by the item to allow the enemy to escape.

She originally wanted to throw the other party into a never-ending loop.

Ceningmis, in the main city area, beside a small square.

Shang Jianyao looked at the hazy tower in the distance and asked Genava, "Can you see it?"

“Yes,” Geneva replied without hesitation.

“Do you find it familiar?” Shang Jianyao asked.

“No.” Geneva had already completed the analysis and comparison.

Shang Jianyao sighed with emotion. “It seems like the New World has such a tall tower. I’ve seen it at Yama Tiger’s place and on the cruise ship.”

“I heard you mention that this seems to be a landmark of the New World.” Geneva ‘came to a realization.’ “That’s the root of the problem, so much so that the New World’s landmark building overlaps to a certain extent with Ceningmis, allowing us to see it several kilometers away?”

“That’s right.” Shang Jianyao—who had one hand paralyzed—couldn’t punch his right fist into his left palm. He then wistfully and calmly looked in the direction of the hazy tower and rationally said, “Let’s go.”

Geneva didn’t object.

The two of them sped up and ran back, but they didn’t follow their original route. Instead, they circled around a little to avoid encountering the Eighth Research Institute.

When they were about to leave the dark area enveloped by the fog, Shang Jianyao stopped.

“What’s wrong?” Geneva asked as he braked, not adding the word ‘now.’

Shang Jianyao smiled. “The strengthening of the vortex seems to have stopped; it didn’t spread out any further. Yes, it’s even calming down bit by bit.”

Geneva analyzed the situation for a few seconds and said, “The Eighth Research Institute’s quarantine measures are showing its effects?”

Although he and Shang Jianyao had yet to discover what quarantine measures the Eighth Research Institute had taken, they could only guess in this direction in the current situation.

“What if it’s a restriction of some existence in the New World?” Shang Jianyao retorted.

Genava couldn’t rule out this possibility and could only sigh with emotion. “Fortunately, it didn’t spread. Otherwise, we could only consider the nuke.”

The Old Task Force’s bottom line was that they couldn’t let the Heartless disease erupt in the Ashlands again.

Shang Jianyao didn’t answer Genava and praised him in an incongruous manner, “The night is long; the Arbiter of Fate blesses thee!”

Genava took nearly two seconds to understand why the fellow said that.

This exploration indicated that there was indeed a large amount of the Heartless virus in Ceningmis. The closer one was to the vortex, the easier it was to be infected. Yet, Shang Jianyao remained alive and kicking even now.

Apart from the Arbiter of Fate’s protection, there was no other reason.

Uh, it might also be Subhuti’s protection, Master Zhuang’s protection, and Eidolon Nun’s protection...

“Unfortunately, we didn’t manage to retain the Awakened.” Long Yuehong shook his slightly heavy head and sighed at Jiang Baimian—who was approaching him—as he walked toward Bai Chen.

“How do I retain her?” Jiang Baimian laughed. “As long as she’s not dead or unconscious, we will be affected by her abilities. It’s much more difficult to knock her out accurately than kill her.”

The sparse forest—an open environment—wasn’t suitable for her to release anesthetic gas. Furthermore, the enemy kept a sufficient distance from her until she was affected by the song. Only then did she enter a 100-meter radius.

Bai Chen then said, “It’s better for her to be dead than to let her escape.”

“Yes, yes, yes. I think so too.” Long Yuehong indicated that he wasn’t stupid. He wouldn’t have any delusions of capturing a Mind Corridor-level Awakened alive and obtaining valuable information from her.

It was a little coincidental that the Old Task Force had previously captured the Eighth Research Institute’s commissioner, Khal, by striking him unconscious. If not for Kanna, if not for the premeditated plan, and if not for the various factors, how could the Old Task Force have the opportunity to anesthetize the other party?

Jiang Baimian smiled. “It wasn’t impossible to kill her if I really tried our best back then, but I gave up.”

She looked at the traces of blood on the ground and calmly said, “If she dies, how are we to follow the clues after Hey and Old Ge return?”

