

Ad Infinitum 161

Chapter 161: Dealing an Unusual Hand

In the dark environment that was filled with the smell of antiseptic, such a painting, such a symbol, and such words instantly outlined a strange and horrifying feeling. It made the hearts of everyone who saw it tremble. They even had the subconscious urge to avoid it.

At this moment, Shang Jianyao suddenly turned around and spoke in a deliberately deep voice. “The effects would be better if the door were to suddenly close now.”

Jiang Baimian followed his gaze and thoughtfully said, “This is an electric shutter. If one is prepared, they can control it remotely.”

When he heard this baffling conversation, Oudick—who was a little affected by the atmosphere—immediately felt the situation turn on its head.

They were actually discussing how to enhance the current atmosphere.

Before Oudick could think of anything else, he heard rumbling.

The aluminum-white shutters at the entrance automatically lowered themselves, quickly isolating them from the outside world.

The few rays of light that illuminated the hall halved in number, making the place dark and gloomy.

At the same time, lamps in the darkest corners lit up one after another, scattering a pale glow.

On the corresponding illuminated walls were stick figures in different poses, which looked like a child’s scrawls.

The thing that these stick figures had in common was that they had no facial features and were blank.

Under the gazes of such faces, white noise emitted from the LCD screen that hung in the middle of the hall. After a few flashes, a person appeared on the screen.

This person wore a black trench coat and a pale mask without any facial features. Only two holes were dug out near the eye area to reveal a pair of eyes.

His eyes were as deep as an ancient lake in the forest, and vortexes seemed to be spinning at the bottom.

Upon seeing the person on the screen and meeting his gaze, Oudick, Jiang Baimian, and Shang Jianyao couldn't take their eyes off of him.

The person in the pale mask opened his mouth, and his voice sounded through the loudspeaker in different places. "There is no truth in the world. Please believe in God with all your body and heart..."

This voice seemed to have a strange rhythm that echoed in Oudick and the others' minds.

Shang Jianyao suddenly interrupted and asked seriously, "Don't you feel uncomfortable and suffocated when wearing such a mask?"

There were no holes for his mouth or nose!

On the screen, the black-robed man in the pale mask froze as if he had forgotten what to say next.

Oudick and Jiang Baimian immediately escaped the indescribable atmosphere. They felt like they had returned to reality; it seemed as though their feet were firmly on the ground.

Jiang Baimian didn't feel any lingering fear. She quietly looked at her left arm and nodded slightly.

Oudick came to a realization and questioned in a deep voice, "Did you deliberately lure us here? The abnormal behavior along the way, combined with the decorations here, is equivalent to a large-scale hypnotic ritual!"

Oudick knew that an ability like Hypnosis could have its effects enhanced through external arrangements. It could also increase the ability's effective range to a certain extent.

On the screen, the pale-faced Father in the black trench coat warped and dispersed into white noise.

His voice still sounded from the loudspeakers everywhere, making it difficult to determine his exact location.

“If I can’t hypnotize you, who will be the key character to get close to Xu Liyan and deliver the fatal blow? Unfortunately, I encountered an unconventional person... But it doesn’t matter; it will only take a little more effort...”

Before he could finish his sentence, Oudick had already taken out a light-blue object, which was the size of a walkie-talkie.

Oudick clicked the item and lit it up; it seemed as though he was about to speak to a designated target. However, only rustling and sizzling static sounded from the receiver.

Father’s words echoed in the hall again with a mocking tone. “Knowing that Xu Liyan has a deep relationship with Mechanical Paradise, how could I not prepare the equipment needed for electromagnetic screening?”

After hearing this, Shang Jianyao regretfully clenched his right fist and punched his left palm. “What a pity.”

Jiang Baimian completely understood what this fellow was pitying.

Shang Jianyao found it a pity that he was out of range and couldn’t use Inference Clowning through the electronic conversation. Otherwise, given Father’s loquaciousness, Shang Jianyao could make him willingly kneel down and call him ‘Daddy.’

Oudick’s expression didn’t change in the face of Father’s mockery. He only stuffed the electronic item back into his pocket and took out another item—it was a black grenade.

Oudick quickly pulled out the grenade’s ring. He then braced his back, swung his arm, and threw it at the glass window beside the door.

After a crisp, cracking sound, a loud explosion sounded from outside as a fireball rapidly expanded.

In midair, a drone—which originated from Mechanical Paradise and had been following Oudick—silently captured this scene. The drone then sent it back to the controller to let the corresponding people know that something had happened.

When Oudick took out the grenade, Shang Jianyao and Jiang Baimian had already begun running in the hall. They each found a pillar to seek cover.

After the explosion subsided, Oudick—who was leaning against a wall—shouted, “Two people are approaching! From both sides of the corridor! I’m not sure if Father is between them!”

Oudick sensed two human consciousnesses by relying on his Awakened abilities. But since Awakened can disguise themselves and deceive such senses, he can’t determine if Father is between the two? Father might have hidden himself while quietly approaching us. It’s also possible that he does the opposite and deliberately mixes himself among his companions to pretend to be an ordinary person...

Since Oudick didn’t directly force the target to sleep to deal with them one at a time, it means that the distance now exceeds his limits of forcing people to sleep. However, it’s within the range of his dream influence or another ability... Many thoughts flashed through Jiang Baimian’s mind.

She then looked at Shang Jianyao.

Shang Jianyao nodded hard, indicating that Oudick was right.

Jiang Baimian didn’t waste any time. She held the Ice Moss pistol and adjusted her posture. At the same time, she removed the dark-green grenade hanging from her belt with her other hand.

Bang! Bang!

Gunshots sounded from both sides of the corridor, producing sparks on the walls.

The enemy seemed to be worried about Oudick’s abilities. They didn’t dare to get too close and only attacked from afar.

Oudick was forced to change his position as he counterattacked with his pistol. Suddenly, he slapped his face with his empty left hand.

A clear, soft sound sounded. However, it sounded like a muffled thunderclap to Shang Jianyao's ears.

His ears buzzed from the shock, and his head spun. Shang Jianyao also seemed to lose his balance.

Similarly, the gunshots on both sides of the corridor stopped. They were clearly affected as well, and they felt as if they were standing on violently shaking ground.

On the other hand, Jiang Baimian only tilted her head slightly. She felt that the sound was a little loud as if there was a sudden clap of thunder in midair. Apart from that, she didn't show any abnormalities.

This was because she had hearing problems.

This was one of Oudick's Awakened abilities; it was called Auditory Control. He could freely make all humans within a certain range have extremely sharp hearing, or it could deteriorate to the point of having severe hearing problems.

He had just used a technique to enhance the hearing acuity of others.

The only problem with this ability was that it couldn't distinguish between friend and foe. It just didn't affect himself.

Taking this opportunity, Oudick rolled and closed the distance between him and one of the enemies.

At this moment, Jiang Baimian suddenly raised her hand and fired at the stairwell not far away from Oudick.

With a bang, a figure—which had swooped down from above—suddenly pounced to the side, appearing very hasty. However, he reacted the moment Jiang Baimian raised her hand, so he still dodged the sudden shot.

The stairwell was relatively narrow. The figure pounced at the wall and bounced back before tumbling and changing directions.

It was only then that Jiang Baimian saw the person clearly.

He propped himself up with one hand and half-squatted on the ground. He wore a black trench coat, and he had slightly messy short hair. His face was pale as if he had just recovered from a serious illness.

Father.

A dangerous figure from the Anti-intellectualism Church, Father.

Father looked at Jiang Baimian with slight surprise in his eyes. He didn't know how she had discovered him.

He had always believed that his main opponent this time—and the only one he could consider an opponent—was Oudick.

Unexpectedly, in the ordinary Hunter group, the man had a strange train of thought and could always ruin the atmosphere, while the woman seemed to have a special perception that allowed her to sense him in advance.

It was only now that Oudick realized that an enemy was hiding in the stairwell.

At this moment, he didn't have the time to make his target—who was not far away—'fall asleep.'

After Father dodged the shot, Jiang Baimian didn't waste any time. She quickly threw the grenade that she had prepared in advance.

This time, she didn't have the time to pull out the ring.

Elsewhere, Shang Jianyao had already raised his hand and aimed, prepared to fire at the grenade.

Given the stairwell's half-sealed state, it was almost impossible for Father to dodge the shockwave once the grenade exploded inside. Unless he could jump down the stairs in time and lie prone on the ground, he would be seriously injured even if he didn't die.

But before Jiang Baimian could actually throw the grenade, her left arm suddenly couldn't help but rise toward her face as if she wanted to slap herself.

This was like An Ruxiang stabbing herself.

Body Automation!

Bang!

The grenade's trajectory was higher and more slanted than planned. It landed elsewhere, and Shang Jianyao's shot undoubtedly missed.

However, Shang Jianyao wasn't disappointed or depressed at all. Before the grenade landed, he rushed out of the pillar and dashed.

He then pounced forward and followed it up with a roll, quickly closing the distance between him and Father.

Just as he looked up, he saw a pair of eyes that were as deep as an ancient lake in the forest. Shang Jianyao then smiled and made a face at Father.

A face.

This didn't stop him from raising his hand, aiming, and firing.

Chapter 162: Round after Round

Father—who was undergoing hypnosis—didn't expect the other party to make a face at him.

He wasn't the only one who didn't expect this; Shang Jianyao himself also didn't expect this.

Father was first stunned before he nimbly pounced to the side.

With a bang, Shang Jianyao steadily moved the muzzle with both hands, attempting to pull out a firing line to cover the area where Father could dodge. But at this moment, he couldn't help but raise his hands. He turned the gun around and aimed it at his head.

Body Automation!

Not only did Shang Jianyao not panic, but he also laughed.

This was a brand new experience.

His finger was just about to pull the trigger and fire at himself. However, it suddenly forgot this action and rested on the trigger as though it had forgotten what to do next.

Shang Jianyao used Hands Immobility on himself.

At this moment, he turned his head and looked at Oudick as if he was saying, "It's your turn."

Shang Jianyao had never imagined that his shot would hit Father. His goal was to drive Father toward Oudick and decrease the distance between them.

Regarding this matter, Jiang Baimian had an abnormal rapport with him. In a rush, she casually fired a shot to Father's left—in the direction away from Oudick.

This forced Father to pounce toward the corridor where Oudick was.

Oudick gave up on his designated target. He half-turned, leaned against the wall, and locked onto Father.

Before Father could do a second roll, his eyes lost their luster as his eyelids drooped uncontrollably.

In this intense battlefield, Father actually dozed off and was about to fall to the ground.

Shang Jianyao and Jiang Baimian naturally wouldn't let go of this opportunity. As soon as their hands recovered, they immediately moved their muzzles and aimed at the tottering Father.

But before they did, a bullet shot from the other side of the corridor away from Oudick.

From this angle, it was impossible to hit Oudick. However, it came with a bang.

This sound jolted their eardrums, waking Father from his slumber.

Father couldn't be bothered to distinguish the situation. He fell to the ground and continued rolling, randomly choosing a target as he made his corresponding target's hands raise their muzzle.

Bang! Bang!

Jiang Baimian's bullets shot into a ceiling lamp, and a large number of glass shards fell.

The surroundings turned darker.

Shang Jianyao's bullet struck the spot where Father was originally standing, stirring up a spark.

Father—dressed in a black trench coat—rolled into an empty room and stopped. He took out a small glass bottle from his pocket and abruptly threw it at Oudick.

Oudick didn't dare let the item approach him. He raised his wrist and shattered it with a bang.

The next second, the strong smell of vinegar filled the air.

Oudick's expression changed. Without thinking, he ran out of the corridor and returned to the middle of the hall, distancing himself from the area. However, he had only taken two steps when he started sneezing.

The sneezes were so intense and frequent that Oudick couldn't help but stop and bend his back. He couldn't do anything else.

The tip of his nose quickly turned red, making him look rather comical.

Upon seeing this, Jiang Baimian instantly understood something—the price that Oudick paid was probably related to his nose and sense of smell.

Oudick was allergic to vinegar, and it was a rather serious allergy!

This reminded Jiang Baimian of the first time she saw Oudick. He looked calm and reserved, but his nose was red like a clown's.

As a result, Shang Jianyao commented that it wasn't good to have a sharp nose and that it was easy to turn red from the cold wind.

Now that she thought about it, Oudick had probably passed by South Street that day and sneezed when he smelled a little vinegar.

