

Embers Ad Infinitum #Chapter 131: Can Be ‘Trusted’ - Read Embers Ad Infinitum Chapter 131: Can Be ‘Trusted’

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It was still a while before lights went out at 8:30 p.m. The street lamps continued to glow, illuminating the area ahead for pedestrians.

However, it was incomparable to the interior of Pangu Biology’s underground building. Many of the street lamps on South Street were long defunct. Only one was intact for dozens of meters out. There were only faint, flickering lights in many places, making it impossible to see anything clearly.

Bai Chen had brought Long Yuehong out for a walk before dinner. She had several plans for what to do next. She walked calmly as if she were a woman on her way home and was carrying a large object.

Long Yuehong was undoubtedly a little nervous, but he had experienced too many things during his first trip. He had become somewhat immune to such situations, so his hands and feet didn’t go limp, nor did his heart race.

He quietly followed beside Bai Chen, occasionally blocking the passersby’s line of sight to prevent the Orange rifle wrapped in cloth from being too eye-catching.

There was a sentry at South Street Slave Market’s entrance. The two guards inside carried the same standard assault rifles. They looked around distractedly, occasionally sitting or standing.

Bai Chen passed them and walked toward Central Square at an adequate pace.

She and Long Yuehong soon entered the street lamps’ blind spot. They were akin to two blurry shadows on the dark street.

At this moment, Bai Chen suddenly turned around and came to the courtyard entrance of the neighboring building. In a second or two, she nimbly climbed over the metal gate.

Long Yuehong was impressed because Bai Chen had to focus on stabilizing the rifle in her arms during this process.

Without any delay, Long Yuehong followed closely behind and flipped over the metal gate. He didn’t make a sound.

He and Bai Chen then entered the building adjacent to South Street Slave Market. Under the dim yellow light, they walked up the cold stairs to the top floor.

Bai Chen took out a piece of wire that she had prepared in advance and inserted it into the keyhole. After adjusting it a few times, she opened the door that led to the rooftop.

Although this building looked like it had flying eaves and corbeled columns, it was mostly a type of imitation and decoration. It had the usual layout as one would expect.

After arriving on the rooftop and closing the door behind them, Bai Chen and Long Yuehong arrived at a spot close to South Street Slave Market under the dim moonlight.

In this quiet night and in this open area, they heard singing, shouting, music, and all kinds of mixed sounds coming from West Street.

At this moment, Long Yuehong looked in the direction of South Street Slave Market and tilted his head slightly. "Some sounds seem to be coming from there?"

Just as he said that, the commotion in South Street Slave Market became much clearer as the din at West Street temporarily subsided.

It consisted of many whimpering sounds.

Every sound was not loud, so weak that they didn't seem to exist. However, after they overlapped, they quietly echoed in the pitch-black night. Occasionally, there were a few heart-wrenching coughs and a faint grunt of pain.

"It's the slaves; they are crying." Bai Chen looked down at the market expressionlessly.

Long Yuehong fell silent for a moment before sighing. "How tragic... Unfortunately, there are only four of us. We can't save them."

Bai Chen turned around and looked at the alley opposite her. After a while, she said, "In this season, you might as well let them stay there if you didn't prepare sufficient supplies."

Long Yuehong thought about it and realized that it made sense. However, it was this reasoning that made him feel an indescribable sense of grief.

He watched as Bai Chen chose a spot and mounted the Orange rifle. He then placed his eyes in front of the binoculars and monitored the alley opposite them. He also followed Bai Chen's instructions and used the binoculars to observe the rooftops and rooms on the other side of South Street Slave Market.

"Nothing from me." Long Yuehong made repeated observations and came to a conclusion.

"Do an observation every three minutes," Bai Chen emphasized.

“Yes...” Long Yuehong was stunned when he said the first word.

Usually, he would say, “Yes, Team Leader.” This time, he didn’t know what to say. It didn’t seem right to directly add Bai Chen’s name at the back.

Bai Chen thought nothing of it and focused on monitoring the target area.

Long Yuehong looked across and happened to see his team leader and Shang Jianyao turning into the alley after their meal.

...

“Wait beside the broken street lamp in front.” Jiang Baimian wore the hoodie that came with the black cotton jacket over her head. A circle of brown fur was embedded along the rim of the hoodie.

This seemed to have the effect of making her face appear smaller.

Shang Jianyao shut his mouth and didn’t say anything rashly. He followed his team leader to the other side of the broken street lamp and hid his body in the shadows.

The light on the street couldn’t illuminate this area at all. Only some light seeped out from the buildings on both sides, vaguely revealing the silhouettes of various objects.

Jiang Baimian and Shang Jianyao remained silent. They observed their surroundings and paid attention to the pedestrians coming and going.

Every time someone approached, they would look at each other as if they were a couple on a date.

They believed that the couples in Pangu Biology—who met in certain corners despite the cold after lights-out—were representative. There were definitely similar people on the surface. It was even more so for a place like Weed City, which had a relatively good environment.

Bai Chen did not deny this.

Time passed minute by minute. Eight o’clock soon arrived.

After about a minute or two, a figure walked into the alley from the south street entrance. He wore a cyan cotton coat, a furry leather hat, and a black scarf. His body was slightly hunched, and his head was lowered like an elder trembling in the cold.

When he passed by Jiang Baimian and Shang Jianyao, the elder’s feet slipped. His body swayed, and something fell to the ground. He quickly squatted down and searched for the lost object using the light from the neighboring buildings.

Jiang Baimian and Shang Jianyao had long noticed that the elder had dropped a red badge with no words.

“Did you drop this?” Jiang Baimian bent down and smiled as she handed her red tag with gold text to the elder.

The elder took a glance and looked up. “Yeah.”

Under the dim light, he didn’t look old at all. He looked to be in his thirties. His eyebrows were neither thick nor thin, and his facial features were neither ugly nor handsome. He was someone who didn’t leave an impression.

After answering, the person quickly picked up his ‘badge’ and stood up.

After confirming that the other party was an intelligence agent hiding in Weed City, Jiang Baimian smiled and asked casually, “Have you already been here to recce and observe the environment?”

The intelligence agent nodded and casually said, “Regardless of you wearing your clothes right or inside out, wearing a hat or not, the way you wear your scarf, or your gait, they can make you look like another person at night. However, this requires a little skill.”

Jiang Baimian quietly listened and suddenly smiled. “You’ve already passed by here four times, right?”

The intelligence agent looked at Jiang Baimian in surprise. He was not surprised that the lady in front of him had sensed that he had been nearby, but she had accurately said the number of times he had passed by!

Jiang Baimian smiled and looked at his feet. “Remember to change your leather shoes next time.”

The intelligence agent immediately came to a realization.

Jiang Baimian made a terse acknowledgment and nodded. “Indeed. It’s not convenient to carry extra shoes with you. You can only consider dirtying them. Are you a little unwilling?”

In the Ashlands, apart from those self-proclaimed nobles, who would be willing to take the initiative to defile their own items?

The ordinary employees of Pangu Biology usually led a life with a relative shortage of supplies, but they were better than most wilderness nomad settlements.

"A little." The intelligence agent nodded truthfully. He didn't say anything else and looked around. "It's not convenient to talk here. I'll take you somewhere."

Jiang Baimian then turned her head and looked at Shang Jianyao.

The intelligence agent noticed this and frowned. "You don't trust me?"

At this moment, Shang Jianyao laughed. "Why wouldn't I trust you? Look, we are all employees of the company. Our families are all in the company. So..."

The intelligence agent's expression gradually softened. "That's right. Everyone is trustworthy."

His attitude was clearly a little warmer. "I've been stationed at Weed City for almost two years. I'll be able to return in another year. I wonder if my daughter still recognizes me. She was only five when I left."

"That's not auspicious. Don't say that." Shang Jianyao interrupted him.

The intelligence agent was stunned and subconsciously glanced at Shang Jianyao, only to see his sincere face. "That's true." The intelligence agent felt a friend's concern.

He then pointed at the other end of the alley. "Let's go somewhere else. People come and go here."

Intelligence agents had instinctive precautions and high requirements for a rendezvous point.

With the insurance of Inference Clowning, Jiang Baimian could trust the other party now, even if the other party was indeed untrustworthy minutes ago. Therefore, Jiang Baimian no longer hesitated and nodded slightly. "Alright."

With that said, she took out the walkie-talkie and pressed the button. "You can stand down now."

Chapter 132: Meeting an Old Friend in a Foreign Place

Only when Jiang Baimian and the others completely left her line of sight did Bai Chen put away the Orange rifle and leave the edge of the rooftop.

The next second, she and Long Yuehong turned their heads at the same time and looked at the South Street Slave Market on the other side.

Amidst the commotion coming from the west, Bai Chen retracted her gaze and said to Long Yuehong, "Let's go."

Long Yuehong nodded solemnly and followed Bai Chen, tracing their steps back to the street.

Just as they were about to leave the area with the broken street lamps, they suddenly saw a figure bending down in front of a shop along the dark street. The figure was acting suspiciously, doing something unknown.

The person seemed to have sensed Bai Chen and Long Yuehong's arrival and quickly turned around to look over. The next second, 'he' ran away and speedily turned into an alley beside them.

"A thief?" Long Yuehong guessed in confusion.

Bai Chen didn't answer him. She walked to the spot where the figure was standing and bent down to pick up a stack of paper.

...

In a warehouse on East Street, the light from the outside shone through the glass windows, barely revealing silhouette portions of the objects inside.

"How should I address you?" Shang Jianyao smiled and asked the intelligence agent standing at the intersection of light and darkness.

"Chen Xufeng," the intelligence agent replied frankly. In any case, he did not give his alias in Weed City, so he did not have to worry about being exposed.

"Jiang Baimian, Shang Jianyao." Jiang Baimian also briefly introduced themselves.

Shang Jianyao frowned slightly. "This name sounds a little familiar."

Without waiting for Chen Xufeng's response, he took the initiative to ask, "Do you know Chen Xianyu?"

"Huh? My dad!" Chen Xufeng was stunned.

They really ended up encountering an acquaintance!

Shang Jianyao smiled. "495th floor?"

"Yes, yes, yes. I'm the youngest in the Chen family." Chen Xufeng laughed and asked, "You live on the 495th floor too?"

Shang Jianyao nodded heavily. "I guess I might have pinched your daughter's face."

"What?" Chen Xufeng was a little confused.

“She’s chubby.” Shang Jianyao expressed his feelings. “Almost two years ago, Grandpa Chen often took her to the Rec Center to play. We barely met after she went to primary school.”

“Two years ago? Ah, I was just assigned here back then. My wife has to work most of the time. I guess only the older generation can take turns taking care of her. As you know, the company’s kindergarten releases the kids too early!” Chen Xufeng roughly understood the situation.

He then ‘hatefully’ said, “How could you pinch her face? She was already five years old back then.”

“Grandpa Chen also has times when he’s busy. If we were around, we would play games with her. Whoever loses will be pinched in the face or slapped on the palm,” Shang Jianyao explained seriously.

“Is that so...” Chen Xufeng smiled and said, “We have a ten-year age gap, right? Maybe I’ve also bullied you when we were young. Count it as revenge.”

The two of them chatted happily, increasingly finding each other trustworthy.

Although Jiang Baimian could understand that Chen Xufeng had been away from home for two years and couldn’t wait to learn about his parents’ health, his wife’s condition, and his daughter’s growth, she knew that it was imperative to talk business. Therefore, she interrupted this ‘friend’ from her hometown.

“Brother Chen, have you figured out the reason for the team’s disappearance?”

“Hey, how can you call me brother? You’re already a team leader, so you should be a D6, right? I’m still far from that.” Chen Xufeng was a little flattered.

Jiang Baimian didn’t retort and asked very supportively, “What rank are you now?”

“D5. I’m in charge of the intelligence network here. Heh heh, there aren’t many people.” Chen Xufeng smiled and sighed. “When I finish my time here and transfer back, I should be promoted.”

Pangu Biology was rather generous to personnel they deployed outside.

“That’s not much different from D6,” said Jiang Baimian with a smile. “Let’s talk business first.”

“Yes.” Chen Xufeng took out a stack of documents and said in a tone of reminiscence, “Before the company informed me, I didn’t know that such a team had come to Weed City. You should also know that we work in parallel. None of us are under the other.”