Chapter 828 Rendezvous

Ceningmis, at the periphery of the main city area.

Genava and the military exoskeleton-wearing Shang Jianyao walked to the suburbs from under a bridge. They didn’t return the way they came; the latter also hid his human consciousness the entire time to prevent them from being discovered by the Eighth Research Institute members summoned by the gigantic feline creature.

The rash Shang Jianyao suggested laying an ambush for a counterattack, but the motion was rejected by the other Shang Jianyaos before it entered a vote. This was because they didn’t know how many people the Eighth Research Institute had stationed in Ceningmis and what their overall strength was.

Even if Vice President, Professor Li, and the other New World powerhouses weren’t carried over and were sleeping here to preside over the area, it was already tough enough for the Old Task Force to deal with two to three Awakened who had explored the Mind Corridor’s depths.

After taking a few steps in the wilderness, Shang Jianyao suddenly turned around and laughed out loud.

“What’s wrong?” As a smart bot, Genava had a rather good temper.

“No, not that sentence.” Shang Jianyao looked at Genova, hoping that the latter could understand him.

“What do you mean by ‘not that sentence?’” Genova expressed his confusion.

Shang Jianyao replied in exasperation, “At a time like this, you should be asking, ‘Why art thou laughing?’”

Genava quickly searched through the database for this sentence and came to a realization. “Do you want me to cooperate with you and reenact that classic scene?”

“That’s right!” Shang Jianyao guided him patiently. “A real person can’t be old-fashioned and rigid; they have to keep up with the times and fully grasp the corresponding culture. They have to be able to accept memes that their companions throw at them.”

The Chameleon-like Genova moved his neck up and down and readily agreed. “Why art thou laughing?”

Shang Jianyao laughed. “I’m laughing at how stupid and rigid the Eighth Research Institute’s people are; they actually didn’t wait at the main exits to ambush us. Do they think we will definitely return the way we came?”

“Maybe they just don’t have enough manpower and can only choose the most likely route to intercept us.” Genova analyzed the situation at hand.

Shang Jianyao clicked his tongue with a chuckle. “If it’s really as you say, their problem is that they only stationed a small number of people to guard Ceningmis. It’s not even enough! Their arrogance has made them careless.”

ev

At this point, Shang Jianyao raised his right hand and stroked the Berserker assault rifle’s surface against his chin. He muttered to himself, “It’s also possible that they believe that the people who venture deep into Ceningmis’s main city area can’t come out in one piece. They will either die or become Heartless. Therefore, they might as well not send anyone to block or ambush them.

“That big cat followed us to confirm if we really entered the most dangerous area deep in the main city area.”

Genava had some doubts about this. “But nothing is absolute. There will always be people who enter the main city’s depths and come out alive, such as you. People like you shouldn’t be an exception. It’s very normal for such situations to happen a handful of times over the years.”

Shang Jianyao smiled. “Then, why do you think I came out intact?”

“The night is long; the Arbiter of Fate blesses thee.” This time, Genava was very cooperative. “It’s also possible that it’s Namō Annutara-Samyak-Subhuti or ‘The Perfected Man has no self; the New World is before

us.”

Shang Jianyao nodded in satisfaction. “Therefore, even if there previously were people who came out alive like me, it was most likely because they obtained a Kalendaria’s blessing. How would the Eighth Research Institute dare to rashly ambush a target protected by a Kalendaria? Aren’t they afraid of another instance of Doctor being terrified by Eidolon Nun again?”

Genava completely understood what Shang Jianyao wanted to say. “Ignore those who die inside; nothing can be done to those who come out alive, right?”

Bang! Bang! Bang!

Shang Jianyao thumped the Berserker assault rifle with his chin to replace his hands. He then said, “The problem now is: Since there’s no need to care, why did the Eighth Research Institute send people over or let the big cat patrol?”

“It’s difficult to complete the analysis without the necessary conditions,” Genava replied truthfully.

