

## **Ad Infinitum 261**

Chapter 261: Resolving the Chaos

In just a few minutes, Zhou Yue was done with her equipment.

On the hemp rope tied to the waist of her white robe hung a piece of an Old World symbol—the Eight Trigrams. In the middle was an object that looked like a normal mirror. She held a black flashlight in her left hand and a transparent plastic water bottle in her right hand. It contained dirty water with ashes floating in it. On her back was a loose sack.

This strange and contradictory combination made the others in Nanke Convent find it ridiculous. Zhen Lian couldn't help but ask, "Abbess, are you ghostbusting?"

"Something even more terrifying," Zhou Yue answered seriously.

Zhen Lian's heart tightened as he hurriedly said, "Abbess, you didn't bring your peach wood sword!"

"That's useless," Zhou Yue answered based on some theory.

Seeing that Zhen Lian—who wasn't an Awakened—was a little dumbfounded, Zhou Yue shook her head and said with a smile, "Everything is but a dream. Why so serious? "

With that said, she switched on the flashlight and cast the beam at the impluvium. Following that, she walked out of Nanke Convent step by step.

Outside, Zhou Yue covered the lidless plastic water bottle with her right thumb, leaving only a tiny gap.

As she walked, she shook the bottle, letting a small amount of the talisman liquid inside spill to the front and sides.

During this process, her flashlight kept sweeping from left to right and from top to bottom without stopping. It was as though she was searching for an enemy hidden in the night.

As for the street lamps on both sides of the street, she ignored them.

At the same time, she kept gyrating her waist, allowing the Eight Trigrams Mirror hanging from the hemp rope to reflect different spots.

If Jiang Baimian were here, she—who knew quite a bit about the Old World—might've mistaken Abbess Zhou Yue as performing the 'Samdambi,' a feudal ritual that was akin to a shaman dance.

...

Inside Wild Pigeon Bar, upon seeing the Heartless with turbid eyes that looked like ferocious beasts, Long Yuehong would've most likely committed Ninth Zhang's mistake if he hadn't known beforehand that this might be an illusion. He would've drawn his gun and shot randomly.

Meanwhile, when Jiang Baimian heard Shang Jianyao's suggestion of switching off the lights, the first thought that flashed through her mind wasn't that this fellow was causing trouble again, but whether this method worked.

With the lights off, nobody could see each other, so they wouldn't treat each other as monsters and Heartless, resulting in a maniac attack in a bid to protect themselves...

From this angle, switching off the lights was indeed a good idea. After all, hallucinations mainly affected the senses. Vision was one of the most important senses of humans.

However, the problem was the limits of the Superior Heartless's ability. Could it be that it could still make people see a 'fake' monster even without light? Maybe it could distort the information obtained from the sense of hearing and smell to the vision center or directly create a corresponding scene in the target's mind.

In that case, switching off the lights not only made it easier to cause more tension and greater chaos, but it also couldn't resolve the illusion's effects.

What if the Superior Heartless sneaked in while there was no light?

At that instant, countless thoughts clashed in Jiang Baimian's mind. With her experience and intuition, she made a decision in a split second. "No need!"

As she shouted these two words, she quickly moved and changed positions. She speedily issued orders: “Plan 2! Close the door! Close the windows! Nakdanin!”

Plan 2 was the second strategy commonly used by the Old Task Force. The content was: “Find cover to hide and observe the situation. Don’t attack; await further orders.”

Condensing such a sentence into the words ‘Plan 2’ could effectively shorten the time.

In such a situation, every second could spell life or death.

In addition, using Plan 2 to replace the specific orders prevented the enemy from figuring out the Old Task Force’s concrete plans. This avoided the hallucination from ‘tampering’ the content.

Not attacking meant that they wouldn’t accidentally cause friendly fire.

As for the second order, it was shouted by Jiang Baimian after she had completed the first action of lunging to the back of a door.

At this moment, Shang Jianyao, Long Yuehong, and Bai Chen had already found a short wall that divided the building into different areas, pillars that supported the building, and corners with shockingly thick bricks to hide.

The next second, there was a gunshot.

In their eyes, one of the Heartless pulled out its pistol and—driven by its hunting instincts—shot at the door.

Fortunately, private fighting was forbidden in Tarnan. There were cameras everywhere, and the locals were used to not bringing weapons since they had no use for them. The already chaotic scene didn’t immediately turn worse.

Of course, a few townsfolk, foreign Ruin Hunters, and caravans—who lacked a sense of security—had one or two pistols on them, although they didn’t carry rifles or submachine guns that weren’t easy to conceal.

At this moment, their first reaction when they realized that they were surrounded by Heartless was undoubtedly to draw their guns.

However, the Heartless also attacked them at the same time and fought them, preventing them from drawing their guns even if they wanted to.

Only a few people successfully pulled out their pistols. Some shot at the monsters at the entrance, and some dealt with the nearest Heartless.

Two to three Heartless collapsed after a few gunshots, blood flowing out of their bodies.

The people who had drawn their guns didn't engage any further or stay. They fought as they retreated, heading for the exit they had chosen.

In their eyes, there were too many Heartless here; some of them even held guns. It was better to wait for the robot guards to deal with them.

At this moment, Shang Jianyao, Long Yuehong, and Bai Chen—who had heard Jiang Baimian's instructions—bent their backs and approached the window before closing it with a clang.

After doing all of this, they found cover nearby, took off their tactical backpacks, took out a drug from within, and swallowed it.

Jiang Baimian had already closed the door. She leopard-crawled and rolled as she approached the most chaotic area.

She didn't join in. Instead, she used the dance floor and the low wall around the card tables as cover. Jiang Baimian then raised her left hand and extended it a little.

Gunshots sounded one after another. The group of Heartless kept fighting, appearing hysterical.

Jiang Baimian held her breath and didn't interfere. From time to time, she would change her position and approach the crowd in different areas.

The few gunmen finally retreated to different windows, wanting to jump out and leave this dangerous place.

Smack!

One of the gunmen was hit in the ear and fainted on the spot; he didn't even see who the attacker was.

Shang Jianyao squatted down and reasoned with him. "It's more dangerous outside. It's better to remain unconscious here."

At the other window, Long Yuehong and Bai Chen had also knocked out the panicked gunmen.

This was what the second order implied.

Closing the door and windows was equivalent to not letting anyone open them. If they encountered the latter situation, they could deliver force to a certain extent.

Time passed minute by minute. The Heartless—who were capable of grabbing, biting, pinching, and colliding—gradually felt exhausted and couldn't open their eyes.

"You carry the luggage; I rein the horse[1]..." When a song from Shang Jianyao's small speaker sounded, the Heartless fell to the ground one after another, just like people who had taken anesthesia described in Pangu Biology's radio programs.

Yes, they had all inhaled the anesthetic gas released by Jiang Baimian's left hand.

Shang Jianyao and the others had taken the neutralizing agent, Nakdanin, in advance.

This was the best solution Jiang Baimian could think of to protect the humans here. Therefore, she got Shang Jianyao, Long Yuehong, and Bai Chen to help her close the door and windows.

"Phew..." Jiang Baimian couldn't help but heave a sigh of relief when she saw that the 'Heartless' had fainted. She then said loudly, "Nobody came in!"

The Superior Heartless didn't take advantage of the chaos to sneak into Wild Pigeon Bar!

This was Jiang Baimian's judgment based on the electric signals. She believed that the Superior Heartless definitely didn't know any technology or knowledge in this regard. After all, Pangu Biology was the only one in control of such technology at the moment. Therefore, no matter how the other party distorted her senses and 'concealed' their tracks, they would still leave a flaw due to their own illiteracy.

According to her monitoring, Jiang Baimian confirmed that no foreign biological electric signals had entered. This is a little strange. Could it be that the Heartless is so careful that it wants both sides to be seriously injured before it enters to hunt?

Just as Jiang Baimian had this thought, Shang Jianyao replied loudly amidst the music. "He's afraid of you!"

Pui!

Jiang Baimian spat before being a little stunned. Could it be that the Superior Heartless didn't take advantage of the chaos to sneak in and hunt because it was afraid of something? Something in this room scared it... Since humans have to pay a price for awakening their abilities, do Heartless follow similar rules when they have abilities? Of course, being a Heartless themselves might've been a price.

As Jiang Baimian's thoughts raced, Shang Jianyao had already looked up and said to the surveillance cameras in the bar, "Say something. Why aren't you saying anything?"

That's right; there are cameras in the bar. I wonder if they are connected to Tarnan's network... In short, I have to think of a way to inform the robot guards and the various Churches about the anomaly. They all have certain abilities... Jiang Baimian felt that she couldn't continue waiting in Wild Pigeon Bar, but she couldn't rush out blindly.

At the same time, she was also thankful that the Superior Heartless had yet to make them have auditory hallucinations. The Old Task Force could maintain effective communication; they also saw their team members as Heartless.

However, Jiang Baimian couldn't guess how long this state would last. Therefore, she wanted to find a solution before the situation worsened.

...

In Serene Dream, the lady boss, Aynor, could sense someone loitering behind her even without turning her head.

This person would occasionally approach her, move closer to her neck, or occasionally move away, producing a cold wind.

Aynor stared at the computer screen and muttered to herself in fear, “If—if you come again, I-I’ll attack indiscriminately. Although I-I can’t determine where you are, I-I can attack indiscriminately!”

Chapter 262: Real Charlatan

In Wild Pigeon Bar, just as Jiang Baimian was thinking about how she could reasonably use her available resources to break through the illusion predicament and inform the robot guards, Clam Dragon Church, and the other factions about the ‘enemy attack,’ Shang Jianyao—who had failed to communicate with the surveillance cameras—took out a loudspeaker from his tactical backpack.

Amidst the music, he held the loudspeaker and shouted at one of the few human consciousnesses outside. “It’s already dark! The wind is still so strong! Don’t you know it’s time to return home!”

This sounded like a tirade directed at people who played outside without any heed for the time or the weather. In fact, it was a way to realize Inference Clowning. But with the help of a loudspeaker, the effects would be greatly reduced. Shang Jianyao had to provide guidance to a certain extent, and it could only be used on individuals.

As his voice echoed, the target’s consciousness paused for two seconds before jogging to a certain spot on the street.

Jiang Baimian sensed this and roughly understood Shang Jianyao’s idea.

After the Superior Heartless used the illusion to influence the people in the bar, it meant that he had an interaction with Shang Jianyao and couldn’t hide his consciousness. In other words, one of the human consciousnesses Shang Jianyao sensed was very likely an enemy.

The enemy might not be able to understand human language, and they knew that the premise of the strong wind came from an illusion and that it was fake. Therefore, they wouldn't be affected by Inference Clowning.

This seemed like a good thing, but they would be exposed when they reacted differently from other human consciousnesses. They would be like fireflies in the night—bright and outstanding.

The tallest tree always experienced the strongest winds!

However, Shang Jianyao's response wasn't perfect in his haste. Jiang Baimian quickly thought of a few flaws.

The first was that the Superior Heartless's ability range far exceeded Shang Jianyao's. The place he was currently hiding was outside Shang Jianyao's perception range. None of the human consciousnesses were real targets.

The second was that the Superior Heartless could make the people outside experience auditory hallucinations and maintain the same reaction as him.

Third, among the human consciousnesses outside, some of them might be fake—a created illusion.

How troublesome. I can only eliminate them step by step... Jiang Baimian cooperated with Shang Jianyao and sensed the changes in the electric signals to determine if the affected person was a fake or a real person.

After urging a human to return home, Shang Jianyao switched targets and repeated the same trick. At this moment, he was like a mayor in a settlement who had used a loudspeaker to make an announcement.

...

Abbess Zhou Yue walked toward the most powerful part of the illusion as if she were performing a shaman dance. This was the confidence an Awakened with similar abilities in the same domain had regarding the corresponding signal.



I'm so tired... Zhou Yue couldn't help but complain after walking for a distance. As she walked, she had to gyrate her waist, sway her body, and move her hands. It was simply too exhausting!

It was difficult for a clergyman like her, who had never undergone professional training.

This exhausted her to the point of having blasphemous thoughts. Should I disguise myself and sneak into the Furnace Church to learn how to dance?

