

Scavengers 971

Chapter 971: Attack!

Ji You stopped and examined the Charging Pole—

The pole's surface was smooth, without a single opening, and its material was a composite of thousands of metals, designed to last over 100 years with normal use. Ji You turned slightly, lowered her gaze, and saw the maintenance record sticker on the back of the Charging Pole. It had only been three years since its last maintenance.

With current technological standards, maintenance is typically needed only once every ten years. Therefore, theoretically, this Energy Pillar should still be usable for at least seven more years.

But where exactly did the Black Gold Rat come from?

Ji You circled around again and still found no trace of it.

Ji You frowned, "Strange—I clearly saw it come out from here. How could it just disappear?" She raised her hand, wanting to touch the outer wall of the Charging Pole. But Ji You restrained herself and refrained from making a sudden move.

At this moment, Shen Changqing's voice came through the communication device: "Student Ji You, the Dock's monitoring system has been successfully repaired. Shall we activate it now?"

Ji You said, "Activate it, and relay the feedback information to me in real-time."

Shen Changqing nodded, "Alright."

Then.

Ji You's screen flickered, then revealed a vast Starry Sky Map. Unlike other planets, the sky over the northern hemisphere of Bee Head Star during midnight was a clear blue.

Endless, blue as the ocean's gentle embrace.

Gazing at the tranquil starry sky, Ji You found her breathing unknowingly lighter and said to Shen Changqing, "Adjust the monitoring angle, zoom into Dock 6."

Shen Changqing immediately complied.

Then.

The view shifted back to the slightly rundown Dock 6. Besides some artificial structures, there were no other decorations in the port. The monitor offered a 360-degree view, covering all angles, stretching bit by bit along the inlet of the dock...

Everything appeared normal, without any issues. If not for the deep hole dug open by the Black Gold Rat, this place would seem very safe and sturdy.

Shen Changqing said, "So far, no third Black Gold Rat has been found, no other Star Beasts have been detected, and no other system damages in the Dock have been discovered. Current checks indicate everything is normal."

Ji You said, "The surface is clear, but what about underground?"

The absence of Black Gold Rats on the surface does not guarantee their absence underground.

Black Gold Rats excel at digging and tunneling; their claws are extremely sharp and sturdy. One Black Gold Rat, without eating or drinking for 24 hours, can dig down at least 500 meters.

It's imaginable how proficient they are at burrowing.

Shen Changqing then extended the probe underground.

The surface and the underground are two different worlds.

The underground was pitch black, with only the occasional glimmers from the sky's blue light casting a faint glow. The transmitted images were of dark sand.

meters.

meters.

meters.

...

As the probe kept descending, the monitoring screen showed a safe green.

At 200 meters, it was still safe.

This indicated that there were no Black Gold Rats or any Star Beasts up to 200 meters underground beneath the Dock.

Ji You didn't call to stop, and Shen Changqing continued exploring deeper. The probe was extending continuously. Around 300 meters, suddenly, "Beep beep beep!!!!"

The alarm sounded, and four red dots appeared on the monitoring screen.

Ji You narrowed her eyes, "Mark the exact locations and continue."

This meant that they had discovered four Black Gold Rats. Shen Changqing, Chu Jiaojiao, Yue Qiguang, and others immediately became alert. Shen Changqing marked the coordinates of the four Black Gold Rats and cautiously operated the monitor's probe to continue downward...

Then.

The alarm rang again!

"Beep beep beep—"

A new cluster of six red dots appeared on the screen. Unlike the previous four Black Gold Rats, these dots were clustered together rather than scattered individually.

Chu Jiaojiao said, "Just as expected, this group of Black Gold Rats is being led by a mother rat with her offspring." Unless during a reproductive period, Black Gold Rats usually act and live alone, only grouping with others when a mother rat leads her pups.

Thinking of this, Chu Jiaojiao couldn't help but breathe a sigh of relief. Pups mean weakness, easier to defeat. Just as she was about to exhale, Ji You's voice said gravely, "The probe isn't fully complete yet. Don't rush to conclusions."

Right as Ji You finished speaking, another cluster of red dots flashed on the screen.

1, 2, 3, 4...

in total!

Ji You, Chu Jiaojiao, Shen Changqing widened their eyes, "!!!"

Ji You gulped and said, "Don't panic. Judging from the energy wave frequencies, there are only 1-2 matured ones here; the rest are just pups. Are you scared of pups?"

"Scared?" Yue Qiguang said, "I've never been scared of anything."

"Are you insulting me?" Yue Qiyuan retorted, with confident assurance in his tone.

"Student Ji You, if it's just 12 pups, leave them to me. I need to teach these pups the harsh reality of society. Without experiencing adversity, they won't mature. If they don't face challenges or hardships, how will they learn to behave?" Chu Jiaojiao was eager, seemingly ready to engage in battle immediately.

Ji You said, "They're now hiding somewhere underground, at a depth of approximately 300 meters. Are you sure you can go down there and engage in combat?"

Chu Jiaojiao said, "Ahem ahem..."

Beside them, Shen Changqing suddenly asked, "Student Ji You, how do you intend to solve this problem?"

Ji You said, "Let's brainstorm. If anyone has good ideas, please bring them up."

In the following minutes, from beneath the Dock, probing continued until no more red dots appeared. They discovered Black Gold Rats up to over 50,000 meters deep, totaling 179. Many were in groups, nests.

From the monitored images, these Black Gold Rats formed at least 7 or 8 groups, with some scattered individually. Seeing this, Ji You, Chu Jiaojiao, Shen Changqing, Sheng Qingyan, Yue Qiguang, and Yue Qiyuan all fell silent.

was quite a sizable group. If they triggered one, causing all 179 Black Gold Rats to converge, what would they do then?

After a while.

Sheng Qingyan pouted, stomped, and asked, "Damn it, are we going to fight or not?"

If not, he could at least go back to sleep, right?

Ji You was silent for a few seconds, then gritted her teeth, "Fight!"

Hmm?

Everyone was startled; Yue Qiguang asked, "How exactly are we going to fight?"

Black Gold Rats, with just one slightly more advanced among them, could swarm in an attack. Ji You and her team couldn't possibly evade them.

Chapter 972: Bait

"How do we fight?" Ji You stroked her chin and turned to the others.

Chu Jiaojiao, Shen Changqing, and Yue Qiyuan heard this and bowed their heads in thought. Yue Qiguang, who didn't like to think too much, yanked at his own red hair and said, "You guys decide, I'll just do what you say."

Sheng Qingyan half-closed his eyes, staring intently at the monitor, looking uninterested and not participating in the discussion.

Liu Fufeng looked at Ji You, then at the others, sitting on the soft sofa of the spaceship, but as if on pins and needles, he thought for a moment and said, "Why don't we retreat?"

Ji You was taken aback: "Retreat?"

Does that mean they won't capture the Black Thorn Bee either?

Ji You's eyes suddenly lit up, but before she could be happy, she heard Liu Fufeng say seriously, "179 Black Gold Rats, too dangerous, I'm so scared! Let's hurry to the Southern Hemisphere to catch the Black Thorn Bee."

Ji You: "..."

Ji You gave him a sideways glance: "Your tone doesn't sound scared at all; it sounds like you're asking for a beating!"

Liu Fufeng looked at himself, clutching his chest, and said, "Classmate Ji You, I am truly terrified."

"Ahem..." Ji You turned her head and looked at the seriously pondering Chu Jiaojiao, Shen Changqing, and Yue Qiyuan, saying, "You three, have you come up with anything?"

Chu Jiaojiao stopped thinking and said, "179, that's a large number, we must isolate them."

Yue Qiyuan mused, "How to isolate them is a problem."

Shen Changqing looked at everyone and said, "179 Black Gold Rats, according to rough monitoring results, only 3 are level 3. There are about 8-10 level 2 ones, and the rest are level 1 juveniles. If they all rush out, it would indeed be unfavorable for us."

Hearing this, Ji You's lips curled upward and she said, "Everyone's on the same wavelength. We could face off against these 179 Black Gold Rats head-on, but there's no need. Why exert two parts of effort when one will do?"

"Moreover—" Ji You looked at Chu Jiaojiao, Shen Changqing, and others, saying, "I don't want to see any casualties among us. So, our priority is to ensure the safety of our own lives."

Ensure?

Chu Jiaojiao, Yue Qiguang, Yue Qiyuan... after hearing this, all rolled their eyes at Ji You, who coughed slightly and corrected, "Ensure the safety of oneself and teammates."

