

Ad Infinitum 371

Chapter 371: Phone Call

Long Yuehong finished reading the information projected by Geneva and asked with uncertainty, “Could the Anti-intellectualism Church’s target be the two of them?”

He felt that there were still too many options. After all, under the premise that the Reformists and the Conservatives’ conflict had intensified, the assassination of any Elder on both sides or any person with authority who had yet to enter the Senate could escalate the internal strife, just like throwing a burning match into a keg of gunpowder.

Jiang Baimian thought for a moment and said, “There’s definitely more, but I’m more inclined to believe that the Anti-intellectualism Church’s target is General Phocas. Seeds were planted in Shang Jianyao and me at the general’s residence. This indicates that the Anti-intellectualism Church has already infiltrated the area to a certain extent. General Phocas is either one of them or the next target.

“Yes, there’s a small chance that Superintendent Alexander is the Anti-intellectualism Church’s target. He’s one of First City’s two big shots, so the protection he receives is definitely of the highest level. Even if the Anti-intellectualism Church mobilizes all eight Elders, they most likely won’t succeed. Their only hope is that a traitor has appeared around Alexander and that there’s a mole. This isn’t something we can interfere with. Even if we want to be free bodyguards acting in secret, there’s a high chance that we will be discovered and captured as the Anti-intellectualism Church’s accomplices.

“As for the shock from the death of other Elders and the reactions from various parties, it would be inferior to something that happens to General Phocas. Besides, we don’t have enough manpower and can’t do everything. We can only choose the most likely possibility. Leave the rest to the company to see if they can figure out anything.”

After hearing that, Shang Jianyao smiled. “This is fate.”

This time, Long Yuehong roughly understood what he meant.

The Old Task Force—which had no intention of returning to General Phocas’s residence—had to monitor the area again.

When the time came, Shang Jianyao definitely wouldn’t miss any celebratory feast.

Jiang Baimian ignored Shang Jianyao and nodded. “We’ll formulate a plan to monitor General Phocas’s residence then. The first premise is that we can’t be discovered by the Anti-intellectualism Church or the general’s security personnel.”

“We should place emphasis on the public bathrooms in the area!” Shang Jianyao suggested seriously.

“Huh?” As Long Yuehong was a little confused, Jiang Baimian, Bai Chen, and Genava turned their heads at the same time to look at the projected page of information—it was the cigarette butt’s laboratory report.

The saliva extracted from it had a component called Ralph sugar. It was a cheap candy made from a type of plant root mixed with peppermint. In Redstone Collection, it was called ‘Eating for Nothing.’ It wasn’t sweet, but it was very refreshing.

Its only problem was that it would cause a certain level of diarrhea, making any consumption of it to be equivalent to ‘eating for nothing.’ This negative side effect was very popular in First City, where dietary habits easily caused constipation and indigestion.

Citizens at the lower strata of society that couldn’t afford Ralph candy would regularly eat a plant root called ‘Yellow’ and make it serve as stew on the dining table. It had similar effects to ‘Eating For Nothing,’ but it was relatively mild.

Therefore, the real Father often smoked Flagship cigarettes and ate Ralph candy to energize himself. It was possible that he frequently suffered from diarrhea.

Although this sounded a little disgusting and funny, they might really gain something by monitoring the public bathrooms around General Phocas’s residence.

As Long Yuehong came to a realization, Shang Jianyao imagined the scene. “When I rush into the bathroom, the real Father would’ve already taken off his pants and squatted there with his ass bare-naked. All he can do is stare at me.”

Long Yuehong imagined the scene and felt that the real Father might kill himself in embarrassment.

“Be careful not to be hypnotized because of eye contact.” The naive Genava didn’t understand Shang Jianyao’s humor.

...

Two days later, the Old Task Force—which had finished setting up the monitoring zones around General Phocas’s residence—went to Wolf’s Den before they began their official monitoring. They handed the rest of the Ashlandic introductory textbooks to Su Na and the others.

Bai Chen looked at the women and coldly reminded them, “Study well. There are many people in the Ashlands who died tragically because they wanted to grasp language and knowledge.”

She didn’t mention the people from the Anti-intellectualism Church—the real Father who had almost blown up Wolf’s Den—and how they hated normal people who wanted to think and learn. This was because she was worried that it would end up scaring these insecure women who had yet to gain a firm foothold in the city.

“Yes, yes.” Su Na nodded hard. “Actually, we don’t find it difficult to learn languages. We grasp words bit by bit, and we can understand some words without using the translation device. It makes us very, very happy.”

Jiang Baimian nodded slightly and said, “That’s for the best. I think your preparations for the fast-food restaurant are almost done. The corresponding ingredients can be settled the day after tomorrow at the latest.”

Tomorrow was the day of the handover of Left Bank Manor.

When trading firearms with Lehman, Jiang Baimian would add an additional clause: Within three years, no matter who the manor was sold to, they had to sell the manor’s production to the fast-food restaurant that was run by Su Na and the others for minimum profit.

After three years, either Su Na and the others couldn’t continue running the business in First City and moved elsewhere, changed businesses, or they had already established themselves.

Su Na and the others couldn’t help but exchange a few words, filled with anticipation.

Upon seeing that the Old Task Force was about to leave, Su Na recalled something and quickly said, “Ogre seems to be looking for you.”

“Ogre?” Jiang Baimian repeated the name.

This was the former boss of Wolf’s Den, a core member of the Black Shirts.

Ogre—who had a thick beard and was no longer slightly obese—had just come out of the bathroom when he saw the smiling Shang Jianyao.

For some reason, he shivered and quickly smiled. “Good morning.”

“I heard you were looking for us?” Shang Jianyao asked on behalf of Jiang Baimian.

Ogre hurriedly nodded. “Yes. Actually, Second Boss Terrence came to find you and said that he had information on the Church of Paragon Desire. He wanted you to meet him.”

Second Boss was a specific term for the Black Shirts. In Ashlandic organizations, they were equivalent to a deputy leader, but there was more autonomy, making the role more of a partner.

Intelligence regarding the Church of Paragon Desire? Jiang Baimian didn’t say anything else and nodded. “Alright.”

After leaving Wolf’s Den, she suddenly chuckled and said, “The real Father really is a haunting presence.”