...

In Serene Dream, the lady boss—Aynor—stared at the computer screen as she repeated the warning in fear. However, the 'person' lingering behind her and blowing at her neck from time to time still existed.

After nearly a minute, Aynor felt something cold on her shoulder.

She couldn't control herself any longer and let out a scream. "Ah!" At the same time, her dark-brown eyes turned extremely dark.

...

In a building along Riverfront Avenue.

A man suddenly took off his clothes uncontrollably, rushed to the balcony, and peed against the wind.

After peeing, he woke up, confused and happy. He was confused as to why he had acted as if he had been possessed. He was happy that he had proven himself by defeating the wind with his pee.

In a room in the other building next to his.

A woman was holding a book she had found in a city ruin and said to her child, "If you can't read, you won't even be able to take on many missions as a Ruin Hunter!"

“I can hire someone to read the mission statement,” her child replied stubbornly.

The woman suddenly felt a rush through her head. Without thinking, she raised her arm and slammed it against the table. Amidst the loud bang, she roared, “You have to pay! Are you going to learn this?”

After shouting, she regretted it and felt that she shouldn’t have done that.

Her child—who was originally rather strong—cried at this moment. “I’ll learn, I’ll learn...”

...

In Wild Pigeon Bar, Long Yuehong suddenly felt hot-headed for some reason as he listened to Shang Jianyao’s ‘broadcast.’ He suddenly stood up and fired at the area where many humans were unconscious.

This was something he had previously wanted to do out of impulse. After all, they were Heartless in his eyes.

Fortunately, he shot based on the assumption that the Heartless had their bodies hunched in preparation to pounce on him. Every shot was fired into the air, not the ground. Due to this, nobody died.

Bai Chen shrunk herself even more under the other window. She seemed to think that she wouldn’t react in a random manner that might cause an irreversible outcome or be affected by the hallucinations too much if she didn’t move, look, or listen.

Jiang Baimian jumped and rolled before arriving at the door.

Just as she opened the door and wanted to take out a grenade from her tactical backpack and throw it outside to create a commotion to attract reinforcements, she was suddenly stunned.

What am I doing? Why am I so impulsive? Wasn’t I planning on waiting for Shang Jianyao to ‘clear’ the consciousnesses outside and ‘urge’ the real humans to retreat before ‘informing’ the robot guards and Nanke Convent with a grenade? As her thoughts raced, Jiang Baimian cast her gaze at Shang Jianyao.

Shang Jianyao had already thrown away the loudspeaker and tried to rush past her to the door.

The small speaker not far away from him was still singing. "Dare I ask where the road is..."

The next second, a hoarse, high-pitched bestial roar sounded dozens of meters away from everyone outside Wild Pigeon Bar. "Roar!"

The roar was so loud that not only did it penetrate the illusion, but it also allowed Jiang Baimian to hear it clearly.

With this roar, the wind suddenly stopped. The Heartless in Long Yuehong's bloodshot eyes turned back into humans, and the dim lights in the bar returned to normal.

Shang Jianyao didn't stop. He ran out and approached the spot where the roar came from as quickly as possible. He wanted to shorten the distance and enter within range of his abilities.

Upon seeing this, Jiang Baimian didn't hesitate to hold her pistol and follow closely. She wanted to fire continuously, not giving the target a chance to reinstate the illusion.

In just a few seconds, Shang Jianyao rolled, propped himself up with his hands, and looked at the dark corner of another street.

His eyes were deep.

Corny Person!

The next second, a figure jumped down from nowhere and entered the area illuminated by the street lamps. He appeared in front of Shang Jianyao and Jiang Baimian in an open and aboveboard manner.

He had long, grayish-white, and messy hair. He looked like an old man past his prime. His clothes were tattered in all kinds of ways as if they had been peeled off from many corpses and constantly piled over him.

His face was warped, and his eyes were turbid. They were filled with countless blood vessels, and there were red traces at the corners of his mouth. It was obvious that he was a Heartless.

Jiang Baimian didn't hesitate to raise her pistol, but her conditioned reflex of 'discovering the target—aiming at the target' had failed.

She was no longer aiming at the target but at the sky!

Bang!

Jiang Baimian's bullet flew into the night.

Almost at the same time, she saw the Superior Heartless raise his right hand.

He held a United 202.

In the face of such a situation, Jiang Baimian's instinctive reaction was to pounce, roll, and dodge. However, with a thought, she couldn't help but stop in her tracks. She even assumed a forward posture.

This was like raising an arm instead of her calf after her knee was hit in the right spot.

On the other side, Shang Jianyao's subconscious reaction to such a change should've been employing Hands Immobility, preventing the target from pulling the trigger. But at this moment, he actually chose Inference Clowning.

"Look..."

Before he could finish his sentence, the Superior Heartless had already aimed at Jiang Baimian.

At this moment, Abbess Zhou Yue—who was shamanic dancing—followed the roar and rushed to the vicinity.

The moment she saw the Superior Heartless standing under the street lamps, she threw away the flashlight in her hand without thinking.

Right on the heels of that, she released her thumb from the bottle's mouth and threw the plastic bottle containing the talisman water at the target.

Talisman water splattered as the bottle rolled, producing a drizzle along the way.

Before she became a target and was affected, Zhou Yue used her free hand—which had been relieved after she abandoned the flashlight—to take off the Eight Trigrams Mirror hanging from the hemp rope around her waist and shone it at the enemy.

Amidst these seemingly useless actions, the Superior Heartless actually didn't pull the trigger.

He hurriedly raised his hands to shield his face. He then roared, turned around, and fled in a sorry state.

With a smack, the plastic bottle—which only had a little talisman water left—smashed to the ground. The Superior Heartless's figure alternated between a tall state and a short state as he disappeared into the darkness that the street lamps couldn't illuminate.

Jiang Baimian caught her breath and fired at his back several times, but it was already too late. All that was left in her eyes was the messy, grayish-white hair.

“Thankfully it worked...” After Nanke Convent's Abbess Zhou Yue watched the Superior Heartless escape, she heaved a long sigh of relief.

Before she could finish speaking, an electronic voice sounded from a surveillance camera on the street lamp pole beside her.

“Circuit malfunction eliminated, rebooting.”

This... As Jiang Baimian was surprised that Zhou Yue's charlatan-like performance was effective, she frowned.

More and more facts showed that the Superior Heartless could affect electromagnetic signals and interfere with circuitry.

This might be the reason why communications with the robot guards were lost... Fortunately, he doesn't seem to know that there are bioelectric signals in the human body and didn't deal with it. Sigh, knowledge can indeed be equivalent to strength... As Jiang Baimian's thoughts raced, she turned her head to look at Shang Jianyao.

Chapter 263: Aftermath

Shang Jianyao was looking at Abbess Zhou Yue with a curious and eager expression. He also seemed to want to carry a bottle of talisman water, an Eight Trigrams Mirror, and a peach wood sword to fight the Superior Heartless in an intense tussle.

This was a term that the Old Task Force had conveniently grasped when gathering information regarding the Eternal Time Sect.

However, Shang Jianyao quickly retracted his gaze and walked to the surveillance camera that had made a sound. He spoke as if he had finally seen a fellow villager from his hometown. "You finally spoke! I thought you were dead; I was wondering if I should hold a funeral for you and prepare for the seventh day of your demise..."

The surveillance camera remained silent and didn't respond.

Shang Jianyao went straight to the point. "Quick, tell Geneva that the target has gone down the mountain."

The surveillance camera emitted an electronic voice again. "Please wait. I'll help you transfer to Officer Geneva."

Shang Jianyao was first stunned before he excitedly asked, "You are actually a telephone that's disguised as a surveillance camera?"

As the surveillance camera connected the signal, it replied in an emotionless voice, "I'm a multifunctional surveillance robot."

Just as it said that, Genova's mellow male voice sounded. "Hello, who is it?"

"Your brother," Shang Jianyao replied without stuttering.

"..." On the other end of the surveillance camera, Genova saw the person clearly. He skipped the previous question and asked, "What's the matter?"

Shang Jianyao replied seriously, "The Superior Heartless broke into town and knocked out a bar full of people. Quickly, come over and take a look."

Upon seeing that he had finally explained everything, Jiang Baimian spoke to Long Yuehong and Bai Chen, who were at the door of Wild Pigeon. "Open the door and windows and treat the injured."

Her hidden meaning was: ventilate and don't let any anesthetic gas remain inside to prevent others from analyzing the composition, which might affect any subsequent usage.

After Long Yuehong and Bai Chen began busying themselves, Jiang Baimian walked toward Abbess Zhou Yue—who was carrying a sack and holding the Eight Trigrams Mirror—and casually sighed with emotion. "Abbess Zhou, these artifacts are actually effective!"

She had seen it very clearly just now. It was precisely because Zhou Yue had used the water-filled bottle and the Eight Trigrams Mirror she had obtained from somewhere to launch an 'attack' that the Superior Heartless had fled in panic without pulling the pistol's trigger.

Zhou Yue laughed. "These are all Dharma artifacts recorded in our Church's canon. I just realized that they are really useful."

Jiang Baimian turned her head to look at Wild Pigeon and thoughtfully said, "I previously wondered if the Superior Heartless didn't enter the bar because he was afraid of the light and relied on the chaos created by the illusion to complete the hunt. However, I realized that my guess was wrong when I saw him appear under the street lamps. Furthermore, he had also caused a massacre in the southwest mountains during the day.

"Abbess Zhou, I saw you throw away the flashlight in your hand the moment you discovered the Superior Heartless standing under the street lamp. Do you have a similar guess as mine?"

Zhou Yue was stunned for a moment before she laughed dryly. “Everything is but a dream. Why so serious?”

Without giving Jiang Baimian a chance to respond, she frowned in confusion. “Oh right, do we know each other?”

“You probably haven’t seen many women as tall as me,” Jiang Baimian replied.

Zhou Yue revealed a look of enlightenment. “Yes, yes, yes. Although I can’t remember your face, I won’t forget your characteristics. You are a member of that four-person team...”

As the two of them spoke, metallic clangs sounded. Robot guards in dark-green uniforms rushed over to Wild Pigeon Bar at high speed.

Leading them was none other than Tarnan’s mayor, Genava.

With so many smart bots appearing at the same time, Jiang Baimian felt a little dizzy, much less Zhou Yue. She almost couldn’t tell who was who.

But after careful observation, Zhou Yue realized that these smart bots had certain differences in height, arm span, facial contours, and body thickness. There were no two identical robots.

Among them, Genava’s face was relatively square, and his height was above average. He looked sturdy and muscular. Most importantly, it also wore a dark-green military beret with 0 and 1 symbols. It was clearly different from other smart bots.

I wonder if they had all kinds of modifications when they left the factory to ensure the individual’s uniqueness. Or did they accumulate contribution points, buy components, and modify themselves? Jiang Baimian thought with interest.

“Your team shall enter to confirm the townsfolk’s condition. Those who need to be sent to the hospital should be sent as soon as possible,” Genava said to his three subordinates.



A team of robot guards consisted of four smart bots and several non-intelligent combat robots that assisted them. Therefore, communication wasn't only lost with ten smart bots in the southwestern mountains.

"Your team will search the surroundings and maintain contact at all times..." Geneva issued orders before walking toward Jiang Baimian and the others. Although it had already gained a general understanding from Shang Jianyao, it still asked cautiously, "Has the target fled?"

Its main modeling chip made a judgment after analyzing Shang Jianyao's words and actions: This person has mental problems and is suspected to be an Awakened.

However, Shang Jianyao's attitude of treating him as a brother made Geneva feel that the price the other party had to pay wasn't that serious.

Jiang Baimian nodded. "It's all thanks to Abbess Zhou."

This was both the truth and also a cover-up for her team's performance.

Geneva twisted his metal neck and looked at Zhou Yue. "Thank you."

For it—who was in charge of Tarnan's public security and defense—it was very likely that it would be dismissed and transferred back to Mechanical Paradise's headquarters if the town suffered a large number of casualties.

"It's all thanks to the Kalendaria's blessing." Zhou Yue half-raised her body, slightly raised her hands, and bowed at the Shattered Mirror in the void.