Father had actually accurately grasped the price that Oudick had paid. He had made preparations in advance and crippled this powerful Hunter—who was unafraid of most Awakened—at the most critical moment.

The reason why he didn't sprinkle vinegar in the hall ahead of time was that Oudick wouldn't have entered if he did that.

In a flash, Jiang Baimian chose to retreat. She ran and rolled, quickly arriving at the nearest door.

It wasn't that she wanted to escape and abandon Shang Jianyao, but she wanted to distance herself quickly and strive not to be affected by Father's Awakened abilities.

As long as she wasn't controlled, the current distance could only be considered medium range for her. She could have a 100% hit rate.

Her legs stiffened the next second, almost making her fall.

With one hand in his pocket, Father walked out of the room that he had been hiding in and smiled faintly. “It’s useless. The entire building is within the range of my abilities. I mainly closed the distance to control Oudick.”

Father’s pale face looked abnormally sick in such an environment.

Shang Jianyao didn’t move because he was fighting with his hands. If not for the fact that he had used Hands Immobility in time, he would’ve succeeded in ‘committing suicide.’

During this process, Shang Jianyao also transferred his abilities’ effects to Jiang Baimian from time to time to prevent her from shooting herself.

Father constantly changed targets to control the enemy in a one-versus-two situation. This prevented him from doing any more precise actions. For example, making Jiang Baimian ‘walk’ to the wall and commit suicide by crashing into it.

Shang Jianyao paid attention to his and Jiang Baimian’s condition and kept using his abilities. He was rather excited as he laughed and said, “Villains always die from talking too much. Don’t you know that?”

Father—who wore a black trench coat and looked like he had just recovered from a serious illness—smiled. “Didn’t I say so much because I can’t do anything else? While using one ability, one can’t use a second ability unless they have already entered the Mind Corridor and obtained some special items. As an Awakened, you should know very well that you can’t use any other abilities now.”

In other words, Father wasn’t afraid of being caught unaware.

Father then looked around and smiled. “Besides, I also have two servants.”

Just as he said that, a person appeared on both sides of the corridor. They quickly approached and revealed their appearances.

One wore a baseball cap and had eyebrows that resembled swords. He looked good, but his eyes gave off the feeling that he hadn’t fully opened them. The other had her hair tied up; she had gentle facial features and a gentle bearing. There was a black mole at her eyebrow.

Lei Yunsong and Lin Feifei!

The two—who had disappeared for nearly two months—had eyes that were slightly blank. At the same time, they raised the guns in their hands and aimed at Shang Jianyao and Jiang Baimian.

At this moment, Father's smile became obvious. "Oh right, I forgot to tell you. I didn't go around the city to enhance the hypnotic ritual's effects. The reinforcements you are looking forward to might not make it in time."

...

While Oudick, Shang Jianyao, and Jiang Baimian tracked Father down and drove north, countless wilderness nomads remained kneeling or sitting. It appeared as if they were corpses that had lost their souls outside the city walls.

It was especially cold today, and it seemed as though it would snow at any moment. Very few people left the city—the people willing to buy slaves and all kinds of junk had already bought enough.

A man with a beard—who hadn't shaved for an unknown period of time—sat beside a dugout. He stared blankly at his wife and child, who were about to faint from hunger.

At this moment, a man in a tattered cotton coat walked over. He was also dirty and had a beard.

"Ah Cai, we have to think of something," said the man to his companion beside the dugout.

Ah Cai slowly turned his head, looked over, and spoke weakly. "Li Tou, what can we do?"

Li Tou grinned hideously. "Storm our way in! Everyone shall storm in! If we don't, we won't be able to survive tonight once the snow comes down. If we do this, we'll at least have a chance of survival!"

"How can we storm in? It's not like we haven't tried it before..." Ah Cai looked at his wife and child and was a little tempted.

Li Tou said solemnly, “We were too rash and not ruthless enough back then. We can first infiltrate the group near the city gate and find an opportunity to kill the guards there. Then, we can get everyone to storm in together! No matter how many guns there are on the city walls or how many bullets there are, can they have more people than us?”

As Li Tou spoke, he pulled up his clothes, revealing an old revolver.

“You didn’t sell the gun?” Ah Cai was a little surprised.

The corners of Li Tou’s eyes twitched. “They are probably stuffed from ‘eating.’ Nobody has come out to purchase anything recently. Sigh, I can’t sell it even if I wanted to. I know that many people are in similar situations. If we organize them, there will be dozens or over 100 guns. Why should we be afraid that we won’t be able to charge in? This might be fate.”

“I wonder how many people will die...” Ah Cai slowly stood up.

“What’s there to be afraid of? We might not even make it through the night, so why should we be afraid of death?” Li Tou’s expression turned abnormally gloomy. “If we really can’t storm in, we can overrun the nearby manors. They have fewer people, fewer guns, and more food. If this won’t do, won’t all the dead corpses satisfy your appetite?”

“Ah Cai, I don’t want to go this far either. It’s all because of the darned heavens! Do you want to see your A’Xiu and Tianniu starve to death? Do you want to wait until they can’t take it any longer? We’ll exchange children; we’ll eat Tianniu, while your family eats my Xiao Erhei. This is just in case you can’t bring yourself to do it.”

Ah Cai’s expression changed slightly as his expression gradually turned ruthless. “Alright! I’ll do it with you! There won’t be all these darn matters if we’re dead!”

Li Tou said in satisfaction, “You haven’t sold that crappy loudspeaker of yours, have you?”

“No.” Ah Cai shook his head and said, “It can still be used.”

“Alright, give it to me later. I want everyone to hear me.” Li Tou took a deep breath and slowly exhaled. “To be honest, everyone will really die if we don’t unite and risk our lives!”

Ah Cai had no objections, and he anxiously asked, “Is there anything else you need me for? Who else do we need to rope in?”

“There’s no need. I’ve already contacted the first batch of people.” After saying that, Li Tou turned his head to look at the city gate. His gaze gradually turned fierce, and his eyes suffused slight redness.

Ah Cai and many people around him also looked over with the same gaze.

Chapter 163: Chaos Begins

The north wind howled, and the leaden clouds hung low. The guards at the city gate were freezing despite wearing thick clothes. This was especially so for their faces. They either felt a stinging pain as if they had been scraped by a knife, or their muscles were already numb and cold.

Although the sky was dark like it would be before an impending storm, it was ultimately morning—daytime in every sense of the word. This made the guards less vigilant.

As they swept their gazes, they saw faces that were so numb that they didn’t look like living people. It was as if they were facing a group of statues that were completely inept.

“I wonder when the other slave hunters from First City will rush over... It won’t be good if this continues.” The junior officer with a pistol hanging from his waist walked back and forth at the city gate and casually said, “If more people die, a plague might erupt.”

A plague was a nightmare that many people found more terrifying than war.

At this moment, he heard a loud boom—this clearly came from an explosion.

The sound came from the depths of North Street!

All the guards at the city gate turned their bodies and heads to look over, unsure of what had happened.

At this moment, the junior officer from before saw a group of bearded wilderness nomads suddenly stand up from the crowd near the city gate from the corner of his eye.

They were all holding guns!

Some held revolvers, some held shotguns, and others had rusty-looking rifles. However, they were ultimately firearms.

“Care...” The junior officer had just shouted a syllable when he heard numerous gunshots. His vision turned black as intense pain drowned him like a tide.

Bang! Bang! Bang!

After a round of intense shooting, more than half of the guards at the city gate fell. The remaining few were injured, and they were in terrible conditions.

They each ran to the fortifications and retaliated with their weapons. However, they were abnormally horrified to discover that the group of wilderness nomads had stormed over despite the bullets. Although people kept falling, the rest remained unaffected. It was as if the New World or Paradise was up ahead.

These people’s expressions were extremely warped, and their eyes were bloodshot. They looked like intelligent beasts or Heartless.

At this moment, Li Tou held a loudspeaker and shouted crazily, “Rush in! Rush in! There’s food if we rush in! We can survive if we rush in!”

Countless wilderness nomads outside the city cast their gazes over, their eyes turning red one after another.

Upon seeing that only a few guards were left at the city gate and that they had almost been wiped out, they instinctively stood up and rushed over.

Some still had stamina and ran very quickly, while some were already relatively weak and could only follow behind slowly.

Ta! Ta! Ta!

The machine guns on the city tower lit up, showering the nomads with bullets. Large swaths of wilderness nomads fell down like straw.

In just a minute of sweeping gunfire, a large number of people lost their lives.

The wilderness nomads behind the frontrunners cowered, hesitated, and paused.

But at that moment, the machine guns went silent. A new ammunition belt had to be reloaded.

The first batch of people—Ah Cai and the others—had already finished off the guards there and obtained better weapons. They quickly rushed up the stairs to the city tower.

Upon seeing this, the wilderness nomads—who were about to scatter—went crazy again and surged into Weed City like a tide.

The city guards and castellan guards—who had been mobilized due to the explosion at First Hospital—were momentarily at a loss as to which side they should support in such a situation.

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In First Hospital, Lei Yunsong and Lin Feifei raised their guns and aimed at their colleagues.

At this moment, Jiang Baimian finally understood something.

Lin Feifei's entry into Wild Wolf Alley had nothing to do with any bar. She passed through it and had entered North Street through a secret passage.

At this moment, Shang Jianyao—who was fighting his hand—suddenly asked, “Why didn't you fire yourself? Why did you find two servants?”

Father originally didn't want to waste any more time, but for some reason, he felt that he should share his meticulous plan. Otherwise, wouldn't he have done so much for nothing?

“Don’t be in a rush,” he said to Lei Yunsong and Lin Feifei. He then smiled at Shang Jianyao as Oudick kept sneezing. “Guess.”

Shang Jianyao immediately became excited. “I guess it’s a restriction of that ability of yours. Its essence is to connect a certain part of your body to another person’s corresponding body, allowing the target to ‘replace’ you in doing what you want. In other words, what we are doing now is equivalent to what your hands are doing.

“Since it is already doing something, there’s no way to complete other actions. For example, pulling out a gun and firing.”

Father chuckled. “Although it’s not right, it’s not too far from the truth. You’re smarter than I imagined, but there seems to be something wrong with your brain.”

Shang Jianyao smiled and looked at the other party before saying something strange. “Fall, fall, fall...”

As soon as he said the third ‘fall,’ Lei Yunsong and Lin Feifei’s eyes glazed over. Their bodies fell to the ground uncontrollably.

Father also realized that he was about to lose consciousness. He blurted out in surprise, “Y-you...”

Jiang Baimian—who was near the door—laughed. “As a company that specializes in biology and medicine, it doesn’t seem too strange for us to be equipped with anesthetic gas. Knowing that you can make others lose control and harm themselves, how can we not be prepared before entering this place?”

Jiang Baimian’s electric eel-like biomechanical limb had another use—the Consciousness Connection chip. When motionless, it could spew out a relatively faint and difficult-to-detect anesthetic gas.

Therefore, back when she eliminated the bandits with the exoskeleton, Jiang Baimian had said that one of her plans was to choose to surrender. After being restrained, she would counterattack to the fullest extent.

This was her counterattack.

This—combined with her genetically modified ability to hold her breath—was enough to reverse the situation. She could also change the gas and turn anesthesia into poison.

Of course, there was no need for her to reveal this. Having made preparations in advance, she and Shang Jianyao had taken the corresponding preventive medicine.

The vinegar—which Father had used to restrain Oudick—concealed the strange smell perfectly.

The effect was beyond Jiang Baimian's expectations.

Father's consciousness became increasingly unfocused. "I-I shouldn't have..."

He began to regret saying so much. It had to be said that he had very strong willpower. Oudick—who was enveloped in the smell of vinegar—had already fainted and stopped sneezing.

Shang Jianyao's smile became brighter. "Don't tell me that you really think you like to talk that much? Guess when my ability affected you."

Back when he rolled to approach Father, it wasn't just to fire and force the enemy to Oudick's side. Otherwise, how did that little bit of distance matter? No matter how large the building was, how large could it be? It wouldn't have affected his hit rate significantly.

Shang Jianyao's hidden goal back then was to use Corny Person to influence Father. However, he didn't make the other party do something that would seriously violate their rationality and make them regret it.

In that case, the effects of Corny Person would immediately be removed.

He only used his ability as a backup in the event that Oudick was unable to control Father. He used his actions, words, and performance to induce Father into speaking in a corny manner to buy Jiang Baimian enough time.

