

# Embers Ad Infinitum #Chapter 121: Transaction - Read

## Embers Ad Infinitum Chapter 121: Transaction

### *Chapter 121: Transaction*

Jiang Baimian was speechless when faced with a certified mental patient. Frankly speaking, she was unwilling to believe that Shang Jianyao had done so much just to dance.

It didn't make sense.

In just a few minutes, Shang Jianyao first infuriated Zhao Tie with his unyielding gaze. Then, he seized the opportunity to provoke him by taking off his pants to compare their penis sizes. He successfully made the other party choose to fight on the 'dance floor' outside.

He had spent so much effort and had gone one big round just to escape the restrictions, head out, play music, and dance?

Compared to this, Jiang Baimian would rather believe that every step during this process was a change brought about by Shang Jianyao's 'brain spasm.' Only then could such an outcome happen.

But after eliminating all the impossibilities based on all the details and her understanding of Shang Jianyao, there was only one answer.

This fellow had meticulously planned each and every step in this huge roundabout manner, solely to join in the fun and dance!

This was like a person spending a long time formulating a plan and successfully completing a robbery with an intricate plan. However, the goal was merely to use this opportunity to share a lollipop with the girl, who was with the victim.

Is this the persistence of a mental patient? For a very simple goal, they will act in such a circuitous manner to design extremely complicated plans. Furthermore, his execution ability is terrifying... As Jiang Baimian sighed inwardly, she calmly pointed at the high stool beside her. "Since you're done dancing, sit down."

Before Shang Jianyao could take a step, a group of young people suddenly rushed into the RV.

The various smells of gas—either strong or mild—instantly drilled into Long Yuehong and the others' olfactory senses.

Among these young people, the men had shaven off their sideburns. The women either had short hair, or their hair was either green, purple, red, or gold, just like the blinking lights outside.

They surrounded Shang Jianyao and spoke at once.

“What was that song called?”

“It was dope!”

“I still can’t stop playing that melody in my head!”

“Can you copy it for us?”

“That rhythm was excellent!”

Shang Jianyao revealed a sunny smile. “Alright. Copy me the songs you guys previously played too.”

Upon hearing this response, the young people raised their thumbs. “Good taste!”

Just like that, Shang Jianyao mixed with them and did an exchange of favorite music with the help of a laptop and the corresponding data cable.

After doing this, Shang Jianyao reluctantly returned to Jiang Baimian’s side and sat down.

After watching their conversation, Jiang Baimian thoughtfully asked, “Don’t tell me you have to play music when fighting others in the future?”

Shang Jianyao replied seriously, “If there’s a chance and if time permits.”

Without waiting for Jiang Baimian and the others to speak, he described his idea. “Besides, different enemies need different music. For mechanical monks like Zen Master Jingfa, it should be accompanied by a song like ‘Paradise Land.’ Although I don’t understand the lyrics, I think this name suits them very well.”

Jiang Baimian imagined everyone engaging in an intense ‘battle’ as a music track played in the background. As they swayed their bodies and took rhythmic steps, she silently sighed. “I think this will end up destroying the enemy’s mind. Yes, it might also trigger their potential...”

At this moment, Ferlin had already poured four cups of wild tree fruit wine and pushed them in front of Shang Jianyao and the others.

The wine was purple-red in color and had a fragrant scent.

“Don’t be in a rush to drink it. Wait a little longer.” Ferlin advised them and smiled at Shang Jianyao. “Not bad, lad. I even have thoughts of wanting you to be my son-in-law.”

Jiang Baimian didn’t give Shang Jianyao a chance to ‘spout nonsense.’ She joked, “Caravan Leader, aren’t you blaming him for hitting one of your own?”

That’s right... Long Yuehong silently agreed, indicating that this was also a question on his mind.

Bai Chen helped explain, “The Rootless welcome powerful warriors.”

Ferlin smiled and nodded. “Yes, there are five types of people that our tribe or caravan welcomes and looks up to the most. First, a good repairman. Second, a good driver. Third, a good guide. Fourth, a good gunman. Fifth, a good warrior.

“Warriors are those who are good at close combat, the kind that uses melee weapons like blades.

“Haha, as you can see, there are oil tankers and many RVs in the camp. It won’t be good if they are hit or grazed by bullets. Therefore, although you are allowed to bring firearms in, usage of firearms is actually prohibited in the camp. Any disputes will be resolved with one’s fists and legs.

“It’s the same for young children. They are full of energy, so it’s unrealistic to control them completely. We can only make them dance and fight more. Over the generations, whoever is good at combat will be the alpha child and be very popular.

“Besides, we’re a caravan. Most of the time, we try our best not to use our guns if we can. If we end up having a blood feud, how are we going to do business in the future? At times, we might even develop feelings for each other after a fight.”

After Jiang Baimian heard that, she smiled and pointed at Bai Chen. “We have a very good guide. She told us long ago that it’s best not to take out our firearms in the camp.”

Ferlin’s attitude was very amiable. He looked at Bai Chen and joked, “Why don’t you be my daughter-in-law? We give excellent treatment to guides here.”

“I have no objections if you’re willing to marry the entire caravan into our team,” joked Jiang Baimian.

As they chatted, Jiang Baimian glanced at Shang Jianyao and said to Ferlin, “One more canned food for another four glasses of wild fruit wine.”

“Ask for seconds after you’ve tasted it and find it delicious,” said Ferlin sincerely.

Jiang Baimian's eyes were black and bright as she explained with a smile, "I'm buying it to treat you."

"Then, I won't stand on ceremony." Ferlin poured four more glasses of fruit wine and placed one glass in front of himself.

After chatting for a while, he said, "You can drink it now."

Long Yuehong glanced at his team leader. After obtaining her permission, he picked up his glass and gulped it down.

The wild tree fruit wine was not as sweet as he imagined, but it did not taste too sour. As the fragrance filled the air, the mellow taste spread bit by bit. The taste lingered for a long time.

"Not sweet enough." Shang Jianyao frowned slightly and gave an honest evaluation.

Ferlin laughed. "Over the years, countless young people in the caravan have said such words. But when they grow a little older, all of them, without exception, like to drink a few glasses. They even want the stronger kind."

At this point, he sighed gently. "There are too many pains in life. For rootless people like us, we might only have a moment of peace after drinking and returning to a hometown that we have no idea of."

Jiang Baimian did not interrupt Ferlin. After he finished speaking, she raised her glass and said, "That mouthful was to taste it. This is me toasting you."

The other three people from the Old Task Force also picked up their glasses.

"Cheers to you too." Ferlin smiled and raised his glass, clinking it with them.

After taking a sip, Shang Jianyao looked at Ferlin and thoughtfully said, "Caravan Leader, look. We treated you to a drink. I also heard you talk about the camp rules. So..."

Ferlin listened with a smile and became extremely enthusiastic. He stretched out his body and patted Shang Jianyao's shoulder. "To us Rootless people, this makes us friends!"

After he did this, Jiang Baimian saw a black revolver at his waist.

"Python?" Jiang Baimian probed.

This was the name of a revolver.

Ferlin sat up straight again and patted his revolver. "This is better than other pistols. Besides, it allows for quick draw, and firing it is also fast. The enemy will be dead before they can react."

Upon seeing that Shang Jianyao had successfully 'befriended' him, Jiang Baimian didn't continue the topic and asked casually, "Caravan Leader, are you staying in the camp for the winter and not going out to do business?"

Ferlin took another sip of wine. "How is that possible? There's such a large group of people and so many cars. If we don't do business, who will feed us? Although we have winter supplies in reserve, we have to be prepared for any accidents. We have to make plans for next year.

"Besides, as you can see, we have to dance, fight, and drink to let everyone vent their energy. This will cost a lot. A caravan doesn't have any surplus food either. However, we definitely won't go far during the winter. At most, we will be active in the nearby areas and send a convoy on trips lasting a few days."

Jiang Baimian nodded slightly. "Winter transactions are relatively rare."

Basically all the supplies that could last through the winter had been stored.

"Once it snows, the roads will be difficult to drive on. It's easy for accidents to happen," Ferlin echoed before smiling. "But during such times, the factions that still need supplies are often more generous, and we can negotiate a good price."

Isn't that obvious? Such a situation implies urgency... With Long Yuehong's knowledge, he knew that this was called 'taking advantage of the situation.'

Jiang Baimian imagined it and said, "This is very dangerous. You might end up in a gunfight if you aren't careful."

Ferlin smiled and didn't respond. Instead, he asked, "Are you asking about this because you have a transaction in mind? On account of us being friends, I'll give you a discount."

Jiang Baimian smiled and nodded. "Yes, we have some goods that we want to send to Weed City."

"What goods?" Ferlin asked.

Jiang Baimian pointed at herself, Shang Jianyao, Long Yuehong, and Bai Chen. "The four of us."

Ferlin looked at them carefully and drank another mouthful of wine. "No problem. A friend's business is our business."

He tacitly didn't ask why the other party wanted to 'transport' themselves.

After saying that, he nodded at Shang Jianyao like they were sworn brothers.

Jiang Baimian then said, "Also, I want to give our car a new coating of paint. Can you do that?"

"We are the best people for the job!" Ferlin's eyes lit up. "Do you know why the young people in the camp like to dye their hair? That's because we often 'change clothes' for our vehicles. They find it very fashionable."

With great interest, he asked, "What car is yours? What color is it now?"

#### *Chapter 122: Missionary*

After hearing Ferlin's question, Jiang Baimian gave a simple introduction. "A four-seater jeep. Gray-green."

Ferlin thought for a moment and said, "It's already dark. I'll bring someone over tomorrow to take a look and come up with a plan. Also, let's discuss how you want to enter Weed City and what kind of service you need us to provide. When the time comes, we'll settle the tab. I hope you have enough canned food."

Jiang Baimian could tell that Ferlin didn't want to talk business now, so she gave up on the idea of further discussion. She smiled and patted Shang Jianyao's shoulder. "If it's not enough, we'll use him as payment!"

Ferlin laughed involuntarily. "It's not impossible. I was just wondering how to make my brother stay willingly."

Long Yuehong was speechless, wondering if this 'progress' was too fast. Not only had Shang Jianyao gone from 'stranger' to 'friend' in just a few minutes, but he had actually evolved into a 'brother!'

"You can marry your younger daughter to him," Jiang Baimian suggested 'maliciously.'

Ferlin and Shang Jianyao looked at each other and quickly shook their heads. "No, no, that won't be right! How can a niece marry an uncle?"

Shang Jianyao solemnly echoed, "How can a brother be a father?"

The two of them looked at each other and nodded at the same time. Their friendship seemed to have sublimated to another new level.

Jiang Baimian smiled and turned her eyes before she continued coming up with rotten ideas. "Then, are there any wives left behind by deceased brothers?"

“How can they be leftovers? At this age and in such an environment, who wouldn’t want to find another companion? Besides, our caravan needs to have more children. In this day and age, it’s too easy for children to die young.” Ferlin thought for a moment and said, “My mother has been widowed for a few years, but that won’t be right.”

Realizing that the topic was gradually turning odd, Jiang Baimian looked around and inquired, “Caravan Leader, what food do you have here?”

She then added, “Something more unique.”

The Old Task Force had yet to have dinner.

Ferlin finished the wild tree fruit wine in his cup and laughed self-deprecatingly. “What unique foods can people like us—who have no roots—have? We travel the world and eat whatever is available. Heh heh, those with good culinary skills in the caravan know how to cook many different dishes.”

At this point, he changed the topic. “But after so many years, we still have a little of our own.”

“What is it?” Shang Jianyao spoke before Jiang Baimian could. His face was filled with anticipation.

Ferlin looked at the psychedelic lights outside the RV. “Compared to many wilderness nomad settlements, although we have no roots and drift everywhere, our business is doing pretty well. Most of the time, food is still guaranteed, and the corresponding variety can be considered plentiful.

“Every time we travel through the wilderness or the mountains and forests, there will be a little of all kinds of food left in the end. That makes things quite awkward. It’s impossible to cook every dish and make them a staple, right? It’s only one or two mouthfuls’ worth.