Geneva then asked Jiang Baimian and Shang Jianyao, "Was anyone else attacked?"

"The Mountain Fox bandits," Jiang Baimian replied truthfully.

After the Superior Heartless was scared away, she wondered how the remaining 13 people from the Mountain Fox bandits were doing. Of course, this was only a thought. It was already good enough that she didn't fire a few more shots at these bandits.

It was simply a fool's dream if she was expected to organize a team and take the risk to try and save them.

Genava immediately contacted the smart bot team in charge of the search through its additional communication module and briefly explained the situation.

Before long, the team reported the results. "Found them. Five dead, and the rest are sleeping in a pool of blood. They didn't even wake up from the cold despite the trembling."

"They're pretty lucky," Shang Jianyao commented.

Jiang Baimian knew that this was relative to Ninth Zhang.

At this moment, the smart bot team in charge of Wild Pigeon Bar gradually sent the injured townsfolk, Ruin Hunters, and caravan members to Tarnan General Hospital. This included those who had no external injuries but were still in a coma.

Upon seeing this, Genava instructed his adjutant, "Charlie, get the people in charge of the various religions to come over and discuss how to resolve the subsequent problems."

Only then did Zhou Yue let out a cry. "So it's Officer Genava."

Did it take you until now to recognize it... Jiang Baimian criticized inwardly and said to Genava, "I guess we won't be needed then?"

Just now, smart bots had already asked them about the incident and all kinds of details.

In this regard, the Old Task Force had sufficient professional qualities despite not colluding in advance. It was to make their performance vague and not fabricate any details. They only talked about the basics.

As for how these basic points were connected, it was naturally handled by Team Leader Jiang Baimian. When others were asked about such topics, the blame was directly pushed to the illusions.

"You may leave." Genava paused and said, "But we might have to rely on you in the future."

Its shimmering blue eyes swept across Shang Jianyao, Jiang Baimian, and the others before it said in a slightly deep voice, “You guys are very impressive.”

“You can tell?” Shang Jianyao asked.

“We roughly understand Zhang Jin’s situation. The fact that no tragedy happened at Wild Pigeon Bar is enough to indicate your abilities,” Geneva explained simply.

It then added, “Thank you.”

“There’s no need to thank me. There’s no need for thanks between brothers.” Shang Jianyao put on a righteous expression.

Geneva’s program didn’t seem to have a response to such words, so it could only remain silent.

After bidding Geneva farewell, the Old Task Force vigilantly returned to Serene Dream; nobody spoke on the way.

At the hotel’s front desk, the lady boss—Aynor—was huddled there, looking at the computer and trembling.

“What’s wrong?” Jiang Baimian asked in concern.

Aynor picked up her handkerchief, wiped her eyes, and replied nervously, “I-I’m watching a horror movie.”

She was so scared that tears came out? Jiang Baimian realized that this lady—who looked to be in her thirties and spoke in a tone that made her appear over fifty—seemed to have a maiden’s heart.

Although Shang Jianyao, Long Yuehong, and the others had never seen a horror film, ghost stories would occasionally be told on Pangu Biology’s radio programs. It wasn’t difficult for them to understand what this term meant. Therefore, they curiously stuck their heads out and looked at the screen in front of Aynor.

On the screen, a pale face suddenly enlarged, revealing a bloody, gaping mouth.

Long Yuehong jumped in fright; he even heard his pounding heartbeat.

He instinctively wanted to shrink back, but he was unwilling to show his cowardice in front of Bai Chen, Shang Jianyao, and Jiang Baimian. He forced himself not to move.

“How ugly,” Shang Jianyao deliberately commented.

Jiang Baimian didn't give the pair of good friends a chance to find an excuse to watch a horror film for free. She directly said, “Let's return to our room first. There's something else.”

Shang Jianyao reluctantly retracted his gaze. Although Long Yuehong was afraid, he couldn't help but steal a few glances at Aynor's computer, wanting to know what would happen next.

After returning to Room 221, Jiang Baimian closed the wooden door and looked around. “Don't forget the after-action review. I'll raise the first question: What do you think scared the Superior Heartless away?”

Bai Chen had long thought about it and calmly replied, “That Eight Trigrams Mirror.”

Chapter 264: Intel from the Details

Previously, after she recovered from the sudden urge to hide, Bai Chen had already stood up, opened the window, and prepared to cooperate with Jiang Baimian and Shang Jianyao to deal with the Superior Heartless. Therefore, she had seen Abbess Zhou Yue's actions.

Jiang Baimian wasn't surprised by Bai Chen's answer and asked, “Why do you say so?”

Bai Chen simply explained her analysis process. “Back then, Abbess Zhou only did three things. The first was to throw away the flashlight; there's no need to consider that. The second was to smash the container. Yes, it should be the bottle of talisman water. The third was to use the Eight Trigrams Mirror to reflect the Superior Heartless.”

Frankly speaking, Long Yuehong had a nagging feeling that this didn't make sense when he heard the terms ‘Talisman Water’ and ‘Eight Trigrams Mirror.’

What was even more unscientific was that they had actually been effective!

This was like a plot in a story being reflected in reality. The beginning of the story also specially had the disclaimer: “All matters portrayed in this production are fictitious.”

While in this trance, Long Yuehong heard Bai Chen continue, “If the Superior Heartless is afraid of the talisman water, there’s no need for him to escape after dodging. This is because Abbess Zhou apparently had only one bottle of water with her.”

Furthermore, the talisman water in the plastic bottle had already been splattered all over the ground. There was only a little left inside, so there was nothing to worry about.

After eliminating the first two options—the flashlight and talisman water—Bai Chen’s conclusion was very clear.

Jiang Baimian first tersely acknowledged her words before commenting. “There’s a problem with that. You equate the Superior Heartless’s intelligence with that of humans. We can clearly see that he’s different from the Superior Heartless in Swamp Ruin 1. He’s closer to a beast than a human. When hasty, a beast can’t consider if the enemy still has talisman water. They will only instinctively distance themselves from danger.”

The Superior Heartless in Swamp Ruin 1 had clearly been trained by Xiaochong, or perhaps they had been influenced by him, so they acted more humanlike.

Bai Chen thought for a moment and recalled her years of experience dealing with beasts and ordinary Heartless. She nodded and said, “Indeed; he was too strong, so I subconsciously treated him as a human.”

She didn’t feel embarrassed or angry because she had made a mistake in her analysis, nor was she unwilling to admit it.

On the one hand, mistakes often meant danger in a wilderness nomad’s life. To have someone point out your mistakes was akin to saving you. On the other hand, in a similar review, the Old Task Force advocated an atmosphere of self-criticism. Even Jiang Baimian herself had times when she was reminded due to her lack of consideration.

Jiang Baimian then looked at Shang Jianyao and Long Yuehong. “What do you guys think?”

“I still think that’s... too surreal.” Long Yuehong deliberated over his words.

Shang Jianyao nodded and said, “Because he’s a ghost...” He dragged the word ‘ghost’ long and deliberately gave off a creepy feeling.

Jiang Baimian shot him a glance. “Say something human!”

“Those things restrain him.” Shang Jianyao’s expression turned serious as though he had become a professional. “There’s a price to pay for a human’s Awakening, and it should be the same for a Superior Heartless. The Clam Dragon Church worships the Goddess of Illusions. It’s very normal for them to know the price and the weaknesses in this domain.”

Is this the professional and serious Shang Jianyao? Jiang Baimian muttered but didn’t dare ask.

Upon hearing this, Long Yuehong slowly came to a realization and accepted the fact that Zhou Yue had scared away a Superior Heartless with charlatan-like items.

Perhaps it was because he had either not participated in the encounter with the Awakened, had no idea, or had never exploited the price paid by the other party. Therefore, he didn’t have a deep impression of this aspect. He wouldn’t directly think about the corresponding matters.

“Not bad.” Jiang Baimian affirmed Shang Jianyao’s analysis and gradually smiled. She smiled like a fox that had stolen a hen. “From this point, the things that Abbess Zhou prepared reveals very important intel. An Awakened in the illusion domain might have the following weaknesses: Hydrophobia, photophobia, eisoptrophobia, and prosopagnosia. Yes... What does the sack behind her represent?”

Hydrophobia could be identified from the bottled talisman water. Photophobia came from the flashlight. It was needless to point out eisoptrophobia because of the Eight Trigrams Mirror. Prosopagnosia was a result of Zhou Yue’s own performance.

This... Long Yuehong was stunned when he heard that. He inexplicably felt like he had accidentally revealed a secret, but his team leader had just chosen not to expose him.

Without doing anything, Abbess Zhou had been fully analyzed!

Clap! Clap! Clap!

Shang Jianyao suddenly applauded. As for the meaning of the sack, he also sincerely replied, “She’s afraid of getting caught and beaten up.”

“Who isn’t?” Jiang Baimian snapped back before saying, “We can rule out the possibility of photophobia. After Abbess Zhou saw the Superior Heartless standing under the street lamp, she directly threw away the flashlight. This means that she had the same thoughts. Prosopagnosia doesn’t constitute reason to be scared away; it can also be ruled out. So, he’s afraid of water. Yes, you should’ve noticed that the corpse thrown into the bar had obvious bite marks on its neck, and a lot of blood flowed out. That’s also liquid—the Superior Heartless is clearly not afraid of that.”

She paused and added, “Uh, we can’t rule out the possibility that he’s afraid of a specific type of water. Unfortunately, Abbess Zhou and Genava were both present back then, so I couldn’t get some samples for research. However, this possibility is still relatively unlikely.

“The sack wasn’t used, but we can’t rule out the possibility that it has a deterrent effect. In short, the greatest possibility is that the Superior Heartless is afraid of mirrors.”

Bai Chen thoughtfully echoed, “If this hypothesis is valid, it can explain why the Superior Heartless didn’t enter the bar. With the lights switched on, the windows resemble mirrors.”

Jiang Baimian laughed and said to Long Yuehong and Shang Jianyao, “Look, look. This is called drawing inferences, making bold assumptions, and carefully verifying them.”

This praise made Bai Chen a little uncomfortable.

After praising Bai Chen, Jiang Baimian said to Long Yuehong, “You have to prepare a mirror that you can carry with you.”

Long Yuehong was the only one who didn’t have one.

As ladies and snipers, Jiang Baimian and Bai Chen had makeup mirrors. Shang Jianyao had more than one mirror in order to make his abilities work on himself.

“I’ll get one at dawn!” Long Yuehong didn’t show any embarrassment when it came to a matter of life and death.

He had previously realized that the stalls in Tarnan had makeup mirrors available for trading. They were clearly from the Old World’s city ruins.

Just as he said that, Shang Jianyao gently and eerily said, “Maybe it was used by a deceased, and her ghost lives inside...”

“Stop scaring Little Red. Let’s get down to business.” Jiang Baimian interrupted Shang Jianyao’s ghost story.

Why would I be afraid of this? Long Yuehong thought for a moment and decided to choose a relatively new makeup mirror.

At this moment, Jiang Baimian did a self-reflection. “I made a mistake this time. As Tarnan has good public security and isn’t small, and there are robot guards protecting the area, I subconsciously believed that the Superior Heartless wouldn’t attack this place and didn’t have enough vigilance.”

It was common in the Ashlands for Heartless to attack relatively small human settlements for food.

“I also made a mistake,” Shang Jianyao said. “When the wind started blowing and someone knocked on the door, I didn’t go out to play hide and seek with them in a bid to see who would be the first to find the other.”

“Such situations are mostly a child’s prank.” Bai Chen gave her opinion. “We really can’t let our guard down, but there’s no need to be overly suspicious. Humans have limits to what they can worry over.”

So, I’m not human? This sentence suddenly flashed across Jiang Baimian’s mind. She thought that Shang Jianyao would respond in such a manner, but Shang Jianyao only nodded.

“Being a child doesn’t affect a game of hide and seek.”

This time, their brainwaves didn’t match.



