

Embers Ad Infinitum #Chapter 141: Official Hunter - Read Embers Ad Infinitum Chapter 141: Official Hunter

Chapter 141: Official Hunter

Looking at the Advanced Hunter in front of her, Jiang Baimian raised her hand and scratched her ear. "Ah, what did you say?"

The words that the Advanced Hunter had prepared were immediately stuck in his throat.

At this moment, Shang Jianyao turned around and helped translate. "He asked us what we found in that woman's room."

Jiang Baimian looked enlightened and smiled. "The clues we found have been submitted to the guild. When they are done reviewing and announcing it, you will know what was found."

The black-haired, blue-eyed Advanced Hunter gave them a deep glance and didn't ask any further. He turned around and prepared to leave.

At this moment, Shang Jianyao suddenly said, "How rude."

"How is he rude?" Jiang Baimian asked cooperatively.

"Isn't it common sense to introduce yourself before asking questions?" Shang Jianyao replied seriously. He didn't seem to have any fear of being dragged out and beaten up.

The Advanced Hunter paused and didn't turn around. He sullenly said, "Oudick."

"His Ashlandic is pretty good." Shang Jianyao was already chatting with Jiang Baimian about something else.

Jiang Baimian tersely acknowledged it. "He looks to be of mixed heritage. Maybe Ashlandic is his mother tongue."

With his back facing them, Oudick fell silent for a few seconds before finally walking away.

After the Advanced Hunter left the seating area at the edge of the lobby, Jiang Baimian chuckled and said, "You sure know how to do it. Your taunting skills are pretty good. Haha, you also don't introduce yourself when you question others."

Shang Jianyao replied seriously, "Brothers don't need to introduce themselves."

“...” Jiang Baimian had no retort. She pretended not to have conversed with Shang Jianyao about this matter. Bored, she shook her legs and waited for the review to be completed.

Suddenly, she looked up at the lobby’s ceiling.

After a few seconds, she said in confusion, “A group of people passed by... One of them has an electric signal pattern that’s different from humans. It doesn’t even appear to be that of an animal... A robot?”

Shang Jianyao also looked up at the ceiling and said, “It’s all human consciousness.”

Jiang Baimian turned her head and looked at Shang Jianyao. “They’re all humans?”

“I can make them corny at this distance.” Shang Jianyao didn’t answer her question.

Jiang Baimian easily understood what he meant and frowned. “Human consciousness... Inhuman electric signals...”

After combining these two descriptions, there seemed to be only one answer—an Eternal! Or rather, a mechanical monk from the Monks Conclave!

“Could it be an old friend?” Jiang Baimian asked herself. “No, Jingfa would’ve long gone crazy in such an environment.”

There were a large number of female employees in the Hunter’s Guild.

“You can go up and ask.” Shang Jianyao suggested.

Jiang Baimian shot him a glance and couldn’t be bothered to answer.

She tersely acknowledged it and thought for a moment. “It’s not necessarily a mechanical monk. Back then, not all Eternals were converted to the conclave’s faith. There were exceptions...”

At this moment, the group of people upstairs had already gone beyond their perception range.

Due to the lack of information, Jiang Baimian stopped discussing this matter. She observed the coming and going of Ruin Hunters, attempting to summarize some of the local customs.

After about ten minutes, a voice sounded from the loudspeakers in the lobby.

“May the Hunter—who submitted new clues to Liu Dazhuang’s mission—please head to Counter 11’s Su Xiaoman to receive your payment.”

Jiang Baimian stood up, took out her Hunter's Badge, and quickly walked to the circular platform.

"How much do I get?" she asked Su Xiaoman with a smile.

Su Xiaoman smiled and replied, "100 Oray. Each person in your two-man team will then receive 100 credits. Congratulations on becoming Official Hunters!"

Jiang Baimian did not hide her smile. "Not bad."

For the four of them, it would cost about 4 Oray a day just to eat. Adding on rent, it cost them nearly 5 Oray a day. 100 Oray was enough to sustain them for another three weeks.

After handing the Hunter's Badge to Su Xiaoman and letting her swipe it, Jiang Baimian and Shang Jianyao became Official Hunters.

They then took a receipt and their Hunter's Badges from Su Xiaoman before heading to a finance kiosk on the first floor, where they received a thick stack of notes.

Oray was dark green in color, with 10 being the highest denomination. However, they were also given some notes with denominations of 5 and 1.

After returning to the mission area, Jiang Baimian realized that the clues she had submitted had been publicly released. There were even Lei Yunsong, Lin Feifei, and the others' names.

Jiang Baimian was just about to sigh at Shang Jianyao when she suddenly saw the Advanced Hunter walk over.

Oudick—who was wearing a thick, black coat—stopped in front of them and asked, "You didn't discover anything in that woman's room?"

Jiang Baimian didn't pretend not to hear him this time because his voice was rather loud. She smiled and said, "The corresponding payment is needed to obtain any clues of value. Isn't this common knowledge among Ruin Hunters?"

Without waiting for Oudick's response, she added with a smile, "I've already received 100 Oray as a reward. I'll only accept equivalent clues as payment in the future."

Oudick fell silent and didn't speak.

"It seems like you haven't thought it through. Come find us after you've thought it through." Jiang Baimian smiled as she walked past him.

Shang Jianyao followed behind her and left the Hunter's Guild with her.

On the street, Jiang Baimian looked back and thoughtfully said, "Before the new clues were released, this Advanced Hunter knew of Lin Feifei's existence. He also confirmed that we went to Lin Feifei's room... He has a good relationship with the local Hunter's Guild's higher-ups and knew about the clues we submitted in advance?"

"No, if that were the case, he should've already known that we only mentioned the gunman's accomplices and not our subsequent search... It seems like he knows something? Or did he discover clues that allowed him to quickly determine that the gunman had a female accomplice?"

As she muttered to herself, Jiang Baimian turned to look at Shang Jianyao and realized that he was staring at her.

"What's wrong?" Jiang Baimian felt that she shouldn't have asked.

Shang Jianyao sighed. "You just said what I wanted to say."

"I'll give you a chance to speak next time," said Jiang Baimian perfunctorily before smiling. "You actually didn't ask me why I didn't report the pamphlet in Lin Feifei's room."

Shang Jianyao glanced at Jiang Baimian curiously. "I'm not Long Yuehong."

Jiang Baimian was first stunned before she walked to Central Square and asked with a smile, "...Didn't I say that it's not nice to speak ill of friends behind their backs?"

Shang Jianyao replied seriously, "I'm only describing his usual behavior truthfully."

"Sigh, I'm only 1.75 meters tall after genetic enhancement..." Jiang Baimian added cooperatively after hearing that. She couldn't help but laugh midway.

They soon returned to South Street and found Bai Chen and Long Yuehong.

After exchanging looks, Jiang Baimian led them to the alley opposite the slave market and rendezvoused with them in a quiet corner.

She took out the stack of notes and showed them. "100 Oray!"

"We have money now." Long Yuehong was sincerely happy.

"Also, Shang Jianyao and I obtained 100 credits and became Official Hunters," Jiang Baimian added with a smile.

Long Yuehong said in disappointment, "Only I'm still a rookie."

“It’s your turn to hand in the next clue with Bai Chen.” Jiang Baimian smiled and consoled him. She then fully described the information she had submitted.

Long Yuehong was rather confused when he heard that. “Team Leader, why didn’t you report the matter regarding the pamphlet? This way, the Ruin Hunters will be activated to find the organization as soon as possible.”

“As expected...” Shang Jianyao suddenly said something baffling.

Jiang Baimian held in her laughter and looked at the confused Long Yuehong.

She silently took a deep breath and exhaled. She then explained, “We still aren’t sure if Lin Feifei deliberately left that pamphlet behind. But even if it was intentional, the reason for doing so can also be divided into two situations. The first is to mislead the subsequent investigators, and the second is to provide clues and save herself.

“If it’s the latter, Lin Feifei will be in danger when the news spreads.”

“I see...” Long Yuehong sighed with emotion at his team leader’s meticulousness.

Jiang Baimian continued, “After the company replies and we have a grasp of the organization’s exact situation, we will consider submitting this clue based on the facts on the ground.”

“Okay, okay.” Long Yuehong was convinced.

Jiang Baimian looked at Bai Chen and thought for a moment. “Did you guys discover anything? We encountered an Advanced Hunter at the guild. He directly asked us what we found in Lin Feifei’s room...”

When sharing this matter, Jiang Baimian described Oudick’s general appearance, hoping that Long Yuehong and Bai Chen would pay attention to this person in the future.

Long Yuehong became more and more surprised. “I’ve seen him! He was buying clothes at Old Clothing Bazaar in Red Silk Alley.”

Shang Jianyao immediately asked, “Anything abnormal back then?”

“Nothing abnormal...” Long Yuehong recalled and said, “Only, the boss of that store was dozing off and was woken up by him.”

“The boss was napping while she had customers?” Jiang Baimian repeated this detail in a questioning tone.

“I found it a little strange too, but we have no way of knowing if the boss slept well last night.” Long Yuehong voiced his thoughts. “Besides, the person didn’t do anything back then. He even woke the boss up and paid for the clothes.”

Jiang Baimian listened seriously and laughed. She turned her head to Shang Jianyao and said, “Ask the boss later. If she slept well last night but suddenly felt sleepy and couldn’t control herself, things will be interesting.”

At this point, Jiang Baimian looked around and smiled. “I suspect that the Advanced Hunter named Oudick is an Awakened. He has abilities similar to Slumber Cat and Nightmare Horse.”

Chapter 142: Exchange of Intelligence

“Huh?” Long Yuehong recalled his past encounter and asked in shock, “Team Leader, are you saying that Old Clothing Bazaar’s boss was dozing off because of an Awakened ability? That Advanced Hunter obtained clues through a dream?”

“I can only say that it’s possible,” Jiang Baimian replied seriously. “But if that weren’t the case, I can’t figure out how Oudick confirmed that the gunman had a female accomplice before the clues were released. He also went all the way to Lin Feifei’s room and realized that we had already searched it.”

At this moment, Bai Chen—who was listening quietly—interrupted. “Anyone who can become an Advanced Hunter in their thirties has to have some impressive abilities.”

However, some relied on team strength, some relied on connections, and others mainly relied on their own strength.

“Indeed.” Long Yuehong indicated that he could completely accept the idea that an Advanced Hunter was an Awakened.

It had to be known that Bai Chen had used so many years to barely advance beyond Official Hunter and become an Intermediate Hunter. There was still a Senior Hunter between her and Advanced Hunter.

The further one progressed as a Hunter, the more difficult it would be to advance. The credit points required would increase exponentially. In the early stages, one might only need one or two missions to advance from a Rookie Hunter to an Official Hunter.

Jiang Baimian nodded and reminded them, “If you discover that fellow nearby later, don’t go to a quiet and uninhabited place. The more people there are, the safer it will be.”

Upon seeing that Long Yuehong was a little scared, she added, “This doesn’t mean that your lives will be in danger. It’s just that there are many secrets that you might not be able to keep in your minds.”

It was very difficult for a person to control what they should and shouldn’t think in a dream.

After discussing this matter, Jiang Baimian counted out 50 Oray from the stack of notes and handed it to Bai Chen. “Get some bullets and food that can be stored for a period of time.”

Although they didn’t encounter many enemies on their way to Weed City, they still expended a lot of bullets. This was because they had to stop the car every few days for shooting practice to prevent their skills from getting rusty. It would spell a decrease in strength when they encountered a situation.

Talent was one thing for every good gunman, but building their skill up by expending a large number of bullets was another.

“Why do we need food?” Long Yuehong asked, not understanding.

Weed City had plenty of food and plenty of variety.

Jiang Baimian laughed. “Maybe I’m always thinking too much. The disappearance of Lei Yunsong and Lin Feifei, the organization that promotes the idea that knowledge is toxic, the death of the intelligence peddler—Liu Dazhuang—the appearance of an existence suspected to be an Eternal in the guild, and the participation of a high-ranking Hunter.

“All of these matters mixed together makes me feel like a storm is brewing. It would be fine if nothing serious happened. But once the situation worsens, having more bullets and more food means that we have a higher chance of survival.”

