

Ad Infinitum 191

Chapter 191: Walking Ninety Miles Out of a Hundred Is Just Halfway the Journey

In Room 05 of the hotel camp.

Jiang Baimian sat by her bed and looked at Shang Jianyao. “How is it? Have you learned anything more about diseases recently?”

Shang Jianyao put down the book in his hand and seriously answered, “I realized that most diseases come from external infections. As long as we take precautions and follow the procedure strictly, we basically won’t get sick.”

“There’s nothing wrong with that,” Jiang Baimian commented.

Shang Jianyao had always been a man of action. He immediately lay flat on the bed and massaged his temples.

...

In the Sea of Origins that shimmered, Shang Jianyao followed his previous strategy and used Inference Clowning to make himself believe that he was Pangu Biology. He then climbed onto the Island of Diseases.

Figures draped in white bedsheets appeared as expected, appearing to blot out the sky and earth.

Shang Jianyao smiled at them, splitting himself into countless figures, just like how Pangu Biology was made up of countless employees.

A portion of these figures gathered and evolved into a fully-equipped hospital. It was divided into a disinfection zone, a patient area, and other areas. It strictly implemented measures to control the spread of infection.

The remaining Shang Jianyaos took up their respective jobs. Some wore Shang Jianyao face masks and created a local advantage in numbers. They pounced on the terrifying figures draped in white bedsheets and tied them to Shang Jianyao stretchers.

Some carried Shang Jianyao stretchers and quickly entered the Shang Jianyao hospital. According to the procedure, they sent the figures in white bedsheets to the wards.

Some transformed into Shang Jianyao doctors and used Shang Jianyao disinfectant before wearing Shang Jianyao face masks, Shang Jianyao goggles, and Shang Jianyao protective suits. They passed through the disinfection area with Shang Jianyao nurses and used Shang Jianyao injections to treat the patients.

During this process, Shang Jianyao disinfectant, Shang Jianyao masks, Shang Jianyao medical alcohol, and Shang Jianyao protective suits were constantly expended. However, Shang Jianyao doctors and Shang Jianyao nurses maintained their health; nobody fell ill.

This improved Shang Jianyao's collective situation significantly, allowing the figures in white bedsheets to receive 'treatment' before they dissipated on the hospital beds.

For the first time, the Shang Jianyaos had the upper hand.

After a long confrontation, the figures draped in white bedsheets became fewer and fewer. In the end, only the Shang Jianyaos remained on the island.

Upon seeing this, the Shang Jianyao doctors and Shang Jianyao nurses slowly exhaled and sat in Shang Jianyao chairs.

At this moment, they felt intense fatigue. This fatigue made their bodies extremely weak as if something baffling was growing in them.

The Shang Jianyao doctors and Shang Jianyao nurses looked up and sized each other up. They realized that the other party's white coats and white clothes had turned to white bedsheets at some point in time.

These white bedsheets were large and enveloped them, leaving only a shadow.

Diseases had struck again.

...

Shang Jianyao opened his eyes, sat up, and panted twice.

“How was it?” Jiang Baimian asked as she sat by her bed. Her waist was leaning against a folded blanket, and a vertical pillow was behind her head.

Shang Jianyao’s eyes lit up as he said, “I’m about to win!”

“Oh?” Jiang Baimian expressed her puzzlement with her tone.

Shang Jianyao explained seriously, “We’ve already controlled the infection and beaten them to a pulp. But in the end, just as it was about to end, we inexplicably fell ill again.”

“Stop, stop, stop!” Jiang Baimian quickly stopped him. “When you return to reality, don’t use the term ‘we’ to describe yourself. This will only worsen your condition. No matter how divided you are in the mind world, you will only have one body when you come out.”

“That’s right. It would be good if there were multiple bodies in reality.” Shang Jianyao agreed.

“...” Jiang Baimian wisely didn’t harp on the topic to prevent Shang Jianyao from gaining a deeper understanding of this topic. She then asked, “How did you feel before you fell ill?”

Shang Jianyao immediately replied, “Very tired, very exhausted, and very weak.”

Jiang Baimian nodded thoughtfully. “Diseases don’t just come from infections. They might also come from some intrinsic pathology or malignant mutations from cellular division. This has a certain level of correlation with genetics, mental state, physical condition, and habits. It doesn’t mean that one will definitely not fall ill once they prevent infection.”

Shang Jianyao tersely acknowledged it. “I think so too.” He hadn’t been reading books for nothing.

“It’s good if you don’t think so.” Jiang Baimian sighed instead. “The fear in the mind world is mostly related to your own understanding. If you subconsciously believed that diseases only come from infections, you might’ve already defeated the white bedsheets and cleared this ‘island.’”

Shang Jianyao's eyes lit up. "I can try not to think so."

Jiang Baimian said in amusement, "It shouldn't be possible at the moment. Your Inference Cloning only misleads the surface cognition, making one unconsciously ignore certain memories and imagine certain situations. It doesn't actually control the memories' content, nor does it affect the corresponding subconscious."

"The different islands in the Sea of Origins should be different projections of your memories and subconscious. No matter how much you deceive yourself, they will appear according to the actual situation you know."

At this point, Jiang Baimian thought for a moment and said, "I just don't know if the real Father's memory tampering or the Awakened who can delete memories in the company can do something in this regard. Yes, without sufficient examples and putting it into practice, I can't determine if their abilities have truly changed the content of memories, or if it's some kind of long-term misdirection."

As Shang Jianyao listened, he took out a pen and paper and began scribbling.

"What are you writing?" Jiang Baimian got off the bed and went over.

When she read the paper clearly, Shang Jianyao had already written the title: "True Father's Capturing Plan."

"..." Jiang Baimian's smile stiffened.

She raised her hand and pinched the corners of her mouth. "I think there should be considerable latent dangers if we rely on other people's abilities in the hope of pulling a trick. The simplest inference is that, although you clear the Island of Diseases, you will immediately face Memory Island. This comes from your subconscious fear of memory modification."

"Memory is one of a person's most intrinsic characteristics. The fear that comes from this aspect is most likely ten to a hundred times greater than the fear of disease. There's no way to defeat it. If you give up on modifying your memories and return to normal, the Island of Diseases will make a comeback. Think about it. Isn't the fake Father stuck on some 'island' and unable to advance?"

Upon seeing Shang Jianyao nod slightly, Jiang Baimian heaved a sigh of relief. “You’re already 90% of the way to victory. As long as you have a clearer understanding of your own disease and slightly change the method, I believe it won’t be long before you succeed.”

“Yes.” Shang Jianyao fell into deep thought as if he were considering what to improve.

Jiang Baimian also helped think and deliberated before saying, “Do you want to get some medical supplies and do a volunteer medical consultation at Redstone Collection? This doesn’t require medical skills obtained through formal training. Instead, we can use this method to make contact with all kinds of patients and gain a deeper understanding of diseases. In any case, it’s good for the patient to have an additional channel to obtain medicine. At least there’s a little hope.”

Shang Jianyao put down his pen and paper, clenched his right fist, and struck his left palm. “Why didn’t I think of that?”

Upon seeing his sudden excitement, Jiang Baimian began to wonder if she had made a bad suggestion.

Fortunately, the people from Redstone Collection are very vigilant. They must be the same when it comes to taking medicine or getting medical advice... Jiang Baimian tried her best to comfort herself.

...

As they temporarily didn’t have any additional medical supplies, the volunteer medical consultation plan was forced to be postponed. After the four people from the Old Task Force took a nap, they leisurely revised their plan on making contact with Mechanical Paradise in the room. They chatted about the Old World and went to an open area to practice combat.

A day passed just like that.

In the middle of the night, Shang Jianyao—who was lying in bed—suddenly opened his eyes. He quietly got off the bed and picked up the mask.

Jiang Baimian—who was in the bed beside him—had already woken up.

Shang Jianyao quickly put on his mask, bent his back, and crept to the window by the door.

The curtains were drawn here, blocking out the moonlight and starlight outside.

Shang Jianyao half-squatted, grabbed the curtain, and suddenly pulled it to the side.

With a swoosh, he stood up and looked out the window.

A face appeared under the faint moonlight.

The skin of this face was grayish-black and suffused a weak glow. Upon careful inspection, it appeared like scales. From the bottom of his ears to the sides of his neck, gills constantly trembled. His eyes also protruded, mostly white and a little black.

It clung to the glass so tightly that its muscles were squashed, making it appear grotesque.

At this moment, the ‘monster’ outside the window also saw the scene inside clearly.

Standing there was a terrifying ‘monkey’ with a pointy mouth and a furry face!

The ‘monster’ let out a terrified exclamation and abruptly turned around, running out of the camp.

Shang Jianyao was first stunned before he became abnormally excited. He was just about to open the window, jump out of the room, and give chase.

“He’s already escaped the vicinity of Corny Person.” Jiang Baimian—who wasn’t far behind him—gave a hint. “Don’t chase in the dark to prevent any accidents.”

Shang Jianyao stopped and stared out the window before sighing regretfully.

“Did you see the person clearly?” Jiang Baimian asked curiously.

In that instant, Shang Jianyao's body blocked her line of sight, preventing her from seeing the spy. All she heard was a sound.

Shang Jianyao immediately described what he had seen and heard excitedly.

At this moment, Bai Chen and Long Yuehong—who had been woken up—walked over in their clothes.

After Jiang Baimian heard that, she muttered to herself thoughtfully, “A Subhuman that has fish-like mutations?”

“This is the Lake of Wrath,” Bai Chen added.

This meant that there was a large lake in the area, which was suitable for Subhuman survival.

Shang Jianyao came to a realization. “No wonder I felt I could make friends.”

Long Yuehong glanced at him. “Were you not frightened just now?”

Shang Jianyao was stunned for a moment before he replied in frustration, “I might've scared him.”

Chapter 192: Mountain Monsters

Long Yuehong didn't know how he should criticize Shang Jianyao's answer. He could only say in disbelief, “Don't you find your description terrifying?”

“So what? He's still human.” Shang Jianyao began to give an example. “Would you find a person terrifying just because they have no nose, ears, or eyelids?”

Long Yuehong imagined it and nodded heavily. “Yes.”

Shang Jianyao seemed to have just realized that there was a certain generation gap between him and his good friend. He could only change the example. “Would you find him terrifying just because he's 1.75 meters tall, has average looks, and average grades?”

Long Yuehong didn't know if Shang Jianyao was seriously giving an example or if he was just beginning his daily teasing. He said in exasperation and amusement, "How can it be the same?"

"Stop!" Jiang Baimian stopped their 'debate' and yawned. "It's late; continue sleeping."

"Team Leader, aren't you worried that the Subhuman will return with companions?" Long Yuehong felt that it was necessary to keep watch until dawn.

Jiang Baimian smiled. "Not bad; you're becoming more and more careful. Although this is the core area of Redstone Collection, and it's unlikely that we will encounter a terrifying attack without any warning, the situation here is more complicated than I imagined. Ashlanders, Red River people, foreign smugglers, Ruin Hunters, Subhumans, the Vigilance Church, the Underground Ark... Ha, it has become a hodgepodge like the Rootless caravan. There's indeed a need to take turns for night duty.

"However, there's no need to be too worked up. Just having one person on night duty will do. You just have to pay attention to any loud sounds."

"Yes, Team Leader!" Long Yuehong immediately replied.

...

The next morning, the Old Task Force quartet entered Redstone Collection in high spirits as always. They came to the Public Security Department again before visiting the DiMarco family's butler.

"You guys seem to have encountered something in the middle of the night yesterday?" Han Wanghuo asked frankly. He didn't hide the fact that Redstone Collection had surveillance of the hotel camp.

Jiang Baimian—who was wearing a graceful monk mask—smiled and said, "I was just thinking about how to start a conversation and ask where the fish-like Subhumans came from without making it obvious."

"Will they sing a lullaby in the middle of the night?" Shang Jianyao asked excitedly.

Long Yuehong found the question a little strange at first, but he understood after some thought. Shang Jianyao linked the monsters in the radio story—which had a human head and a fish body and could sing beautiful songs—to the fish-like mutated Subhuman.

Long Yuehong had no idea why Shang Jianyao called it a lullaby.