After they finished their self-reflection and summarized their experiences and lessons, Jiang Baimian said, “The range of the Superior Heartless’s abilities is a little large, and the effects are very strong. I suspect that he has reached the end of the Sea of Origins and found himself. However, he is unable to overcome the Sea of Origins because of his lack of intelligence. Otherwise, he entered the Mind Corridor before he contracted the Heartless disease.

“Fortunately, powerhouses without intelligence are much weaker than normal.”

Jiang Baimian had always believed that a Superior Heartless couldn’t pass the final stage of the Sea of Origins. It was a battle against oneself; it was very difficult to complete it without a clear mind and sufficient intelligence.

Upon hearing this, Long Yuehong subconsciously said, “Superior Heartless might not rely on Awakening. It’s also possible that their brains and other organs have mutated, producing similar abilities...”

This then ruled out the question of whether one had cleared the Sea of Origins.

As he spoke, Long Yuehong fell silent because he realized that the Superior Heartless—at least the one he had just encountered—had similar behaviors to an Awakened.

They all had certain weaknesses or prices to pay.

“Yes.” Jiang Baimian didn’t directly deny it. After all, she lacked sufficient samples and evidence.

She thought for a moment and said, “Let’s assume that this Superior Heartless is an Awakened and that the price is the fear of mirrors. Then, what are his three abilities?”

“Illusion creation!” Long Yuehong rushed to answer.

Jiang Baimian nodded and added, “He doesn’t appear to have any shortcomings in his illusionary abilities at the moment.”

“There’s also the ability that causes us to make a wrong choice all the time.” Shang Jianyao assumed the posture of a famous detective, just short of holding a pipe in his mouth. “I feel like this was targeting our conditioned reflexes.”

Only he and Jiang Baimian had experienced this ability.

“Yes.” Jiang Baimian agreed. “It should be to mislead our reflexes or instinctive reactions so that we can’t respond correctly to external stimuli.”

Back then, she could clearly control her body, but she kept making choices that she shouldn’t have made.

“That sounds a little terrifying.” Long Yuehong couldn’t help but sigh with emotion. “How should we deal with this?”

“Wear a set of clothes covered in shattered mirrors so that he won’t dare look at you.” Shang Jianyao provided an idea. He then sang, “You’re the brightest...”

Without waiting for Jiang Baimian to glare at him, Shang Jianyao restrained his expression and said seriously, “We can change our conditioned reflexes. For example, when you encounter an enemy, your first reaction isn’t to draw your gun but to dance. When you’re affected by the ability, two wrongs will make a right.”

Long Yuehong first felt that it made sense before realizing a problem. What if we don’t encounter this Superior Heartless but another enemy or beast? Are we to dance for them?

Chapter 265: Changing Train of Thought

Jiang Baimian could naturally figure out anything Long Yuehong thought of.

She laughed. “You have to ensure that the next attacker you encounter is a Superior Heartless before you can use this method. If we encounter a wolf that’s out during the winter to hunt because of its hunger, should we perform a dance for it and pray that it will be confused and not take the opportunity to pounce over and bite us?”

As for how to change one's actions and instinctive reactions under stimulus, it was not within the scope of discussion. This was because it could be achieved with the augmentation of Inference Clowning.

Shang Jianyao wasn't stumped by this question and smoothly replied, "We can split the work. Two of us can be cued as preparation for the Superior Heartless. The other two can stay the same and resolve any accidents that might crop up. To put it simply, once we encounter a starving wolf during winter, two people will dance for it while the other two will feed it some bullets."

Jiang Baimian thought about it carefully and realized that apart from the strange scene and relatively strange train of thought, it seemed effective.

This was a typical Shang Jianyao solution. It made the entire team appear like they were mentally ill.

Suddenly realizing something, Jiang Baimian spat. "I was almost confused by you! Let me ask you: How can you guarantee that two wrongs make a right?"

"This is a mathematical question," Shang Jianyao replied confidently.

Jiang Baimian took a deep breath and slowly exhaled. "What if my warped instinct doesn't change from dancing to drawing out a gun and firing? What if it develops into singing instead?"

Shang Jianyao opened his mouth and let out a sound.

"Bang!"

"..." Jiang Baimian was speechless. Of course, she knew that Shang Jianyao's true intention was to simulate a gunshot and scare the other party, making them dodge and reduce the effects of their abilities.

After calming down, she seriously said, "There's a certain level of feasibility with this plan, but there are too many uncertainties. It can only be used for emergencies. I have a relatively simple solution—slow down my reaction speed. As the proverb goes, 'think before you act.'"

Bai Chen imagined the application of this plan. “Control your instincts and think clearly before slowly doing the right thing?”

“Yes.” Jiang Baimian nodded slightly. “There’s also a considerable problem with this. It will make us miss the opportunity and not be timely in dealing with any problems. In short, there should be people with conventional trains of thought to work in concert with Shang Jianyao’s method.”

At this point, she suddenly sighed. “Compared to this, illusory abilities are more difficult to crack. The fact that we don’t know the third ability implies a huge latent danger.”

The ability to distort environmental information to create illusions wasn’t something that could be avoided by injuring oneself and stimulating one’s mind with pain.

“Sigh, we still have to cover a large area with firepower and nip the enemy in the bud.” Shang Jianyao was the one who helped with the voice-over.

This sentence happened to be what Jiang Baimian was thinking, so she didn’t roll her eyes.

“I’ll have to consult Abbess Zhou later.” Jiang Baimian concluded.

After discussing this question, she looked around and said, “Before the Superior Heartless roared and exposed its location, did you have any strange reactions before the illusion failed?”

“Yes.” Shang Jianyao had always been proactive in answering questions. “I originally wanted to wait for that song to finish and go out after the next one, but I couldn’t control myself.”

“Yes,” Long Yuehong echoed. “Back then, I knew that the Heartless I saw were ordinary people and that it was all an illusion. I shouldn’t have attacked them; it was only because of their performance and the environment that I inevitably felt a little impulsive. I could clearly control my thoughts in this regard very well, but I actually stood up in a moment of heat and repeatedly fired at the spot where there was the most number of ‘Heartless.’”

Bai Chen tersely acknowledged his words. “Me too. I put the thoughts that I had buried in my heart into practice at that moment. I just wanted to hide and wait for the hallucinations to pass.”

“That’s more or less what happened.” Jiang Baimian nodded. “This reaction that directly releases the suppressed urges isn’t only directed at us. Could it be that the Superior Heartless will roar for no reason and remove the illusion he created for no reason?”

“This...” Long Yuehong gradually understood what had happened.

Shang Jianyao replied in all seriousness, “Tarnan is full of hidden talents!”

“Don’t steal my lines.” Jiang Baimian scolded jokingly before saying, “This matter isn’t something we can avoid just because we want to. From tomorrow onward, we have to take the initiative and hope to resolve the latent problems as soon as possible.”

She paused and added, “Don’t close the three bedroom doors tonight. Everyone will take turns doing night duty.”

After arranging the night shifts, Shang Jianyao and the others washed up and entered the room one after another.

...

In the glimmering Sea of Origins, an island with mountains, water bodies, and green grass—

Shang Jianyao sat on a recliner, basking in the warm sun and taking in the fresh breeze. He experienced what it meant by a vacation as described in some radio stories. However, an environment that remained unchanging made him a little bored.

After an unknown period of time, Shang Jianyao suddenly sat up.

His body instantly split apart as one Shang Jianyao walked out after another.

These Shang Jianyaos wore the same clothes and dressing. They looked no different from each other.

Three of the Shang Jianyaos got a bench and sat beside the recliner. They then played cards with the original Shang Jianyao.

The other two Shang Jianyaos fiddled with a small speaker and loudspeaker. Amidst the melody's accompaniment, they sang songs one after another.

With their help, the remaining three Shang Jianyaos danced in a rhythmic manner.

The island became lively.

No matter how lively it was, there was always an end. Shang Jianyao still didn't see any monsters, disasters, or accidents.

Finally, the nine Shang Jianyaos combined. He then threw himself back into the Sea of Origins and swam into the distance.

After swimming for an unknown period of time, another island appeared in front of him.

This island had mountains, rivers, verdant green grass, sun, and a gentle breeze. It was identical to the previous one.

Shang Jianyao stood at the edge of the island and fell into deep thought.

...

Early the next morning, Shang Jianyao recounted his experience to Jiang Baimian and the others.

Jiang Baimian thoughtfully said, "Could the monster be the island itself? The form it shows you is a way to trap you?"

"I have to have a good chat with it then." Shang Jianyao—who had a new direction—was immediately excited.

Jiang Baimian exhorted him, "This is only a guess. The probability of it being wrong is very high. In any case, give it a try first."

Just as she said that, the phone in the room rang.

Long Yuehong eagerly picked up the receiver and said with great aplomb, “Hello, who is it?”

“The act’s quite obvious,” Shang Jianyao commented. “You have to say, ‘Hey, who is it?’”

His voice suddenly became loud, reverberating in Long Yuehong’s ears.

“Indeed, it’s too dramatic.” Jiang Baimian stood on Shang Jianyao’s side this time.

Bai Chen didn’t say a word because she only knew walkie-talkies. She had no experience using phones and had never listened to many radio programs.

At this moment, Aynor’s voice sounded from the other end of the line. “Who’s shouting? Hey, the robot guards are looking for you.”

“Alright.” Long Yuehong—who had recovered from the blow—quickly replied.

“Robot guards...” Jiang Baimian muttered to herself and smiled. “Pack up and bring the necessary items along when heading down.”

Waiting in the hotel lobby was not a smart bot but an auxiliary robot. It conveyed Geneva’s words: “Officer Geneva has extended an invitation to you to meet him at the town hall.”

As expected... Jiang Baimian, Shang Jianyao, and the others looked at each other and smiled.

“Alright.”

...

On the town hall’s top floor, in the mayor’s office.

Jiang Baimian and the others met Genava again. It was still wearing its usual military uniform and riding boots. It was sitting in a specially reinforced metal chair.

“There’s something I need your help with,” Genava said frankly.

The four Old Task Force members—who had taken their seats—weren’t surprised at all. Jiang Baimian maintained a polite smile and asked, “What is it?”

Genava leaned forward and clasped its two metal palms together. “I communicated with President Gu of the Hunter’s Guild and the various religions’ natives about the Superior Heartless last night. Everyone agreed to resolve this problem as soon as possible.

“According to Abbess Zhou, it’s best to take turns searching and hunting. Unrelated people shouldn’t mix together as they will be used by the other party. The final plan is to form teams and be in charge of guarding a portion of the area outside the town. Then, we will take turns searching for the Superior Heartless.”

After briefly explaining what was needed, Genava raised its request. “Tarnan doesn’t lack manpower, but it lacks experts with sufficient strength. I want to invite you to join this endeavor in case that dangerous creature brings chaos again and injures the innocent townsfolk.”

Shang Jianyao stood up and said righteously, “It’s only right.”

As he spoke, he clenched his fists and bent his arm. “To save all of humanity!”

Genava’s blue-emitting eyes stared at him, and it didn’t react for a moment.

At this moment, Shang Jianyao added seriously, “It would be even better if you also provided rice, flour, fresh meat, frozen meat, and vegetables as payment.”

Genava still looked at Shang Jianyao as if it had hung.

After a few seconds, it said, “Your requests are very low...”

“Not at all.” Jiang Baimian revealed a smile that inexplicably terrified Long Yuehong.



After Genova looked over, she maintained her smile and continued, “I’ve thought about it carefully over the past two days. The Source Brain said that it wouldn’t see anyone, right?”

“Yes.” Genova gave an affirmative answer.

Jiang Baimian’s smile became even more obvious. “But it didn’t say that it can’t talk to humans. We can directly communicate with it over the phone and ask some questions. There’s no need to meet!”

Genava fell silent again. After a while, it slowly said, “I can help you put up this request.”

Chapter 266: Zhou Yue’s Reminder

Nanke Convent.

The Old Task Force—which had reached a preliminary agreement with Genova and was waiting for the Source Brain’s response—came here again. This was because, according to Genova, Abbess Zhou Yue still had some instructions for the people involved in the operation.

Zhou Yue was still wearing the white robe with a hemp rope around her waist. Her raven-black hair simply draped over her shoulders.