When the corniness wasn't so obvious, the target would find it difficult to sense that they had been affected in a short period of time. This allowed Corny Person to maintain its effects for two to three minutes.

Therefore, even if Shang Jianyao had been resisting his and Jiang Baimian's hands ever since and couldn't use other Awakened abilities, it didn't stop him from making Father talk more than usual.

Upon hearing Shang Jianyao's words, Father's body gradually slumped down, indignation remaining in his eyes.

Shang Jianyao maintained his smile and added, "You lost because you are anti-intellectual. Your servants have no intelligence, and they are only puppets that obey your orders. As for my companion, she's very, very strong."

With a thud, Father fell to the ground and completely lost consciousness.

"Tsk, there's no need to suck up to me during that last bit." Jiang Baimian turned around and tried to open the door for ventilation. She exerted strength with her left arm and directly lifted the aluminum-white electric shutters.

The cold wind outside blew in through the door, clearing away the strange smell in the area, along with the winds that had entered through the shattered glass.

During this process, Jiang Baimian casually asked, "Apart from waiting for my anesthetic gas to take effect, what other preparations did you make?"

Shang Jianyao immediately raised the Ice Moss in his hand, aimed at his head, and pulled the trigger. Then, he pulled the trigger.

An empty click echoed—there were no bullets in the gun.

"I only loaded three rounds in each gun..." Shang Jianyao explained with a smile.

These bullets had been used up during the first few attacks.

If there was still a situation that required him to shoot, Shang Jianyao would abandon the Ice Moss and exchange it for his United 202.

Jiang Baimian couldn't help but laugh. "Were you fooling around with him at the end?"

Shang Jianyao didn't need to resist his hands in that tussle at all. He could take the time to use his ability on Father.

"The plan was to anesthetize him, so the result had to be to anesthetize him unless success was impossible." Shang Jianyao wore a serious expression.

Jiang Baimian smiled and was just about to instruct Shang Jianyao to drag Lei Yunsong and Lin Feifei to the lawn outside and use Inference Clowning to make them friendly when they woke up. Then, she would formulate a plan to remove the hypnosis according to the situation.

At this moment, she heard concentrated gunshots coming from the distance. It sounded as if a war had broken out.

"Those wilderness nomads..." Jiang Baimian frowned and quickly recalled the various details. Then, she suddenly muttered herself, "Not good!"

At this moment, Shang Jianyao sighed. "Sigh."

Upon seeing Jiang Baimian look over, Shang Jianyao took the initiative to explain. "I think Father is too weak. He's not as powerful as I imagined."

Jiang Baimian nodded solemnly. "I also discovered a problem. Back when Father hypnotized Zeng Guangwang and the others, didn't he consider the fact that those people might have failed in their suicide attempt and spread information on his looks, characteristics, and abilities? The truth is that this is actually possible!

"If this is his style of doing things or if it's a trap targeted at Oudick, it's very difficult for me to imagine him being active for so long when under the pursuit of a large faction like First City. He's too careless."

At this point, Jiang Baimian paused and said in a deep voice, "He looks more like bait."

Chapter 164: Jingnian

On the second floor of the Hunter's Guild, in the president's office guarded by four armed personnel.

After the explosion on North Street, Xu Liyan picked up the ringing black phone and listened to his subordinate report the situation based on drone surveillance.

Before he could give the order, a series of intense gunshots erupted from South Street's city gate.

This made him instinctively frown and have a bad feeling.

Xu Liyan patiently waited for a while before a new person finally replaced the person on the other end of the line. He reported the sudden incident of the wilderness nomads creating a commotion and how they were about to storm the city.

"Is this the situation that Father wants?" As Xu Liyan muttered to himself, he hung up the phone and dialed another number before reaching the city guard's highest-ranking officer.

He then instructed with a cold expression, "Gather the main forces immediately and push out all the wilderness nomads that have stormed in. Don't worry about the number of casualties."

After issuing this order, he called his trusted aide—who was in charge of the Castellan Guard. "Split the manpower into two teams. One team will bring heavy ordnance to First Hospital to help Oudick deal with Father. The other team will gather downstairs and escort me back to Castellan Manor."

Castellan Manor had permanent fortifications and an underground bunker. It was many times safer than the Hunter's Guild's old building.

Furthermore, if the chaos escalated and Father escaped the encirclement—making it impossible to control the situation in a short period of time—he could still leave through the relatively safe and closer north city gate under the Castellan Guards' protection. He could then return to his manor or seek refuge in another city.

After methodically arranging all of this, Xu Liyan stood up and walked to the door with the attendant—who was covered in a robe and hood.

The four armed personnel outside dispersed immediately and took their positions, guarding against possible attacks from different directions.

At this moment, Xu Liyan suddenly felt an itch on the back of his left hand.

He subconsciously stretched out his right palm and scratched the back of his left hand a few times.

Not only did the itch not disappear, but it became even worse.

Xu Liyan panicked and exerted more strength.

Red scratches immediately appeared on the back of his hand.

Almost at the same time, unbearable pruritus appeared on his back, chest, thighs, face, and all the areas that were covered or not covered by his clothes.

The more he scratched, the itchier he felt, and the more he wanted to scratch. In just a few seconds, he felt like 10,000 ants had crawled all over his body. He wished he could take off all his clothes and have the time of his life scratching.

He wasn't the only one; the four armed personnel also had similar reactions. They couldn't hold their guns any longer and only wanted to scratch their itch.

Clang! Clang! Clang!

The metal firearms fell to the ground and bounced a few times.

The only one who didn't move was the mysterious person in the hooded robe.

"Eh..." A slightly surprised voice sounded from a room on the other end of the corridor. Then, a person walked out.

It was a woman. She had golden hair and a pair of light-blue eyes. Her skin was relatively rough, and the pores on her face were slightly large.

This woman looked very charming, and she was Christina, the vice president of the local Hunter's Guild!

She looked at Xu Liyan's abnormally mysterious attendant and asked curiously, "You aren't feeling itchy?"

As she spoke, three people came down from the stairs near the president's office.

Some of them held pistols, and some held short-neck submachine guns. Their gazes locked onto Xu Liyan—who was scratching himself crazily.

Among the three people, one was female—about 1.65 meters tall—and she had a baby face. Two were men; one was masculine and handsome, and the other was weathered.

They were the remaining three members of the Old Task Force, who had previously disappeared—Wei Yu, Lu Jiqi, and Yun He!

At this moment, the mysterious man in the hooded robe took a diagonal step forward and stood between Xu Liyan and the three assailants.

With multiple clangs, sparks flew from the mysterious person's body due to the large number of bullets. But only his clothes were damaged, leaving not a single drop of blood.

With a whoosh, the mysterious person tore off his robe, revealing a tall body made of black metal bones and various mechanical components that looked intimidating.

He raised one hand and calmly chanted his Buddhist name. "Namo Annutara-Samyak-Subhuti. This Penniless Monk no longer has such feelings. Although I still feel the itch, I can fully tolerate it. It's like I'm facing an illusion."

This was the answer to Christina's question.

He was indeed a mechanical monk—a mechanical monk who lived in the surrounding wilderness.

Christina raised her eyebrows. “What if we change it to another? I hope your desires are satisfied.”

The next second, Xu Liyan and his five bodyguards realized that the itch on their bodies was gradually weakening.

The mechanical monk’s blinking red eyes suddenly lit up, almost bloodshot.

“Surge in sexual desire? You are indeed an Awakened, an Awakened who believes in the Kalendaria, Mandara.” The mechanical monk muttered to himself before he pressed his palms together and calmly said, “Female Patron, this Penniless Monk isn’t Junior Brother Jingfa and the others. This Penniless Monk can still barely control himself.”

As he spoke, Xu Liyan and the five bodyguards had already found places to hide. They began a gunfight with Wei Yu, Lu Jiqi, and Yun He.

The mechanical monk was located in the center of the gunfight. He was struck by stray bullets, but he remained standing as if he were only facing a storm.

Christina pressed her hip and bowed slightly. “But I can tell that you are also affected.”

A smile surfaced on her face, but it also appeared rather sacred. “Mandara is in our hearts.”

“Patron, everything in the world is illusory, and so is desire. The pleasure you gain from physical indulgence will definitely enslave you, turning you into a female beast in this mortal world.” The mechanical monk’s electronic voice sounded a little compassionate.

He pressed his palms together again and solemnly said, “Six Realms of Rebirth and Existence, Animal realm.”

Just as the mechanical monk said that, Christina saw countless beast phantoms.

There were wolves, tigers, hyenas, and boars. All of them looked at her with their bright-green eyes.

Under such gazes, Christina’s self-awareness suddenly changed.

Christina realized that she had become a wolf at some point in time. She was covered in thick, grayish-black fur, and her straw-like tail hung down.

She was a little flustered and confused. Christina wanted to say something, but she only spoke in a beast-like voice. “Howl...”

From Xu Liyan’s point of view, Christina and the other three attackers suddenly lay on the ground strangely; they had then propped themselves up on all fours and started howling.

Their eyes seemed to have lost the glow of intelligence.

“Haha...” Xu Liyan couldn’t help but laugh. He walked out of his hiding spot and said in fear and excitement, “Don’t tell me you think I only have ordinary bodyguards, Advanced Hunters that I hired from the guild? If not for Master Jingnian, how could I have known that someone wanted to assassinate me in advance?”

Xu Liyan’s five bodyguards instinctively turned their heads and looked at the mechanical monk.

Although Jingnian wasn’t wearing a monk robe or a kasaya—which revealed his metal body and heavy firepower capabilities—he still maintained the manner of an accomplished monk. He calmly said, “This Penniless Monk has reflected on himself and obtained the most important divine power: Clairvoyance.”

Just as he said that, the gunshots on South Street suddenly turned vague. The entire building shook and instantly shattered like a dream.

Xu Liyan suddenly shivered and realized that he was still in the president’s office. He had just put down the phone.

“Zen Master, just now...” Xu Liyan quickly turned his head to look at the hooded mechanical monk, Jingnian.

Without waiting for him to finish, Jingnian nodded. “This Penniless Monk was also dragged into an illusion and sparred with Patron Christina. This is very similar to an ability in the domain of Kalendaria Last Man.”

“Last Man... Isn’t this the Anti-intellectualism Church’s Kalendaria? Father? Isn’t he supposed to be at First Hospital? Are there other Awakened here?” Xu Liyan was shocked and angry. He quickly stood up. “We can’t confirm any problems with Christina at the moment. In the illusion, her performance seemed to belong to the Church of Paragon Desire. If she’s really involved, it means that someone in First City wants me dead!”

Jingnian chanted a Buddhist proclamation. “Patron Xu, it’s best to leave this place as soon as possible and return to the manor.”

The shared illusion had completely exposed his identity and revealed two of his abilities. This made him ‘foresee’ immense danger.

“Alright!” Xu Liyan drew his pistol and walked to the door.

Immediately, the five bodyguards outside surrounded him like human shields—they were prepared to use their bodies to block any bullets.

As long as the Castellan didn’t die, their families would definitely receive the most appropriate care.

“Maximum alert from now on,” instructed Xu Liyan.

“Yes, Castellan!” one of the bodyguards replied. He then added, “We were also dragged into that illusion and know what happened.”

Xu Liyan looked at the bodyguard and realized that he looked very tired. He had dark circles, but his eyes were rather deep.

“Okay.” Xu Liyan nodded. “When this matter is over, I won’t be stingy with my rewards!”

At this moment, the red glow in Jingnian’s eyes suddenly intensified. His auxiliary chip told him: Previously, there were only four bodyguards outside.

His consciousness believed: There were a total of five bodyguards, so nothing is wrong!

No good... Jingnian's mood sank. He immediately wanted to use Animal realm—which had the greatest range.

At this moment, the five bodyguards simultaneously raised their guns and aimed at Xu Liyan.

Four of them had slightly blank and dull eyes, looking as if they weren't facing the Castellan but a lifelong enemy.

Without any delay or hesitation, they pulled the triggers.

Bang! Bang! Bang!

Sparks spewed from the five guns' muzzles as many bullets rained down on Xu Liyan.

Chapter 165: Tricks

Jingnian was most thankful that, although he wasn't a professional bodyguard, he still remembered one thing: Never leave his employer for a moment and remain within range to block any bullets with his body.

Therefore, as he used Animal realm, he moved his metal joints and pounced at Xu Liyan.

Clang! Clang! Clang!

Bullets struck Jingnian's head and back, producing sparks and inconspicuous marks.

This wasn't a human shield, but a real armored shield!