“That’s right. If we didn’t come with a mission, we would’ve had to send a telegram to the company to get the higher-ups to issue an order if we wanted to get your help.” Jiang Baimian nodded in agreement. “I remember that the last telegram the team sent to the company said that they had already arrived in Weed City and hoped to find some elders who had experienced the Old World’s destruction.”

She suspected that the Old Task Force had an accident after coming into contact with a particular elder.

Chen Xufeng nodded slightly. “When I received the company’s telegram, they had been missing for more than two weeks. Many of the clues stopped in their tracks, making it impossible to investigate.

“However, I still obtained something.” He changed the topic and said, “They were a five-person team, consisting of three men and two women. With the intention of trying, I got someone to ask about the various hotels and motels in the city to see if there were any similar groups checking in during that period of time. In the end, I really found something!”

“Can’t Ruin Hunters have three men and two women a team?” Shang Jianyao asked in response.

Chen Xufeng laughed. “There must be similar teams. The feedback we obtained included more than one. But after careful comparison and exclusion, I’m certain that the team lived in the Meri Hotel, a relatively good one in Weed City. The time they checked in is identical to the time when the company received their last telegram.”

At this point, Chen Xufeng added, “The reason the Meri Hotel’s people had a deep impression of them is that the women in the team are beautiful, and the men are handsome. They are different from most Ruin Hunters. After genetic enhancement became widespread, our company’s young adults are a beautiful sight to behold!”

“You’ve also undergone genetic enhancement, right?” asked Shang Jianyao suddenly.

Chen Xufeng was stunned for a moment before he let out a long sigh. “Sigh, I don’t know why. Maybe it’s because my parents were relatively old back then, or maybe it’s because of my physique. The effects of my genetic enhancement weren’t too good.

“The only advantage I have is that I’m very ordinary. It’s not easy for others to remember my face when they see me. Oh, and I have some talent in disguising and tracking.”

“You are at least taller than 1.75 meters,” Shang Jianyao consoled sincerely.

Chen Xufeng was about the same height as Jiang Baimian.

What a good friend of Long Yuehong... Jiang Baimian secretly rolled her eyes when she saw that no one was paying attention to her.

She interrupted Shang Jianyao and Chen Xufeng's conversation again and took the initiative to say, "The fact that the team chose to stay in a place like the Meri Hotel means that they didn't think there would be any danger when they entered Weed City, nor did they think there were any hidden enemies."

They were at extreme ease and did things very openly.

"I think so too." Chen Xufeng returned to the topic at hand. "Based on this, their subsequent actions in Weed City should be relatively public. There's a chance of tracking them down."

He held the stack of information and continued, "I got a Hunter's Guild internal member to check if there were any similar five-person teams that took on missions during that period of time. The answer was no."

Since the missing Old Task Force team didn't hide their tracks, they definitely wouldn't deliberately split into two or three teams when accepting missions from the Hunter's Guild.

Without waiting for Jiang Baimian to ask, Chen Xufeng took the initiative to say, "However, we've discovered their registered Hunter identities. All of them are already Official Hunters. Heh heh, guess how I found out?"

"They used their real names," Shang Jianyao replied without hesitation.

"..." Chen Xufeng was stunned for a moment. "Yes! They sure followed the rules."

Jiang Baimian gave her opinion. "This means that their actions hadn't incurred any danger all this while. Or perhaps, they had already eliminated all the dangers. Hence, they felt very safe."

This significantly increased the possibility of an accident happening to the team in Weed City.

Chen Xufeng didn't comment and said, "I spent some money and obtained the photos when they registered as hunters and all the missions they completed. You can have a good look when you return."

As he spoke, he handed the stack of information to Jiang Baimian.

"Alright." Jiang Baimian reached out to take it.

Chen Xufeng thought for a moment and said, "I have some clues from my investigations. First, they went to Flying Bird Bar and had a conflict with a few customers inside, but it didn't escalate. This happened on the second night after they arrived in Weed City.

"Second, they visited a certain high-ranking member of the local Hunter's Guild. I only found out yesterday, but figuring out who it is requires further investigation.

"Third, they seem to have entered North Street. A servant from Castellan Manor, who often comes out to shop, has seen such a combination.

"Fourth..." At the mention of 'fourth,' Chen Xufeng's expression became rather solemn. "According to Meri Hotel's waiter, they checked out by themselves. It happened two days before the company got me to investigate."

Jiang Baimian thought for a moment and asked, "In other words, they were active in Weed City for nearly two weeks, but they didn't send a telegram back to the company? The real disappearance didn't last as long as we imagined?"

The missing Old Task Force was different from them. They came equipped with a radio. According to the rules, they had to contact the company almost once a week. Furthermore, in the last few days of the second week, the company took the initiative to send a telegram to inquire about the situation.

"That's why it's strange," Chen Xufeng replied firmly. He then frowned. "Recently, someone told me that they'd seen people suspected to be Lei Yunsong and Lin Feifei in the city. Oh, they are the two photos at the top."

Under the current illumination conditions, Jiang Baimian couldn't see the photos at all. Therefore, she didn't look at them and thoughtfully muttered to herself, "I wonder if they are strangers who look alike, or if someone is pretending to be them. Or maybe they can still move freely?"

"We can't be sure." Chen Xufeng didn't make a blind judgment.

Jiang Baimian slowly exhaled. "Any other clues?"

"Not for now." Chen Xufeng shook his head.

Jiang Baimian tersely acknowledged his words and asked, "What's with the library fire at noon?"

Chen Xufeng mocked, "In the past two months, there have been more brainless guys running around the city. Lunatics who proclaim that the Old World was destroyed because it pursued knowledge and violated certain taboos. They want to force everyone to stop reading the books left behind by the Old World."

After they finished talking about their main work and agreed on a way to communicate later, Shang Jianyao told Chen Xufeng about the Chen family's current situation. The two of them then waved goodbye reluctantly.

Jiang Baimian led Shang Jianyao around one-quarter of Weed City before finally turning back into the alley where Ah Fu's Gun Shop was.

After returning to their rented room, they found Bai Chen and Long Yuehong looking at a stack of paper.

"What's this?" Jiang Baimian asked curiously.

"Pamphlets." Bai Chen handed a piece of paper to her team leader.

Jiang Baimian and Shang Jianyao looked at the paper at the same time and read the contents.

"Thinking is a trap, and knowledge is poison..."

"Don't touch any more books..."

"We can't repeal the Old World's mistakes..."

There was also a circle drawn around the term 'repeal,' with a line drawn out to indicate the need for revision.

The revised word was: 'repea.'

"..." Jiang Baimian laughed involuntarily. "They really live up to their ideals perfectly."

Chapter 133: Confirming the Direction

"This might be called knowledge and action go hand in hand." Long Yuehong echoed his team leader. He wanted to laugh every time he read those pamphlets.

Jiang Baimian retracted her gaze from the pamphlet and looked at the silent Shang Jianyao. She then casually asked, "What are you thinking about?"

"I'm wondering what their Holy Communion is." Shang Jianyao's expression was very serious.

Jiang Baimian was not surprised at all and smiled. "Maybe they aren't religious at all. Besides, the quality of Holy Communion definitely won't be high for such a brainless organization."

"Sigh..." Shang Jianyao sighed regretfully.

Bai Chen watched her team leader throw the pamphlet back on the table and thoughtfully said, “There are similar organizations in First City. Their slogan is ‘brains are useless,’ ‘stupidity is a blessing,’ and ‘giving up on thought saves the world’...”

“How can anyone believe that?” Long Yuehong asked in surprise. Although he had already seen the example, he still found it unbelievable.

Compared to this, the Life Ritual parish—which imparted knowledge on childcare and advocated natural birth—was much better.

Jiang Baimian smiled and sighed. “After experiencing the Old World’s destruction, the long years of war, the constant famine, and the epidemics, the people in the Ashlands are willing to grab at anything that looks like a life-saving straw. This can at least give them some hope for the future.”

Long Yuehong was speechless. He wanted to say something, but he couldn’t formulate a suitable sentence.

Bai Chen changed the topic and said, “I wonder which Kalendaria they believe in. Or perhaps, none of them are people of faith?”

“I’ve never come into contact with such an organization.” Jiang Baimian shook her head and smiled at Shang Jianyao. “It’s better for you not to join such an organization. It will be troublesome if you end up ‘infected’ and lose your brain.”

“I can be their collective brain, their only brain,” Shang Jianyao said seriously.

“How ambitious!” Jiang Baimian joked and distributed the information in her hand to her team members. “Read it carefully. It’s time for us to discuss serious matters.”

As for the organization that advocated knowledge being toxic and not reading books, it didn’t conflict with them. There was no need to pay too much attention to them.

After everyone flipped through the information, Jiang Baimian repeated what Chen Xufeng had said. Finally, she asked, “Which line of clues do you think we should start investigating?”

Bai Chen looked at the information in her hand and thought for a moment. “The missions they took on are relatively common. There’s nothing special about them. I can’t tell anything worth further investigation for the time being.”

“That’s right, that’s right.” Long Yuehong only recalled something after agreeing. “Bai Chen is an Intermediate Hunter!”

This was something he discovered when he registered as a Hunter in the afternoon.

Those who joined the Hunter's Guild were Rookie Hunters. Only when their credit points reached 100 did they become Official Hunters. After that, they would have to accumulate 1,000 points to be an Intermediate Hunter.

This wasn't something that could be satisfied with one or two large missions like gathering Qiao Chu's information. Every Intermediate Hunter had definitely completed dozens to over 100 missions. Their experience could not be said to be lacking.

Bai Chen saw her team leader and Shang Jianyao looking over and explained simply, "I registered as a hunter seven to eight years ago."

"You were 18 or 19 years old back then?" Jiang Baimian asked in response and laughed self-deprecatingly. "I always end up imagining that you are younger than me."

"Maybe it's because of the height difference," Shang Jianyao 'explained.'

Jiang Baimian shot him a glance. "Don't say anything if you have nothing better to say."

She then asked Bai Chen, "Did you use your real name when registering as a Hunter?"

"No." Bai Chen shook her head. "That would make many things inconvenient and result in easy exposure. It's not like the employees of the Hunter's Guild can't be bribed."

"That's good." Jiang Baimian nodded in relief. "You've been smart since you were young! Yes... If we want to take on missions to earn money in the future, it's up to you. Intermediate Hunters can take on many missions."

She, Shang Jianyao, and Long Yuehong were Rookie Hunters. Their credit points were zero, so they couldn't take on missions that required sufficient credit.

"Alright." Bai Chen nodded slightly.

Jiang Baimian then looked at Shang Jianyao and Long Yuehong. "Which clue do you think is more valuable?"

This was also considered education through discussion, an attempt to start a brainstorming session.

"The fifth clue. People suspected to be Lei Yunsong and Lin Feifei are still in Weed City," Shang Jianyao replied without hesitation. "As long as we find them, the problem will be solved."

"How should we find them then?" Jiang Baimian asked with a smile.

Shang Jianyao seemed to have long considered this question. "Find a place to print out the photos and distribute them across the city. Ask if anyone has seen them."

As a graduate of the electronics department, he knew about photocopying and printing, even though he had not touched a computer much.

“...” Jiang Baimian laughed when she heard that. “It’s a very direct method. It will definitely be effective, but there are two problems. The first is that the cost is too high, and we don’t have that many resources to afford it. The second is that it’s very easy to alert the enemy, causing Lei Yunsong, Lin Feifei, and the others—who might still be alive—to be silenced.

“Besides, such a large commotion might attract the attention of Weed City’s brass and bring about a negative development. Think about it. Chen Xufeng definitely knows Weed City better than us. Since he didn’t use such a wide-range searching method, he must have a lot of concerns.”

She made a terse grunt and continued, “The problems of excessive cost and causing too much of a commotion are easy to resolve. We can issue a search mission at the Hunter’s Guild and use food as payment. This is very common, and no one will find it amiss. At the same time, there’s no need to print or photocopy photos. Just scan them and upload them to the Hunter’s Guild. It’s enough for people who are willing to accept missions to remember their characteristics.

“However, it definitely won’t be that efficient. There’s no way to avoid alerting the enemy either.” At this point, Jiang Baimian sighed and chuckled. “If it weren’t for the caution in taking action, the risk of alerting the enemy wouldn’t be eliminated. It would be easier to discover their traces if we poke around and make them move.”