“That makes sense...” Long Yuehong thought for a moment and agreed. He felt that it gave him a sense of security.

Jiang Baimian then said, “Your next mission is to replenish our supplies. Shang Jianyao and I will return to the Hunter’s Guild and pay attention to any new clues. When noon comes, and nobody is in Red Silk Alley, we will go and find the Old Clothing Bazaar’s boss.”

At this point, she smiled and said, “The mission of finding Lei Yunsong and Lin Feifei’s traces will be left to the Ruin Hunters.”

There was no trick to this. It mainly relied on a massive number of people being involved in the investigation. Jiang Baimian felt that there was no need to waste her team’s energy. After all, there were many ‘volunteers.’

After learning about the female accomplice, it wouldn't be long before the Ruin Hunters learned that Lin Feifei was wearing a hat and a mask while carrying a black travel bag. She left her rented place, entered Yellow Corner Alley, and walked toward South Street.

Although such attire was relatively special and could easily attract attention, not many people would have a deep impression of it without any particular pause. This was because people mainly cared about things that repeatedly appeared in their line of sight. As they walked, they might only glance at each other before brushing past each other.

...

After separating from Long Yuehong and Bai Chen, Jiang Baimian and Shang Jianyao returned to the Hunter's Guild. They sat on chairs at the edge of the lobby and waited for the subsequent investigation results.

"I have the feeling that I'm a high-ranking member of the guild." While waiting, Jiang Baimian laughed. "We are sitting here while others run errands."

Shang Jianyao looked up at the ceiling. "Shall we go somewhere else?"

Jiang Baimian easily understood Shang Jianyao's meaning and raised the question with a teasing smile. "Aren't you worried that you'll encounter the vice president named Christina when you go up? I wonder if she's back..."

Shang Jianyao replied seriously, "I've thought about it. I can dance with her."

"Which direction are you taking? I mean your relationship," Jiang Baimian asked with interest. "Godmother? Siblings? Confidant? Having the same hobbies? Father and daughter?"

Before she could finish her sentence, she saw the Advanced Hunter named Oudick enter. He looked around and walked toward her.

Oudick—who was wearing a thick, black coat—looked at the metal object in Jiang Baimian's ear and raised his voice slightly. "I can use the information regarding which area the woman named Lin Feifei last went to in exchange for what you got. But you need to guarantee something of value."

"That fast?" Jiang Baimian deliberately pretended to be surprised. She suspected that Oudick had used his Awakened abilities to complete the investigation quickly and thus managed to find Lin Feifei's traces after leaving Yellow Corner Alley.

Many things couldn't be recalled when humans were awake, but they could replay the corresponding scene in their dreams.

Shang Jianyao clapped. It was unknown who he was praising.

Oudick was a little stunned by Shang Jianyao's applause. He fell silent for a few seconds before saying, "I have my ways."

Jiang Baimian deliberated for a moment before saying, "Alright, I guarantee that we found valuable clues in that room. If you don't believe me, we can trade in the form of a mission and have the guild vouch for us."

She had suggested the latter option to ensure that the other party wouldn't choose it. After all, she didn't want everyone to know about the organization's participation. This might put Lin Feifei and the others in danger.

The reason she believed it was very likely that Oudick wouldn't choose this option was that she could tell that he was a person with certain morals and confidence from his work style and current status.

Or maybe it had something to do with the price he paid.

When Old Clothing Bazaar's owner was dozing off, he could clearly walk away with the clothes.

In addition, if he did have the Awakened ability to make people fall asleep and affect dreams, he could've left after receiving the information and waking the other party up. There would've been no need to buy any old clothes.

Oudick thought for a moment and said, "There's no need. If it's not worth it, I'll ask for the difference in price back."

Jiang Baimian heaved a sigh of relief when she heard that. After all, she was not absolutely confident. After this matter, she gained a deeper understanding of Oudick's character and behavior.

"Deal." Jiang Baimian smiled.

Oudick nodded and pointed at the guild entrance. "Let's talk outside."

Jiang Baimian stood up at a moderate pace and secretly glanced at Shang Jianyao before rubbing her index finger with her thumb. Her gesture meant that she was going to begin with Plan B.

Be prepared. Use your abilities immediately if anything goes wrong!

It had to be known that the other party was very likely an Awakened, and his abilities were in the domain of sleep and dreams.

As for Jiang Baimian herself, her role was to have Oudick focus on her and become the other party's first target to buy time for Shang Jianyao.

Although she was confident and had done a lot of research in order to deal with Awakened, she still felt that she couldn't completely guard against them at close range and needed to rely on Shang Jianyao.

This was because there were too many Awakened abilities. Some abilities could even induce cardiac arrests and wipe memories. Without obtaining information first, it was impossible to deal with all of them.

After leaving the Hunter's Guild and arriving on West Street, Oudick lowered his hands and casually said, "Lin Feifei carried her black travel bag and walked out of Yellow Corner Alley. She first walked to South Street, then Central Square. She then turned to West Street and walked into that alley."

As he spoke, Oudick stretched out his right hand and pointed diagonally across.

It was the entrance to an alley. The straight-line distance was more than 40 meters away from the Hunter's Guild. Beside it were two ostentatious bars—Flying Bird and Wild Tree.

"Flying Bird Bar..." Jiang Baimian muttered the name.

Thinking that she was asking a question, Oudick added, "That alley's name is Wild Wolf. The name was later changed. It's filled with places similar to bars, and it also hides the underground market in Weed City.

"I spent a lot of effort to find a few witnesses and confirmed Lin Feifei's whereabouts. However, that was as far as I got. The people in Wild Wolf Alley don't wake up so early, so there won't be any witnesses. We have no way of knowing if Lin Feifei passed through the alley and went somewhere else or entered a bar inside."

"Is that so..." Jiang Baimian thought for a moment and took out the pamphlet from her pocket. "We found this under the bed in the room that Lin Feifei rented."

She handed the pamphlet to Oudick and paid close attention to his expression. If she determined that the other party was related to the organization that promoted the idea that knowledge was toxic, she would immediately get Shang Jianyao to 'make friends!'

After Oudick took it, he unfolded it and read it. His eyebrows gradually furrowed. "They..."

Jiang Baimian's heart palpitated as she asked, "You know them?"

Experts who could advance to the rank of Advanced Hunter in the Hunter's Guild definitely had plenty of knowledge in all aspects, regardless of their strength.

Oudick's gaze swept between Jiang Baimian and Shang Jianyao twice before he said thoughtfully, "Such ideas and slogans are very similar to a religious organization that has been relatively active here in the past few years."

"What do they call themselves?" Jiang Baimian asked. Anything she got now would be a bonus.

Oudick replied with a slightly solemn expression, "Anti-intellectualism Church."

Chapter 143: Last Man

Although Jiang Baimian could imagine that the religion's name might be absurd from the pamphlet's contents and that it might even contain typographical errors, she never expected them to use the term 'anti-intellectualism' openly. It gave her the feeling that they were complacent about calling themselves mentally degraded.

Jiang Baimian held in her laughter and asked rather seriously, "Why is it called that?"

Shang Jianyao replied before Oudick could. "By lowering everyone's intelligence, they will be the smarter ones."

Oudick looked at the fellow that was spouting nonsense and couldn't figure out if he was joking or if he was more suitable to join the Anti-intellectualism Church.

After slowly exhaling, Oudick simply explained, "Just as many people believe, the Anti-intellectualism Church also believes that the Old World's destruction was caused by people researching various taboo domains back then, bringing about a disaster.

"However, they go one step further by believing that humans were too smart and had grasped too much. If the Old World's people didn't think, didn't increase their intelligence, didn't read books, and didn't gain new knowledge, it would be impossible for them to have explored forbidden domains. It also wouldn't have triggered the apocalypse.

"They also believe that the Heartless disease's appearance and the Heartless's existence are not only a disaster but also a revelation given by the Kalendarium. As long as humans regress to the Heartless's level of intelligence, the New World will descend and open its door.

"Therefore, the Anti-intellectualism Church advocates that thinking is a trap and that knowledge is toxic. They hope to burn all books and eradicate all places that provide education so that people can only live on instinct and the experience taught by their parents.

“As for exploring the future, they just need to follow the Kalendarium’s guidance and listen to a small number of the Kalendarium’s Chosen Ones. To them, thinking is a sin.”

Upon hearing this, Shang Jianyao nodded and eagerly made a judgment. “Then they must be very gullible.”

“In the Ashlands, everyone has too much to worry about. It might be a blessing to give up on thinking,” Jiang Baimian said in a mocking and emotional tone.

Finally, she asked, “Which Kalendaria does the Anti-intellectualism Church believe in?”

Oudick thought for a moment and said, “Last Man, the one who controls March.”

“Last Man... I remember such a term from a famous philosophical^[1] work of the Old World. It refers to lowly, muddle-headed, mediocre, and slave-like people,” Jiang Baimian said thoughtfully.

Oudick was immediately a little surprised. He glanced at Jiang Baimian and didn’t say a word. He didn’t know that Last Man had such a meaning. Before today, he still felt that it was filled with mystery. It was indeed worthy of the title of a Kalendaria.

After a few seconds of silence, Oudick looked around and said, “That’s about it. I hope there’s still a chance to exchange intelligence in the future.”

Jiang Baimian snapped to her senses and asked with a smile, “Why did you allow us to ask so many questions? We only gave you one clue.”

“The value of your clue is above the intelligence I provided,” Oudick said frankly.

Jiang Baimian nodded and didn’t ask any further.

At this moment, Shang Jianyao suddenly inquired, “Who is the Ashlander between your parents?”

Oudick was a little confused by this question. He didn’t understand how it had come to this, but this was nothing confidential. Hence, he casually replied, “My father.”

“What’s his surname?” Shang Jianyao was excited.

Oudick became increasingly confused as to what the other party was trying to do. He took a step back and said in a deep voice, “Ou.”

He was always more vigilant against such abnormal situations because he had encountered many Awakened. He knew that danger was sometimes hidden in ordinary words.

“Pfft...” Jiang Baimian laughed. “So your name is...”

His surname was Ou, and his name was Dick. These two combined gave off the feeling of the Red River language.

“As expected.” Shang Jianyao clenched his right fist and punched his left palm, putting on an expression as if he had guessed correctly.

“...” Oudick swept his gaze between Jiang Baimian and Shang Jianyao a few times as if he were looking at a mental patient. In the end, he didn’t say anything and turned around to walk back to the Hunter’s Guild’s lobby.

Jiang Baimian watched him leave and spoke without turning her head. “You actually didn’t ‘make friends’ with him.”

“He really answered too many questions.” Shang Jianyao sighed.

“Yes.” Jiang Baimian nodded and said, “You still have to have a bottom line when it comes to using your abilities. You didn’t ‘make friends’ with Convoy Leader Ferlin to pry into his secrets, but to make it easier for our cooperation and ensure our own safety. Therefore, there’s no problem.

“As for Oudick, he told us whatever he could tell us. ‘Making friends’ with him will only help us figure out if he’s an Awakened, what his three abilities are, and what the price is. It’s best not to do so when he hasn’t shown us any hostility. Try not to harm the innocent.”

She was taking the opportunity to teach Shang Jianyao and help him establish the correct values. This was a team leader’s responsibility.

Shang Jianyao replied with the words: “Wang Beicheng.”

“...” Jiang Baimian flew into a rage out of humiliation before coming to a realization. “I’m just making a verbal assumption. I’ve never really beaten him!”

Shang Jianyao looked at Jiang Baimian’s raised left hand and cast his gaze at Wild Wolf Alley. “I wonder when those bars open?”

Jiang Baimian acutely asked, “Do you want to go door to door and confirm Lin Feifei’s whereabouts? Do you want to dance at each bar?”

Shang Jianyao had a serious expression. “You can dance in a bar?”

“Stop pretending. It’s not like you didn’t hear the music last night.” Jiang Baimian mercilessly exposed Shang Jianyao’s disguise.

Although the company's basic education didn't mention what one could do at a bar apart from drinking, the music on West Street didn't completely die down until two to three in the morning. Anyone with brains would make certain connections.