Thud!

Xu Liyan slammed onto the ground and almost fainted from the abnormally heavy mechanical monk's pressure.

At this moment, Jingnian's Animal realm had already taken effect.

The five bodyguards went into crawling positions as if they were no longer accustomed to standing on their feet. They either howled or tried to pee with a hind leg lifted.

Only the one with the dark eye circles could barely stand upright. He only lowered his arms like an ape that had intruded into the human world.

Like an ape, he ran and jumped toward the stairwell before Jingnian could get up. He gripped the staircase railing and jumped down.

During this process, he didn't roar like a beast. Instead, he shouted crazily, "Blow them up! Blow them up!"

Jingnian seemed to have installed a spring as he sprang up with Xu Liyan. He then looked at the stairwell and cautiously said, "Let's jump out the window."

"Alright." Xu Liyan—who had almost been shot to death—was still in shock. He could only trust Zen Master Jingnian completely.

Jingnian wrapped his arm around Xu Liyan and bent his knees slightly. He easily leaped toward the window, broke the glass, and jumped down.

The four bodyguards—who had transformed into beasts—recovered.

They looked at each other in confusion before instinctively following Jingnian. They jumped from the broken window to the back door of the Hunter's Guild.

At this moment, the Castellan Guard nearby had already gathered and surrounded Xu Liyan.

After Xu Liyan sat in a custom-made bulletproof car, he calmed down and instructed the driver in a deep voice, "Return to the manor."

With that said, he looked at Jingnian—who was sitting beside him—and said with abnormal gratitude, "It's all thanks to you, Zen Master. Otherwise, I would've died."

Jingnian replied in an electronically synthesized voice, “Namo Annutara-Samyak-Subhuti. Saving a life is better than building a seven-storied pagoda.”

He paused and added, “I hope you remember your previous promise to allow our parish to preach in Weed City.”

“No problem,” Xu Liyan replied firmly. “But Zen Master, the premise is that you can’t send those monks who are prone to going crazy. Otherwise, I won’t be able to convince the public.”

To be honest, Xu Liyan often felt uneasy when facing Jingnian because he had no idea when he would hit Jingnian’s sore spot, making him lose his mind.

As he spoke, the bulletproof car door closed.

The relatively small convoy then drove into West Street and returned north.

In the vice president’s office on the third floor of the Hunter’s Guild.

Christina stood behind the glass window and watched this scene. She smiled and said, “I hope things can develop as you expect; otherwise, I’ll be transferred back to First City.”

A figure walked over from her side. He was about 1.8 meters tall, and he wore a black shirt and pants. He also had commonly-seen short hair. Although he looked pretty good, his dark eye circles made him appear listless; it seemed as though he hadn’t slept well for a long time.

He was the person who had sneaked into Xu Liyan’s bodyguard team. After he jumped to the bottom of the stairwell, he returned upstairs from the other side.

The only difference from before was that he had already escaped Animal realm’s influence.

This man covered his mouth and yawned. “I can’t guarantee that there will be any more variables involved. I can only say that the chances of success are high. You didn’t participate in any of this at all; why are you afraid of having scores settled in the future?”

Christina had only appeared in the Real Hallucination once, so nobody could criticize her for it.

Christina looked at the person beside her and smiled with moist eyes. “If Xu Liyan survives, he will be wary of me no matter what. He will do his best to request headquarters to transfer me away. Besides, he doesn’t need a reason. It’s not impossible for him to control me and get Oudick to use his Awakened abilities to search for clues.

“If it weren’t for the orders from above, I really wouldn’t have wanted to get involved in this matter of yours. Speaking of which, your Real Hallucination ability doesn’t seem to come from Last Man’s domain. Instead, it’s closer to a bestowment from Shattered Mirror.”

Shattered Mirror was the Kalendaria that controlled November, also known as the God of Illusions.

The man with the dark eye circles smiled and ignored Christina’s words.

That ability did belong to Last Man’s domain, but he produced spectacular effects with it.

It was called ‘Dream Journey.’ It could stimulate certain memories of the target and make them have a real hallucination.

For many Awakened with this ability, they often only used it to such an extent that their enemies would fall into a daze, dementia, fear, and obsession.

They ignored the fact that this was an area-of-effect ability that could simultaneously trigger many people’s memories and create multiple illusions.

After many attempts and ‘evolution,’ he finally grasped the technique to connect these illusions together. Thus, a large-scale real illusion was staged.

Before the target woke up, this illusion could last for several minutes. Therefore, the man could switch abilities and use Hypnosis to guide the plot development.

Hypnosis was an ability with a very small effective range. Every time he wanted to use it, he had to be within five meters of the enemy and make eye contact. But when the enemy’s psyche expanded outward and connected with others, they would sink into a hallucination together.

The corresponding Awakened could then perform some crude hypnosis in reverse by affecting the hallucination.

To put it simply, he could first 'hypnotize' himself and change his corresponding hallucination. He would then use a mental link to influence the hallucinations of others and use the changes in the hallucination to plant a certain 'cue' in their minds.

This way, two effects could be achieved.

The first was to rehearse what would happen next in the Real Hallucination and 'observe' the targets' response and abilities.

The second was to perform a few simple 'hypnosis' that benefited the subsequent actions.

Through the former, this man with relatively dark eye circles grasped most of Jingnian's abilities. He had mentally 'hypnotized' himself in advance so that he could transform into an ape that knew how to avoid danger and escape while shouting in human language once he lost his human consciousness. This way, he could deal with Animal realm.

Using the latter, he made Jingnian, Xu Liyan, and the others accept the fact that there were five bodyguards. He surreptitiously mixed in and 'hypnotized' his few 'companions.'

Upon seeing that the other party didn't answer, Christina could only sigh. "You should've already found yourself in the Sea of Origins. As long as you defeat him, you can enter the Mind Corridor."

"If you think so, so be it." The man with dark eye circles smiled and retracted his gaze before walking to the office door.

Christina called for him to stop. "Remember to bring those people from Pangu Biology to North Street. We have to establish a major villain later."

"I've already got them to go over," said the man calmly.

Christina glanced at him and asked, "Since you're the real Father, who's the one in the hospital?"

The man smiled and said, “When he thinks he’s Father, he’s Father.”

With that said, he raised his hands, covered his eyes, and bowed in the Anti-intellectualism Church’s style. “Please believe in God with all your body and heart.”

After bowing, he turned around and walked out the door.

The image of him in Christina’s mind suddenly became a little blurry, and she couldn’t remember the corresponding characteristics.

Her eyes became increasingly moist. She squeezed her legs slightly and sighed regretfully. “What a pity...”

...

North Street, Weed City First Hospital.

Although they had discovered the problem and suspected that the person in front of them might not be the real Father, Jiang Baimian and Shang Jianyao still stayed on-scene. They moved Oudick, Lei Yunsong, Lin Feifei, and the fellow—who claimed to be Father—to an empty space outside and tried to wake the first three people up as soon as possible.

The reason they did this was that they knew that Xu Liyan had an Eternal beside him, so his safety was still guaranteed. Furthermore, Xu Liyan had nothing to do with them. They had only met once, and they only had a verbal promise between them.

Thus, Jiang Baimian actually didn’t care about his safety.

She decided to wake Lei Yunsong and Lin Feifei up as soon as possible and ask about Wei Yu, Lu Jiqi, and Yun He’s whereabouts.

Saving them was of utmost urgency! This was the Old Task Force’s primary mission in Weed City.

Perhaps it was a problem with his nose, or perhaps it was because he had taken in too much vinegar, but Oudick had previously sneezed until he was almost unconscious. He had inhaled very little anesthetic gas, and he was strong enough, so he was the first to wake up.

He looked at Jiang Baimian and Shang Jianyao before suddenly sitting up. “Where’s Father?”

“Don’t disturb him.” Shang Jianyao raised his finger and gestured for Oudick to lower his voice.

“He won’t wake up that easily.” Jiang Baimian quickly stopped this fellow’s confusing behavior.

Of course, Jiang Baimian could roughly guess Shang Jianyao’s meaning. Father was relatively strong and good at Hypnosis. It would be very troublesome once he woke up.

As the two of them conversed, Oudick had already stood up and looked around.

Oudick didn’t ask if they were the ones who took down Father because it was a question with an obvious answer. Instead, he only sighed. “You guys are much stronger than I imagined.”

In the beginning, he had only determined that the two people opposite him came from a large faction and had certain standards. Who knew that these standards were a little terrifyingly high?

“Now’s not the time to talk about that.” Jiang Baimian pointed at the pale man suspected to be Father. “I have a feeling that he might not be the real Father. It’s best if you contact Castellan Xu.”

Oudick recalled what had happened and felt a little suspicious. He quickly took out the electronic product known as a cellphone in the Old World—which used the local base station built by Mechanical Paradise—to dial a number.

The call quickly connected.

Oudick gave a reminder and received a response. He then briefly reported the situation here.

As Shang Jianyao had been making faces and kept giving ‘hints,’ Oudick didn’t mention their exact role.

After hanging up, Oudick said to Jiang Baimian and Shang Jianyao, “Castellan was indeed attacked by the real Father. Fortunately, there was a powerful bodyguard. A portion of the Castellan Guard will come over to take over soon.”

Jiang Baimian looked down at the unconscious Lei Yunsong and Lin Feifei. “Can we take these two people away? I’ll leave the suspected Father to you.”

Oudick—whose nose was still red—fell silent for a few seconds before saying, “Alright. It’s inconvenient for you to bring these people with you; it’s very eye-catching. Drive my car.”

His red SUV was near First Hospital’s entrance.

“Thank you,” Shang Jianyao and Jiang Baimian said in unison.

Jiang Baimian then asked in concern, “Did you ask about what happened at South Street?”

Although she had her guesses, she still needed accurate information.

Chapter 166: Chaos

Not long after Oudick threw the grenade, he fell into a predicament of constantly sneezing. He then fainted for a short period of time.

Thus, he had no impression of the anomaly at South Street; he only had a vague understanding of it. The situation was urgent, so he naturally couldn’t care less about obtaining other information from Castellan Xu Liyan.

Oudick shook his head and said, “I’ll ask now.”

As Oudick spoke, he picked up his phone and dialed another number.

Jiang Baimian took this opportunity to squat down and search the fake Father’s body to see if she could find any useful clues.

She quickly took out a note from the fake Father’s pocket. It was written in Ashlandic and Red River language at the same time: “This is a special permit issued by the Castellan.”

Apart from these words, there was nothing on the paper. There wasn't even a signature, much less a seal.

Jiang Baimian said in amusement, "He easily entered North Street using such a pass?"

"This actually works..." Shang Jianyao's eyes lit up as if he felt a little tempted.

Jiang Baimian sensed something and turned her head to scold him jokingly. "Don't try it. You don't know Hypnosis."

Even if Shang Jianyao wanted to try, he had to, at least, find a carrot and use it to stamp the note.

At this moment, Oudick ended the call and said to them, "There's a riot among the nomads outside the city. They've already rushed in; it's chaos everywhere."

"As expected..." Jiang Baimian took off the walkie-talkie hanging from her belt and tried to contact Bai Chen and Long Yuehong.

But it didn't succeed.

"I'm out of range..." Jiang Baimian exhaled and said to Oudick, "We have to return to South Street and find a few friends. This is to prevent any accidents from happening to them during the riot."

Oudick was very understanding. "Drive my car and take these two away."

"Alright, how do I return it to you later?" Jiang Baimian didn't waste any time being polite.

"If the riot ends soon, drive it to the guild. If not, head to Castellan Manor. The car also has a special permit," Oudick said simply.

Shang Jianyao and Jiang Baimian didn't say anything else. They carried Lei Yunsong and Lin Feifei on their backs and ran to First Hospital's entrance. They then used the key that Oudick gave them, opened the door, got in the car, and drove away.

It was only at this moment that the Castellan Guard assigned to this area arrived.

As they had a special pass, Shang Jianyao and Jiang Baimian easily crossed the encirclement and left North Street, entering Central Square.

At this point, the gunshots became increasingly obvious. They came from all directions, and there were countless corpses on the ground. Some were in their prime, some were children, some were men, and some were women. Some were neatly dressed, some had tattered clothes, some had incomplete corpses, some looked like they had been strangled to death, some looked like city guards, and some held guns like ordinary hunters...

Their blood had splattered on the ground, reflecting the large number of bullet holes on them.

Many people were also sitting near the alley, stuffing cornbread into their mouths. They watched the commotion dazedly, neither joining in nor resisting.