Shang Jianyao didn’t mock the Eighth Research Institute again. Together with Genava, they returned to the increasingly bright sky. When they approached the forest, they stopped one after another.

Genava stopped first, followed by Shang Jianyao.

“The rendezvous point has been changed...” Shang Jianyao looked at the hidden marks left behind by his companions and sighed with emotion.

Genava rotated his neck before turning it back in the opposite direction. “Big White and the others probably encountered something and had to move camp.”

“I missed it again!” Shang Jianyao felt pained and disappointed. “If I had known, I would’ve stayed here in the forest today and let you explore Ceningmis’s main city yourself.”

As he spoke, he and Genava circled around the forest from afar according to the markings and headed for the second designated rendezvous point.

In a hidden spot in the mountains, they successfully rendezvoused with Jiang Baimian, Long Yuehong, and Bai Chen.

After Jiang Baimian finished describing the attack on them, Shang Jianyao took out the small, black speaker with a blue bottom and patted it in relief. “You’ve done something! You are deserving of the title of an Old Task Force member!”

Without waiting for Long Yuehong and the others to speak, he suggested excitedly, “Shall we track the traces now and launch a counter-attack?”

“There’s no rush.” Jiang Baimian looked up at the sky. “One is always the most vigilant at the beginning. Besides, the sky is still a little bright.”

She then asked, “Did you discover anything in the main city area? Did you guys do something that triggered a certain change to all of Ceningmis?”

“Yes!” The Shang Jianyaos recounted their previous experiences, and Genava was in charge of filling in the gaps.

Long Yuehong became more and more solemn as he listened. Finally, he concluded, “There’s an overlap between Ceningmis and the New World. The deeper one goes, the worse the overlap becomes?”

“That’s about it.” Shang Jianyao guessed in anticipation. “Maybe there’s a door that leads to the New World at the root of the problem. It’s located in the Ashlands, not the Mind Corridor.”

Bai Chen frowned and said, “It has only been about ten years since Ceningmis was destroyed. There have never been any signs of a New World door before. Back then, or even earlier, there were rumors that led to the New World’s entrance hidden somewhere in the Ashlands. It can’t be referring to Ceningmis, right?”

“Who said that there’s only one door that leads to the New World?” Shang Jianyao smiled. “The disaster that destroyed Ceningmis back then might’ve created another New World door.”

Bai Chen nodded, believing that such a situation was indeed possible.

Jiang Baimian tersely acknowledged it. “The reason the team that investigated the cause of the Old World’s destruction came to Ceningmis must be that there’s a certain problem here and that there are relatively important clues hidden.”

She was referring to the Old Task Force that Shang Jianyao’s father was a member of.

“What problem could it be? What clues?” Geneva helped pick out the key points.

Nobody could answer.

Even Shang Jianyao only sighed and said, “We didn’t find any survivors for the time being.”

At this point, he suddenly became excited. He looked in the direction of Ceningmis’s main city area and said, “Apart from using a nuclear bomb, how should we resolve the problem of the overlap between Ceningmis and the New World?”

“Approach the source of the problem and channel all the electricity to destroy the overlapping phenomenon?” Long Yuehong postulated.

Geneva analyzed the situation. “We might not have enough electricity now.”

“Yes, we can consider going to the White Knights’ sphere of influence first and filling up the batteries.” Jiang Baimian looked at the sky again. “If we can attract summer thunderstorms down and guide them to the main city of Ceningmis, the problem will be easily resolved. I remember that the Old World had weather weapons that used similar principles. Unfortunately, no faction can create them now.”

She tersely exclaimed and continued, “Besides, it will be very difficult for us to investigate what happened back then if we completely destroy Ceningmis’s electromagnetic environment.”

Currently, scenes from the past were constantly being replayed in the depths of the Ceningmis main city district.

“That’s right.” Shang Jianyao chose to agree.

Jiang Baimian pondered for a moment and said, “Actually, approaching the source of the problem without agitating the vortex is possible.”