“To save time, my father’s generation began to cook them together. The taste isn’t great, but it isn’t terrible either. After we went to many places and saw more, our culinary methods gradually improved. It’s not bad now. We call it Hodgepodge.”

Jiang Baimian especially liked the culture of different places and said with great interest, “Then, give us four servings—large servings—please!”

With that said, she turned to look at Long Yuehong and Bai Chen. “You guys want it, right?”

“Yes, yes.” Long Yuehong nodded hard. For the current him, it was good as long as he didn’t eat energy bars, compressed biscuits, or military canned food.

“I might not be able to finish a large serving,” said Bai Chen after some deliberation.

“It’s fine. I’ll help you finish it. If we can’t finish it, there’s still Shang Jianyao!” Jiang Baimian spoke as if she were rearing a pig back home. In fact, she knew that Shang Jianyao had recently been roaming the Sea of Origins when he slept. Searching for the second island expended a lot of energy, so he ate more than usual.

“The four servings will cost you two cans.” Ferlin offered the price. He then looked at Shang Jianyao and said sincerely, “I gave a discount.”

“It’s fine as long as it’s delicious.” Shang Jianyao didn’t mind at all.

“That depends on whether it suits your taste.” Ferlin circled around the milky-white platform and walked to the kitchen. He opened the aluminum stew pot on the electromagnetic stove and scooped out four bowls of sticky things.

After he held the orange plastic tray and carried the Hodgepodge to Jiang Baimian and the others, they finally saw what the food looked like.

It was dark amber in color and looked as though it was a very sticky liquid.

Jiang Baimian stirred the soup with a spoon and realized that there were small pieces of meat cubes, flour lumps, slices of ham, diced carrots, and some unknown vegetables inside. It was a combination of various ingredients.

“There’s some of everything.” As Ferlin walked back to the milky-white platform’s back, he smiled and said, “The greatest characteristic of Hodgepodge is that the ingredients you eat are more or less different every time. It’s rarely repeated.”

“It depends on what’s available at the time?” As Jiang Baimian spoke, she realized that Shang Jianyao had already lowered his head and started eating. Therefore, she didn’t say anything else. She scooped a small spoonful of the dark amber soup, brought it to her mouth, and blew at it a few times.

She then tasted the food.

Her first impression was that it was fragrant, followed by a faint sourness, and then a perfect saltiness.

These three experiences mixed together harmoniously, suppressing the dazzling variety of ingredients and making them mild.

When she chewed, different tastes bloomed one after another when her teeth ‘met’ with different encounters.



“Not bad. Delicious.” It was Shang Jianyao who praised with his mouth full. If he weren’t busy using the spoon, he might have clapped.

“Yes, yes...” Long Yuehong replied, touched.

After a long and arduous journey, such a meal was enough to soothe his heart.

Jiang Baimian smiled and turned her head to look at Bai Chen.

Upon seeing that the gray scarf-wearing member was gobbling down the food with a faint look of satisfaction, Jiang Baimian laughed inwardly. It seems like there’s no need to help her with the food...

The Old Task Force quartet’s praises of Hodgepodge made Ferlin rather happy. He felt that they were indeed friends.

After dinner, Jiang Baimian looked around and saw that nobody was in the RV. She then asked, “Caravan Leader, has anyone asked you to keep an eye on some people’s whereabouts recently?”

Ferlin—who was washing the dishes—looked up and chuckled. “For example, people like you?”

Jiang Baimian did not feel uncomfortable at having her cover blown at all. She smiled and replied, “Yeah. People like us believe that our friends won’t betray us.”

“Friends might. It only depends on whether the pay is good,” Ferlin said seriously. “But brothers don’t.”

As he spoke, he raised his right arm.

Shang Jianyao didn’t mind that Ferlin’s palm was wet at all and struck his palm.

After completing the ‘ritual,’ Ferlin said to Jiang Baimian, “There’s nothing like that for the time being. There are people searches, but their characteristics don’t match yours at all. You should also know that we people without roots travel the world. Many members will also be part-time Ruin Hunters. If they want to find someone, they will definitely mobilize the entire caravan to help. It’s impossible for me not to know.”

“That’s good.” Jiang Baimian smiled. She then asked, “Caravan Leader, have you encountered any strange religious organizations recently?”

Ferlin thought for a moment and nodded. “Yes.”

Jiang Baimian and Bai Chen looked at each other and inquired, “Which religion is it? What’s its name?”

“It’s called the Eyes of Holiness. It worships the Kalendaria, Double Sun, that rules over July.” Ferlin didn’t hide anything. “They’re still proselytizing in the camp.”

July’s Kalendaria... Double Sun... Jiang Baimian asked in confusion, “Caravan Leader, are you just going to let them preach?”

Ferlin said seriously, “It’s impossible for me not to do anything. I also helped gather people, provided a venue, and prepared food...”

Upon seeing that Jiang Baimian and the others were gradually confused, the caravan leader laughed. “Because I’m this church’s deacon! The one closest to the Kalendaria in this caravan.”

Jiang Baimian was first stunned before she smiled. “I thought you did such business.”

“Yes, yes, yes.” Shang Jianyao indicated that this was also his opinion.

Bai Chen asked in confusion, “I heard that you guys don’t believe in any Kalendaria?”

“How is that possible?” Ferlin retorted. “We believe in all of them!”

He smiled and added, “As a caravan that needs to travel the world and deal with all kinds of factions, we definitely have to sing to the tune of wherever we go. We can’t be too extreme; otherwise, we won’t be able to make friends. Therefore, as long as someone preaches, we will more or less believe them.

“If it weren’t for the fact that the Eyes of Holiness forbids me from taking on part-time jobs, I might’ve been given the title of more than ten religions. I could be a Dream Guardian of Dawn’s Morning Star, a bishop of the Glorious Scale, or a Hexadite of the Crystal Consciousness... As long as my business partners are religious, I can be their brother in Kalendria.”

Long Yuehong was dumbfounded. He couldn’t believe that such a person existed.

Isn’t this too casual?

At this moment, Shang Jianyao asked with a yearning expression, “Which church’s Holy Communion is the best?”

“It has to be the Glorious Scale for me. Their fried chicken wings are top-notch. However, this purely depends on one’s taste.” Ferlin and Shang Jianyao exchanged insights with each other.

Upon seeing this, Jiang Baimian deeply suspected that Shang Jianyao could’ve become good friends with Ferlin even without using his Awakened abilities.

After discussing Holy Communion for a while, Ferlin said, "Among so many religions, the Eyes of Holiness's teachings are the most suitable for us and also the ones that can move me the most. Therefore, I barely managed to join a religion. Sigh, I won't be free from now on."

He then tersely acknowledged. "We have a Mass at noon tomorrow. If you're interested, you can come and watch. It's right here."

Upon seeing Shang Jianyao's eagerness, Jiang Baimian hesitated a little. Ferlin smiled and said, "We don't force our religion on others. It's all voluntary. At least two-thirds of our camp doesn't believe in the Double Sun. Of course, if you want to put on a show and show some faith, fine by me."

"Alright." Jiang Baimian agreed.

After chatting for a while, they bade farewell and prepared to return to the jeep.

When she reached the door, Jiang Baimian suddenly turned around and asked curiously, "Caravan Leader, I haven't asked you about your caravan's name."

As colorful lights pulsed outside the window, Ferlin fell silent for a moment. "Hometown."

### *Chapter 123: Mass*

After leaving the RV, Jiang Baimian looked back and sighed softly. "Hometown..."

Amidst the playing lyrics of 'I'm looking,' her mutterings were completely drowned out.

The next second, she pressed down on Shang Jianyao's shoulder and pulled him back. She laughed loudly. "You've already danced!"

She then added with a grin, "I originally wanted to let off some steam and have some fun after we were done with work and had dinner. But you used up this opportunity in advance, and you didn't cherish it. You only danced for a minute or two."

Shang Jianyao's expression changed, and he didn't hide his disappointment and regret.

This elevated Jiang Baimian's mood.

She then directed a question at Long Yuehong and Bai Chen, "Are you guys going to have some fun?"

“If I’m not interested in having sex with the person, I wouldn’t like such entertainment. It’s too noisy,” Bai Chen replied frankly.

Long Yuehong—who was a little eager to try—couldn’t help but feel a little scared when he saw that he was the only one. He could only say unhappily, “I’m a little tired today.”

Indeed, one’s mental state would be bordering on fatigue after a road trip that lasted so many days, even if they took turns driving and had sufficient rest.

“Then, let’s all go back.” Jiang Baimian didn’t persuade them. She retracted her gaze and walked out of the area first.

Shang Jianyao followed behind her and loudly asked amidst the loud music that was still blaring near them, “Team Leader, don’t you want to dance?”

“I’m such a mature person.” Jiang Baimian praised herself. “Why would I participate in such a messy activity? Besides, I have better ways to vent my energy.”

As she spoke, she looked back at her three team members and smiled maliciously. “When we reach Weed City and settle down, we have to practice combat and prime our skills to an optimal state. This way, we can deal with the dangers lurking in the subsequent investigations.”

Long Yuehong felt his entire body ache when he heard that.

As they spoke, they returned to the spot where the jeep was parked. They realized that many people in the camp had deliberately passed by and sized up their ride.

“They really love cars...” Jiang Baimian sighed with emotion.

She was in no rush to drive them away. She stopped a certain distance away and spoke as if she were considering something. “Do you think that, as the Eyes of Holiness’s deacon, Ferlin is an Awakened? If so, did he secretly use his Awakened abilities to influence us?”

Long Yuehong was shocked when he heard these two questions and quickly checked himself.

Bai Chen immediately replied, “I did a careful observation and didn’t discover anything abnormal about Ferlin.”

In other words, he might not have paid a price, so he wasn’t an Awakened.

“Maybe the price isn’t obvious.” Jiang Baimian raised a counterexample. She then half-closed her eyes, her actions a mystery.

Shang Jianyao said seriously, "There's nothing wrong with me."

"Me neither." Jiang Baimian opened her eyes and gave an affirmative answer. "Then, let's temporarily pretend that Ferlin isn't an Awakened."

They chatted for a while. When the crowd had mostly dispersed and the intense music in the distance subsided, Jiang Baimian said to Bai Chen and Long Yuehong, "You guys will be on duty tonight. The usual rules apply."

"Yes, Team Leader!" Long Yuehong was already very skilled.

Shang Jianyao didn't say a word. He got into the jeep and lay flat on the backseat. At the same time, he massaged his temples.

...

In the endless Sea of Origins, Shang Jianyao swam forward using a freestyle stroke, alternating his arms. He had mostly learned how to swim in this mind world during this period of time.

Pangu Biology did not have any swimming lessons because it was useless in the underground building. Shang Jianyao's first swim was completed in the Green River on the way to Qifeng Town after leaving the city ruin where Xiaochong was. This was also part of his training.

His feelings back then were: water is cold.

At this moment, he was aimlessly swimming as if there would never be an end. This was also a form of torture to his mind and spirit.

Fortunately, whenever his 'stamina' ran out, he would retreat by himself and not drown to death.

The boring repetition was unbearable, but Shang Jianyao was very persistent as if he could keep swimming.

After an unknown period of time, a shadow suddenly appeared in front of him—it was a large island.

It quietly lay across the water surface. There was nothing above except rocks.

Shang Jianyao instantly became excited. He alternated the exertion of strength into his arms and quickly paddled the water with his feet.

He soon arrived at the island and climbed up without thinking.

The next second, figures appeared from the rubble crevices.

These figures were draped in white bedsheets, completely covering their bodies.

At a glance, their faces were hidden in the cloaks' shadows. It was pitch-black, making it impossible to see them clearly.

Shang Jianyao immediately assumed a combat posture and prepared to use the Awakened ability, Hands Immobility.

But when he encountered one of the figures and touched the white blanket-like 'cloak,' he suddenly felt enervated.

His forehead began to heat up, and his heart raced. As he breathed, it felt like a wind box was being activated, blowing out scorching air.