Han Wanghuo was even more confused and directly ignored Shang Jianyao's question. He tersely grunted and said, "These are Subhumans who live on certain islands in the Lake of Wrath. We generally call them merfolk."

Bai Chen thought of the Subhumans in Blackrat Town and had no questions about the names given by Redstone Collection.

Han Wanghuo continued, "These Subhumans were originally fishermen from certain parts of the lake. When the Old World was destroyed, they mutated due to the pollution of certain areas and the corresponding water source. They slowly became what they are now."

Upon hearing this, Long Yuehong suddenly felt a little confused. "Why are their abnormalities so uniform?"

This didn't make sense! This wasn't a mutation induction experiment that was administered with qualitative and quantitative objectives.

Han Wanghuo glanced at Jiang Baimian. Upon seeing that she didn't say anything, he casually explained, "Back then, there were many abnormalities. Most died in a few days or months. Among the remaining, the merfolk are the ones who are most accustomed to the Lake of Wrath's environment. They can reproduce and can dive very deep. They can find undercurrents that are devoid of pollution and obtain sufficient food from the lake. They gradually became one of the two mainstream elements in this area. Apart from the mountain monsters, the rest were wiped out at some point in time."

"Mountain monsters?" Jiang Baimian acutely captured another term.

Han Wanghuo pointed at the ceiling and said, "Didn't you guys go to the cathedral? Further north is a mountain range; there are also Subhumans there. They look much more normal than merfolk, but their skin is a little blue. Their teeth are relatively sharp, and it's as easy for them to climb cliffs as it is for us to walk the ruins."

Jiang Baimian asked with interest, “Why didn’t they get eliminated by nature and instead became one of the mainstream people in this area?”

Han Wanghuo was a little confused. “I’m not sure. I’m not a scholar in this regard.”

He recalled and said, “People in Redstone Collection only told me about the strength of the Subhumans and how to deal with them; they didn’t say anything else. But when I was a Ruin Hunter, I protected a researcher from First City. He told me that mountain monsters have a very strong resistance to certain pollution...”

Jiang Baimian came to a realization. She took out a pen and paper from her pocket and jotted down this point.

This stunned Han Wanghuo, and he hesitated before saying, “I’ve always felt that you don’t look like pure Ruin Hunters. You look more like researchers and investigators.”

As he spoke, he glanced at Shang Jianyao. His subconscious had eliminated this fellow from such an evaluation.

Shang Jianyao immediately expressed that Han Wanghuo’s words were unacceptable. “What kind of purity are you referring to? If we are talking about building walls, painting, being teachers, or picking up trash, we would indeed be impure.”

Han Wanghuo’s intuition told him not to continue arguing with this fellow. Otherwise, the situation might spiral out of control. Therefore, he cast his gaze at Jiang Baimian and Bai Chen.

Jiang Baimian laughed. “Ruin Hunters accept whatever missions that are available, so they naturally know a lot. They know the importance of recording information.”

After patronizing him, she asked, “The merfolk and mountain monsters don’t seem to have a friendly relationship with Redstone Collection?”

“Do you think they volunteered to live in harsh environments like the islands in the lake or the depths of the mountains?” Han Wanghuo sighed. “Ever since the Underground Ark opened, most of the pollution in this city has basically subsided. They were driven out of their homes.”

Jiang Baimian nodded slightly. “You seem to have a certain level of sympathy for them?”

“That’s my personality,” Han Wanghuo explained simply. “But this doesn’t stop me from organizing a team to protect Redstone Collection. Countless merfolk and mountain monsters have died under my gun.”

At this point, he thoughtfully muttered to himself, “Merfolk infiltrated the hotel camp... They’re a little tempted again...”

After muttering to himself, Han Wanghuo reminded the Old Task Force, “The merfolk have scales on their bodies. It’s very difficult for small caliber guns to deal damage to them. You have to be careful. Even if it were an ordinary gun, it would be best to double tap if the first shot doesn’t blow up their heads.”

“Thank you,” Jiang Baimian replied on behalf of the entire team.

After leaving the Public Security Department, they went straight to the Visa Trading Company on the fifth floor of Redstone Collection.

Unlike other places, not everyone was hiding here. A lady was still sitting behind a wooden platform near the door. She wore a fierce, green ghost mask as if she wanted to soothe the fear in her heart.

Jiang Baimian walked over and smiled. “We’re here for Mr. Carl. We made an appointment yesterday.”

The lady was highly tense as if she would find a place to hide at the slightest disturbance. She reluctantly said, “Mr. Carl did mention it. Go straight to the innermost office.”

Jiang Baimian grabbed Shang Jianyao and stopped him from adding fuel to the fire.

Bai Chen nodded at the lady, indicating that she didn’t have to be so vigilant.

Carl's office was very simple, but it made Long Yuehong and the others find it abnormally amiable. This was very similar to Pangu Biology's offices for middle management—a shelf with folders and books, a desk, a sofa, a pot of plants, and a few chairs. The only difference was that there was an iron-black safe here.

Like yesterday, Carl didn't wear a mask. His slightly grizzled hair was neatly combed back.

At this moment, he was sitting there with his back straight as if he had always been like this.

Shang Jianyao spoke before Jiang Baimian could. "Aren't you a believer of the Vigilance Church?"

Without a doubt, Shang Jianyao had switched to the Red River language.

Carl calmly said, "I'm very vigilant about matters pertaining to Sir."

For this, he could ignore the vigilance for himself.

Jiang Baimian then took a step forward and smiled. "I won't waste your time; I'll be direct. Do you have a military exoskeleton? We want to buy one."

Carl fell silent for a few seconds before saying, "For items like this, unless a major client has reserved it in advance, we would definitely keep it for our own use. Mr. DiMarco is very, very vigilant about his safety. He doesn't mind paying a premium for such things."

He tactfully rejected the four people's request.

"Is that so..." Jiang Baimian was in no rush for the time being. She then asked, "Mr. Carl, what do you know about Helvig's stolen batch of firearms?"

Carl shook his head. "I'm not sure. I was in the Underground Ark and didn't know about this until the next day."

Jiang Baimian tersely acknowledged it. "Then, who do you think is related to his death?"

“Too many.” Carl’s expression became measured. “He’s a greedy, cruel, and evil person. He might even sell weapons to merfolk and mountain monsters, bringing about countless unnecessary casualties. People who hate and despise him are all over Redstone Collection.”

At this point, Carl’s voice turned cold. “Besides, in order to monopolize the arms trade, he even incited the townsfolk to view the Underground Ark with hostility. His death must be a gift to us from the Kalendaria.”

At this point, Jiang Baimian didn’t ask any further. She politely bade farewell and left Redstone Collection with Shang Jianyao and the others.

For the rest of the morning, they drove the jeep and leisurely wandered the city ruins, recording the terrain characteristics of many areas.

When it was almost lunchtime, they returned to Redstone Collection’s entrance.

As the car drove, Jiang Baimian’s gaze suddenly froze while she was seated in the passenger seat. She—who habitually observed the situation outside—saw a familiar fire flash in the middle of a distant building!

“Left!” Jiang Baimian only had time to shout that one word.

Bai Chen tacitly turned the steering wheel to the left.

A round flew out of a rocket launcher and went straight for the jeep.

An attack came suddenly.

Chapter 193: Came Knocking On The Door

Translator: CKtalon

With a sharp screeching sound, the jeep swerved in a way that almost caused it to flip.

The vehicle didn’t slow down despite the swerving. It zoomed left and stumbled along the bumpy road.

The rocket landed on the ground the next second.

Boom!

A crimson fireball rapidly expanded, illuminating the surroundings. The shockwave that instantly spread out made the jeep windows creak.

Fortunately, the Old Task Force had already switched the glass to bulletproof glass at the Rootless camp.

Jiang Baimian saw the explosion through the rearview mirror and frowned slightly.

Right on the heels of that, Bai Chen turned the steering wheel and made the jeep swerve to the back of a collapsed building. This way, they would completely escape the attackers' line of sight.

Boom!

Another rocket exploded in the jeep's former path.

After that, everything returned to silence.

"Stop!" Jiang Baimian shouted.

Bai Chen didn't ask why. She stepped on the brakes and made the jeep stop behind the 'natural fortifications.'

Shang Jianyao and Long Yuehong rolled down the windows at the same time and mounted their Berserker assault rifles to guard against any possible attackers.

At the same time, Shang Jianyao spoke with a look of regret. "They really should hire a shooting coach."

Not only did Jiang Baimian not retort, but she also nodded. "The assailant doesn't seem like they really want to kill us."

“Why?” Long Yuehong maintained the spirit of asking questions on anything he didn’t understand.

Jiang Baimian explained, “Even if I didn’t discover it in advance and the jeep had followed its original trajectory, the first rocket would’ve landed with some deviations.”

Shang Jianyao seriously thought of a reason. “Maybe he predicted your judgment and adjusted it in advance?”

Jiang Baimian shot him a glance. “Unless I’m crazy, I won’t let Little White drive the car into the building. The first rocket exploded at the door of the tall building diagonally ahead.”

“Yes, I understand.” Shang Jianyao clenched his right fist and punched his left palm. “It’s solely because his standards aren’t up to mark.”

“Then, why would you find such a person to attack us?” Jiang Baimian asked in exasperation and amusement.

Shang Jianyao fell silent for a few seconds before clapping his hands. “To save the damsel in distress!”

“...” Although Jiang Baimian understood Shang Jianyao’s meaning after some thought, she still found his train of thought strange.

As expected of a certified mental patient... She criticized inwardly.

Long Yuehong could roughly guess the theoretical basis behind Shang Jianyao’s guess. In those radio stories!

At this moment, Bai Chen broke the short silence. “It’s probably to scare us.”

“Yes.” Jiang Baimian nodded. “This might be a warning, similar to the previous note. It might also be a trap. They hope it can agitate us and make us deepen our investigation of the arms robbery or Helvig’s death.”

“Then, what should we do?” Long Yuehong asked worriedly. “This place is much messier than Weed City.”

If they followed things strictly to a tee—finding the firearms and completing the mission—it was likely that they would be sucked into a dangerous vortex. However, it was a little dissatisfying to give up and leave Redstone Collection.

Jiang Baimian replied, “Didn’t we know this a long time ago?”

As she spoke, she smiled. “What I want to do now is: Find the attacker and the person who instigated him. Tie them up and fire rockets at their surroundings so that they can have a taste of the same thing.”

Shang Jianyao’s eyes lit up. “That’s good; that’s good.”

Jiang Baimian suddenly had an ominous feeling and quickly changed the topic. “Let’s return to Redstone Collection and tell Han Wanghuo about this. Let’s see how he reacts before we determine what to do next.”

“Alright.” Long Yuehong heaved a sigh of relief. It was enough to have a dangerous lunatic like Shang Jianyao in the team. It was imperative that the team leader didn’t like to cause trouble!

...

Redstone Collection, Public Security Department.

“Captain Han isn’t around?” Jiang Baimian asked Dr. Weiler.

Weiler remained unshaven and looked very rugged. “He organized a team and went to the lake. They said they wanted to see if there were any anomalies with the merfolk.”

“When will he return?” Jiang Baimian asked.

Weiler shook his head. “It depends on whether the merfolk have really done anything.”

He then sighed. “If it weren’t for the fact that I can’t return to United Industries, I really wouldn’t want to stay in this crappy place. There are Subhumans externally, and there’s strife internally. I don’t see anyone all day long, and I don’t even know what they look like when I see them...”

The flirtatious doctor was clearly vexed about his inability to have romantic encounters. In Redstone Collection, this depended on luck. Before taking off one’s mask and clothes, one couldn’t even be sure if the other party was male or female.

Furthermore, Redstone Collection townsfolk—who believed in Eidolon Nun and advocated vigilance—wouldn’t sleep with people so easily unless their goal was to rob them.

Jiang Baimian didn’t feel uncomfortable with Weiler’s complaints. Instead, she asked with interest, “I’m curious. How do the residents of Redstone Collection get to know and love each other until they get married and have children?”

Weiler sighed again. “A budding romance might bloom when they fight side by side against Subhumans or foreign bandits, when working together in a particular smuggling business, or meeting in a ruin when out hunting.