That's more like it.

Chu Jiaojiao, Yue Qiguang, Yue Qiyuan... after hearing this, were satisfied.

Ji You rolled her eyes and said, "The meaning is the same, it's just a matter of wording, isn't it a bit unnecessary?"

Yue Qiguang said, "You don't care about face, but we do."

Ji You was shocked: "You actually have face?"

Yue Qiguang's face darkened and he cursed, "Idiot! Hurry up and talk about the serious stuff. Stop blabbering nonsense."

Ji You raised her hand and pointed to the surveillance footage sent over by Shen Changqing, smiling as she said, "Classmate Shen Changqing, look at this position, what do you think?"

Shen Changqing, Yue Qiguang, Yue Qiyuan, Chu Jiaojiao... all followed Ji You's direction, and with a look, everyone instantly understood. Shen Changqing's eyes lit up and asked, "You mean to set up a checkpoint here? To trap all the Black Gold Rats here?"

Ji You nodded: "That's right."

Ji You pointed to a hall about 1000 meters deep underground and said, "Here, there is a military defensive checkpoint tower specially built by the Dock, strong enough, secure enough, I believe even if all 179 Black Gold Rats swarm, they can't break through. Then, we just need to guard the exit, everyone focuses fire, and we can kill them one by one."

This is known as?

Known as holding a pass against ten thousand enemies.

Chu Jiaojiao frowned: "But, how do we lure all the Black Gold Rats over there?"

Ji You said, "That's a problem. But it's not too hard to solve."

Yue Qiguang frowned: "It's not too hard? If the Black Gold Rats were cooperative, we wouldn't have to go to so much trouble to fight them."

Yue Qiyuan pursed his lips: "Ahem... Brother, please just shut up. How much merit did our Yue Family accumulate to have someone like you, this living ancestor."

Yue Qiguang: "..."

Yue Qiguang was slightly displeased: "Yue Qiyuan, you idiot, do you want to get beaten? Don't think just because you say that, I don't know you're mocking my intelligence."

Yue Qiyuan: "..."

Yue Qiyuan no longer wanted to speak.

At this point, Shen Changqing's clear voice chimed in, breaking the brief awkwardness: "It's indeed not difficult, we just need some bait."

Ji You said, "Exactly. We need some bait."

"Bait?" Chu Jiaojiao was confused and couldn't help asking, "What kind of bait?"

Ji You asked, "What do Black Gold Rats like the most?"

Sitting on the sofa, Liu Fufeng's body shivered slightly: "Eating people."

Ji You: "..."

Ji You took a deep breath and said, "So, should I send you out as bait?"

Liu Fufeng: "..."

Ji You rolled her eyes and said, "Keep arguing and I'll send you to feed the Black Gold Rats."

Liu Fufeng closed his mouth and sat still.

Ji You continued, "I believe everyone knows that Black Gold Rats love Black Gold Ore the most, and they are a very greedy Star Beast. We just need to sprinkle a little Black Gold Ore along the path the Black Gold Rats take, and we can lure them into the Xuan Gate Tower. Once they enter the tower, it won't be easy for them to get out."

With Ji You's explanation, everyone immediately understood.

Yue Qiguang also suddenly realized, he slapped his head and frowned, "Why didn't Daddy think of something so simple?"

Yue Qiyuan whispered, in a low tone, "There are plenty of things you haven't thought of."

This method wasn't too difficult to come up with, but to pierce through all the information collected earlier and directly think of this method requires a very sharp mind and quick decision-making abilities.

This cannot be cultivated overnight.

Yue Qiyuan admitted to himself that if it were him, he definitely wouldn't have thought of it immediately. He might have opted for a more circuitous route, or even directly abandoned the place and moved to a safer location.

Yue Qiyuan glanced at Ji You, his expression slightly complicated: Has 4444 reached this level already?

Ji You was unaware of the little calculations going on inside the minds of the Yue brothers, she looked at the group and asked, "What do you think?"

Chu Jiaojiao, Yue Qiguang, Yue Qiyuan, Shen Changqing, even the usually silent Sheng Qingyan and Liu Fufeng, all nodded.

The bait was settled, but Chu Jiaojiao thought of a crucial issue, felt a bit troubled, and said, "Then—where do we get the Black Gold Ore? Although Bee Head Star is rich in Black Gold Ore, the mines have been mostly excavated. Do we have to go underground and try our luck to dig?"

Ji You cleared her throat, raised her voice, and said, "You don't have to worry about that, the clever me prepared it for you in advance. All you have to do is buy it from me."

Everyone: "..."

Chapter 973: Deep Underground

As soon as Ji You spoke, the tense atmosphere on-site suddenly fell into an eerie silence. Ji You clearly saw Chu Jiaojiao, Yue Qiguang, Yue Qiyuan, Shen Changqing... a few people slightly swayed their figures.

Soon enough, everyone regained their upright stance, except for Chu Jiaojiao who was clutching her chest, gazing at Ji You with a look of admiration after disbelief, "Oh no, oh no, my wallet~ my heart~ Why does classmate Ji You look so cunning yet so good-looking!"

Everyone: "..."

Ji You said, "Don't mind her. I only bought 120 pounds this time; the quantity is limited. Are you buying or not? If not, I'll take it back."

Yue Qiguang said with a black face, "Why did you think of hoarding this stuff?"

Ji You said matter-of-factly, "Of course, to be prepared for unexpected needs, isn't it being used now?"

Yue Qiguang said speechlessly, "Then why did you think of selling it to us?"

Ji You's smile dropped, and he put away the Black Gold Ore solemnly, "Listen, my dear fellows, I'm not doing this to make a fortune; I'm doing this to ensure everyone's safety! I'm considering everyone's well-being; I'm serving everyone... Besides, Black Gold Ore for 5000 credit points a pound, what's wrong with me selling it to you for 5100 credit points? Is my effort to make a 100 credit point fee easy?"

"Ahem... Ahem..."

So it's only 100 credit points extra per pound, indeed not easy. Moreover, since this is a group task everyone took on together, a material required to complete the task shouldn't have been paid for by Ji You alone.

Thinking this way, a touch of guilt inevitably rose in the minds of a group of stingy folks.

Clearing their throats, Chu Jiaojiao was the first to jump over and said, "Classmate Ji You, I want all of it!"

"Don't be ridiculous!" Ji You gave her a light knock on the head and said, "It's only 120 pounds, each person is limited to 20 pounds, hurry up and pay!"

"Oh—" Chu Jiaojiao quickly handed over the money.

The others didn't delay either, all paying up and taking the Black Gold Ore one by one.

Ji You looked at the credit points in hand, feeling delighted, just turning them over, netting 12,000. How was that tough?

Such tough tasks, the more, the merrier in the future, ha.

Seeing everyone else got their share, and only himself without, Liu Fufeng looked on eagerly, feeling a bit dejected. He opened his mouth, hesitated for a while, and asked, "Classmate Ji You, don't I get any?"

Ji You huffed, "You're so frail, you don't need it. Besides, do you even have money?"

Liu Fufeng: "..."

Liu Fufeng thought it over, indeed, he might be slightly more fragile than the others; in that case, he might as well not fuss and just sit quietly and be protected.

Ji You looked at everyone with their Black Gold Ore, then seriously told everyone, "Now let's divide the tasks."

Everyone listened intently.

Ji You said, "These 179 Black Gold Rats are distributed fan-shaped in several corners, let's not make it complicated, just divide into east, west, and south directions, two per group, based on the number of Black Gold Rats in each area, dividing the direction each group is responsible for."

Everyone had no objection to this point.

Ji You continued, "Do you want to form teams yourselves, or should I help you divide them?"

Yue Qiguang and the others shrugged and said, "Any arrangement will do."

Chu Jiaojiao said, "I want to be in a group with classmate Ji You, I want to protect you."

Ji You thought about it and felt perhaps a strong combat-type around would be needed, so she said, "Then I'll team up with Jiaojiao. Yue Qiguang, you team up with your brother, Spicy Eye, you team up with Shen Changqing."

No one had any objections.

Forgotten and ignored, Liu Fufeng squatted in the corner, continuing to play dead, drawing circles with his fingers.

Ji You said, "Shen Changqing, you and Spicy Eye stay in the Dock's surveillance room first, you must relay the monitored situation in real-time to them."

"You are teammates; when we can't identify scenarios and can't see the danger, remember! Shen Changqing and Spicy Eye, they are your eyes.

You must trust them!"