“Is there a problem with Terrence?” Bai Chen asked acutely.

Jiang Baimian looked back at Wolf’s Den. “Since the real Father has been here, it’s impossible for him not to sense that Ogre and the others have an odd relationship with Ashlandic women like Su Na. With his ability to tamper with memories, he can easily figure out that Ogre and the others belong to the Black Shirts and come under Terrence. They became like this because of what they encountered.

“Therefore, Shang Jianyao’s Inference Clowning ability should’ve been exposed to the real Father. It’s too much of a coincidence that Terrence would suddenly wish to meet us at such a time.”

She paused and said, “I suspect that the effects of Terrence’s Inference Clowning have already been secretly removed by the real Father. He’s now incomparably clear-headed and has gathered the Black Shirts and the Church of Spiritual Transcendence clergymen to set a trap for us as revenge.”

“What should we do then?” Long Yuehong was most afraid that his team leader would say that they would beat him at his own game and force him to do something. He was also afraid that they would do nothing, thereby allowing Wolf’s Den to be taken over by the Black Shirts again.

Jiang Baimian smiled at Shang Jianyao. “Let Hey have a chat with him.”

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In a coffee shop at the Red Wolf Zone, Shang Jianyao—who had disguised himself—picked up the receiver and dialed Terrence’s number.

The person who picked up the call was a Black Shirts member. He quickly found the Black Shirts’s second boss, Terrence—a Church of Spiritual Transcendence member.

“It’s me, Zhang Qubing.” Shang Jianyao directly gave his name.

Terrence fell silent for two seconds before saying with a smile, “When are you coming over as a guest? I miss you very much and have something to discuss with you.”

Shang Jianyao asked without hiding anything, “Do you not trust me anymore?”

Terrence fell silent again.

Shang Jianyao smiled without minding it. “I know who’s trying to sow discord between us. You have to know that he’s from the Anti-intellectualism Church and has strong ties with the Church of Paragon Desire.”

Terrence said nothing.

Shang Jianyao continued, “If you change your mind, you can send a telegram to this frequency range at this time tonight. We will call back based on the situation...”

He repeated the exact time and frequency twice before hanging up the phone with a bang and walking out of the café that was closely monitored by the four other Old Task Force members.

At 9 p.m., Jiang Baimian and Shang Jianyao—who had taken turns leaving the area around General Phocas’s residence—returned to their rest points and switched on the radio transceiver.

The surveillance spot they chose was rather far from General Phocas’s residence to prevent them from being discovered by the other party’s security personnel. They mainly relied on the building’s height, binoculars, and Geneva for observation.

Before long, they received a telegram: “The Church of Paragon Desire has been active in First City’s recent situation and is suspected to be deeply involved. If you agree to cooperate, I hope we can meet up. The exact time, location, and method will be up to you.”

Chapter 372: Discovery

In the pitch-black night, First City, West Port.

This place was connected to the Green Olive Zone. There were warehouses that stored goods everywhere, and there were specialized port guards patrolling.

Terrence didn’t expect to receive a call from Zhang Qubing not long after he sent the telegram. He was requested to meet at West Port’s Pier 3 at 10:30 p.m. that very night. He wasn’t to bring any attendants with him.

This didn’t give anyone a breather or chance to prepare.

This bloated, fierce-faced, brown-haired, and blue-eyed gang leader and Church member parked their black car before entering Port Avenue according to the Qian Bai Team’s instructions and walked to the meeting spot.

Through the connections of his Black Shirts, he obtained Shang Jianyao and the others’ registration information and mission records in the Hunter’s Guild. He confirmed that this was a relatively powerful team with unknown origins.

Terrence looked around and suspected that one or several of Zhang Qubing's team were in a building along Port Avenue or at a vantage point of a warehouse at the dock. They were quietly watching him and observing if anyone was secretly following him.

Fortunately, Terrence didn't have any ulterior motives and walked over without any apprehension.

With his weight, it was inevitable that he was a little out of breath after such a long stretch. It wasn't easy for him to avoid the patrolling port guards and arrive at Pier 3.

He looked around and didn't see his target. He restrained his temper and waited.

About seven to eight minutes later, two figures approached along the path Terrence had taken.

It wasn't until they were only 40 to 50 meters away that Terrence sensed something. He turned around and looked over.

Under the moonlight, Zhang Qubing and October Xue's familiar faces reflected in his eyes.

"Happy cooperation." Shang Jianyao's words stunned Terrence.

He took more than ten seconds to gather his train of thought and replied with a smile, "May we have a pleasant cooperation."

Jiang Baimian didn't immediately ask Terrence what cooperation he had in mind. Instead, she raised a question. "What does a top-notch gang like yours—a secret religion that serves the Kalendaria—need to cooperate with us for?"

Terrence smiled. "Your various performances, your mission records, and the fact that you dared to deal with our Black Shirts and even obtained preliminary success mean that not only are you powerful, but you also have a deep background. I guess you were sent by one of the mainstream and major factions in the Ashlands?"

"Guess if we'll guess." Shang Jianyao—who had some knowledge of the Old World's entertainment—finally found an opportunity to say this.

Terrence had no intention of probing their origins. Instead, he said, “Weren’t you planning on participating in First City’s internal conflict through your investigation of the Anti-intellectualism Church? I can sell you some information.”

Jiang Baimian smiled and asked, “What payment do you need, or should I say, what are the terms of cooperation?”

Terrence smiled and said, “We don’t expect you to cooperate with us because just letting you know that information might help us. Our only request is that you share the information you have with us when you feel the need.”

His words were a little awkward, but his attitude was very humble.

“There’s such a good deal?” Shang Jianyao voiced Jiang Baimian’s thoughts.

The latter thought for a moment and said, “Tell me, what information?”

Terrence habitually looked around and confirmed that nobody else was at Pier 3. He deliberated over his words and said, “We have always been in possession of a Church of Paragon Desire member’s identity, but we never exposed her. We’ve only secretly kept her under observation. Her name is Cynthia, a noble descendant and a socialite of First City’s high society. She has a deep relationship with many people in power.

“She recently went to three places and met three people. One was Christina from the Hunter’s Guild, and the other was Superintendent Alexander...”