After hearing this analysis, Long Yuehong felt that he had learned a lot. He then muttered to himself, How does Team Leader’s brain work? Why is she able to carry out so much mental gymnastics?

Upon seeing Jiang Baimian look at him, he quickly voiced his opinion. “Which line of clues do you think we should start investigating?”

Jiang Baimian laughed. “Can’t you think about it yourself?”

“My opinion is about the same as Shang Jianyao’s.” Long Yuehong quickly indicated that he had considered the possibility.

“I don’t believe you,” Jiang Baimian replied with a smile. “Most people can’t keep up with his train of thought.”

Long Yuehong could only add, “Let’s go to Flying Bird Bar and find the person who had a conflict with the Old Task Force.”

“That is a trail.” Jiang Baimian first acknowledged his idea before shaking her head. “However, Chen Xufeng will follow up on this. He knows the ways of the area, so it’s

more convenient for him than us. I hope we can gain something from it. Uh... The North Street trail is too broad, and it's not easy to investigate. Besides, we can't enter North Street now unless we take on the mission of being short-term mercenaries..."

After eliminating these possibilities, she laughed. "There's only one more relatively clear clue trail—Lei Yunsong and the others visited a certain high-ranking member of the local Hunter's Guild."

"But we don't know who it is," said Long Yuehong with a frown.

This still required further investigation from Chen Xufeng.

Jiang Baimian maintained her smile. "We don't know, but we can analyze it. That Old Task Force came to Weed City to find elderly who had experienced the Old World. Then, why did they suddenly visit the Hunter's Guild's higher-ups? Is he such an elderly, or does he have such an elderly at home?"

"We'll go to the Hunter's Guild tomorrow to take a look and figure out which higher-ups are there. We'll compare the conditions one by one. If they aren't satisfied, we'll get Chen Xufeng to retrieve information on these higher-ups' families to determine if their elders are still alive.

"After we narrow down on the target..." At this point, Jiang Baimian smiled even more brightly and looked at Shang Jianyao. "It'll be your turn to make 'friends' or acknowledge god-parents or god-grandparents."

Long Yuehong—who was unaware of the various details regarding Life Ritual—was dumbfounded.

"Alright." Shang Jianyao's eyes lit up as he thought of something.

Bai Chen nodded indiscernibly and muttered to herself, "It's the end of the New Calendar's 46th year. The Chaotic Era was about 20 years ago... Those under the age of 70 can't be considered to have truly experienced the Old World's destruction..."

Even if they experienced the Old World's destruction, those under the age of 70 wouldn't remember what they had encountered because they were too young back then.

In the Ashlands' current environment, very few people could live to 70 years of age.

"That's about it." Jiang Baimian clapped her hands and said, "Take a careful look at the photos and remember their looks. What if you encounter them tomorrow?"

"Is this a result of good or bad fate?" Shang Jianyao asked.

“That depends on the situation.” Jiang Baimian understood Shang Jianyao’s meaning and couldn’t help but look at Long Yuehong’s urge.

If one had a good fate, they most likely wouldn’t encounter it. If one had a bad fate, they might very well encounter it directly.

Long Yuehong didn’t want to argue with Shang Jianyao about having a bad fate. He looked down at the photos.

Lei Yunsong was about 28 years old. His eyebrows were like swords, and he looked good. However, his eyes were relatively small, giving off a feeling that he had not fully opened them.

Lin Feifei looked slightly older than Lei Yunsong. She had long hair, an oval face, and a gentle aura. She had a black mole at her eyebrows.

Lu Jiqi was in his early thirties. He was handsome, and he had thin lips and bronze skin.

Yun He seemed to have been through plenty of hardships. His face was rather thin, looking more like a surface resident than an employee of Pangu Biology. There was an old scar on his chin.

Wei Yu had a baby face and was rather likable. According to the information, she was 1.66 meters tall...

As he read the information, Long Yuehong suddenly said, “They should be married, have spouses and children...”

Jiang Baimian tersely acknowledged his words and sighed. “That’s why we can’t be rash or alert the enemy...”

Chapter 134: Gunshot

Long Yuehong was just about to read the information a few more times when the lights in the room suddenly turned off.

“It’s already lights out?” Jiang Baimian flipped her wrist and looked at her electronic watch. She realized that it was already past 8:40 p.m.

She immediately laughed. “This is much more humane than the company.”

Inside Pangu Biology, the street lamps were switched off at 9:00 p.m., not one minute late. It was nothing like Weed City, which switched off the lights more than ten minutes late.

“Does it being humane mean that management is relatively loose?” Bai Chen tried her best to understand her team leader’s hidden meaning.

Jiang Baimian tersely acknowledged it. “There’s good and bad, I suppose? The exact situation needs to be analyzed.”

“It’s equivalent to not saying anything,” Shang Jianyao evaluated solemnly. He then added, “I’m afraid Bai Chen will be embarrassed to say that.”

“Whoa, you’re pretty enthusiastic.” Jiang Baimian was already accustomed to such behavior from Shang Jianyao and only rolled her eyes at him. She then said, “Have a rest. We’ve been busy from morning to night today. We have business to do tomorrow.”

“Yes, Team Leader!” Long Yuehong subconsciously replied loudly.

Upon hearing this, Jiang Baimian smiled helplessly. “There’s no need to be so formal. Do you want the entire building to know that we’re together and that we have a team leader? Heh heh, it’s fine. Just be careful. Different environments have different requirements.”

Fortunately, the power had just stopped. It brought a considerable amount of noise with it, completely drowning out the small commotion here.

According to their previous arrangement, Bai Chen and Long Yuehong entered the room by the courtyard.

This way, if anything really happened, Bai Chen could jump into the courtyard with Long Yuehong and return to the jeep immediately. Jiang Baimian and Shang Jianyao—who both had abnormal perception abilities—could effectively prevent accidents from happening on the street.

After watching Bai Chen and Long Yuehong leave, Jiang Baimian pointed at the bunk bed in the room. “Who’s taking the top bunk? You or me?”

“You,” Shang Jianyao replied without hesitation.

Jiang Baimian thought for a moment and asked with a smile, “Are you worried that waking up at night will affect me?”

“I ate quite a bit today,” Shang Jianyao said sincerely.

“That works too.” Jiang Baimian suddenly thought of something. “Don’t challenge the Island of Diseases tonight. We have to do serious business tomorrow, so conserve your energy.”

“Alright.” Shang Jianyao wasn’t in a dilemma.

Jiang Baimian smiled and praised, "You still know the severity of the matters."

As she spoke, she walked to the table by the window and looked out.

The entirety of South Street and East Street was pitch black. Even the street lamps no longer emitted light.

A portion of West Street still emitted a glow like a lighthouse in the darkness. North Street was brightly lit as if the galaxy had fallen to the ground.

"What a clear distinction..." Jiang Baimian sighed. She took off her coat and climbed onto the top bunk.

Not long after she and Shang Jianyao lay down, they suddenly heard a few clear gunshots. The sounds came from West Street.

After a few shots, the night quietened down again. The lively music continued coming from West Street without being affected.

Clap! Clap! Clap!

Shang Jianyao suddenly clapped.

Jiang Baimian couldn't be bothered to guess what Shang Jianyao wanted to express and directly asked, "Why are you clapping?"

"They are really spirited," Shang Jianyao replied with some yearning.

"Maybe this is Weed City." Jiang Baimian closed her eyes and slowly prepared to drift off into slumber land.

Before long, a commotion broke out around the city gates not far from them, mixed with a few gunshots.

Long Yuehong—who was sleeping in the lower bunk—asked Bai Chen worriedly and curiously, "Why are people firing their guns over here?"

He chose to sleep in the lower bunk because Bai Chen was good at sniping. She could better monitor any activity in the courtyard from a higher vantage point.

"The nomads who couldn't enter the city during the day are probably trying to break in at night." Bai Chen guessed based on her knowledge and current environment. "Then, the guards fired."

Long Yuehong felt mixed emotions when he heard that. He pitied the nomads who were waiting to die in the cold winter night, but he also felt that it was a justified act for the guards to fire. They weren't in the wrong.

This reminded him of a saying that Pangu Biology's employees—who had served in the Security Department for a long time—liked to say: "This f*cked up world!"

When the commotion at the city gates subsided, Long Yuehong quickly forced himself to sleep. At this moment, he heard moaning coming from upstairs or two floors up.

Similar sounds echoed in the other rooms.

Long Yuehong was no stranger to this. After all, the soundproofing in the residences of Pangu Biology's ordinary employees wasn't that good.

The sounds made him blush a little. The difference now was that a woman was sleeping above him.

After the moaning subsided, Long Yuehong heaved a sigh of relief after a while.

But a few minutes later, crooning sounded again.

Almost at the same time, a sharp curse erupted. "Scram! You want a second time after only giving me two buns? Aren't you shameless?"

Long Yuehong was a little stunned. After a while, he stammered, "W-what's going on?"

"A prostitute," Bai Chen replied concisely. Nôv(əl)B\jnn

Within Pangu Biology, this was a non-existent occupation. Long Yuehong only knew what it meant through textbooks and the dictionary.

"Ah, this..." Long Yuehong was first stunned before he defended himself. "I thought the people on the surface were busy surviving..."

"This is a way of survival in itself," Bai Chen said without any hint of disdain. "The more stressful it is to survive, the more one will seek to relieve themselves in such matters."

She paused and added, "In Weed City, there are too many outsiders and too many Ruin Hunters. They wander the Ashlands all year round and may not have touched a woman for weeks or even months.

"In this regard, female Ruin Hunters are much better. As long as one is willing, there are plenty of candidates. They might even be able to earn some supplies. However, they also have to consider whether they will be infected or impregnated. For a female Ruin Hunter, these are things that can ruin them if they aren't careful."

Long Yuehong quietly listened and wanted to say something, but he eventually sighed.

The night constantly switched between calmness and rowdiness. When Long Yuehong woke up in the middle of the night, the entire city had fallen asleep at some point in time.

At 7:30 a.m., the sky had just lit up. The darkness was still the ruler of the land, but the streets had already become lively.

Many shops opened their doors and started selling breakfast. Among them, the most popular ones were a few shops that sold cornbread. Being cheap was their specialty.

Some shops even only sold hot water that was heated with charcoal. It cost 1 Cass a cup, and it was specially prepared for Ruin Hunters who choked while eating cornbread.

Fresh water also needed payment.

“How dry...” Shang Jianyao commented after eating two pieces of yellow cornbread.

One of these cornbreads cost 5 Cass, two for 1 Drace.

Jiang Baimian—who was holding a waterskin—rolled her eyes at Shang Jianyao. “No one’s rushing you. Why are you eating so quickly?”

Shang Jianyao gulped down the water and explained seriously, “I’m re-experiencing the feeling of the Hungry Ghost Realm again.”

Jiang Baimian asked in enlightenment, “Are you trying to say that you can buy a few more seconds when you encounter Jingfa again and are inflicted by his Hungry Ghost Realm by adapting to this method of eating?”

Shang Jianyao nodded. “There’s no harm in being prepared. It’s better to be prepared than not.”

“...You’re repeating my words again!” Jiang Baimian found the words familiar at first before she recalled that she had said the same before. She then smiled and said, “Actually, isn’t it better to prepare some food that’s easy to swallow?”

“We can’t predict when we will encounter Jingfa.” Shang Jianyao hung the waterskin back on his belt.

“You can always keep it on you and not eat it,” Jiang Baimian retorted. “However, we probably won’t be able to bump into Zen Master Jingfa in Weed City. There are so many women here. He won’t be able to control himself at all.”

As they spoke, Jiang Baimian and Shang Jianyao walked along the street toward Central Square. Their destination—the Hunter’s Guild.

Bai Chen and Long Yuehong slowly ate their breakfast and were in no rush to follow.

After walking for dozens of meters, Jiang Baimian saw a man in a wide-brimmed hat rush out of the alley.

She suddenly stretched out a hand and stopped Shang Jianyao before casting her gaze at the building opposite her.

Bang!

After a gunshot, the man in the wide-brimmed hat fell to the ground, splattering red and white everywhere.

The entire street instantly froze and fell silent.

After a few seconds, screams and loud shouts sounded one after another.

The Weed City patrolmen with submachine guns rushed to the building where the bullet had been fired from.