Upon seeing this, Jiang Baimian and Shang Jianyao temporarily fell silent.

After a few seconds, Jiang Baimian took out the walkie-talkie again and tried to contact Bai Chen and Long Yuehong.

This time, there was an answer.

“Where are you?” Jiang Baimian tried her best to maintain her tone so as not to make her team members panic and nervous.

Bai Chen’s voice came with a noisy background. “We’re rushing to Ah Fu’s Gun Shop. We were still on East Street when the nomads rushed in; we immediately found a place to hide. The first wave of rioting nomads has already dispersed, and a large number of people are no longer concentrated in one place.

“We plan on returning to move the supplies in our rooms to the jeep before driving to pick you up. We’ll leave through East Street’s city gate and return to the city after the situation stabilizes.”

“Alright, we’ll meet in the alley outside Ah Fu’s Gun Shop.” Jiang Baimian praised Bai Chen and signaled for Shang Jianyao to drive Oudick’s red SUV into South Street.

Clang! Clang!

The occasional bullet that flew over was blocked by the thick steel plates and bulletproof glass installed on the vehicle.

The situation at South Street was worse than in Central Square. Blood even flowed down the street.

A large number of people had died on the street. Corpses were everywhere, and some had their eyes open, filled with indignation and confusion.

From time to time, one or two living people could be seen, but most of them were about to die. They only instinctively moaned in pain.

As Jiang Baimian swept her gaze across the area, she suddenly pointed at a spot. “Drive over.”

It was the first restaurant they ate at after coming to Weed City—Time-Honored Noodle Restaurant.

Back then, Jiang Baimian and the others had a deep impression of the boss’s mixed accent and persistence in borrowing books from the library to teach his grandson how to read.

The delicious, spicy oil-drenched noodles similarly left an impression.

At this moment, the noodle shop was in chaos.

The boss with gray sideburns was on the ground. There was a large hole in his forehead, and blood dyed his clothes red—he was no longer alive.

The boss was in front of a wall corner. A seven-year-old boy was squatting there, trembling.

Several books—which mostly contained pictures—were scattered around them.

On the other side of the noodle shop, two people sat at the only table that hadn't been overturned.

One was a man in his thirties, and the other was a seven-year-old girl.

They buried their heads and ate the noodles in the large bowls, ignoring the chaos and gunshots outside.

After Shang Jianyao stopped the car, Jiang Baimian immediately opened the door and jumped down. As she raised her hand to aim at the noodle-eating man, she quickly approached the noodle shop owner and the boy behind him.

She didn't need to conduct any other inspection. She could tell that the boss was dead from the electric signals.

The man—who was eating the noodles—quickly scooped the remaining scallions inside the bowl into his mouth. He then licked the tip of his chopsticks and stood up reluctantly, shielding the little girl behind him.

The little girl's face was dirty, but her eyes were very bright. She didn't stop eating, slurping down the remaining noodles in two mouthfuls.

Shang Jianyao recognized the man.

This man had bronze skin and a square face. He looked rather honest—a wilderness nomad that had previously answered Oudick's question and told him about the fake Father's whereabouts.

Upon seeing Jiang Baimian and Shang Jianyao pointing their guns at him, the wilderness nomad revealed a smile that was uglier than crying. "Shoot me; I killed him. He didn't give us anything to eat, so I could only snatch the food and cook it myself... Otherwise, we'd starve to death."

Upon recalling this, the man's expression became a little warped, and his voice became much louder. "We are all humans. Are we not fit to live? We're humans too; do we deserve to starve to death?"

Jiang Baimian looked at the man and the little girl behind him—who reluctantly put down her bowl and chopsticks.

Jiang Baimian didn't pull the trigger for a long time.

A few seconds later, a gunshot sounded.

The man fell to the ground, and blood gushed out of his chest.

The one who fired was Shang Jianyao.

The little girl watched this scene numbly; she didn't cry or shout.

Jiang Baimian turned her head slightly and looked at Shang Jianyao. She saw him holding the gun with both hands and staring ahead with a solemn expression.

Jiang Baimian retracted her gaze and quickly instructed, "Bring both of them along, and we'll rendezvous with Little White."

If they didn't do anything, the two children wouldn't survive in such a chaotic situation.

When the time came, they could think of a way to settle them in after Weed City stabilized.

Shang Jianyao nodded and helped the two children into the red SUV. One squeezed into the backseat with the unconscious Lei Yunsong and Lin Feifei, while the other entered the passenger seat and stayed beside Jiang Baimian.

The two children didn't cry or resist; they seemed to be terrified instead.

After the car gradually drove away from Time-Honored Noodle Restaurant, the boy and girl seemed to wake up and lunged toward the windows at the same time.

They looked at the two corpses and shouted at the top of their lungs.

"Grandpa!"

“Daddy!”

...

In the alley where Ah Fu’s Gun Shop was.

Long Yuehong hastily swung his right arm and pulled the trigger.

Bang!

A knife-wielding nomad—who had appeared out of nowhere—fell to the ground and convulsed.

Compared to how he acted at the beginning of the chaos, Long Yuehong was relatively calm now. At least eight wilderness nomads had died at his hands.

After he and Bai Chen left their hiding spot in East Street, they returned to Ah Fu’s Gun Shop by utilizing the route with the least number of people. Even so, they encountered many wilderness nomads—who were overwhelmed by bloodthirstiness—and local bandits, who were taking advantage of the situation.

After the initial panic, Long Yuehong realized that these people didn’t have good marksmanship; they weren’t skilled either. As long as they avoided large groups and didn’t rush toward places with bullets flying everywhere, he and Bai Chen could deal with them through their cooperation.

The only thing to worry about was that the ammunition they carried with them was depleting. There was no time to replenish it.

Of course, it was not without danger along the way. Long Yuehong and Bai Chen encountered a City Guard team that cleaned up the wilderness nomads. It was unknown if the team treated them as civilians because of an overreaction caused by nervousness or if they believed that they could wipe them out due to them being alone.

Fortunately, there were only five people in the team.

Bai Chen had seen through their intentions in advance. After a chaotic battle, they abandoned two corpses and retreated to another alley.

This left Long Yuehong with lingering fear and excitement. This was because he had killed one of the city guards with a single shot to the head.

To him, this was an impressive achievement.

After entering Ah Fu's Gun Shop, Bai Chen swept her gaze around, and her heart sank.

Many of the guns sold here had disappeared. It was a mess everywhere, looking as if someone had robbed the shop.

Almost at the same time, gunshots came from upstairs.

The sound was intermittent and heart-wrenching.

"Auntie Nan..." Long Yuehong looked at Bai Chen and said a name.

Bai Chen's expression didn't change as she nodded. "Let's go up and take a look."

With that said, she added, "There's still plenty of supplies in the room."

"Alright." Long Yuehong didn't object. He only put away the Ice Moss with a slightly hot barrel, switched to his United 202, and reloaded it with bullets.

When they arrived at Ah Fu's Gun Shop's back door, they looked at the courtyard through the door hole and confirmed that the jeep was still parked in its original spot.

It was obvious that the wilderness nomads—who had rushed here—were temporarily uninterested in cars. They also didn't discover that many supplies were hidden in the car.

After turning into the stairwell, corpses were reflected in Long Yuehong and Bai Chen's eyes.

There were men and women among them; they were either lying on their stomachs or lying on their backs. All of them had been shot to death.

Bai Chen quickly scanned the area and subconsciously quickened her pace.

When they were about to reach the second floor, gunshots sounded again.

Bai Chen lowered her back and carefully moved upward. Long Yuehong mimicked her actions and followed behind closely.

After rounding the corner, they saw five to six armed men firing at someone in a room on the second floor.

In front of them were densely packed corpses, which were almost piled up.

Bai Chen didn't hesitate to raise her hands and fire at the group of wilderness nomads.

Long Yuehong didn't ask any further and did the same.

Bang! Bang! Bang!

Coupled with the counterattacks that came from inside the room, the duo emptied their clips and wiped out all the enemies in front of them.

"It's us!" Bai Chen immediately shouted.

Auntie Nan's voice sounded. "Quick, come on up."

Bai Chen and Long Yuehong dashed over and saw a group of people hiding in the room. There were Ah Fu's Gun Shop's shareholders like Auntie Nan, Gu Changle, and the prostitutes of different ages. They hid inside and trembled slightly.

An Ruxiang was guarding the door, preventing any wilderness nomads from rushing up.

This Ruin Hunter and temporary teacher held her pistol, half-kneeling as she leaned against the wall. Her expression remained cold and calm.

Auntie Nan's brother, Ah Fu, was in charge of reloading and handing out guns.

Upon seeing Bai Chen and Long Yuehong come up, An Ruxiang suddenly sat down and panted heavily.

A rare smile appeared on her clean and pure face.

Chapter 167: Returning to North Street

North Street, Castellan Manor.

After returning to his familiar home, Xu Liyan was no longer terrified and uneasy. He became calm and confident again.

"How's the situation now?" he asked his assistant, who had rushed over.

His assistant was a middle-aged man in his forties. He had experienced the two eras helmed by Xu Erde and Xu Wugong, and he had seen several revolts and coups. At this moment, he was very calm.

"Mr. Oudick has already sent the criminal suspected to be Father over and wants to meet you. The wilderness nomads that rushed in have snatched plenty of weapons and food. They are gathering at Central Square as if they want to attack North Street.

"They are evolving into a real group from an unorganized state. The city defense forces suffered a heavy blow in the beginning. Several teams lost their establishment and were scattered in different parts of the city. They can only do preliminary defense and cleanup; the chaos might drown them at any moment.

"After the Castellan Guard—which you assigned—left First Hospital, the reinforcements went to North Bridge and the municipal building. They have already rendezvoused with the city guards there. With their weapons, it won't be a problem for them to defend the area for a period of time. However, there are too few of them."

This was relative to the large number of wilderness nomads.

Compared to his previous near-death experience, the current situation couldn't be considered pressing. Xu Liyan clasped his hands behind his back and paced around before asking in a gentle voice, "Uncle Liu, what do you think we should do?"

Uncle Liu replied respectfully, "Organize more people."

Xu Liyan nodded slightly. "Pass down my orders: Gather all the members of the Aristocratic Council to discuss countermeasures. All of them have to do something.

"Organize a batch of elite members to leave through the north city gate and circle to South Street to connect the scattered city defense forces and gather them together. As long as this matter is completed, those rioters are nothing to worry about.

"If it really doesn't work out, we'll just throw out the baby with the bathwater—get the drone team to bomb the city; don't be afraid of destroying the city. Also, issue a mercenary mission to all Hunters and get the guild to shout through the loudspeakers."

At this moment, many Ruin Hunters were also separated in different parts of the city. They couldn't go to the guild in time to see the available missions.

"Yes, Castellan!" Uncle Liu replied respectfully.

Xu Liyan recalled something and quickly added, "Let Mr. Oudick come over."

After arranging everything in an orderly manner, Xu Liyan requested Jingnian—who was beside him, "Zen Master, please 'foresee' the subsequent situation."

A red glow flickered in Jingnian's eyes. "Alright."

The light in his electronic eyes froze.

After seven to eight seconds, Jingnian said, “Danger remains. The enemy has made subsequent arrangements that are related to the explosion. Patron, you mustn’t be careless.”

Before defeating himself and entering the Mind Corridor, his clairvoyant ability could only determine if something that could threaten his or his corresponding target’s survival was impending. He couldn’t see the corresponding scene or know where it came from; it was rather vague.

Xu Liyan nodded. “I’ll be careful, and I’ll get the guards to examine everyone’s bodies. Zen Master, I’ll go clean up and change.”

In the previous attack, he had rolled twice on the ground. Xu Liyan was alarmed and flustered, but he had also been seriously injured by Jingnian’s crushing weight. He had actually suffered a little bit of incontinence.

Even if he didn’t, he had to take the opportunity to clean himself up and adjust his mindset to deal with the subsequent chaos.

Jingnian nodded slightly. “I’ll guard the door.”

Jingnian had already checked Xu Liyan’s bedroom, balcony, and the garden outside—he didn’t discover any hidden dangers.

...

In the courtyard behind Ah Fu’s Gun Shop, the residents—who had repelled the first wave of attacks—began to barricade the several entrances with obstacles. They were prepared to build a barricade and seal the area to deal with the possible bandits that might come later.