“Yes, I heard that the Vigilance Church also organizes activities to gather believers who want a partner but don’t have a suitable target. Uh, they will be divided into groups. The men will be on one side, and the women will be on the other. They will draw lots to determine who will be hiding. The seekers have a single chance to be with whoever they find.

“They believe that this is Eidolon Nun’s revelation and don’t dare to violate the results.”

That works? Long Yuehong’s mouth fell open when he heard that. He felt that there was no end to the wondrous things in the world.

“Interesting custom.” Jiang Baimian didn’t give a good or bad evaluation.

Shang Jianyao asked, “What if they don’t find anyone?”

“That means the Kalendaria thinks you’re not suitable for marriage for the time being,” Weiler casually replied.

“The Kalendaria must be busy,” Shang Jianyao said with emotion.

“Phew...” Long Yuehong heaved a sigh of relief. He imagined that Shang Jianyao would take the opportunity to mock him and say, “Long Yuehong is doomed to be unable to find a partner.”

Jiang Baimian—who had learned a little about the local folklore—was satisfied and reminded Weiler, “When Captain Han returns, get him to look for us at the hotel camp. There’s something important.”

“Alright.” Weiler was rather vigilant and didn’t ask what it was about.

...

At the hotel camp, the four people from the Old Task Force—who had parked their car—walked toward Rooms 05 and 06.

Before they reached their rooms, Jiang Baimian suddenly turned her head and glanced at Shang Jianyao.

Shang Jianyao didn’t immediately respond. He took a few steps forward before nodding. He then swung his tactical backpack in front of him and took out his small speaker as he shouted, “You’ve been surrounded!”

Bai Chen and Long Yuehong had already drawn their pistols. After spending so much time together, they could easily guess that Jiang Baimian and Shang Jianyao had discovered an intruder in the room.

After a brief silence, Room 06’s door creaked open.

A man in an iron-black mask walked out. His flaxen hair was messy as if he hadn’t tidied it in a long time. Upon seeing the black muzzle aimed at him, he quickly took a step back and suppressed his voice. “I’m Baz.”

“Huh, what did you say?” Jiang Baimian asked loudly.

Baz fell silent for two seconds before raising his voice. “I’m Baz, Helvig’s subordinate. You guys came to look for me before.”

“The one who likes to dig tunnels?” Jiang Baimian had actually long recognized Baz from his characteristics.

“Yes.” Baz nodded heavily.

“Why did you come looking for us?” Jiang Baimian walked over, seemingly relaxed.

Baz looked around and said in horror, “Someone wants to kill me!”

Jiang Baimian—who was wearing the elegant monk mask—immediately replied, “Let’s talk inside.”

After entering Bai Chen and Long Yuehong’s room, Jiang Baimian was in no rush to inquire. As she got Shang Jianyao to guard the door, she smiled and asked, “How did you get in?”

“The electronic lock here is very easy to crack.” Baz took out a white card and waved it twice.

Jiang Baimian tersely acknowledged his words and smiled. “Shouldn’t you take off your mask? Otherwise, how can I be sure that you’re Baz?”

“But you guys have never seen my face before...” Although Baz said that, he still took off the iron mask obediently.

Baz had a slightly square face and flaxen eyes. His beard was shaved relatively clean, and he had many freckles on his face. He didn’t seem too old, probably not over 30.

“Tell me what happened.” Jiang Baimian finally returned to the topic at hand.

With a flustered expression, Baz said, “You didn’t say that Helvig was dead when you came looking for me.”

“That’s not the point,” Jiang Baimian replied thoughtfully.

Baz’s tone became anxious. “That is the point! I can guess who killed Helvig; he still wants to kill me!”

“Who is it?” Jiang Baimian was rather cooperative.

Baz’s expression darkened. “Here’s the thing: That batch of firearms wasn’t lost at all. It was all a farce.”

Jiang Baimian and the others smiled at the same time. Unfortunately, Baz couldn’t see their smiles.

Baz continued, “This batch of firearms was originally to be sold to the mountain monsters. If we hadn’t disposed of it that way, we would be hated by the others in the team. Helvig found Anhebus to cooperate and got his people to pretend to be bandits and snatch the firearms.

“He then found an opportunity to send them to the mountain monsters. After that, Helvig forged clues and returned to town to issue a mission. He wanted to direct the blame to the Ashlanders or the Underground Ark to accumulate everyone’s dissatisfaction. In the end, he actually died!”

Jiang Baimian asked in a timely manner, “Who’s Anhebus?”

“He’s a very high-ranking Red River resident in town, and he mainly smuggles energy. He has a partnership with Helvig,” Baz described. “The mountain monsters control a few coal mines and have conducted many transactions with him.”

At this point, Baz became angry. “It’s definitely him! He killed Helvig, and he wants to swallow that batch of firearms! I was attacked this morning. If not for the fact that I dug enough tunnels, I would’ve died! If I died, nobody would know about this.”

After Jiang Baimian heard that, she turned her head to look at Shang Jianyao—who was at the door.

Shang Jianyao knew what she was getting at. He took off his monkey mask and slowly walked toward Baz with a friendly smile.

Baz immediately became vigilant and took a step back. “W-what are you trying to do?”

Chapter 194: Behind the Door

A minute later, in Room 06.

Baz and Shang Jianyao sat down with their arms around each other’s shoulders. Their attitude was so intimate that it seemed as if they had reunited with a long-lost brother. This completely deviated from the Vigilance Church’s creed of ‘distance is the true friend.’

“You aren’t lying to us, right?” Shang Jianyao asked without hiding anything.

Baz immediately revealed an aggrieved expression. “How is that possible? I will lie to anyone but you! I almost died this morning; those bastards actually got into my tunnels. Fortunately, I prepared more than three tunnels.”

Upon hearing Baz, a sentence surfaced in Long Yuehong’s mind: “A wily rabbit has three burrows.”

Shang Jianyao asked, “Are you sure they are Anhebus’s subordinates?”

“Of course!” Baz was very sure. “The leader is his most capable goon; he came from United Industries. He’s tall and muscular, so I can’t be mistaken. I didn’t pay attention to the others. If I were a little slower back then, I would’ve been caught!”

“How tall?” Shang Jianyao’s focus finally turned aberrant.

“A little taller than you. He’s the only one with such a height in Redstone Collection,” Baz described. “His name is Lopez; he used to be an employee of a security company in United Industries. Later, he fled here for some reason.”

Jiang Baimian nodded slightly and suddenly asked, “Why didn’t you directly go to the cathedral and find Bishop Renato? He should handle this matter, right? Or you could enter Redstone Collection and find Han Wanghuo?”

Baz looked around warily. “It’s useless with Han Wanghuo! If it weren’t for the fact that he’s famous for being impartial and won’t betray us and how he can organize both Red River people and Ashlanders to deal with those ugly bastards and bandits that come running over, no one would listen to him.

“For trivial matters like maintaining order, everyone can still cut him some slack. They are also willing to accept a certain level of punishment if they make a mistake. But for such a major matter, Anhebus will only be afraid of powerful groups and their representatives.”

Jiang Baimian immediately added, “For example, the Underground Ark and its representative, Butler Carl. Or the Vigilance Church and its representative, Bishop Renato?”

“Yes.” Baz exhaled. “I was worried that I would be attacked on the way to the cathedral. They might already be lying in ambush around the cathedral, so I thought of you. I hope you can sneak me into the cathedral.”

At this point, Baz stood up. “Forget it; forget it. I can’t involve you. There are only four of you, and it’s not enough to handle Anhebus and his subordinates’ focused fire. I’ll think of a way to hide. I’ll sneak to the cathedral when things calm down.”

He had said these words to Shang Jianyao as if he didn’t want to implicate the other party due to their brotherly affection.

Shang Jianyao was touched. “Won’t you be in danger?” He really seemed to treat the other party as a brother.

Sensing his sincerity, Baz proudly said, “In the past three hiding Masses, I’ve entered the top five twice. In other words, there are only a few people in Redstone Collection who are better at hiding than me.”

“Impressive!” Shang Jianyao clapped.

Jiang Baimian pondered for a moment and said, “Let’s take you to the cathedral. We were just about to visit Bishop Renato.”

The matter regarding Redstone Collection seemed to have gotten out of control a little. It was better to communicate with their real mayor, Bishop Renato, as soon as possible. Otherwise, they would be implicated once things got out of hand.

Bai Chen and Long Yuehong didn't object to their team leader's decision. Shang Jianyao even raised his hands and feet in agreement.

Before getting into the car, they took out the Tyrant grenade launcher and the Death rocket launcher and placed them in a convenient spot.

"You have pretty good firepower." Baz—who was squeezed between Shang Jianyao and Long Yuehong—suddenly felt a little more confident. "Have the vehicles been modified as well? The armor seems pretty thick, and the glass seems to be bulletproof."

As Helvig's trusted aide, he had keen eyes in this regard.

"We came to Redstone Collection to buy a military exoskeleton," Jiang Baimian said simply.

On the one hand, it was to showcase the goal of Qian Bai's team, which was the Old Task Force. It also indirectly indicated their strength. On the other hand, they hoped that Baz—a native that was familiar with local arms transactions—could provide the corresponding intelligence.

"That's very difficult to buy. They are all reserved by major customers," said Baz. "Even for major customers, it's not easy to reserve them, especially the latest models. Even United Industries' elite teams have to wait in line."

As they spoke, Bai Chen started the car and drove toward the Vigilance Cathedral north of the city ruin.

Jiang Baimian understood what Baz meant and thought for a moment. "Any solutions for the old models?"

"There are some in the Underground Ark, but nobody can enter. Mr. DiMarco won't sell them either." Baz shook his head. "My boss and Anhebus used to have some, but we didn't keep any."

At this point, he lowered his voice. "The town guards that Han Wanghuo organized have two; AC-42 General."

"This is the oldest model, right?" Jiang Baimian had also done some research on military exoskeleton equipment.

“Pretty much,” Baz explained simply. “Two years ago, the merfolk and mountain monsters recovered and teamed up to drive us out of Redstone Collection. The situation was critical, and Mr. DiMarco was unwilling to send his guards out of the Underground Ark. Therefore, Han Wanghuo organized everyone and gathered a batch of supplies. He then forced Boss and Anhebus to use up all their favors and got two Gramps from a warehouse in United Industries.

“It was actually quite useful!”

“Maybe it’s Granny.” Shang Jianyao expressed his opinion.

Jiang Baimian ignored him and looked at the rearview mirror before sighing. “These are powerful weapons used to guard Redstone Collection. Han Wanghuo probably won’t sell them.”

“Yes.” It was unknown if Baz was grumbling or if he was impressed. “Besides, he’s not greedy for benefits and can’t be bribed.”

Jiang Baimian nodded thoughtfully. “Everyone I met at Redstone Collection has a high evaluation of Han Wanghuo.”

Even Mrs. Theresa only felt that Han Wanghuo might be biased toward the Ashlanders and didn’t think there was anything wrong with him.

“Otherwise, he wouldn’t be the sheriff and town guard captain to this day,” said Baz without praise or derision.

“It really isn’t easy for an outsider.” Jiang Baimian tersely acknowledged this.

The jeep soon arrived at the northern city area near the Vigilance Cathedral.

Jiang Baimian observed the environment outside and suddenly pointed at a spot. “Stop there.”

Bai Chen didn’t ask why and quietly drove the jeep to the side of an abandoned high-rise building.

Jiang Baimian then turned around and said to Long Yuehong, “We’ve previously reconnoitered the terrain. We can monitor the area around the cathedral from here. Go to the roof with Bai Chen and use the Orange rifle and Death rocket launcher to help us guard against any accidents.”

“Yes, Team Leader!” Long Yuehong was no longer a rookie; he no longer trembled in fear.

Jiang Baimian exhorted him, “You guys have to be careful too.”

This place was already in the suburbs, and there weren’t many high-rise buildings. If Anhebus’s men wanted to snipe Baz, they might very well be on the top of that building.

“It’s time to test your stamina.” Shang Jianyao smiled and waved at Long Yuehong.

This high-rise building—covered in withered plants—with few intact windows was most likely not where Redstone townsfolk lived. Therefore, there was no electricity or elevators.

Long Yuehong also had to carry the Death rocket launcher and the corresponding ammunition up.