“How?” Shang Jianyao’s eyes lit up.

Jiang Baimian explained, “At the edge of that area where you encountered Flora and Barnard, they couldn’t see or hear you, only sensing the corresponding human consciousness when you walked to their side. The man sitting in the library seemed to be able to see you or sense Hey’s human consciousness when you passed by.

“To put it simply, I suspect that the closer one is to the source of the problem, the more obvious the overlapping situation becomes. With that, the more likely it is for a powerhouse in the New World to detect the situation in Ceningmis.

“In the beginning, they can’t see or hear anything. You needed to be close enough for them to sense you. Later, they could see, hear, and sense you from a certain distance...

“Therefore, if you had chosen to circle around the square from the outside, there’s a high chance that you wouldn’t have alarmed the man sitting in the library. You can also do the same when you encounter similar projections later, but the closer you are to the root of the problem, the more careful you have to be. Leave enough buffer; take a detour rather than conserving energy.”

“That makes sense,” Geneva said. “But this solution probably won’t work once we reach the deepest depths. There should be projections everywhere there, and we can’t circle around them.”

Jiang Baimian nodded slightly and said, “When the time comes, Hey should be able to sense the vortex directly and determine where the root cause of the problem is.”

sen

Clap! Clap! Clap!

Shang Jianyao—who had put away the small speaker and the Life Angel necklace—applauded. He also took off his military exoskeleton to conserve electricity.

After some discussion on this problem, the Old Task Force began to eat rations and drink potable water. They were mentally and physically prepared to track the Eighth Research Institute’s personnel.

Ceningmis was controlled by the Eighth Research Institute, so Jiang Baimian and the others didn’t believe that the assailant belonged to another faction.

Chapter 829 Labor Role Model
Geneva

“Old Ge, we’ll cheer you on!” Shang Jianyao waved his right hand and shouted enthusiastically at Geneva.

He, Jiang Baimian, Long Yuehong, and Bai Chen were standing on high ground, looking down at the smart bot below.

As they didn’t know how many companions the fleeing enemy had, how strong they were, how large their perception range was, or if there were any traps, the Old Task Force erred on the side of caution. They decided to send only Geneva to follow the tracks. The four carbon-based humans used binoculars and the surrounding terrain to trail from a few kilometers away. They paid close attention to their teammate’s actions and were prepared to launch a long-range attack at any moment.

This was something that couldn't be helped. After all, smart bots had high tolerance for mistakes. If they really encountered an accident, the probability of him surviving was far higher than that of Jiang Baimian and the other carbon-based humans.

More importantly, smart bots were also immune to most Awakened abilities and didn't need to worry about having a detectable human consciousness.

In order to ensure Old Ge's safety, the four carbon-based Old Task Force members unanimously decided to let the other party wear the Blackmarsh Iron Snake bionic artificial intelligence armor this time to enhance his defense.

There was a saying in the Old World: Flesh covering metal only led to a quick death; metal covering flesh stood a chance of living.

Genava could be considered as metal covering metal; he was substantial and sturdy enough.

Flesh covering metal generally referred to humans riding motorcycles and bicycles, with flesh lumps placed over steel. Metal covering flesh referred to humans riding motorcars where their flesh was being protected by steel.

Genava raised his steel arm—which was covered in black scales—and waved at his companions, indicating that he had received their encouragement. He then began to follow the traces of blood, footprints, and other clues into the distance.

Jiang Baimian looked at the sky that had darkened to the point that it reached the level of Ceningmis's main city district and exhaled. "In such an environment, only Old Ge can leave no traces."

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

Long Yuehong glanced at them, raised his binoculars, and observed Genava's every move so that he could timely understand what the other party had encountered.

At this moment, the four carbon-based humans were fully armed. Three wore military exoskeletons, and one wore the Chameleon—that one person was Long Yuehong

They weren't stingy with their electricity. They planned to attack the enemy once she was found.

Through the binoculars and the military exoskeleton's corresponding functions, the four Old Task Force members saw Geneva speed ahead.