Among them, although the men and women in their forties and fifties weren’t as nimble as young people, they dealt with the corresponding matters neatly and efficiently. They gave off the feeling that they were like fish in water.

This was something they often faced when they were young.

After Jiang Baimian and Shang Jianyao parked the large red SUV in the alley, they carried Lei Yunsong, Lin Feifei, and the two children into the courtyard before the courtyard was completely

sealed. They then went up to the second floor and met up with Bai Chen, Long Yuehong, and the others.

After asking Auntie Nan and Gu Changle to take care of the two children, they entered a room and discussed their experiences.

“Are we still leaving the city?” Jiang Baimian asked after some deliberation.

Bai Chen fell silent for a few seconds before saying, “The most chaotic period has passed.”

“Yes.” Jiang Baimian agreed. “When we came over, we realized that the nomads were gathering at Central Square. They might want to attack North Street since that’s where most of the food is. When Weed City regroups, it’s only a matter of time before order is restored. They have plenty of weapons and ammunition.”

This was the most important trading center at the intersection of three major factions. Its defense system was built to withstand a large faction’s attacks for a period of time.

As long as the wilderness nomads didn’t attack North Street and completely paralyze the entire city with their large numbers and surprise attacks in the first wave of attacks, they wouldn’t have much of a chance.

Bai Chen continued, “As long as we aren’t attacked, it won’t be a problem for us to last until the situation stabilizes.”

Be it food reserves, weapons, or fortifications, they could last two to three days.

Bai Chen paused and hesitantly said, “Auntie Nan has many people with her. If we want to bring them all out, we have to organize a convoy. It’s too eye-catching, and it’s easier for us to be targeted.”

“I understand,” Jiang Baimian replied with a smile, indicating that Bai Chen didn’t have to feel embarrassed. “There are benefits to staying behind, and it’s not a bad idea for everyone to stay here. It’s just nice...”

At this point, she turned to look at Shang Jianyao. “Let’s see if we can wake Lei Yunsong and Lin Feifei up. If we can figure out Wei Yu and the others’ whereabouts, we might have to take a risk in the city.”

Although Jiang Baimian called it a risk, her tone was very relaxed as if she was just going out for a stroll.

Finally, she smiled at Long Yuehong and said, “You did well today. You’re already a qualified warrior.”

When Long Yuehong unconsciously puffed up his chest, Shang Jianyao had already walked to the bed and assumed a posture of pressing Lei Yunsong’s chest.

This made Jiang Baimian roll her eyes helplessly, but she couldn’t be bothered to stop him. She simply let Shang Jianyao do whatever he wanted.

Once, twice...

Lei Yunsong suddenly coughed and slowly opened his eyes.

The first thing he saw was a red name tag with golden words. It read: Pangu Biology

“Do you still remember this?” Jiang Baimian began to evaluate the other party’s condition to determine if she should make Shang Jianyao ‘befriend’ him.

Lei Yunsong’s eyes were clearly wide open, but he still looked groggy. His gaze was blank for a few seconds before a glow appeared, seeming as if he had finally woken up from a nightmare that had lasted for nearly two months.

“Are you guys from the company?” he asked anxiously.

“Make a guess,” Shang Jianyao replied with a smile.

Just as Shang Jianyao said that, Jiang Baimian pulled the back of his shoulder with her right hand.

“Do you still remember who you are and why you came to Weed City?” Jiang Baimian asked in response.

Lei Yunsong frowned; the muscles on his face slightly warped as if he were enduring an indescribable pain.

“I-I...” He suddenly sat up and panted. “Be careful! Be careful of that sickly person!”

After saying this, Lei Yunsong’s face was covered in sweat. It was wet, seeming as if he had washed his face.

Shang Jianyao nodded. “If he can escape.”

Lei Yunsong was still in a state of being able to see the light gradually, and he didn’t understand the meaning of this sentence.

After a while, he finally recovered. “I’m Lei Yunsong, a team leader of a small team in the company. I came to Weed City to investigate Mechanical Paradise’s mainframe. When we left Castellan Manor and walked out of North Street, we encountered a man in a black trench coat. He looked very thin and seemed to be sick...”

Lei Yunsong’s voice gradually softened as he spoke, and his tone was filled with fear.

“He hypnotized the five of you in one go?” Jiang Baimian was a little surprised. After their previous exchange, she could almost confirm that the fake Father could only hypnotize one person at a time.

“No.” Lei Yunsong shook his head. “I was the one who looked him in the eye back then. After returning to the hotel and sleeping, I sleepwalked out and saw him again. After that, I followed his instructions and waited until dawn to find an excuse and an opportunity to bring my team members to see him...”

After hearing Lei Yunsong’s recount, Jiang Baimian’s evaluation results were: After escaping the corresponding environment and being stimulated by familiar items, he should’ve been freed from the hypnosis and returned to normal.

“Do you know where Wei Yu and the others went?” Jiang Baimian asked about the most important matter.

Lei Yunsong shook his head in self-blame. “We were separated. Lin Feifei and I lived in the two buildings adjacent to South Street, and we did things according to that man’s orders. Little Yu and the others were taken away by him...”

“Then, do you have any clues?” Jiang Baimian asked.

Lei Yunsong frowned and recalled. “That person’s Hypnosis seems to have a time limit. He would come over to see us after a period of time with his makeup on to carry out another hypnosis session on us. At the same time, he will give us some orders.

“One time, he came a little late. I recovered quite a bit and vaguely knew that something was amiss. Thus, I specially went outside to observe his route. He should usually be at North Street. Back then, I even heard him talking to people using electronic products. He said something like ‘bring them all to North Street...’”

At this moment, Lin Feifei woke up.

After repeating the previous process, Jiang Baimian confirmed some of what Lei Yunsong had said.

“Both of you haven’t fully recovered yet, so have a good rest. We’ll make a trip to North Street and try our best to meet the fake Father. We’ll see if we can obtain Wei Yu and the others’ whereabouts from him.” Jiang Baimian made a prompt decision and decided to go right away.

Shang Jianyao immediately added, “We’ll return the car while we’re at it.”

Lei Yunsong and Lin Feifei looked at each other when they heard that. They kept wondering if they had yet to escape the hypnosis completely or if the anesthetic effects had yet to wear off, causing them to be slow-witted and unable to understand what the other party was saying.

After leaving the room and arriving at the stairwell, Jiang Baimian spoke to Long Yuehong, who had followed her. “Stay here and help Little White. Yes, remind her to pay attention to Lei Yunsong and Lin Feifei. Although they look fine, there’s no guarantee that nothing will go wrong.”

“Yes, Team Leader!” Long Yuehong inexplicably felt like he had been entrusted with a heavy responsibility.

Jiang Baimian randomly found a window and jumped into the alley outside from the second floor. She then drove to South Street with Shang Jianyao.

She knew that wilderness nomads were gathering at Central Square in an attempt to attack North Street. Hence, she didn’t dare to take that route and chose to circle around.

Just like before, they left from South Street’s city gate and circled to North Street’s city gate. They used their special pass to successfully pass through the heavily guarded defense line.

Chapter 168: Drawing Silk from the Cocoon

To Jiang Baimian’s relief, Oudick couldn’t return to the Hunter’s Guild because the wilderness nomads were blocking Central Square and attacking North Street. He could only stay in Castellan Manor.

Not only could they return the car this way, but they also had the opportunity to interrogate the fake Father without any need for relays—this wasn’t something that could be done with a special permit.

After entering Castellan Manor and seeing Oudick in the side room, Jiang Baimian threw the car key at him and asked frankly, “Has the fake Father awoken?”

Her subtext was: Did you complete the first round of interrogation?

Oudick nodded and said, “He undoubtedly believes that he is Father. The plan he prepared was to lure us into the trap, find an opportunity to ‘hypnotize’ me, and make me his accomplice. During this process, he would rely on the seeds that he planted in advance to cause a huge commotion and create the most suitable environment for the final assassination.”

“If we didn’t know that the Castellan had almost died in the Hunter’s Guild, this plan sounds pretty realistic at first glance,” Jiang Baimian commented.

Shang Jianyao added, “Unfortunately, he’s too weak to carry out such a plan.”

These words suddenly made Oudick feel a little embarrassed. This was because he was almost useless against such a 'weak' opponent. He had fallen into a sneezing hell not long after the action began.

Jiang Baimian didn't waste any time glaring at Shang Jianyao and inquired, "Have you figured out the whereabouts of Lei Yunsong, Lin Feifei, and their companions?"

This was the question she was most concerned about.

Oudick shook his head. "The fake Father handed them over to a person nicknamed 'Mute' and prepared to frame them after the assassination succeeded. He doesn't know what Mute looks like or where he lives. His communications only rely on the Anti-intellectualism Church's agreed-upon communication method. But it's too chaotic outside North Street, so we can't use the corresponding means to contact him."

After Jiang Baimian heard that, she thoughtfully said, "Could this Mute be the real Father? Is his contact and communication with the fake Father actually a form of Hypnosis?"

"That's possible." Oudick had such a guess as well.

Their current consensus was: The fake Father was an Awakened that had been hypnotized or had his memories tampered with by the real Father. Therefore, he sincerely believed that he was the real Father and completed all kinds of missions according to the instructions of the Church's higher-ups.

The high-ranking member was most likely the real Father. At the same time, he might also be the cooperating partner, Mute.

At this moment, Shang Jianyao suddenly asked, "Why does the fake Father know Hypnosis?"

"Did the real Father specially find Awakened who knows Hypnosis? Only then can he create a perfect substitute," Jiang Baimian guessed.

If the fake Father didn't know Hypnosis, not only would others not believe that he was the real Father, but he would also suspect something and have his corresponding understanding waver.

Oudick subconsciously said, "How can they accurately find an Awakened who knows Hypnosis..."

Not only were there very few Awakened, but they were also accustomed to hiding their traits of having superpowers.

Oudick suddenly paused before he could finish speaking because he had already thought of the answer.

Shang Jianyao excitedly said, "Every time the Anti-intellectualism Church produces a batch of Awakened, a Father has to be chosen."

Last Man's domains were in hypnosis and memory, so even though the Awakened of 'His' Church's corresponding domains didn't hold the absolute advantage, there was definitely no lack of them.

Jiang Baimian tried to translate Shang Jianyao's words. "When a certain number of Awakened with hypnosis abilities reach a certain number, they will be placed together, locked up somewhere, and be made to 'kill' each other? Finally, a real Father and many fake Fathers will walk out?"

The more Jiang Baimian thought about it, the more she felt that it might be true.

This perfectly matched the Anti-intellectualism Church's teachings!

"Most people don't need brains. They are just puppets and archetypal nihilists; they leave their thinking to the corresponding Chosen One..." Jiang Baimian sighed with emotion and found it funny. "My previous understanding of the Anti-intellectualism Church was still too shallow. They actually did the same thing among the Awakened, who are a Church's backbone. They really do what they preach..."

What kind of spirit was this!?

As she sighed, Jiang Baimian saw that Shang Jianyao was a little tempted from the corner of her eye.

She had every reason to suspect that this fellow wanted to compete for the identity of the real Father.

But Jiang Baimian didn't think that Shang Jianyao could use Inference Clowning to deal with the real Father. She even felt that he might be hypnotized by the other party or have his memories tampered with.

The final outcome might be that the real Father would work hard to clean up the mess for the fake Father. After experiencing this many times, the real Father might decide to kick him out of the Father team with abnormal disdain, only to realize in surprise that this fellow had taken away all the fake Fathers and formed a new Father brotherhood, leaving the real Father alone.

Phew... Jiang Baimian exhaled and decided to throw these wild thoughts to the back of her mind.

Since she couldn't obtain information on the real Father and Wei Yu's whereabouts from the fake Father, Jiang Baimian could only ask, "Have you seen Castellan Xu? Did you ask about the details of his attack?"

Jiang Baimian wondered if she could find any clues from this matter.

Oudick didn't hide anything and explained the assault in detail with the information he had learned from Xu Liyan.

Of course, this didn't include the mechanical monk's abilities. Xu Liyan had skipped that topic.

At this point, he rather admired Jiang Baimian and Shang Jianyao's abilities. He only felt that their brains might be a little abnormal, which might be the price they had to pay.

Similarly, Jiang Baimian also trusted Oudick's ability to use his influence on dreams to obtain statements. She didn't request to interrogate the fake Father personally.

Jiang Baimian's expression gradually turned solemn as she listened, but Shang Jianyao's expression didn't visually change.