Fortunately, the building wasn’t too tall. It was only about 20 stories tall. When Long Yuehong arrived at the rooftop, his breathing was only a little heavy. His legs were a little sore, but he didn’t feel any other discomfort.

On the rooftop covered in bird feces, he and Bai Chen found a spot each. They placed the Orange rifle and Death rocket launcher on the guardrail and covered the different areas around the Vigilance Cathedral in their firing range.

After she was in position, Bai Chen picked up the walkie-talkie and said, “In position. You may proceed.”

...

Jiang Baimian put away the walkie-talkie and alighted from the jeep.

As they were going to visit Bishop Renato, Jiang Baimian and Shang Jianyao didn’t bring their grenade launchers or assault rifles. They only took an additional United 202 each as backup.

This allowed them to maintain their mobility. Together with Baz, they bent their backs slightly and approached the Vigilance Cathedral in the abandoned buildings' shadows.

They left the broken cement columns, the rubber electric wires without any metallic cores, the glass shards that had been embedded into the soil, and the concrete blocks piled up behind them one after another.

After more than ten minutes, they arrived at the fortress-like Vigilance Cathedral and flipped through the window at the back of the two-story building.

After standing firmly and looking around, Jiang Baimian said in a deep voice, "There was no attack..."

She felt like she was fighting the air for a while.

"Impossible..." Baz expressed his confusion. Has Anhebus already given up? Isn't he afraid that the bishop will be angry?

"It means that we hid well," Shang Jianyao praised himself.

At this moment, Jiang Baimian suddenly took two steps to the side and pushed open a black wooden door.

Behind the door was a Vigilance Cathedral guard in a dark robe holding an assault rifle.

"Where's Bishop Renato?" Jiang Baimian asked in Red River language.

The guard pointed at the corridor outside. "In his room. Walk toward the main hall; it's the room behind the Kalendaria's Sacred Emblem."

"Is that so?" Jiang Baimian turned to ask Baz.

"Yes." Baz indicated that it was indeed Bishop Renato's bedroom.

The three of them didn't delay and immediately walked along the corridor toward the cathedral hall.

Before long, they saw the area on the side of the hall and the wall with the Kalendaria's Sacred Emblem.

After arriving at the place described by the guard, Jiang Baimian easily recognized Renato's room.

Like the corresponding elements in the Sacred Emblem symbol, his door was painted pure white with a golden handle.

Jiang Baimian and Shang Jianyao looked at each other and nodded at the same time. This meant that there was someone in the room.

Knock! Knock! Knock!

Baz knocked on the door and shouted, "Your Grace, I have something to talk about."

The room was silent; nobody replied.

Baz shouted twice and muttered to himself in confusion, "Nobody?"

As he spoke, he turned the doorknob and pushed the door open.

This was considered rude elsewhere, but it was normal in Redstone Collection, where people often had to search for their own targets.

The moment the white wooden door opened, Jiang Baimian felt her vision suddenly turn dark. It was as if the lightless environment in the room had flowed out and drowned the corridor.

In the endless darkness, a feminine figure stood behind the door and looked out.

For some reason, Jiang Baimian felt that the female figure's silent gaze was close yet distant. It was so close that it felt like they were inches apart, yet it also seemed like it was far out on the horizon.

When such a gaze landed on her, Jiang Baimian felt like someone had poured a basin of cold water over her in winter. She felt a chill run down her spine and couldn't help but shiver.

This reminded her of Swamp Ruin 1 and the monster in the mysterious laboratory. Its roar alone could make people in the distance tremble in fear. It was abnormally terrifying and uncontrollable.

Unlike the monster's roar, the current gaze was lofty, empty, indifferent, and dignified. It made one unable to raise any thoughts of resistance.

The next second, the feeling vanished. The darkness was melted away by the sun as if it had never appeared.

Jiang Baimian abruptly turned her head to look at Shang Jianyao and realized that his forehead was covered in sweat.

Chapter 195: Massive Strength

At this moment, Baz—who was in charge of opening the door—had already collapsed to the ground. He was trembling non-stop.

Jiang Baimian didn't have time to communicate with Shang Jianyao. Instead, she cast her gaze into the room.

It was relatively spacious inside. There was a large bed, a closet, a desk, and a sofa area. It was covered with a thick, dark-brown rug. It was obvious that the resident was of high status.

The only problem was the wall at the back of the room, which hung Eidolon Nun's Sacred Emblem. There was no way to open the windows. The windows near the corridor had a rather heavy, light-colored curtain that completely blocked out the light.

With the few rays of light that surged in through the door, Jiang Baimian barely managed to see the room clearly. She felt that, be it the layout or the decorations, they were closer to the style of Red River.

Jiang Baimian suddenly sensed something and raised her right arm, prepared to block.

Almost at the same time, a figure jumped out of the room. This figure wore a black robe and was about 1.7 meters tall.

He was extremely fast as he swung his fist fiercely.

Shang Jianyao took the initiative before Jiang Baimian could react and raised his arms to receive the brunt of the blow.

With a bang, the air seemed to explode when their fists and legs made contact.

Shang Jianyao staggered back the next second and almost bumped into Jiang Baimian. Despite his lower body's stability and strength—which exceeded that of an ordinary person—he failed to block the other party's punch.

Jiang Baimian was very surprised as well. During normal training, she wasn't capable of achieving such an effect even if she used her left hand. After all, Shang Jianyao's genetic enhancement was very effective, and he usually worked very hard to train himself.

It was only then that Jiang Baimian saw their assailant clearly.

He looked to be in his thirties, and he had deep facial features. He had slightly curled black hair and a pair of amber eyes. His face appeared pale from not getting enough sunshine.

Under the sunlight coming from the corridor, his eyes were bloodshot and turbid. He was ferocious like a beast and no longer gave the feeling that he was human.

Heartless!

He was a Heartless!

Jiang Baimian dodged the retreating Shang Jianyao and didn't hesitate to rush forward. She swung her left shoulder and punched out.

It sounded like a miniature cannonball had blasted out and forcefully shattered the air wall with a bang.

The Heartless had the necessary instincts. Upon realizing that he couldn't dodge in time, he raised his arms and crossed them in front of him.

Bam!

His body only swayed slightly, but he didn't retreat. He managed to block Jiang Baimian's punch, which had fully delivered the biological prosthetic limb's strength.

Jiang Baimian—who was in a combat state—had no time to be surprised. She attacked with both arms, unleashing a barrage of attacks like a storm.

During this process, her right fist was mainly used to adjust the rhythm. She could force the Heartless to dodge by delivering an uppercut, a hook, a lashing, and a straight punch. She could then use her strengths without actually colliding with the Heartless.

Her left fist was like a cannon or a hammer—each punch was heavier and more ferocious than the last. The air crackled as the Heartless retreated into the room.

Cracking sounds constantly sounded as the two of them overturned the sofa and shattered the chairs with their punches and kicks, leaving the room in chaos.

After an unknown period of time, Jiang Baimian forced the Heartless to a corner and forcefully punched out with her left hand again.

Although the Heartless blocked the punch, he flew backward and slammed into the wall with a clang.

Eh... Jiang Baimian realized in surprise that the other party was much weaker than before. He wasn't even as strong as Long Yuehong. This made her suspect that the Heartless's immense strength was a temporary enhancement.

Without time to analyze the situation, she prepared to switch to combat techniques pertaining to joints. Jiang Baimian planned on coupling it with a high-voltage electric current to restrain the Heartless and confirm the situation.

At that moment, the Heartless's mouth curled up as he suddenly laughed. Countless blood vessels seemed to come to life in his beast-like amber eyes.

Jiang Baimian unconsciously smiled as well, and the hostility in her heart suddenly vanished.

This made her feel that the other party had given up resisting and was willing to surrender. Therefore, she stopped being vigilant and stopped her attack preparation.

Pa!

The Heartless punched again, targeting Jiang Baimian's ear.

Jiang Baimian's body instinctively reacted. She curled up, ducked, and rolled on the ground, escaping the Heartless's attack range.

Seeing this, Shang Jianyao—who was blocking the door—took two steps forward and stopped the enemy.

Upon seeing this, the Heartless smiled at him. This smile seemed to come from a man-eating beast.

Shang Jianyao was stunned for a moment, but he didn't give up on attacking. He punched out with his right fist.

The Heartless was a little stunned. His reaction speed slowed down significantly due to the lack of an effect. Fortunately, he was also prepared to launch a sneak attack—he squatted down in time to avoid the punch.

Shang Jianyao smiled. His left thigh tensed up and lashed out like a whip that tore through the air.

The Heartless couldn't be bothered to maintain his posture. He exerted strength with his right foot and jumped to the side, rolling to the ground.

Shang Jianyao followed closely and began grappling.

In such a state, Shang Jianyao—who had learned the corresponding combat techniques—was clearly superior to the Heartless, who only relied on his instincts. In a few moves, Shang Jianyao grabbed the other party’s joints and firmly locked the enemy with his body.

With another roll, Shang Jianyao flipped the Heartless around and pressed his knees against the Heartless’s back, shoving his face to the ground.

“I won!” Shang Jianyao announced happily.

Is he treating this as a game, and hence he isn’t affected by that ‘smile?’ No, he should’ve treated this as a game after he saw that ‘smile’ that replaced his wariness with a sense of victory and defeat... A mental illness sure is useful... Jiang Baimian could probably determine that the Heartless opposite her was a Superior Heartless. She just didn’t know if he was an Awakened who fell ill or if he had inexplicably obtained an ability after his illness acted up.

At this moment, the Heartless replied with a deep roar as if he were threatening Shang Jianyao.

Shang Jianyao howled without hesitation.

The Heartless immediately fell silent, exuding confusion.

The corners of Jiang Baimian’s mouth slightly twitched as she turned to speak to Baz, who was outside the door. “Do you know who he is?”

Although she had already guessed the Heartless’s identity, she still needed further proof.

Baz had already recovered from his previous shock. He walked into the room and squatted down to examine the area.

He suddenly fell to the ground, propped himself up with both hands, and retreated. He then shouted in abnormal horror, “Bishop! It’s the bishop!”

“Bishop Renato?” Jiang Baimian had just determined that the person who had caught the Heartless disease was very likely Bishop Renato based on his various characteristics. However, she was still a little shocked when she heard Baz say that.

Even a bishop blessed by a Kalendaria would contract the Heartless disease?

Baz nodded heavily. “Yes, I recognize his eyes! The amber color is the only one in the entire town! T-the bishop contracted the Heartless disease...”

He stood up in horror, momentarily at a loss for words.

“You’ve never seen Bishop Renato’s face?” Jiang Baimian asked cautiously.

Baz replied, “He has always been wearing a mask when I met him.”

Jiang Baimian thought for a moment and said, “Go get the others in the cathedral and have them identify him.”

Baz was in a daze. After receiving the instructions, he reflexively did as instructed.

He ran out of the room and down the corridor, shouting as he ran. “Help! The bishop has contracted the Heartless disease! Help! The bishop has contracted the Heartless disease...”

Jiang Baimian retracted her gaze and spoke to Shang Jianyao, who restrained Bishop Renato. “Fortunately, it’s the Heartless disease. Otherwise, we might very well have been wrongly accused of killing Bishop Renato.”

There was no way to blame others for falling ill. It wasn’t like he was poisoned or infected.

Shang Jianyao immediately replied, “That’s inauspicious.”

Jiang Baimian didn’t continue the topic. As she waited for the others in the Vigilance Cathedral to come over, she asked seriously, “Did you feel like we were being watched from afar the moment Baz opened the door?”

“Yes.” Shang Jianyao was very honest.

Jiang Baimian asked, “Back then, did you feel very terrified and horrified, but you couldn’t muster any thoughts of resisting? L-like you were facing a real deity?”

“Something like that,” Shang Jianyao replied frankly.

Jiang Baimian slowly exhaled and said seriously, “Could it be that the bishop’s contracting of the Heartless disease attracted Eidolon Nun’s attention?”

Shang Jianyao suddenly turned his head and looked over when he heard this.

Jiang Baimian’s voice was deep as she muttered to herself, “We might’ve just ‘encountered’ a Kalendaria...”

The Kalendarium really seem to exist...