This meant that the clues hadn't stopped until now. The traces remained on the ground.

"Old Ge circled around a pile of rocks...

"Old Ge crossed a stream...

"Old Ge entered an abandoned village and passed through it...

"..."

Finally, Jiang Baimian couldn't take it any longer and cut Shang Jianyao off. "There's no need for a commentary. We can all see it."

Shang Jianyao shut his mouth in disappointment, feeling regretful that he hadn't fully enjoyed his role as a commentator.

Jiang Baimian cast her gaze at Geneva again and relied on the communications system embedded in the military exoskeleton to say, "Old Ge, stop for a moment. We'll shift positions. If you continue forward, the angle here won't be too good. Furthermore, we're too far away; it's not conducive for us to provide you support.

"Pay attention to your surroundings and guard against any accidents."

After receiving Geneva's affirmation, Jiang Baimian summoned Long Yuehong and the others and moved to the second surveillance spot.

This surveillance spot wasn't predetermined because they had no idea which direction the enemy had fled in. This surveillance spot was one of the few suitable places they had specially chosen while watching Geneva's pursuit.

The Old Task Force's carbon-based humans were augmented by equipment, so it didn't take them long to reach their designated spots.

It was a water tower.

Jiang Baimian and the others stood firmly on the small, steel balcony at the top of the water tower and observed Geneva's situation again.

There was nothing abnormal.

Geneva continued his pursuit.

As they watched, a scene suddenly surfaced in Long Yuehong's mind-it was a comical picture from the Old World's entertainment.

He suppressed his voice and shared his feelings with Bai Chen. "Don't you think the current situation is a little like that picture? The one where a group of people watches one person doing all the work."

"It does!" Before Bai Chen could speak, the attentive Shang Jianyao agreed. He then sighed. "Poor Old Ge."

You make it sound like you weren't the one who cheered Old Ge on... Jiang Baimian didn't voice her criticism.

After a while, Geneva slowed down.

At this point, the traces seemed to decrease in number, making it harder to capture them. This didn't stump Geneva. With the help of various equipment and modules, he continued forward bit by bit in his pursuit.

After an unknown period of time, when night was truly about to arrive, Geneva stopped and pointed at a building in front of him. "The enemy should've entered here."

The building belonged to a town at the edge of Ceningmis, near the northern mountain pass. It was originally the tallest building in the area, but it was later modified to resemble an outpost.

“How about we blow up that building?” the ruthless Shang Jianyao suggested.

The honest Genava replied, “But according to my detectors, there are no living creatures inside.”

“Why didn’t you say so earlier?” The Shang Jianyao that sought novelty was disappointed.

“She moved ahead of time? A trap?” Jiang Baimian muttered to herself and instructed Genava, “Old Ge, enter and search. Be careful.”

“Alright.” Genava always followed orders.

His report was then constantly transmitted to Shang Jianyao and the others through the communications system. “There are traces of human life at the bottom. It’s very new...

“They also rear animals... The soil outside the side window smells like shit...

“I found a storage room. There are some supplies inside, but not much. There are traces of movement...

“There’s an observation spot on the top floor. You can see the paths that lead north and west into Ceningmis...

“Preliminary judgment indicates that three to four people and a large animal once lived here...

“I found relatively clear tire tracks on the east side of this building. I have reason to believe that the humans here had hastily evacuated a few hours ago with most of their supplies. Their destination is the Ceningmis main city...”

Jiang Baimian listened carefully and frowned. She muttered to herself, “This doesn’t make sense... There are only so many people from the Eighth Research Institute in Ceningmis? Besides, the combat strength of the one we injured is one of the best...”

From what she knew, there had to be at least dozens of Eighth Research Institute personnel in Ceningmis. They were in charge of eliminating the investigators and watching the area that overlapped with the New World. Among them, there might be more than five Mind Corridor-level Awakened. Furthermore, they carried items that could directly contact the Eighth Research Institute's New World powerhouses.