After Oudick finished speaking, Shang Jianyao excitedly asked, "Does Zen Master Jingnian know Zen Master Jingfa?"

"They should know each other..." Oudick replied in an uncertain tone.

Although there weren't many mechanical monks, and most of them knew each other, he didn't dare make an affirmative judgment as he wasn't a mechanical monk.

After this conversation, Jiang Baimian thought for a moment and said, "I think there's something wrong with this attack. There are at least three oddities."

"What are the three oddities?" Oudick also felt that something was amiss, but he couldn't figure out what the problems were.

Jiang Baimian raised her finger and said, "First, based on the attack's timing and the environment back then, what the fake Father did seemed useless. Be it transferring you from the guild or triggering the wilderness nomad riot, it didn't provide any additional help to the attack itself.

"Think about it. Under normal circumstances, you wouldn't stay in the guild all the time. You definitely would've been searching for clues outside. The commotion only affected the city guards and the Castellan Guard. It only deepened the tense atmosphere for Zen Master Jingnian and the four bodyguards in the guild. They wouldn't have been distracted or overstrained because of this."

"Yes." Oudick agreed with this.

The real and fake Father's plan seemed very ingenious, but upon careful thought, there was no need for the fake Father to exist.

Jiang Baimian curled up her other finger. "Second, given how Zen Master Jingnian's true identity and abilities were grasped through Real Hallucination ahead of time, the real Father's subsequent actions were simply... simply..."

Upon seeing this, Shang Jianyao added, "Brainless."

Jiang Baimian didn't retort and continued speaking. "When Castellan Xu opened the door, there was no need for him to answer at all; he could've pretended to be a real bodyguard. He should've immediately used Real Hallucination to influence Zen Master Jingnian again and get the four 'hypnotized' bodyguards to deal with Castellan Xu instead of letting off the greatest threat and swarming the target to finish him off.

“If Father adopted this plan, you should only be able to see the Castellan’s funeral portrait.”

Oudick deliberated and said, “Maybe the Hypnosis wasn’t strong enough due to the rush for time, and he needed to give guidance before the other bodyguards violated their duty and shot the Castellan?”

This was Zen Master Jingnian’s explanation of the situation back then.

“That’s indeed a possibility.” Jiang Baimian raised her third finger. “Let’s not talk about whether Christina from the Hunter’s Guild is his companion or if she was innocently pulled into this matter. Considering the resources and the faction backing Father, it’s too crude for him to choose to carry out an execution by gunfire.

“At that distance, throwing a grenade, getting some toxic gas, or tying a ring of high-performance, remote-controlled bombs invented by the Orange Company would suffice. Zen Master Jingnian won’t be able to protect him even if he wants to, or he won’t be able to do so in time.”

Jiang Baimian meant that the person who had mixed into the bodyguards’ ranks didn’t need to be Father himself, but another man of sacrifice that had been ‘hypnotized.’ In any case, the four bodyguards believed that there were five people in the team. This only required Father to project the man of sacrifice’s appearance when the Real Hallucination affected them, not Father’s own appearance.

“Something is indeed amiss...” Oudick thought about it and felt that Castellan Xu would’ve died countless times if the operation had been planned by the female Hunter opposite him.

At this moment, Shang Jianyao clapped his hands and came to a realization. “I get it.”

Upon seeing Oudick look at him, Shang Jianyao seriously said, “Father is teasing Castellan Xu!”

When Oudick’s mouth twitched slightly, Jiang Baimian exhaled and said, “It seems like Father doesn’t want to kill Castellan Xu. Then, why did he go through all the trouble—to the point of mobilizing himself—to attack Castellan Xu?”

At this moment, a word surfaced in Oudick’s mind: “Hypnosis!”

Father spent all his effort to close the distance between him and Xu Liyan and ensure eye contact so as to 'hypnotize' the other party!

Jiang Bohemian had also come to this conclusion, and she quickly asked, "Where's Castellan Xu now?"

"In the Aristocratic Council Chamber. He's discussing the matter of dealing with the wilderness nomads' riots with all the nobles..." Oudick suddenly understood something. This might be the reason why Father stirred up a wilderness nomad riot!

"Let's go!" Oudick suddenly turned around and rushed out of the side room. At the same time, he took out his phone.

Chapter 169: Aristocratic Council

Oudick dialed a number, but nobody picked up.

"Maybe the phones have been put to silent mode during the meeting..." Oudick voiced his guess as he ran.

Jiang Baimian and Shang Jianyao didn't say a word as they ran behind him.

...

Castellan Manor, Aristocratic Council Chamber.

A long table was placed in the middle. In the seat of honor was the luxuriously-dressed Castellan, Xu Liyan.

Sitting on each side were three people.

These were the seven great nobles and council members that stood atop Weed City. But ever since Xu Erde's rule, the focus of power had shifted to the City Hall and the city defense forces. The Castellan—who controlled these two departments and had the support of a certain faction in First City—gradually took the wind out of the Aristocratic Council.

But in such a critical situation, even if Xu Erde reincarnated, he wouldn't dare ignore the other six nobles' opinions.

They had private troops, manors, people, and all kinds of reserves. If they took advantage of the chaos to carry out an uprising and gather the wilderness nomads, it would be enough to turn Weed City upside down.

At this moment, only two guards were behind every noble in the Council Chamber. Even Castellan Xu Liyan was the same.

This was a rule that had gradually been 'developed' after the council's establishment—a lesson learned after numerous conflicts, leaks, coups, and bloodshed.

Anyone who entered the Council Chamber could only bring two bodyguards with them at most.

Similarly, the nobles and bodyguards could carry weapons but not expose them.

Weed City's rule on weapons originated from the council. Back then, the various armed groups' leaders weren't allowed to bring armed guards in with them. They were definitely afraid of being attacked and worried that the Castellan would suddenly smash his cup and have dozens to a hundred gunmen rush in to fire at them.

If they were allowed to bring armed guards along, they would be emboldened. Furthermore, they were all people who had experienced chaotic times and had their muzzles covered in blood. A small battle might erupt at the first sign of disagreement and involve others.

Therefore, they could only leave the guards outside and bring a certain number of bodyguards in for discussion. At the same time, they had to conceal their weapons well and not let anyone see them. In other words, they had to hide them in places that were inconvenient for them to draw their weapons. This way, there would be a buffer if they wanted to blow up their political enemy's head with their guns.

This gave the neutral parties a chance to stop them and allow them to calm down. In addition, people would also be worried that they hadn't holstered their guns in a convenient spot. If they were a few seconds slower than the other party—or even more than ten seconds—things would end up comical.

They might as well be more peaceful and quarrel without taking arms.

As part of the protocol, such gatherings had a strict inspection of any explosives to prevent anyone from sacrificing themselves to wipe out everyone.

At this moment, on Xu Liyan's left was the mechanical monk—Jingnian—in a long robe. On his right was his assistant, Uncle Liu. One was adept at combat, while the other was an academic.

Of course, this didn't mean that Uncle Liu had no combat strength. When Uncle Liu was young, he had killed countless enemies with guns in both hands—people who wanted to conquer Weed City and start a bloody coup.

But he was older and less feisty now. He also realized that he had greater talent in handling political matters, so his catchphrase became 'harmony is the most important thing.'

Xu Liyan looked around and spoke smilingly without using any official, formal words. "Uncles, you should have seen what it's like outside."

Upon seeing his humble posture, Zhao Zhengqi—head of the Zhao residence—stroked his beard and said, "Castellan, feel free to speak your mind. This is everyone's Weed City; who would be unwilling to contribute?"

Zhao Zhengqi was in his fifties, and his beard was a little white. In the Ashlands—where people were mostly thin—his chubbiness left a deep impression.

One of the bodyguards behind him was a man of sacrifice raised by his family, and the other was his eldest son—who was in his thirties. He was mainly here to familiarize himself with the Aristocratic Council's styles and procedures.

Everyone's Weed City... Xu Liyan secretly sneered and sincerely said on the surface, "There are many casualties now, and we are very short-handed. The wilderness nomads might break through the municipal building's defense line at any moment and rush into North Street. Uncles, I hope that you will send out your private troops and form a team to counterattack. We hope to scatter the nomads and drive them out of the city before they are truly organized."

Zhao Zhengqi looked at his in-law—Merrick—and waited for him to speak first.

The Merrick family was of the Red River race, but after several generations of intermarriage, he also had obvious Ashlandic characteristics.

His facial features were relatively soft, and his pores weren't that wide. He had blond hair and blue eyes. His wrinkles were relatively deep, and he always spoke slowly as if nothing would happen even if the sky collapsed.

“Castellan, it's not a problem to send a private army. Weed City is everyone's, so how can we sit back and do nothing? As long as you leave us the manpower to protect our manors, the rest are at your disposal. However, my men aren't part of the regular army. They are trained according to the rules of manor protecting. Not only is it difficult for them to counterattack, but it might not be effective.

“How about this? Let our people replace the city defense forces and your guards. We'll guard North Bridge and the municipal building and let the regular troops carry out the counter-charge.”

As Xu Liyan spoke in Ashlandic, Merrick used the same language. Furthermore, he was fluent and eloquent with his choice of words. It was obvious that he had put in a lot of effort.

Just as Merrick said that, Zhao Zhengqi and the other nobles immediately echoed his words, indicating that he was right.

The veins on Xu Liyan's forehead twitched, and his grip on the chair's armrests unconsciously tightened.

After receiving Uncle Liu's 'harmony is the most important thing' gaze, Xu Liyan forced a smile onto his face and said, “I can understand your concerns. I also plan on picking a batch of uninjured personnel from the city defense forces and city guard to form a team for the counterattack. But this number of personnel might not be enough. When the time comes, I'll have to choose some from your private army.”

After looking at each other, Zhao Zhengqi nodded. “Alright, let's do that.”

The other nobles didn't harp on the matter. This was because they had their own interests in East Street, West Street, and South Street. Even if they weren't the real owners of certain warehouses, they were hotel owners, grain shop owners, and major shareholders in nightclub businesses.

All of them desperately wanted to finish off the wilderness nomads as soon as possible so that their property would suffer the least damage.

After conveying this decision and making it official, Xu Liyan switched to the second topic. “Uncles, the riots should be quelled soon. We have to discuss how to deal with the aftermath. Outside North Street, countless civilians have been killed and robbed. The coming winter will be very tough.

“I’m willing to take the lead and donate a portion of food to help them tide through winter until the situation improves. Yes, we have to donate some medical supplies as well. There will definitely be many injured people, but they might not be able to afford medical care.”

Just as Xu Liyan said that, Zhao Zhengqi shook his head vigorously. “We don’t have any surplus food either. Besides, it’s only been a morning. How much food can the city lose? By being thrifty, it won’t be a problem for them to survive the winter.”

What a joke. This wasn’t their ‘property.’ Why did they need to extend aid to them?

“That’s right.” Merrick echoed. “What does it matter if some civilians die? We have enough slaves anyway.”

“That’s right! Anyone who dares to cause trouble will be driven out to be wilderness nomads.” Another Aristocratic Councilor, Zhang Wenxin, voiced his opinion. “When the situation stabilizes, as long as we have food to sell, plenty of people will be coming to Weed City to live and fill the manpower gap.”

Upon hearing their objections, Xu Liyan rubbed his temples and felt his head buzz. He barely maintained his bearing and analyzed the situation seriously. “Considering that the soldiers’ families live outside North Street, we can only flee to First City if they defect.”

Zhao Zhengqi chuckled and said, “Castellan, don’t worry. Our private army’s families are all in the manor.”

But the city defense forces’ families aren’t... Xu Liyan felt the veins on his forehead throb even more.

Not only did his mind buzz amidst the other nobles' objections, but Xu Liyan also seemed to hear an illusory voice shouting in his ears.

"Blow them up!

"Blow them up!"

Xu Liyan's eyes gradually glazed over. With one hand supporting his head, he reached into his pocket with the other and took out a small, black remote control.

"Blow them up!

"Blow them up!"

The devil's roar constantly echoed in his ears, gradually making his breathing become heavier.

At this moment, the door to the Aristocratic Council Chamber was opened.

A guard shouted inside, "Castellan, Mr. Oudick has something urgent to see you about!"

At the door, Jiang Baimian had excellent eyesight. At a glance, she realized that there was something wrong with Xu Liyan's gaze—it was filled with blankness and craziness.

"Quick!" As she reminded Oudick, Jiang Baimian immediately drew her pistol and fired at the crystal chandelier above the long table in the Aristocratic Council Chamber.