Without waiting for Shang Jianyao to speak, Jiang Baimian tersely acknowledged his words. "We have to get Little White to do this. She's familiar with the underground market here and knows who to ask."

"Yes." Shang Jianyao felt very regretful, but he also agreed that Bai Chen was the most suitable candidate for this matter.

"Let's go. There's no need to wait in the guild. There won't be any new clues for the time being." Jiang Baimian took the lead and walked to Central Square, prepared to carry out some Weed City folklore investigation.

This was an extracurricular assignment that she had assigned herself.

As they walked, Jiang Baimian suddenly laughed. "In our team, apart from you, our names have colors. Big White, Little White, and Little Red[2]. You're the only one who doesn't fit in."

"I'm the color of sunlight," Shang Jianyao immediately replied.

Jiang Baimian tersely acknowledged it. "That's true. 'Yao' has the meaning of sunlight..."

...

In the evening, Bai Chen—who was wearing a gray scarf—led Long Yuehong into Wild Wolf Alley.

Compared to how it was in the morning, this place was already very lively. Music blasted everywhere, interweaving into a kinetic melody.

Many Ruin Hunters—who lacked worries—lived their lives on the border of death. There might not be a tomorrow. Once they had excess money and supplies, they would inevitably want to come over and indulge themselves.

Be it with alcohol or the warm embrace of women or men, they could temporarily forget the cruelty of life. They didn't have to think about the missions they had to take tomorrow, where they would adventure next, or whether they could still live.

In Weed City, where the Hunter's Guild was abnormally powerful, this also led to the abnormal prosperity of local bars and nightclubs.

When many nomad settlements in the Ashlands lacked sufficient food, they could still squeeze out some food and fruit to make wine.

At the same time, Weed City's municipal department cooperatively gave the green light and demarcated the streets here to be beyond the residential area. Even in winter, there was no need to turn the power off.

Under the throbbing lights, Bai Chen and Long Yuehong entered a nightclub called Today. They circled around the dance floor, where many people were gyrating crazily, and arrived in front of the bar counter.

Bai Chen bent her finger and knocked on the bar top seven times before speaking in a normal tone. "Two glasses of Golden Oray."

This was a type of distilled grape wine. The reason it was called Golden Oray was that it was very popular in First City, as popular as the paper currency—Oray.

The bartender—who was wiping his cup—looked up and sized up Bai Chen. "I have better recommendations."

"What is it?" Bai Chen asked cooperatively.

The bartender laughed. "Wheat ears. You can head straight to the back to sample it."

The bartender pointed at the wooden door that seemed to lead to the kitchen on the other side of the bar counter.

"Alright." Bai Chen turned around.

At this moment, the bartender also tapped the bar top eight times—four long and three short intervals between each strike.

Bai Chen didn't turn around, knowing that the bartender was telling her that the secret signal they had agreed on had changed. She had to use this next time.

After pushing open the suspected kitchen door, Bai Chen and Long Yuehong saw two muscular men in black holding submachine guns through a junk-filled room and a narrow corridor.

After matching the secret signal, they were allowed in and went underground along the stairs.

There was a sizable hall with tables, chairs, and other items. Dozens of people sat in different spots, happily chatting with their friends under the sunlamps.

This looked like a place for private gatherings, not an underground market. It was completely different from what Long Yuehong had imagined.

Bai Chen cast her gaze over and searched for someone suitable to ask if they had seen Lin Feifei in the bar district.

Suddenly, her gaze froze.

A man stood up from a long, dark-red sofa. He was average in height, about 1.7 meters tall. However, his arms were thick, and his body was muscular. It was obvious that he was very strong.

In the cold winter, this man only wore a short-sleeved, black cotton T-shirt and a pair of brightly-colored, baggy pants. He lacked the necessary respect for temperature.

He had a shaved head with a bluish-black wolf symbol representing First City tattooed on it. His face looked fierce, and he seemed like the kind of person who could scare a child to tears without doing anything.

Behind him were two bodyguards in black. There was a bulging spot around their waists, and it was obvious that they were concealing weapons.

The man—whose exact age was indiscernible—walked towards Bai Chen and smiled teasingly. “You really escaped? You dare return?”

His eyes were cold, without any hint of a smile.

Bai Chen’s body trembled slightly, and she lost her usual calm and composure.

Although Long Yuehong was a little afraid when he saw this, he felt that he couldn’t just watch.

Team Leader said that we have to protect each other... Long Yuehong gritted his teeth and took a few steps forward to put himself between Bai Chen and the man.

His body also trembled indiscernibly, but he still looked at the bald, fierce-looking man without flinching.

Uh... Actually, I’m not too short... As he looked at the height of the man opposite him, this realization suddenly flashed across his mind.

[1] From Nietzsche. A concept that’s the antithesis to Übermensch, or Beyond-Man.

[2] Long Yuehong’s Hong is Red in Chinese.

Chapter 144: Eugene

The bald man's aura was very strong. Every step he took felt like an additional boulder was pressing down on Bai Chen's heart, making her uncontrollably recall the nightmares she had tried to forget.

Her body trembled slightly as if she had encountered her born enemy.

At this moment, a figure appeared in front of her. It was a slightly hunched figure in a black cotton coat.

This figure blocked the bald man from her line of sight, cutting off the source of her fear.

Long Yuehong stared at the bald man, his heart beating like drums. He constantly hypnotized himself and pretended to be Shang Jianyao, playing a game where whoever first blinked and looked away lost.

The bald man chuckled and sized up Long Yuehong. He then laughed. "Why? Do you want to save the damsel in distress?"

As he spoke, he didn't stop walking. He continued approaching the two of them with an extremely oppressive feeling.

His two bodyguards circled the dark-red sofa and followed closely behind.

Long Yuehong trembled in fear, unsure of what would happen next. He already had the urge to draw his gun. As long as he killed the three in front of him, the matter would be resolved!

At this moment, a slightly old voice sounded from the inner area of the hall. "Eugene, don't cause trouble here."

The bald man, Eugene, slowly turned his body and looked at the person speaking.

This was a man in his fifties. He was wrapped in a thick and fluffy black down jacket, seemingly unable to withstand the winter's cold and humidity. His face was thin, and his sideburns were a little white. He wore a golden watch on his left wrist, and a string of lustrous mala beads on his right hand.

Eugene laughed. "How can it be called causing trouble? I'm just trying to retrieve my lost property."

The middle-aged man emphasized, "Don't settle any disputes at my place. There are plenty of places outside."

Eugene stared into the elder's eyes, his gaze gradually turning fierce.

The elder didn't look away, appearing calm and composed.

"Haha, alright. I'll do it for you, Uncle Sun." Finally, Eugene retracted his gaze. He then looked at Long Yuehong and Bai Chen—who were behind him—and smiled. "I hope we don't bump into each other outside."

Long Yuehong wanted to retort with a few harsh words, but he was inexperienced and couldn't organize his words quickly. He could only watch as Eugene turned around, walked back to the dark-red sofa, and sat down.

At this moment, Bai Chen nudged Long Yuehong's back and whispered, "I'm fine."

Long Yuehong silently heaved a sigh of relief. He turned around and made Bai Chen walk toward the elder sitting in the armchair.

"Uncle Sun," shouted Bai Chen.

Uncle Sun narrowed his eyes slightly and looked at Bai Chen's face for a few seconds before smiling apologetically. "Too many people come and go here. I don't really remember who you are."

After all, people who entered the underground market always respectfully called him Uncle Sun.

"It's fine." Bai Chen's gaze casually swept past the row of bodyguards behind Uncle Sun. She then took out Lin Feifei, Lei Yunsong, and the others' photos and bent down. "I took on a Hunter's Guild mission and wanted to ask if any of them had come to this bar before."

Uncle Sun took the photos and flipped through them. He then shook his head and smiled. "Several Ruin Hunters I know came to ask, but unfortunately, no such people have come to my bars, teahouses, or nightclubs in the past few days. This answer is free because it's worthless."

"Thank you," Bai Chen replied politely.

Uncle Sun smiled and asked, "Are you interested in getting some good stuff? A batch of new things came recently. There's a jeep with stronger cross-country and bulletproof capabilities that First City just produced. There's a batch of heavy weapons—including rocket launchers—marijuana produced by Spirit Island, and more exciting trinkets..."

As a wilderness nomad who had come to Weed City's underground market many times, Bai Chen had heard of Spirit Island, but she didn't know much about it. She only knew that it was also called Paradise Island. It was located outside the Gold Coast, and it was a medium-sized faction. There were no industrial factories on the island, but it was especially suitable for growing plants like marijuana and poppy. Many people in the

Ashlands needed such things to relieve the psychological pressure from the bleak lives they faced, especially those who often needed to fight.

“Do you have any food?” Bai Chen was in no rush to change her questioning. She was replenishing supplies for the team anyway.

Uncle Sun shook his head. “There’s a batch of flour, but it’s already been reserved.”

Bai Chen thanked him again and walked to another person, repeating her previous question.

After going one round, she didn’t obtain any information regarding Lin Feifei or Lei Yunsong. She could only leave with Long Yuehong.

During this process, Long Yuehong kept feeling like Eugene’s gaze was on the two of them, making him feel a chill run down his spine.

After leaving the Today nightclub, Bai Chen silently returned to South Street.

Long Yuehong followed beside her. He wanted to ask several times, but he shut his mouth each time.

In the indescribable silence, they circled around for a while. After confirming that they weren’t being followed, they returned to Ah Fu’s Gun Shop and went up to the second floor.

After they entered the room by the alley, Jiang Baimian closed the door and asked, “How was it?”

“All of them say that they’ve never seen them,” Bai Chen replied truthfully. “I observed their expressions and didn’t discover anything abnormal about them.”

She knew that if someone ‘took’ Lin Feifei in, they definitely wouldn’t say that they had seen her. Therefore, she had to make a judgment based on the other party’s subtle reactions.

“It’s normal.” Jiang Baimian tersely acknowledged it. “I hope the other Ruin Hunters can give us a surprise.”

As the two of them conversed, Long Yuehong glanced at Bai Chen, wondering if he should tell his team leader about Eugene.

As he hesitated, Bai Chen tugged at the gray scarf around her neck and fell silent for a moment. “I encountered an enemy at the underground market. You have to be careful in the future.”

“Enemy?” Jiang Baimian raised her eyebrows.

Shang Jianyao instantly became focused.

Bai Chen fell silent again. After a few seconds, she smiled mysteriously. “A unilateral enemy. I’m the only one who treats him as an enemy. In his eyes, I’m just prey.”

Jiang Baimian thoughtfully gave up on the idea of answering and asked, “What’s his name? Which faction is he from?”

Bai Chen slowly exhaled and said, “Eugene. He’s the leader of a slave-catching team in First City.”

At this point, Bai Chen pursed her lips and said, “I was once captured by him... I was a slave for a period of time...”

Although they had already guessed it, Jiang Baimian and the others were momentarily at a loss for words.

At this moment, Bai Chen raised her right hand and removed the gray scarf around her neck.

After the scarf fell off, her neck was revealed.

Perhaps due to the rare exposure to the sun, the skin around her neck was clearly much fairer. There was a bluish-black tattoo on each side. It was a word and a number: “Female slave, 105.”

Jiang Baimian’s expression revealed some pity, but she quickly restrained her expression and pretended that it was nothing serious. “I see. When we return to the company, get something to cover it. If you don’t trust others, I can learn from them.”

Just as she said that, Shang Jianyao suddenly asked, “What does Eugene look like?”

As she wanted Shang Jianyao and the others to pay attention to Eugene and avoid being implicated, Bai Chen didn’t hesitate to describe him. “He’s about 1.7 meters tall and has a shaved head. On it is the wolf symbol of First City...”

“His body has undergone certain mechanical modifications. It’s said that his core has been transplanted with an artificial heart. This gives him explosive strength that exceeds that of humans and some powerful means. In this regard, he knows how to keep it a secret. Almost no one knows what it is...”

“He’s very afraid of heat. Even in such weather, he’s only wearing a short-sleeved shirt and shorts. This might be related to the mechanical modifications...”

Jiang Baimian muttered to herself as if in thought. "Is there a heat dispersion problem with the mechanical parts obtained from cheaper workshops?"