Chapter 196: Harbinger

Shang Jianyao fell silent when he heard Jiang Baimian.

After a few seconds, he suddenly smiled and said, “But ‘They’ won’t save all of humanity.”

Jiang Baimian was stunned for a moment before she heaved a sigh of relief for some reason. She then smiled and said, “Yeah, we can only rely on ourselves, just like the song you often play.”

Compared to the monster in Swamp Ruin 1’s laboratory, the gaze she felt just now was even more unimaginable. It completely exceeded her understanding, making her emotions rise and fall in a moment of panic.

After all, the knowledge she had learned and the life she had experienced made her believe in science more. She believed that everything could be analyzed, understood, hypothesized, verified, grasped, and replicated. The so-called deities and Kalendarium did not exist. Even if they did exist, they were only stronger mutated creatures.

The experience just now overturned her worldview. But after chatting with Shang Jianyao for a while, she escaped this emotional state and became excited again. Even if there really are Kalendarium and deities, we don’t see ‘Them’ saving all of humanity. Therefore, what do ‘They’ have to do with us? Besides, why can’t the Kalendarium be analyzed, understood, hypothesized, verified, grasped, and replicated?

Jiang Baimian knew that such thoughts carried the spirit of self-delusion, but in the current situation, this was the best way to help her recover as quickly as possible.

In the brief silence, they heard footsteps coming from outside.

Baz and a middle-aged man in a black robe quickly entered Bishop Renato's room.

The cathedral guards—who had all kinds of weapons—scattered themselves in the corridor, blockading the area.

“I'm Harbinger Song He.” The middle-aged man in the black robe glanced at Bishop Renato—who was restrained by Shang Jianyao—and introduced himself.

In Redstone Collection, where masks flourished, it was a rare occasion for him not to wear any disguises. He was Ashlandic, and his eyebrows were slightly sparse. His sideburns were a little white, and there were no wrinkles on his face. It was difficult to determine his exact age.

At a glance, Jiang Baimian first remembered his square face and clean-shaven face.

“Harbinger?” she asked in confusion. This sounded like a rank within the Vigilance Church.

“A clergyman that's directly subordinate to the bishop and is in charge of daily proselytizing and preaching,” Song He explained simply.

Jiang Baimian didn't ask any further. “Quick, take a look and see if it's Bishop Renato.”

Considering the existence of Baz and the others, their conversation was in the Red River language to show their sincerity.

Song He walked to Shang Jianyao's side and squatted down. His expression became increasingly solemn as he looked at the Heartless, who was trying his best to raise his head.

After a few seconds, he sighed. “It's the bishop. He contracted the Heartless disease.”

Song He then instructed the cathedral guards outside the door to bring in handcuffs, rope, and other items. After that, he tied Heartless Renato up tightly.

After doing this, he turned around and said to Shang Jianyao and Jiang Baimian, “Please wait a moment. I have to report the bishop’s situation immediately.”

“Alright.” Jiang Baimian expressed her understanding.

Song He immediately walked to the door and said with a serious expression, “Everyone, stay here. Nobody is to leave or tell anyone about the bishop’s illness.”

“Yes, Harbinger,” the cathedral guards replied respectfully.

After watching Song He leave, Jiang Baimian turned to look at Baz. “You seem to trust Harbinger Song?”

“Yes.” Baz nodded. “He was one of the first Harbingers that came to Redstone Collection.”

“How old is he?” Jiang Baimian immediately sensed a problem. Superficially, Song He’s age didn’t seem compatible with being the first to proselyte in Redstone Collection. How could a person—who is clearly not more than 50 years old—come to Redstone Collection to proselytize at the beginning of the New Calendar or the end of the Chaotic Era? Could it be that he was talented and could be a preacher at a young age, allowing him to take on the position of Harbinger?

“I’m not sure; he should be about the same age as my late grandfather. Even if he’s not 70, he’s very close,” replied Baz thoughtfully.

Jiang Baimian was slightly surprised. “He looks very young.”

“Yes, his age doesn’t show. He says that he has the blessing of the Kalendaria.” Baz indicated that he felt the same.

Shang Jianyao interrupted in a deep voice, “Maybe this is already the nth generation of Song He. Every time Song He ages, a new Song He will replace him.”

“...” Baz—who lacked the influence of entertainment programs—was confused. However, he felt that Shang Jianyao’s description of the situation was very terrifying.

“Don’t listen to him; he likes to tell horror stories.” Jiang Baimian reprimanded and asked, “Then, why didn’t he become the bishop?”

After being a Harbinger for so many years, it had to be worth something even if he didn’t make any significant contributions.

Could it be that the Vigilance Church stipulates that only those who have received the Kalendaria’s grace and awakened their abilities can be bishops?

“Harbinger himself rejected it. He always says that he has already gotten enough and is very satisfied. Any extravagant hopes of becoming a bishop would only make him appear greedy and no longer be favored by Eidolon Nun.” Baz repeated Song He’s words.

At this moment, Bishop Renato—who was inflicted with the Heartless disease—had his mouth stuffed. He couldn’t let out any beast-like cries and could only twist and turn in an attempt to break free.

Before long, the black-robed Song He returned to the room and said to Jiang Baimian and Shang Jianyao, “The Terror Episcopal will soon send a new bishop over and deal with Renato’s matter. I’ll be in charge of the Church’s matters in Redstone Collection during this period of time.”

With that said, he crossed his arms, placed them on his chest, and took a step back. “Wariness is a hint from the Goddess.”

After bowing, Song He looked at Jiang Baimian and the others and sincerely said, “I have a request.”

Upon seeing his humble posture, Jiang Baimian and Shang Jianyao looked at each other and said, “Please speak.”

“Please don’t spread the news that Bishop Renato contracted the Heartless disease. Before figuring out why his illness acted up, the corresponding rumors will damage the Church’s reputation.” Song He didn’t hide anything and frankly voiced his concerns.

“Understandable.” Jiang Baimian felt that Song He was very friendly. She tersely acknowledged his words and said, “We will keep this a secret.”

A bishop favored by a deity had actually contracted the Heartless disease. This was a major blow to the Kalendaria’s image and the Church’s prestige. It would make believers wonder if the Kalendaria could protect them.

Towards the end of the investigation, Renato might very well be labeled as having committed sacrilege... Jiang Baimian didn’t have ill intentions toward the Vigilance Church, but such handling methods were too common.

Shang Jianyao nodded and said, “With our friendship, there’s no problem.”

When did you make friends? Was it self-declared? Jiang Baimian found it funny.

Song He didn’t retort Shang Jianyao’s words and warned Baz as well. He then ordered the cathedral guards in a stern manner.

He had a trustworthy bearing.

As she watched Song He methodically arrange various matters, Jiang Baimian suppressed her voice and praised, “I think he’s more like a bishop than Renato and more suitable for this position.”

“Unfortunately, he’s unwilling to take on the role. Otherwise, Redstone Collection wouldn’t be as divided as it is now,” echoed Baz.

At this moment, Song He got Baz to go over and brief him on something.

Jiang Baimian stayed in the room and calmly watched them in the corridor. After 20 to 30 seconds, she suddenly frowned.

“I’m going to the bathroom,” she said loudly.

Song He pointed to his right and said, “It’s all the way to the end.” He didn’t stop her, appearing very confident and at ease.

“Me too.” Shang Jianyao followed behind Jiang Baimian.

Upon arriving at the bathroom, Jiang Baimian pulled him into a stall in the women’s bathroom and asked seriously, “Did you sense it?”

Shang Jianyao tersely acknowledged it. “Song He is very good at making friends.”

Jiang Baimian nodded slightly. “I just examined my change in mood and attitude and realized that the transition from being vigilant and wary to being friendly and trusting was too fast. Although I would have agreed to keep the secret, I definitely wouldn’t have agreed simply because Song He is friendly and trustworthy. The only reason for making a decision might be my style and personal creed.”

“It might also be a result of the situation,” Shang Jianyao added.

Jiang Baimian glanced at him. “What do you have in mind?”

“He’s an Awakened,” Shang Jianyao replied.

Jiang Baimian exhaled and said, “One of his abilities should be to make people find him friendly, trustworthy, and willing to obey him. Yes, he didn’t use his abilities before and didn’t activate them until he had a request for us... It seems like he doesn’t need words to induce such behavior... This is really an ability suitable for proselytizing.”

She wasn’t angry at Song He for using his friendly abilities. Compared to ‘convincing’ her by having dozens of guns aimed at her, a similar ‘request’ was completely acceptable. It was even closer to an insurance policy.

She could understand Song He’s desire to keep the matter a secret. Furthermore, she hadn’t been forced to change her mind, so she naturally didn’t feel angry.

“What was the price he paid?” Shang Jianyao was rather curious.

Jiang Baimian thought for a moment and said, “Could it have something to do with his unwillingness to be a bishop?”

“I think it has something to do with how young he looks.” Shang Jianyao voiced his opinion.

“How can that be a price? Who wouldn’t want such a price? This might be one of his abilities...” Jiang Baimian scolded jokingly before sighing with emotion. “The Vigilance Church is really filled with the capable. They deployed two entire Awakened to Redstone Collection, and there’s probably more than that.”

From Song He’s words, there should be several Harbingers under a bishop.

“Maybe they saved on costs by having no Holy Communion.” Shang Jianyao sighed from his perspective.

After discussing this matter, they went to the bathroom since they were already there before returning to Bishop Renato’s room.

Upon seeing them, Song He nodded slightly. “I’ve already learned about Baz’s matter. I’m prepared to send a cathedral guard to get Anhebus over. Everyone will have a face-to-face chat. It’s best if we can resolve this peacefully. Do the two of you want to watch and bear witness, or do you want to leave now?”

Before Baz could request Qian Bai’s team to stay and provide the necessary protection, Jiang Baimian laughed. “Of course, we will be observers. This has something to do with the mission we took on.”

Chapter 197: Please

The cathedral guard who went to find Anhebus returned faster than Song He had expected because they encountered Anhebus’s trusted subordinate, Lopez—he was the one who had almost killed Baz in the morning.

Lopez was about 1.9 meters tall and could look down on most people in the Ashlands. Even Shang Jianyao—who had undergone genetic enhancement—was slightly shorter than him. Apart from

being tall, he was also rather muscular. The pressure such a person exerted on another when they stood in front of them was obvious.

Lopez wasn't a parishioner of the Vigilance Church, so he didn't wear a mask and directly revealed his face.

Light-blond messy hair, light-blue eyes, distinct edges and corners, a stiff and rugged bearing, a camouflage-green army uniform, two United 202 pistols at his waist, and leather boots with steel nails embedded at the tip—together, they portrayed the muscular man's appearance.

Jiang Baimian—who was standing beside Baz—said in Red River language, “He doesn't look like a Red River person. He's closer to an Icelander. Uh, he might be a Yargai.”

Iceland was in the northernmost part of the entire Ashlands, and it covered a large area. Many Red River people these days carried certain Icelander characteristics. According to some information from the Old World, many native Icelanders had headed south as a result of climate change. They entered the Red River area, conquered many local native tribes, and settled down. Over the generations, the Yargai people had become a branch of the Red River people.

Similarly, there were also Ashlandic people who had blond hair, fair skin, and tall and muscular builds. However, they slowly disappeared with time.

Upon hearing Jiang Baimian's 'whisper,' Lopez couldn't help but look at her in surprise.

He was indeed Yargai. But after the Old World was destroyed, there was a new round of intermixing regarding human species due to disasters, war, and migration. Coupled with the loss of all kinds of information, almost nobody would mention such matters in places other than places with more Yargais. They were usually treated as equivalent to the Red River people.

Lopez quickly retracted his gaze and bowed at the gigantic symbol deep in the hall. Although he wasn't a believer of Eidolon Nun, he didn't dare to be too impudent after entering the Vigilance Cathedral. After all, there were many pious believers in Redstone Collection, including his subordinates.

If he did anything to blaspheme the Kalendaria, he suspected that his subordinates would shoot him from behind before he could walk out of the cathedral. It was impossible to guard against such matters.

Furthermore, the large red signs warning of danger and the solemn and holy golden colors that covered the Vigilance Cathedral subconsciously made him feel reverence.

Song He—who was wearing a black robe—stood in front of the gigantic Eidolon Nun symbol and nodded slightly.