Jiang Baimian quietly listened to Terrence, and her eyebrows twitched indiscernibly. A member of the Church of Paragon Desire went to meet one of the two bigshots, Superintendent Alexander, at this juncture?

Terrence didn’t immediately say who the third person was and first introduced the others. “It’s actually not surprising if Cynthia only went to meet Superintendent Alexander. The Church of Paragon Desire has many supporters in First City’s high society. Although many nobles won’t admit it verbally, they secretly participate in some Celestial Body Gatherings. This is very similar to the Church of Paragon Desire’s style. Heh heh, many nobles in high society indulge in pleasure and their desires.”

High society? Jiang Baimian scoffed inwardly. How many years has it been since the Old World was destroyed? How many years has it been since the New Calendar began? Yet, high society has already appeared?

Terrence then said, "But two days before Cynthia found an opportunity to visit Superintendent Alexander, she met another person. That person's name is Sutton. He's an artist on the surface, but according to our investigations, he's very likely an Anti-intellectualism Church member."

"What does he look like?" Shang Jianyao asked anxiously.

Terrence frowned in confusion. "Less than 1.7 meters tall. He's thin, and his hair is dyed gray. He looks like he has overindulged in his pleasures."

Shang Jianyao sighed in disappointment.

Jiang Baimian asked thoughtfully, "You suspect that the Anti-intellectualism Church and the Church of Paragon Desire are cooperating once again and that their target is Superintendent Alexander?"

This matched their judgment that the Anti-intellectualism Church wanted to escalate the conflict further.

Could it be that their next target isn't General Phocas but Superintendent Alexander? The one pushing the matter forward isn't the Anti-intellectualism Church, but a Church of Paragon Desire member? Could this hide from the security forces around Superintendent Alexander? Thoughts rose in Jiang Baimian's mind, making her see a fog.

Terrence said seriously, "I can only say that I have a guess. I hope you can verify it with this information. To show our sincerity, we'll relinquish Wolf's Den and not find trouble with them. However, you have to release Ogre and the others."

"We might have to borrow them for another two to three months." Jiang Baimian didn't comment on the first sentence.

In two to three months, Su Na and the others should be able to have a simple conversation with Red River people. They would also be more skilled at marksmanship. With the translation device's help, they wouldn't need the 'services' of Ogre and the other Black Shirts.

Just as Jiang Baimian said that, Shang Jianyao shared his thoughts. "They've done too many bad things. They have to serve at least ten years."

Upon seeing Shang Jianyao's spirited eyes, Terrence rationally gave up on arguing and smiled. "Ten years it is. Just don't ask me for their living expenses."

He was only mentioning Ogre and the others in passing. This was the last bit of his dignity as a 'superior.'

After stopping Shang Jianyao from making the comment 'so we can actually ask for living expenses,' Jiang Baimian nodded and said, "If we have any gains or any other information we want to share with you, we'll call you."

"Alright." Terrence heaved a sigh of relief.

After watching him leave Pier 3 and gradually walk into the distance, Shang Jianyao asked, "Are we going to monitor Alexander?"

Jiang Baimian fell silent for a moment before saying, "We don't have the ability. Without being able to approach, we can't stop the Church of Paragon Desire. Besides, the real Father might not appear if that happens. Yes, it's better to report it to the company and let the ministers and directors worry. They can mobilize the intelligence personnel here to handle it. We'll continue monitoring General Phocas."

"Alright." Shang Jianyao smiled. "I still have something to do over there."

"What is it?" Jiang Baimian asked warily.

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The next morning, they took over the jobs of Bai Chen, Long Yuehong, and Genava—who had been monitoring the entire night—and entered a room on the top floor of the building.

Shang Jianyao walked around and took out a piece of paper filled with words and pictures. He smiled and said, "This is the public bathroom distribution map of the surrounding blocks. Most of them are free, and the environment is pretty good..."

Jiang Baimian glanced at him with a complicated expression. "Yes, pay more attention to these places later and see if anyone that matches the real Father's characteristics appears."

The two of them held binoculars and observed the people that came and went around the general's residence.

They took turns eating during the process.

At five or six in the afternoon, when the sky gradually darkened, Jiang Baimian saw a dark-green SUV with a black and white license plate drive into the surveillance area.

She subconsciously turned her attention over and realized with the binoculars' help that the driver was a person in black that wore a baseball cap pressed very low.

The car plate belonged to the Senate. It could enter and leave the Golden Apple Zone without any inspection.

Jiang Baimian was first stunned before she said to Shang Jianyao, "Look at that car. Is it the one that followed us previously?"

The only difference between the two was that the one before didn't have a car plate.

"Yes." Shang Jianyao quickly gave an affirmative answer.

Jiang Baimian immediately laughed. "The appearance of the real Father's puppet in this area means that they are still targeting General Phocas."

This spelled opportunity for the Old Task Force.

Chapter 373: New 'Work'

Without waiting for Shang Jianyao's response, Jiang Baimian added, "From the looks of it, the Anti-intellectualism Church will mainly target General Phocas, while the Church of Paragon Desire will target Superintendent Alexander. By working together, First City's situation will irreversibly slide into the abyss as long as one side succeeds."

Shang Jianyao nodded. "Why not the other way around?"

Unsure why this fellow was considering such a strange question, Jiang Baimian casually said, "Maybe General Phocas no longer has any worldly desires and won't take the Church of Paragon Desire's poison bait..."

As she spoke, she laughed as if she didn't think it was right to badmouth General Phocas behind his back.

Besides, the Church of Paragon Desire had certain Awakened abilities that could overwhelm even a eunuch with desires. At worst, they would just have no means of venting.

After a pause, Jiang Baimian said seriously, "As one of First City's two giants, Alexander's security forces are definitely far superior to General Phocas's. Only those from the Church of Paragon Desire who have joined the ranks of nobles have a chance of 'banging up' the target. Similarly, the Anti-intellectualism Church has clearly infiltrated General Phocas's residence for quite some time. They don't lack opportunity or connections."

The 'banging up' she used was referring to the slang for sex.

Shang Jianyao raised his binoculars again, targeting the few public bathrooms in the area.

Jiang Baimian didn't stop him and sighed. "Fortunately, we didn't lose the forest for the trees by giving up on this area as soon as we discovered other clues."