All kinds of pain and discomfort instantly appeared. Shang Jianyao's movement became extremely difficult, and he was quickly drowned by the white figures.

...

Shang Jianyao opened his eyes and sat up, breathing heavily.

Jiang Baimian woke up because of his actions and habitually rubbed her eyes. She thought for a moment and probed, "Discovered a second island?"

In the past half a month, Shang Jianyao had never encountered such a situation.

"Yes." Shang Jianyao didn't hide it and even took the initiative to describe his encounter.

Jiang Baimian thoughtfully asked, "What do you think happened to you back then?"

"I was seriously ill," Shang Jianyao replied firmly.

Jiang Baimian tersely acknowledged his words and seriously said, "Could it be that you often went to the hospital when your mother was sick? You were young, so you were afraid of diseases and that left behind a trauma?"

She deliberately didn't mention that Shang Jianyao's mother had died from an illness to avoid agitating him.

Shang Jianyao fell silent for a few seconds before saying, "I watched her being pushed into the emergency room. I sat outside and waited for a long time."

Jiang Baimian sighed silently and asked, "Have you been sick since then? Any relatively serious illnesses?"

"No." Shang Jianyao shook his head.

"I can tell that you're as strong as an ox." Jiang Baimian was someone who had truly seen an ox.

Shang Jianyao didn't ask what a muscular ox looked like. He thought before saying, "You mean I should get inflicted with a serious illness and defeat it in reality?"

"I didn't mean that!" Jiang Baimian denied in exasperation and amusement. "There's no way to control such matters. It might be possible that you end up not defeating it and have it defeat you."

She stopped Shang Jianyao from raising any more strange ideas and said seriously, "Let me consider it for a few days. You should think about it too and don't try anything rash."

She was afraid that Shang Jianyao—who had a mental patient's unique persistence—wouldn't simply listen to her suggestion, so she emphasized the need for responsibility. "We're almost at Weed City. We can't lose our strength!"

"Okay." Shang Jianyao nodded in agreement.

Jiang Baimian then softened her voice. "Sleep a little longer. Go to sleep this time and replenish your energy."

...

At noon the next day, they arrived at the RV of Hometown caravan's Caravan Leader, Ferlin, as agreed.

At this moment, the chairs and stools outside were neatly arranged in rows.

Ferlin—who had a white beard around his mouth—had already donned an orange robe, and his expression was a little more serious.

"You guys are here?" Seeing his sworn brother and his team come over, Ferlin smiled and greeted them.

After exchanging pleasantries, Jiang Baimian curiously asked, "Why is your Mass in the middle of the day? Is it because the Kalendaria's name is Double Sun?"

"Yes." Ferlin nodded. "The Double Sun doesn't only control the hottest July, but it also controls noon."

“Is that so...” Jiang Baimian was abnormally satisfied with the answer.

At this moment, Shang Jianyao suddenly asked, “Are there Awakened in your church?”

Ferlin couldn't help but cough. “Shall we discuss this in private?”

Shang Jianyao looked around and said, “Look, there's no one around.”

Ferlin was convinced. “Yes, I've seen three or four.”

“Are you one?” Shang Jianyao was very direct.

Ferlin quickly shook his head. “Of course not. I don't dare to pay the price.”

At this point, he clicked his tongue. “Our church has an Awakened. The price was severe hair loss. Heh heh, at our age, every strand of hair is abnormally precious. How can we bear to part with it?”

As he spoke, Ferlin stroked his short silver hair with a proud expression.

Jiang Baimian laughed. “Actually, this price is pretty good. You can't be targeted.”

“That's right. That's why I'm telling you. Otherwise, it'll need to be kept a secret.” Ferlin agreed sincerely. “There's also an Awakened from our caravan. He has already passed away. The price he paid was a problem with his sexual proclivities. As you know, everyone in our caravan likes cars, but we mostly treat them as precious items and family members. We often make jokes about that. As for him... During that period of time, every family had to protect their cars' exhaust pipes...”

This shocked everyone in the Old Task Force.

Without waiting for their comments, Ferlin looked up at the sun and smiled. “Mass is about to begin. Talk to you later.”

He then stretched out two fingers and pressed them against his eye sockets. “May your eyes be bright.”

At this moment, the chairs in front of the RV were already filled with people.

Ferlin quickly boarded the RV, stood at the door, and pointed at the window beside him. “First step, salute.”

It was only then that Long Yuehong realized that there were two golden suns stuck to the RV window.

They were like a pair of shining eyes.



The believers present stood up at the same time, pressed their fingers to their eye sockets, and solemnly praised, “God is the Sun and Moon!”

After completing the first step, Ferlin signaled for everyone to sit down. As there were guests watching, he added, “The Kalendaria represents the sun and the moon, as well as holy eyes.

“He’ told us that only those with sufficiently sharp eyes and strong bodies could find and enter the New World in the Ashlands.

“Step two, formal ritual. This was a ritual from before the Old World was destroyed. It was proof that people revered the Kalendaria in the distant era. It was passed down despite the calamity.

“Everyone, be prepared. Close your eyes! Play the hymns!”

Music sounded, and a woman’s voice echoed. “Session 1, knead your eyebrows[1]”

[1] Chinese eye exercises have been implemented in China as an intervention for controlling children’s myopia for over 50 years. This ‘hymn’ is likely the broadcast that students listen to in school.

#### *Chapter 124: Settled*

Following the female voice, the Eyes of Holiness believers present raised their hands and pressed their thumbs under their eyebrows.

At the same time, their other fingers stretched upward and touched their foreheads.  
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“One, two, three, four...”

Amidst the clear female voices, they followed the rhythm and wore solemn expressions as they kneaded.

“...” Long Yuehong stared with his mouth agape, and his expression gradually turned strange.

If he didn’t remember wrong, this should be the Eye Exercise that Pangu Biology’s primary and secondary school students did every day. At most, there were differences in the actions’ details and the length of the name.

Finally, Long Yuehong reacted and looked at Jiang Baimian and Shang Jianyao.

Jiang Baimian kept her lips tightly pursed. The muscles on her face and the ponytail behind her head trembled slightly. Shang Jianyao had closed his eyes at some point in time and sat up with an abnormally solemn expression.

Long Yuehong was just about to whisper to them when Jiang Baimian suddenly turned her head to look at him. The Old Task Force's team leader then raised her right hand and did a zipping action across her mouth.

Long Yuehong got the idea and kept quiet.

Bai Chen looked at them in confusion, not understanding why they had such a reaction.

"Session 2, squeeze your nose bridge..."

"Session 3, massage under your eyes..."

"Session 4, tap out a circle around your eyes..."

In the solemn atmosphere, the Eyes of Holiness's Mass slowly came to an end.

Ferlin—who was at the door's entrance—opened his eyes and spoke in a singing voice. "Eyes, most sacred. Love and protection of thy eyes is showing love and protection of thy life!"

The believers placed their index fingers under their eyes again and replied loudly, "May your eyes be bright!"

Ferlin did the same, but he didn't say the same words. Instead, he praised the Kalendaria, Double Sun. "God is the Sun and Moon!"

After completing this step, he loudly announced, "Next, it's time for Holy Communion."

With that said, he jumped down from the door and made way.

Several believers stepped in and brought out orange plastic trays from the kitchen.

On the trays were plates. Each plate had several pieces of steamed carrots.

Ferlin looked at Shang Jianyao and the others and explained in a preaching tone, "These are the gifts of the Kalendaria. It can brighten your eyes."

"May your eyes be bright," Shang Jianyao replied sincerely, but he didn't do any actions.

Ferlin was rather generous. He gave each guest a serving of Holy Communion, along with chopsticks and spoons.

Long Yuehong thanked him and reached out to take it before eating at a moderate pace.

Although the steamed carrot didn't have any additional seasoning and tasted rather bland, it was still delicious for Long Yuehong—who was tired of energy bars, compressed biscuits, and military canned food.

After Holy Communion, Mass officially ended. Ferlin walked in front of Shang Jianyao and the others and smiled. "For people like us who often drive long distances, our eyes are very important. This is also the main reason why I accepted the Eyes of Holiness as my lord. Look, I don't have any far-sightedness yet."

"Indeed." Jiang Baimian understood very well why Rootless were more inclined to believe in the Eyes of Holiness.

This was due to their living environment and customs.

Shang Jianyao asked, "Don't you have glasses?"

"I do." Ferlin felt that it was his good brother's show of concern. He smiled and explained, "Many factions still have the equipment and craft needed to polish glasses. However, there are very, very few factions that can make your eyes clear like in the Old World.

"Besides, glasses are ultimately external objects. When we traverse the wilderness and other places, we might not encounter a single human settlement for days. Even if we do encounter one, they might not be able to make you glasses.

"During such a process, wouldn't it be equivalent to being blind if one's glasses are damaged? How can you drive? Even if you prepare spare glasses in advance, it won't prevent your eyesight from deteriorating again. When the time comes, you'll be useless."

After laying out the facts and reasoning, Ferlin smiled and asked, "How is it? How do you feel about our Eyes of Holiness? Do you want to join us?"

If my relatives and friends in Pangu Biology learned that I had joined such a church, I would definitely be a joke for the rest of my life... Jiang Baimian muttered silently and didn't answer directly. Instead, she looked at Shang Jianyao.

Shang Jianyao sincerely said, "I don't think we are fated with the Eyes of Holiness."

"What a pity..." Ferlin looked regretful. He pointed in the direction of the Old Task Force's jeep and said, "Wait for me there. I'll come after changing. Let's discuss the paint job."

“Alright.” Jiang Baimian immediately agreed.

On the way back to the jeep’s area, Long Yuehong looked back and thoughtfully said to Shang Jianyao, “The reason you rejected them is that you don’t think their Holy Communion is delicious?”

“This might be fate,” Shang Jianyao replied frankly.

“Haha, I knew it.” Long Yuehong was rather happy. He also felt that the simple carrot Holy Communion was too bland. It probably couldn’t attract Shang Jianyao.

Bai Chen had also blended in with the team. Upon seeing that the atmosphere was suitable, she asked, “Why did you have such a big reaction to the Eyes of Holiness’s Mass?”

Upon hearing this question, Jiang Baimian finally couldn’t hold it in any longer. She chortled until she almost couldn’t walk.

After a while, she took a deep breath in and said, “I’m too familiar with their Mass. Every student in the company is familiar with it!”

Upon seeing that Bai Chen was still a little confused, she gave an example. “Do you still remember Moat Town’s morning exercise? That’s one of the company’s primary and secondary schools’ morning exercises. Haha, it is indeed a relic of the Old World, but it has nothing to do with the Kalendaria. In the end, they treated it as Mass because it’s related to the eyes. Haha, I can’t take it anymore...”

Jiang Baimian laughed until Long Yuehong couldn’t help but laugh as well.

Bai Chen roughly understood what was happening. She imagined the scene of the Eyes of Holiness using Moat Town’s morning exercise as Mass, and she couldn’t help but wear a faint smile.

Shang Jianyao suddenly asked, “What if the company’s higher-ups were all believers in the Eyes of Holiness and deliberately chose this routine for eye exercise?”

“How is that possible...” Long Yuehong said as his voice gradually softened.

This possibility was terrifying just thinking about it.

Jiang Baimian glared at Shang Jianyao. “Stop telling ghost stories! If that were the case, we would’ve long been believers of the Eyes of Holiness.”

As they spoke, they returned to the jeep.

Jiang Baimian looked at her car and gradually fell into deep thought.

Long Yuehong waited for a while before curiously inquiring, "Team Leader, what are you thinking about?"

Jiang Baimian thought for a moment and said, "I'm wondering if I can infer the power traits of the Kalendaria Double Sun's domain from 'severe hair loss' and 'sexual abnormality.' Du Heng said that there should be a blurry reflection of the price and ability."

Shang Jianyao immediately made a guess. "It can make an enemy lose their hair and become a pervert?"

"...Such an ability should be categorized as a mental blow." Long Yuehong imagined it.