“You said you wanted to find Baz?” Shang Jianyao spoke in the Red River language.

Lopez didn’t answer immediately. He looked around and said, “Where’s Bishop Renato?”

Song He calmly replied, “The bishop is occupied with other matters. I have full authority to represent him.”

Lopez didn’t make any irreverent claims and showed his friendliness. “Harbinger, it’s very likely that Baz is related to Helvig’s death. My boss, Mr. Anhebus, is both a business partner and a very good friend of Helvig’s. He has been investigating this matter since yesterday.”

“Lies!” Baz refuted in shock and anger.

Lopez smiled. He first looked back at his subordinates—who wore all kinds of masks—before saying to Baz, “No murderer will directly admit that they did it.”

“There are—” Shang Jianyao, who was wearing a monkey mask, interrupted, “—some who admit as a way to show off, and some do so to cover up other matters.”

For example, Father.

Lopez glanced at Shang Jianyao and didn’t take the random interjection from a nobody to heart.

He looked at Song He and smiled. “Harbinger, can you guarantee that Baz isn’t the murderer?”

Song He fell silent for a few seconds. “It’s true that I can’t guarantee anything. Nobody can guarantee anything until we get to the bottom of the matter.”

Without waiting for Lopez to speak, he continued, “Baz also identified Anhebus as the murderer and gave a sufficiently convincing reason. You crafted the firearms robbery to deceive others and sent the batch of firearms into the mountains. At the same time, you pushed the blame to the Ashlanders and the Underground Ark. In order to seize this batch of firearms, Anhebus has a motive to kill Helvig.”

Be it Helvig or Anhebus, none of them dared to blatantly sell the firearms to Subhumans. That would make them public enemies of Redstone Collection.

Until now, there were only rumors regarding their sale of firearms to Subhumans. If Baz wasn't Helvig's trusted aide, it would be very difficult for him to know this secret.

Lopez suddenly laughed out loud after quietly listening to what Song He had to say. “Haha, this is the funniest joke I've heard this year!”

His laughter echoed in the empty and quiet cathedral, making Song He frown slightly.

“Please pay attention to your volume in the cathedral,” Song He warned.

Regardless of what was on his mind, Lopez didn't dare to be impudent. He restrained his laughter and clicked his tongue. “Harbinger, you can't be deceived by Baz. He must have framed Mr. Anhebus to get away with his crime.

“Over the years, Mr. Anhebus has been contributing to Redstone Collection's fight against Subhumans. He has even used his social connections to purchase a military exoskeleton for the city. How is it possible that he sold the firearms to the mountain monsters? You need evidence!”

Baz immediately replied, “Apart from me, Mark and Castil know as well. They can testify!”

“Maybe you teamed up to kill Helvig to seize that batch of firearms and then framed Mr. Anhebus,” said Lopez calmly.

Song He raised his right hand and stopped their confrontation. “There's no conclusive evidence now. You can say whatever you want. As a Harbinger, I won't side with anyone. I can only guarantee that everything will happen under the Kalendaria's watch.”

Upon hearing the words ‘Kalendaria’s watch,’ Jiang Baimian couldn’t help but recall her previous experience. Even now, she still had lingering fears.

Song He continued, “You can interrogate Baz, but it has to be done in the cathedral. I’ll bear witness. Similarly, Anhebus has to come to the cathedral to be personally interrogated. You can’t make the decision on this matter; go back and report to him.”

His words stopped Lopez from any potential argument.

If Anhebus comes, can you make him friendly and make him confess? Does this count as us completing the mission? Jiang Baimian muttered inwardly.

At this moment, Lopez—who couldn’t argue—diverted his attention and cast his gaze at the two outsiders. “Are you the foreign Hunters who took on the mission regarding the firearms robbery?”

After receiving an affirmative answer, Lopez smiled and said, “It’s very difficult to make any progress in an interrogation. I hope you can give an objective and fair investigation result as a third party.”

As he spoke, his gaze moved back and forth between Jiang Baimian and Shang Jianyao’s masks.

Without waiting for their response, Lopez turned around and walked to the cathedral door.

His subordinates didn’t follow immediately. They raised their arms, placed them in front of their chests, and took a step back.

After bowing, they chased after Lopez.

After watching them leave, Song He said to Baz, “The truth cannot be faked, and the false cannot be turned into truth. Stay in the cathedral for the time being. Since Viel is also here, you can exchange techniques on hiding.”

“Yes, Harbinger.” Baz was clearly relieved that the Church hadn’t abandoned him.

Upon seeing that there was no progress for the time being, Jiang Baimian pulled Baz to the side and asked in a 'low' voice, "Where do you think Anhebus will hide that batch of firearms? Everything will be clear once we find them."

"I don't know." Baz shook his head in frustration. "Back then, Anhebus mobilized mercenaries under his employ. They were all foreign refugees and were led by Lopez."

Jiang Baimian didn't ask any further and said to Shang Jianyao, "Let's take a spin again and see what clues we can find."

After leaving the cathedral, the two of them walked to the abandoned building where Bai Chen and Long Yuehong were.

When they were about to reach their destination, someone stopped them.

From the masks, they could tell that these people were the Redstone Collection townsfolk who had been following Lopez—Anhebus's subordinates.

One of the men in a spider mask held a submachine gun aimed at Jiang Baimian and Shang Jianyao. He raised his chin and said, "Our boss wants you to go over."

Jiang Baimian wasn't surprised at all and nodded slightly. "Alright."

Shang Jianyao seriously emphasized, "You need to say please."

After looking at the fellow in the monkey mask, Lopez's subordinate—who had just spoken—snorted, turned around, and led the way.

The other two held weapons and flanked Jiang Baimian and Shang Jianyao.

After circling around a building, they saw Lopez.

The blond, stout man in a camouflage-green military uniform sat on the hood of an earthen-yellow, all-terrain vehicle. He smiled as he watched Jiang Baimian and Shang Jianyao walk toward him.

On each of his sides was a subordinate with a gun.

After the foreign Ruin Hunters approached, Lopez laughed. “You guys are very calm.”

“Could it be that you will kill us when the Vigilance Church is already involved?” As she spoke, Jiang Baimian looked around and swept her gaze across the top of the building.

“It’s impossible for the dead to point out their murderers. Didn’t that idiot, Baz, fail to prove anything?” Lopez leaned forward slightly and increased the pressure. “I made you come here because I have something to tell you...”

Just as he said that, he suddenly saw a figure jump over. The furry mask with a protruded mouth reflected in his eyes.

This figure’s movements were so fast and sudden that Lopez didn’t have the time to draw his gun. He could only raise his hands and block in front of him.

Lopez then realized that his arm uncontrollably swung to the side with a simple wave of the other party’s hand, revealing his chest and abdomen.

What tremendous strength... Just as this thought flashed in Lopez’s mind, the monkey-masked hunter lowered his shoulder and slammed him in the chest.

With a thud, Lopez’s vision turned black as he fell back.

Shang Jianyao bent his elbow and did an elbow drop.

Bam!

Lopez’s stomach sank, and his upper body jerked up.

The next second, his neck was gripped by a hand.

He looked at the smug monkey mask and shouted in surprise and anger, “What are you doing?”

Under the aiming of the guns, Shang Jianyao said seriously, “First, you can’t insult my brother.

“Second, the hood isn’t used for sitting.

“Third, you need to say please.”

“...” Lopez almost couldn’t believe his ears. “Are you crazy?”

Chapter 198: Clues

Shang Jianyao tightened his grip on Lopez’s neck, preventing him from saying anything else. At this moment, he had used Lopez’s body to block the three guns aiming from the all-terrain vehicle’s left. He left his back to Jiang Baimian.

As he rushed out, Jiang Baimian helplessly and tacitly pulled out her United 202 and aimed at one of Lopez’s subordinates.

As for the remaining one, she believed that the other party wouldn’t be able to fire at the critical moment, even if he didn’t care about accidentally injuring Lopez.

They were all within the range of Hands Immobility.

Lopez tried to struggle, but Shang Jianyao had already pulled out the Ice Moss with his other hand and pressed the muzzle against his chest.

As he looked at the smug monkey mask, Lopez couldn’t decipher any emotion from the other party’s eyes. He could only raise his hands in surrender.

Shang Jianyao pulled him off the all-terrain vehicle’s hood and released the hand that clamped his neck. He then helped Lopez straighten his messy collar and patted the dust on his chest. He said with a friendly chuckle, “Isn’t this nicer?”

After doing this, Shang Jianyao maintained his aiming posture and walked back to Jiang Baimian’s side.

Such a development left the experienced Lopez abnormally confused. He couldn't grasp the other party's true intentions at all and couldn't figure out what he was trying to do. He could only sense an indescribable madness.

Upon seeing that the other party had taken the initiative to give up on controlling him, Lopez's eyes narrowed slightly as he prepared to take revenge.

He wasn't the kind of person who would swallow his pride after suffering a slight. His status in Anhebus's gang was built up through combat. He never used his height and strength as a bluff to raise his value.

If he had been inexplicably beaten up today but didn't kill the fellow on the spot or counterattack, he believed that he would definitely become a joke in the eyes of the Redstone townsfolk and foreign desperados under Anhebus. He would no longer be the heartless, cold, and terrifying 'Giant' Lopez that was worthy of following.

At this moment, Jiang Baimian raised her left hand and raised three fingers.

With a muffled splat, soil splattered, and a bullet hole appeared beside the earthen-yellow all-terrain vehicle.

Someone fired from afar!

Lopez and his subordinates reflexively dodged, either hiding behind the tires or tumbling into a pile of concrete.

It was obvious that they were rather experienced.

Jiang Baimian held her United 202 and smiled despite her inner wariness. "You should know that our team has four people."

At the top of a high-rise building that gave her a vantage point to monitor the surrounding area, Bai Chen's eyes were behind the scope, and her expression was abnormally focused.

She could fire again at any moment. This time, it wouldn't be a warning shot but the reaping of a life.

Long Yuehong was rather envious of this. He also wanted to take on the role of deterring the enemy. Unfortunately, he also knew that there was still a considerable gap between his sniping skills and Bai Chen's.

Furthermore, he was holding a Death rocket launcher. The ammunition was clearly more expensive, and it was easy to deal collateral damage.

Upon seeing Lopez and the others hiding and attempting to aim at her, Jiang Baimian smiled and said, "Can't everyone put down their guns and have a friendly conversation?"

"That's right, that's right." Shang Jianyao agreed.

Who was the one who just beat someone up? Jiang Baimian grumbled inwardly.

She first put away United 202 to show her sincerity. Of course, she didn't gesture at Bai Chen and Long Yuehong—they were to maintain their current state.

Lopez weighed the pros and cons and felt that hiding so timidly didn't suit his image; it would make his subordinates look down on him even more. Therefore, he slowly stood up and walked back to the all-terrain vehicle.

He held a United 202 and lowered the muzzle to the ground. "What are you trying to do?"

"Didn't you invite us over?" Jiang Baimian asked.

Lopez fell silent for a few seconds before gritting his teeth. "I'm providing you with clues. Didn't you take on the mission to retrieve the firearms and investigate Helvig's murder?"

"Yes." Jiang Baimian smiled and asked, "There are two possibilities at present. First, Baz is telling the truth. The firearms are in Anhebus's hands, so Baz and Helvig's other trusted aides lack the motivation to kill Helvig. This is because they won't get anything and will only benefit Anhebus even if Helvig dies. Second, the firearms actually fell into their hands, and it has nothing to do with Anhebus. In such a situation, they are the most suspicious. Which possibility do you think it is?"

As Shang Jianyao had already befriended Baz, she believed that the firearms were with Anhebus. She only asked this question to observe Lopez's reaction.

Lopez quietly listened and suddenly laughed. "There's another possibility. It was neither our boss nor Baz and the others. Helvig's death had nothing to do with the firearms; it was done by another enemy of his."

Lopez is hinting that they know Baz and the others are innocent. At the same time, Anhebus has never thought of letting Helvig die? Jiang Baimian tried to decipher his meaning.

Without waiting for her to speak, Lopez added, "Our boss is still more inclined to believe that Baz and the others did it. With Helvig dead, one of them might be able to inherit his wife, his children, his faction, and his supplies."