As she spoke, she kept observing the modified dark-green vehicle.

As she memorized the Senate car plate number—A125—she paid close attention to the target's actions.

A dark-green SUV that was suspected of having another fake Father in it drove past General Phocas's residence and turned left at the intersection ahead. It then circled around and entered the backdoor of General Phocas's residence.

It was Jiang Baimian and Shang Jianyao's blind spot.

After about ten minutes, the modified dark-green SUV appeared in their eyes again. It drove away from the Golden Apple Zone at an adequate speed.

"The real Father sent a puppet to contact the Anti-intellectualism Church's spy in the general's residence?" Jiang Baimian nodded thoughtfully.

Shang Jianyao sighed. "The public bathrooms in the Golden Apple area aren't very utilized."

It was completely incomparable to the Green Olive Zone, but the public bathrooms here had a much greater coverage than in the Green Olive Zone. One was available on almost every street.

"The real Father shouldn't be in the area. Would he come all the way here to use the bathroom?" Jiang Baimian scoffed.

She then fell into deep thought and muttered to herself, "If you were the real Father, what would you do after you confirmed that you are participating in the assassination of General Phocas? Think about it from the real Father's style and habits, not yours..."

Shang Jianyao immediately leaned forward slightly, covered his mouth, and forced a yawn.

"..." Jiang Baimian was almost speechless. "I'm not asking you to imitate his appearance!"

Shang Jianyao straightened his body again and assumed a contemplative posture. "The real Father is a careful and cunning person."

"Yes. If he wants to do something this big, he will definitely want to fully grasp all aspects of the situation even if he's only a second-in-command," Jiang Baimian echoed. "What will I do in his shoes? Yes... Even if a puppet is in charge of communications, observation of the surroundings, and awareness of every situational aspect, I still won't be at ease. This is because a puppet's eyes can't replace my eyes, and a puppet's ears can't replace my ears. The information they gather might very

well miss out on some key details... This is an idea that an extremely conceited and careful person will definitely have.”

The trait of being extremely conceited was information that came from the fake Father—Guo Zhen—in Weed City. His memories had only been slightly modified. Once the Hypnosis effect was dispelled, he immediately knew that he was the fake Father and didn’t insist on believing that he was the real Father.

According to him, this was because the real Father didn’t allow fake Fathers to become real Fathers even in their memories.

The fake Father, Sandel, similarly had similar encounters. His tampered memories only concealed the real Father’s existence and gave him a fake scene of becoming a Father. Once Shang Jianyao nullified the Hypnosis effect, he immediately understood that he was a fake Father.

Shang Jianyao thought for a moment and said, “Such a conceited and careful person might very well do a field investigation personally.”

Jiang Baimian nodded slightly. “He should’ve made some observations to confirm all the details, but there’s a high chance that he won’t directly appear. And if he doesn’t directly appear and yet has to observe the situation personally, he can only... can only...”

At this point, Jiang Baimian’s eyebrows twitched.

Shang Jianyao laughed. “He can only do what we are doing now!”

He had to use the terrain and tools to observe and monitor from afar! This also allowed him to discover if the puppets were being tailed.

“Yes!” Jiang Baimian suddenly felt a little excited. She pointed at the floor and said, “Could the real Father be in this building?”

“Or...” She took out a hand-drawn map and pointed at the few markings on it. “Among the high-rise buildings we chose?”

Clap! Clap! Clap!

Shang Jianyao clapped.

Jiang Baimian ignored him and paced around. “We also have to include the buildings we previously eliminated. They might not be too tall, but they are closer. The real Father isn’t like us who needs to worry about being discovered by the Anti-intellectualism Church.”

Just as she said that, Long Yuehong, Geneva, and Bai Chen—who were done resting—entered the rental apartment and prepared to take over their shifts.

“Team Leader, there’s progress?” Long Yuehong could clearly sense that Jiang Baimian and Shang Jianyao were in high spirits.

Jiang Baimian smiled and recounted her previous observations and analysis before saying, “The real Father might be much closer to us than ever before.”

Long Yuehong became excited and raised the most pertinent question. “Then, how can we determine which building the real Father is in? Search each and every building?”

“That’s one way, but there are many buildings that meet the requirements. There are also many rooms, so it will take a lot of time to search them one by one.” Jiang Baimian deliberated and said, “It’s fine if it just takes time, but it will cause quite a commotion if we search them one by one. I’m afraid it will alert the real Father.”

Bai Chen thought for a moment and said, “Wait outside every building for two days to observe people entering and exiting and seek out targets that match Father’s characteristics?”

“The target needs to buy food and items to keep him refreshed. He will definitely be out once every two to three days,” Geneva agreed.

“Why not?” Shang Jianyao objected. “In any case, he has puppets. He can get them to buy the items for him and send them over via relays.”

It was just like how the fake Father—Sandel—had obtained the surveillance footage of Wolf’s Den. There were multiple relays that concealed his tracks layer by layer.

“With the real Father’s caution, there’s a high chance that he will choose not to go out after entering the observation point. Heh heh, the rooms in this apartment have bathrooms. Uh, they prefer to call them washrooms.” As she thought and analyzed the situation, Jiang Baimian gradually smiled. She looked around and said, “I know how to find the real Father!”

“How?” Long Yuehong asked cooperatively.

Jiang Baimian wiped away her smile and said seriously, “Go to the trash rooms in those buildings and rummage through the items inside. The real Father suffers from a sleep disorder, and his mind will also be in a weakened state. In such a state, his tolerance for the place he lives in will clearly decrease. This is especially so when he tries to rest. He definitely has high requirements for the room’s silence and the corresponding smells. Now that the weather is gradually heating up, there will definitely be a strange smell if the trash pile is left inside for too long. The real Father probably won’t have them in the room.

“Of course, the method he chooses might very well be to hypnotize his neighbors and get them to help him take out the trash.” After a pause, Jiang Baimian concluded, “As long as we find the Flagship cigarette butts or Ralph Candy packaging in the trash room, we can roughly determine which building the real Father is in!”

In the Golden Apple Zone’s periphery, there were definitely some people who ate Ralph candy. However, there were almost none who smoked Flagship cigarettes.

It was something exclusive to the port or laborers in the Green Olive Zone.