Jiang Baimian glanced at Shang Jianyao. "I'm talking about finding common ground. However, we can't be sure that the second Awakened that Ferlin mentioned is also a believer of the Eyes of Holiness. If that's the case, I think their commonality is that it involves hormones."

Bai Chen had relatively good basic education among wilderness nomads. Thus, she had a rough idea about what hormones represented. She deliberated and said, "That's a huge scope."

"Indeed, but there's too little information at present. We can only speculate to this extent." Jiang Baimian tersely acknowledged her words and said, "Also, since their religion focuses on the eyes, their abilities might also include the field of vision. Heh heh, I wouldn't be surprised if an Awakened of the Eyes of Holiness can achieve near-invisibility."

She did not mention how to guard against such Awakened if they encountered one.

As the four Old Task Force members discussed, Ferlin had already changed into the black leather coat from yesterday and walked over. He still had a holster hanging from his waist. Inside was the Python revolver.

After exchanging greetings, he looked at the Old Task Force's jeep and deliberated before saying, "How about an army-green camouflage? For a jeep, this is relatively common. It won't draw attention."

"Sure." Jiang Baimian fully respected the professional's opinion.

Ferlin then asked, "How do you plan on sending yourselves to Weed City? We have a special trailer that can accommodate a jeep."

"There's no need to go through so much trouble." Jiang Baimian voiced her thoughts to Shang Jianyao's sworn brother. "You can send a small convoy and pretend as if you are

in Weed City to do business. We can just hide inside. It would be even better if you happen to have such plans.”

Ferlin laughed. “What a coincidence!”

After laughing, he added, “We happen to have a convoy heading to Weed City to see if we can get more food back.”

Jiang Baimian could guess that wasn’t the reason, but she deliberately asked, “You don’t have enough food?”

Ferlin sighed and said, “The weather wasn’t good this year. Food production in many places has been reduced. Having more reserves might save lives, or we can sell them for a good price.”

A smile gradually surfaced on his face when he reached the second half of the sentence.

“We’ll follow your convoy then.” Jiang Baimian didn’t ask any further. “How many cans do we have to pay in total? Or do you prefer compressed biscuits and energy bars?”

“Last night’s wine and dinner... Today’s paint job and tomorrow’s convoy’s protection... A total of ten cans will do. If it’s not enough, we can use compressed biscuits and energy bars as collateral.” Ferlin quickly gave a number.

Jiang Baimian heaved a sigh of relief. “Just barely enough.”

Ferlin’s smile relaxed. “Then, we’ll set off tomorrow morning. We’ll definitely be there before noon.”

“That fast?” Although Jiang Baimian didn’t plan on continuing taking detours, she knew that there was still a day’s journey ahead.

Ferlin smiled and said, “We repaired Weed City’s broken bridge over Turbid River some time ago. There’s no need to take detours.”

Turbid River was the name given to the green river after it entered the Monk Wastelands.

Jiang Baimian nodded. “Alright, it’s settled then.”

### *Chapter 125: Weed City*

Around 9 a.m. the next day, Bai Chen drove the jeep that had been disguised. She drove the Old Task Force’s three other members and the Rootless camp’s Convoy Leader, Ferlin, toward Weed City in a caravan made up of five to six cars.

It was unknown if it was because of the rushed job or the fact that they were trying their best to make it look realistic, but the colors of many parts of the jeep were inconsistent after it was repainted. However, one could generally tell that it was an army-green camouflage.

This was very similar to most of the jeeps that traveled across the Ashlands. Once they bumped into something, they either had nowhere to repair it or just repaired it without much effort. There was no need to be so particular about the repairs.

The reason why Ferlin didn't sit in his caravan's car was that he felt that he would soon be separated from his good brother, Shang Jianyao, once they reached Weed City. He had to make the best use of his time to chat a little longer.

This resulted in the three men squeezing in the jeep's backseat. Fortunately, the vehicle had plenty of space, so it did not affect the ride experience. Nôv(el)B\\jnn

After leaving the camp and circling to the other side, Long Yuehong finally saw the most important facility in the area: a waterworks factory.

Green trees covered its surroundings. The environment was rather good, and it seemed like it had been 'taken care of.'

After passing through the factory, a city ruin gradually unfolded in front of all the Old Task Force members. Nearly all the high-rise buildings here had already collapsed. The grayish-white or brown 'mud bricks' were haphazardly piled together with rusted steel columns that stubbornly kept the structure up. They were covered by yellow creeper leaves and various plants, with only certain parts of it vaguely revealed.

It was like countless people—who had been buried alive—had finally stretched out their hands before they died in an attempt to grab onto something.

Compared to the city ruin deep in the swamp, this place looked nothing like it did back in the Old World.

Even the Ruin Hunters had given up on this place. The remaining items were either difficult to gather or worthless.

If he had never entered the swamp's depths or seen the Old World's silhouette, Long Yuehong would, at best, sigh at such a scene. But now, his emotions were extremely complicated. He felt inexplicably heavy but also sad.

"Sigh..." Jiang Baimian—who was in the passenger seat—sighed softly.

Ferlin sat between Shang Jianyao and Long Yuehong and looked out the window. "Back when my grandfather was still alive, he told me what kind of tourist city this was. Otherwise, they wouldn't have driven an RV all the way here."

Shang Jianyao didn't answer or continue Ferlin's conversation. Instead, he suddenly said, "I want to play a song."

"Reminiscing the Past?" Jiang Baimian asked in understanding.

Shang Jianyao nodded heavily. "Yes."

"Forget it, forget it. It'll affect the mood." Jiang Baimian waved her hand. "This road is already difficult to drive through. It's better not to disturb Bai Chen."

In this city ruin that had been completely abandoned, many roads had been buried or cut due to the collapse of buildings and the sinking of the ground. There was no way to pass through them at all. The vehicles could only constantly change their routes and advance bit by bit.

Fortunately, be it Bai Chen, Ferlin, or the Rootless leading the way, they were relatively familiar with this place and wouldn't end up getting lost.

During this process, Jiang Baimian sighed with emotion. "I really have to thank those Ruin Hunters for getting rid of the cars blocking the road. Otherwise, it would've been too much of a waste of time if we had to circle around this city ruin."

"We contributed to this as well." Ferlin smiled and stroked the white beard by his mouth. "Many of us obtained our cars here. They're all of the same grandfather generation now."

As they chatted, the convoy took more than an hour to slowly pass through the city ruins with the most damage. The road conditions gradually improved.

In front of them, they could even see a road being propped up by grayish-white columns. It was abnormally empty, and the signs of damage were not obvious. However, there were many withered weeds.

After an unknown period of time, the convoy arrived beside Turbid River.

The flowing water here was yellowish in color as if it had mixed with a lot of sand. This was a result of winter—many parts of the riverbed were exposed to the air and covered in mud.

Diagonally in front of the convoy, a medium-sized bridge—propped up by blocks—spanned across the river.

After crossing this new bridge and driving forward for about ten minutes, a grayish-white city wall—several meters tall—appeared in everyone's eyes.

"That's Weed City," Ferlin introduced.



“They have city walls?” Long Yuehong asked in surprise and curiosity.

He remembered that the textbooks had written that the cities of the Old World were no longer like those of the Old Era, which needed tall and sturdy city walls built. At most, places like schools would have a low perimeter wall built around it to facilitate management.

If it was done after the Old World was destroyed, how big a project would it have been?

Ferlin smiled and said, “This is an accessory to the city ruin from before. It’s said to be an ancient city before the Old World was destroyed.”

“A tourist attraction? In order to restore the ancient vibes, they preserved and repaired the city walls?” Jiang Baimian inferred with her knowledge.

Ferlin tersely acknowledged her words. “I heard that many survivors early on considered the previous ruin when they were preparing to build a settlement. However, the damage there was too serious. There are city walls here and a waterworks factory. They are also close to the hydropower station.”

At this point, he chuckled and said, “Although the city walls can’t defend against cannons or bombs, they can at least block beasts, monsters, and Heartless, giving everyone a greater sense of security.”

As he spoke, the convoy arrived at the entrance of Weed City.

It was a little congested here, so the jeep slowed down.

Long Yuehong rolled down the window and looked out, only to discover a crowd at the city gate.

They were wearing tattered or old clothes. Their faces were pale in the winter wind, and their lips had turned a little blue.

Most of these people were young or middle-aged men and women, followed by children. None of them were elderly.

Their expressions were more or less a little numb as they mechanically moved forward alongside the rest.

“What’s this?” Long Yuehong looked back at Ferlin.

Ferlin propped himself up and tried his best to look at the city gate. He then quickly sat down and sighed. “These are wilderness nomads without winter food. They came to Weed City to try their luck.”

“Can they find a job here?” Long Yuehong asked habitually, given his background as a company employee.

Ferlin laughed self-deprecatingly. “The ones with the best luck will be taken in or bought by the Hunter’s Guild as a direct descendant. Those with lesser luck are chosen by nobles and made slaves. A little worse, and they will be brought to the surrounding manors to be serfs.

“Those who aren’t too lucky are bought by those in the flesh business. The most unlucky ones become miners...”

After hearing Ferlin’s description, the jeep became extremely quiet. No one spoke for a long time.

Long Yuehong watched the vehicle gradually overtake those people, but he didn’t know what he could do. He retracted his gaze and glanced at Shang Jianyao, only to see his good friend wearing a solemn expression.

Finally, Jiang Baimian broke the silence and repeated a word in a mocking tone. “Nobles...”

“It’s a result of learning it from First City? It’s a part of First City, after all.” Ferlin didn’t mind.

Long Yuehong composed himself and continued asking, “Why are they still lining up at the entrance?”

He remembered Bai Chen mentioning that Weed City was relatively open and had no entry fees.

“There are so many nomads. Who knows if they are carrying any infectious diseases? At a time like this, we definitely have to do a basic inspection. Otherwise, everyone will be doomed.” Ferlin was rather familiar with such procedures.

“Mm.” Long Yuehong nodded and asked, “Eh, why aren’t there any old people...”

Before he could finish his sentence, he suddenly came to a realization. “I got it.”

In such a cold season, with them lacking in clothes and food, the slightly older ones would definitely have failed to reach Weed City. They might as well end their lives and reserve any resources for their descendants. This might even include their corpses.

This realization pained Long Yuehong.

Ferlin patted Long Yuehong on the shoulder. “Sigh, get used to it. This is the Ashlands. Things will only get worse after the first snow.”

At this point, he looked north. "I heard that it's already snowing in the Blackmarsh Wilderness..."

"A snow disaster..." Bai Chen—who was driving—seemed to recall something.

Jiang Baimian then consoled her. "Fortunately, Moat Town doesn't have to worry about these problems anymore."

After moving slowly for a while, the convoy finally passed the inspection and entered Weed City.

Long Yuehong subconsciously looked outside and realized that the road was paved with green or grayish-white stone bricks. They looked very neat, but they were a little cramped. They barely allowed two cars to pass through.

The buildings by the side of the road were not too tall. They were at most five stories tall, and the top was arched with eaves.

At the bottom were rows of outlets facing the street. This was very similar to the city ruin deep in the swamp. Similarly, they all had their own signboards.

Long Yuehong looked over and saw the names 'Time-Honored Noodle Restaurant,' 'A'xiu's Subsidiary Food,' 'Zhang Ji Food Oil,' 'First City Office,' and 'Shooting Internet Cafe.'

Even the electric poles by the side of the road had pieces of paper pasted on them. On it were the words 'Specialize in Treating Diseases.'

In addition to these, Long Yuehong also saw many signs written in Red River text. This included words like 'Restaurant,' 'Club,' and 'Bread.'

It was only at this moment that Long Yuehong deeply realized that Weed City was part of First City. Almost half of the pedestrians on the road had black hair and brown eyes. The rest either had blond or brown hair and blue or green eyes.

Of course, as it was winter not many pedestrians were outside due to the biting cold.

"It looks lively," Long Yuehong sighed with emotion.

"That's not all. In the past two months, driving has been impossible," Ferlin said with a smile. "The roads here weren't designed for vehicles to begin with. They're narrow, and it's easy to have a jam."