Upon hearing this, Sheng Qingyan, who was slightly nonchalant, suddenly froze at these words, then his handsome face became extremely serious, he looked at Ji You, wanted to say something, but swallowed it back, finally, Sheng Qingyan rolled his eyes, "Poor dead, remember, don't call me Spicy Eye anymore in the future~"

Ji You said, "Okay, Spicy Eye."

Sheng Qingyan: "..."

Sheng Qingyan stomped his foot suddenly, "I'm not playing with you anymore."

Speaking, Sheng Qingyan immediately turned his back.

At this moment, Ji You proactively spoke, "I'm teaming up with Jiaojiao for reconnaissance first. Classmate Shen Changqing, Spicy Eye, you two provide real-time intelligence."

Shen Changqing softly said, "Rest assured."

Two words, simple, calm.

Ji You turned to Yue Qiguang, Yue Qiguang, and said, "You enter the underground 20 minutes later."

The two brothers of the Yue Family had no objections either.

Ji You raised a hand and beckoned to Chu Jiaojiao, "Jiaojiao, let's go!"

Chu Jiaojiao immediately jumped over, shouting loudly, "Yes!"

To go underground, you need to wear specialized armor, or you won't be able to breathe freely. Just as Ji You changed into armor, the gate to the underground opened.

It was the handiwork of Shen Changqing and Sheng Qingyan.

Ji You pointed at a big hole in the ground and said, "Actually, I initially wanted to jump straight down here to investigate."

Shen Changqing softly said, "Safety first, proceed through the underground protective gate."

Ji You nodded.

She took the lead, heading into the protective gate without looking back, followed closely by Chu Jiaojiao.

Initially, the world inside the protective gate was similar to the daytime, visible in its layout.

However, as time slowly passed, the entire Underworld became indistinct, pitch black.

meter.

meters.

meters.

...

Continuously delving deeper until visibly dark, almost unable to see anything within sight.

Ji You and Chu Jiaojiao still didn't dare to turn on lights for illumination, fearing as soon as they did, they would attract other Black Gold Rats.

But they weren't completely blind; unable to observe with eyes, they could only use spiritual power to explore, supplemented by Shen Changqing and Sheng Qingyan's real-time coordinate reports, the path forward was unobstructed.

Watching afterward, Shen Changqing, Sheng Qingyan, Yue Qiguang, Yue Qiyuan held their breath and then relaxed.

Yue Qiguang said, "I'll go down with Yue Qiyuan soon."

Yue Qiyuan didn't oppose this time.

Shen Changqing considered comprehensively, nodded in agreement, and reminded, "Be even more careful going down; avoid them if unnecessary. But if something happens, join Ji You and them immediately."

"Hmm. Yue Qiguang: "Naggy."

Soon, Yue Qiguang and Yue Qiyuan also went down.

Over here, Ji You had already reached beside the first Black Gold Rat—

Chapter 974: Execution

Ji You and Chu Jiaojiao were wearing protective clothing, helmets, and goggles, almost no skin exposed. Fortunately, all the protective equipment was soft, form-fitting, and lightweight, not affecting their agility at all. Once fully equipped, the two slowly descended from the edge of the collapse into the underground. Inside, it was pitch black, without a hint of light.

Worried about alerting the Black Gold Rats, they dared not turn on their flashlights, relying instead on detection equipment and the guidance of Shen Changqing and Sheng Qingyan from the command center to move cautiously forward.

The entire underworld seemed like a maze formed by countless tunnels, innumerable and invisible. The deeper they went, the more lost they felt, but Ji You and the others recorded their progress every 10 meters, further aided by Dock's monitoring equipment, ensuring they didn't worry about getting lost.

After recording, Ji You and Chu Jiaojiao stopped. Chu Jiaojiao tilted her ear, carefully monitoring the surroundings. Ji You spoke into the communicator to Shen Changqing, "Are you sure it's 11.5 meters away from us?"

Shen Changqing responded quietly, "Be careful; it seems slightly aware."

Ji You and Chu Jiaojiao immediately composed themselves, halting all movement, minimizing their presence as much as possible, while the Light Computer connection remained steady. Shen Changqing's clear voice came through:

"According to thermal detection results, this is a level 3 Black Gold Rat and is very dangerous. Be careful."

Ji You: "Got it."

After giving the instructions, Shen Changqing temporarily paused communications with Ji You and Chu Jiaojiao, turning to contact Yue Qiyuan and Yue Qiguang instead.

Shen Changqing and Sheng Qingyan were busy in the monitoring room, while Ji You, Chu Jiaojiao, Yue Qiguang, and Yue Qiyuan were also under pressure deep underground. Shen Changqing and Sheng Qingyan needed to ensure accurate information transmission to provide maximum logistical support for their teammates. Ji You and the others faced direct danger, at any moment a battle could erupt, so they were under immense pressure...

No one complained, and no one retreated; all focused on the tasks at hand...

In the corner, Liu Fufeng paused from sketching circles, watching Shen Changqing and Sheng Qingyan, who were fully trusted by Ji You, Chu Jiaojiao, Yue Qiguang, and Yue Qiyuan...

For a moment, Liu Fufeng's beautiful eyes widened.

He too...

wanted a group of such friends.

Liu Fufeng lowered his eyes and continued folding the small paper piece in his hand.

Yeah.

As long as his hands kept moving, troubles disappeared.

...

On their way through, Ji You and Chu Jiaojiao cleverly buried Black Gold Ore in the earth along the path, just covering it slightly with a thin layer of soil, allowing its scent to attract nearby Black Gold Rats.

With 10 meters left to the level 3 Black Gold Rat, Ji You and Chu Jiaojiao exchanged glances, communicating silently in the pitch-black tunnel with a brief 1-second eye contact,

Chu Jiaojiao: "I'll go."

Ji You shook her head: "I'll go."

Chu Jiaojiao: "I'm stronger than you."

Ji You: "You're a big brute, I'm more meticulous than you."

Chu Jiaojiao: "...But you're short, skinny, and small..." saying this, her eyes even darted past Ji You's chest...

Even in the darkness, being so close, their breaths could reach each other's face. While trying to minimize their presence, Chu Jiaojiao's presence was still strong... Unavoidable, Ji You rolled her eyes, "Why must women make things difficult for each other... just because you lack a bust doesn't mean you should look down on those who have one."

Chu Jiaojiao was shocked: "You have?"

Ji You: "..."

Ji You gritted her teeth: "I'll go, just hold back a bit."

Chu Jiaojiao shrank her neck but still gripped the Charging Particle Gun tightly, ready to support at any moment.

Ji You threw the words aside and slowly crawled towards the destination. The passage they used was a pipeline built by Dock. During Dock's construction, many such pipes were laid underground, but they were very narrow, allowing only one person at a time. Ji You inched forward slowly, halting occasionally, finally reaching the location of the level 3 Black Gold Rat.

meter.

With just 1 meter of separation, even a slight increase in Ji You's presence would immediately alert the Black Gold Rat. She held her breath, not daring to make a move...

"Squeak squeak squeak..."

"Squeak squeak squeak..."

"Squeak squeak squeak..."

Ji You could clearly hear the Black Gold Rat's calls and the rustling it made while shifting its body.

second.

seconds.

seconds.

...

After a long pause, Ji You seized the opportunity, placing a prepared 10-gram piece of Black Gold Ore at a turn in the Black Gold Rat's burrow.

Only 10 grams. With the appetite of a Black Gold Rat, this is far from enough. So when it finds it appealing, it will continue searching, and find the second piece of Black Gold Ore, which weighs even less, just 5 grams, or 6 grams...

The Black Gold Rat, unsatisfied, will keep looking.

...

In this cycle, it will be gradually lured into the checkpoint tower.

All this must be done silently. As the Black Gold Ore was just buried, the level 3 Black Gold Rat suddenly raised its head, stopping its squeaking...

Separated only by a layer of pipeline wall, and a layer of earth, the formidable aura of the level 3 Black Gold Rat was palpable. Sweat instantly appeared on Ji You's forehead.

Thankfully, the Black Gold Rat sensed it slightly, indistinctly, without anything particularly obvious. It lay back down in the burrow.

Ji You paused for a few seconds before crawling back slowly.

Chu Jiaojiao waited at the turn, only breathing a sigh of relief after reuniting with Ji You. Without a sound, they crawled towards another direction.

Once away from the level 3 Black Gold Rat, they both exhaled slowly, Ji You said, "Next target."