Rummage through trash... As Long Yuehong imagined the scene, he replied, “Yes, Team Leader!”

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Wearing a tattered jacket, Bosen looked at the strangely masked couple in front of him and took a few steps back in fear.

Ever since the last bit of farmland in the suburbs was taken over, he had become a scavenger in the Golden Apple Zone.

Unlike the other zones, the residents here often had food leftover. They would throw it away as trash, allowing him to fill his stomach. At the same time, there was no lack of valuable items in the Green Olive Zone. From time to time, Bosen could exchange it for some Cass or Drace.

“Don’t be nervous. We’re here to help you,” said Shang Jianyao—who had put on a gas mask because of the smell—in all seriousness. “It’s too much of a time waste for you to rummage through all this alone.”

Bosen didn’t say anything, and he had a vigilant expression.

Shang Jianyao squatted down and took out a few crumpled pieces of paper. He casually unfolded them and read them before throwing them to Bosen. “It hasn’t been used much. You can take it back and use it to jot down stuff.”

Bosen didn’t dare to take it, but he hesitated about leaving because it was very likely that he could find food in the trash room of this building.

At this moment, the gloved Jiang Baimian turned her head to glance at Shang Jianyao. “Mind your own business.”

“It was just in passing.” Shang Jianyao emphasized that he didn’t waste any time.

Upon seeing the couple busy themselves and stop sizing him up, Bosen hesitated for a moment before mustering his courage and joining them.

This was not only work but also life.

Chapter 374: Looking for a Needle in a Haystack

Translator: CKtalon

Bosen opened a wrinkled paper bag and found a small piece of oatmeal bread and a thumb-sized piece of smoked meat covered in dust.

He was delighted and looked up at Jiang Baimian and Shang Jianyao. Upon seeing that they weren’t paying attention to him, he quickly wiped the smoked meat and stuffed it into his mouth.

He ignored the complicated and unpleasant smell around him and nibbled at the small piece of oatmeal bread.

Perhaps he was afraid that the food would be snatched away, so he wolfed down the food and quickly choked himself. However, he was an experienced scavenger. He skillfully removed a tin-white water bottle he had previously picked up and gulped down the liquid in it.

At this moment, Jiang Baimian and Shang Jianyao were searching through the pile of trash for possible clues.

The trash that had been bagged up and categorized was relatively pleasing to the eye; it could be efficiently examined. The trash that had been directly thrown into the bin with all kinds of trash mixed together formed a fermented, moist, and sticky environment. Some things had already rotted, and the smell struck them hard.

Upon hearing Bosen's drinking, Jiang Baimian—who was wearing a gas mask—turned around and looked at the scavenger.

He was in his forties. His eyes were blue, and his face was weathered by the elements. The light-yellow beard by his mouth was messy and stained with many crumbs and water droplets.

After swallowing the food that choked him, the scavenger raised his left hand and wiped his beard.

Jiang Baimian noticed that his hand trembled slightly unconsciously. After some thought, she took off one of her rubber gloves and took out a photo from her pocket. "Do you know such cigarettes?"

It was a photo of the Flagship cigarettes taken by Geneva.

Bosen screwed on the cap of the water bottle and pointed at himself with his left hand. "Are you asking me?"

"Yes," Jiang Baimian replied affirmatively. She was just about to say that she could pay him something when Bosen looked at the photo seriously and said, "These are Flagship cigarettes. Its filter is short and useless. It has almost no taste when smoked."

Compared to the other cigarettes available in First City, Flagship cigarettes were known not only for their pungent smell and their similarity to rolled cigarettes but also for their short filter that didn't bring much utility.

"You've smoked this before?" Shang Jianyao asked curiously.

Perhaps it was because these two people hadn't snatched his food and were considered people he could get along with peacefully, Bosen was no longer as vigilant as before. He smiled and said, "I occasionally find some cigarette butts in the trash room. There are all kinds of brands. As long as they aren't wet, I'll pick them up, find a fire, and light them up. I will take a few deep sucks and take it in. It would be an even better day if I could find some food and fill my stomach."

Bosen had already realized that the two people in front of him likely had a different goal than him and that he wasn't competing with them.

Upon hearing that he had picked up cigarettes, Jiang Baimian's eyes lit up. She patiently asked, "You know all kinds of cigarettes?"

"I've smoked some in the past, and there are often discarded old newspapers in the trash room. Advertisements for all kinds of cigarettes are printed on them," Bosen said proudly. "I can read!"

Jiang Baimian immediately asked, "Then, where did you pick up the Flagship cigarette butts?"

Bosen tried recalling. "Back when I went to the Green Olive Zone to sell some miscellaneous items, I picked some up when I was passing by the port. I was somewhat looking forward to it, but..."

The buyer of the Flagship cigarette had only taken a few puffs before throwing it away. Coupled with the short filter design that didn't have any filtering effects for certain components, the residual taste was almost zero.

Jiang Baimian was a little disappointed and asked in confirmation, "You didn't pick up such a cigarette butt in these few blocks?"

"No." Bosen shook his head firmly.

Jiang Baimian thought for a moment. "Which buildings have you been to in the past week?"

She was prepared to use the process of elimination.

Bosen thought for a moment. “Geder Building, Hurst Apartments...”

As he spoke, he pointed with his right hand.

Jiang Baimian realized that there was something wrong with his right hand as well—it wasn’t that nimble.

After memorizing the buildings’ names, Jiang Baimian stood up, walked out of the trash room, and took out her walkie-talkie in a quiet corner.

She gave Bai Chen, Long Yuehong, and Genava orders. “Geder Building and Hurst Apartments... shall be given secondary priority. Prioritize checking the other buildings on the list.”

After receiving an affirmative reply, she put away the walkie-talkie and returned to the trash room.

At this moment, Shang Jianyao and Bosen were already chatting happily.

“Are you looking for something? There’s no rush. There’s still a few hours before the garbage truck arrives.” Bosen consoled his new friend.

“Yes.” Jiang Baimian nodded, squatted down, and put on the rubber glove.

As Bosen rummaged through the trash for food and valuable items, he chuckled. “I often find interesting stuff here. I found a bag of clothes in an opaque bag last winter. Guess what was in there?”

Shang Jianyao cooperatively replied, “A coat or cotton coat?”