"Is that so..." Long Yuehong nodded and looked out the window again, just like Shang Jianyao.

On the electric poles, all kinds of wires were randomly strung in different directions. They looked very messy as if they were splitting the sky.

As the car drove forward, Long Yuehong saw another signboard: 'South Street Slave Market.'

Long Yuehong fell silent.

### *Chapter 126: History*

Ferlin didn't seem to notice Long Yuehong's silence and continued introducing the city. "Weed City isn't large. Its layout is very simple. It's divided into north, south, east, and west streets. There are also some alleys along each street. There, only one car can enter and leave at a time.

"South Street is mostly the market. You can buy all kinds of things as long as you find the right person, including Paradise Island's marijuana..."

Ferlin didn't finish his sentence and skipped the rest. "East Street is mainly made up of hotels, motels, warehouses, and parking lots. West Street has the Hunter's Guild, bars, teahouses, bathhouses, and nightclubs. These are places where all kinds of riffraff can be found.

"To get to North Street, we have to cross Central Square and the municipal building first. Then, there's a small bridge with more than ten to twenty armed guards on it. North Street is where nobles, manor lords, and rich merchants live. Castellan Manor is also over there."

Jiang Baimian and the others knew all of this. After all, they had a competent guide like Bai Chen. However, they still listened very seriously as if they didn't want to miss out on any details.

As the convoy advanced, Ferlin retracted his gaze and thoughtfully asked, "Do you have a Hunter's Badge?"

"No." Shang Jianyao was very calm.

"No." Jiang Baimian and Long Yuehong shook their heads, but Bai Chen didn't answer.

Ferlin smiled and said, "If you get the chance, it's better to register as a Ruin Hunter. It's fine elsewhere, but it's not that convenient to not have a Hunter's Badge in Weed City."

"Has this place already become a city dominated by the Hunter's Guild?" Jiang Baimian asked the obvious.

She had a certain level of understanding of Weed City, and Bai Chen was very familiar with it.

Ferlin thought for a moment and said, "From a certain perspective, yes."

He smiled and explained, "Do you know the situation back when Weed City was first established?"

"I don't know," replied Bai Chen, who was driving. In the past, she was a wilderness nomad who desperately ran around in a bid to live. Her knowledge of Weed City was focused on the information that could be used immediately, so she had never paid much attention to its history.

Upon seeing Jiang Baimian also turning around to look at him, Ferlin stroked his white beard and said, "Back then, the survivors gathered here, naturally forming a dozen armed groups. After an intense gunfight, only seven remained. No one could do a thing to each other.

"Coupled with the threat of beasts, monsters, and Heartless, they realized that everyone would die if they continued fighting. Therefore, they compromised and established a council. Every armed group had a vote to elect a castellan so that they could collectively face against their enemies."

Upon hearing this, Jiang Baimian nodded and said, "Primitive military democracy."

She then sighed. "The cycle of human civilization..."

Primitive military democracy... Long Yuehong repeated the term in his heart and realized that he knew every word. However, it was a little difficult to understand the term when the words were placed together.

We are all employees of Pangu Biology that received the same education. Why does Team Leader grasp so much additional knowledge? Is it because she can read a lot of extracurricular books?

Ferlin was also stunned. He didn't expect to hear such an academic term. Of course, with his understanding of the various political systems, he easily understood what it meant.

"Whether it's primitive or not, it's fine as long as it works." Ferlin expressed his thoughts and continued, "This allowed Weed City to survive the most dangerous period and continue. Although this didn't completely eliminate internal strife, and every power struggle was more or less accompanied by blood, it was at least controlled to a certain extent."

He looked out the window again. “Later, Weed City became First City’s vassal. The leaders of the seven armed groups slowly evolved into the region’s great nobles. They each have a small batch of nobles under them, who are in charge of the manors that surround Weed City.

“Heh heh, the council also added a word to their name, becoming the Noble Council.

“Later, an illegitimate son relied on his own efforts and family’s resources to climb to the position of the Hunter’s Guild’s local president. This wasn’t a big deal in the first place, but in an internal coup, the family’s main branch was terminated. In order to prevent a family branch from inheriting the family line, the illegitimate son was recognized as the family head and made a noble.

“He relied on his status in the Hunter’s Guild and his family’s wealth and supplies to gradually rope in a group of powerful Ruin Hunters without attracting anyone’s attention. Yes, they can be called mercenaries elsewhere. Anyway, I suspect that there might be some Awakened among them.

“In short, after a few bouts of internal strife, the illegitimate son was elected as castellan. From then on, the Noble Council’s powers began to diminish in actual strength. The election system was rigged into a disguised form of family inheritance.”

“It feels like history repeated itself...” Jiang Baimian laughed after hearing that. “This is why the local Hunter’s Guild is relatively strong.”

Ferlin nodded. “Yes, every castellan will be the local president of the Hunter’s Guild.”

“From the looks of it, the Hunter’s Guild will undergo some changes in different places. I knew too little in the past.” Jiang Baimian was very satisfied with knowing this.

Bai Chen suddenly asked, “That illegitimate son is the stone statue in front of the municipal building?”

“Yes.” Ferlin smiled. “Xu Erde is known as the greatest castellan of Weed City to date. When he was alive, he released many restrictions and made Weed City the most developed, most vibrant, and the best agricultural city in the Monk Wastelands. If not for that, it would be impossible for Weed City not to lack food in this year’s climate.

“But after he was elected as castellan, he paved the way for the next generation. In order to obtain First City’s support, he abolished many of Weed City’s important industries and started imports from them. In this regard, Weed City completely became First City’s vassal.

“However, this is good for us. We make many trips between Weed City and First City every year.”

As a caravan leader who traveled extensively, he knew these secrets very well.

As they spoke, the convoy turned into East Street and drove outside a hotel.

This hotel was called the Meri Hotel. It occupied three adjacent units on the street and the corresponding third, fourth, and fifth floors.

Beside the hotel was an alley. In the alley was a pair of iron fence doors that led to an empty courtyard surrounded by buildings.

This was the hotel's parking lot.

Hometown's convoy drove here skillfully.

A middle-aged man—wearing a knit cap and a thick army-green cotton coat—came out of the sentry post. He opened the door and smiled. “You guys are here again?”

He rubbed his hands, trembling a little from the chilly wind.

“Isn't it because I like your daughter?” The Rootless in front joked as he drove the car into the parking lot.

Upon seeing Bai Chen step on the brakes and stop the jeep on the street, Ferlin asked regretfully, “Are you guys planning on finding a place to stay yourselves?”

“Yes, I won't trouble you any further. I don't want to implicate you in any future matters,” Jiang Baimian said frankly.

“What's there to be afraid of? Jianyao and I are brothers!” Ferlin patted Shang Jianyao's shoulder.

“It's because we are brothers that I can't implicate you,” Shang Jianyao replied very seriously. He then looked into Ferlin's eyes, unwilling to show weakness.

Finally, Ferlin sighed and said, “Then, you have to be careful. Come to me if you have any problems. We should be here for a few days. Sigh, the situation is gradually becoming clearer. The nobles and manor lords should be able to tell that it won't be easy to buy food.”

After giving the advice, he alighted from the car and tightly gripped Shang Jianyao's hands. He then reluctantly said, “Pray we meet again!”

“We'll definitely meet again!” Shang Jianyao shook their tightly clenched hands.

After bidding Ferlin and the others farewell, Bai Chen let the jeep continue driving forward.

Long Yuehong held in his question for a long time before he finally had a chance to ask, "Where are we going now?"

Jiang Baimian pointed at Bai Chen with her chin. "Let Little White[1] do whatever she wants."

"..." Bai Chen frowned. "Team Leader, why did you give me a nickname?"

"There will be a distance between our team if we keep using our names." Jiang Baimian smiled. "You can also call me Sister Jiang, Sister Mian, or Big White[2]."

"You're so childish," Shang Jianyao said.

Jiang Baimian raised her left hand and let it escape the passenger seat's seat cover.

Tiny electric arcs flashed on it.

Bai Chen didn't say a word. She drove the car to the end of East Street and circled back south along the road by the city wall's edge.

Upon seeing Shang Jianyao shut his mouth, Jiang Baimian thought for a while and continued, "After we settle down, we'll have lunch. We'll then contact the company's intelligence personnel and meet at the designated time according to our agreement.

"There's nothing wrong with secretly observing the intelligence officer. After we confirm that no one is tailing him, we'll get Shang Jianyao to 'make friends' with him..."

At this moment, the jeep turned into an alley on South Street and stopped in front of a row of houses.

Long Yuehong looked out and saw a signboard: 'Ah-Fu Gun Shop.'

Under the signboard, someone had written a line of words on the seriously damaged white porcelain wall with a black place: "Taking in broken pistols, broken rifles, and broken submachine guns."

[1] Bai Chen's Bai is White in Chinese

[2] Jiang Baimian's Bai is also the same Bai—White—in Chinese

*Chapter 127: Auntie Nan*

"They also know how to repair firearms?" Long Yuehong looked at Bai Chen in the driver's seat and pushed open the door. He was implying that this was no longer a simple repair job.



“If they can’t do such work, they won’t be able to open such a shop.” The cold wind howled outside, and Bai Chen couldn’t help but tug at the gray scarf around her neck.

“Besides, sometimes a broken gun might not really be damaged, or it might not be that badly damaged.” Jiang Baimian speculated based on her experience and knowledge. “It’s just that the person selling the gun doesn’t know much.”

Bai Chen nodded and said, “This is where the money is.”

With that said, she closed the door and walked to Ah Fu’s Gun Shop.

“Money?” Long Yuehong had learned this term before, but he had only seen it once in reality. It was the Old World coin Shang Jianyao had obtained from Wu Shoushi.

As Jiang Baimian looked through the windshield, she casually said, “This place is considered a part of a large faction. Currency is definitely circulating here, but it’s often limited internally. Actually, the company’s contribution points are essentially equivalent to money. Have you forgotten the concept of equivalency?”

Long Yuehong recalled for a few seconds and weakly said, “We never learned that…”

Jiang Baimian was speechless. She smiled after a few seconds. “I’ll give you a few books to read in the future. Although this is useless in terms of company life, it’s useful for us—who often come to the Ashlands—to understand more things.

“Besides, it will be much easier for you to be transferred out of the Old Task Force if you can master it. You might even be assigned to the department in charge of foreign trade.”

“Good, good.” Long Yuehong’s eyes lit up. Although he would definitely be in the Old Task Force for the next half a year, he was bound to have immediate concerns despite there being none in the future. He had to prepare for his future transfer.

Otherwise, it would be really easy to be disappointed after adapting to such a high-income job. Besides, he still had to support a family in the future!

Jiang Baimian smiled and nodded. She then looked at Shang Jianyao suspiciously. “Why aren’t you saying anything?”

The quieter this fellow was, the more she was afraid that he would cause trouble.

Shang Jianyao rubbed his stomach and said, “Saving energy.”

“That’s true…” Jiang Baimian also felt hungry.

It had been quite a while since lunch.

As she spoke, Bai Chen came out of Ah Fu's Gun Shop and returned to the jeep.

Behind her, a young man in an old windbreaker walked out and pulled open the iron fence a few meters away.

This led to the back of the building, where the gun shop was located.

This was a square courtyard surrounded by several buildings. The ground was covered in grayish-white stone bricks, but many of them had shattered and had rainwater pooling in them.

After Bai Chen found a spot to park the jeep, she said as she drove, "We're here."

Jiang Baimian nodded slightly, alighted, and looked around. She firmly drilled the locations of the four exits in the courtyard into her mind.

They then followed Bai Chen through Ah Fu's Gun Shop's backdoor and went up a cold, damp, and grayish-white staircase to the second floor.

A woman in her thirties was already waiting here. Her black hair was tied into a high bun. She didn't have outstanding facial features to speak of, but she had an indescribable charm.

At this moment, she was wearing a dark-red cotton jacket and a dark scarf around her neck. She looked rather clean.

"Auntie Nan." Bai Chen greeted her.