Chu Jiaojiao said, "I'll do it."

Ji You wanted to speak, but Chu Jiaojiao clutched her chest, saying, "I can't bear for Ji You to take risks while I just stand there like a fool."

Ji You: "..."

The sudden sentimentality gave a sense of trickery.

Chu Jiaojiao said, "I really thought that Black Gold Rat was going to scratch Ji You's face, goodness, it scared me to death."

Ji You: "..."

Chu Jiaojiao said, "I've said it before, Ji You's face is mine to protect."

Ji You rolled her eyes, "My face is mine to protect. Besides—"

Ji You declared emphatically, "I have no face."

"..." Chu Jiaojiao choked, shook her head, and said, "No—you do."

Ji You said, "I don't, I have no face."

Chu Jiaojiao: "No—you do."

In the communicator, Sheng Qingyan's lazy, obviously disdainful voice sounded: "Are you two done yet? Your faces? Do you even have such things? Why aren't you quickly continuing with your task..."

"Hurry and finish, some of us want to sleep!"

Chapter 975: Squeak Squeak Squeak

When Sheng Qingyan interrupted, Ji You and Chu Jiaojiao immediately collected their thoughts and continued focusing on the tense baiting —

This baiting task was quite troublesome: not only did the Black Gold Ore need to be buried for the Black Gold Rat to smell it, but the timing had to be precise. If you buried the bait one second and the Black Gold Rat dug it up the next, you wouldn't have time to leave, and the rat would definitely notice you.

So, every bait must be meticulously and carefully buried in the right position to let it emit its scent within the designated time...

Ji You, Chu Jiaojiao, including Yue Qiguang and Yue Qiyuan in another direction, were all executing with great diligence.

piece.

pieces.

pieces.

...

Shen Changqing's originally tight lips quietly curled up, and his tone became a bit more cheerful: "We have completed 150 pieces, and there are 29 left to go, keep it up!"

Sheng Qingyan chimed in: "Keep it up~ You guys are amazing~, deserving of being teammates of the universe's number one cute little thing~ Don't worry, when you successfully come out, I will give each of you a signed autograph~."

Ji You, Chu Jiaojiao, and others: "..."

Ji You said: "Spicy Eye, I'd actually prefer your IOUs. How about you write me an IOU for a million?"

Chu Jiaojiao said: "That's right, an IOU is more meaningful."

Yue Qiguang said: "What use is an IOU really, but it's better than nothing, Dad wouldn't mind having one either."

Yue Qiyuan said: "Give me 10."

Upon hearing Yue Qiyuan's words, Sheng Qingyan finally cracked a smile and said: "See~, you poor souls~ all of you... so vulgar~! Ayuan sure has vision~."

Next second.

Yue Qiyuan said: "Please don't misunderstand, I meant 10 IOUs."

Sheng Qingyan: "..."

Sheng Qingyan rolled his eyes and said: "You all talk too much~, disturbing my rest~ Hurry and complete the task~."

"Ahem..." Shen Changqing said: "It's not time to rest yet, Ayan, hang in there."

Sheng Qingyan snorted: "I'm just saying~"

"Ahem ahem..." Ji You and Chu Jiaojiao exchanged a glance, Ji You whispered: "I have to admit, sometimes hearing Spicy Eye talk is quite motivating. At least, right now, I just want to hurry and complete the task, then get back to give him a beating."

Chu Jiaojiao softly said: "I plan on 10 beatings."

In the monitoring room, Sheng Qingyan heard this and took a deep breath, saying: "Jiaojiao~, isn't that a bit harsh~?"

Chu Jiaojiao said: "A ruler that isn't harsh can't maintain their position."

Ji You grinned and said: "As long as one is strong enough, being a ruler isn't hard. Only weak souls would worry about unstable positions, while I—am strong enough that I never worry about my position, only about there not being enough money in my pocket."

Shen Changqing: "..."

The topic seemed to be drifting more and more off course.

Then—

Ji You and Chu Jiaojiao changed the subject, saying to Shen Changqing and Sheng Qingyan through the monitor: "We're ready."

Shen Changqing and Sheng Qingyan's expressions tightened, and Shen Changqing heavily said: "Be very careful."

Ji You, Chu Jiaojiao: "Okay."

The two were headed to a nest of 31 Black Gold Rats, which was a bit troublesome; while the strongest was a level 3 peak mother rat, unlike other nests with just the mother and all offspring, this nest had 2 level 3 and 3 level 2, with the rest all level 1...

These levels didn't seem too high, it looked manageable. Ji You and Chu Jiaojiao's team were veterans in outsmarting level 8 Sea Iron Bull, level 8 Carrion Vulture, level 8 Viper Worm...! Usually, they dealt with the corpses of level 4, 5, and 6 Star Beasts, and quite frequently too...

Ahem ahem...

Collecting Star Beast corpses in outer space is also collecting corpses.

Why fear mere levels 2 and 3?

But—

This was underground, this wasn't facing Star Beasts head-on, and Ji You and the team only wore armor, carried energy weapons, and ordinary particle guns, without any mecha.

It was all relying on physical strength and battle prowess.

During the final exam period, Ji You and Chu Jiaojiao's group had to cooperate with the entire team to handle the sudden influx of 3-level Long-Mouthed Pig, without mechas.

Therefore, Ji You and Chu Jiaojiao's action now was very dangerous.

The two concentrated, trying to lower their presence as much as possible, before slowly, slowly, inching forward.

Shen Changqing and Sheng Qingyan were closely watching the monitor and dared not relax...

All around was very quiet.

But the closer they got to the Black Gold Rat group, the more the noise increased.

Finally, they were about to reach the nest of Black Gold Rats, Chu Jiaojiao and Ji You held their breath, and the rat group was completely unaware, not noticing a hint of anomaly, the level 3 peak mother rat was gnawing on a fingernail-sized piece of Black Gold Ore with its sharp teeth, surrounded by a group of Black Gold Rats, some were tiny, and some were slightly larger, and even a few were about her size; it was nighttime when the rats were most active, they chatted incessantly...

Ji You listened closely for a moment, then gestured to Chu Jiaojiao.

Receiving it, Chu Jiaojiao immediately moved a few steps forward, the rats still remaining oblivious, Chu Jiaojiao slowly, quietly breathed out...

Then—

Chu Jiaojiao buried 5 pieces, each weighing 10 grams, of Black Gold Ore at around 3 meters from the rat nest entrance using a spade...

Everything went smoothly.

Chu Jiaojiao retrieved the spade and put it back into the Space Button, ready to retreat.

Ji You remained tense and alert.

Chu Jiaojiao edged back slowly, smoothly rendezvousing with Ji You, she beamed at Ji You, mouthed silently: "Ji You, am I strong or what?"

Ji You raised a thumb: "Strong! Very strong, just a tad less than me."

Chu Jiaojiao didn't quarrel with Ji You, just said: "You look good, you say whatever you want... I'm willing to pamper you."

Having spoken, Chu Jiaojiao stepped forward wanting to climb a step, suddenly—

"Bang—"

Her head banged against the pipe wall, Chu Jiaojiao was startled—

At this moment, the slowly gnawing mother rat jerked its head up, other rats too quickly became alert, Shen Changqing and Sheng Qingyan's faces simultaneously changed in the monitor room!

Things went south!

At this point, Ji You grabbed Chu Jiaojiao, who wanted to act first, opened his mouth and suddenly said: "Squeak squeak squeak..."

Mother Rat: "???"

Chu Jiaojiao, Shen Changqing, Sheng Qingyan... were all stunned.

Ji You disregarded this, opened his mouth, wholeheartedly plunged into nonsense: "Squeak squeak squeak..."

At the same time, releasing the grip on Chu Jiaojiao's hand briefly, he swiftly seized the Little Golden Dragon in his arms, Little Golden Dragon struggled against the chokehold, Ji You relaxed his grip a bit, only then did the reluctant Little Golden Dragon open its mouth to follow: "Squeak squeak squeak..."

[What the heck are you saying, you're going to scare the Black Gold Rats to death.]

Ji You: "Squeak squeak squeak..."

[I don't care.]

Little Golden Dragon: "Squeak squeak squeak..."

[Your squeaking is so terrifying to rats, don't be reckless...]

Ji You: "Squeak squeak squeak..."

[I'm reckless, I'm proud, I invite rats to sleep tight...]

Little Golden Dragon: "..."

Chapter 976: Play!

Ji You: "Squeak squeak squeak..."

Little Golden Dragon: "..."