They stuck to the corresponding street to prevent themselves from being shot.

“Rather professional...” Jiang Baimian evaluated very calmly. She had just noticed that a gunman was on the rooftop.

Shang Jianyao sighed inexplicably. “What a pity...”

“What’s a pity?” Jiang Baimian asked in confusion.

“I should be able to stop him from pulling the trigger if I clear one more island,” Shang Jianyao replied regretfully.

Jiang Baimian looked at the width of South Street and the buildings’ height before nodding slightly. “It’s not impossible if the shooter is on the fourth floor in those terrace buildings.”

South Street was about five to six meters wide, and the three-story building was over ten meters tall. By considering the windowsill’s height and using the Pythagorean theorem, it was easy to determine that, if the sniper was on the fourth floor and was roughly parallel to the two of them, the straight-line distance between him and Shang Jianyao was between 12 to 13 meters. It was just within the range of the Awakened’s Hands Immobility.

The fifth floor and the rooftop were outside of Shang Jianyao's range.

Without waiting for Shang Jianyao's response, Jiang Baimian smiled thoughtfully. "I previously neglected this ability. In a city with many obstacles and an environment that focuses on street fights, it should be more useful than I imagined."

This was especially so in a place like Weed City, where buildings generally weren't tall.

"What a pity..." Shang Jianyao sighed again.

"Is it a pity that there aren't any enemies for you to have a go at?" Jiang Baimian asked in response.

"Yes." Shang Jianyao nodded honestly.

Jiang Baimian didn't say anything and only reminded him seriously, "This place is also suitable for most Awakened."

Here, the distance between people was clearly squeezed together by the buildings.

Chapter 135: Guild Brass

As they chatted, Shang Jianyao and Jiang Baimian turned into West Street and walked toward the Hunter's Guild.

It was still early, and the guild had not officially opened. Only a few cleaners were busy inside.

Jiang Baimian was in no rush at all; she slowly circled the lobby.

After returning to the starting point, she grumbled to Shang Jianyao, "There's no introduction about the guild's brass... It's too unfair, unjust, and untransparent!"

Within Pangu Biology, every unit had to provide information on the main Person-in-Charge and related personnel on the wall.

"It might be upstairs." Shang Jianyao looked up at the ceiling.

"Who's it shown to then?" Jiang Baimian found a few rows of chairs at the edge of the lobby and sat down.

"How cold..." She rubbed her hands and sighed loudly.

"You can get up and move about," Shang Jianyao said seriously.

Jiang Baimian was just about to say, “Whoa, that’s a pretty normal suggestion,” when she heard Shang Jianyao add, “Try dancing.”

“...” Jiang Baimian said in exasperation and amusement, “When we complete the mission, I can give you a break. You can dance however and wherever you want!”

Shang Jianyao’s eyes lit up as he fell into deep thought, seemingly considering how he could investigate the other Old Task Force’s disappearance better and faster.

After many Ruin Hunters had breakfast and came to the lobby to choose missions and work on their livelihood, the guild’s employees came down one after another. They either took their posts or booted up the different machines.

Upon seeing this, Jiang Baimian stood up and led Shang Jianyao to the circular platform in the middle.

At this moment, a figure passed by and rushed in front of them.

As Jiang Baimian and Shang Jianyao’s appearances were rather outstanding, they were as eye-catching as fireflies in the night, despite wearing clothes that were essentially the same as most Ruin Hunters. Therefore, the person subconsciously turned his head and glanced at them.

He was a man more than 1.8 meters tall, almost the same height as Shang Jianyao. This was relatively rare among Ruin Hunters—who were generally malnourished. He wore a thick, dark tweed coat. He was in his thirties, and he had black hair, blue eyes, and good facial features. Although he couldn’t be considered handsome, he had the characteristics of Ashlands and Red River heritage. His outlines were relatively deep, and his nose was especially high.

At the same time, he had a calm and confident bearing.

After watching the man walk to a window and take out a Hunter’s Badge, Shang Jianyao suddenly said, “It’s not a good thing to have a sharp nose...”

Jiang Baimian thought for a moment and chuckled. “Are you trying to say that the nose tip will end up red from the wind?”

The man from before had a rather good overall appearance. It was obvious that he wasn’t someone to be trifled with. The only flaw was that the tip of his nose was red and slightly comical.

“The wind outside is too cold.” Shang Jianyao nodded and rubbed the tip of his nose.

“You weren’t much better when you first entered the lobby...” Before Jiang Baimian could finish her sentence, she saw the Hunter’s Guild employee opposite the man stand

up and hand the Hunter's Badge out the window with both hands, appearing very respectful. Nôv(el)B\|jnn

His status isn't low... Jiang Baimian muttered to herself silently and walked to the window at the edge.

"Let me do it." Shang Jianyao quickly took a few steps and overtook his team leader.

"Don't." Jiang Baimian quickly stopped him. She looked around and suppressed her voice. "Just leave the general targets to me. Don't abuse your abilities. Be careful not to expose yourself. We'll use your talents where they're most needed."

For Awakened, keeping their abilities a secret was also very important. If enemies learned of the ability, not only would the ability be useless, but it would also be easily dealt with in a targeted manner.

"Huh? What did you say?" Shang Jianyao touched his ear.

"..." At this moment, Jiang Baimian finally understood what it meant to have the tables turn. She gritted her teeth and asked, "Was I saying it too softly?"

"Yes." Shang Jianyao nodded honestly.

"Then, I'll be simpler." Jiang Baimian returned to her normal volume. "I'll do it!"

With that said, she walked to the window at the end without giving Shang Jianyao a chance to protest.

Inside was a girl in her twenties. She had short hair and large eyes. Her looks were average, but she showed very good upkeep of her appearance. On her chest was a name tag with the words: 'Su Xiaoman.'

"I want to issue a mission." Jiang Baimian smiled brightly.

Faced with such a beautiful, polite, and valiant woman, everyone—regardless of gender—would naturally have a favorable impression of her. Su Xiaoman was no exception. She enthusiastically inquired, "What mission is it?"

"Different missions have different review times. If you can find a hunter with sufficient credit points as a guarantee or have cases of seriously fulfilling the multiple missions you issued, the corresponding time will be reduced significantly."

"It's a very simple mission. The reward is one can of military canned food." Jiang Baimian smiled and said, "I think you can complete this mission too."

As she spoke, she took out the braised beef canned food she had long prepared from her pocket.

Upon seeing that the payment was in place, Su Xiaoman felt more at ease. She smiled and asked, "What mission is it?"

"I want to know who the guild's brass are." Jiang Baimian put on a knowing expression. "I've just become a Rookie Hunter. I'm very unfamiliar with the guild and want to know more about it."

Su Xiaoman's smile remained the same as she reminded sincerely, "Although President Christina does have highly confidential missions that can't be issued publicly, they aren't things a Rookie Hunter can take on. It's better for you to do something simple first and raise your credit. You can consider such matters after you become an Official Hunter."

"President Christina..." Jiang Baimian repeated and smiled frankly. "I didn't even know there were missions that weren't issued publicly. See, I'm such a rookie. I want to know more about the guild mainly because I'm afraid I'll accidentally offend someone I shouldn't. You seem to know quite a bit. Why don't you accept this mission?"

Su Xiaoman accepted Jiang Baimian's explanation. "There's nothing important. President Christina is a vice president transferred from First City. She's in charge of communicating, coordinating, and cooperating with the guild headquarters and different regional guilds. At the same time, she also has all the missions that are inconvenient for public release. She has direct contact with many relatively high-ranking hunters."

500 grams of braised beef canned food was worth at least 1 Oray in Weed City. Sometimes, it was even more than that. It was quite a temptation for Hunter's Guild employees, who earned less than 30 Oray a month.

"How old is she?" Jiang Baimian casually asked.

"In her thirties. Long blond hair and light-blue eyes. She's about the same height as you and is rather cheerful." Su Xiaoman roughly described the characteristics of Vice President Christina in case the rookie in front of her offended someone she shouldn't.

"Oh..." Jiang Baimian asked, "What about the other higher-ups?"

Su Xiaoman said in detail, "The guild president is also the castellan. His name is Xu Liyan, and he's about the same age as me. He was only selected to be the castellan a few years ago..."

Jiang Baimian knew this information. She even knew that Xu Liyan was the grandson of the greatest castellan, Xu Erde. His father, Xu Wugong, had also been a castellan, but he died from an illness in his forties. Back then, Xu Liyan was only 16 or 17 years old.

Su Xiaoman continued, "The President is mainly in charge of the finances and audits. Most of the time, he won't come over and will only send a few subordinates to handle management. We also have another two vice presidents. One is called Cui En, and the other is Zhou Linfeng. President Cui is mainly in charge of us, basically matters in the Hunters' Lobby. President Zhou is in charge of security and our own mercenaries. Heh heh, you can also join them and quit as you wish."

"What do they look like?" Jiang Baimian asked in a gentler manner.

"President Cui is less than 50 years old. He was an employee, and he later became a Ruin Hunter for a period of time. He knows all kinds of things very well. His hair isn't white at all, but there's not much of it. He's tall and thin, and his nose is a little big..." Su Xiaoman recalled the looks of the brass. "President Zhou is about 40 years old. He's very strong and muscular, and his arms are as thick as my legs. His hair is shaved short. He looks fierce, but he's actually quite amiable..."

"Are there no other higher-ups?" Jiang Baimian didn't discover anyone that met the age requirements.

Su Xiaoman thought for a moment and said, "There's also Chief Wang. He's our guild's Chief Hunter."

Chief Hunter was an honorary title in the Hunter's Guild. There was only one in every area, and it mainly depended on one's qualifications, not their current abilities.

"What's his name?" Jiang Baimian asked.

"Wang Chongyue," Su Xiaoman answered. "He's in his fifties. If no one introduces you to him, he would appear to be an ordinary old man. However, he joined the guild when it was first established. Later, he was promoted to a Master Hunter and completed countless missions. He's currently in charge of the guild's training department, including the training of Rookie Hunters. If there are classes, you can register for them. The tuition fees are only symbolic."

"Alright." Jiang Baimian nodded slightly.

Upon seeing that Chief Hunter Wang Chongyue didn't match the age, she stopped and asked with a smile, "Is there anything else to take note of?"

Su Xiaoman continued speaking as more and more Ruin Hunters came over and started lining up.

Upon seeing this, Jiang Baimian pushed the can into the window. "You completed this mission very well."

Su Xiaoman looked up at the surveillance camera not far away and said, "It has to be more formal. I'll help you upload this mission immediately."

As she spoke, she created the mission.

Jiang Baimian thoughtfully said, "The mission's name is 'Assistance in Understanding the Guild.'

It didn't directly point at the guild's brass.

Su Xiaoman nodded and quickly submitted the mission for a review. She then took out a Hunter's Badge and swiped it gently to accept the mission.

After that, she clicked on 'Mission Completed.'

"This makes it very formal." After doing this, Su Xiaoman smiled and took the can. "Besides, I can accumulate credit points. You can also gain some credit."

Most importantly, this couldn't be considered a private transaction.

"Not bad," Jiang Baimian praised. She then asked, "Who was that person just now? I noticed that your colleague respected him greatly."

Jiang Baimian was referring to the man in the black tweed coat.

Su Xiaoman thought for a moment and lowered her voice. "I can't say the name. I can only tell you that he's already an Advanced Hunter before the age of 30!"

This was a rank second only to Master Hunters. It was enough to indicate that the corresponding person had outstanding resources, connections, and strength.

Chapter 136: Unexpected Clue

Advanced Hunter, I wonder what areas he is advanced in... Jiang Baimian muttered to herself and waved her hand with a smile. "Thank you."

Before the Ruin Hunters in line behind her became irritated, she took the initiative to end her inquiries.

After returning to the seats at the edge of the lobby, Jiang Baimian saw that no one was around and said to Shang Jianyao, "None of them match the age. We have to get Chen Xufeng to gather information on the family members of the guild's higher-ups."

"You can also ask them directly." Shang Jianyao gave another plan without hesitation.

Jiang Baimian easily understood Shang Jianyao's meaning. "Visit them one by one and ask if they've seen Lei Yunsong, Lin Feifei, and the others?"

"Yes!" Shang Jianyao looked eager.