“No, no, no.” Bosen shook his head. He smiled and said, “A pair of dark-blue socks, a pair of black leather boots, a pair of silk underwear, a pair of black pants, a white shirt, a black vest, and a formal black suit. They are the kind of clothes that nobles like to wear the most. Furthermore, they were very new with no traces of mending.”

“This sounds a little strange.” Jiang Baimian’s thoughts raced as she roughly understood what was going on.

A certain aristocrat was following in the footsteps of Redstone Collection’s coroner, Weiler. While accompanying someone’s wife, the husband returned home early and left him trapped in the room.

Without the luxury of time to put on his clothes, he crawled out the window and fled in a panic while dressed in his ‘Emperor’s New Clothes.’ Subsequently, he had either encountered a nearby subordinate, met a sheriff and claimed to have been robbed, or taken someone else’s drying clothes.

Afraid that the clothes and shoes he left behind would be discovered by her husband, the wife hurriedly threw them in a bag, gave the excuse that she was throwing out the trash, and brought the clothes out before throwing them into the trash room.

Bosen was just about to respond when he discovered a rotten apple. His eyes lit up as he placed it in a linen bag he had brought.

After doing this, Bosen smiled and said, “Yes, I can imagine a love story. Unfortunately, I didn’t dare to sell that set of clothes in Golden Apple Zone or Red Wolf Zone. I could only send it to the Green Olive Zone, but I also got five Oray for it. That month was absolutely lovely...”

Shang Jianyao listened with relish and expressed his opinion. “That outfit is worth at least 50 Oray.”

“50? At least 200!” Bosen retorted.

Jiang Baimian glanced at him and nodded slightly. “You seem to have received a certain level of education?”

“I’m a citizen,” Bosen emphasized. “I once joined the army.”

“How did you become a scavenger then?” Jiang Baimian asked curiously.

Bosen fell silent for a moment before saying, “I was once the best marksman in camp and made many contributions. I later injured my right forearm in a war, reducing my agility. I then left the

army. Back then, I was assigned a lot of farmland in the southern suburbs and lived a good life for several years. This lasted until the weather changed drastically one year, and our food production plummeted. The Senate refused to help us... Later, I couldn't shoulder the debt. I could only sell the fields to a noble and enter the city..."

Jiang Baimian asked, "Then, why don't you become a Ruin Hunter and go to the North Shore wastelands to earn a living? At your age, there should still be some oil in the tank."

Bosen smiled bitterly. "The day I discovered that the debt interest was too high to bear, my left hand began to tremble from time to time. I can't use guns anymore with these hands of mine..."

After a brief silence in the trash room, Shang Jianyao asked seriously, "Then, do you hate the Senate for not helping you? Do you hate those nobles for taking the opportunity to provide you with high-interest loans, thereby giving them an opportunity to repossess your land?"

Bosen's expression changed a few times. He lowered his head and looked at the ground. "How can I not hate them? Hume, Jaspas, Paris... They sacrificed their lives one after another before for those lands. However, they still ended up in the hands of nobles who didn't take any risks during the war."

He suddenly looked up and roared in pain, "Us citizens died in hordes before we had First City. However, they only want to strip us of our lands and send us to those factories! Most of the slaves in those factories don't even live past three years!"

Jiang Baimian quietly listened and looked at Shang Jianyao. This was the first time she understood First City's internal conflict so clearly.

...

Alpha Building, in the attached trash room.

Bai Chen and Long Yuehong also wore gas masks as they rummaged through the trash with Geneva.

A large number of companies and chambers of commerce were stationed here. There were also condominiums that were provided to employees. They were originally not on their list of

inspections today, but Jiang Baimian's update had made them give up on Geder Building and Hurst Apartments.

"What a test of patience." Long Yuehong almost made an analogy that it was akin to looking for a needle in a haystack.

Bai Chen turned her head and glanced at him. "It's in such a place where clues are almost impossible to find that the real Father might be careless. Make the best use of our time. We have to finish searching before the garbage truck arrives."

As she spoke, her hands didn't stop moving.

As unofficial personnel, they had to avoid times when there were many people while searching the trash to avoid alerting the enemy. At the same time, they had to do so before the garbage truck transported the trash away. Otherwise, who knew where the trash would come from when they were mixed together?

"Alright." Long Yuehong held in his disgust and continued his work.

Genava didn't feel any discomfort in this regard.

Time passed quickly. Long Yuehong picked up a thin plastic bag and poured the trash inside onto the ground.

As he swept his gaze, his eyes suddenly froze.

There were several cigarette butts with a short filter in the pile of trash. These were the cigarette butts of Flagship cigarettes!

Long Yuehong subconsciously looked up, out of the trash room, and toward Alpha Building—a 27-story-tall monolith.

Chapter 375: Appearance

"Look at this!" Long Yuehong shouted in a trembling voice.

Bai Chen and Genava cast their gazes over and fixed their gazes on the short-filter cigarette butts.

“Flagship cigarettes.” Geneva’s eyes flashed red.

Long Yuehong heaved a sigh of relief when he heard that. He was just worried that he had recognized the wrong item and had prematurely celebrated, but he didn’t have such worries now.

Geneva had definitely said that after careful analysis and comparison.

Bai Chen didn’t say a word. She had already stretched out her hand and started rummaging through the pile of trash.

She quickly found many items, including packaging of Ralph candy, empty wrappers, and the hand-ground coffee residue.

“We can preliminarily judge that it’s the real Father.” Bai Chen looked up and exchanged looks with Long Yuehong and Geneva.

She couldn’t help but smile. After repeated failures, disappointment, and exhaustion, the Old Task Force finally caught the real Father’s tail!

They had firmly caught it!

Long Yuehong couldn’t hide the joy on his face and quickly said, “Quickly, get Team Leader and Shang Jianyao over.”

In about ten minutes, Shang Jianyao and Jiang Baimian rushed over and saw the ‘evidence.’

Shang Jianyao immediately smiled and sang, “Hey, I really miss you...”

“Stop!” Jiang Baimian stopped his performance and beamed. “It’s not time to celebrate yet. When we capture the real Father or kill him, I’ll allow you to sing in front of him or his corpse for five minutes!”

“I also want the small speaker and Old Ge to sing it together. Surround sound.” Shang Jianyao made his request.