Unexpectedly, according to Geneva, there were only three to four people and a gigantic black feline creature. Furthermore, they chose to evacuate in a hurry instead of regrouping to form a stronger siege because the person who attacked the Old Task Force had suffered a serious injury.

"Could it be that they aren't from the Eighth Research Institute?" Long Yuehong muttered.

Bai Chen shook her head. "No, the commissioners we captured confirmed that the Eighth Research Institute has quarantined this place. They will definitely leave someone behind to guard it."

Jiang Baimian tersely acknowledged it. "There's also the existence of the large feline creature. It can't be that coincidental."

At this moment, Shang Jianyao laughed. His voice reached Jiang Baimian, Long Yuehong, Bai Chen, and the distant Geneva. "The answer is very simple: The Eighth Research Institute doesn't value this place enough, so they only sent a small team to guard it.

"And why don't they give it importance? It's because outsiders who enter Ceningmis's main city are basically throwing themselves to their deaths or becoming Heartless. The few who survive are more or less protected by the Kalendarium. The Eighth Research Institute can't do much about them either..."

He repeated what he had said during his discussion with Geneva.

Jiang Baimian nodded and thoughtfully said, "This guess is very reasonable, but the problem is: Why would the Eighth Research Institute send such a small team to guard Ceningmis in such a situation? Do they think they have too many Awakened at the Mind Corridor level? What are they guarding?"

"We can only ask them," Shang Jianyao replied sincerely.

Jiang Baimian immediately said to Geneva through the communications system, “Old Ge, track the tire tracks and see where those people went.”

Geneva tracked them to the edge of Ceningmis.

After night fell, it was so dark that one couldn't even see their fingers. At a glance, it seemed like some dangerous existence was sleeping deep in the depths.

After observing for a while, Geneva said to Shang Jianyao—who was a few kilometers away, “That group of people seems to have entered the main city. Aren't they afraid of contracting the Heartless disease?”

Jiang Baimian, Long Yuehong, and Bai Chen didn't dare to approach too closely. They could only send Shang Jianyao to provide support.

“Maybe they also have someone protecting them.” Shang Jianyao ‘wasn't surprised’ and didn't mind.

After he and Geneva rendezvoused with the rest and reported this matter, Jiang Baimian deliberated for a moment and said, “There are too many mysteries here, and our power supplies are almost below the safe zone. Next, we'll go to the White Knights' sphere of influence and charge up. We'll then come back and explore further.”

As far as the Old Task Force knew, the nearest human settlement of the White Knights was none other than Gesterbourg, which the Rootless team had set off from.

Chapter 830: Gesterbourg

Gesterbourg was a building with a long history even back in the Old World. The tall towers and sturdy outer walls allowed it to withstand repeated tests since ancient times.

Its outer walls and towers were now riddled with holes and filled with cannons. It exuded a feeling of deterrence just looking at it from afar.

These modifications originated from the Chaotic Era. The people who had gathered in this ancient castle had discovered a military warehouse nearby, moved out a large number of cannons, and restructured the building to resist the crazy Heartless and the wandering bandits.

As time passed, as an important stronghold at the northern border of the White Knights, not only had it been reinforced and replaced with the latest and most suitable cannons, but fortifications were also raised around it, forming a complete defense system.

After the jeep drove past the simple bridge over a trench, Shang Jianyao—who was sitting in the driver’s seat—raised his right hand, tented it over his eyes, and sighed with emotion. “The air quality here isn’t too good.”

The sky was gray, but it was completely different from the darkness that Ceningmis experienced. The culprit was the large amount of dust—the surrounding buildings had coal dust settling over them.

“It’s very normal.” Jiang Baimian subconsciously covered her nose. “The mountain behind Gesterbourg is one of the White Knights’ top coal mines.”

Coal mines were extremely abundant in the White Knights’ sphere of influence, likewise for iron ores, copper ores, and various mineral resources.

These were their main exports. Like genetic enhancement serums, they had used them to exchange for a large amount of food, salt, mechanical and electronic equipment, various firearms, and high-performance batteries.