Behind her were the simple, solemn shrine and the dragon symbol formed from embedded mirror shards. On both sides were rows of black armchairs.

There were many believers praying at this moment, but none of them were sitting. All of them stood in a gap, spread their arms slightly, raised their bodies, and chanted.

As she scanned the area, Jiang Baimian glanced at Shang Jianyao.

Shang Jianyao nodded.

There’s quite a number of real humans this time... The chaos last night made many fair-weather townsfolk and outsiders turn to god in a pinch. They each pray to the Kalendaria of their faith, hoping to receive blessings? Jiang Baimian—who received confirmation—sighed inwardly.

As soon as she entered, she realized that many of the believers in the temple had bioelectric signals. This was completely different from the last time she was here. Of course, she couldn't guarantee if Shang Jianyao's nod meant the same thing she was looking for.

"May you please the deity!" Zhou Yue spread her arms and raised her body.

Although she's face-blind, she still has the bearing of a charlatan... Just as this thought flashed through Jiang Baimian's mind, she heard Shang Jianyao ask, "Why aren't you singing?"

He had previously participated in the Clam Dragon Church's choir.

Zhou Yue wanted to get straight to the point, but she was immediately silenced by such a question. However, she was a pious believer in 'everything is but a dream; why so serious.' She quickly composed herself and replied with a smile, "Singing is a way to please the deity, not an etiquette between believers."

Shang Jianyao seemed to have been waiting for a similar answer. He then said, "Everything is but a dream. Why so serious?"

"That's true..." Zhou Yue thought for a moment and nodded.

After receiving confirmation, Shang Jianyao immediately suggested, "I know a song that suits you very well."

As he spoke, he sang: "We are forever the heirs to the dragon[1]..."

"It's 'descendants,'" Zhou Yue corrected.

Jiang Baimian—who couldn't bear to see the topic gradually deviate to the ends of the world—interrupted their conversation and forced a smile. "Abbess Zhou, Mayor Geneva said that you have something to tell us."

"Oh..." Zhou Yue came to a realization. "Are you the Ruin Hunter team that dealt with the Superior Heartless last night? Have you decided to participate in Tarnan's defense operation?"

Did you take this long to recognize us? You actually had such a nice chat... Jiang Baimian almost coughed up blood.

Similar criticisms flashed across Long Yuehong and Bai Chen's minds, but their emotions were different.

Phew... Jiang Baimian exhaled and answered Zhou Yue's question.

"It's only temporary. We're still waiting for Officer Genova to give us an answer. Of course, we will shoulder the defense of a certain area no matter what. This is also to protect ourselves."

If the Source Brain wasn't even willing to communicate over the phone, Jiang Baimian definitely wouldn't have gotten the Old Task Force members to take the initiative. She felt that there was no need to take the risk. After all, Tarnan was filled with crouching tigers and hidden dragons. With so many religions, there was definitely no lack of powerhouses.

"Understood," Zhou Yue replied with an expression that said: "I didn't understand anything."

She then smiled and narrowed her eyes. "I mainly want to tell you two things."

"Pray, do tell." This time, it was the polite Shang Jianyao.

Zhou Yue tersely acknowledged his words. "After returning last night, I thought about it and finally confirmed something: The Superior Heartless is afraid of looking into mirrors."

"Looking into the mirror?" Although Jiang Baimian had already guessed that the target's weakness was related to mirrors, she was still a little surprised.

She originally imagined that the Superior Heartless was afraid of shiny items, but she didn't expect it to be the act of 'looking in the mirror.'

Is he afraid of seeing his reflection? Some guesses quickly flashed through Jiang Baimian's mind.

Long Yuehong criticized Zhou Yue inwardly. She clearly knew about it long ago, yet she still said that she thought deeply about it before finally confirming it... She didn't even stutter while lying. Oh right, everything is but a dream. Why so serious...

"Yes," Zhou Yue replied firmly. "Therefore, it's best if you prepare a few more mirrors on you. When you encounter an illusion, take the mirrors out and sweep them around."

"Like this?" Shang Jianyao turned his back before turning back. A palm-sized mirror was already tied to his forehead.

On the way to Nanke Convent, the Old Task Force had bought many mirrors.

"..." Zhou Yue was stunned by the other party's appearance and momentarily forgot how to speak.

Just as Jiang Baimian and the others thought that this was another case of Shang Jianyao stunning the other party, Zhou Yue widened her eyes. "Why didn't I think of wearing it on my forehead? I was twisting my waist so much last night; it was backbreaking!"

It was Jiang Baimian and the others' turn to be speechless.

After a few seconds, Jiang Baimian reminded her, "If you wear it on your head, your neck will be sore, and your head will be dizzy."

"That's true..." Zhou Yue thought about it and felt that it was better to have a sore back. She then said, "There's one more thing—you absolutely can't measure the Superior Heartless based on last night's performance. There are too many mirror-like objects in Tarnan at night. The strength he could exert was definitely reduced significantly."

After a moment of silence, she added, "There might be something special about a Superior Heartless at this level. In short, you have to be careful."

"Thank you," Shang Jianyao replied sincerely on behalf of the entire team.

Jiang Baimian laughed as well. "We won't joke with our lives."

“That’s good.” Zhou Yue tersely acknowledged her words. “There’s no need for you to take the risk to search the surroundings; just take precautions. A Dream Protector from our Church is on the way.”

Will he get lost? Long Yuehong recalled Zhou Yue’s words and felt that their religion had the words ‘unreliable’ written all over them.

Shang Jianyao ‘asked’ the question Long Yuehong was embarrassed to ask in his place. “What if he gets lost?”

Zhou Yue immediately laughed dryly. “The one who’s coming is definitely the kind who won’t get lost.”

Jiang Baimian didn’t continue the topic that exposed their shortcomings and asked again, “Abbess Zhou, do you have any solutions or ideas to crack the Superior Heartless’s illusion?”

Zhou Yue thoughtfully replied, “The more you do, the more mistakes you make. The less you do, the fewer mistakes you make.”

“Then, wouldn’t we make no mistakes if we don’t do anything?” Shang Jianyao asked cooperatively.

“No.” Zhou Yue shook her head. “Illusions emphasize the fact that there’s something real in the fake and something fake in the real. If you don’t do anything, they will blend in with the illusion and walk in front of you to shoot you in the head.”

After chatting about illusions for a while, the Old Task Force bade farewell and left Nanke Convent for Tarnan General Hospital.

They wanted to see the survivors from last night—the remaining members of the Mountain Fox bandits.

After obtaining the robot guard’s approval with the warrant that Genova had given them, Jiang Baimian, Shang Jianyao, and the others met Panania.

The Mountain Fox bandit leader had his long blond hair shaved off. His head was wrapped in countless white bandages, and he looked dispirited as if he doubted life.

In just a few days, the originally powerful Mountain Fox bandits were about to collapse. Furthermore, each matter they encountered was increasingly bizarre.

The powerful Ruin Hunter team from before was still understandable, but everything that happened last night had exceeded Panania's imagination.

Upon hearing the door open and close, Panania looked up. His pupils suddenly dilated as he sat up and stammered, "I-I didn't do anything. It's not that I want to stay here."

"Relax." Jiang Baimian smiled and calmed him down.

"We'll beat you up at most, but we won't kill you," Shang Jianyao echoed.

Long Yuehong was a little curious about the logical foothold in Shang Jianyao's words, so he asked, "Why?"

This bandit boss had done many bad things. Killing him was equivalent to enforcing justice on behalf of the heavens.

Shang Jianyao replied seriously, "Private fights are prohibited in Tarnan, and it's forbidden to harm others beyond the limits."

I thought you had compassion... Long Yuehong realized that he was still relatively naive.

Their harmonious chiming successfully calmed Panania's fear. He swept his gaze around and asked, "What's the matter?"

"We want to ask about your encounter last night." Jiang Baimian went straight to the point.

Panania's face revealed unconcealed fear again. "W-we wanted to go to Green Grapes across the road after we left Wild Pigeon. On the way, Johnny suddenly needed to pee and wanted to find a corner to relieve himself. We stopped in the middle of the road and waited for him."

“Why didn’t you wait inside Green Grapes?” Bai Chen questioned. She had a good understanding of how such teams acted during their corresponding activities.

Normally speaking, Panania would’ve said to Johnny, “Come over quickly after you’re done,” instead of waiting in the middle of the road with a large group of people.

Panania’s tone softened a little. “I-I was afraid that you would chase after us. It’s safer with more people.”

“Then?” Jiang Baimian asked.

Panania recalled and said, “Johnny didn’t return. We searched the entire way, but we encountered many beasts. Some were mutated, some were starving, and there were Heartless among them. We fought a great battle with them, and several people died. Finally, a robot guard came, and we were escorted back to our rooms. Back then, we were all exhausted. We thought that the robot guards would handle the subsequent matters, so we took off our clothes and slept in peace...”

Jiang Baimian and Shang Jianyao took turns asking about some details from normal and abnormal angles. They then released the bandit leader from his anxiety and left the ward.

Before they left, Panania reflexively raised his right hand and waved it. “Goodbye.”

Shang Jianyao smiled and politely replied, “Goodbye.”

After questioning the remaining bandits and returning to the jeep, Jiang Baimian suddenly said, “Abbess Zhou still hid certain things from us...”

Chapter 267: Major Progress

Upon hearing Jiang Baimian’s sigh, Bai Chen—who was driving—thoughtfully replied, “About Ninth Zhang seeing a dragon? That Superior Heartless might have a certain connection with the Clam Dragon Church?”

“Yes.” Jiang Baimian nodded slightly. “I can now make a preliminary judgment that the hallucination created by the Superior Heartless is rooted in his own understanding, knowledge, and experience. It has nothing to do with our memories or emotions. At most, he will constantly make some adjustments according to the target’s reaction. For example, you show signs of fear when

watching a horror film. The illusion created by the Superior Heartless might very well develop in this direction then.”

At this point, she turned to look at Long Yuehong and Shang Jianyao and teased, “Otherwise, the Mountain Fox bandits wouldn’t have seen mutated monsters, starving beasts, and commonly seen Heartless in the illusion. Instead, they would’ve seen the aggressive us.

“Yes, we can’t rule out the possibility that they are lying about this matter, but I don’t think there’s a need for them to do so. Everyone can barely be considered as being on the same boat. If we don’t finish off the Superior Heartless as soon as possible, everyone might die. Unless... unless they are already controlled and have begun acting as accomplices.”

Shang Jianyao shook his head. “He didn’t lie.”

“Didn’t you not use your powers?” Jiang Baimian asked in amusement. Why are you so sure?

Shang Jianyao replied truthfully, “Although he has killed, robbed, and raped and deserves to be hanged, he’s a polite person.”

“...” At this moment, Long Yuehong didn’t know where to start criticizing.

Wasn’t that fellow’s manners taught by you? Jiang Baimian was just about to scold him jokingly when something in her pocket suddenly buzzed.

She then took out a palm-sized electronic product. On its front was a black LCD screen. On the screen, the image of two robots leaning against each other flickered.

This was a phone. In Tarnan, such communication tools could be directly used because Mechanical Paradise had installed a base station and the relevant department.

Of course, the four phones that Genava had distributed to the Old Task Force were self-produced models from Mechanical Paradise. They weren’t repaired leftovers from the Old World.

This Tarnan Mayor and robot guard captain probably knew that the Superior Heartless could interfere with electromagnetic signals to create an illusion that could affect robots. However, it felt



that it shouldn't avoid something essential because of a slight risk and completely abandon the communications between the various defenses.

They couldn't just rely on shouting to communicate, right? Their voices could also be distorted and tampered with!

After the mission was completed, the participants could choose to return the phones or keep them as partial payment.

The only problem was that the cell phone's main functions would basically be non-functional once they left Tarnan. It could only be used as a miniature computer to read novels and play some simple games.

Even if one were to head to a place like Weed City—which also had a base station—they had to register with the supervisor and obtain permission before they could make calls again.

Although Jiang Baimian had never used a cell phone, she was smart enough and had experience with other electronic products. After struggling for a few minutes, she roughly figured out how to answer phones, make phone calls, read novels, and play games.