Little Golden Dragon: "Squeak squeak squeak..."

[Woman, do you know what you're saying?]

Ji You: "Squeak squeak squeak..."

[I don't know, aren't mice supposed to squeak like this...]

Inside the Black Gold Rat nest less than 10 meters away, the head of the level 3 peak female rat turned around once, then stretched its neck: "Squeak squeak squeak???"

Little Golden Dragon couldn't hold back, raised a hand to rub its forehead: "Squeak squeak squeak..."

[Do you know what that rat is saying?]

Ji You grinned, her smile very open: "Squeak squeak squeak?"

Little Golden Dragon: "Squeak squeak squeak..."

[It said, you big idiot outside, what are you babbling about, you're bothering me, if you keep it up, I'll bite you to death!]

"Squeak—" Ji You just opened her mouth and heard Little Golden Dragon's translation, abruptly swallowing her words halfway, forcing a calm smile onto her stiffly frozen lips: "..."

[Such arrogant stinky rat, does it really think that I, standing at the World's Peak, would be intimidated by it—]

The next second.

Ji You grabbed Little Golden Dragon and stuffed it into her chest, [Damn! Run quickly, now or never!]

Little Golden Dragon: "..."

Little Golden Dragon curled up its body and said: "Squeak squeak squeak..."

[Mom... I chased away the big idiot~]

Ji You's foot paused, nearly stumbling: "Squeak squeak squeak..."

[You actually called it mom?]

Little Golden Dragon's mouth stiffened, "Ahem... Squeak!"

[You don't understand, this is disguising the enemy, infiltrating from within! Unlike you, just a silly fool, squeaking randomly without knowing anything...]

More baffling to Little Golden Dragon was this silly woman, she was so engrossed in her squeaking, completely losing herself, yelling as if she's a mouse.

Honestly.

Not being bitten to death by the Black Gold Rat already shows she's quite lucky.

Upon hearing Little Golden Dragon's words, Ji You suddenly understood: "Squeak—"

[Oh—you're pretty smart.]

At this time, the team of two people and a mecha had successfully escaped the danger zone. Hearing Ji You still persevering in her squeaky calls, Little Golden Dragon said in exasperation: "Alright, it can't hear you now, stop squeaking, all your squeaking is giving me a headache."

Ji You: "Squeak squeak..."

[Even if it can't hear me, I must maintain my identity and image, listen, starting today, I will be a cool and domineering Black Gold Rat all day long!]

Little Golden Dragon: "..."

Little Golden Dragon suddenly felt a bit of depression.

Beside, Chu Jiaojiao patted her chest strongly and said to Ji You: "Ji You, you're really... both beautiful and witty!" She paused slightly, face curious and asked: "Ji You, can you really understand the Black Gold Rat's sounds?"

Ji You's confident smile paused for a moment, but only for an instant, then she raised her chin proudly: "Squeak—"

[Of course.]

Ji You: "Squeak squeak squeak..."

[I'm the Black Gold Rat's best friend, I invite it to meals, give it a place to sleep, and even offer comprehensive service for killing and burial.]

Chu Jiaojiao: "..."

"Sorry, I can't understand this language." Chu Jiaojiao finished and turned to Little Golden Dragon in Ji You's hold: "Mr. Little Golden Dragon, what is she saying?"

Little Golden Dragon's mouth stiffened again, after thinking, it waved its hand: "Translating this is a bit tricky, why not ask Ji You directly."

Chu Jiaojiao turned to Ji You, Ji You squinted mischievously and smiled brightly, "Squeak squeak squeak..."

Chu Jiaojiao lifted a hand and rubbed her forehead, helpless against Ji You's playful enthusiasm:

Why does she have to be so cute?

Really—

Just endure it.

Thus—

Chu Jiaojiao rubbed her forehead, then gave a standard smile revealing eight teeth toward Ji You, "Squeak squeak squeak—"

In the surveillance room, Shen Changqing and Sheng Qingyan almost simultaneously raised hands and rubbed their temples heavily. Sheng Qingyan said disdainfully: "Why would a perfectly fine person choose to act like a mouse? What's wrong? Did your brain get pinched?"

Shen Changqing replied softly: "Ahem... perhaps."

But!

Both let out a sigh of relief. At a critical moment, Ji You's actions were simply extraordinary, otherwise, everything would have been in vain, everyone would have been forced to pick up weapons, and prematurely engage in a battle against the Black Gold Rats.

In the surveillance footage, Ji You and Chu Jiaojiao were still squeaking like crazy, talking past each other... Shen Changqing's gaze involuntarily settled on Little Golden Dragon nestled in Ji You's arms.

Was it really... so strong? Not only able to understand Black Gold Rats' language but also perfectly mimic it, even they can't tell apart! This!

This!

This! It's no wonder it's so legendary...

Gazing at Little Golden Dragon, Shen Changqing gently clenched his fist, determined someday he will also design such an incredible mecha. As long as—once the Star Beast threat is resolved, he will retire and open a small workshop for mechanical manufacturing and repair.

Take orders when available, and when idle, research his mecha.

Yes.

That's the plan.

Eyes bright, yet thoughts clear, Shen Changqing calmly directed Ji You, Chu Jiaojiao, Yue Qiyuan, and Yue Qiguang to proceed cautiously, once everyone placed all the bait, Shen Changqing said: "Retract along the central pipeline. Quick, that level 3 peak female rat has climbed out of its nest and is gnawing the Black Gold Ore."

With limited Black Gold Ore, totaling only 120 pounds, the entire amount had to be divided into small portions, scattered underground at different positions several kilometers apart. Each bait needed a minimal quantity, enough for the rats to discover and excavate, yet stimulating their appetite, luring them into prepared traps, so each bait amount was no more than a dozen grams.

Ji You, Chu Jiaojiao, and another direction's Yue Qiguang, Yue Qiyuan all picked up pace, heading to the rendezvous point.

About half an hour later, everyone regrouped in the dock's monitoring room, Shen Changqing looked at Ji You and the others, joy gleaming at the corners of his eyes, yet maintaining some restraint, striving for calmness, said: "Everything within plan, all level 3 Black Gold Rats entered the tower, besides one level 2 rat, all others trapped. Overall, 168 Black Gold Rats took the bait, confined within the tower."

Yue Qiyuan stroked his chin: "Meaning only 11 are roaming outside?"

Shen Changqing said: 'The success rate is very high.'

After this, Shen Changqing continued: "Let's deal with the 11 stragglers outside first, then tackle those inside the tower, what do you think?" As he spoke, his gaze fell on Ji You.

Then.

Ji You: "Squeak!"

Everyone: "..."

Chapter 977: Ruined

Yue Qiguang ruthlessly yanked a handful of hair: "Speak human!"

Ji You: "Squeak squeak!"

[Even if I speak human, you won't understand.]

Yue Qiguang: "..."

Yue Qiguang rolled his eyes, sat heavily on the sofa in the machine room, leaned back on the chair, and spread his hands: "This fool is already a qualified rat. How about we kill her together?"

Chu Jiaojiao: "Squeak—"

[Ji You classmate is under my protection! I won't allow anyone to harm her!]

Shen Changqing, Yue Qiyuan, Yue Qiguang, and Sheng Qingyan, the four guys, helplessly watched the gender-mysterious Ji You and Chu Jiaojiao, then simply turned around and started chatting among themselves.

Yue Qiguang curled his lip and cursed: "Two fools, really think they're rats."

Yue Qiyuan straightforwardly said: "Ignore them."

"Cough cough... Let's pretend we don't know them for now." Shen Changqing said, his face slightly flushed, then shifted the topic and asked: "Later, Ayan, you and Ayuan guard the surveillance room, I'll go underground with Ji You and the others to kill the Black Gold Rats. Splitting the tasks will help us complete the mission faster."

Sheng Qingyan shook his head: "No, I won't."

Shen Changqing: "???"

Sheng Qingyan continued: "I'm not guarding the surveillance room oh, I want to go underground oh."

Shen Changqing was surprised and asked: "But didn't you say you didn't want to go?"

Sheng Qingyan covered his mouth and yawned, "But it's so boring to be stuck in the surveillance room oh, can't even shoot oh."

Shen Changqing asked: "Then, who will guard the surveillance room?"

As soon as this was said, the scene became silent enough to hear a pin drop.

At this moment, Ji You, who switched from a rat back to a human, spoke: "Yue Qiguang and Yue Qiyuan should stay in the surveillance room."