"Are you saying that one of them might have an affair with Mrs. Theresa?" Jiang Baimian pretended to be convinced. Anyway, it wasn't a bad thing to get more information.

"I can't give you a definite answer." Lopez acted very restrained. "Our boss once heard Helvig mention that Theresa was very cold to him. She always used vigilance as an excuse to reject his requests for sex."

With Redstone Collection's culture, isn't such a thing very normal? Jiang Baimian grumbled inwardly. She then asked, "What clues did you say you were going to give us?"

Lopez glanced at the motionless Shang Jianyao in the monkey mask. "Don't you find it strange that Helvig died from excessive shock?"

"It's because it's strange that it seems suspicious," Jiang Baimian repeated.

Lopez gradually recovered from his shock and anger from being beaten. He smiled and said, "This might be caused by some Awakened ability. Our boss said that it appears more often in the group that believes in Eidolon Nun. Bishop Renato or a particular Harbinger possess such an ability. DiMarco also has one in the Underground Ark."

Jiang Baimian nodded thoughtfully. "Are you hinting that Butler Carl killed Helvig?"

The Vigilance Church had no intention of messing up Redstone Collection. The current situation was most in line with their thoughts.

“That will require you to investigate. Our boss doesn’t have any evidence either,” said Lopez with a smile.

Jiang Baimian tersely acknowledged it and suddenly smiled. “One last question—do you know where the batch of firearms is?”

“You also have to investigate it yourselves.” After Lopez said that, he suddenly smiled, a little smug.

This... Jiang Baimian turned her head to look at Shang Jianyao in surprise.

Shang Jianyao nodded slightly, indicating that he had indeed added ‘condiments.’

Is this the weak application of Corny Person? This is just like how he dealt with the fake Father previously. Although it prevented him from doing something that would seriously violate his rationality and make him regret it on the spot, he couldn’t help but be a little corny in some of the details. He unconsciously flaunted himself? Jiang Baimian came to a realization.

Lopez’s smile just now was enough to prove that Baz wasn’t lying. Lopez knew where the firearms were, and he had even hidden them himself.

At this moment, Shang Jianyao suddenly said, “Six people.”

Two against six? Subdue Lopez, forcefully ‘befriend’ them, then retrieve the firearms and complete the mission? Jiang Baimian understood Shang Jianyao’s meaning.

With a thought, she realized that it wasn’t a 2v6 but a 4v6. Bai Chen and Long Yuehong were in position to snipe.

The main problem was that it was very difficult to capture the other party alive. Once it began, it would definitely result in considerable casualties. For the two parties that didn’t have any deep grudges, there was no need for this. It also didn’t conform to Jiang Baimian’s moral bottom line.

“There’s no rush,” Jiang Baimian replied.

Lopez suddenly had a sense of danger as he listened to their strange conversation. He maintained a high level of vigilance and said, “I’ve already said what needs to be said.”

He wanted to distance himself from these aggressive and strong Ruin Hunters as soon as possible.

“Goodbye.” Jiang Baimian smiled and waved her left hand.

Lopez didn’t get into the car immediately. He only got two of his subordinates to drive the all-terrain vehicle to the back of a nearby high-rise building. He then scattered around with the others and followed them on foot with the help of obstacles to prevent them from being wiped out because of their concentration.

“Very vigilant.” Shang Jianyao clapped and sent them off.

After Lopez and the others disappeared from sight, Jiang Baimian picked up the walkie-talkie and got Bai Chen and Long Yuehong to come down.

On the way back to the hotel camp, Long Yuehong eagerly asked, “Should we find an opportunity to capture Lopez alive next?”

“Yes.” Jiang Baimian didn’t object. “Report to the company first and see if we can get any useful information.”

Shang Jianyao smiled and added, “We can find bait to fish Lopez out.”

Long Yuehong immediately shrank back and looked at Shang Jianyao warily. “What’s the meaning of this?”

Shang Jianyao said seriously, “Baz is a very good bait.”

“That’s true...” Long Yuehong replied in a daze.

...

While the Old Task Force ate their late lunch, Pangu Biology returned the telegram.

After Jiang Baimian's translation, the contents were displayed: "The Vigilance Church believes in October's Kalendaria, Eidolon Nun. The supreme leader is Pope Darkness. Next are Terror Episcopal, bishops, and Harbingers. They call the believers 'People of Vigilance.'

"A large portion of this Church's Awakened are good at influencing others' emotions and states. Some are experts at provocation, some are embodiments of terror, some are friendly people, and some can make people cold or enhance their corresponding abilities...

"In the Ashlands, the Vigilance Church is mainly in the White Knights and Orange Company's sphere of influence, as well as some small and medium-sized settlements."

Chapter 199: Tenebrarum

After Jiang Baimian read the telegram, she laughed and said, "This is equivalent to saying nothing. Apart from letting us understand the abilities of the Awakened in the corresponding domain better, it doesn't help our current analysis.

"In Redstone Collection, Ashlanders are Eidolon Nun's believers and are People of Vigilance. The Red River people are the same. There's a chance that someone will awaken in either group."

Shang Jianyao said regretfully, "I thought their awakened abilities were related to hide and seek."

"They hide and are vigilant because of fear, so how can it not be related?" Jiang Baimian casually replied. "Besides, this is only a portion of the information the company has. It doesn't mean everything. Maybe the Vigilance Church's Awakened really have the ability to hide themselves."

She held the piece of paper and looked around before saying, "Yes, I can't say that this telegram is completely useless. At the very least, it allows us to confirm that an Awakened in Eidolon Nun's domain can cause excessive shock. Uh... Everyone is to carry a FECA biological agent with them in the future. It has a cardiogenic effect, and it may save your life."

The FECA biological agent was the drug that was injected into Moat Town's mayor.

As Long Yuehong wistfully sighed at the company's powerful R&D abilities and the adequate amount of emergency drugs the Old Task Force brought along, he asked in confusion, "But when suffering from excessive shock, we'd most certainly have fainted and will be on the brink of death. How can we inject ourselves with FECA?"

Jiang Baimian laughed. "Therefore, we can't act alone; at least two people a team. This way, when you are about to die of shock, your companion can chase away the enemy and seize the opportunity to inject you with FECA."

Just as she said that, she saw Shang Jianyao raise his hands and freeze there as if he were hesitating.

"What are you trying to do?" Jiang Baimian asked warily.

Shang Jianyao replied seriously, "I'm wondering which religion's style I should pray in."

With that said, he made up his mind. He bent his arms and did a cradling action of shaking a baby.

"You sure like Life Ritual," Jiang Baimian said in amusement.

Shang Jianyao gave a serious reason. "Among the Churches we've encountered up to now, Life Ritual's Holy Communion is the best."

Why am I not surprised... Long Yuehong wasn't surprised at all. He subconsciously asked, "Why do you suddenly want to pray?"

"I need to pray that the terror abilities in Eidolon Nun's domain aren't area-of-attack ones and can only be used on an individual," Shang Jianyao said truthfully.

These words made Jiang Baimian and Bai Chen frown.

After a few seconds, Jiang Baimian smiled and sighed. "There's no way to save ourselves in that case. Therefore, battles with Awakened are really annoying and completely unreasonable. Sometimes, the one who uses their abilities first wins."

At this point, she smiled and said, "Actually, I still have a chance of saving myself successfully."

Upon seeing Long Yuehong's confusion, she raised her left arm. "Isn't it normal to have an additional electric shock capacity with so much electrical capacitance? Isn't it reasonable for an auxiliary chip to have the corresponding physical state monitoring function? I remember that some electronic watches in the Old World can do this."

While Long Yuehong was stunned, Jiang Baimian tried tempting him and Bai Chen again. "How is it? Are you tempted? When you return to the company, you can exchange your accumulated credits for a biological prosthetic limb. Although it's unlikely to be an experimental model like mine, the others aren't weak either."

"I'm hesitating." Shang Jianyao answered for them.

"Oh?" Jiang Baimian glanced at him.

Shang Jianyao boldly said, "A mechanical arm is more in line with my measure of a man."

"There's no way to do this in the company unless we have the chance to go to places like First City." Jiang Baimian discussed this problem with him.

Bai Chen quietly listened and pursed her lips. "Can you choose the types and models yourself?" She was clearly tempted.

Jiang Baimian immediately nodded. "Yes, you can—as long as you accumulate enough credits or contribution points."

When one lost their limbs in battle, they could replace it with a biological prosthetic limb for free, but they had no choice in the selection.

After discussing this matter, they continued eating lunch.

While they were clearing away the lunch boxes and other cutlery, Jiang Baimian and Shang Jianyao cast their gazes at the door at the same time.

Ten seconds later, there was a knock on Room 05's door.

Shang Jianyao quickly picked up the monkey mask and wore it before rushing to the door.

He looked around and couldn't help but sigh. "There's no rod."

Jiang Baimian ignored him and asked loudly as she put on her mask, "Who is it?"

She asked in both Ashlandic and Red River language.

The person outside was very polite and directly gave his name. "Han Wanghuo."

He's finally back... Jiang Baimian said in relief, "Please come in."

At this moment, Bai Chen and Long Yuehong had already put on their masks and stood by her sides.

Han Wanghuo wasn't the only one outside the door. There was also an Ashlandic in his twenties.

He had black hair and brown eyes. He was less than 1.7 meters tall, and his skin was rough from the elements. He clearly had a baby face, but he had no expression.

"This is?" Jiang Baimian took the initiative to ask.

Han Wanghuo immediately did the introductions. "Tan Jie, a member of the Public Security Department, an Ashlander."

His emphasis was on the last few words.

Jiang Baimian nodded thoughtfully. "Please come in."

After taking their seats, Shang Jianyao remained at the door with his arms crossed like a bodyguard.

“I heard from Weiler that you have something important to tell me?” Han Wanghuo asked in a tone that was neither humble nor arrogant.

Jiang Baimian tersely acknowledged his words and recounted the rocket attack. She didn’t hide the fact that the other party didn’t seem eager to kill them.

Han Wanghuo turned his head to look at Tan Jie and deliberated before saying, “It might be to agitate you and make you focus on investigating the two cases you have on hand. It might also be to scare you away and prevent you from getting involved in Redstone Collection’s murky waters.”

He spoke rather frankly, not hiding what kind of situation Redstone Collection was in.

“The assailants seem very sure that those two cases can stir up a storm,” said Tan Jie coldly.

Jiang Baimian immediately smiled. “You were the ones who stuffed a note into our room to warn us, right?”

She asked very directly.

Tan Jie fell silent for two seconds before saying, “This is because we’re all Ashlanders. You guys are too weak; getting involved in this matter will cost you your lives.”

At this moment, Shang Jianyao said seriously, “Thank you.”

While Tan Jie was a little confused by the sudden gratitude, Jiang Baimian opened the door and asked, “Don’t you want to find out the truth? If you are sure you didn’t do it, help us figure out the truth, and we can clear your names.”

Without a change in expression, Tan Jie stated, “Some people just want an excuse, not the truth. In all these years, everyone has done something that crossed the line. No one is truly innocent.”

This was a very understandable situation for Bai Chen. In the Ashlands—where survival was difficult—it was common for groups to fight for resources.

Jiang Baimian didn’t continue the topic and switched to talking about Baz.

Upon mentioning that Helvig and Anhebus might be working together to kill two birds with one stone, Tan Jie laughed without a smile. “I won’t be surprised by what they do. Unfortunately, Helvig died too easily.”

Jiang Baimian didn’t respond and continued talking about her trip to the Vigilance Cathedral. She kept her promise and didn’t mention that Bishop Renato had contracted the Heartless disease. She only said that she happened to encounter Harbinger Song He.

In addition, she didn’t hide the clues that Lopez had given her. She then talked about the Awakened’s terror abilities in Eidolon Nun’s domain.

“That’s right.” Tan Jie gave an affirmative answer.

Han Wanghuo wasn’t surprised either as though he had long obtained the corresponding information from the Ashlanders.

He deliberated and said, “Maybe Redstone Collection’s survival situation is very close to the Vigilance Church’s teachings, causing the number of Awakened here to be higher than normal. This is my personal suspicion. There’s no evidence.”