Just as Jiang Baimian said that, a whistle sounded from a distance.

A train carrying coal had entered the station.

Railway repairs were the best in the White Knights’ sphere of influence due to their needs. This resulted in train cannons becoming a common weapon. This also resulted in many Ruin Hunters choosing to take a train to larger settlements before renting cars to travel to the nearby city ruins to search for supplies or complete the corresponding missions in the wilderness.

Shang Jianyao immediately reeled in excitement. As he drove, he muttered to himself, “I’ve never taken a train.”

“After you take it, you’ll realize that it’s nothing much,” replied Bai Chen in the backseat.

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When she was a Ruin Hunter in First City, she was lucky to have taken the train twice. However, she was accompanied by supplies.

In First City's sphere of influence, passenger trains didn't exist. The repaired railroads were all used to transport large amounts of supplies.

Shang Jianyao didn't continue the topic because his attention was attracted by the blast furnaces further away.

Behind Gesterbourg were several steelworks factories. Their chimneys spewed out grayish-white gas mixed with blackness, making the sky appear increasingly hazy.

As Shang Jianyao drove with one hand, he raised his right palm and sincerely chanted a Buddhist proclamation. "Namo Annutara-Samyak-Subhuti."

As a member of Buddhism, Zen Master Redemption naturally had to respect the surrounding towers. These could be Buddhist stupas or blast furnaces.

After passing through the periphery's fortifications, the number of houses on both sides of the road gradually increased. They circled around Gesterbourg layer by layer.

Some were modified from Old World buildings, and some were newly built. They had eclectic styles.

The humans who first came to Gesterbourg to seek refuge mainly lived in the castle and its attached buildings. Those who came here to mine, refine steel, hunt for fur from Icefield creatures, and provide all kinds of services could only live in the area outside the castle.

Before long, the Old Task Force slowed down.

In front of them was a fortified checkpoint. Many soldiers in silver-black armor carried submachine guns and assault rifles as they checked the vehicles that were entering the settlement, Gesterbourg, under the protection of armored vehicles.

They were all men. Their hair was brown or blonde, and they were relatively tall—on average, they were 1.8 meters tall. Their bodies looked rather muscular, and their faces were chiseled. Their outlines were well-defined, and they had a cold and stiff bearing.

“They’re all Chosen Ones...” Jiang Baimian sighed with emotion.

Chosen Ones were humans who had undergone genetic enhancement since they were young.

As a faction on par with Pangu Biology and one that also relied on exporting genetic enhancement serum, all the White Knights’ soldiers were basically Chosen Ones.

Of course, Pangu Biology was the same. Geneva was the only one in the Old Task Force’s jeep who had never undergone genetic enhancement.

Bai Chen looked at the silver-black armor on the soldiers and nodded slightly. “Only Chosen Ones with enhanced strength can still move freely while wearing bulletproof alloy armor unique to the White Knights.”

The White Knights—which were famous for their mineral resources—also had some unique equipment.

Shang Jianyao smiled and said, “Sigh, I’m only 1.75 meters tall after genetic enhancement. My looks are average...”

“Stop!” Long Yuehong quickly stopped him from chanting.

“Shall we make friends?” Geneva asked.

There were simply too many contraband items in the trunk of the Old Task Force’s jeep. If an accident really happened, the entire Gesterbourg might be destroyed. Therefore, in order to pass the inspection, it was naturally necessary for Shang Jianyao to ‘make friends.’

Jiang Baimian looked at the inspection checkpoint and deliberated before saying, “Not for the time being. From the looks of it, those soldiers don’t seem keen on finding contraband. It’s closer to using this method to get a city entrance tax. Even if it’s not, with Hey’s current abilities, he can completely make up for any erroneous judgment if needed.”

The soldiers often only took a glance when opening the trunk.

Jiang Baimian’s judgment was right. When the Old Task Force was examined, the soldiers in charge only sized them up and estimated the number of supplies before saying to them, “Two Knight silver coins.”