At this moment, she swiped her thumb and brought the phone to her ear. "Hello."

"I'm Geneva." A mellow male voice sounded from the other end of the line.

Jiang Baimian smiled and asked, "Good news?"

"Yes," Geneva replied firmly.

Yes... Jiang Baimian's other hand instantly clenched into a fist, and she gently pumped it.

Upon noticing her reaction, Shang Jianyao turned around and stretched out his right hand toward Long Yuehong.

Long Yuehong was taken aback, not wanting to show that he understood this lunatic. But under Shang Jianyao's persistent gaze, he still stretched out his right hand and slapped Shang Jianyao's palm.

At this moment, Geneva's subsequent words entered Jiang Baimian's ears. "Source Brain just gave a reply: When this matter is resolved, and you have made the corresponding contribution, you can pose the questions you want to ask over the phone. The time limit is five minutes."

Shang Jianyao—who had narrowed the distance with Jiang Baimian's head and was eavesdropping on the phone call—gasped. "That's difficult. How can we come up with five minutes' worth of questions?"

"..." Geneva fell silent for a moment before saying, "This includes the answers."

"That's too short." Shang Jianyao didn't show any signs of being ashamed of his mistake.

Jiang Baimian suspected that Geneva had succumbed to Shang Jianyao's 'rhetoric.'

"..." Geneva fell silent again before saying, "This is decided by the Source Brain. I can't make any further compromises."

"No matter what, thank you!" Jiang Baimian's mood became rather good when she saw that her main mission had made significant progress.

"Thank you," Shang Jianyao said.

Jiang Baimian then hung up, put away her phone, and smiled. "That's strange. Why doesn't the Source Brain agree to a meeting request and has an extremely unyielding attitude, but it doesn't reject a call?"

This was her usual form of leading questions.

"Is it because there's something special about the Source Brain that will result in the leakage of secrets when we meet?" Long Yuehong was now considered an experienced and knowledgeable Ruin Hunter.

“What’s so special about a smart supercomputer? At least, it’s hard to tell from its appearance, right?” Jiang Baimian asked.

Long Yuehong was momentarily speechless.

Shang Jianyao smiled and said, “Maybe it’s not a supercomputer but a person.”

Jiang Baimian followed Shang Jianyao’s train of thought and retorted, “They can talk to us in their supercomputer form then. They can hide far away and not be afraid of being sensed.”

Long Yuehong was confused. “Then, what’s the difference between this and using a phone to communicate?”

“Nothing.” Jiang Baimian laughed. “That’s why it’s strange.”

At this moment, Bai Chen deliberated and said, “If the Source Brain agrees to meet, where will we meet?”

Jiang Baimian nodded slightly. “The Source Brain shouldn’t be able to move, at least not easily. Therefore, our meeting will definitely be in the city where Mechanical Paradise’s headquarters is.”

Long Yuehong came to a realization. “Team Leader, are you saying that the secret lies in that city—Mechanical Paradise’s headquarters?”

“Something like that.” Jiang Baimian smiled and said, “I’m very curious. What secrets does such a city—which mainly produces all kinds of robots—have to hide...”

As they discussed, the jeep arrived outside the Hunter’s Guild.

The local guild president, Gu Bo, was in charge of arranging the defenses. Compared to Genava—who had just been assigned to Tarnan for a few years—Gu Bo, who had lived and fought here for more than 40 years, was clearly more familiar with the surroundings. Therefore, Genava—who had gathered a bellyful of data and felt that he had no problems in this regard—ultimately didn’t take on everything and fully trusted these ‘professionals.’

On the second floor of the Hunter's Guild, outside Room 1.

Jiang Baimian looked at the two mirrors hanging on the brownish-red wooden door and smiled. "It feels like Tarnan's folklore has changed overnight..."

Everyone carried a mirror, and every household hung up mirrors.

Knock! Knock! Knock!

Shang Jianyao politely knocked on the door.

Gu Bo's voice sounded. "Please come in." He was still wearing the black uniform and holding a silver thermos. His thin and small body was curled up in the high-back chair.

Upon seeing Jiang Baimian and the others enter and sit down, Gu Bo straightened his white and sparse hair and smiled. "Fortunately, I didn't offend you previously. Otherwise, I would've really been beaten up."

Jiang Baimian wasn't present during Long Yuehong, Bai Chen, and Gu Bo's conversation and had only heard the highlights. She couldn't figure out what was going on, so she could only ask with a smile, "Why do you say so?"

Gu Bo took a sip of water from the thermos and smiled. "You guys exceeded my expectations. Your performance last night—not only were you fine while in the area with the most hallucinations, but you also aided in the survival of so many people. How can you not have some ability?"

Back at Tarnan General Hospital, Jiang Baimian and the others had learned of the exact number of casualties. It was said that apart from the Mountain Fox bandits, only two townsfolk—who had been shot—had died from excessive blood loss.

Everyone else was fine.

Compared to the tragic situation where Ninth Zhang was the only survivor in his Ruin Hunter team, this couldn't be any better.

“What has this got to do with us beating you up?” Shang Jianyao’s thoughts weren’t on Gu Bo’s implied praise at all; he only wanted to figure out this question.

Gu Bo was momentarily speechless as Long Yuehong coughed.

After a few seconds, he forced a smile and said, “I’m just being witty, lad. Don’t be so serious.”

“Is that so...” Shang Jianyao was clearly a little disappointed.

Jiang Baimian followed the topic and smiled casually. “President Gu, are you afraid of us beating someone as impressive as you?”

“No, no, no.” Gu Bo shook his head. “I’m just an ordinary person. I didn’t even realize that I was hallucinating last night.”

At this point, he looked around and chuckled. “There are many powerful people in the Ashlands, but they are limited; it’s not easy to encounter them. When Mu Sha and I were young, we were considered the best among ordinary people. Our experience, knowledge, marksmanship, physical fitness, and combat abilities were all passable. That’s how we survived to this day and ended up as hunters.

“Actually, we might’ve died if we were to go elsewhere. Fortunately, Tarnan is relatively safe, and the surrounding ruins aren’t that dangerous. If there’s really a serious problem, there’s still the robot guards.”

As he spoke, Gu Bo picked up the thermos and took a sip. “It wasn’t the best of times back then; it wasn’t easy to just eat our fill. Unlike now, one might manage to smuggle genetic enhancement liquid or have the opportunity to get a mechanical arm installed someday. I can’t compare to you—not at all.”

The last half of his sentence was said while looking at the Old Task Force quartet with an expression that said he was born in the wrong period.

Jiang Baimian didn’t continue the topic and asked, “President Gu, how long have you been a Ruin Hunter?”

“The Hunter’s Guild didn’t exist when I first started,” Gu Bo replied with a smile.

Just as he said that, Shang Jianyao spoke before Jiang Baimian could. “Then, do you know a Hunter named Du Heng?”

Chapter 268: ‘Construction Work’

Shang Jianyao’s question wasn’t too strange in itself, but it had nothing to do with the previous conversation.

It left Gu Bo confused. “Why are you asking this?”

“Just asking.” Shang Jianyao’s answer made Gu Bo’s chest tighten.

Upon noticing the change in his expression, Shang Jianyao raised his hands, leaned back, and added, “Everything is but a dream. Why so serious?”

Whoa, putting theory into practice? Have you recently fallen in love with this saying? Jiang Baimian didn’t interrupt Shang Jianyao’s performance. After all, she also wanted to know if Gu Bo knew Du Heng.

Gu Bo hissed. “Are you a believer of Shattered Mirror? Why do I hear that you plan on joining the Furnace Church?” As the president of the local Hunter’s Guild, he was definitely well-informed.

Shang Jianyao replied in all seriousness, “I plan on joining the Furnace Church while admiring the Clam Dragon Church’s philosophy.”

It’s best if you can give him one serving of every Holy Communion... Long Yuehong silently added.

Gu Bo nodded first before he felt that something was amiss. “Then, why do you have to learn the way the Clam Dragon Church salutes?”

“As emphasis,” Shang Jianyao replied in an abnormally sincere manner.

Gu Bo suddenly felt that not only would it waste a lot of time to continue harping on this matter, but he might also end up getting an answer that would make him vomit blood. Therefore, he wisely

gave up on the question and said, “I don’t know which Du Heng you’re asking about. It’s not a rare name; I’ve met three to four of them.”

Jiang Baimian simply described Du Heng’s characteristics. “He calls himself an antiquarian. He has long black hair and a beard around his mouth...”

Gu Bo did a recollection. “I’ve really met him. Back when he came to Tarnan to explore the surrounding city ruins, we chatted a little. What’s so strange about him? I find him ordinary. Apart from his looks, he’s relatively cultured and likes to teach others.”

Jiang Baimian didn’t answer Gu Bo’s question and asked, “How long ago was that?”

“It’s been slightly less than 40 years...” Gu Bo said, not too confident. However, there was one thing he was certain of—that this matter happened a long time ago.

“Then, I’ll tell you that Du Heng still looks the same 40 years later.” Jiang Baimian answered Gu Bo’s previous question.

Gu Bo hissed again. “That’s a little impressive...”

He recalled the various details from back then and thought for a moment before saying, “He acted very normal. I just had a faint feeling that he was pursuing some object or some matter.”

Afraid that Long Yuehong and the others wouldn’t understand, he found another example. “Take trash like me... Heh heh, a trash hunter. Our goal is always very general every time we go to a city ruin—it’s to find valuable items. His goal was very clear. Although I don’t know what it was, I had this feeling.”

It turns out that trash hunters are also a universal term used both in the north and south... Long Yuehong held in his laughter. After all, he was now an official trash hunter.

“We think so too,” Jiang Baimian replied.

Gu Bo and Du Heng had only met once, so he couldn’t provide more information. The topic quickly ended.

He looked around and took out a relatively precise map. “You’ll stand guard at the intersection northwest of town. There’s a road that leads straight into the mountains there...”

This path wasn’t the one Shang Jianyao and the others had taken. It was connected to Old Mountain Range, and it was deserted.

...

In the northwest of Tarnan, at the intersection that led to Mount Chilar by the Movable River.

The Old Task Force—who had taken the opportunity to request for many supplies—drove the jeep here.

Jiang Baimian looked at the sky, glanced back at the small city behind her, and smiled. “Set things up according to the plan. Treat it as a training session to build fortifications. Yes, we have to make the corresponding changes based on the destination’s characteristics. We can’t be rigid.”

“Yes, Team Leader!” Shang Jianyao replied loudly.

The next second, he carried a full-body mirror and excitedly ran to the intersection. He inserted it into the soil and fixed it with a rock.

Long Yuehong did something similar.

Before long, the entire intersection was surrounded by multiple full-body mirrors. All of them faced outward, leaving only the passageway leading into Tarnan.

As the commander-in-chief, Jiang Baimian smiled and muttered to herself when she saw the results. “Why does this feel strange...”

Shang Jianyao introduced seriously, “This is the Eight Gates Golden Light Formation. It can subdue demons, subdue devils, and eliminate ghosts.”



“There are such things on radio programs?” Jiang Baimian was greatly surprised. Although she rarely listened to the radio and spent most of her time surfing the Internet, it wasn’t like she had never heard of it. She felt that the company’s radio stories were selective and weren’t that ridiculous.

Shang Jianyao frankly replied, “I stole a glance at the lady boss’s horror films.”

“But that’s not the Eight Gates Golden Light Formation...” Long Yuehong had also stolen a few glances back then.

Shang Jianyao nodded. “I think it will be better if the words ‘Eight Gates,’ ‘Golden Light,’ and ‘Formation’ are combined.”

Long Yuehong—who couldn’t win the argument—turned around and took out a pile of items from the jeep’s trunk. This included but wasn’t limited to land mines, shovels, iron nails, and hemp ropes.

Jiang Baimian then pointed in different directions. “Dig a hole there and make it into a hunting trap. Throw the iron nails in... Then, pull two hemp ropes and seal the area... Bury the land mines there, there, and there...”

After giving the instructions, Jiang Baimian said smugly, “The greatest problem with illusory abilities is that it only affects creatures with thoughts that can respond. However, it can’t make land mines, ropes, iron nails, or traps hallucinate. By setting these up here, no matter what kind of illusion it is, it won’t budge. When you come, there is no denial of their realism...”