Jiang Baimian tersely acknowledged it. “This makes things more complicated. Let’s not consider this for the time being and only talk about Anhebus. If he really has Helvig’s batch of firearms, he probably won’t dare to go to the Vigilant Cathedral today. It’s obvious that he has a certain level of understanding of Awakened. What will he do in such a situation?”

Jiang Baimian regretted it the moment she said that. This was because this was the kind of leading tone she often used when discussing problems with her team members. The people she was conversing with now were from Redstone Collection.

Han Wanghuo was very supportive and thought for a moment before saying, “If I were him, I would make the best use of my time to give that batch of firearms to the town guards and say that it’s the supplies he previously saved up. This way, the Vigilance Church will definitely turn a blind eye.”

“It’s also possible to throw out outsiders like Lopez and say that they did it behind his back,” Tan Jie added calmly.

Jiang Baimian nodded slightly. “Is there such a possibility? Anhebus will take the opportunity to send the firearms out of Redstone Collection tonight and hand them over to the mountain monsters. He will refuse to go to the Vigilance Cathedral, but he will allow investigators to search at will.”

“No, if he doesn’t go to the Vigilance Cathedral, it shows that he’s guilty and doesn’t dare to face the Kalendaria’s gaze. This way, the townsfolk under him will definitely become suspicious. When the time comes, he won’t even be able to sleep well. Besides, he knows the Vigilance Church’s strength very well.” Han Wanghuo gave a negative answer.

“Is that so?” Jiang Baimian asked, “Where does Anhebus usually stay?”

“He often swaps places, but he will most likely choose the lakeside villa when he encounters a relatively dangerous situation. The underground parking lot there leads to the dock, where there are boats,” Tan Jie replied simply.

Uh, you guys have had Anhebus in your sights for a long time... Jiang Baimian thought for a moment and suddenly asked, “Captain Han, it’s impossible for the Vigilance Church not to guess that the Awakened were behind the deaths from excessive shock two years ago. Do you still remember their reactions? Did they suddenly have an additional Harbinger during that period of time?”

As Han Wanghuo frowned as he recalled, Tan Jie suddenly stood up. “About half a year after the last case, the Church gained an additional Tenebrarum. These are clergymen who cloister themselves in dark rooms to pray.”

He sounded a little agitated, but he remained expressionless.

Upon hearing this, Han Wanghuo’s expression changed. He stood up and anxiously said, “He’s Anhebus’s brother, Brand!”

Chapter 200: Rare Peace

“Anhebus’s brother?” Jiang Baimian asked in a confirmatory tone. She immediately understood where Anhebus’s information regarding the Vigilance Church’s Awakened came from.

Han Wanghuo nodded very firmly. “Yes, I remember it very clearly.”

Just as he said that, Tan Jie suddenly said a name. “Baz.”

Baz was in the Vigilance Cathedral at this moment. He was the key witness in the testimony against Anhebus.

Shang Jianyao—who was guarding the door—didn't say a word. He had already turned around, opened the door, and walked out.

Jiang Baimian immediately said, "To the cathedral."

She didn't believe that Tenebrarum Brand would assassinate Baz in the cathedral—that would be too insulting to the intelligence of the rest of the Vigilance Church's clergymen. Besides, the Kalendaria—Eidolon Nun—might really be watching them. However, nobody could guarantee anything when it came to Awakened matters. After all, they didn't know what price the other party had paid. What if they lost their minds like Shang Jianyao?

Han Wanghuo didn't object. He left the hotel camp with Tan Jie and got into his car.

His car was a common black SUV. It was in terrible condition as if it could be scrapped at any moment.

The six people in the two cars quickly arrived at the fortress-like Vigilance Cathedral and entered the hall that was mainly colored danger red and holy gold.

Jiang Baimian looked at the white door, which was half-open. Like the symbol hidden in the darkness behind the female figure, Jiang Baimian searched for the hiding cathedral guards according to her senses.

At this moment, Shang Jianyao and Han Wanghuo shouted at the same time.

The latter shouted, "Your Grace!"

The former shouted, "Fire!"

Tan Jie expressionlessly swept his gaze between the two of them before closing his mouth.

This is indeed the fastest way to find someone... Let the people come out by themselves without having to find them... Jiang Baimian's eyes darted up as she sighed.

In less than a minute, Song He—who was wearing a black robe and had slightly white sideburns—came in from the side of the hall. He looked around and calmly asked, “Captain Han, what’s the matter?”

Before Han Wanghuo could answer, Shang Jianyao asked, “Where’s Baz?”

“Exchanging hiding techniques with Viel,” Song He said calmly.

Shout... At this moment, Long Yuehong silently said a word in his heart.

Just as this thought crossed his mind, Shang Jianyao shouted, “Baz!”

Baz—who was wearing an iron-black mask—soon jogged into the hall and happily said, “You’re here again?”

This is a good friend!

Shang Jianyao frowned and asked, “Why didn’t you come out when I shouted ‘fire?’”

Baz replied without stuttering. “I can’t blindly believe such a claim.”

“Very vigilant,” Shang Jianyao praised before saying, “Take off your mask; I have to see if you’re the real person. I can’t blindly believe you.”

Baz had no objections. He took off his iron mask and revealed his slightly square face with freckles.

Shang Jianyao nodded in satisfaction.

Song He patiently waited for their conversation to end before turning to look at Baz and casually asking, “Where’s Viel?”

“He’s hiding. I’m looking for him.” As he spoke, Baz looked around as if he were searching for Viel.

Song He turned around and asked again, “Why are you here?”

The fierce-looking Han Wanghuo honestly said, “Harbinger Song, we want to meet Tenebrarum Brand.”

“The Tenebrarum cloister themselves under the Goddess’s watch. Unless there are special circumstances, they do not entertain others,” Song He explained calmly.

Han Wanghuo touched the two scars—one horizontal, one vertical—on his face. “I suspect that Brand has something to do with the Ashlanders who died from excessive shock a few years ago.”

His yellowish-white eyes met Song He’s gaze without backing down.

Song He fell silent for a moment before sighing. “You can speak to him from the outside.”

With that said, he turned around and led Shang Jianyao and the others out the hall’s side door before turning into the corridor at the back.

Before long, he stopped in front of a dark-red wooden door.

“Brand, Captain Han from the Public Security Department is looking for you.” Song He switched to the Red River language and spoke in a moderate voice.

About ten seconds later, a slightly hoarse voice sounded from behind the tightly shut door. “Public Security Department, Han Wanghuo?”

He seemed to have not communicated with anyone for a long time, making it very difficult for him to speak.

At the same time, Jiang Baimian respectively glanced at Long Yuehong, Bai Chen, and Shang Jianyao. She used an inconspicuous gesture to signal them to raise their vigilance and be prepared to inject their companions with the FECA biological agent.

Han Wanghuo took a deep breath and asked seriously, “Brand, are you an Awakened?”

The slightly hoarse voice fell silent for a moment before saying, “Yes.”

Han Wanghuo asked, “Do you have the ability to make people die from excessive shock?”

The slightly hoarse voice spoke fluently. “It’s called Extreme Terror.”

Han Wanghuo closed his eyes and took a step toward the door. “Were you the one who caused Ashlanders to die from excessive shock two to three years ago?”

He didn’t have sufficient evidence because too much time had passed. Furthermore, Redstone townfolk liked to hide. Most of the time, nobody could determine the whereabouts of others.

The slightly hoarse voice sighed after a while. “I thought you would quickly find me, but I didn’t expect you to wait until now.”

As he spoke, Jiang Baimian realized that Brand had walked to the door step by step from the electronic feedback.

“You admit it?” Tan Jie took a step forward and interrupted. He spoke in Ashlandic.

It was unknown if Brand understood his words, but he said in a deep voice, “Ever since I obtained my abilities, anger has always been burning in my heart. I want to kill everyone who has harmed me and the Red River people. Sometimes, even just exchanging gazes makes me unable to control the anger in my heart.

“It was only when Bishop Renato came to me and counseled me for a while, suggesting that I cut off all human contact and cloister myself in the dark room to pray that I obtained a long-awaited peace under the Kalendaria’s gaze. Captain Han, I thought you would’ve quickly narrowed it down to me.”

The price he paid is the loss of control over his emotions? Before it worsens, the condition pertains to anger? Jiang Baimian analyzed the situation inwardly.

Han Wanghuo fell silent for a few seconds before blaming himself. “You became a Tenebrarum half a year after the last case. I didn’t make enough connections.”

“Is that so? I don’t know. It seems like Bishop Renato chose to announce it six months later.” Brand came to a realization.

Tan Jie had already turned his head to look at Harbinger Song He. “Will the Church protect this murderer?”

Tan Jie had switched to the Red River language. His tone hid anger, but no corresponding expression appeared.

Song He calmly replied, “His current situation is equivalent to being sentenced to life imprisonment in the Old World. They can only leave the room unless the Church encounters a serious crisis. They will then sacrifice their lives to contribute to the Kalendaria.”

Tan Jie fell silent for a while before saying, “Just because he’s an Awakened?”

Without waiting for Song He’s response, he retracted his gaze and spoke to the tightly shut dark-red wooden door. “You really are despicable. You don’t even dare to face what you’ve done.”

Behind the door, Brand’s breathing suddenly became heavier.

Song He’s expression changed slightly, and his eyes turned dark.

At this moment, Brand roared, “Damn it! I’m only willing to suffer because of the Kalendaria’s attention! Have I ever been afraid of anyone?”

His anger overflowed, bringing with it the strange dimming of the surrounding light. It was as if the sun outside was blocked by drifting clouds.

Accompanying the rapidly darkening environment was a sudden acceleration of everyone’s heartbeat. It was as though an indescribable terror was hiding behind the door.

This terror was like a flood that had been gathering strength for a long time. It could break through the dam at any moment and drown everyone.

Tan Jie—who was right in front of the ‘flood’—felt like a hand was tightly gripping his heart.

Extreme Terror was about to descend!

Tan Jie’s expression didn’t change. He drew his pistol and aimed at the door as if he was prepared.

As he prepared to attack, Brand laughed from behind the door. “Do you think you can make me use Extreme Terror on you just by agitating me? I won’t!”

Upon hearing Brand’s words, Jiang Baimian took a deep breath to calm her heart before looking at Shang Jianyao.

Shang Jianyao nodded slightly.

“Please calm down,” Song He said at that moment.

Tan Jie struggled for a moment and put away his pistol.

The sense of impending danger vanished, and the light in the corridor returned to normal.

“For Brand, the current situation is more unacceptable than directly executing him.” Song He’s voice was as calm as ever.

Tan Jie fell silent for a moment before saying, “But he still has hope.”

Behind the door, Brand seemed to be walking away. “Hope is what’s most torturous.”

Tan Jie was just about to say something when Shang Jianyao interrupted. “You didn’t do it right.”

“Oh?” Tan Jie turned his head and looked at him emotionlessly.

Shang Jianyao sincerely said, "If I were you, I would've directly told him that I wanted to kill him, not secretly agitate him and attack him during the chaos."

At this moment, Brand stopped behind the door. "You've also awakened? You just used Provocation? Heh heh, Provocation is really effective against people who are prone to anger like me. Fortunately, Harbinger Song can make everyone friendly and eliminate hostility."

Jiang Baimian's eyes lit up when she heard that; she wished Brand could say more.

Harbinger Song He coughed. "Tan Jie, I won't stop you if you officially suggest revenge. However, you have to think it through. A prepared Brand can take at least one person down with him."

Han Wanghuo then looked at Tan Jie. "If you've decided to take revenge, I'll help you."

"You?" Tan Jie sounded a little surprised.

This was a matter with a one-in-two chance of death!

"This is the sheriff's responsibility," Han Wanghuo said calmly.

Tan Jie fell silent.

Jiang Baimian resisted the urge with great difficulty and didn't tell them that they could still be given emergency treatment after a shock. They would then be treated with surgery later.

Uh, with Redstone Collection's medical standards, it might depend on luck... Jiang Baimian acutely sensed Shang Jianyao's stirrings and glared at him to stop him from spouting nonsense.

Upon seeing that Tan Jie didn't say anything else, Han Wanghuo directed a question toward the door again. "Brand, did you kill Helvig as well? He died from excessive shock the day before yesterday."