Shang Jianyao asked, "Where does he live? How many people does his team have?"

Bai Chen's complicated feelings were mostly washed away by these questions. She glanced at Shang Jianyao suspiciously and said, "I just met him too, but he always has many bodyguards by his side."

Shang Jianyao didn't ask any further and fell into deep thought.

Jiang Baimian glanced at him and suddenly smiled at Bai Chen. "It's fine. Recently, we've been moving around separately. He probably doesn't know that we're companions. On the other hand, you have to be careful when you go out these days.

"Yes... Since nobody at the underground market knows, Shang Jianyao and I will go to the various bars and nightclubs to see if there are any other clues. We can also satisfy his desire to dance."

Bai Chen nodded and spoke in a soft voice. "Eugene will also be in the city. He will kidnap good-looking young women and men and sell them to some nobles in First City and the mine supervisors..."

After speaking for a while, she stopped.

Jiang Baimian listened carefully and touched her metal cochlear implant. "It's fine. We are from Pangu Biology!"

Her words were filled with killing intent.

With that said, Jiang Baimian didn't delay any further. She led Shang Jianyao out of the room and went downstairs into the courtyard.

After watching their backs disappear from the door, Bai Chen suddenly sat down on the bottom bunk as if she had lost all her strength. She stroked the bed as if she were searching for something.

Suddenly, a gray scarf appeared in front of her.

Long Yuehong had picked it up from the ground.

...

In the courtyard behind Ah Fu's Gun Shop, Jiang Baimian walked toward the exit as she glanced at Shang Jianyao and chuckled. "What excuse do you plan on finding if I don't take you there?"

“Bathroom,” Shang Jianyao replied as if he already had the answer.

“Can you go to the bathroom for that long?” Jiang Baimian was peeved and amused.

Shang Jianyao replied seriously, “Constipation.”

“...” Jiang Baimian subconsciously raised her hand and held it to her nose and mouth. After two seconds, she looked to the side and coughed. “Oh right, what did Little White say in the end? I only heard a little, so I was too embarrassed to ask.”

Shang Jianyao did not mock her and repeated Bai Chen’s words seriously.

Jiang Baimian narrowed her eyes.

After Shang Jianyao finished speaking, she tersely acknowledged it and smiled. “Next, you can do whatever you want. I only have two requests.”

Chapter 145: People of Action

Shang Jianyao’s eyebrows gradually relaxed. “Alright.”

“Alright my ass! I haven’t even said what my requests are,” Jiang Baimian retorted angrily. She paused and exhaled. “First, it must not affect the investigation of the reason behind Lei Yunsong and his team’s disappearance.

“Second, if you aren’t confident and think that you will expose yourself, switch to gathering intelligence. There will be plenty of opportunities in the future.”

The core content of the two requirements was simple—Shang Jianyao needed to be concealed, and the other was to be careful.

“Alright.” Shang Jianyao still gave the same answer. He then turned around and walked to the team’s jeep. He opened the trunk and rummaged for a baseball cap.

“What can this hide? Uh... Wear your clothes inside out.” Although Jiang Baimian said that, she still took a baseball cap and placed it on her head. She lowered it to cover half of her face.

This had a certain camouflage effect in places with relatively dim lighting.

Shang Jianyao did the same and replied, “A sense of ritual.”

Jiang Baimian looked up and couldn’t be bothered with the fellow beside her.

After leaving the courtyard and turning into South Street, they walked all the way to Wild Wolf Alley.

It was not 8:30 yet. Not only were bars, teahouses, and nightclubs illuminated, but the street lamps outside were also lit, drawing out the pedestrian's shadows—all of varying lengths.

After finding the Today nightclub, Jiang Baimian and Shang Jianyao—who were wearing baseball caps—walked in.

They were met with a heatwave that was completely different from the cold outside, as well as music that sounded increasingly loud and dizzying.

Amidst the constantly changing and colorful strobing lights, Shang Jianyao felt like he had returned home. His body followed the melody and gently swayed rhythmically.

Jiang Baimian couldn't help but purse the corners of her mouth.

However, Shang Jianyao did not join the dancing crowd. He walked to the area near the bar counter and casually found a spot to stand. He stared at the door that led to the underground market without blinking.

This was mentioned in Bai Chen's description. Furthermore, based on the content of her and Long Yuehong's recount, they could determine that Eugene was still inside when they left.

As for whether Eugene had left after the duo left the Today nightclub and before Shang Jianyao and Jiang Baimian came, it was unknown.

Shang Jianyao raised his watch up and shouted at Jiang Baimian, "Wait an hour."

If they still couldn't find the target after an hour, they would have to change tactics.
Nôv(el)B\\jnn

"That's quite a plan..." Jiang Baimian originally wanted to discuss the plan with Shang Jianyao and help him perfect the details, but she had given up on the idea now. She wanted to see what tricks this fellow could come up with.

If there was indeed a mistake, she could only clean up his mess as the team leader.

Amidst the moving melody, Jiang Baimian gently gyrated her body to prevent herself from appearing out of place and unsociable in such an occasion, lest it draw attention to her. During this process, she would send away the people who came to invite her to dance from time to time and help Shang Jianyao block off possible romances.

Although both of them wore baseball caps that were pressed very low, and the light here was more psychedelic than bright, preventing people from seeing their faces clearly, their builds were still good enough to attract people.

After about ten minutes, the wooden door near the bar counter opened, and three people walked out.

The leader was a muscular man with a shaved head. He wore a black T-shirt and bright shorts. Behind him were two bodyguards in black.

Eugene's characteristics were so obvious that Jiang Baimian didn't need to make any additional comparisons to determine her target. She turned her head to look at Shang Jianyao, prepared to remind him to be patient and not rush to head up. She also didn't draw her pistol and fire randomly.

However, Shang Jianyao didn't do what Jiang Baimian was worried about. He seemed to be immersed in the music as he swayed his body from side to side.

After Eugene and the other two approached the nightclub's side door, two of the people drinking in the surrounding area stood up and followed from behind.

At the same time, two people among the swaying crowd on the dance floor stopped and walked to the side door.

These were all Eugene's bodyguards, who had blended in with the surroundings.

"Now," said Jiang Baimian immediately. However, her voice was drowned out by the loud music.

But Shang Jianyao seemed to be waiting for this moment. He strode forward and followed the group like he was another bodyguard.

He stopped when the people in front stopped and walked when the people in front walked. Not only did he have no intention of hiding his tracks, but he also showed that he was blatantly following them.

This naturally didn't escape the attention of the two bodyguards in the rear. They looked at each other. One continued forward, and the other stayed by the side door before turning around to block Shang Jianyao.

The remaining bodyguard waited for Shang Jianyao to approach before picking up his clothes in the strobing, psychedelic light, revealing his pistol. He then questioned in a deep voice, "Bro, what ya doing?"

Shang Jianyao—who had his hat lowered and most of his face hidden in the shadows—smiled condescendingly. "What am I doing? Look, you have weapons, so do I."

As he spoke, he reached into his pocket with his right hand and pulled out half a gun. It was part of Ice Moss.

This made the bodyguard a little nervous, and he considered firing first.

Shang Jianyao seemed not to notice the change in mood and continued, "You were dancing just now, and so was I. So..."

The bodyguard was stunned for a moment before he heaved a sigh of relief. "Are you also one of Boss's secret guards?"

"I specialize in dealing with those with supernatural abilities. I'm not usually here," Shang Jianyao explained seriously. "Where is Boss going next? I received news that someone wants to assassinate him."

The bodyguard instantly became nervous. "We're going to the parking lot to prepare to return to camp."

"The parking lot at the end of the alley?" Shang Jianyao asked.

Thanks to his previous 'shopping' with Jiang Baimian, he was rather familiar with the city layout outside Weed City's North Street. Furthermore, he would occasionally review the hand-drawn map.

If it were anyone else who had just arrived in Weed City, they would definitely have gone to East Street to search for parking.

"Yes," the bodyguard said truthfully. "Then, I have to report it quickly."

"Don't be anxious. Don't alert the enemy. Don't worry; I'm here." Shang Jianyao gave systematic advice patiently. "Which car is Boss using today?"

It was impossible for there to be only one car in a slave-hunting team.

"A black SUV. It's very domineering and bulletproof. Old Geng is waiting over there. You won't miss it." The bodyguard did not hide anything.

Shang Jianyao nodded. "Catch up to them quickly. When you see my gesture later, protect the Boss immediately. Also, keep it a secret from the others! Tell them that you suspect that I'm mentally ill."

"Alright!" The bodyguard turned around and jogged to chase after Eugene and the others.

Shang Jianyao turned his body and spoke to Jiang Baimian, who had quietly snuck nearby. "Parking lot."

With that said, he swung his arms and ran. However, he did not follow the route that Eugene and the others took. Instead, he ran in the opposite direction—back to the exit of Wild Wolf Alley that led to West Street—and circled around the alley beside it.

When he arrived, he quickly changed directions and ran north—toward the area where the parking lot was.

Amidst the sound of footsteps, Shang Jianyao ran as if he were being chased by ten armed thugs or competing with someone in a race.

Of course, there was someone chasing after him, and she was getting closer and closer.

Jiang Baimian's explosive strength and speed were not inferior to Shang Jianyao's. Furthermore, her endurance was clearly better.

Before long, they ran to the end of the alley, took a left, passed by the exit of Wild Wolf Alley, and ran into the parking lot.

This was the benefit of being familiar with the terrain.

At this moment, Eugene and the others had only walked two-thirds of the way.

They first saw a man in a baseball cap running ahead. Following that, a woman in a baseball cap chased after him.

Did he do the deed without paying? Eugene was stunned for a moment before he guessed with a smile.

This was not too rare in Weed City.

Eugene didn't think there was any hidden danger. After all, he had been through hundreds of battles and had encountered many assassinations. He didn't believe that such a joyous, comical, and funny matter would affect him.

After walking for a while, they arrived at the parking lot's entrance. Eugene then questioned the old man guarding the sentry post. "Did someone run in just now?"

Although Eugene didn't think there was anything wrong with the woman chasing after the man, he still had to ask what he needed to ask. It was better to be safe than sorry.

"Yes, I didn't manage to stop them!" the old man grumbled. He then pointed in a direction. "They ran over there."

Upon seeing that his two cars weren't in the same direction, Eugene didn't say anything else. He enjoyed the cold wind and entered the parking lot before strolling to a relatively tall black SUV.

The windows on both sides of the SUV were covered with a dark-colored film that effectively blocked any sniper's line of sight.

At this moment, the driver in a beanie was leaning against the front of the car, smoking a simple cigarette.

"Old Geng, did anyone pass by?" asked the bodyguard that Eugene trusted the most.

Old Geng threw down his cigarette and stepped on it twice. He chuckled and said, "No, I've been watching the entire time."

Eugene nodded and signaled for the bodyguards on both sides to make basic confirmation.

One of the bodyguards walked up, opened the backseat door, and looked inside. Suddenly, he felt a little displeased.

Why are they just watching while I do everything? Why can my boss live in the lap of luxury? I risk my life for him, but all I get is that tiny bit? Why am I doing my best? I should slack off when I can!

With this in mind, the bodyguard in charge of the inspection ended the inspection hastily. He turned around and said, "Boss, no problem."

Eugene felt relieved and walked to the other side of the car, prepared to enter the backseat.

At that moment, he heard a bang.

Someone fired from afar!

Eugene reacted quickly and squatted down, using the bulletproof vehicle as a defense.

Bang! Bang! Bang!

Gunshots constantly sounded, and soil splattered from time to time on the ground. The bodyguards took cover and pulled out their guns to fire back.

Upon seeing this, Old Geng quickly shouted, "Boss, get in. I'll take you back to camp first!"

As he couldn't figure out how many enemies there were, Eugene felt that this wasn't a bad idea. Therefore, he pulled open the passenger door, propped up his left hand, and sat inside.

With a clang, the SUV let out a violent roar and shot out like an arrow. It didn't slow down at all and rushed out of the parking lot as the gunshots behind continued.

At this point, Eugene heaved a sigh of relief and looked at the driver's seat.

His gaze suddenly froze.