Yue Qiguang frowned: "No, I want to go on a rampage."

Ji You glanced at him and said: "I'm afraid the Black Gold Rats will tear you to pieces."

Yue Qiguang, feeling underestimated, clenched his teeth and said: "4444, let's spar!"

Ji You's tone became serious, looking earnest and said: "Little Guangguang, spiritual power is your weak point. Your body and mind coordination still have many issues. Guarding the surveillance room and relaying information to everyone challenges the use of spiritual power. You must seize chances to practice. To improve spiritual power, only through constant and diligent use and practice can you fully master it."

Yue Qiguang opened his mouth, "You want me to treat this as practice?"

This concerns everyone's life safety, used... for practice?

Ji You heard this and instead of refuting, smiled at Yue Qiguang and said: "I believe in you, and they do too, you—must believe in yourself, otherwise, our lives hang on a single thought of yours."

Yue Qiguang stared with wide eyes, mouth agape...

Ji You raised an eyebrow: "What, you don't believe in yourself?"

Yue Qiguang smiled: "Leave it to me. I can do it."

Ji You: "Good."

It's settled.

Yue Qiguang and Yue Qiyuan stayed in the surveillance room, tasked with being everyone's eyes, while Ji You, Shen Changqing, Sheng Qingyan, and Chu Jiaojiao continued underground to deal with 11 scattered Black Gold Rats.

They still split into two groups.

Shen Changqing and Sheng Qingyan formed one group.

Ji You and Chu Jiaojiao formed the other.

...

The four, donning their armors, didn't waste even a second, leapt into the collapsed black hole. Agile and swift, they vanished underground in the blink of an eye.

Liu Fufeng, witnessing this, paused slightly in his finger movements, the butterfly in his hand, intricately woven and lifelike, had its wing accidentally snapped in the middle. Liu Fufeng paused, staring blankly at the broken-wing butterfly for a few seconds—

Ruined.

Just like myself.

Ruined.

...

Liu Fufeng, looking at the dark, unfathomable collapsed hole, had a tinge of obvious envy in his eyes.

...

Underground.

Ji You crouched low, half-lying at the mouth of a pipe, Chu Jiaojiao half-lying on the other side; the distance between the two is roughly 10 meters, and about 500 meters directly ahead of them was a Black Gold Rat gnawing at Black Gold Ore, very alert, stopping to observe its surroundings after each bite, and would immediately halt once sensing something amiss.

Ji You and Chu Jiaojiao remained half-lying, motionless.

The Black Gold Rat didn't notice anything wrong and continued gnawing. Although it was only level 1, its teeth were exceptionally sharp, gnawing on Black Gold Ore as if munching on peanuts, crunch ~

Crunch ~

Crunch ~

In no time, it finished gnawing a piece the size of a fingernail.

Ji You watched, feeling a twinge but could only hold it in, watching the Black Gold Ore being consumed.

After finishing, the Black Gold Rat sniffed around, felt for a moment, then leapt towards its nest's direction. Just as it leapt, Ji You released the arrow in her palm!

Whoosh—

The Black Gold Rat, startled, the next second, was lying on its back in the pipe: "Squeak squeak—"

"Squeak—"

With the Black Gold Rat completely closing its eyes, its sound gradually vanished from the world.

Chu Jiaojiao said: "Nicely done."

After dealing with this Black Gold Rat, the two quickly moved to the next target. This time, before finding a place to hide, a level 1 Black Gold Rat sensed something wrong and charged furiously at Ji You and Chu Jiaojiao. Chu Jiaojiao, without a moment's hesitation, swung her weapon on the spot.

Bam!

Bam!

Bam!

After a few swings, the Black Gold Rat's corpse slammed onto the ground.

Chu Jiaojiao sheathed her sword: "Ji You classmate, do you want this corpse?"

Ji You disdainfully said: "No. I'm very discerning, this thing is worthless, why keep it?"

The next second.

Ji You bent down and pried out the Black Gold Rat's teeth, putting them into the Space Button.

Chu Jiaojiao said speechlessly: "...Didn't you say you didn't want it?"

Ji You opened her eyes wide, sparkling, "I thought about it and figured it could sell for 100 credit points. Mosquitoes may be small, but they're still meat, can't waste it."

Surveillance room.

Yue Qiguang hearing this couldn't help but curse: "You two, hurry up and get the job done, stop dilly-dallying, wasting time."

Next.

rat.

rats.

rats.

...

The two teams, four people, quickly lured out and dealt with the 11 scattered Black Gold Rats underground. In total, it took less than an hour, and now comes the main event.

Inside the tower.

Black Gold Rats huddled together, seemingly sensing something, were a bit agitated, uneasy. Ji You, Chu Jiaojiao, Sheng Qingyan, and Shen Changqing craned their necks, listening carefully to the murmurings of the 168 Black Gold Rats. Then, Shen Changqing cautiously opened a door handle of the Xuan Gate Tower, letting one Black Gold Rat inside come out.

Chapter 978: Murder for Profit

In the pitch-black underground, silence surrounded them, when suddenly, a rustling sound echoed, followed by a shadow crawling out from the passage entrance. The moment it crawled out, the entrance behind it suddenly closed.

The shadow leaped up in shock, and at that moment, suddenly—

Whoosh—

The shadow that had just jumped into the air began trembling violently: "Squeak! Squeak! Squeak!!!"

"Squeak!!!"

"Squeak———"

The sharp screams gradually weakened until there wasn't a single sound left.

Sheng Qingyan withdrew his gun, slightly disdainful, "Even a level 1 rat isn't enough as an appetizer, what a waste of talent, don't call me for such trivial matters again, I'm going to sleep~"

After speaking, Sheng Qingyan lay on the wall and closed his eyes.

second.

"Sigh~"

"Sigh~"

"Sigh~"

Chu Jiaojiao, Ji You, Shen Changqing glanced at each other, Ji You tilted his head, "Did Spicy Eye really fall asleep?"

Chu Jiaojiao moved closer, reached out to check Sheng Qingyan's breath, and nodded, "...Yes, he really fell asleep."

Ji You's eyes sparkled, "Spicy Eye's Space Button is on him, right? How about the three of us see how much money Spicy Eye has in his pocket?"

Chu Jiaojiao got quite interested upon hearing this, "That's a good idea. Actually, I've been curious about how much money and good stuff Spicy Eye has been hiding." Having said that, Chu Jiaojiao made a move to grab Sheng Qingyan's Space Button.

With his eyes closed, Sheng Qingyan continued to snore audibly, seemingly sleeping like a dead pig.

Chu Jiaojiao's action hesitated for a moment, then she looked up at Ji You, and Ji You said, "Ask your own heart! Girl! I must solemnly and seriously tell you one thing: You must learn to trust yourself, at any time, it's always yourself giving you courage and support, and you—only need to follow your heart, work hard, be strong, be brave, and take the step you want."

Chu Jiaojiao: "..."

Shen Changqing: "..."

Shen Changqing muttered quietly, "Saying so much, the main idea is just to persuade Jiaojiao to take Ayan's Space Button."

"Cough cough!" Ji You coughed heavily and glared at Shen Changqing, reiterating pointedly, "Classmate Shen Changqing, my main idea also encourages you to take it."

Shen Changqing: "..."

Shen Changqing promptly shut his mouth.

Ji You glanced at Sheng Qingyan, who was laying on the wall, motionless. He really showed no reaction to their conversation.

Ji You: "..."

The Space Button is about to be stolen, yet this guy still sleeps soundly?

Real sleep?

Fake sleep?

Over here, after listening to Ji You's words, Chu Jiaojiao reached out, hesitating whether to follow her heart and take it or be restrained by morality not to take it. She lowered her head, examining Sheng Qingyan, with night vision goggles, she could clearly see Sheng Qingyan's distinct, dense, and long eyelashes, his face as smooth and bouncy as a peeled egg, delicate eyebrows, and rosy-colored lips...

Hm?

Facing this appetizing sleeping beauty scene, Chu Jiaojiao raised her hand and mercilessly pinched Sheng Qingyan's cheek hard.

Sheng Qingyan furrowed his brows and exclaimed loudly, "Jiaojiao, oh, stop it, oh~ I have no money, no money, no money~"

He kept his eyes closed while speaking.

Chu Jiaojiao shrugged, "Alright, confirmed, it's fake sleep."

Having said that.

She reached out and swiftly took Sheng Qingyan's Space Button hanging around his neck.

Sheng Qingyan: "..."