Jiang Baimian laughed. "If it were anyone else who suggested this, I would be worried about alerting the enemy or failing to get the truth from them. However, it's different for you."

They were Shang Jianyao's potential siblings, uncles, aunties, godparents, etc. There was no risk of them lying or selling them out in the short term.

"Then, let's wait here and see who we can encounter." Jiang Baimian looked back at the stairs that led to the second floor. "Don't be in a rush to go up. There's a high chance that there are Awakened and genetically modified people in such a large Hunter's Guild. We have to be careful."

"We can make all of them friends," Shang Jianyao suggested.

"They can then vouch for you with each other and form a cycle?" Jiang Baimian remembered that Shang Jianyao had mentioned some key points regarding Inference Cloning.

If a person 'became' Shang Jianyao's friend and the people around him confirmed this, it would be very difficult for them to discover the truth and realize the mistake in the inference.

Of course, this was relatively difficult in practice. After all, it was impossible for Shang Jianyao to follow a person all the time and deal with everyone and everything they met.

For example, Ferlin from the Rootless camp would always treat Shang Jianyao as his sworn brother during the two to three days he often saw Shang Jianyao. Their rapport with each other also deepened this knowledge and gave the people around him a reason to accept him. But after the two of them separated for a period of time, even if the people in the Rootless camp didn't suspect anything, they would just imagine that their Convoy Leader clicked well with the other party. Their occasional words might also make Ferlin instantly wake up and realize the truth.

This was also the reason why Jiang Baimian didn't approve of Shang Jianyao abusing Inference Cloning.

Under the premise that they didn't silence the other party, the affected people would realize their mistakes sooner or later. The more people who knew of this, the harder it was for Shang Jianyao to keep this ability a secret.

This was not inside the company, where it was sealed. The people everyone could come into contact with every day were basically fixed, so it reduced the possibility of accidents. The reason Shang Jianyao could make the Life Ritual parish's members on the 495th floor constantly believe that he had joined through official channels was that the people involved had been 'convinced' by him, forming round-robin proof.

People who weren't involved didn't know what had happened and didn't care about the exact details. As for the neighbors and colleagues they interacted with during daily life, the believers definitely could not discuss the parish with them.

The parish's concealment helped Shang Jianyao cover up the traces perfectly.

Of course, with the current communication conditions in the Ashlands, Shang Jianyao would still be fine elsewhere as long as he didn't do anything that caused a huge commotion, even if he revealed his abilities in one place.

Shang Jianyao nodded slightly in response to Jiang Baimian's question. "This is very challenging."

"When the time comes, will they choose you to be the next guild leader?" Jiang Baimian first joked before saying seriously, "You don't know what abilities the Awakened here might have. It's best not to take too many risks. What if they restrain you? For example, a deaf person or someone who doesn't know how to make inferences and only wants to refute you."

"Writing can similarly work on the deaf," Shang Jianyao said seriously. As for the latter situation, he seemed unable to resolve it.

"That works too?" Jiang Baimian said thoughtfully. "The more accurate description of the key point doesn't seem like a conversation but an exchange."

At this point, she suddenly sighed. "What a pity..."

"Unfortunately, I don't know sign language?" Shang Jianyao asked in a guessing tone.

"No." Jiang Baimian smiled and was very pleased with herself. "It's finally your turn to be unable to keep up with my train of thought. It's a pity that there's a distance restriction. Otherwise, you can complete a misdirection using a telephone or a telegram to communicate with someone remotely. What's this called in the Old World? I think it's—it's a telephone scam? An Internet virus?"

Just as she said that, the Hunter's Guild lobby suddenly became noisy.

Jiang Baimian looked back at the Ruin Hunters before following their gaze to the large screen hanging in midair.

The slow-moving missions on the screen stopped and fixed on one of them.

“Emergency mission: Find clues regarding Liu Dazhuang’s murder.

“Description: On November 23, 7:56 a.m., Liu Dazhuang was shot on South Street and died on the spot. The scene of the incident was three meters away from Red Silk Alley...”

“Reward: A clue that passes a review and is deemed valid will earn you at least 10 Oray, with a maximum of 500 Oray.

“Mission rank: C, 100 credit points.

“Mission requirements: Unrestricted.

“Commissioned by: Weed City’s City Defense Command.”

As it was an official organization’s mission, there was no guild guarantee. In Weed City, the City Defense Command was in charge of public security due to the large number of personnel it could deploy and weapon owners.

500 Oray was enough for an ordinary family to live a relatively comfortable year in Weed City. Even the lowest reward of 10 Oray could allow many Ruin Hunters—who were already in dire straits—to catch their breaths. After all, this was nearly half a month’s worth of food and rent for an individual.

Although Ruin Hunters didn’t really want Oray and hoped more for supplies, Oray’s credit was still acceptable in First City’s sphere of influence. Despite the fluctuations in value, the volatility wasn’t too exaggerated.

“This is the shooting from before.” Jiang Baimian retracted her gaze.

Bai Chen—who had already arrived at the Hunter’s Guild and was looking at the gigantic screen at the entrance—muttered, “Liu Dazhuang...”

“You know him?” Long Yuehong asked acutely.

Bai Chen nodded. “I didn’t see who it was just now; I didn’t expect it to be him. He’s a relatively famous intelligence peddler in Weed City’s underground market.”

“Intelligence peddler? No wonder...” In Long Yuehong’s limited knowledge, this was a high-risk occupation.

At this moment, Jiang Baimian swept her gaze and saw a few people enter from the side door.

The leader was slightly shorter than Jiang Baimian and wore a thick, camel-colored coat. Her blond hair was gently draped over her shoulders. Her eyes were light blue, and the pores on her face were slightly large, making her skin appear relatively rough. She was a woman in her thirties. She had average looks but exuded a charm.

In the blink of an eye, Jiang Baimian connected her to Christina, the vice president of the local Hunter's Guild.

Jiang Baimian became increasingly certain when she saw many guild members salute her.

Jiang Baimian then turned her head and said to Shang Jianyao, "She's here."

Shang Jianyao confirmed his target and strode over.

Beside Christina, one of the three muscular men in black clothes stepped forward and blocked Shang Jianyao. During this process, his hand reached toward his waist.

"President Christina," Shang Jianyao shouted in broken Red River language.

As Shang Jianyao had an outstanding appearance and didn't show any hostility, Christina smiled kindly. "You can use Ashlandic directly. What's the matter?"

Her pronunciation was perfect.

"President Christina," Shang Jianyao said sincerely. "I'm a newly joined Hunter, and you're a member of the guild. I'm an outsider, and so are you. So..."

These words—which sounded a little messy and illogical—made Shang Jianyao feel like a new hunter eager to cling to the higher-ups.

Christina said with an unchanged expression, "So... we have to help each other."

She then smiled. "I have a meeting. Come to my office at 9:30. Room 308 on the third floor."

With that said, she walked to the staircase. Just as she and Shang Jianyao passed each other, she suddenly stretched out her hand and secretly patted Shang Jianyao's butt.

Jiang Baimian—who had been paying attention—was stunned when she saw this. Fortunately, she had a strong mental fortitude and did not show any abnormalities.

After Christina and her bodyguards disappeared, Jiang Baimian approached Shang Jianyao and suppressed her smile. "Any thoughts?"

“I was careless,” Shang Jianyao said truthfully.

“Oh?” Jiang Baimian vaguely guessed what Shang Jianyao meant.

“I should have called her Mom.” Shang Jianyao did a self-reflection.

Jiang Baimian lowered her head and chuckled. She composed herself and said, “It’s not your fault. She didn’t show anything wrong, and she’s clearly an old hand.”

After calming down her team member, she joked, “Are you going later?”

Shang Jianyao fell into deep thought. It was unknown what he was thinking.

Jiang Baimian restrained her smile and said seriously, “My opinion is not to go. There’s no mission that requires the sacrifice of a team member. We still have many solutions, and you have plenty of targets.”

“I can make her a little cornier,” Shang Jianyao said slowly.

“That’s also an idea...” Jiang Baimian nodded gently. “But we should consider it and be careful.”

As they spoke, the large screen in the lobby changed again.

“Emergency mission (status update): Find clues regarding Liu Dazhuang’s murder.
Nôv(el)B\\jnn

“Further description: Someone encountered a gunman in the building...”

The latter part was a portrait of the person drawn according to the witness’s memories.

It was a man who was not short. He wore a cap, and his eyebrows gave off a sharp feeling. His eyes didn’t seem to be fully open.

Jiang Baimian only took a glance before she suddenly froze. Although the sketch didn’t resemble the person in mind, she still made the connection with the person based on his main characteristics.

Lei Yunsong! The missing Old Task Force’s team leader, Lei Yunsong!

Chapter 137: Economic Brain

No way? Even with Jiang Baimian’s mental fortitude, she couldn’t believe her eyes at that moment. She could accept it if it was simply Lei Yunsong being alive in Weed City. However, the problem was that this team leader—who was clearly still very active and

had even been involved in a shooting—didn't contact the company to report the situation.

Even if their radio transmitter was damaged or lost, they could still try to get a new one or rent one from the underground market!

Could it be that they discovered something and defected? No, if they had defected, they wouldn't have stayed in Weed City at all. They should be very clear that the company would definitely investigate... Unless this has already become a plot against the company... Jiang Baimian retracted her gaze and looked at Shang Jianyao.

Shang Jianyao felt her gaze and took the initiative to say, "He's using murder to remind the company?"

"...It shouldn't be that complicated. Also, your train of thought is a little dangerous." Jiang Baimian thought for a moment and said, "I suspect that they are controlled by someone. Those people then used the other team members' lives to force Lei Yunsong to help them do some dirty work. This can explain why Chen Xufeng received information that people suspected to be Lei Yunsong and Lin Feifei had been seen in the city but didn't mention the other three." Nôv(el)B\\jnn

The other three were hostages and were imprisoned!

"It's too complicated." Shang Jianyao seemed to start repeating Jiang Baimian's words.

Jiang Baimian nodded. "Indeed. There's no need to make it so complicated if they want people to do dirty work. There's not enough motivation. Could it be revenge? Some of the people that Liu Dazhuang represents made Lei Yunsong's team suffer heavy losses, leaving only two people? However, they should still contact the company first. With the company providing help, things will be much simpler..."

Jiang Baimian muttered to herself for a while before exhaling. "It's useless to think about it here. Let's accept the mission first. In any case, there are some clues at least."

Shang Jianyao used actions in place of words. He walked to the nearest table, lit up the machine on it, swiped his Hunter badge, and accepted the mission.

This was an unrestricted mission. Even rookies could take it.

After Jiang Baimian took on the mission, the blond, blue-eyed Christina suddenly returned to the first floor. This time, she didn't bring any bodyguards with her.

Upon seeing Shang Jianyao, she smiled and said, "I'm afraid I'll need to take a rain check. Something urgent cropped up."

With that said, the Hunter's Guild's vice president rushed to the side door and left the lobby.

Jiang Baimian approached Shang Jianyao and muttered to herself thoughtfully, "Something urgent?"

Without waiting for Shang Jianyao's response, she smiled and said, "It seems like you don't have to take the risk. Yes... What details can you read from this scene?"

"She's alone," Shang Jianyao replied.

"Not bad." Jiang Baimian praised him. "For a person who usually needs three bodyguards to dare go out alone means that she's not weak. Or is it that the person she's meeting makes her feel very at ease, and it won't be too far away? Yes, the corresponding matter definitely involves many secrets."

At this moment, Jiang Baimian saw that Bai Chen and Long Yuehong had also accepted the mission from the corner of her eye. Therefore, she didn't say anything else and pointed at the door. "Let's go and take a look at the scene."

After leaving the Hunter's Guild and returning to South Street, the first thing that Jiang Baimian noticed was a group of people, not the crime scene.

A group of Ruin Hunters surrounded the spot where Liu Dazhuang was gunned down. They wished they could flip the entire road over for clues.

Jiang Baimian glanced at the area and shook her head. "What's the point? What's important is the gunman's location and what's on Liu Dazhuang's body, not where he fell."

Liu Dazhuang's corpse had long been carried away by the city guards.

After identifying the building that the bullet had been fired from, Jiang Baimian led Shang Jianyao into the corresponding courtyard.

The next second, she was shocked by the scene in front of her—many people formed a long line outside a stairwell!