The driver beside him—who was focused on driving—was not wearing a beanie like Old Geng's. Instead, he wore a baseball cap.

At this moment, the driver turned his head, revealing a handsome face that was mostly covered by shadows.

The corners of his mouth curled up bit by bit.

Chapter 146: Elimination

The street lamps by the side of the road shone into the vehicle, but they were filtered by the dark windows, making it appear abnormally dim.

This seemed to shroud the driver in shadows, bringing an indescribable horror and coldness with him.

This was a completely different feeling from close combat or a gunfight.

The hair on Eugene's back stood on end. He felt more terrified than ever.

He suddenly braced his body and exerted immense strength, about to activate the machinery inside of him to counterattack at maximum speed. But he suddenly found himself incapable of raising his arms. It felt as if they no longer belonged to him.

The series of counterattacks—which he had expected—encountered obstacles that exceeded his imagination just as they began.

Right on the heels of this, a black muzzle then appeared in front of his eyes.

Eugene immediately felt the metal's coldness on his forehead.

"Be quiet," the driver said emotionlessly.

The driver was none other than Shang Jianyao. After befriending Eugene's driver—Old Geng—and successfully convincing him, he curled up and hid in the space under the driver's seat. When Eugene came in, he immediately got up and started the car.

Jiang Baimian's long-range attack convinced Old Geng of Shang Jianyao's words. He believed that this was a meticulously planned assassination. Furthermore, there was more than one mole among the bodyguards. Therefore, the loyal him could only get the most trustworthy secret guard leader to leave with his boss first.

In order to cooperate with the performance and numb the traitor, Old Geng also followed the instructions of opening and closing the door—an act to show that he had gotten into the car—before rolling on the ground to hide behind a nearby car.

In a dim and chaotic environment, who could distinguish between all of that?

After pressing the Ice Moss pistol to Eugene's forehead, Shang Jianyao controlled the steering wheel with one hand and calmly instructed, "Turn around and have your back facing me."

Upon hearing this, Eugene's eyes narrowed slightly. He slowly shifted his body and turned to the window beside him.

During this process, he paid attention to the other party's gun-wielding hand. He realized that it was very stable and didn't tremble at all. The finger on the trigger was clearly ready to squeeze at any sign of defiance. This prevented Eugene from finding an opportunity.

Shang Jianyao maintained his posture and drove a distance before stepping on the brakes.

Almost at the same time, a figure flipped out from the parking lot's fence, rushed to the SUV's side in two to three steps, pulled open the backseat door, and jumped in.

It was none other than Jiang Baimian—who had put on a pair of black gloves at some point.

She looked at Eugene and said in surprise, "You haven't killed him?"

Just as she said that, Eugene took the opportunity to slide down while the two of them were conversing, moving his head away from the muzzle. At the same time, mechanical sounds came from his body.

Jiang Baimian suddenly leaned forward, stretched out her left hand, and pressed down on Eugene's back.

Countless silver-white electric arcs instantly erupted and leaped onto Eugene, illuminating the car as if it were daytime.

The mechanical sounds in Eugene's body vanished. Even the artificial heart was affected and suffered a certain level of malfunction. It activated its own stress protection.

The bald man's eyes gradually rolled back as smoke and a charred smell emanated from his body.

Upon seeing this, Shang Jianyao retracted his hand—which was holding the gun—and stepped on the accelerator, driving the car again.

As the electric bolts subsided, Eugene's body collapsed into his seat. There were obvious signs of incontinence from his lower body.

Jiang Baimian retracted her left hand and swung it. "Humans with mechanical modifications are relatively afraid of electricity..."

This was because mechanical modifications had to be connected to the human nervous system and had an electric current channel.

Jiang Baimian then snapped at Shang Jianyao. "Shouldn't you shoot him dead the moment he got in the car and drive out of the encirclement? Aren't you worried that he will have a way to counterattack? He's someone who has undergone mechanical modification!"

After Jiang Baimian stopped speaking, Shang Jianyao replied as he drove. "Capturing him alive."

"...Don't set such a lofty target next time," Jiang Baimian advised helplessly. She then took out the small black speaker with a blue bottom—which was slightly larger than her palm—from her large pocket and placed it on the armrest compartment.

"To be honest, its recording and loop playing functions are quite useful. It saved me a lot of bullets."

At this point, she specifically emphasized, "However, don't expect it to really cooperate with you. Without real bullets mixed in, those old foxes won't be deceived. Yes, someone has to cooperate with such an operation."

She had never imagined that Shang Jianyao would actually bring a small speaker with him when he was clearly out doing black ops.

It was only because this speaker was small and easy to carry around. Otherwise, if it was something like the one used by the Hometown caravan, she suspected that Shang Jianyao would carry it while doing the job.

As Jiang Baimian spoke, the SUV turned into an alley by Central Square and stopped at a corner without any surveillance cameras.

“Wake him up.” Shang Jianyao unbuckled his seatbelt and requested help.

“You even wore a seat belt?” Jiang Baimian wanted to laugh when she saw this scene.

One was a ‘killer,’ and the other was a ‘kidnapper.’ When they achieved their goal and were leaving the scene, they actually ‘abided by the law’ and buckled their seat belts!

This isn’t the only problem... Jiang Baimian muttered and stretched out her left hand, using an electric shock to wake Eugene up.

Just as Eugene opened his eyes, he saw a pair of deep eyes.

Shang Jianyao quickly said, “You were kidnapped by me; your body is under my control. So...”

Eugene’s slightly dazed mind became increasingly confused. A few seconds later, he shouted timidly, “Master.”

Shang Jianyao nodded and pressed the front of his baseball cap lower. He then said to Jiang Baimian, “Give him the clothes in the trunk and let him change into them.”

This was something he had confirmed while chatting with Old Geng.

As they occasionally did some abduction, there were always a few sets of clothes used for camouflage in the trunk of Eugene’s car.

Jiang Baimian first confirmed if there were any GPS devices in Eugene’s clothes and the clothes in the trunk. Then, she casually took a few pieces and threw them onto the passenger seat.

Soon, Eugene ‘obediently’ wore black pants and a blue coat. He wore a brown fisherman’s hat and ordinary sunglasses, making him not as distinctive as before.

Smack!

Jiang Baimian patted the back of Shang Jianyao’s shoulder and questioned in exasperation and amusement, “Why did you make him wear sunglasses? It’s late at night! Do you think others won’t remember the suspicious people they’ve seen?”

Are you crazy? Wearing sunglasses at night!?

Shang Jianyao answered awkwardly, "His eyes are too ugly."

"Let him keep his head down then," Jiang Baimian said quickly.

While Eugene was changing, she had already opened the car's fuel tank and used the tools to let some of the fuel inside flow out.

After Eugene took off his sunglasses, Shang Jianyao put away the small speaker. She looked around and identified a direction. "Let's go!"

The three of them walked from this quiet corner to another alley without surveillance. They looked like friendly companions who had just returned from a nightclub dance.

As she approached the alley, Jiang Baimian took out a dark-green grenade, pulled out the ring, and casually threw it back with her left hand.

The grenade accurately landed in the SUV, which had a door open.

Boom!

A loud explosion sounded in the car. The burgeoning flames ignited the fuel around them, triggering a chain reaction.

...

Boom!

Eugene's bodyguards—who were searching for traces of vehicles—didn't miss this commotion. They looked at each other, held their guns, and ran toward the spot where the flames rose.

After the shooting stopped, they realized that Old Geng—who had clearly left with his boss—was still in the parking lot, hiding behind a car.

Back then, the atmosphere was abnormally tense, and everyone was flustered. They had wanted to capture Old Geng—the 'traitor'—but they could only counterattack and shoot him to death because the other party had fired first and shouted about a traitor.

When Old Geng died, his face was filled with pain and confusion as if he were wondering why all of them were traitors and why none of them helped him.

After running a long distance, the bodyguards finally saw the flaming black SUV.

It's over... This thought simultaneously appeared in their minds.

...

On the second floor of Ah Fu's Gun Shop, Bai Chen—who had already returned to her and Long Yuehong's room—lay on the upper bunk bed and stared at the ceiling with her eyes open.

She wanted to sleep, but unbearable scenes flashed through her mind the moment she closed her eyes.

Eugene's fierce eyes, the heavy body that smelled of engine oil on her, the beatings and punishments she encountered if she didn't obey, and the pain of being forcefully dragged away by her hair—all of it surfaced in the depths of her memories, making her body tremble involuntarily.

Her nightmare experiences during that period had become a part of her. The moment she saw Eugene, she reflexively couldn't help but be afraid of him and afraid of resisting.

Suddenly, someone knocked on her room door.

"Who is it?" Long Yuehong—who had been afraid to speak—asked warily.

"Us," Jiang Baimian answered loudly.

Long Yuehong heaved a sigh of relief and walked to the door.

Bai Chen also got off the bed, prepared to hear what clues her team leader and Shang Jianyao had found.

After the door opened, Shang Jianyao rushed past Long Yuehong and stood in front of Bai Chen. His baseball cap had been put away at some point in time, and his clothes had returned to normal. He no longer wore his clothes inside out.

Bai Chen vaguely saw another person beside her team leader—a person in a fisherman's hat and blue coat.

"Who's this?" she asked in confusion.

Shang Jianyao smiled brightly. "I brought you a friend."

Bai Chen was immediately a little stunned. She knew that Shang Jianyao often spoke without any basis, and his train of thought was baffling and incomprehensible. But at times like these, her team leader would often say a few additional words to prevent others from making wild guesses. But now, Jiang Baimian didn't say anything.

After Shang Jianyao turned his body to make room, she finally saw who the so-called 'friend' was.

The muscular Eugene stood there timidly. His originally fierce eyes were filled with helplessness and pleading. He was like a slave that had been 'educated' for more than a year and had yet to die.

Chapter 147: Have It End Here

The moment she saw Eugene, Bai Chen's body began to tremble the moment. She felt as if he would slap or kick her in the next second, forcing her to do all kinds of disgusting and degrading things.

As long as she dared to resist, she would suffer double the punishment—a kind that would result in death.

After suffering failures in the first few attempts, her tortured mind was no longer clear. Bai Chen was muddle-headed, timid, and subservient.

Upon seeing Bai Chen, Eugene seemed to recall parts of his identity. His eyes gradually turned fierce as he straightened his back.

At this moment, Shang Jianyao took a step toward him.

Eugene's body also began to tremble. His back hunched as if he couldn't bear the weight of his body any longer. His fierce eyes were no longer filled with malice and were filled with a pleading expression instead.

If Eugene had a tail, he would definitely be shaking it.

It was only then that Long Yuehong confirmed that he wasn't hallucinating.

F*ck! Isn't this Eugene, that terrifying slave-catching team's leader!? Why was he brought back by Team Leader and Shang Jianyao, and why is he virtually wagging his tail and begging for mercy? Where are his bodyguards? What about his mechanical modifications?

The explosion at North Street just now was an assault on Eugene's convoy by Team Leader and Shang Jianyao? Then, Shang Jianyao made him a victim of Inference Clowning?

Didn't Team Leader say that she was going to a nightclub to dance and search for clues? How did such a huge matter happen? Furthermore, they acted so casually as if they had gone out shopping, bumped into a friend by chance, and had invited him home!

On the other side, Bai Chen gradually returned to her senses and figured out what had happened.

With her experience and knowledge, it wasn't difficult for her to guess that Shang Jianyao and her team leader's dance and search for clues before leaving was only an excuse.

They were after Eugene from the beginning.

In less than an hour, they brought back Eugene—who was heavily protected and also very strong personally.

This was many times more difficult than assassinating him.

Bai Chen asked herself whether she would've taken the chance of sniping Eugene if she didn't have the corresponding psychological barrier and had sufficient intelligence to support her. However, it was impossible to capture him alive.

Bai Chen's breathing became heavier as her body trembled slightly. She tried her best to raise her head and look at Eugene.

But when their eyes met, Eugene's eyes became fierce once again. It seemed as though he didn't want to show weakness in front of his former prey.

Shang Jianyao quickly made a terse grunt.

Eugene's eyes flickered as he hurriedly looked at the ground.

After such a long confrontation without suffering an assault, Bai Chen slowly calmed down and came to a realization—the seemingly invincible devil appeared to be all show and no substance.