Jiang Baimian exhaled and looked around. “We can only say that we have obtained some level of progress. What we need to consider next is how to find the real Father in this building.”

Long Yuehong looked at Alpha Building—which was 27 stories tall—again. “Act as sheriffs and search each unit?”

Residing in the building were a large number of companies, Chamber of Commerce employees, and tenants.

Bai Chen shook her head. “I’m afraid that won’t do. I suspect that there are a large number of ‘puppets’ in the building. They usually work and live like normal people, but they will immediately transform into the real Father’s eyes and ears when they discover any abnormalities.”

“Yes, there’s no way to avoid this.” Jiang Baimian simply gave an example. “For example, when we knock on one family’s door and use the excuse of investigating a case to search for the real Father, there might be a pair of eyes quietly watching everything from the peephole opposite or diagonally across the hallway. They might then use an agreed-upon method to warn the real Father.”

Genava gave the results of his analysis. “After eliminating similar methods, there’s only one choice left: Let the real Father come out himself.”

Clap! Clap! Clap!

Shang Jianyao clapped for smart bot Old Ge.

The red light in Genava’s eyes flickered a few times.

Jiang Baimian laughed as well. “We have to create a scene that forces the real Father to come out.”

...

At 2 p.m. the next day, the disguised Jiang Baimian, Shang Jianyao, and Genava infiltrated Alpha Building and entered an empty room on the third floor.

Shang Jianyao walked to the window, cleared the tables and chairs, and did some additional work to the marble floor.

Genava then threw down the sack on his back and poured half of the items inside into the empty area. These were all flammable objects that easily produced smoke.

Jiang Baimian then wore a gas mask, drew a few matches, and threw them at the pile of items.

Gradually, sparks began to spread as black smoke quickly filled the air.

Before long, the flames blazed upward. As they were surrounded by a deliberate barricade, they didn't spread out.

The thick smoke quickly triggered the alarm on the ceiling, and sirens quickly echoed in the entire Alpha Building.

Genava—who had long hacked the surveillance system here—raised his flamethrower and spewed flames out the window. He also made the corresponding screens play out scenes edited from the Old World's entertainment, making the surveillance personnel believe that a big fire had already started and that the building's fire-fighting capabilities couldn't extinguish it.

As the Old Task Force had expected, a voice quickly shouted from the building's intercom. "Attention please: The building is on fire. Everyone, please evacuate in an orderly manner! Do not use the elevators! Those on higher floors can head to the rooftop and await evacuation."

This voice spread to every corner of Alpha Building, making the company employees and apartment residents rush into the stairwell and keep going down.

The ones who went out the fastest saw flames and black smoke billowing out of a window on the third floor. Therefore, they were sure that a fire had started.

On the rooftop of the building opposite Alpha Building, Long Yuehong held the Orange rifle and observed everyone rushing out of the building's main entrance with a fixed scope.

In contrast, Bai Chen was in charge of the back exit.

Long Yuehong—who was acting alone for the first time—couldn't help but feel a little nervous and uneasy. However, he—who was no longer a rookie—knew how to deal with such emotions.

He took two deep breaths in, but he didn't relax his surveillance of Alpha Building's main entrance.

Amidst the chaos, Long Yuehong's eyes suddenly lit up.

The figure sandwiched in the middle of the group matched the real Father's characteristics very well. He was about the same height as his team leader, and he had relatively dark eye circles. He looked rather exhausted, and he leaned forward slightly when walking.

He looked to be in his late twenties. He wore a black shirt and pants, and he had short black hair. He looked Ashlandic, but his facial features were relatively deep. As he walked, he consciously used the surrounding buildings and crowd to avoid any snipers from above.

Long Yuehong traced the person with his gaze as he reported through the walkie-talkie. "Target spotted. Target spotted. Walking in the direction of Hurst Apartments."

After shouting, Long Yuehong relaxed significantly and focused on aiming at the person suspected to be the real Father.

At this moment, he—who had followed his team leader's instructions and didn't give up on monitoring Alpha Building's main entrance—noticed another person from the corner of his eye.

This person was also in his late twenties. He wore a black shirt and pants, and he had short black hair. He was between 1.75 to 1.8 meters tall, and he had dark eye circles. His expression was also filled with fatigue. At this moment, he was slightly burying his head as he leaned forward and quickly walked in another direction.

Apart from his looks that weren't too similar to the previous one, he also matched all the characteristics of the real Father!

This... There's nothing wrong with the real Father. He's just an asshole. Long Yuehong couldn't help but use a term he had learned from the Old World's entertainment.

He quickly informed his team leader of the new discovery through the walkie-talkie. “Another suspected target has appeared! He left in the opposite direction of Hurst Apartments!”

He only hoped that the team leader and the others could split up in time to intercept the two.

The current situation made him unsure if he should fire.

Ignoring the fact that the two of them were consciously searching for cover and preventing a distant snipe, Long Yuehong found it a little difficult to take action because there was definitely a puppet and an innocent between them.

...

The person heading to Hurst Apartments reached the intersection and suddenly turned around, walking toward the Red Wolf Zone.

At this moment, a figure in a dark-green military uniform jumped out of the alley beside him.

He was 1.9 meters tall, and his entire body had a silver-black metallic luster. He was the smart bot, Geneva.

Looking at the target suspected to be the real Father in front of him, Geneva didn't let Shang Jianyao down. He played the voice he had recorded in advance. “You have two choices now: First, follow me to that alley. Second, have me beat you up and be dragged into that alley.”

The eyes of the target—who was suspected to be the real Father—suddenly froze.

...

In the opposite direction of Hurst Apartments, the other suspected target rushed to a café as if he wanted to pass through it and leave through the back door.

A gunshot suddenly sounded, and a bullet struck the spot in front of him.

He rolled on the ground and hid by the mailbox beside him. He then saw a beaming Shang Jianyao in sunglasses.

“Heh, I really miss you...” A song sounded from Shang Jianyao’s tactical backpack at the right time.

...

Upon noticing that both sides seemed to have intercepted the target, Long Yuehong exhaled again and reported the situation to Bai Chen.

At this moment, the thick smoke on the third floor began to fade. There were no longer any surging flames.