In order to prevent the distortion of electromagnetic signals, she chose relatively ‘classical’ objects and didn’t rely on electronic components.

“I’m afraid Little Red will step on them.” Shang Jianyao expressed his worries as he dug a hole.

“Am I that stupid?” Long Yuehong protested.

Shang Jianyao glanced at him. “Sigh, I did genetic enhancement...”

“Stop!” Long Yuehong stopped him in time.

Jiang Baimian also chimed in. “As long as he isn’t affected by an illusion, Little Red is very reliable now.”

This was also the reason why they first set up the full-body mirrors and then planted land mines and dug traps. Otherwise, they might very well ‘remember’ the spots wrongly and step on them.

After some work, the Old Task Force completed the construction. They also erected a wooden sign with light bulbs beside the two full-body mirrors facing the mountainous area.

On the wooden sign were the words: “This road is blocked. Please take the northeast gate.”

The person in charge of the northeast gate was from the Clam Dragon Church. Zhou Yue personally guarded it.

“Phew, it’s done!” Jiang Baimian wasn’t only a commander. She also participated in the labor, but her focus was on monitoring the nearby electric signals of large creatures.

Without waiting for Shang Jianyao to speak, she turned to the jeep and said, “We’ll stay behind the jeep later. No matter what happens, try your best not to care. Didn’t Abbess Zhou say that the more one does, the more mistakes one makes, and true for the converse?”

Long Yuehong heaved a sigh of relief when he heard that. He felt like he had a sturdy fortress despite the enemy’s strength.

After everyone entered their designated spots, the four of them chatted from time to time.

There would be some strange questions and answers mixed in.

“When was the last time you peed the bed?”

“Five years old...”

This wasn’t because Shang Jianyao was deliberately making things difficult for Long Yuehong, but because he was regularly conducting identity checks.

With her previous experience and the corresponding intelligence, Jiang Baimian believed that the illusion created by the Superior Heartless came from him and not their own memories and emotions.

Therefore, if one's companion became a fake one, they definitely wouldn't be able to answer a relatively private question. Even if the questioner was distorted by the illusion and heard the information, they wouldn't receive the right answer.

This could be used to prevent any malicious intent from approaching.

For this, Shang Jianyao prepared a hundred questions for Long Yuehong.

...

The sun gradually moved west, and the colors of the sky gradually turned warm.

Just as Jiang Baimian was about to make arrangements for the evening, a car drove out of the mountains and arrived at the intersection.

This was a dark-blue car with steel plates. The undercarriage was elevated, and the tires were large.

Shang Jianyao picked up the loudspeaker and whistled. "Handsome!"

This shout confused the people in the car as if they doubted this fellow's sexual orientation.

After a few seconds, the door opened, and four people alighted.

One was a man whose right side had a small half of his skull shimmering with silver-white metallic light, and his forehead was embedded with irregular shrapnel. The other was a woman with a gentle and intellectual bearing. Her black hair was long and straight.

The second man wore a black priest robe from the Old World. He was almost Shang Jianyao's height, and he had a gentle smile on his face. The last wore an earthen-yellow military uniform and

a matching beret. His facial features were all standard Ashlandic, but his facial contours appeared relatively stiff.

They were the Ruin Hunter team that Shang Jianyao, Jiang Baimian, and the others had encountered at Mount Chilar's water source.

"We can't go through here?" asked the man—who had half of his skull metallic.

Jiang Baimian picked up another speaker. "Stand in front of the full-body mirror."

Afraid that the other party wouldn't accept it, she added, "This is to determine your authenticity and verify your identity. You should know what the Superior Heartless is best at."

The four Ruin Hunters conversed with each other and nodded. They walked to the full-body mirror one after another and had their figures reflected for a few seconds.

The gentle and intellectual woman and the man in the black priest robe took the opportunity to straighten their hair.

"How should I address you?" Shang Jianyao asked through the loudspeaker.

"Bai Xiao," replied a man with a mole under his left eye loudly as half of his skull shimmered with a metallic glow.

"Lin Tong." This was the woman's name. "A person who studies biology."

Coincidentally, our company is called Pangu Biology... As Jiang Baimian muttered, the man wearing the black priest robe and a gentle smile also replied, "Lei."

"Zhang Shaopeng," said the man in military uniform.

Upon seeing that they had all looked into the mirror, Shang Jianyao raised a question before Jiang Baimian could. "What did we talk about at the last water source in the Mount Chilar area?"

The four of them looked at each other, and Bai Xiao replied, “We talked about the city ruins around Tarnan.”

Long Yuehong’s eyes suddenly froze.

Back then, they had never chatted with this Ruin Hunter team. They had only been warned that there was a Superior Heartless in the southwest mountains!

Chapter 269: Here “Again”

With this thought in mind, Long Yuehong raised his arms and pointed his assault rifle at Bai Xiao, Lin Tong, and the others.

“No rush.” Jiang Baimian interrupted his stressful response.

Shang Jianyao held the loudspeaker and asked, “Which city ruin did we talk about back then? What posture were we in while talking about it? Inverted or lying on our sides?”

The four Ruin Hunters beside the mountain car fell silent. Their figures gradually faded, disappearing without a trace along with the car.

“It’s really an illusion!” Although Long Yuehong already knew this, he still found it unbelievable.

Bai Xiao’s team felt so vivid as an illusion. Be it their actions, words, expressions, or reactions, they were no different from the real ones.

If it weren’t for the fact that the Old Task Force had obtained key information in advance, prepared a plan, and used something that only the two parties knew as a question to verify their identities, it was very likely that they would’ve been deceived.

Jiang Baimian frowned and muttered to herself, “They all have bioelectric signals...”

“Could they be real?” Long Yuehong found it even more unbelievable. At this moment, he understood why his team leader had stopped him.

This was because Bai Xiao, Lin Tong, and the others might be real. However, they had suffered auditory hallucinations and obtained the wrong answer, so they believed that they were fake.

If he had fired back then, ignoring the problem of accidentally killing the innocent, it would only cause conflict and chaos—a very dangerous outcome.

An identity verification could determine if they were real or not, but it couldn't determine if they were fake. If one answered correctly, they would definitely be real. If they answered wrongly, they might not be fake.

Jiang Baimian shook her head. "Not anymore."

Upon seeing that Long Yuehong was still a little confused, Shang Jianyao—who was holding the loudspeaker—' explained. ' "There's been a leak in knowledge!"

He wore a pained expression.

Long Yuehong came to a realization and asked in surprise, "Team Leader, are you saying that the Superior Heartless has begun to understand how to use illusions to create bioelectric signals to make up for the flaws in the details after what happened last night?"

Wasn't it said that this Superior Heartless was closer to a beast? H-he can still evolve?

Jiang Baimian thought for a moment and said, "That's a very slight possibility. I didn't use this ability to pose any threat to him last night. I only used it as a form of vigilance, so he shouldn't know about it out of thin air."

At this moment, Bai Chen voiced her guess. "Maybe the Superior Heartless references the original version when creating the illusion. Since the original version has human consciousness, the illusion will also have human consciousness. The original version had bioelectric signals, so the illusion has bioelectric signals."

Clap! Clap! Clap!

Shang Jianyao clapped.

He showed his agreement with such an action.

Having seldom received such treatment, Bai Chen was a little unaccustomed to it. Now, she fully understood her team leader's amused and angry reaction every time she encountered such a situation.

"That's right." Jiang Baimian nodded slightly. "It's indeed very likely that he's just copying it. He knows how it's done but not how it works. But no matter what, he's much better than Abbess Zhou in terms of illusions."

She had previously commented that the illusion created by Zhou Yue was a little crude. It had neither human consciousness nor bioelectric signals.

As she spoke, Jiang Baimian added, "Next, we'll see if he will deliberately distort the bioelectric signals while hiding his tracks."

What happened just now reminded her that she couldn't completely rely on weak electric signals.

As the four of them conversed, another car came out of the mountain.

It was dark blue in color and equipped with bulletproof steel plates. The bottom carriage was elevated, and the tires were very large.

This was the mountain car of Bai Xiao's team. It was here 'again.'

Long Yuehong felt a headache coming on. He didn't know if this was real or fake.

He put on his night-vision goggles and didn't discover any problems.

It was around dusk, and there was barely some lighting, so there was no need to use the night-vision goggles. Long Yuehong only used some of the equipment's functions.

The cool mountain car soon stopped in front of the two full-body mirrors.

Shang Jianyao held the loudspeaker and excitedly greeted them. “Hello, Bai Xiao, Lin Tong, Lei, and Zhang Shaopeng.”

“Why do you have to shout every name?” Long Yuehong couldn’t help but mutter.

Shang Jianyao put down the loudspeaker and replied seriously, “That’s politeness.”

“But these names might not be real.” Jiang Baimian dealt Shang Jianyao a blow.

Shang Jianyao quickly smiled. “Everything is but a dream. Why so serious?”

At this moment, Bai Xiao—whose cranium had been modified—alighted from the car and asked in confusion, “How do you know our names?”

He didn’t remember that they had exchanged names when they came into contact.

“As foretold by the wise old man on the mountain.” Shang Jianyao spoke a line he had learned from somewhere.

Jiang Baimian quickly ‘remedied’ the situation. “You guys just came.”

“Are you saying that the Superior Heartless created an illusion of us?” Lin Tong—who had a gentle bearing—alighted from the car.

Behind her, Lei and Zhang Shaopeng held their weapons and stood guard.

Using the loudspeaker, Jiang Baimian replied, “Yes, it’s a good thing we asked questions based on what we previously talked about.”

Bai Xiao nodded slightly when he heard that. “You guys have also grasped a lot of information.”

They actually knew the characteristics of the Superior Heartless’s hallucination abilities and began using the method of identification.



“The target attacked Tarnan last night,” Jiang Baimian explained simply. “Alright, please accept the identity verification as well.”

“No problem.” Lin Tong expressed her understanding.

Shang Jianyao held the loudspeaker and raised the previous question. “What did we talk about when we were getting water at Mount Chilar?”

Bai Xiao shook his head. “We didn’t. I just warned you that there was a Superior Heartless in the southwest mountains.”

“Congratulations, you got it right!” Shang Jianyao replied through the loudspeaker.

If not for the fact that they were too far away, with countless landmines and traps with iron nails between them, he might very well have shaken hands with the opposing team.

Jiang Baimian thought for a moment and inquired, “When was the last time you did an identification test?”

“An hour ago. We were in the car after that, and we didn’t stop,” replied Bai Xiao patiently with a straight knife on his back and a strange purplish-red right eye.

Jiang Baimian sincerely said, “Please do another identity test on them. Then, take a look in front of the mirror.”

Bai Xiao turned around and chatted with Lin Tong, Lei, and Zhang Shaopeng.

He quickly announced the results loudly. “No problem.”

They then walked to the two full-body mirrors facing each other and reflected their figures.

During this process, Lin Tong and Lei took the opportunity to comb their hair.

This made Long Yuehong's scalp tingle. The illusions created by the Superior Heartless did something similar! His observation of the targets and grasp on the details really doesn't resemble a Heartless that lacks intelligence.

"That's enough." Jiang Baimian heaved a sigh of relief and asked, "Did your investigations come up with anything?"

Bai Xiao seemed to have his own loudspeaker. Without using much strength, his voice reached Shang Jianyao and the others' ears. "We were lost for a long time, and no equipment could help us in any way. It's likely the Superior Heartless's ability. We were wondering why he didn't take the opportunity to attack us. From the looks of it, he came to Tarnan after affecting us.

"Later, we found our bearings and realized that the vehicle was parked very close to the edge of the cliff. If we had acted blindly back then and didn't arrange for manpower to investigate the surroundings in the most careful manner, we would've been dead by now."

He explained the situation clearly.

The mountains are indeed more dangerous than the town. The terrain makes it more suitable for the Superior Heartless to showcase his powers... Jiang Baimian sighed and thoughtfully said, "Don't tell me those smart bots and their auxiliary robots fell down the cliff?"