He had no way of ever hurting her again.

Bai Chen got a hold of her trembling bit by bit, and her face contorted slightly. Her eyes began to redden, and her breathing became abnormally heavy.

Suddenly, Bai Chen turned her body to the left and tightened her right thigh, driving her calf and toes. She made them lash out like a whip toward the space between Eugene's legs.

Eugene instinctively wanted to dodge, but he couldn't react in time.

Pa!

He clamped his legs together, gripped his crotch, and collapsed. The pain was so intense that he couldn't even scream. Only the sound of hollow gasping lingered in his throat; he was like a rooster that had its neck gripped.

Hiss... Long Yuehong felt a chill run down his spine, and he unconsciously turned his body to the side.

Jiang Baimian secretly clicked her tongue and didn't disturb Bai Chen.

Phew! Phew...

After kicking out, Bai Chen bent down and propped her hands on her knees. She panted heavily as if she had used all her strength. Her eyes seemed to be a little misty, and droplets of water dripped to the ground, spreading out.

Bai Chen quickly wiped her eyes with her sleeve and stood up. She then looked at Eugene—who was curled up like a shrimp—and let out a long breath. After that, she spoke to Shang Jianyao and Jiang Baimian in a slightly hoarse voice. “Can I get Auntie Nan to deal with him together? She will definitely keep it a secret.”

Upon thinking of the dark scarf around Auntie Nan's neck, Jiang Baimian nodded slightly. “Sure.”

Bai Chen immediately went out and walked down the stairs to the bottom.

When he realized that Eugene had fainted from the pain, Long Yuehong couldn't help but ask, “Y-you guys didn't leave just to capture him, right?”

Shang Jianyao smiled and replied, “This is called taking precautions.”

“Isn't... Isn't this too rushed?” Long Yuehong found it a little unacceptable.

Shang Jianyao thought for a moment. “It would be a pity not to put on a horror story during such a good night.”

Jiang Baimian quietly rolled her eyes and stood by the ajar door, paying attention to the commotion outside.

Before long, Bai Chen walked into the room with Auntie Nan, who wore a dark-red cotton coat.

Auntie Nan—who had her hair tied up in a high bun, looking very charming—carefully closed the door and watched Bai Chen flip the unconscious Eugene around.

Her mouth opened, forming a small circle that didn't close for a long time. Her body slowly trembled, much stronger than Bai Chen's previous trembles.

Shaking, she lowered her head and softly laughed as if she were whimpering. As she laughed, she quickly walked to Eugene's side, squatted, and pulled up his coat and T-shirt.

Eugene's chest and abdomen were revealed, shimmering with a metallic luster under the light. This was embedded with a series of machinery, which had several sockets that could be opened.

"Injection sockets?" Jiang Baimian muttered 'softly' to herself.

Her words snapped Auntie Nan to attention as she laughed maniacally. "It's him! It's really him!"

As she laughed, her legs went limp. She sat on the ground and squeezed out a faint sob from the depths of her throat.

Bai Chen didn't stop her. She waited for Auntie Nan to calm down.

Auntie Nan slowly stood up and nodded at Shang Jianyao, Jiang Baimian, and Long Yuehong. "Thank you."

"It's only right," Shang Jianyao replied smoothly.

Jiang Baimian wanted to glare at him, but she felt that there was nothing wrong with his answer.

Auntie Nan paused and curiously asked, "Did you come to Weed City this time to deal with him?"

She thought that the people opposite her were helpers that Bai Chen had hired for revenge.

"Uh..." Jiang Baimian hesitated, unsure if she should deny the other party's guess. In the face of such an inconvenient situation, she had a very good plan.

The next second, she turned around and looked at Shang Jianyao.

Shang Jianyao immediately replied, "It was convenient."

"..." Auntie Nan was speechless.

...

In the basement of Ah Fu's Gun Shop.

Eugene slowly woke up and saw a glowing, yellow light bulb.

What is this place? He snapped to his senses and began recalling his previous encounter. He then remembered that he had been attacked and had taken the initiative to follow the attacker to a certain place.

After that, Bai Chen had kicked him in his groin. This brought him intense pain that he had never experienced in his life.

At the thought of this, Eugene felt the discomfort in his lower body again. The stinging pain followed him like a shadow.

Several faces then appeared in front of him, looking down at him.

One of them belonged to Bai Chen, whom he had previously encountered. He was a little familiar with the other few faces, but he couldn't recall who they belonged to.

"He... He..." Eugene wanted to say something, but he realized that his mouth was stuffed full.

Bai Chen stared at him and smiled. "There's no need to struggle. All the machinery on you has been destroyed."

With that said, she took off the gray scarf around her neck and revealed the two markings—'female slave' and '105.'

Beside her, Auntie Nan undid her scarf. In the same spot were similar bluish-black symbols. One was 'female slave,' and the other was '98.'

The women standing beside her also took off their scarves, revealing the marks on their necks.

Eugene immediately understood what was going on. He wanted to mock and deride them, but he also felt fear from the bottom of his heart.

Bai Chen ignored him and turned to look at Auntie Nan. "Are you doing the honors first, or should I?"

Auntie Nan fell silent for a few seconds before gritting her teeth. "Let me do it." She then picked up a snow-white dagger beside her.

Eugene knew that the situation wasn't good. He tried his best to make his gaze ferocious to intimidate the other party and struggled violently.

Upon seeing those familiar, terrifying eyes, Auntie Nan's body couldn't help but tremble again. She shakily raised the dagger in her hand, took a few breaths, and suddenly stabbed down.

As the feeling of the sharp blade entering flesh entered her brain, she finally seemed to break free from invisible restraints.

“For you!

“For you!

“All yours!”

She cried out as the dagger in her hand stabbed down crazily.

...

Outside the underground chamber, Jiang Baimian and Shang Jianyao leaned against the wall on one side and quietly listened to the cries, shouts, and curses coming from inside.

After a while, everything finally calmed down.

They waited for a few more minutes before Auntie Nan opened the door. Her body was covered in blood.

Jiang Baimian curiously looked inside, unable to connect the badly mangled corpse to Eugene.

Shang Jianyao wanted to say something, but he tightly shut his mouth again.

“We’ll seal up this chamber tonight. Nobody will be able to open it again.” Auntie Nan hoarsely informed Jiang Baimian and Shang Jianyao about how she would deal with the corpse.

As she spoke, she sighed and laughed self-deprecatingly. “This was originally a place we specially built to hide because we were afraid of Eugene and the others’ pursuit. Who knew that it would become his tomb? I hope his soul is also sealed here, never to be freed.”

Clap! Clap! Clap!

Shang Jianyao applauded, indicating that she had said it very well.

This stunned everyone present.

“Alright, get busy. We’re going up.” Jiang Baimian quickly tried to smooth things over. “If you need any help, you can look for us anytime.”

Auntie Nan nodded and laughed. "Your rent will be waived. Unfortunately, I don't have time tonight. Otherwise, I can give you some service."

"It's fine. After we escaped, we didn't dare wander around. We could only stay here and make a living with the gun shop. Occasionally, we use our bodies to provide for our lives. Don't worry; we are selective about our targets and have taken protective measures. Our bodies are still considered healthy."

"Haha, men will do; likewise for women."

Jiang Baimian immediately coughed. "We'll talk about it later. We'll talk about it later."

The Old Task Force trio quickly returned to the second floor and walked to their rooms.

Bai Chen suddenly stopped and stood at the door. With her back facing Shang Jianyao and Jiang Baimian, she said in a low voice, "Thank you."

Chapter 148: Self-inflicted Tragedy

"Ah, what did you say? The one digging their ear and asking wasn't Jiang Baimian, but Shang Jianyao."

This made Bai Chen's body stiffen. She then pushed open the door and walked in without saying anything.

At the same time, Jiang Baimian turned her head and angrily glared at Shang Jianyao.

"I helped you with the voice-over," Shang Jianyao said sincerely.

"Although I really didn't hear what Little White said, I could guess it. You destroyed the mood and feeling!" Jiang Baimian felt pained. "That was such a good opportunity to build camaraderie!"

As she spoke, she opened the door and entered the room.

After closing the door, her expression changed as she smiled at Shang Jianyao. "You might've even missed the opportunity to sleep with Little White because of this. In that situation, if you say something warm or heroic, she might change rooms with me after letting her emotions get the better of her."

Shang Jianyao shook his head solemnly. "It's not suitable."

"Yo, you know this?" Jiang Baimian sized up Shang Jianyao.

Shang Jianyao replied seriously, "She doesn't like dancing. We're not suitable."

“...” Jiang Baimian didn’t know if Shang Jianyao was joking or if he really thought so. Hence, she could only play the same game. “I thought you would say that a lover would only affect your saving of humanity.”

“The relationship between having sex is different from that of a lover,” Shang Jianyao explained in a tone that suggested Jiang Baimian had comprehension problems.

“...You sure know how to differentiate.” Jiang Baimian felt that she couldn’t gain the upper hand in such a topic. She quickly inquired, “Is your Inference Clowning more effective than before? After Eugene became your slave, he actually became so afraid, seeming as if he had been educated for a long time. Also, your routine doesn’t seem to be limited to ‘that’s how you are, and so am I?’ It’s no longer about finding common ground?”

“It could be done in the past, but it had to be a fact that was closely related to the target and had already happened. Different facts will result in different inferences. It might not be biased toward me; I have to make a choice or take the initiative to create one.” Shang Jianyao answered the latter question first.

His answer to the previous one was: “I didn’t know why Eugene became like that either. They weren’t that effective when used on the bodyguards and driver.”

Jiang Baimian sat on the lower bunk and thought for a moment. “That’s true. You used it three times tonight, but the first few rounds didn’t have exaggerated effects. Maybe... Inference Clowning’s effects are also related to the target’s cognition?”

“Eugene has been capturing and training slaves for a long time. In his heart, he definitely has a ‘standard’ for true qualified slaves. When he believes himself to be your slave, he begins to use this ‘standard’ to standardize his actions. Hence, he trembled in fear and didn’t dare resist when he saw you?”

“If it were anyone else, they wouldn’t have acted so exaggeratedly, even if they treated themselves as your slave. This is because they have no idea what a qualified slave would look like. Due to this, they won’t be able to match the details perfectly and will only submit to a lower degree.”

Shang Jianyao thought for a moment and said, “That’s possible.”

Jiang Baimian tersely acknowledged his words and continued, “This is equivalent to adding a self-hypnosis after being influenced by Inference Clowning. Therefore, the effects are surprisingly good.”

At this point, she laughed. “In a sense, this is called a self-inflicted tragedy. Think about it. Could it be that Eugene has never trained a slave that completely meets his ‘standards’ his entire life? In the end, the most perfect slave that meets his ‘standards’ is actually himself?”

“Interesting, how interesting...”

“Life is always filled with the feeling that we are bound by the machinations of fate. At this moment...” Shang Jianyao began to speak in a magnetic broadcasting voice.

“Stop, stop talking!” Jiang Baimian immediately interrupted him to prevent any inauspicious words from being uttered.

Shang Jianyao sat on the stool in front of the table regretfully.

After two seconds, he suddenly questioned, “Eugene mainly creates slaves; then, who buys the slaves?”

Jiang Baimian sighed. “I’ve already thought about this. Don’t ask first; wait for Little White to say it herself. This might have something to do with why she wants to undergo genetic modification...”

After a moment of silence, Jiang Baimian looked at Shang Jianyao and said seriously, “Do you remember what you have to do?”

“After-action review. Every completed mission requires a recap,” Shang Jianyao replied skillfully.

“That’s right.” Jiang Baimian’s eyebrows relaxed. “Think about it from the beginning. Do you think that you left any flaws that would make it easy for others to track you down?”

Shang Jianyao thought for a moment and said, “The bodyguard who I first used Inference Cloning on. Back then, the lights occasionally brightened and dimmed at the nightclub’s side door. Although I kept wearing the baseball cap, he was much shorter than me. He was 1.7 meters tall at most; it’s possible that he saw my face.

“When recalling the matter, he will also discover that he has been affected. This will expose my Inference Cloning ability to a certain extent.”