Sheng Qingyan cursed, "You knew I wasn't sleeping, so why did you take my Space Button~"

Chu Jiaojiao and Ji You said in unison, "None of your business, you sleep, you sleep..."

Sheng Qingyan: "..."

Shen Changqing reduced his presence throughout, lowered his head, and stared at the corpse of the level 1 Black Gold Rat at the passage entrance...

Ji You and Chu Jiaojiao wasted no time, and the two immediately opened Sheng Qingyan's Space Button, at that moment, Shen Changqing, who had been pretending not to be there, quietly perked up his ears.

Ji You pursed his lips, "Little Stupid, if you want to know, just come over and take a look. Why be so hesitant?"

Shen Changqing stiffened all over.

The next second.

Shen Changqing suddenly turned around, his face flushed, but he still tried to stay calm, walking over to Ji You and Chu Jiaojiao, curiously staring at the Space Button.

Then—

The expressions on all three faces simultaneously froze. Inside, there was a stack of about 100 low-level nutrient solutions, along with two Soul Devices, and a lump of black blob, nothing else!

Really.

Not a grain of rice could be found.

Ji You exclaimed, "Tsk! Poor dead!"

Chu Jiaojiao covered her face, "You are poverty-stricken like this!"

Shen Changqing opened his mouth, swallowed back, opened his mouth again, swallowed back, when everyone thought he simply couldn't find the words, it seemed impossible to say anything, Shen Changqing suddenly said, "Ayan, let me lend you some money."

Ji You's fingers shook, "Seriously! Little Stupid, repeat what you just said!"

Shen Changqing: "???"

Although bewildered, Shen Changqing still spoke up, "Ayan, I..."

Ji You quickly interjected, "Take out Ayan."

Shen Changqing: "..."

Almost choked, Shen Changqing promptly said, "I'm not lending you money."

Ji You: "Tch! No fun."

Meanwhile, Sheng Qingyan grumbled and cursed, "Seen enough? If so, I'll put my Space Button back. Really, a bunch of paupers, who's classier than whom, and also, look closely, these two Soul Devices are crafted by Green Glaze Master, personally made by Green Glaze Master! Where am I poor? If I let out that I'm willing to sell them, easily, it'd be millions."

Ji You scoffed, "Millions, and you're still a poor ghost."

Sheng Qingyan elegantly rolled his eyes, saying, "No matter how poor I am, compared to you with all your debts, I'm still a bit richer."

Ji You's mouth stiffened, "Cough cough... Why are we talking about this? Who started it? Hurry up and shut up. Let's get to work."

Beside them, Little Golden Dragon suddenly popped out two dragon horns, "Ji You——"

Initially, Ji You didn't hear it, Little Golden Dragon cleared its throat and raised its voice a bit, "Ji You~~~~"

Upon hearing Little Golden Dragon's voice, Ji You shuddered, goosebumps really appearing. You know, the Little Golden Dragon is an arrogant dragon, a smug dragon, always acting like a silly overbearing CEO. Now, it actually let out such a soft, coquettish, and pampering tone...

This!

This!

This!

It's a plot to gain fortune and harm life!

Ji You immediately got vigilant, "What are you up to?"

Little Golden Dragon looked up at Ji You, showing a smile, "Woman—your suspicious and cautious look inexplicably piques my interest, how about you—"

Stopping there, Little Golden Dragon pointed to the side at Sheng Qingyan, opening its mouth—

Chapter 979: Sparrow Yellow

Little Golden Dragon: "I want you to—"

Following the direction pointed by Little Golden Dragon, Ji You saw Sheng Qingyan and was taken aback. Then she suddenly realized and said, "You want me to kill him?"

Little Golden Dragon: "..."

Little Golden Dragon twitched the corner of its mouth, almost unable to resist tail-slapping its owner, but it seemed to think of something and showed an expression of endurance, saying, "I want his Space Button..."

Ji You waved her hand and said, "That poor guy's stuff, I'd throw it in the trash for recycling, not even worth the effort. Let's not, I'll buy you some better toys."

Little Golden Dragon was taken aback, and even Sheng Qingyan showed displeasure, saying, "Poor dead, you know, my Soul Device is a Green Glaze Master's Soul Device! Personally crafted by Green Glaze Master!"

He was currently wearing a 'Qing Zhu' brooch made by Green Glaze Master. The pink earrings and grass seed fruit he purchased earlier had been stored away, yet the two Soul Devices stored away were still usable. However, the 'Qing Zhu' provided a better enhancement to Sheng Qingyan's spiritual power, hence he wore the Qing Zhu.

A Soul Device by Green Glaze Master is hard to come by! It's even harder than winning the lottery, and I have three!

Three!

If word got out—

Sheng Qingyan was full of pride and arrogance, then—

Then—

"Oh—" Ji You said indifferently, "Aren't they just two low-level tras... cough, two low-level soul artifacts? I'm neither envious nor jealous because—I can't afford them."

Sheng Qingyan: "..."

Sheng Qingyan: "Tsk! Poor guy~"

Beside them, Little Golden Dragon, who had been listening to the conversation between Ji You and Sheng Qingyan, just raised its head with some confusion and asked, "Who is Green Glaze Master?"

"Cough, cough..." Ji You hurriedly said, "Just someone irrelevant. Hurry up and tell me, what did you want earlier?"

Little Golden Dragon's attention was immediately diverted, and it quickly said, "I want that black lump inside his Space Button."

Ji You said, "That thing doesn't look like anything good, we don't want it."

The black lump that Sheng Qingyan kept in his Space Button, along with the Soul Device from Green Glaze Master, was obviously not ordinary, and likely expensive too. Ji You dared not listen further. She picked up Little Golden Dragon and said, "Let's continue catching rats."

Little Golden Dragon twisted its head, its gaze still fixed on Sheng Qingyan's Space Button, expectantly saying, "But I really want it."

Ji You said, "No—you don't want it."

Little Golden Dragon: "No—I want it, I really want it."

Ji You said, "No—you don't want it, you really don't."

Little Golden Dragon: "..."

Little Golden Dragon let out an angry snort, immediately turning its back and showing its butt to Ji You's face, saying, "Woman! You'll know the consequences of not satisfying me. This is the Ji Family's only chance to come out on top. Miss this, and your Ji Family will go bankrupt."

"..." Ji You raised her hand, rubbed her forehead, and said, "Alright, I get it. If I, Ji You, agree today, my Ji Family will decline, never to rise again."

Little Golden Dragon: "..."

Little Golden Dragon twitched its mouth: "Woman! You will pay for your ignorance and stupidity."

"Cough, cough..." Suddenly, Shen Changqing, who had been silent, cleared his throat and said, "Excuse me, you two, if I may intrude."

Ji You, Little Golden Dragon: "???"

Shen Changqing pointed at the Space Button hanging from Sheng Qingyan's chest and said, "That—that black lump isn't a good thing either. It's just a teething stick Ayan used when he was little."

Sheng Qingyan, who had been leaning against the wall, closing his eyes, suddenly opened them wide: "Aqing, you're so annoying, I won't let you say it anymore~"

"Cough, cough..." Shen Changqing blushed and reluctantly shut his mouth.

And then—

In the next second, Chu Jiaojiao rolled her eyes and said, "I thought it looked familiar. Isn't this the teething stick that the fool Sheng Qingyan used to gnaw on all the time? When we were in kindergarten, I wanted to see it, but he wouldn't let me, so I beat him up. Tsk tsk—" At this point, Chu Jiaojiao sneered, "I remember you were still holding onto that teething stick every night even when you were seven or eight years old. Are you still using it now?"

As soon as she said this, Sheng Qingyan's pretty face turned a rare shade of red, and his cheeks puffed up like a pufferfish in an instant, "Jiaojiao, you—"

"You—"

Sheng Qingyan stomped his foot fiercely: "I'm not playing with you anymore~"

Ji You declared decisively, "Looks like I'm right."

Sheng Qingyan: "..."

Ji You said wryly, "People hug blankets, dolls, and pillows... But you hug a teething stick. You have a really peculiar taste."

Sheng Qingyan's face turned red again, and he stomped his foot hard: "I'm not playing with you anymore."

Ji You originally thought that thing was expensive and that she couldn't afford its price. But upon hearing it was just Sheng Qingyan's childhood teething stick, she felt a sense of relief. She noticed out of the corner of her eye that Little Golden Dragon was still staring at the Space Button on Sheng Qingyan's neck, so she couldn't help but ask, "What's that thing made of?"