"What are they doing?" Jiang Baimian subconsciously asked.

Shang Jianyao seriously observed for a few seconds before answering, "Visiting tour."

"Lining up to visit the rooftop?" Jiang Baimian suddenly found this scene a little ridiculous and comical.

Unimaginably many Ruin Hunters had accepted this mission!

Jiang Baimian briskly took a few steps forward and came to the back of the line. She nudged the man in front of her and asked with a smile, “W-what are you queuing for?”

The man impatiently turned his head first before smiling. “Waiting to speak to the witness and see what new clues we can dig up.”

Such a clue was worth at least 10 Oray.

“Alright... Thank you.” Jiang Baimian was a little interested in this strange situation, but she also found it rather funny. She quickly signaled to Shang Jianyao with her eyes and led the way to the stairwell. As she walked, she shouted, “We live here, we live here...”

Amidst sporadic clamoring of ‘do you want some money on the side’ or ‘how much for a night,’ Jiang Baimian and Shang Jianyao squeezed their way up the stairs to the fourth floor.

The queue formed by Ruin Hunters ended here and stopped in front of a half-closed door.

Jiang Baimian looked over and realized that there was a charcoal pen on the door. Its words were written untidily: “The only witness in the shooting. Conversation costs 2 Cass a minute.”

1 Oray was equivalent to 10 Drace. 1 Drace was equivalent to 10 Cass.

“...Th-that’s pretty smart,” Jiang Baimian muttered to herself with a complicated tone.

Furthermore, the service was priced very well. Any higher and many Ruin Hunters would have to consider whether it was worth it or if they wanted to form a larger team temporarily.

With the current pricing, people believed that they could be more unconventional and ask different questions to extract exclusive clues.

Shang Jianyao also sighed. “Why don’t they ask for one bun at a time? It can last them a month.”

“Won’t you get sick of it?” Jiang Baimian casually replied and cast her gaze at the other rooms on the floor.

Many people had their doors half-open as they looked at the long line enviously. From time to time, someone would shout, “He’s not the only witness!”

“Maybe I saw it too, but I don’t remember it now...”

After the initial shock, surprise, and exclamations, Jiang Baimian gradually adapted to this situation and spoke to Shang Jianyao with considerable interest. "In a settlement dominated by the Hunter's Guild, the citizen culture here has a different characteristic if they are considered citizens."

This was one of the few aspects that Jiang Baimian was most interested in. However, she didn't make further observations. She led Shang Jianyao to the fifth floor and climbed up to the rooftop as if she were rushing for time.

There were very few Ruin Hunters here, and the City Defense Command forces maintained order to prevent anyone from inadvertently destroying the scene.

Jiang Baimian locked eyes with Bai Chen, who had caught up. They walked to a wall facing the rooftop, chose a spot, and muttered to themselves, "The gunman probably shot from here."

She had witnessed the shooting process.

Bai Chen leaned against Jiang Baimian and pretended to hold a sniper rifle to get the feeling. "It's a little awkward," she commented.

When Liu Dazhuang was shot, he had walked to the middle of South Street. He was only three to four meters away from the building.

At this angle, the sniper had to extend his body past the edge of the rooftop by quite a bit if he wanted to hit the target from here. He would also have to contort his body a little.

Bai Chen retracted her gaze and added, "If it were me, I would've fired before Liu Dazhuang left Red Silk Alley."

The entire Red Silk Alley could be monitored from the left side of the rooftop. Sniping the enemies inside was both easy and convenient.

Jiang Baimian looked at Shang Jianyao and pretended to discuss something with him. "It means that the gunman wasn't here when Liu Dazhuang was still in Red Silk Alley. He only took up his position in a rush and completed the shot?"

Shang Jianyao replied seriously, "Maybe he couldn't hold it in and went to the bathroom first."

"...That counts as a reason." Jiang Baimian suddenly smiled. "You can search later to see if there are any traces of excrement on the rooftop or the fifth floor."

Such traces clearly wouldn't be missed by the Ruin Hunters, who had a number advantage.

Jiang Baimian then said, "From a different perspective, how can the gunman be sure that Liu Dazhuang will come out of Red Silk Alley? If he long knew about it, why did he appear so rushed?"

After raising the question, she pondered and answered her own question. "Could it be that the gunman had accomplices? They only knew that Liu Dazhuang was in this area, but they didn't have any further information. Therefore, they scattered across the opposite alley to search for the target. When they discovered Liu Dazhuang's traces, they immediately informed the gunman via walkie-talkies or other equipment. Then, the gunman rushed here from a certain spot on the rooftop?"

At this moment, Bai Chen had already walked back and forth alongside the rooftop that was parallel to the street. She seemed to be talking to Long Yuehong as she said, "The other side can monitor Yellow Corner Alley, but the view of Red Silk Alley is poor."

Yellow Corner Alley was an alley adjacent to Red Silk Alley.

Upon hearing this, Jiang Baimian came to a realization. "The gunman was monitoring Yellow Corner Alley in the beginning, and his accomplice was in Red Silk Alley. When he obtained definite information, he immediately changed his sniping position..."

Just as she said that, Shang Jianyao had already walked to the rightmost area of the rooftop. He then squatted down and carefully examined the ground and walls. "Someone stepped on it and rubbed against it. The traces are relatively fresh," he reported truthfully.

Many Ruin Hunters looked over. Some were confused, and some were in thought.

Jiang Baimian waved her hand and said to Shang Jianyao, "There's nothing to see. Let's go down."

Shang Jianyao didn't say anything else. He followed his team leader down the road and returned to South Street.

Jiang Baimian smiled and said, "Let's enter Red Silk Alley to search for clues left behind by the gunman's companions."

Red Silk Alley was only about two meters wide. The ground floor had shops like Repair Store or Old Clothing Bazaar.

At this moment, several Ruin Hunters held Liu Dazhuang's photo and asked different shop owners in succession, hoping to know if they had seen him interact with anyone before he died.

The answer that Jiang Baimian and company saw was the shaking of heads.

Long Yuehong—who was a meter away—asked Bai Chen, “How do we conduct the search?”

The corners of Jiang Baimian’s mouth curled up slightly as she smiled at Shang Jianyao. “Of course, it’s by asking using a photo.”

She didn’t take out Liu Dazhuang’s photo, nor was it the photo of the suspected gunman—Lei Yunsong. Instead, she took out another person’s photo.

It was a photo of the other Old Task Force member, Lin Feifei.

Chapter 138: Seeking Confirmation Carefully

When he saw the photo in Jiang Baimian’s hand, Long Yuehong was enlightened. Since the gunman was suspected to be Lei Yunsong, the gunman’s accomplice was very likely to be Lin Feifei!

According to the information provided by Chen Xufeng, after the other Old Task Force went missing, only these two members were suspected of being seen.

Why didn’t I connect these two matters together? Long Yuehong couldn’t help but raise his hand and slap his forehead. He felt that he would easily tense up when he encountered problems, and his thoughts became less active.

Shang Jianyao wasn’t surprised that Jiang Baimian had taken out Lin Feifei’s photo. He spoke in a tone that depicted his non-surprise that she had come this far. “Where should we begin?”

Jiang Baimian frowned. “Are you trying to say that you wanted me to ask around using the photos of Lei Yunsong and Lin Feifei? How can the current situation be the same as yesterday? Besides, it’s not like we’re spreading the net wide. There’s no need to worry about alerting the enemy when it’s within controlled confines.

“Times are different.”

If they asked anyone if they had seen Lei Yunsong today, there wouldn’t be any latent dangers. All the Ruin Hunters in the city were looking for him. However, Lin Feifei required some thought because she had yet to be ‘exposed.’

Without giving Shang Jianyao a chance to ‘defend himself,’ Jiang Baimian swept her gaze across the various shops in Red Silk Alley and spoke first. “Help time me.”

She then walked to the spot closest to Yellow Corner Alley and shouted, “On your mark.”

When the second hand reached 0, Shang Jianyao raised his right hand with great interest and waved it down abruptly. "Go!"

Jiang Baimian lowered her body, swung her arms, and ran like a swift and fierce cheetah.

Long Yuehong watched this scene in surprise. Before he could think about what his team leader wanted to do, Jiang Baimian had already run out of Red Silk Alley and stopped beside Shang Jianyao.

Such a commotion naturally attracted the attention of the Ruin Hunters and passersby. However, they wore confused looks as if they were watching a fool.

"How many seconds did I take?" Jiang Baimian panted and asked.

Shang Jianyao retracted his gaze from his watch. "About four seconds." He didn't have an electronic watch or a stopwatch, so he couldn't give a very precise timing.

"Back then, the gunman was still carrying a sniper rifle. There were also many obstacles on the rooftop. Four seconds shouldn't be enough. Let's take it to be five to six seconds..." As Jiang Baimian spoke, she came to the spot where Liu Dazhuang had fallen after being shot. She then took a few steps back toward the entrance of Red Silk Alley and muttered to herself, "The gunman also needs time to aim."

After standing still, Jiang Baimian raised her hand and flipped her wrist. She looked at the electronic watch and walked into Red Silk Alley at Liu Dazhuang's pace and frequency based on her memories.

"One... two... three... four... five... six." Shang Jianyao cooperatively counted.

Once the six seconds were up, Jiang Baimian immediately stopped.

At this moment, Long Yuehong vaguely understood what his team leader was doing. Jiang Baimian was reenacting part of the shooting to determine Liu Dazhuang's general location when the gunman's companion discovered him!

Jiang Baimian didn't do anything strange and beckoned Shang Jianyao over.

The Ruin Hunters watching moved their gazes away gradually. Only a few were still watching.

They believed that Jiang Baimian was attempting to reenact the scene when the incident happened. This had already been done by experienced hunters. They had failed to find any useful clues, and it lacked sufficient value.

After she no longer received any attention, Jiang Baimian smiled at Shang Jianyao. “It’s impossible for the gunman’s companion to use the walkie-talkie to notify Lei Yunsong as soon as she discovered Liu Dazhuang. Otherwise, the other party will notice and change their route in advance.”

As she spoke, she walked some distance forward.

Jiang Baimian stopped again and pointed at the street. “At this position, Liu Dazhuang probably won’t discover the accomplice if she turns her back and lowers her volume. Take the photo and question the stores around here.”

She looked at Long Yuehong—who was not far away.

“Me?” Long Yuehong silently pointed at himself.

Jiang Baimian nodded and said to Shang Jianyao, “Needs more training.”

Long Yuehong took a deep breath and walked to his team leader first. He quietly took Lin Feifei’s photo before entering an appliance repair shop by the street.

“Hello there...” Long Yuehong greeted nervously.

The boss of the repair shop was a man in his late twenties. His body was a little dirty.

The man replied without looking up. “I’ve never seen him. I’ve really never seen him! There are dozens, if not a hundred, people walking past my door every morning. How can I remember them? What Liu Dazhuang? I’ve never heard of him!” Nôv(el)B\\jnn

Uh, some Ruin Hunters have already come to ask... Long Yuehong understood what was going on the moment he heard that. In order not to fail before his solo mission began, he mustered his courage and handed over a photo. “I’m not asking about Liu Dazhuang.”

In his nervous state, he thought of something and blurted out, “Boss, I’m a man, and so are you...”

The boss looked up in surprise and happened to see Lin Feifei’s photo. He then revealed a look of understanding. “Are you also smitten by her? Where did you get this photo from? You have a camera? This is good stuff!”

Long Yuehong was stunned for a few seconds before saying, “You’ve seen her?”

He has actually seen Lin Feifei! Team Leader’s foresight is amazing!

Outside the shop, not far away, Shang Jianyao—who was facing the road—suddenly muttered to himself in confusion, “When did he learn Inference Cloning?”

“This is called imitation. It was a lucky hit.” Jiang Baimian exhaled sincerely. Finding useful clues from the beginning made her feel that things should go smoothly today.

In the shop, the boss admired the photo and scratched his head. “It was this morning; it wasn’t that long ago. When I opened the door, she was already by the tree. She was shivering from the cold wind, and it made me feel sorry for her. Sigh, if it weren’t for the fact that I have family, I definitely would’ve let her come in and wait.”

Long Yuehong became excited when he realized that he had gained something. He quickly asked in confirmation, “Is it really her?”

“I just saw her. How can I be mistaken? I remember her mole.” The boss pointed at Lin Feifei’s left eyebrow in the photo.