Jiang Baimian nodded. “That’s right.”

She then laughed. “When I fired to create chaos, he was the target of my first few shots. He should be dead by now.”

When Shang Jianyao spoke to the bodyguard, she had memorized his looks and characteristics.

“As for Eugene, those bodyguards were rather professionally trained. They kept blocking his body, preventing me from targeting a suitable spot. Otherwise, it wouldn’t have been so troublesome.” After Jiang Baimian sighed, she said to Shang Jianyao, “Continue.”

Shang Jianyao followed the process and picked up the details. "It was easy for us to attract attention when we ran to the parking lot. We might become suspects after the incident."

"We ran so fast and wore baseball caps. There weren't many street lamps, so no one could see our faces clearly." Jiang Baimian smiled. "When we ran, I deliberately lowered my back. This should cause the witnesses to make errors in their visual perception and give the wrong height description."

"Wasn't it to defeat me?" Shang Jianyao was a little surprised. In order for Jiang Baimian not to catch up to him, he switched to a similar jogging posture. This allowed him to be faster.

"Do you think I'm mentally ill too?" Jiang Baimian replied angrily. "Back then, our clothes were also worn inside out. Our appearances and characteristics basically don't match what we wear during daytime."

As for when they were in a nightclub, under such lights and in such an environment, and with them not dancing with anyone... It was impossible for anyone to see their faces with their baseball caps constantly lowered. At most, they would be remembered as two people.

Shang Jianyao continued, "The driver was next, but there were no lights in the parking lot. I also deliberately maintained a certain distance from him. He probably couldn't see my face, but he might expose my Inference Clowning abilities."

"I told him that there was more than one traitor among the bodyguards. When the bodyguards discover that he's still in the parking lot and storm over aggressively, he might very well fire in response to the agitation and trigger a new round of gunfighting..."

"Good job. As long as they can't connect it to you, it's fine even if your abilities are exposed." Jiang Baimian praised him before saying, "The driver hid too quickly. I couldn't lock onto him, or I could have eliminated him on the spot."

She then asked, "When you hid in the car, weren't you afraid that there would be an Awakened beside Eugene or that he was an Awakened himself and sensed that there was someone in the car in advance?"

Time was of the essence back then. Since Shang Jianyao was confident, she hadn't asked any further.

Shang Jianyao was rather calm. "Awakened should be able to disguise themselves so that they won't be sensed by other Awakened."

Jiang Baimian asked in a very studious manner, "What if a figure is seen or footsteps are heard?"

“The disguise will fail. As long as the other party can determine your existence through their five senses, the disguise will fail,” Shang Jianyao replied truthfully.

“It’s pretty magical...” Jiang Baimian commented. She didn’t ask what would happen if Eugene and the others could sense electric signals because it was almost impossible.

In the Ashlands, only Pangu Biology and White Knights could steadily carry out genetic enhancement and produce the corresponding liquid. The only faction that could carry out genetic modification and had a high chance of success was Pangu Biology.

Genetic modification that could allow one to sense electric signals was a secret development of Pangu Biology. Its technology was not even mature, so it wasn’t wrong to call it unique.

Of course, Jiang Baimian didn’t dare to make guarantees. She wasn’t sure if such technology existed in a relatively mysterious place like the Eighth Research Institute.

Shang Jianyao continued his review. He skipped the part about why he didn’t fire as soon as Eugene boarded the car and talked about the aftermath. “Any traces that might’ve been left in the car were blown up by you...”

“On the way back, you stayed some distance away from us. It wouldn’t make the other people we encountered think that we were a group of three...”

“We had already removed our disguises in an area without surveillance cameras. It’s very difficult for witnesses to link us to what happened there...”

Jiang Baimian quietly listened and nodded. “That’s about it. The biggest problem is that you didn’t kill Eugene directly but tried to capture him alive. This brought about many variables and complicated things. Fortunately, there weren’t many accidents, and they were all resolved.”

After sharing her criticisms, Jiang Baimian looked at Shang Jianyao suspiciously. “Apart from capturing him alive, did you have any other motives?”

Shang Jianyao fell silent for a moment before saying, “I wanted to scare him.”

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

At this moment, a commotion sounded from outside.

Jiang Baimian immediately stood up, walked to the table, and looked out the window.

At this moment, the power supply wasn’t cut off yet. The street lamps on every street were lit, allowing Jiang Baimian to see two to three city guards in olive uniforms with submachine guns enter the alley ahead and question passersby.

Light similarly rushed into the sky from the city gates. There seemed to be many people there as well, and it was noisy.

Jiang Baimian nodded thoughtfully. "Eugene's slave-hunting team wants to enter the city and personally hunt the murderer to save their boss?"

This was her initial judgment based on the current situation.

She then laughed. "We sure stirred up a hornet's nest."

Chapter 149: Countermeasure

The city guards in the alley questioned a few passersby—who had returned home—and the bosses of the shops that were still open. They then went elsewhere; clearly, they didn't find anything.

At this moment, the commotion at the city gates remained huge. It hadn't subsided.

Knock! Knock! Knock!

Someone knocked on Jiang Baimian and Shang Jianyao's door.

"Who is it?" Jiang Baimian turned around and asked, not panicking at all.

"Me." Long Yuehong's voice came from outside.

Only then did Shang Jianyao walk over and open the door.

He and Jiang Baimian could sense two people outside the door, but they couldn't confirm their identities. All they could do was ask. This was because their attention had been completely focused on the alley, preventing them from grasping if the person who knocked had come from the opposite room.

After Long Yuehong entered the room, he fearfully asked, "Will they come here to investigate?"

He was still relatively careful. After Bai Chen entered the room and closed the wooden door, he controlled his volume and asked the question.

Jiang Baimian replied confidently, "It will really be unbelievable if the people of Weed City can lock onto us like this."

This calmed Long Yuehong down significantly.

Jiang Baimian looked at Bai Chen—whose eyes were slightly red and swollen but overall in good shape—and added with a smile, "It's fine even if we are discovered."

Don't we already have a plan for retreat? However, we have to bring Auntie Nan and the others along and get them to open shop elsewhere."

Their plan was: Rush into the courtyard before any hostiles did and drive straight to the end of East Street.

There was a city gate that was perennially closed. Relatively few city guards were stationed there.

When the time came, they could use the Death rocket launcher to blast open the city gate forcefully and drive away into the night.

In the Ashlands, this was not a rare occurrence. Many Ruin Hunters followed the rule of 'might is reason.' If forced into a corner, they could do anything. At worst, they wouldn't come to Weed City in the future and would pay attention to any missions that had a warrant for them.

If one were stronger, they could also cull the Ruin Hunters that had taken on missions to capture them.

For teams like Jiang Baimian and the others—who came from elsewhere and had a large faction backing them—they could be a little more unbridled considering how they didn't have any relatives or friends locally.

What has your Weed City's rules got to do with us?

Of course, the premise for all of this was that one had sufficient strength. Otherwise, one would be killed on the spot before they could cause trouble.

Long Yuehong felt increasingly at ease when he thought of the contingency plan.

At this moment, Jiang Baimian changed the topic. "However, there's something wrong with Little White. Eugene was attacked less than an hour after he met you, so it's inevitable that people will suspect you."

The dead bodyguard had been on the dance floor, not the two people that had protected Eugene inside the underground market.

Upon hearing this, Shang Jianyao clenched his right fist and slapped his left palm with a vexed and regretful expression.

"What are you thinking about?" Jiang Baimian asked.

"After controlling Eugene, I should've driven the car back and killed those bodyguards." Shang Jianyao's tone indicated that he was still not careful enough.

As long as they were dead, there would be no witnesses. Then, nobody would connect Bai Chen to the matter.

Jiang Baimian was speechless.

After a few seconds, she rubbed her temples and sighed. "That will cause too many uncertainties to arise in the matter. The longer the delay, the harder it will be for us to leave the scene undetected. Besides, those bodyguards aren't weak. Even if you have Awakened abilities, you might not be able to kill them all. You might even put yourself in danger.

"If one or two of them escape, you might be exposed."

At this moment, the commotion in the city gate area gradually subsided.

Jiang Baimian then asked Bai Chen, "Does Eugene have many enemies?"

"Yes. There are many who have conflicting interests with him and the motivation to kill him," answered Bai Chen calmly. "Even if it's limited to Weed City, there are many such people and factions."

Jiang Baimian nodded slightly. "That's good."

She then asked about something else. "How many people are in Eugene's slave-hunting team? How's their firepower?"

Upon hearing this question, Shang Jianyao's eyes suddenly lit up.

Bai Chen thought for a moment and said, "First City's slave hunters are divided into two types. The first type is related to the army and can be considered a semi-formal organization. The second type works through corrections. They form their own team after obtaining a slave permit. Eugene's slave hunters are the latter.

"But even so, he has 50 to 60 people, many cars, machine guns, and cannons that can destroy an ordinary wilderness nomad settlement..." Bai Chen fell silent for a moment before adding, "Eugene is a trusted aide of an Elder in First City's Senate. His team might have controlled weapons."

"No wonder..." Jiang Baimian said in relief. "No wonder Eugene's slave hunters dared to attack Weed City."

Of course, this was only her personal guess. She couldn't be sure; after all, she hadn't seen the situation at the city gate with her own eyes.

After slowly exhaling, Jiang Baimian frowned and said, "What I'm hesitating about now is whether I should let Little White go into the streets in the next two days. If we let her move about, someone will definitely get her to help with the investigation.

"Even if she's less suspicious and was never seen at the scene, there will still be such a process. Besides, this isn't the company's internal department. The investigators will definitely ask about everything and use all kinds of means. They might even get Little White to bring them around this building. That will be relatively troublesome. We might be exposed if we aren't careful.

"But if we don't, won't her sudden disappearance be even more suspicious?"

Bai Chen thought for a moment and frankly said, "I don't know which one to choose either."

"It's fine; let me think about it. I'll give you an answer tomorrow morning." Jiang Baimian first consoled Bai Chen before looking around and smiling. "If I can't figure it out, let's discuss it together."

Just as she said that, the lights in the room were switched off.

The few street lamps in the alley were swallowed by the darkness.

It was time for the daily lights-out again.

Upon seeing that the commotion outside had calmed down, Jiang Baimian made Long Yuehong and Bai Chen return to their rooms to sleep and stop worrying about this matter.

When only she and Shang Jianyao were left in the pitch-black room, Shang Jianyao suddenly said, "I have a solution."

"What is it?" Jiang Baimian raised her guard.

Shang Jianyao calmly said, "Take advantage of the night to sneak out of the city and wipe out Eugene's slave camp. As long as they are gone, the matter will be resolved."

Without the victim's associates, Weed City would probably just be perfunctory with the investigations.

"Good idea." Jiang Baimian clapped, perfectly emulating Shang Jianyao. She then said, "The only problem now is: how can the two of us take down an entire camp's armed personnel?"

Shang Jianyao seemed to have thought of a plan and opened his mouth. “First, I pretend to have a clue and talk to the guards at the camp entrance. I will then become friends with them.

“After that, I’ll get them to bring me to the camp’s current in-charge. I’ll then seize the opportunity and become friends with the person-in-charge.

“After doing this, using the excuse of having found a clue and preparing for action, I’ll get the person-in-charge to gather all the members at the place where they store the ammunition.

“Finally, we’ll each throw a grenade in to prevent any accidents.

“If you don’t think it’s enough with just the two of us and that it’s too dangerous considering a 1:30 ratio, you can get Bai Chen and Long Yuehong to provide support. A 1:15 ratio is within reasonable limits.

“Reasonable my ass!” Jiang Baimian cursed in exasperation and amusement. “Do you think you’re Master Jingfa—steel all over, unafraid of bullets?”

After cursing, Jiang Baimian frankly said, “Actually, this plan is really feasible. Although it’s very crazy, it seems like it can achieve its goal. The only problem is that the timing isn’t right.”

She said seriously, “If Eugene’s slave hunters can’t enter the city, and the person-in-charge has a certain amount of experience, he will definitely have all his subordinates armed for the night. Considering the many enemies and hostile factions they have, they will shoot anyone who dares approach the camp.