Since it was Sheng Qingyan's teething stick, and it always accompanied him to sleep, it seemed... it was Sheng Qingyan's spiritual solace and harbor...

At this point, Ji You couldn't bear to snatch it away. Instead, she wanted to ask about its material and consider making one for Little Golden Dragon later.

Cough, cough...

The money-burning little fairy!

Just keeps wanting, wanting, wanting...

And then—

Sheng Qingyan remained silent, while Shen Changqing said, "It's Sparrow Yellow."

Ji You: "Ah???"

Shen Changqing explained, "A natural treasure growing on a peacock's body—Sparrow Yellow, starting at 1 billion."

Ji You: "..."

Ji You: "Goodbye."

Sheng Qingyan: "Tsk! Poor guy~"

Ji You quickly turned towards the tunnel entrance, trying her best to appear calm and indifferent, saying, "Let's release a Black Gold Rat to fight. Not a second to waste, must seize every moment! Let's finish the task early and go back to sleep early."

As she spoke, Ji You felt the Little Golden Dragon in her arms, which had been struggling earlier, suddenly froze when it heard Shen Changqing's words, asking, "Start at 1... 1 billion?"

Shen Changqing nodded, "Mm. It's very expensive, rarer than a Soul Device, unable to be artificially cultivated. It occurs at a one-in-trillion chance, so it's particularly precious."

Little Golden Dragon: "Oh—"

Pretending not to care, Ji You suddenly asked, "Then—is it a Soul Device?"

Shen Changqing shook his head and said, "No. The piece Ayan has in his hand is just an exceptionally rare Heavenly Material and Earthly Treasure. It hasn't formed into a Soul Device, and the peacock that nurtured it was unfortunately killed by a Star Beast."

Ji You: "Oh— then, can you buy it elsewhere?"

Shen Changqing: "???"

Ji You cleared her throat and said, "I'm just casually asking. I won't buy it."

Chapter 980: Value

Are you really just casually getting to know?

Just asking casually?

Shen Changqing turned to Ji You, and accidentally caught sight of the Little Golden Dragon in her arms out of the corner of his eye. The Little Golden Dragon only had its head sticking out, but upon hearing the term "Sparrow Yellow," its expression was one of extreme curiosity and desire.

Shen Changqing thought for a moment and then earnestly said, "You don't need to know more, you can't buy it."

Ji You: "???"

Although he didn't want to discourage Ji You, Shen Changqing still said, "It's a priceless treasure, Sparrow Yellow. To be precise, it's actually a mutated form of a gallbladder stone inside a peacock. If it doesn't encounter any accidents, Sparrow Yellow has a very high chance of naturally growing into a Soul Device."

Upon hearing this, Ji You couldn't help but ask, "But isn't it not yet a Natural Soul Artifact? Why is it so expensive? One billion, why not just rob someone?"

One billion, for a material.

It's simply~

Shen Changqing explained, "One billion is only the market price. In reality, if someone is willing to sell it, it should be more than one billion. Like the one in Ayan's hand, conservatively estimated to be around two billion to get it."

Ji You: "!!!"

Little Golden Dragon: "!!!"

Ji You looked at Sheng Qingyan in shock, "You're actually using a two-billion treasure to grind your teeth?"

"Oh—" Sheng Qingyan listened, lazily lifted his eyelids, and said, "For me, it's just a teething toy."

Ji You: "..."

Ji You was at a loss for words.

Ji You looked at Shen Changqing, and Shen Changqing continued, "Sparrow Yellow is valuable for several reasons. Let me mention the most important one: if a Soul Artifact Master uses Sparrow Yellow to

create a Soul Device, there's a high chance of success. Once successful, it's at least a Mid-level Soul Device, and there's a 70-90% chance of making a High-level Soul Device with natural attributes."

Natural Soul Artifacts and artificial soul devices, although both are Soul Devices, are entirely different. Artificial soul devices have flaws and various requirements for the user, such as compatibility, harmony, spirit level...

Things like that, numerous requirements; you might spend a fortune on an artificial soul device, only for it to have low compatibility, forcefully using it does not enhance spiritual power, and it might even damage spiritual power.

But with a Natural Soul Artifact, there's no such worry.

A Natural Soul Artifact, whether it's low-level, mid-level, or high-level, is naturally highly compatible with human spiritual power. Even the lowest-level Natural Soul Artifact has over 90% compatibility with human spirit!

Anyone can use it.

Which means, a Natural Soul Artifact doesn't choose its user; a spiritual power of E-level, D-level... S-level, SS-level... can all use a Natural Soul Artifact without barriers.

...

Sparrow Yellow, as long as it grows steadily, can absolutely become a Natural Soul Artifact.

This is one reason for its rarity. Additionally, as a material for making a soul device, Sparrow Yellow has an extremely high success rate, and the new soul device is likely to have the natural attributes of a Natural Soul Artifact. That is to say, it's likely to have no requirements on the user.

This alone makes it a priceless treasure.

Secondly, in today's society, the environment is harsh, and the natural habitats for peacocks have long disappeared. The surviving peacocks live in environments where humans have invested significant effort to create suitable living spaces for them, with continuous artificial breeding and careful nurturing... to sustain the species. Even then, peacocks are incredibly rare, and the chance of Sparrow Yellow forming is one in a billion.

Thirdly, even if Sparrow Yellow cannot ultimately form a Natural Soul Artifact, it is still a valuable treasure. Wearing it can improve spiritual power and physical strength over time.

Fourth.

Fifth.

...

In short, with Ji You's economic capabilities, it's unaffordable, and there's no channel to purchase it.

Shen Changqing thought.

Then.

After hearing Shen Changqing's explanation, the irritation on Ji You's face subsided.

Indeed!

This thing~

Truly has its reasons for being expensive.

Ji You opened her mouth and said, "Oh... I understand, I really can't afford it."

The Little Golden Dragon in Ji You's arms also looked crestfallen after hearing this.

Then~

In the next second, Ji You raised her hand and playfully ruffled the horn on the Little Golden Dragon's head, saying, "Cough, cough... don't be discouraged, maybe we'll have good luck and find a Sparrow Yellow someday."

"Cough, cough..." Shen Changqing cleared his throat and said, "Well, you probably won't find Sparrow Yellow. Because now all the peacocks are artificially raised, managed by the Alliance's peacock breeding base, which is an official organization. This means it's a breeding operation run by the Alliance's official body, where peacocks live their entire lives within the base, and private individuals are not allowed to remove them. Moreover, peacocks are monitored by a system with real-time surveillance. If a peacock is found to have the potential to develop Sparrow Yellow, it gets special care and protection..."

"So, finding one is impossible."

Ji You: "..."

Ji You raised her hand, rubbing her temples, "Classmate Shen Changqing, don't you feel you're sometimes too straightforward when speaking?"

Shen Changqing looked at her with bright eyes and earnestly said, "I'm just stating the facts, all true, not a word is false, is... is there a problem?"

Ji You rubbed her palm with a sinister smile, "No problem, just feel like hitting you a bit."

The corners of Shen Changqing's mouth stiffened slightly, muttering in a low voice, "Cough, cough... could being honest really be a mistake?"

Ji You chuckled, "Being honest isn't wrong, just face the beating honestly."

Shen Changqing: "..."

Shen Changqing decided to shut his mouth and say nothing more.

At this time, the timing was just right, and Chu Jiaojiao had already sneaked to the checkpoint and opened the passage slightly, and with a swish, a Black Gold Rat dashed out, but as soon as it poked its head out, it was immediately killed by Chu Jiaojiao with a single strike.

"Bang!"

Ji You, Sheng Qingyan, and Shen Changqing took charge of guarding the surroundings, while Chu Jiaojiao alone guarded the checkpoint as a butcher. After each kill, Chu Jiaojiao skillfully released another.

"Bang!"

The second one.

"Bang!"

The third one.

...

After continuously killing 20, Chu Jiaojiao finally stopped, showing a bit of breathlessness.

Then.

It was someone else's turn.

The next person was Shen Changqing.

In total, there were 268 Black Gold Rats inside; to minimize risk, Ji You and the team first released the low-level Black Gold Rats for elimination, then worked together to eliminate several that were Level 2 or 3 and above.

Since entering the Combat Department, Shen Changqing usually studied ranged attacks, but aside from being slightly weaker physically, Shen Changqing's melee skills weren't weak. He used a Level 5 Energy Sword, this sword with a cold glow looked like an executioner's sword, slashing down without missing.

1.

2.

3.

...