She believed that creatures were creatures of habit and that successful solutions would always be used repeatedly.

Bai Xiao was a little surprised before he restrained his expression. "Yes, we found some traces and confirmed that they were left behind when the robots fell down the cliff. Yes, they should've used a jetpack to try and save themselves. However, their judgment of the orientation was interfered with, and they slammed into the mountain and exploded."

"May the divine aura bathe them." Shang Jianyao performed a twitching dance in pity.

Upon seeing this, Bai Xiao, Lin Tong, and the others looked at each other and nodded indiscernibly. They determined that the other party was a believer of the Scorching Door and a member of the Furnace Church.

There was a certain difference between the Dance of Frenzy and the Furnace Church's dance. It didn't feel like one was scalded by boiling water.

After a simple exchange, Bai Xiao asked, "Can we pass through here?"

Jiang Baimian smiled and pointed at the wooden sign beside her. "Look over there."

Bai Xiao, Lin Tong, and the others traced Jiang Baimian's hand and looked at the wooden sign.

As the wooden sign's light bulb hadn't lit up and the sky was much darker, it took some careful identification before they deciphered the contents.

"This road is blocked. Please take the northeast gate."

Lin Tong was confused. "Then, why did we chat so much?"

Professional instinct... Jiang Baimian replied silently. She then smiled and said, "I can only tell you something after confirming your identities. Yes, the Superior Heartless is afraid of looking in the mirror."

"Looking in the mirror?" Lin Tong subconsciously looked at the full-body mirror in front of her and revealed a thoughtful expression.

She, Bai Xiao, Lei, and Zhang Shaopeng didn't ask why.

Bai Xiao then thanked Jiang Baimian on behalf of the entire team.

They didn't stay any longer. They got into the car and drove northeast of Tarnan along the fork.

After watching the dark-blue mountain car drive away, Jiang Baimian muttered to herself in confusion, "That's strange. Their answers weren't distorted, allowing us to determine the truth so easily..."

Bai Chen deliberated and said, "Maybe the Superior Heartless has switched targets."

He was no longer in this area.

“He has a strong desire for victory.” Shang Jianyao sighed with emotion when he heard that.

Strong desire for victory? Jiang Baimian found it funny and wanted to reply with, “He’s not Shang Jianyao.”

She also called Zhou Yue and the others to remind them to be careful.

At this moment, she suddenly had an idea and thought of an important question: Why is the Superior Heartless insistent on entering Tarnan? His previous ‘hunt’ should be enough to feed him for days!

Chapter 270: Fatal Experience

This... Jiang Baimian restrained her smile and asked, “Why do you think the Superior Heartless is insistent on entering Tarnan?”

Long Yuehong subconsciously replied, “To hunt...”

Before he could finish speaking, he realized that something was amiss.

There were clearly still prey in the mountains, such as Bai Xiao’s team. However, the Superior Heartless didn’t attack them. Instead, he ran all the way to Tarnan to kill people.

Even if he felt that the prey here were weaker and less vigilant, making it a better place to hunt for food, he shouldn’t have attacked again so quickly after eating his fill and retreating in fear last night.

It had to be known that the Heartless disease was known as Atavism. It was a form of human degeneration in which they lost their rationality and thoughts and became creatures that resembled beasts.

However, even wild beasts would definitely temporarily leave an area after suffering a shock and discovering their greatest fear. They would only take the risk to try again when they were hungry to a certain extent and had no other food.

Beasts acted this way; what's more Heartless?

"That doesn't make sense..." Bai Chen helped Long Yuehong finish his sentence.

Shang Jianyao made a thoughtful expression. "Maybe he thinks the human meat here is better... For the sake of food, he chose to take risks."

Is he judging others by using his own standards? Jiang Baimian muttered and looked back at the small city in Tarnan. She thought for a moment and said, "Could it be that something here is attracting him?"

Just as she said that, she suddenly realized that her meaning was abnormally similar to Shang Jianyao's words. She quickly added, "Something other than food."

"What else can a Superior Heartless pursue?" Long Yuehong muttered to himself in confusion.

"Courtship," Shang Jianyao replied. He then explained in all seriousness, "In Tarnan, there's an old lady. She's his former lover, a companion that he experienced life and death with. Even though he has contracted the Heartless disease and has forgotten everything, he still remembers to find her and protect her so that she would never be harmed."

I'm actually a little touched hearing this... Long Yuehong followed Shang Jianyao's train of thought and realized that this was a touching story. Most importantly, he couldn't find the original version in his memories of the radio stories.

This meant that Shang Jianyao had already developed from a reader to someone who weaved their own stories.

"It's quite reasonable..." Jiang Baimian imagined the situation Shang Jianyao described and found it tragic and beautiful.

If the Superior Heartless didn't treat humans as prey and munch on them until their flesh turned mangled, the imagined scene would be even more beautiful.

Bai Chen pursed her lips and didn't say anything.

Without giving Shang Jianyao a chance to continue, Jiang Baimian continued, "This is a possibility. Another possibility is that something is attracting him."

After a few seconds of silence, Jiang Baimian picked up her phone and dialed a number. "Hello, is this Abbess Zhou?"

Zhou Yue's voice sounded from the other end of the line. "Haha, I recognize you this time. You're October Xue from the Qian Bai Team!"

Her tone was filled with pride.

The corners of Jiang Baimian's mouth twitched as she replied, "My name should be in your contacts..."

Zhou Yue coughed. "Everything is but a dream. Why so serious?"

Without giving Jiang Baimian a chance to continue the topic, she asked, "What's the matter?"

"It's this..." Jiang Baimian roughly described Bai Xiao, Lin Tong, and their team's situation. "They're heading toward you now. "

"Alright, I'll carefully distinguish their authenticity," Zhou Yue replied firmly.

Jiang Baimian then inquired, "Abbess Zhou, why is that Superior Heartless bent on attacking Tarnan? It's not like there's only one human settlement in Mount Chilar."

Zhou Yue fell silent for a moment before saying, "We might have to ask him."

Abbess Zhou, you might have something in common with Shang Jianyao... Upon seeing that she couldn't get an answer, Jiang Baimian politely said a few words before hanging up.

...

At the northeast intersection of Tarnan.

Zhou Yue was wearing a white robe with a hemp rope tied around her. She was sitting cross-legged on a mat and looking toward Mount Chilar.

An Eight Trigrams Mirror hung from her waist, and a dressing mirror was tied to her forehead. On each side stood a non-smart combat robot.

Unlike the Old Task Force's impenetrable fortifications, Zhou Yue didn't make any arrangements. She only erected a wooden sign behind her.

On the wooden sign was a dragon symbol created from mirror shards. This was the Sacred Emblem of Shattered Mirror.

After putting down her phone, Zhou Yue muttered to herself in confusion, "Strange, why does he have to enter Tarnan..."

...

In the northwest of Tarnan, by the Movable River.

Jiang Baimian looked at the slowly setting sun and said to Shang Jianyao and the others, "Take this opportunity to get a bite, and take turns doing so."

Long Yuehong tersely acknowledged it. "I'll go take a piss."

With that said, he took a plastic bottle that he had prepared in advance and took a few steps. Using the jeep hood as cover, he unzipped his pants and relieved his bladder.

This was a plan that they had discussed in advance. Their goal was not to walk too much to prevent themselves from being affected by the illusion—they might misjudge their direction and distance and step on land mines or fall into their traps.

As for the problem of embarrassment, its importance ranked very low. Of course, in order not to make the area they stood guard stink, the Old Task Force had gathered a batch of plastic bottles from various stalls and robot guards' warehouses.

Long Yuehong narrowed his eyes in comfort amidst the whooshing sound.

He suddenly realized that Jiang Baimian, Shang Jianyao, and Bai Chen were all looking at him with strange gazes.

This... Long Yuehong was a little confounded.

Wait, didn't I go to the front of the car? Long Yuehong came to a realization and quickly looked down at his crotch.

It was already wet.

The plastic bottle in his hand had yet to be unscrewed.

The series of actions he had just done was only an illusion!

This was like completely relaxing oneself after a successful search for a bathroom in a dream.

At that moment, Long Yuehong didn't know how to react.

"That's pretty embarrassing." Jiang Baimian evaluated the effects of the hallucination. This was also an indirect way of consoling Long Yuehong.

Shang Jianyao restrained his expression and said to Long Yuehong seriously, "We need to do an identification test. When was the last time you peed your pants?"

"F\*ck off!" Long Yuehong flew into a rage out of humiliation.

"The correct reaction." Shang Jianyao didn't feel like he had been scolded at all.



Just as he said that, he suddenly saw Jiang Baimian, Long Yuehong, and Bai Chen raise their hands and aim their guns at him.

Their expressions looked like they had seen a monster—a Heartless.

Shang Jianyao's hands moved slightly before maintaining their original posture as if the scene in front of him was just a play.

Bang! Bang! Bang!

Jiang Baimian, Long Yuehong, and Bai Chen fired.

Shang Jianyao stood there motionless as if he was in a battle of courage. Almost at the same time, he felt intense pain as his entire body involuntarily curled up.

In just a second or two, Shang Jianyao gradually lost consciousness due to the unbearable pain and the rapid loss of his life. His vision turned pitch black.

In the pitch-black silence, a lively debate slowly echoed and became louder.

“It's fake!”

“It must be fake.”

“Don't scare me!”

“I think we should be more careful. We should gather more clues and make conclusions only after we have sufficient evidence.”

“Why are you arguing? Have a rational discussion.”

“You need to say please.”

...

Amidst the argument, a hole slowly opened in the darkness, illuminating a dazzling light.

Shang Jianyao opened his eyes and saw Jiang Baimian, Long Yuehong, and Bai Chen looking at him with concern.

“What happened to you?” Jiang Baimian asked seriously.

She had just seen Shang Jianyao convulse. His bioelectric signals had turned chaotic, and his forehead was covered in cold sweat.

“I was almost killed by an illusion,” Shang Jianyao said solemnly before reminiscing. “I miss the Nightmare Horse a little. Its Real Dreamscape gave a deeper impression than that illusion of death.”

“What happened?” Long Yuehong had a guess.

Shang Jianyao described his ‘experience’ and said, “It’s probably because he hasn’t really died and can’t simulate the most realistic feelings.”

“How can it be the same?” Jiang Baimian exhaled. “Real Dreamscape is directly related to your consciousness, so the effects will definitely be greater. Yes, no matter what, such usage of illusions is indeed different from Real Dreamscape. It’s also very similar to Extreme Terror in Eidolon Nun’s domain. You have to be careful not to be scared to death.”

Long Yuehong felt apprehensive and uneasy again. This was the strongest enemy he had faced so far.

“We can’t keep enduring it passively.” He exhaled and voiced his thoughts.

“Yes.” Jiang Baimian nodded and looked at Shang Jianyao. “Plan 5.”

“Alright.” Shang Jianyao picked up the loudspeaker on the jeep’s roof. At this moment, he sniffed and said to Long Yuehong, “So your peeing wasn’t an illusion.”

“...F\*ck off!” Long Yuehong replied angrily, his fear greatly reduced.

Shang Jianyao smiled, raised the loudspeaker, and aimed at the road leading to Mount Chilar.

This was one of their plans. By using a loudspeaker to extend Inference Clowning’s range, he could remotely influence the enemy like Redstone Collection’s Tan Jie.

Although the Superior Heartless was closer to a beast and might not understand human language, and Inference Clowning didn’t seem to be effective, Jiang Baimian recalled the questions and answers from Bai Xiao’s team in the illusion. She also felt to a certain extent that perhaps in the depths of its subconscious, the enemy still has some facet of human intelligence that could be exploited to exert a similar influence.

Therefore, after watching the real Bai Xiao’s team leave, she discussed this additional plan with Shang Jianyao, Bai Chen, and the others for a while.

As for whether it would be effective in the end, she couldn’t be sure.

Phew, I hope this fellow can choose some words that are easy to understand and acceptable for a Superior Heartless... As Jiang Baimian expressed her anticipation, she also helped Shang Jianyao think of the rhetoric to use.

At this moment, Shang Jianyao used the loudspeaker to project into the distance. “Howl!”