Auntie Nan glanced at the Old Task Force and didn't ask anything. She pointed at the end of the second-floor corridor and said, "Your rooms are the two innermost ones. If you encounter any problems, you can jump into the courtyard or onto the street. The keys are on the doors."

Jiang Baimian looked at the scarf around Auntie Nan's neck and smiled. "Thank you."

"It's not like I'm letting you guys stay for free." Auntie Nan pursed her lips and smiled. "Each of the two rooms costs 500 grams of military canned food a day. I hope you guys don't end up defaulting on the debt."

Jiang Baimian said briskly, "Don't worry. Even if we really can't pay, I'll get them to find something to do."

She was referring to Shang Jianyao and Long Yuehong.

Auntie Nan smiled casually. "In Weed City, the competition amongst Ruin Hunters is very intense. Sometimes, they even take on missions to deliver lunch and dinner for others."

She paused and added, "The toilet and shower room are on the other side. You won't miss them when you head there."

"If you want to shower but are afraid of the cold, it's best to do it between 12:00 to 12:30 p.m. and 6:30 to 7 p.m. We would have just finished cooking, and there's enough hot water in the empty walls behind the stove, which can be directly drawn for usage. Heh heh, we have to conserve energy. If you miss these two periods, you'll have to put water into the water heater and boil it with electricity before mixing it with cold water for a suitable temperature."

"Oh, it's winter now. There's not much water, and the residential area only provides electricity for five hours a day. From 11:30 to 1:30 in the afternoon and from 5:30 to 8:30 in the evening. Keep track of the time yourselves."

Long Yuehong and the others were not surprised by Auntie Nan's reminder. After all, the energy supply in Pangu Biology was stricter than that. They were all rationed.

"If we use electricity to boil water ourselves, do we need to pay an additional fee?" Jiang Baimian knew that Bai Chen might not be in a position to ask such a question, so she took the initiative to take on the responsibility of bargaining.

Auntie Nan glanced at Bai Chen. "One canned food every four times. If you want us to prepare your meals, you have to tell us in advance."

After confirming the details, Jiang Baimian waved Auntie Nan farewell and walked toward the rooms along the cold corridor, where its two ends were illuminated by light.

The two doors stood facing each other. They were painted dark red, and they had certain traces of damage. They gave off an ancient feeling.

The decorations in the room were the same: a bunk bed, a table against the window, a wooden cabinet with signs of worms, and two square stools.

Due to the climate and environment here, the air was slightly humid. The coldness seemed to penetrate their clothes and reach deep into their bones.

"Same old rules." Jiang Baimian pulled out the brass key to the room by the street. "I'll share a room with Shang Jianyao. The two of you will share a room."

She had to look after Shang Jianyao personally to prevent him from doing anything during his bouts of brain spasms.

For example, turning on his speaker and disturbing the people living nearby late at night.

For example, he would jump out of the window and 'participate' when he heard a commotion on the streets.

Bai Chen was clearly unable to deal with Shang Jianyao.

Without giving Shang Jianyao a chance to speak, Jiang Baimian flipped her wrist and looked at her electronic watch. "There's still ten minutes to 12:30. Everyone, make the best use of your time to take a tactical shower and change your clothes. We will then head out for a meal and contact the intelligence agents."

Jiang Baimian preferred electronic watches over mechanical watches because they had more functions.

To this day, the Old Task Force's members could be considered well-trained. They each took two minutes to finish their shower and change into clothes that were closer to those of ordinary Ruin Hunters and Weed City civilians.

Shang Jianyao wore a short, dark-blue down jacket. The material was slightly old, but it wasn't that shriveled. For his bottoms, he wore a thick pair of pants made of a thick, blue, diagonal-patterned cloth. It had very little impact on his actions.

Long Yuehong was wearing a black cotton jacket that reached his thighs; Jiang Baimian was in the same style as him, and Bai Chen was wearing a gray windproof suit that just covered her armed belt.

Their pants were about the same as Shang Jianyao's. The men wore brown, high-heeled leather shoes, and the women wore short, black boots.

These were perks issued by the company for employees who needed to carry out missions on the surface during winter.

"Hide your pistols well." Bai Chen pulled the scarf around her neck and reminded them, "In Weed City, there's a relatively strange ban—'don't let the patrolmen see your weapons.'"

Those placed in gun shops didn't count.

"They aren't forbidden, but we can't let the patrolmen see them?" Long Yuehong asked in surprise.

"Yes." Bai Chen nodded. "The first time they see it, they will confiscate your weapons. The second time they see it, they will lock you up for a month. The third time they see it, you'll be locked up for three months before being expelled from the city. You will also be

deemed 'unwelcome.' This will also result in the deduction of your credit with the Hunter's Guild."

"How strange. Can't they just ban guns?" Long Yuehong expressed his confusion.

For example, Pangu Biology had a clear gun ban.

"I don't know why," Bai Chen replied calmly.

Jiang Baimian smiled. "In many places, there are similar restrictions that puzzle people. Every restriction has a very deep historical reason."

"What's the reason for Weed City's restriction?" asked Long Yuehong.

Jiang Baimian shot him a glance. "I don't know either. I hope I can find an answer later. Doing such digging is a form of pleasure."

In fact, she had a certain guess. However, it was difficult to say it without confidence.

After chatting about this topic, Jiang Baimian looked at Shang Jianyao—who was crazily giving hints by rubbing his stomach—and chuckled. "Let's go. Time for our meal."

Upon hearing this, Shang Jianyao turned around first and walked along the cold corridor to the stairwell.

After going down to the parking lot, Bai Chen pointed at the jeep. "We have to exchange stuff for coins."

"How do we exchange?" Long Yuehong always asked questions for anything he didn't know. He was an excellent student.

"At the municipal building, there's a row of 'kiosks.' You can use different supplies to exchange for local money. If you aren't afraid of trouble and have acquaintances, you can go to the Hunter's Guild, a bar, a teahouse, or a nightclub to exchange for money in the underground market. It will give a better rate," Bai Chen explained simply. "In Weed City and in First City's sphere of influence, all open transactions can be done using their currency."

"Is that so..." Long Yuehong suddenly had a sense of anticipation because this was something he had never experienced before. It was very refreshing.

Jiang Baimian thought for a moment and said, "Let's go to the kiosk. It's best not to make contact with the underground factions here before establishing contact with the company's intelligence personnel."

Bai Chen had no objections. She pointed at the remaining cans, energy bars, and compressed biscuits and inquired, "How much do we bring?"

"What's your take?" Jiang Baimian had always respected the judgment of those with authority.

"Half," Bai Chen answered without hesitation. "The value of the coins here often fluctuates. It's safer to keep more supplies with us."

"Fluctuation?" Long Yuehong questioned curiously.

Bai Chen casually replied, "In First City, the one with the smallest denomination is Cass, followed by Drace, and the largest is Oray. Under normal circumstances, one company contribution point is equivalent to 2c when it comes to buying supplies. 1d is equivalent to 10c, and one 1o is equivalent to 10d. Yes, that means that 1o can buy one pound of raw pork, but sometimes, they can only buy eight ounces. Sometimes, it can buy one pound and two ounces, or more."

Cass, Drace, and Oray were words in the Red River language. They originated from the names of a few leaders back when First City was established. 1c, 1d, and 1o—were the simplified way of calling them in Ashlandic.

The official language in Weed City was the Red River language, but the commoners mainly spoke Ashlandic.

"In that case, won't we earn a sum sometimes?" Long Yuehong asked with great acumen.

"That's right." Jiang Baimian smiled. "In the Old World, this is a specialized trade. Now, it doesn't matter if you occasionally earn money. Those who do it for a living will be directly dragged out to face a firing squad."

"Cannon fire," Bai Chen corrected.

This was First City's habit of punishing such people. They would finish off one batch at a time.

Long Yuehong hissed and took a deep breath of cold air. He deeply felt a chill run down his spine.

This time, Jiang Baimian heard someone's stomach rumble without Shang Jianyao's hint. She smiled and ended the topic before pointing outside. "Move the things up!"

## *Chapter 128: Library*

After putting the canned food, energy bars, and compressed biscuits that needed to be exchanged for coins into an unmarked cardboard box and handing it to Shang Jianyao, Bai Chen shook open the tent cloth to cover the Orange rifle, the Berserker assault rifle, the Tyrant grenade launcher, the Death rocket launcher, the various ammunition rounds, the first-aid kit, and the remaining supplies.

This way, one couldn't discover anything of value if they only looked in through the window.

Upon seeing this, Jiang Baimian nodded indiscernibly, her eyes filled with praise.

After packing the trunk, Bai Chen turned around and saw Long Yuehong's confused expression. She simply explained, "It's easy to hide from serious bandits, but it's difficult to guard against petty thieves. Auntie Nan's place isn't too orderly."

In places that were too orderly, outsiders were relatively eye-catching.

Jiang Baimian smiled and added, "When we return, we have to move some things upstairs and place them by our side. Only then can things be safe."

She didn't mention the continuation of night shifts and monitoring the jeep from the second floor because she didn't know what trouble they would be embroiled in next. Maintaining their energy was a relatively important matter.

Sometimes, in a situation where one had insufficient sleep for days, one's reaction would be half a beat slower or even a full beat slower when something unexpected happened—even if they felt energized and fine.

Humans could make sensory mistakes, especially when it came to their self-awareness.

Long Yuehong nodded, not fully understanding. He saw Shang Jianyao carrying the cardboard box and walking to the courtyard exit by Ah Fu's Gun Shop.

The alleys were relatively narrow in Weed City, allowing only one car to pass through. The buildings around them were more than ten meters tall. This resulted in only having abundant sunlight at noon every winter that could chase away the coldness.

But when they left the alley and came to the main street, the sunlight became warm. It warmed them, and the wind was not that biting.

Jiang Baimian looked at the pedestrians coming and going and said to Long Yuehong and Bai Chen, "Two of us will each form a team and widen the distance between us a little. The characteristics of a team of four are too obvious."

Without needing much explanation, Bai Chen immediately understood her team leader's meaning and quickened her pace with Long Yuehong.

Soon, the two teams were about five to six meters apart.

Long Yuehong looked around curiously. "There's no public cafeteria here? There are quite a number of people in noodle shops and restaurants..."

This didn't match his imagination of wilderness nomad settlements.

Be it Moat Town or Qifeng Town, they were closer to what he expected in this regard.

"There are many foreign Ruin Hunters here," Bai Chen explained in the simplest words.

Long Yuehong knew this fact very well. He even knew that Weed City was a spot where supplies were exchanged amongst three major factions. There were many people coming and going every day, but it was a little quiet during winter. However, he didn't understand what this had to do with his question.

Bai Chen glanced at him and continued, "Most outsiders won't stay long in Weed City. Every time they come, they will stay for two weeks at most. They will either stay in motels or rent short-term rooms. There's no place to cook."

"Is that so..." Long Yuehong finally understood.

This was an impossible situation inside Pangu Biology.

Even if one went to other floors to visit their relatives and friends, they could return home quickly or be invited to stay overnight. Therefore, there were no hotels or rooms rented by the day in the underground building.

As they spoke, Jiang Baimian suddenly quickened her pace and rushed forward. She spoke as if she were a stranger asking for directions. "Will there be more people in this alley at night?"

She was referring to the alley opposite the South Street Slave Market.

Bai Chen recalled and answered, "On winter nights, there's nobody outside except in the West Street area."

"Thank you." Jiang Baimian smiled brightly. She then returned to Shang Jianyao's side.

"Team Leader's acting is really good..." Long Yuehong praised sincerely.

Bai Chen didn't say anything else and continued walking toward Central Square.



Compared to other places in Weed City, this place appeared very spacious. The ground seemed to have been repaired and was relatively flat. In the middle of the square was a stone statue of a human. It was of an elder holding a gun in one hand and a book in the other.

He had a thin face and wore a hooded robe that didn't seem conducive for movement. His slightly sunken eyes were watching the humans coming and going in front of him.

"Is this the illegitimate son, Xu Erde?" Long Yuehong asked with interest.