Long Yuehong felt relieved and inquired, “What happened after that? Where did she go?”

“Didn’t someone get shot over there? It might have scared her, so she went back.” The boss pointed to his right. “She might live in this courtyard.”

Long Yuehong thanked him profusely and left the shop feeling accomplished.

While there was no one around, he walked to Jiang Baimian and Shang Jianyao’s side. As he returned the photo, he quickly repeated the clues he obtained from the inquiry.

With that said, Long Yuehong revealed an expression of heartfelt admiration and curiously asked, “Team Leader, how were you sure we could get any clues about Lin Feifei here?”

“I wasn’t sure,” Jiang Baimian replied with a smile. She looked at the Ruin Hunters outside the alley and quickly explained, “If we didn’t get any answers, it means that I was wrong. We’ll then combine the traces at the scene and investigate in another direction.

“The Old World has a saying: Make bold assumptions and verify them carefully. When it comes to searching for clues, don’t be afraid of making mistakes. Every mistake means that you have eliminated a possibility and are getting closer to the truth. However, we can’t do this on the battlefield. If we make a mistake, there might not be a next time.”

“I got it,” replied Long Yuehong in a tone of ‘having learned something again.’ He didn’t stay any longer and left Shang Jianyao and Jiang Baimian before returning to Bai Chen’s side.

Jiang Baimian then looked at the courtyard that Lin Feifei had entered and smiled at Shang Jianyao. “Your turn.”

The target was the old gatekeeper guarding the courtyard's entrance. He was in his fifties and wore a military-green cotton hat. He wore a blue top, black pants, and brown cotton shoes. It made him look very bloated, and the clothes didn't match him at all.

"Can I use my abilities?" Shang Jianyao was in no rush to go over.

"Sure." Jiang Baimian nodded. "Everyone here might be related to Lin Feifei and the others' disappearance. We can't be careless."

Shang Jianyao first exhaled and watched it scatter into white fog. Then, he walked toward the courtyard that surrounded the building excitedly.

He soon arrived at the entrance and smiled at the old gatekeeper sitting in the sentry post. "Grandpa..."

The old man glared and interrupted Shang Jianyao. "If you want to ask something, pay first. You Ruin Hunters are each smarter than the other!"

Shang Jianyao could only swallow back the Inference Clowning speech he had prepared. He was not angry and asked excitedly, "I can ask anything?"

The old man was stunned for a moment. He had a nagging feeling that the fellow in front of him was a little strange. He deliberated and replied, "It depends on how much you can pay."

"Grandpa, look." Shang Jianyao put on a bargaining posture. "You're a man, and so am I. You want to take the opportunity to earn some money, and so do I. So..."

The old man was confused for a moment before he sighed. "Sigh, poor people shouldn't make things difficult for poor people. Tell me, what do you want to ask?"

"Have you seen this person?" Shang Jianyao handed him Lin Feifei's photo.

"Yes. She lives in the courtyard." The old man pointed at a building near Yellow Corner Alley. "See that? That one."

"Which floor and unit is it?" Shang Jianyao probed further.

"I heard Old Zheng from that building mention that she lives on the second floor. The innermost room that's by the main door. I don't know if it's right," replied the old man.

"Thank you." Shang Jianyao took out an energy bar and handed it to the old man.

This way, even if the old man recalled their conversation later, he wouldn't suspect that he had been bewitched. He would only think that he had been bought over by food.

As expected, the old man immediately beamed when he saw the energy bar. “No, it’s fine.” He took it despite saying that there was no need.

With this transaction, the old man didn’t stop Shang Jianyao and Jiang Baimian from entering the courtyard.

After arriving at the corresponding building and going up to the second floor, Jiang Baimian was in no rush to find the target’s room. She patiently waited for a while.

After a while, a notification came from her walkie-talkie. Bai Chen’s voice then sounded. “In position.”

Jiang Baimian didn’t delay any further and walked along the corridor toward the door.

After taking a few steps, she frowned. “There’s no one in either room.”

In the deepest depths were two rooms. One was by the courtyard, and the other was by Yellow Corner Alley.

According to Jiang Baimian’s judgment, Lei Yunsong and Lin Feifei were likely staying in the outer room as it made it easier to move. Bai Chen and Long Yuehong had gone to Yellow Corner Alley to prevent anyone from jumping out the window.

“No one.” Shang Jianyao repeated Jiang Baimian’s words.

Jiang Baimian then quickened her pace and came to the target’s room. She took off a small tool hanging from her belt and easily unlocked the slightly ancient lock.

The layout inside was similar to the place they rented. It also had a bunk bed with tables, chairs, and stools.

The room was very clean. At a glance, nothing that belonged to the tenant remained.

“Have you given up on this place?” Jiang Baimian did not slack off and began searching carefully.

Shang Jianyao lay on the ground and looked under the bed.

“There’s a piece of paper,” he suddenly said.

“What paper?” Jiang Baimian stopped moving.

Shang Jianyao stretched out his hand and took out the piece of paper. He stood up and unfolded it.

The next second, he and Jiang Baimian simultaneously saw the front side of the paper.

It read: "Thinking is a trap, and knowledge is poison..."

"Don't touch any more books..."

"We can't repeal the Old World's mistakes..."

Chapter 139: Failed

Jiang Baimian was a little dumbfounded when she saw the pamphlet in Shang Jianyao's hand.

While waiting for Bai Chen and Long Yuehong to get in position, she had imagined all kinds of possibilities after opening the door. However, she never expected to see something familiar yet so unfamiliar.

"The disappearance of Lei Yunsong and the others have something to do with those lunatics, who preach that knowledge is toxic?" Jiang Baimian muttered to herself, filled with puzzlement.

Just a minute ago, there seemed to be no connection between the two!

"They gave up on thinking?" Shang Jianyao's question was a little sudden; it was like the solution to a math question that missed a few steps in the middle.

Jiang Baimian thought for a few seconds and nodded slightly. "...From the looks of it, that's a possibility."

She then added, "This is only a guess for the time being. We can't determine if this pamphlet was accidentally left behind by Lin Feifei and the others or if it was deliberately placed to mislead any investigators."

"As long as we can find one of the organization's members, the problem will be resolved." Shang Jianyao offered his plan seriously.

"You can then sneak in and join the gathering to freeload on food and drinks, gather clues, and search for the truth?" Jiang Baimian helped Shang Jianyao complete the entire plan.

This sounded a little absurd, like a child playing house. But anything was possible with Shang Jianyao's abilities.

"With the intelligence they show, I can be the one distributing the food." Shang Jianyao looked at the pamphlet in his hand, raised his right arm, and wiped the corner of his mouth.

Jiang Baimian laughed and reminded him, "Being illiterate doesn't mean they have low intelligence."

"Those who believe in such words are definitely very gullible." Shang Jianyao was rather confident.

"That's true. Those who can become a member of this organization are people who have been screened and are easily deceived. Yes, they should be easily frightened and misled." Jiang Baimian nodded slightly and smiled. "Aren't you worried that the organizers who deceive them might skip on the food because the members are too gullible?"

"That's too much!" Shang Jianyao immediately felt indignant.

Jiang Baimian fell silent for a few seconds before saying, "To be serious, we have to be careful. Lei Yunsong, Lin Feifei, and the others are definitely not stupid. There's no doubt about that. But why are they with such a group of people?"

"I'm worried that your intelligence will be pulled down to that organization's average if you really join them. This isn't a joke. An Awakened's abilities are rather bizarre and terrifying."

"Corruption is mutual," Shang Jianyao replied solemnly.

"..." Jiang Baimian was rendered momentarily speechless. She then walked to the window and opened a window pane. She waved at Bai Chen and Long Yuehong below, indicating that they didn't have to be on guard.

Jiang Baimian and Shang Jianyao searched the room again, but they didn't find any more clues. They then used a tool to open the room opposite, which was also suspected to be Lin Feifei's residence.

This room was very messy. All kinds of items were placed everywhere, emitting a faint moldy smell.

In contrast, the only table present had the cleanest surface. It was mainly filled with books, paper, and a fountain pen that had been wrapped in transparent tape several times.

As they flipped through the books, Shang Jianyao and Jiang Baimian realized that most of the books had the stamp of Weed City's public library. The few books that didn't have the stamp gave off a dirty, old, and rotten feeling. It was unknown where they had been taken from.

Before long, they determined the kind of person that lived in this room: a simple family unit consisting of parents and a child. The father seemed to do physical labor, while the

mother helped sew and mend clothes at home. The child was 11 or 12 years old and was self-studying.

“Such people likely wouldn’t believe those lunatics.” Jiang Baimian came to a final conclusion.

In other words, this was not the target’s room. They could leave.

Shang Jianyao nodded, suddenly walked to the table, and picked up the pen.

“W-what are you doing?” Jiang Baimian gave up on guessing Shang Jianyao’s thoughts.

Shang Jianyao answered without turning his head. “Grading the homework.”

“...There might not be enough time. If we miss any subsequent clues, we might reach a dead end with the investigation.” Jiang Baimian didn’t directly use her authority as team leader to get Shang Jianyao to stand down. Instead, she laid out the facts and tried to reason with him.

Shang Jianyao thought for a moment. As he nodded, he lowered his body and quickly wrote a few words on the paper.

In just a few seconds, he put down the pen and turned around to return.

Jiang Baimian turned her body and looked at the table. She saw neat words on the paper: “Study hard.”

Jiang Baimian immediately chuckled. After leaving the room and locking the door, she muttered, “This will scare them.”

“Fear is also a form of motivation,” Shang Jianyao said calmly.

“...” Jiang Baimian glanced at him from the corner of her eye and hissed. “There’s no need to keep making your train of thought so complicated.”

As they spoke, the two of them left the building and arrived at the courtyard entrance in Yellow Corner Alley.

There was also a sentry post here.

An old man in a dark-blue cotton coat sat inside. His face was wrinkled, and his skin was as rough as orange peel. However, his hair was not sparse at all; it wasn’t even white.

This made it impossible to determine his age from his appearance.

Without needing Jiang Baimian's instructions, Shang Jianyao walked over and shouted with a smile, "Grandpa."

The old gatekeeper quickly put on his military-green cotton hat and muttered, "Don't call me with such affection. If you have something to say, say it. If there's a question, pay up."

Shang Jianyao calmly repeated the words: 'You are a man, so am I.'

The old man's eyebrows immediately twitched. He raised his finger and pointed diagonally across him. "Th-there's quite a number of them in that building."

Shang Jianyao didn't correct the other party's 'deviation' in inference. He took out Lin Feifei's photo and asked, "Have you seen this person?"

"Yes." The old man's voice became louder. "Don't think about it. Don't even think about it. She's not selling her services."

At this point, he lowered his voice. "I suspect that she's a mistress kept by some noble on North Street. A man will come looking for her every few days."

"How do you know?" Shang Jianyao asked curiously.

The old man chuckled. "I live on the same floor as her. How can I not know?"

"Then, do you know Old Zheng?" Shang Jianyao inexplicably changed the line of questioning.

The gatekeeper at Red Silk Alley said that Old Zheng was the one who mostly told him about Lin Feifei's matters.

The old man was stunned for a moment. "I'm Old Zheng."

"Ah, then forget about it." Shang Jianyao returned to the topic at hand. "Does she live in the room facing Yellow Corner Alley?"

"Yes." Old Zheng was very certain.

Shang Jianyao continued probing. "What does the man who often comes for her look like?"

"I couldn't really tell. He wears a hat and props up his collar every time. He even has a face mask over his face, acting all suspicious. It's obvious that he's somebody, and he doesn't want to be exposed," said Old Zheng as he recalled. "He's quite tall. Uh... he's a few centimeters shorter than you."

Shang Jianyao then asked, "Have you seen the woman in the photo today?"

"I saw her. Slightly past 8." Old Zheng laughed. "She was wearing a mask back then, and her baseball cap was pressed very low. People who aren't familiar with her definitely wouldn't be able to recognize her. However, she comes in and out every day. I can determine that it's her based on her outline."

This old man clearly paid special attention to Lin Feifei.

"Where did she go?" Shang Jianyao asked.

Old Zheng shook his head. "How would I know? I saw her walking toward South Street with a large bag. A black travel bag..."