Shang Jianyao drew his gun and turned around, helping Jiang Baimian guard her back.

With a bang and a crashing sound, a large number of glass shards fell.

Apart from Xu Liyan, the nobles present weren't young. They had also experienced war and riots, so they were very sensitive to gunshots—they reacted immediately.

The slow-talker, Merrick, slid down and hid under the table.

The fat Zhao Zhengqi bent his waist and nimbly jumped out of his seat. He pulled his eldest son and rushed into the corner...

Their bodyguards drew their guns, found their spots, and aimed at the door.

This gunshot also shocked Xu Liyan in the seat of honor, slightly jolting him awake from the devil's roaring. He then stopped moving.

However, this little bit of clarity was quickly drowned out. Xu Liyan's eyes reddened as he swept his gaze around and was about to press the remote control in his hand.

At this moment, his eyelids suddenly became heavy. He instantly lost consciousness and leaned back against his chair as if he had fallen asleep.

Oudick seized the short gap created by Jiang Baimian to jump forward and complete a roll. He had already closed the distance between him and Xu Liyan to a point where he could use Forced Sleep!

He then saw a thick, black barrel—this had 'extended' from Jingnian's hand.

"The Castellan has been hypnotized by Father. He wants to perish together with everyone here!" Oudick quickly shouted his guess.

This sentence made the bodyguards and the guards outside stop their counterattacks and confront Jiang Baimian and Shang Jianyao.

As Jingnian continued aiming at Oudick, he stretched out his metal arm and forcefully tore off Xu Liyan's coat.

The Castellan's physical condition was immediately revealed.

Xu Liyan had tied several rounds of explosives around his waist. They were high-performance products from Orange Company.

Not only would the people in the Aristocratic Conference Chamber not be spared once they exploded, but even the people two doors away would be destroyed.

The only person who might've survived was the mechanical monk, Zen Master Jingnian.

Chapter 170: Bang

Merrick—who was hiding under the table—saw Xu Liyan's situation clearly. He scrambled out and ran to the corner where Zhao Zhengqi was. During this process, he shouted, "Explosives! He has a ring of explosives tied to him!"

Since Zhao Zhengqi and the others were relatively far away and had tables blocking them, they couldn't see Xu Liyan's situation in detail. They could only anxiously ask, "What explosives?"

"What's wrong?"

"What happened?"

Frankly speaking, if it weren't for the fact that the situation seemed to be under control, they definitely wouldn't hesitate to let the bodyguards lead the way, rush out of the room, and rendezvous with their other guards.

"Little Mushrooms! Xu Liyan has a circle of Little Mushrooms tied to him!" Merrick quickly shared his knowledge of the situation.

These explosives originated from the Orange Company, and the model was H404. As they were very powerful, they were nicknamed 'Little Mushroom.'

"Dogsh*t!" Francesco—another member of the Aristocratic Council with Red River blood in him—couldn't help but curse.

If a circle of 'Little Mushrooms' exploded, it meant that nobody in the meeting chamber or the corresponding area outside would be spared—abnormal people excluded.

After a brief moment of chaos, Zhao Zhengqi looked at Oudick, Uncle Liu, and the hooded mystery man. He then asked loudly, "What's going on? Also, r-remove the explosives first."

This conversation made his liver tremble.

“This Penniless Monk will do it.” Under the chip’s control, Jingnian’s five metal fingers slowly removed the explosives tied to Xu Liyan’s body with maximum precision.

Jingnian now felt a little vexed because he had actually made the mistake of being blindsided.

In order to come to Weed City as a bodyguard, he had clearly installed some modules that he usually didn’t use. He had also specially used these modules to check if the nobles and their guards carried explosives that exceeded a certain threshold. Unexpectedly, he had neglected his employer.

Oudick didn’t put on a brave front. He looked at Zhao Zhengqi and simply explained, “Not long ago, the Anti-intellectualism Church’s Father attacked Castellan Xu and was stopped. But his goal wasn’t to assassinate him; it was to close the distance and make eye contact.

“Father hypnotized Castellan Xu and primed him to carry out a suicidal attack when all the nobles had gathered for a meeting. He would then wipe out Weed City’s top brass in one fell swoop.”

At this moment in time, Oudick was only certain of the latter half of the sentence.

Father had no need to put on such a show just to assassinate Xu Liyan. His real goal was very grand and very difficult to achieve.

His goal was to kill all the nobles in Weed City!

It had to be known that Xu Liyan had the mechanical monk, Jingnian, guarding him. Any method of contact or secret hypnosis through normal channels could be foiled by Clairvoyance. Furthermore, under the Eternal’s constant gaze, any attempt at hypnotizing was relatively easy to discover.

When the time came, the culprit might not even be able to escape.

At the same time, everyone had to undergo strict inspection at any gathering that Xu Liyan attended, regardless of the format. They could only bring light firearms like pistols that could be hidden on them.

Under all the different restrictions, it was almost impossible to kill all the nobles in Weed City in one go.

There were still sufficient security measures here.

As for what Father's motive was to aim for such a grand goal, it was temporarily unknown.

The mechanical monk, Jingnian, chanted a Buddhist proclamation in a low voice. "So that's how it is, Namó Annutara-Samyak-Subhuti..."

Jingnian finally understood the entire sequence of events and the details involved. He also found the true source of the danger that he had foreseen—he imagined that there would be a second round of assassination.

"Impressive!" Shang Jianyao was not stingy with his praise. If not for the fact that he was holding an Ice Moss pistol and facing dozens of guards alone, he definitely wouldn't have skipped on applauding.

Although Jiang Baimian didn't turn around, she could imagine the admiration on Shang Jianyao's face.

Shang Jianyao was impressed by how grand Father's scheme was.

Zhao Zhengqi, Francesco, and the others had barely figured out the truth. They didn't care about the baffling words coming out from Oudick's subordinate and heaved sighs of relief.

They had more or less gathered information on the arrival of such an Advanced Hunter in Weed City, so they were no strangers to Oudick. They cast their gazes over one after another to express their thanks.

"Mr. Oudick, right? It's all thanks to you; otherwise, we would've been blown up."

"We'll definitely prepare some thank-you gifts later."

“F*ck, I’ve experienced countless storms in my life. To think that I almost died here today without even knowing who killed me! Mr. Oudick, let’s get to know one another. When this matter is over, you must come to my manor as a guest.”

“When order in the city is restored, capture the Anti-intellectualism Church’s believers immediately and burn them at the stake in Central Square!”

As they spoke, Jingnian had already removed the H404 explosives from Xu Liyan’s body and grabbed the black remote control.

Originally, he wanted to move these high-risk items elsewhere personally to distance them from the Council Chamber. However, he gave up on the idea after looking at Xu Liyan.

A qualified bodyguard couldn’t be more than three meters away from their employer.

Jingnian raised his arm and asked in an electronic voice, “Who will take them out?”

Weed City was located at the edge of the Monk Wastelands. Everyone present was no stranger to mechanical monks. At this moment, they could roughly guess Jingnian’s identity. However, they chose to remain silent after looking at the string of explosives and the remote control.

It was obvious that no noble would lower themselves to do such a thing. Sending their bodyguards would also weaken the defenses around them.

As for summoning the other guards in, it wasn’t in line with the rules and could easily trigger an unnecessary chain reaction—it could make the other nobles think that someone was taking the opportunity to start a gunfight.

Besides, who knew if there was another remote control for that pile of explosives? What if Father or his accomplices were hiding in Castellan Manor and pressed the switch when the time came?

When the time came, whoever carried the explosives would be blasted to nothingness!

Of course, it was also their consensus to move dangerous items away as soon as possible.

With such thoughts in mind, they looked at Oudick again, hoping that he could get his subordinate to do the deed.

Without waiting for them to speak, Shang Jianyao volunteered. "Let me do it!"

He was rather interested in the large string of 'Little Mushrooms.'

"Good!"

"Courageous!"

All the nobles present agreed unanimously and signaled the guards to lower their weapons and stop the confrontation.

Shang Jianyao quickly walked to Jingnian and stretched out his left hand to take the pile of items.

He then stretched out his right palm and assumed a handshake posture.

Jingnian was stunned for a moment before he dazedly stretched out his metallic right hand and shook Shang Jianyao's hand.

"Zen Master, I'll play you a song later. You'll definitely like it," Shang Jianyao said enthusiastically.

If not for the fact that the situation was rather serious, Jiang Baimian really wanted to raise her hand to cover her face.

Jingnian was momentarily at a loss for an answer.

Fortunately, Zhao Zhengqi helped him out. "We can wake the Castellan up now. There are some details that only he knows."

Oudick had no objections and nodded at Jingnian.

Jingnian immediately grabbed Xu Liyan's shoulder and shook him.

Shang Jianyao was originally watching excitedly, but he was unanimously requested to leave quickly because he was holding dangerous items. Thus, he could only move his feet and inch toward the door.

Two to three seconds later, Xu Liyan woke up.

He was confused at first, but he quickly lowered his head and looked at his waist.

"Castellan Xu, you were hypnotized by Father," Oudick reminded him.

Xu Liyan's expression repeatedly changed as he leaned back in his chair. "I remember... When I was cleaning up, the voices of 'blow them up' kept sounding in my head. I then found a pile of explosives at the secret arsenal in the room..."

After his attempt failed, and he was told the truth, the effects of Hypnosis were removed.

"Castellan, it's not that I'm taking advantage of my seniority, but you ought to be more careful in the future. Don't keep going to the Hunter's Guild." After Zhao Zhengqi heard that, he lectured Xu Liyan in an ambiguous manner.

Xu Liyan pulled himself together and ignored Zhao Zhengqi. He looked at the guard outside the door and spoke with killing intent. "Tell Sun Xuefeng that, as soon as the team is organized, we will immediately counterattack and push the wilderness nomads out of the city within an hour."

Upon seeing that the alarm had been lifted, Merrick and the others relaxed. They walked back to the long table and voiced their opinions.

"That's right! I don't know how many things those damn bastards have damaged. I only hope they didn't ruin the supplies too badly."

"Our food was painstakingly planted. Why should we let them have it easy? It's already too benevolent of us to give some of them a chance to be slaves."

“Can’t they just stay outside the city quietly and wait for the other slave hunters in First City to rush over?”

“It’s their fault for not saving up food. Who can they blame for starving to death?”

“I don’t think we should just push them out of the city. If we don’t teach them a cruel lesson, they will still dare to do something similar in the future!”

“It’s troublesome to keep them. It’s better to find a way to finish them off without wasting bullets.”

As everyone discussed the matter, Zhao Zhengqi and the others steered the conversation toward Xu Liyan’s plans for the aftermath.

“Castellan, you can’t be soft-hearted.”

“Even if we want to give aid, we can’t do it for free. Don’t those citizens still have property, shops, and furniture? They can exchange them for food...”

“With so many people dead, there shouldn’t be a lack of food, right?”

“We have to urge them to bury the people as soon as possible. It will be troublesome if a plague breaks out.”

“They can be saved for a while, but they can’t be saved for the entire winter. We still have to consider a more appropriate solution. Why don’t you step forward to borrow some food and supplies from First City?”

“At most, we can recruit new citizens. There’s plenty of people anyway.”

“In this world, food is more valuable than humans...”

“Everyone, everyone. Harmony is most precious. Harmony is most precious.”

All kinds of sounds entered his ears, making Xu Liyan’s head buzz again.

Bang!

At this moment, another gunshot sounded.

The broken crystal chandelier fell and smashed onto the long table.

Merrick—who spoke and did things slowly—slid to the bottom of the table again. The fat Zhao Zhengqi left his seat like a cat and jumped to a sheltered corner. This time, he was in such a rush that he didn't even have time to pull his eldest son along.

As the nobles dispersed, Oudick hid at the head of the long table while looking at the door with Jingnian.

Shang Jianyao stood there, holding the string of 'Little Mushrooms' in one hand and the black remote control in the other. He held the Ice Moss in the other hand and aimed it at the long table.

Noticing everyone's gazes, Shang Jianyao smiled brightly and asked, "If I press this button, will these bombs explode with a bang?"

Upon hearing this question, especially the heavy bang, all the nobles' hearts stopped beating, including Xu Liyan's.

Oudick blurted out, "Are you crazy?"

Shang Jianyao looked at him with a smile and replied, "You just realized that?"

Beside him, Jiang Baimian sighed helplessly. She turned around, raised her pistol, and helped guard Shang Jianyao's back.