In the White Knights, the common currency was the metal coins they forged themselves. They were ordinary Squire coins, higher-valued Knight silver coins, and extremely valuable Grand Knight gold coins.

This fully utilized their mineral resources.

The Old Task Force had previously considered the matter of Gesterbourg’s investigation of the Eighth Research Institute. Therefore, they used food to exchange for some of the White Knights’ currency from Smith’s Rootless team. At this moment, Jiang Baimian calmly took out two Knight silver coins and handed them to the soldier.

As for their looks, they had long been altered using hair dye, colored contact lenses, and other disguises to make themselves resemble the mainstream Red River ethnicity natives of the White Knights.

This time, the Old Task Force didn’t deliberately uglify themselves. This was because many people in the White Knights had undergone genetic enhancement. On average, they weren’t ugly, so they naturally wouldn’t stand out amidst the crowd.

Due to this, Shang Jianyao even hoped that he could have fiery-red hair when he was about to disguise himself, but he was ultimately denied.

The Old Task Force successfully passed the checkpoint and officially entered the core area of Gesterbourg.

Long Yuehong looked at the various buildings slowly receding outside as he asked, “What should we do next?”

Shang Jianyao replied without hesitation, “Investigation!”

The Old Task Force had come to Gesterbourg to investigate two matters. The first was to find traces of the Eighth Research Institute. They should have a long-term and stable partner here to help them gather the supplies they needed—the employer who commissioned Smith’s Rootless team to transport a batch of goods to ice ruins.

Although this employer’s relevant memories had been wiped away by the Eighth Research Institute’s Awakened, Jiang Baimian believed that it was still possible to discover something from an investigation in Gesterbourg.

In the beginning, Jiang Baimian thought of investigating acquaintances of Smith’s Rootless team. After all, it was definitely not possible for a stranger to make them take on a mission that was a little strange and dangerous, requiring them to go to Icefield in spring. However, Jiang Baimian later gave up on the idea because an ‘acquaintance’ could be created. Be it Memory Tampering or Inference Clowning, such an effect could be easily achieved.

Finally, she decided to start with the source of the corresponding supplies. Those goods wouldn’t be affected by Awakened abilities.

The second matter was to see if the Old Task Force of Shang Jianyao’s father had been to Gesterbourg, the closest human settlement to Ceningmis, to see if they had obtained any information or revealed anything.

Jiang Baimian retorted Shang Jianyao in exasperation and amusement, “Our first priority now is to find a place to charge. The investigation has lower priority!”

Shang Jianyao immediately agreed. “That’s right. Old Ge hasn’t taught me dancing for the past two days just to conserve electricity.”

He did as he said and quickly found a hotel called Fire & Iron on the street near the exit.

The moment he entered, Shang Jianyao—who had flaxen hair—asked the man at the front desk, “Does your hotel have a charging point? Are there frequent power outages here?”

The man was stunned for two seconds before asking, “From the south?”

He was young—only in his twenties. He was about the same height as Jiang Baimian, and he had blond hair, blue eyes, and good facial features. However, he didn’t leave much of an impression.

“How did you know?” Shang Jianyao widened his eyes with a curious expression.

The man laughed. “I can tell from your accent.”

Shang Jianyao’s Red River language had First City characteristics. This was similar to the White Knights’ southernmost accent.

“Oh, oh.” Shang Jianyao came to a realization.

The man glanced at the four of them and Genava—who was pretending to be an ordinary robot—and confidently said, “Don’t worry. We don’t have much of anything here in Gesterbourg except for coal, iron, and power plants! If you choose the most luxurious suite, the electricity bill will be included in the room fee. There’s no need for additional payment.”

Shang Jianyao was shocked. “Really?”

“Yes, we can sign a contract.” The man nodded solemnly.

Upon thinking of the large number of high-performance batteries in the team that needed charging, a thought flashed across Long Yuehong’s mind: There’s such a good thing?