Upon hearing this, Jiang Baimian was very sure that Lin Feifei had already moved. Regardless of whether Liu Dazhuang died or not, she would move.

After asking about a few more details, Shang Jianyao took out a bag of compressed biscuits and handed it to Old Zheng.

"Young man, that's the way!" Old Zheng's eyebrows relaxed as he praised him.

After leaving the courtyard, Jiang Baimian, Shang Jianyao, Bai Chen, and Long Yuehong met up in a quiet corner of Yellow Corner Alley.

After hearing his team leader's recount, Long Yuehong said in surprise, "It actually involves the organization that's stuffing pamphlets everywhere?"

No matter how he looked at it, he felt that the organization wasn't presentable and had a comical sense.

"We can't be sure yet." Jiang Baimian thought for a moment and said, "But no matter what, we have to contact Chen Xufeng and get him to send a telegram back to the company to ask about such organizations. We have a chance of encountering those lunatics next. It's better to be prepared.

"Yes... You guys can walk around in a while. Don't be in a rush to ask if anyone has seen a woman carrying a black travel bag. The focus is to observe those Ruin Hunters and see what clues they can find. Shang Jianyao and I will leave a message for Chen Xufeng."

"Yes, Team Leader," Bai Chen and Long Yuehong replied.

Due to the restrictions of the environment, they spoke softly.

Just as Jiang Baimian was about to give a few more words of advice, Long Yuehong suddenly asked in confusion, “Lin Feifei knew how to disguise herself when she left that courtyard. Why was her face seen when she was ‘waiting’ for Liu Dazhuang?”

That didn’t make sense.

Just as he said that, Long Yuehong realized that Shang Jianyao had looked at him. He felt a little shaken, and he kept wondering if he had asked a stupid question.

Jiang Baimian was stunned for two seconds before she smiled. “Not bad; you even noticed this. You can go one step deeper next time and put yourself in that environment to see what decision you will make.”

After complimenting him, she asked, “If you were an ordinary Ruin Hunter, what kind of questions would you ask in passing when you go to Red Silk Alley and question the shop owners about whether they had seen Liu Dazhuang?”

Long Yuehong thought for a few seconds and deliberated before saying, “I’ll ask if they’ve seen anyone more suspicious.”

Jiang Baimian smiled. “So, is a slightly beautiful woman waiting by the side of the road suspicious, or a person wearing their cap low and masking their face, making it impossible to identify them?”

Long Yuehong came to a realization. “In such a situation, overly disguising oneself is actually a characteristic. It makes one memorable.”

Jiang Baimian smiled and added, “That’s right. Besides, apart from us, who else will ask if they’ve seen a woman like Lin Feifei in the short term?”

Then, her tone became meaningful. “But that might not be the case in the future.”

Chapter 140: Report

“Why?” Long Yuehong couldn’t understand.

Jiang Baimian didn’t answer him directly and smiled. “After leaving a message for Chen Xufeng, I’ll go to the Hunter’s Guild and report that Lin Feifei might be the gunman’s accomplice.”

Long Yuehong was stunned. “Won’t everyone know then? We will lose any advantage...”

It was precisely because they had such information that they pulled ahead of all Ruin Hunters in this regard. They could discover the matter related to the organization that promoted the notion that knowledge was toxic in the shortest time possible.

After a pause, Long Yuehong added, "Won't this alert the enemy and cause unnecessary accidents?"

Why do we have to make everyone know about the investigation, which could've been secretly carried out?

Jiang Baimian looked at Shang Jianyao and Bai Chen and realized that one's thoughts were a mystery, while the other nodded thoughtfully and smiled.

"This isn't something that won't happen if we don't do it." Upon seeing that Long Yuehong was still a little confused, she further explained, "Lei Yunsong's team has been to the Hunter's Guild and visited a certain higher-up. It's very difficult not to come into contact with the employees during this process.

"With their looks and bearing, although they might not be the focus of attention wherever they go and attract additional attention, they will definitely leave some sort of impression on others.

"In addition, Chen Xufeng also got people to help him search for traces of Lei Yunsong and the others in the city. These people also know that Lin Feifei is Lei Yunsong's companion and have even encountered the suspected target.

"After Lei Yunsong was seen and his sketch was produced, it won't be long before someone remembers the companions he had."

Upon hearing this, Bai Chen interrupted. "The Hunter's Guild will also scan the gunman's sketch into the computer to see if it matches a Ruin Hunter's appearance. This is a common method of theirs."

Lei Yunsong and his team had left a trail in the Hunter's Guild.

Upon seeing that Long Yuehong had come to a realization, Jiang Baimian smiled and said, "Since this matter will be known sooner or later and our advantage might not last beyond today, why don't we report it and earn some money?"

Long Yuehong was momentarily speechless.

After a few seconds, he hesitated and said, "I keep having an odd feeling; it's like I'm betraying a companion..."

Jiang Baimian laughed and shook her head. "This is called reasonable utilization. In the Ashlands, we can't have moral mysophobia. We even need to have a flexible bottom line when it comes to certain matters, even though it's true that we have to insist on some principled fundamentals."

She then sighed and added, "Since there is no concealing the truth, it's better to spread the relevant information now and use a large number of Ruin Hunters to find Lei Yunsong, Lin Feifei, and the others as soon as possible, snatching time away from the lurking dangers.

"After the gunman was seen, those people should've been mentally prepared for this. They won't overreact."

"Indeed..." Long Yuehong was convinced.

At this moment, Shang Jianyao said seriously, "Also, the most important thing is: Those Ruin Hunters are free. We don't need to pay them."

The remuneration was paid by Weed City's City Defense Command!

Although Shang Jianyao's incisive point deviated from the main point, be it Jiang Baimian, Long Yuehong, or Bai Chen, they all nodded indiscernibly.

Who wouldn't like free labor?

"Besides, we don't have many supplies left. Who knows how long we'll have to stay in Weed City." Jiang Baimian looked around and said, "It's definitely good if we can take the opportunity to earn some living expenses."

With that said, she ordered, "Let's split up."

...

Long Yuehong and Bai Chen returned to South Street and walked back and forth near Red Silk Alley to observe the Ruin Hunters.

The people who had just accepted the mission surveyed the crime scene again. The people who had already questioned the witnesses held two sketches and asked the residents around them in succession, hoping to find new witnesses. When they reached the rooftop, the few people who found the corresponding traces entered Red Silk Alley and went door to door to ask if they had seen anyone suspicious...

As he scanned the area, Long Yuehong saw the boss sitting behind the cash register in Old Clothing Bazaar at the alley's entrance, dozing off.

In the shop, a man in a thick black coat was picking out old clothes.

This man looked to be in his thirties. He had black hair, blue eyes, and a high nose bridge. He seemed to be of mixed blood.

Long Yuehong sighed with emotion when he saw this. She's sleeping even when there's business... Did she wake up too early?

At this moment, the man picked out his clothes, walked to the cashier, nudged the boss, and woke her up.

After they completed the transaction, Long Yuehong looked elsewhere.

...

At the edge of Central Square, on a wooden bench.

Jiang Baimian held a fountain pen and used her thigh as a writing surface. She scribbled on a piece of paper: "The gunman in Liu Dazhuang's murder is suspected to be Lei Yunsong. We used this fact to find someone suspected to be Lin Feifei in Red Silk Alley. We locked onto her residence, but she has already moved.

"She seems to have joined the organization that promotes the idea that knowledge is toxic. Please report to the company immediately and request the corresponding information.

"We will pass this clue to the Hunter's Guild and claim that we were previously employed by someone to search for these people. If possible, give us a 'trustworthy' employer that won't implicate you. If not, we will claim that we are upholding professional ethics..."

After giving her brief instructions, Jiang Baimian put away her pen, folded the paper, and stood up. She then spoke to Shang Jianyao, who was excitedly observing the passersby. "I'll be back soon."

"Are you going to the library?" asked Shang Jianyao suddenly.

"Gosh, don't expose me. Let me maintain my professionalism." Jiang Baimian's expression froze slightly.

Although she knew the excuse of going to the library and her attention on the library's fire made it difficult to keep it a secret from Shang Jianyao—who had been following her—she still felt a little embarrassed when he said it out loud.

Shang Jianyao shut his mouth and raised his hand to zip it horizontally.

Jiang Baimian smiled and inserted her hands into her pockets. She then walked into Weed City's public library at an adequate speed and pulled out the book, Internal Revenue Code, from the familiar corner.

This time, the first page of the book was folded.

Upon seeing this, Jiang Baimian raised the book and shook it a few times.

A folded piece of paper fell to the ground.

Jiang Baimian bent down and picked it up. She unfolded it and realized that it was a notice from Chen Xufeng.

“Liu Dazhuang was shot to death. The murderer is suspected to be Lei Yunsong.”

He learned of this pretty quickly, Jiang Baimian muttered to herself. She then stuffed her piece of paper into the book, unfolded the first page, and folded page 650.

After doing this, Jiang Baimian pushed the book, Internal Revenue Code, back into its original spot.

She then walked out of the library and returned to Shang Jianyao.

“Let’s go to the guild.” She thought for a moment and added, “You can speak now.”

Shang Jianyao immediately beamed and quickly ‘unzipped’ his mouth.

After arriving at West Street and entering the guild, Jiang Baimian scanned the area and went straight to a kiosk by the corner.

At this moment, not many Ruin Hunters were in the hall. Most of them were still gathered in front of the machines that allowed them to browse and accept missions on their own. They weren’t near the circular platform. Therefore, Jiang Baimian did not need to line up and came in front of the employee named Su Xiaoman.

“I’m here again.” Jiang Baimian greeted her with a bright smile.

Such a tone and such a smile were things that immediately cheered people up.

Su Xiaoman subconsciously smiled back. “What’s the matter this time?”

“I have new clues regarding Liu Dazhuang’s mission,” Jiang Baimian said directly.

Su Xiaoman blurted out in surprise, “That fast?”

It had been less than an hour since the mission was issued!

“We were lucky,” said Jiang Baimian with a smile. “We previously took on a search mission. Back then, we weren’t Guild Hunters. One of the few people we needed to find seemed to resemble that gunman as I kept staring at the sketch.”

As she spoke, she handed the photo of Lei Yunsong to the window.

“Why does this look like the guild’s identity photo?” Su Xiaoman felt that the photo was taken during hunter registration. She quickly pulled up Liu Dazhuang’s mission and compared the photo and the gunman sketch in her hand.

Su Xiaoman looked up and said in surprise and joy, “They really look alike!”

Jiang Baimian pushed the remaining four photos over and suppressed her voice. “These are the other people we were looking for back then. We just asked about this person. She appeared at the place where Liu Dazhuang was shot; she was in Red Silk Alley.”

Jiang Baimian pointed at Lin Feifei’s photo.

As she spoke, Jiang Baimian did not control her voice well. Many Ruin Hunters nearby looked over, knowing that she had found useful clues. This made them envious and jealous, but they were also filled with anticipation. They hoped that the new clues would lead them in the right direction and give them a share of the pie.

Su Xiaoman took the photo and didn’t dare to dawdle any longer. “I’ll report it immediately. Give me your and your companion’s Hunter Badges.”

She deliberately concealed the photo so that no one around could see it so as to prevent others from taking advantage of the situation.

After submitting this clue, Su Xiaoman heaved a sigh of relief and looked up at Jiang Baimian. “I’m not sure how long it will take to review the clue’s effectiveness or if others have already submitted it. However, this is an emergency mission. It should be quick. There might be an answer in a short while. We can only know how much Oray I can give you when the time comes.”

Jiang Baimian nodded slightly. “It’s fine. We can wait.”

After taking back her and Shang Jianyao’s Hunter Badges, she smiled and added, “Remember to return the photos to me. I still need them to question others.”

“No problem.” Su Xiaoman had just realized that these photos came from the guild, so they could print as many as they wanted.

Walking to the edge of the lobby, Jiang Baimian and Shang Jianyao sat down and waited for the new clues to be announced.

Less than 20 minutes later, a person suddenly walked in front of them.

This person wore a thick, black coat. He had black hair, blue eyes, and a high nose bridge. He was none other than the Advanced Hunter, who had previously been treated with respect by the guild’s employees.

Upon seeing Jiang Baimian and Shang Jianyao look at him at the same time, he asked in a deep voice, "Did you find anything in that woman's room?"