“Even if he didn’t give such an order, there will definitely be a sentry every few steps. On the way to meet the person-in-charge, you will encounter many slave hunters. Are you sure they won’t have a short exchange with your new friend and cause Inference Clowning to fail?”

Upon seeing Shang Jianyao’s faint disappointment, Jiang Baimian smiled. “Sleep in peace. I’ve already thought of a solution.”

“What is it?” Shang Jianyao asked.

Jiang Baimian laughed. “I’ll tell you in the morning in case you can’t sleep.”

...

The next morning, it was still very dark at around 6 a.m.

Shang Jianyao had already sat up and was waiting for Jiang Baimian to wake up and tell him what the solution was.

After a while, Jiang Baimian climbed down from the top bunk and excitedly said to him, "I've thought of a solution!"

Shang Jianyao looked at her and asked with a frown, "Didn't you figure it out last night?"

Jiang Baimian was stunned until she recalled what she had said before Shang Jianyao slept. She then laughed dryly. "As a team leader, maintaining morale is always the first choice. Besides, didn't I already think of it? There are always more solutions than difficulties!"

She put on a posture of 'ask me what idea I've come up with.'

Shang Jianyao fell silent for a few seconds before asking, "Did you not sleep the entire night?"

"...That's not important." Jiang Baimian's expression almost collapsed. She barely managed to maintain her tall, lofty figure.

Shang Jianyao then returned to the topic at hand. "What's the solution?"

Jiang Baimian's smile gradually widened. "Get Little White to cooperate with the investigation. However, we can make some preparations in advance and let the investigation proceed under expected situations, allowing the results to be under our control."

Upon seeing the puzzled Shang Jianyao, Jiang Baimian smiled and added, "It's true that Little White never attacked Eugene. This is something that can be verified.

"As long as you use Inference Clowning in advance to make her stop believing that we are companions and that she has never participated in the subsequent execution or even thought about it, she can pass any investigation, including any possible Awakened means.

"We will then wait until the investigation is over and remove the influence." At this point, Jiang Baimian smiled like a fox that snuck off with a chick. "We can also time it so that the investigators are familiar with us. For example, Oudick, who is suspected to be capable of influencing dreams.

"Aren't you experienced in keeping people lucid in a dream?"

Chapter 150: Double Effect

Shang Jianyao instantly became excited. "But how can we get Oudick to question Bai Chen?"

In the dark room, Jiang Baimian walked to the window and looked at the silent alley. She smiled and said, "This requires us to take the initiative to create the necessary conditions.

"Think about it. Be it in terms of appearance or weapon of choice, Little White is worlds apart from the attackers. Furthermore, she's a poor Ruin Hunter with no background. It's unlikely that she has the support of a powerful faction. Hence, she's definitely ranked last on the suspect list.

"It can even be said that, apart from having a grudge with Eugene and coincidentally encountering him before his accident, there's nothing worth suspecting.

"Such people often won't receive much attention during the cursory investigations. We can wait a while until the city defense forces and the representatives of Eugene's gang are dispersed to investigate the more suspicious people and factions. After that, we can make Little White go to the Hunter's Guild and take the initiative. She will then take on the mission of finding her to assist in the investigation. This will show how open she is.

"After that, she needs to emphasize that she only trusts the Hunter's Guild and will only be questioned within the guild. In other places, such a request will definitely not be fulfilled. However, Weed City is different. The Hunter's Guild and Castellan Manor are, to a certain extent, one entity. There's no fundamental difference between accepting inquiries at the Hunter's Guild and receiving inquiries at the City Defense Command's headquarters.

"At the same time, we'll get Little White to emphasize that she's still busy with life and that she still has missions she has yet to complete. Her time is very limited, so she can urge the Hunter's Guild to send people to question her as soon as possible and carry out the investigation.

"Anyone who has been a Ruin Hunter can understand this. In that case, it's only logical for the Hunter's Guild to choose a person skilled in interrogation and investigation from the list of direct associates or sufficiently trusted hunters under the premise that Little White isn't highly suspicious while the city's defense forces and Eugene's gang are preoccupied."

Shang Jianyao listened seriously and nodded. "This can't guarantee that Oudick will be in charge of Bai Chen."

Experts who could accumulate credit points and be assigned the rank of Advanced Hunter were sufficiently trustworthy and cooperative in the Hunter's Guild's eyes.

“There’s definitely no guarantee. I can only say that the possibility is very high.” Jiang Baimian smiled again. “Have you noticed that Oudick has a tendency to abuse his abilities? This abuse doesn’t mean that he uses them against people during unnecessary occasions. Instead, he seems to be very accustomed to using the corresponding abilities to resolve problems. Even if the problem isn’t serious, and there are other solutions...”

At this point, Jiang Baimian was suddenly a little speechless because she realized that the subsequent plan also relied on Shang Jianyao’s abilities more. However, she quickly found a reason to convince herself and continued speaking.

“Back then, there were many Ruin Hunters in Red Silk Alley. Many people came and went, yet Oudick actually dared to make Old Clothing Bazaar’s boss fall asleep, allowing him to obtain the corresponding scene and find clues. He wasn’t afraid of being exposed at all. This means that he’s skilled and bold. He’s very confident and isn’t afraid of accidents.

“Would such a person restrain himself when completing other missions? Would he leave behind a reputation for being good at finding clues, breaking through the target’s psychological defenses, and obtaining a real answer in his Hunter career?”

“Would a person with such a reputation be the first person that the Hunter’s Guild considers when searching for a corresponding helper? We better confirm that Oudick is in the guild lobby before letting Little White enter.

“Yes... There shouldn’t be anyone in the local Hunter’s Guild who’s good at this. Otherwise, it wouldn’t have been Oudick who took the lead to investigate Liu Dazhuang’s assassination.”

This was a description that excluded their team.

Shang Jianyao agreed and said, “The only problem is that we still have to determine if Oudick is an Awakened in aspects regarding dreams and sleep.”

“Therefore, we have to make preparations.” Jiang Baimian had a plan in mind and said with a smile, “On the one hand, it’s to prevent hypnotic and bewitching abilities. On the other hand, it’s to prevent influence from dreams.”

After saying that, Jiang Baimian recalled something and quickly asked, “Can your Inference Clowning stack the effects?”

This was the crux of the problem.

Shang Jianyao thought for a moment and said, “I’ve never tried it. In theory, it’s possible, but the different effects must not contradict each other.”

“Then, let’s give it a try later.” Jiang Baimian heaved a sigh of relief.

Shang Jianyao thought for a moment and asked again, “What if it’s an Awakened ability related to memories?”

He seemed to have encountered one before.

“Then, there’s no hope. It’s not like you can control memories.” Jiang Baimian shrugged. “If that’s the case, Little White’s true memories will be triggered, and the corresponding Inference Clowning effects will be removed.

“Yes, we’ll need to get her to call for help immediately. We’ll rush in and bring her and Little Red out. We’ll then drive them out of Weed City. This requires us to drive the jeep to the parking spot closest to the Hunter’s Guild and place all our supplies in it.”

This was the worst-case scenario.

Back then, although Jiang Baimian had made two requests of Shang Jianyao to prevent him from affecting the subsequent missions, she didn’t stop him when they really began carrying out the operation.

Her original plan was to gather information first and take action in a few days. That way, the probability of people suspecting Bai Chen would be even lower. She could even deliberately leave clues behind in the attack to frame a hostile faction of Eugene’s gang.

Unexpectedly, Shang Jianyao was a man of action.

She could only think: At most, we’ll change cars and disguise ourselves before coming back into the city.

Given the messy situation in Weed City, this was not wishful thinking.

In short, helping Bai Chen vent her anger was more important than completing the mission! It wasn’t like there was nobody else available in the company. It was not like the Old Task Force had to do the deed.

Finally, Jiang Baimian concluded, “Nothing has a 100% chance of success. The most important thing is to be prepared for failure.”

When the sky lit up a little, Bai Chen took the initiative to knock on the door and voiced her thoughts. “It’s better if Long Yuehong and I disappear for a period of time. This won’t affect you and Shang Jianyao. You can continue investigating the reason behind the disappearance behind Lei Yunsong’s team.”

At most, they could stay with Auntie Nan for a week or two. It might even be shorter.

“I’ve also considered this method, but there’s a better solution now,” Jiang Baimian replied with a smile.

Jiang Baimian explained her plan, but she didn’t elaborate in case it affected Inference Clowning’s effects.

Bai Chen thought for a moment and said, “We can give it a try.”

Long Yuehong was a little worried. “Isn’t it too risky?”

“I can only say that it’s indeed a little risky. After that, we have to match our statements with Auntie Nan and the others.” Jiang Baimian didn’t persuade Bai Chen forcefully.

She looked at Bai Chen and said, “It’s up to you to decide which one to choose. In short, remember one thing—no matter what plan you use, it won’t make much of a difference to Shang Jianyao and me. What’s important is your own thoughts.”

Bai Chen fell into deep thought. After a while, she said, “We are unaware of how things will develop with Eugene’s ‘disappearance.’ If we reach the point of a city lockdown, and they start searching every door, it will be dangerous for us to hide here. It’s better to take the opportunity to be cleared of suspicion and watch the show play out.”

“Alright.” Long Yuehong’s thoughts raced before he finally made a choice.

Jiang Baimian smiled at him. “Not bad. You’re getting bolder.

“Let’s go out first to prevent any interference.”

Soon, only Shang Jianyao and Bai Chen were left in the room.

“Let’s begin,” Bai Chen said calmly.

A smile hung on Shang Jianyao’s lips as his eyes turned deep. “Look, there are many Ruin Hunters groups you don’t know in Weed City. Jiang Baimian and I are also a Ruin Hunter group. So…”

Bai Chen’s eyes gradually turned strange as if she was wondering why she was in this room. She looked at Shang Jianyao warily and said, “What are you trying to say?”

Shang Jianyao entered the role he had planned ahead of time and asked with a smile, “How much?”

Just as he said that, Bai Chen suddenly tensed her thigh and lashed out with her right foot.

Shang Jianyao seemed to have been paying attention to this matter and dodged the kick in time.

“There will not be a second time,” Bai Chen warned. She prepared to open the door and walk out.

At this moment, Shang Jianyao shouted, “Wait!”

Bai Chen looked back at him with an unfriendly gaze, seeming as if she would draw her gun and fire if he said anything wrong.

Shang Jianyao took out a piece of paper and folded it into a small star under Bai Chen’s confused gaze.

His eyes then turned deep again. “I’m a Ruin Hunter, and so are you. I live with Auntie Nan, and so do you. I have a folded star in my pocket, so…”

As he spoke, he showed his Hunter’s Badge and placed the folded star in his pocket in front of Bai Chen.

This time, his Inference Clowning had one more condition than before to guide the results.

Bai Chen fell into a daze, and she spoke in a slightly dreamy tone. “I also have a folded star in my pocket.”

Shang Jianyao immediately smiled. “It’s an important prop; it’s very mysterious, and it involves supernatural powers. You can’t attempt to touch it now, nor can you touch it... If someone interrogates you, reach out and search for it every minute. When you find it, it will remind you that you are in a dream.”

“Are you crazy!?” Bai Chen glanced at him suspiciously and cursed before walking back to her and Long Yuehong’s room.

After more than ten seconds, Long Yuehong came to the door and stuck his head in. “Did it work?”

He had been in the stairwell with Jiang Baimian.

“Sort of,” Shang Jianyao answered with a smile.

When Bai Chen no longer remembered that they were companions, the corresponding memories were temporarily hidden, including the part where they executed Eugene.

She would only remember everything when the facts violated the results of the inference.

Long Yuehong heaved a sigh of relief and curiously asked, "Is it my turn?"

"You don't have to," Shang Jianyao replied seriously.

Long Yuehong immediately felt intense unease. "Have you already used it on me?" He remembered that it was like this when he dealt with Qiao Chu last time.

"Stop teasing Little Red!" Jiang Baimian stopped Shang Jianyao from giving an answer and simply explained the situation to Long Yuehong. "You are now the link between Little White and us. If you forget, how can we make her follow the plan? When the plan is on track, Shang Jianyao will find an opportunity to use his abilities on you."

"Alright." Long Yuehong came to a realization.