"Yes." Bai Chen circled around the stone statue and walked toward the municipal building in the north. "Actually, the most accurate title for him should be Weed City's governor. However, everyone is more accustomed to calling him castellan. Yes... There's also a tax collector who directly answers to First City. The kiosks also come under him."

Long Yuehong wanted to ask what 'tax' was, but he felt that he had asked too many questions along the way. It was better to ask next time.

Before long, they arrived in front of the municipal building.

This was a four-story building. It was brownish-yellow in color, and there were some flower beds in front of it. Nearly ten windows had their shutters open at the municipal building's ground floor. Many people were lining up in front of each kiosk.

"The seven on the left are the exchange kiosks." Bai Chen led Long Yuehong to the line with the least people. "The blackboard in front has the exchange rates for the different supplies today. We can't exchange using supplies that aren't on it."

"Are ours fine?" Long Yuehong suddenly felt a little worried.

"No faction will refuse food." Bai Chen was very certain.

In fact, people like them who exchanged food for coins were a minority. Most people came to Weed City to exchange other supplies for food reserves. However, they had to use First City's coins during this process.

Long Yuehong heaved a sigh of relief and curiously asked, "What should we do if there are supplies that can't be exchanged? Head to the underground market?"

Bai Chen looked around as if she wanted to determine the length of the other lines. "You can also go through the streets and peddle them. Or you can spend some supplies and set up a stall in an official market. These are all considered relatively wasteful choices. After coming here a few more times and getting familiar with them, you can get to know the main buyers of different supplies and directly negotiate with them."

At this moment, Jiang Baimian cupped her hands and pointed at Long Yuehong's team with her chin. "Go line up there. I saw a public library by the side. I'll go in and take a look."

On the right side of the square was a white-walled building with multiple entrances. One of the entrances had a signboard: 'Weed City Public Library.'

This was also one of the hallmark contributions of the greatest castellan, Xu Erde. Therefore, the stone statue had a gun in one hand and a book in the other.

Shang Jianyao glanced at Jiang Baimian and didn't say anything else as he walked toward Long Yuehong and the others.

Jiang Baimian exhaled and watched it spread into a white mist in the air. She then came to the library's entrance in satisfaction.

On the wall beside the entrance was a piece of paper. On it were words in Ashlandic and the Red River language: "Only citizens of this city and Official Hunters and above can borrow books."

The Hunter's Badge is really useful here... Jiang Baimian sighed and walked in.

This place was similar to Pangu Biology's library. It was also made up of bookshelves and reading areas. Nôv(e)B\jnn

Jiang Baimian went straight for the former. She casually browsed through the bookshelves and quickly came to an inconspicuous corner. She pulled out a rather old, thick book.

The title was written in pure Red River language. It was translated as: Internal Revenue Code.

In the Ashlands at this stage, this was a useless book. It was mainly used to fill up the bookshelves; no one would borrow it.

Jiang Baimian quickly flipped to the 650th page of the book and folded it. She then took out a piece of paper and a fountain pen from her pocket. In this deserted area blocked by many bookshelves, she scribbled a sentence: "8 p.m., in the alley opposite South Street Slave Market."

This was the way to contact the intelligence personnel. If it was completed before 2 p.m., 8 p.m. referred to 8 p.m. of that very night. If it exceeded 2 p.m., it meant the next night.

After folding the note, Jiang Baimian placed it in the middle of the book. She then pushed the book back to its original spot.

...

In front of the kiosk, Long Yuehong looked at the coins in his hand and suppressed his voice. "Isn't this paper?"

Their supplies had been exchanged for a total of 10 Oray. At today's rates, they could probably buy 12 pounds of raw pork. But these Oray were only thin, textured pieces of paper. On them were colorful patterns, a man's side profile, and the number '1.'

"Outside of First City's sphere of influence, they are indeed equivalent to paper," echoed Bai Chen casually. "If you have a choice, it will be better to choose the gold and silver coins minted by First City."

Unfortunately, this could only be chanced upon by luck.

"Then, let's go have lunch quickly." Long Yuehong suddenly felt like the money in his hand would quickly turn to paper if he didn't spend it.

At this moment, Jiang Baimian had already returned and rendezvoused with them despite maintaining a distance.

Under Bai Chen's suggestion, they returned to South Street, entered Time-Honored Noodle Restaurant, and 'shared' a table.

"Their spicy oil-drenched noodles are very delicious." Bai Chen seemed to recall something, and her expression turned rather mellow.

"Spicy oil-drenched?" Long Yuehong asked in surprise.

It sounds extravagant! Is this the life of a large settlement in the Ashlands?

Bai Chen gestured at the boss for four bowls and said, "Weed City is very suitable for planting oil vegetables and chili. Many nearby manors produce them, so the prices are very low. However, the noodles in such a small restaurant aren't very good. They aren't as exquisite as what the nobles eat..."

At this point, Bai Chen suddenly paused and didn't continue.

Jiang Baimian glanced at her and smiled. "I just hope it's done quickly. Look, how long has it been since Shang Jianyao spoke?"

Just as she said that, there was a sudden commotion outside.

After a while, someone passed by.

The boss—who was making noodles—casually asked, "What happened?"

The people passing by pointed in the direction of the square. “It seems like the library is on fire.”

Jiang Baimian’s eyes instantly narrowed.

### *Chapter 129: Rookie Fresh Out of the Oven*

Like most people in the noodle restaurant, Jiang Baimian only turned to look back at the streetside without leaving her seat.

Before long, the boss—who was in his fifties and reeked of oil and smoke—carried a tray and placed the four large bowls of spicy, oil-drenched noodles in front of Shang Jianyao and the others.

Amidst the intense fragrance that induced the munchies, Jiang Baimian couldn’t help but feel tantalized. She casually inquired, “The library caught fire?”

“Yeah.” The boss sighed and said, “But I don’t see any smoke coming from it. The fire probably isn’t big.”

Jiang Baimian glanced at Shang Jianyao, who had already picked up the bowl and lowered his head to slurp down his food. She then ‘curiously’ asked, “Have there been any fires recently, or something?”

She didn’t mind that such a question would make her look like a foreigner. Most people in Weed City were foreigners.

“It’s not like we have scorching weather!” The boss shook his head in denial. “I think it was done by those lunatics?”

“Lunatics?” Jiang Baimian appeared more intrigued.

The boss sighed. “Just as winter started, a bunch of donkeys suddenly appeared in the city. They’d stuff some paper under your door all day. On it are words like ‘the Old World was destroyed because of knowledge,’ ‘don’t learn anything that exceeds your instincts,’ ‘stay away from books and don’t think.’ Did you get that? Is that even human language? Is the paper free?”

“These lunatics really ended up burning the library!”

As Jiang Baimian listened to Shang Jianyao eat his noodles, she restrained herself and asked, “Are the nobles not going to do anything?”

“No one knows who it is! How can they deal with it?” The boss was very happy to discuss this topic. His sideburns were extremely white, and his hair was very short. There were already some wrinkles at the corners of his eyes.

“That’s true.” Jiang Baimian lowered her expectations of Weed City’s public security. It was definitely incomparable to that of Pangu Biology.

Upon seeing that the boss was rather angry, she asked, “You guys seem to like that library?”

The boss wiped his hands on his white apron. “How can I not mind? The children rely on it for their studies and to recognize words.”

“There aren’t any schools in Weed City? That shouldn’t be the case.” Jiang Baimian had never heard Bai Chen mention this, so she tacitly imagined that they had schools.

The boss looked at the door. “There are, but ordinary people in North Street aren’t admitted. An ordinary family like ours can only rely on homeschooling. Fortunately, my grandfather’s generation knew a lot, and my father had undergone some formal education. Only then was I barely able to recognize most of Ashlandic and most words in the Red River language.

“How can I teach my child without books? The effects of doing so by solely relying on myself... Sigh, let’s not talk about it. I only hope that my grandson won’t be disappointing. I hope he will be able to recognize more words and read more books. He might have the chance to work at the municipal building. I don’t want him to be like his father, who doesn’t like books or know any words. He chose to be a Ruin Hunter and ended up losing his life!”

At this point, the boss recalled the library’s fire and cursed angrily. “That bunch of melon rind!”

Upon hearing the conversation between his team leader and the boss, Long Yuehong suddenly realized how difficult it was for Moat Town to maintain a public education system.

In the Ashlands, not everyone had the right to receive education. Most people couldn’t even read.

Upon realizing that there was the suspected existence of an arsonist, making the fire a coincidence, Jiang Baimian secretly heaved a sigh of relief and joked, “Boss, your dialect is pretty mixed.”

“Back when my grandfather’s generation established Weed City, people came from everywhere. They spoke all kinds of dialects, and some even spoke the Red River language. Over time, this gets into your head, and everything you say gets mixed up.

Oh, hey there, what would you like to eat?" The boss stopped chatting when he saw new customers enter and went forward to welcome them.

Jiang Baimian glanced at Shang Jianyao, who was digging at the bottom of the bowl. She raised her noodles and smiled at Long Yuehong. "How's the taste?"

"Delicious... It's just... a little spicy..." Long Yuehong replied vaguely.

Jiang Baimian had already mixed the noodles when she was chatting. At this moment, she took a bite. The noodles had already soaked up the red oil, making it fragrant and spicy. As she chewed, it carried the unique sweetness of starch and a perfect sourness. She breathed in air filled with the fragrance of shallots, oil, and spiciness.

"It's just too little." Shang Jianyao put down his bowl and chopsticks and 'helped' Long Yuehong add on.

Jiang Baimian never mistreated her team members. She turned around and shouted, "Boss, another bowl. No, two bowls."

She felt that one bowl was probably not enough. Although two bowls were a little too much, she could share them with Long Yuehong and Bai Chen.

Just like that, they ate until sweat broke out on their foreheads. This was an indescribable enjoyment in the cold winter.

They later settled the bill—it cost 18 Drace.

The small bowl of spicy oil-drenched noodles was 1.5d, and the large bowl was 3d. The Old Task Force ate six bowls in total, putting the total cost at almost 2 Orays.

After getting back two one-Drace notes as change, Jiang Baimian counted the remaining notes with a pained expression. "Money really gets spent fast!"

They had only exchanged for 10 Orays, and a single meal had cost them almost a fifth of it.

This bit of money could only last two days.

Jiang Baimian said to Shang Jianyao, who ate the most, "Let's go to the Hunter's Guild to take a look and get a badge. If we have to stay longer in the future, we have to earn money to support ourselves."

At this moment, they had already returned to the streets and were in pairs again.

Shang Jianyao rubbed his stomach and said regretfully, "We should have replaced the second bowl with another type of noodles, the kind with meat."

“As long as you can earn money, we’ll definitely do it next time.” Jiang Baimian didn’t mind that the fellow only had thoughts about eating. This was because their Old Task Force had taken a long detour and didn’t have much food left. Therefore, their current priority was to resolve the problem of survival.

Of course, there was a high chance that they had other means of obtaining supplies if they could contact the intelligence personnel.

On Weed City’s streets in the afternoon, the sun was no longer so hot. The howling, cold wind drilled into the pedestrians’ clothes.

This resulted in many people refraining from going out unless necessary. Apart from the Weed City patrolmen with submachine guns and the Ruin Hunters—who were in a rush to find food—the streets were abnormally empty and quiet.

After arriving at Central Square, Jiang Baimian and Shang Jianyao turned into West Street. After taking a few steps, they saw the Hunter’s Guild that occupied an entire building.

Under the imitation flying eaves and corbeled columns were the words ‘Hunter’s Guild’—formed by mottled white walls and small light bulbs.

The latter had two languages. One could imagine how bright and eye-catching it would be at night after the electricity was switched on.

The rooms at the bottom of the guild were all connected, only leaving behind pillars and walls that couldn’t be knocked down. It formed a very spacious hall.

At this moment, a row of doors was open for people to enter and leave freely.

On the walls and pillars beside the different doors were the same black words: “Opening hours: 8:30 a.m. to 8:30 p.m.”

“Note: Our guild’s employees have the legal permits to carry firearms.

“Warning: Please consciously maintain order.

“...”

As Jiang Baimian browsed through the content, a team walked out of the Hunter’s Guild.

Two of them were rather eye-catching.

One was a robot. Its entire body was silver-black in color. Its lines were smooth, and its texture was obvious. Its eyes were like two light bulbs that flickered with a red glow.

The other was a man in his thirties. His appearance was ordinary, and his eyes were sharp. The five fingers on his right hand were long and iron-black. The corresponding section above his wrist was covered by his sleeve, preventing others from seeing it.

Mechanical arm... Jiang Baimian knew that her mutterings remained very loud, so she could only hold it in.

The Ruin Hunters that came and went looked at this group of people enviously.

Bai Chen's gaze also followed them.

"An intelligent robot... Very impressive!" Long Yuehong sighed with emotion.

Even if they weren't combat-type intelligent robots, they were still great helpers when out surviving in the wilderness!

They didn't get hungry, nor did they get exhausted. They were not afraid of poisonous gases, ordinary firearms, or harsh environments. Furthermore, they could carry intense weights.

The only problem was the energy supply.

Unfortunately, fewer than three places had been able to steadily produce intelligent robots since the Old World was destroyed. As the 'antiques' gradually broke down or were destroyed, it was indeed enviable for a group to have such a 'companion.'

In the past few years, many humans had survived all kinds of dangers thanks to intelligent robots. Even in the Old World, intelligent robots had not truly become mainstream.

Jiang Baimian sized them up for a while before retracting her gaze. She smiled and asked Shang Jianyao, who was beside her, "If you are given a chance to install a mechanical arm, what will be your function of choice?"

"Opening cans," Shang Jianyao replied very seriously.

"...Very pragmatic." Jiang Baimian gritted her teeth.

As they spoke, the two of them had already walked into the Hunter's Guild's lobby.

Attached to the ceilings were lamps that emitted a white glow. It seemed as if they didn't need to save electricity.

In the lobby, many tables were scattered around the round platform in the middle. On each table was a machine that came with an LCD screen.



A gigantic screen hung above the large round platform, slowly scrolling through all kinds of missions.

Under the screen were windows. Black electronic devices were placed in each window.

At a glance, Jiang Baimian felt that she was in a completely different world from the outside world. The technological difference was worlds apart.

She then found an empty window and pulled Shang Jianyao over. Jiang Baimian looked at the clean and refreshing girl behind the window and smiled. "Registering to be a hunter."

"Fill in the form. If you don't know how to write, I'll help you fill in the form." The female staff member handed over two pieces of paper. Her attitude was neither enthusiastic nor arrogant.

The contents of the form were very simple. It included names, gender, age, and other conventional fields. Jiang Baimian took the pen by the window and filled it in.

It was quite difficult to come up with a fake name.

In order to prevent Shang Jianyao from having a chance to perform, Jiang Baimian helped him fill in the form.

After handing in the form, they took photos in front of the black instrument by the window one after another and recorded their fingerprints.

They quickly obtained two Hunter Badges.

The badge was brass in color. On the front were a blurry human face, a saber, and a spear. A chip was embedded in the back.

"You are now Rookie Hunters. Work hard and take on missions. You will soon become Official Hunters." When the staff member handed over the badge, she gave them the standard blessings.

Jiang Baimian tossed her badge up and smiled at Shang Jianyao. "Let's go and see what missions there are."

Shang Jianyao then attached the badge to his chest solemnly.

*Chapter 130: Pity*

Jiang Baimian watched Shang Jianyao attach the badge to his chest and laughed. "It's just a Rookie Hunter badge. There's no need to do that, right?"

Without waiting for Shang Jianyao's answer, she quickly added, "I understand. It gives a sense of ritual."

She remembered having a similar conversation with him before.

"Why ask if you know?" Shang Jianyao didn't seem to understand his team leader's intention of stopping.

Jiang Baimian rolled her eyes at him and took a few steps back. She looked up at the gigantic screen hanging in midair.

"There's no need to go through so much trouble. You can see what missions are available using any machine over there. After choosing, swipe your badge at the blinking red light, and you'll take on the mission," advised the female staff member, who had helped them register as hunters. Nôv(e)B\jnn

As the two people opposite her had filled in the information themselves, she didn't inform them that they could get the machine to read things out to them if they couldn't read.

"...It's pretty high-tech." Jiang Baimian suddenly felt like a bumpkin.

It wasn't even this convenient inside Pangu Biology! Or rather, she had never been to such a department or place.

The female staff member replied proudly, "In the entire Ashlands, there aren't more than ten Hunter's Guilds that are as convenient as ours."

Ah, what did you say? Jiang Baimian touched her metal cochlear implant and was too embarrassed to ask.

The two parties were already a certain distance away, and the clerk's words weren't as loud as before.

"She said that there aren't more than ten such Hunter's Guilds in the Ashlands." Shang Jianyao could always help give a timely 'translation.' Of course, it was unwanted or uncalled for at times.

"As expected of a city that's rumored to be close to being taken over by the Hunter's Guild..." Jiang Baimian muttered to herself in a half-joking and emotional manner.

She led Shang Jianyao to one of the tables scattered across the hall. They each picked up a thin, silver-white machine with an LCD screen.

This was like an enlarged, metal version of a paper notebook.

At this moment, many Ruin Hunters were standing in different spots. They either quickly swiped their fingers across the screen or brought their badges to a blinking red spot at the top of the machine.

Jiang Baimian was also considered experienced with computers. She usually had a chip to control. After doing a quick sweep, she roughly understood how to operate the machine in front of her.

After she lit up the screen, she slid it up according to the notification and had it reveal the mission page.

At this moment, she saw Shang Jianyao looking at her from the corner of her eye. He took out a box containing a mirror and was eager to give it a try.

“What are you trying to do?” Jiang Baimian was very vigilant.

“Deceive myself and pretend to be you. Then, mimic your actions and successfully learn how to use the machine,” Shang Jianyao explained very seriously.

He looked around to make sure that no one was around. This was just like how he had dealt with Qiao Chu and the Superior Heartless that made people greedy.

“...” Jiang Baimian cursed angrily. “There’s no need for such a complicated train of thought! Don’t make such a simple matter so troublesome! Come, I’ll teach you.”

As a graduate of the electronics department, Shang Jianyao quickly mastered how to operate the machine after Jiang Baimian said a few words. He had just been a little ignorant of the ways of the world.

It was only then that Long Yuehong and Bai Chen walked into the Hunter’s Guild’s hall. They didn’t want to register as hunters immediately after Jiang Baimian and Shang Jianyao.

Jiang Baimian glanced at the circular platform area, retracted her gaze, and officially flipped through the missions.

“Mission description: North Street’s Zhao Residence is recruiting 20 short-term mercenaries...”

“Mission description: Historian Harold is organizing a team to head to Swamp Ruin 1 in the near future. Experienced personnel are urgently needed...”

“Mission description: Seeking appraisal for a batch of ancient relics...”

“Mission description: Weapons for food...”

“Mission description: Send lunch to a sentry post in the wilderness...”

After quickly flipping through the missions that were still available, Jiang Baimian couldn't help but sigh. “What a pity...”

“What a pity...” Beside her, Shang Jianyao made the same exclamation, but he didn't imitate Jiang Baimian's tone.

Jiang Baimian turned to look at him and asked with a smile, “What's the pity?”

“The mission regarding Qiao Chu is gone.” Shang Jianyao did not hide his regret.

“I also find it a pity.” Jiang Baimian sighed. “Otherwise, with the information we have, we can receive four tons of flour at least. We wouldn't have to worry about food any time soon. Besides, we would also instantly become Official Hunters.”

Her subtext was that their Old Task Force—which had information regarding Qiao Chu—could get each person to take on the mission individually and report different matters.

The reward for completing one mission was one ton of ordinary-grade flour and 100 credit points.

From Rookie Hunter to Official Hunter, it only required 100 credit points.

At this point, Jiang Baimian and Shang Jianyao sighed in unison again. “What a pity...”

In a sense, Qiao Chu really was a walking ‘treasure.’

After roughly understanding what kind of missions there were, Jiang Baimian said to Shang Jianyao, “Let's go. These aren't suitable. We'll come again tomorrow and the day after.”

In fact, some of the missions were quite suitable for Rookie Hunters. They also didn't require one to leave Weed City. However, Jiang Baimian had to contact Pangu Biology's intelligence agents and confirm what she needed to do next before she could consider taking on those missions.

On the one hand, she was registering her identity at the Hunter's Guild. On the other hand, she used this opportunity to gain a preliminary understanding of Weed City's current situation through the available missions.

A single leaf's fall spelled the coming of autumn. In the highly developed Hunter's Guild in Weed City, any undercurrents would more or less show some clues through the missions issued.

In short, Jiang Baimian only felt that the situation at North Street might be a little tense after she had finished browsing. Everything else was fine.

As Shang Jianyao followed Jiang Baimian to the Hunter's Guild's entrance, he asked in confusion, "Swamp Ruin 1?"

"From the description at the end, it should be the one we've been to." Jiang Baimian was no stranger to using numbers in place of sensitive matters.

After leaving the Hunter's Guild, she placed her hands in her pockets and smiled. "Let's walk around. This is my first time in Weed City. I originally had a chance to come, but I missed it."

Shang Jianyao was also excited.

After a while, Long Yuehong—who was behind them—asked Bai Chen in confusion, "Where is Team Leader going?"

Why did she appear aimless?

Bai Chen thought for a moment before saying, "She should be familiarizing herself with the area."

Long Yuehong was stunned for a moment before he came to a vague realization.

They walked around until three in the afternoon before they finally returned to Ah Fu's Gun Shop. They entered from the front door, exited from the back door, climbed the stairs, and opened the door.

Jiang Baimian didn't say a word. She took out a relatively large piece of paper from her tactical backpack and began drawing on it with a fountain pen as she recalled some things.

Before long, apart from North Street, the entire layout of Weed City was revealed.

At the same time, Jiang Baimian also labeled the areas with words such as 'trenches,' 'more cover,' 'relatively chaotic surroundings,' and 'poor electrical layout, prone to malfunction.'

After doing this, she handed the pen and paper to Bai Chen. "What do you want to add? Haha, Weed City isn't large, thankfully."

Bai Chen tersely acknowledged her words and reached out to take the pen and paper. She laid them on the table and began drawing and writing.

Taking this opportunity, Jiang Baimian said to Shang Jianyao and Long Yuehong, "Take a good look later and memorize it. We might split up later. When the time comes, we have to at least know where to hide and how to use the terrain if we encounter any accidents."

Long Yuehong had long been convinced. "Yes, Team Leader!"

Shang Jianyao frowned slightly. "What needs to be avoided are accidents."

Without waiting for Jiang Baimian to glare at him, he added, "After memorizing it, you can prevent the accidents from dodging or using the terrain."

"It's good that you understand." Jiang Baimian couldn't be bothered to say anything else.

After Bai Chen completed the map and everyone memorized the corresponding key areas, Jiang Baimian pointed at the alley opposite the South Street Slave Market. She then asked, "When we meet the intelligence agent tonight, we will split up into teams to monitor them secretly to prevent any accidents. Which spot do you think is better?"

As the team's sniper, Bai Chen pointed at South Street Slave Market and said, "Here, the roof on the left can give us complete control of the alley opposite."

Jiang Baimian nodded. "If—I mean if—something's wrong with the company's intelligence agent, the person behind them would choose this point as well. We should try our best not to encounter them. It's better to choose the second-best spot."

"In any case, Shang Jianyao and I can adjust our positions to ensure your vision and trajectory."

After a round of discussion, the Old Task Force had finalized on the rooftop to the right of South Street Slave Market. When the time came, Bai Chen and Long Yuehong would be in charge of that spot. Jiang Baimian and Shang Jianyao would meet the company's intelligence agent.

Winter nights always came early. Darkness gradually enveloped Weed City as yellow or pure white lamps lit up one after another.

At 7:40, Jiang Baimian stood up, put on the hoodie that came with her clothes, and said to Shang Jianyao and the others, "Move out."