Bai Chen didn’t relax because of Shang Jianyao, Jiang Baimian, and Genova’s relative success. She maintained the status of monitoring the back exit.

Another group of people fled through the back exit. Among them was a figure wearing a beanie, who kept his head lowered. His gait was inclined forward, and his footsteps were a little unsteady.

Bai Chen’s heart palpitated as she focused completely on him. She then saw the obvious dark circles under his eyes and the unconcealed fatigue on his face.

“Another suspected target has appeared at the back door,” Bai Chen calmly reported.

F*ck... At this moment, this was the only thought in Long Yuehong’s mind.

Chapter 376: All the Encounters in the World

On a street near Hurst Apartments, the suspected real Father finished listening to Genova’s broadcast. He looked at the robot with red-light-emitting eyes for two seconds before suddenly opening his mouth and shouting, “Help! Help!”

As he shouted, he turned around and tried to run to an area with the most pedestrians.

He was fast, but Genova was even faster. He traversed several meters in a single stride and grabbed the back of the target’s collar with his steel hand.

Amidst the tearing sound of clothes, the man suspected to be the real Father was forcefully dragged back.

Bang!

Genava knocked the target unconscious with a well-calibrated punch. Under the pedestrians' horrified and terrified gazes, he dragged the man into a quiet and deep alley.

At this moment, the fire engine's sirens approached from afar. Genava also heard Bai Chen's report.

...

"Hey, I really miss you..."

Beside the mailbox by the street, the man suspected to be the real Father saw Shang Jianyao—who was wearing sunglasses and had a sunny disposition.

Shang Jianyao was just about to take action when he suddenly heard Bai Chen's voice coming from the walkie-talkie. "Another suspected target has appeared at the back door."

He twitched his eyebrows and bowed at the man in front of him. "Sorry to disturb you."

After apologizing, he turned around to search for another target.

Just as the man suspected to be the real Father was still in a dumbfounded state, Shang Jianyao turned around and seriously said, "I can't completely eliminate your suspicion, so I'll still have to bring you back."

The man suspected to be the real Father's eyes suddenly turned deep. He took advantage of the moment when the two parties' gazes met to perform Hypnosis.

Even with the sunglasses separating them, he could 'hypnotize' the enemy as long as their gazes met!

Shang Jianyao—who was wearing sunglasses—didn't seem affected at all. He suddenly took two steps forward, lowered his body, and punched the target's lower abdomen.

Amidst the suspected Father's surprise, he turned sideways and blocked with his hands. But at this moment, he realized that his hands were no longer under his control.

Bam!

He was punched in the gut, and his entire body bent like a gigantic prawn.

Shang Jianyao calmly took off his sunglasses and punched again, knocking the target unconscious.

His sunglasses weren't simple. There was a piece of paper pasted behind each lens, and on the other side of the paper was a photo of his left and right eyes.

In other words, the eyes the suspected Father saw through the sunglasses were printed photos. After Shang Jianyao wore the sunglasses, he was no different from being blind. He faced the enemy and punched out purely based on his perception of human consciousness.

After knocking out the target, Shang Jianyao disguised himself so that he looked more like a Red River native. As he carried the man suspected to be the real Father, he shouted to the pedestrians around him in Red River language, "What are you looking at? Have you never seen a kidnapping before?"

He seemed to have been waiting to say this sentence for a long time.

The next second, Shang Jianyao carried the 'hostage' on his back and ran toward the other target.

...

Bai Chen placed her eyes behind the Orange rifle's scope and focused on observing the target in the beanie.

The target's gait and physical characteristics were very similar to the real Father that the Old Task Force had deduced.

He was slightly thinner than the previous two targets.

Upon seeing that the target was using the various obstacles and pedestrians in the back alley to hide from possible snipers and monitors as he walked quickly toward Geder Building, Bai Chen diverted her attention to observe her surroundings and didn't discover Shang Jianyao, Jiang Baimian, or Geneva rushing over.

There's not enough time... Just as this thought flashed through Bai Chen's mind, she saw the target suddenly turn around and rush straight for an ordinary building that was only eight to nine stories tall. He looked like he wanted to enter, pass through the lobby, and leave through another exit in order to shake off any potential stalkers or monitors.

Bai Chen didn't hesitate, nor did she have any concerns that the other party might be innocent. She adjusted the muzzle and aimed at the target's legs.

After getting her cadence down, she calmly squeezed the trigger.

Almost at the same time, the man suspected to be the real Father seemed to sense something and suddenly pounced to the side.

Bang!

Stone chips splattered where he was about to step, and a deep bullet hole appeared.

The man suspected to be the real Father rolled over, turned around, and cast his gaze at the tall building where Bai Chen was.

At his wrist, a strange accessory that seemed to be woven from black hair emitted a fiery glow.

Bai Chen's vision suddenly went black. At this moment, she lost all her vision and became blind.

To her surprise, the distance between her and the target was definitely more than 100 meters away. It far exceeded the ability range of Awakened at the Sea of Origins level. However, she was still affected by a suspected Awakened ability.

The real Father has items from the Mind Corridor on him, and it has a relatively large range? Bai Chen shrank back without thinking and put away the Orange rifle to avoid any possible attacks.

Nothing happened.

Ten seconds later, a beam of light entered Bai Chen's pitch-black field of vision. This light dispersed all the darkness, allowing her to see her surroundings again.

Her eyesight returned. She quickly regained her vision since the man suspected to be the real Father had no intention of deliberately maintaining the effects.

Without hesitation, Bai Chen stood up again and carried the Orange rifle to the edge of the rooftop.

With the scope's help, she looked at the spot where the target had been and realized that there was nobody there.

There were several high-rise condos there, making it impossible to determine where the man suspected to be the real Father had entered.

...

Alex—who had short hair, obvious dark eye circles, and relatively good facial features—looked at the woman beside him and reached out to take the linen shirt from her.

The male owner of this family also handed over his coat and pants enthusiastically.

In exchange, Alex gave him his blue beanie and watched him wear it happily.

After quickly changing his clothes and putting on the corresponding disguise, Alex touched the glass bead ring on his left pinky. He waved at the couple and walked out the door.

His expression was rather gloomy as if he were very angry about the situation he was in. Fortunately, the difficulties were about to pass, and he would pay them back double.

After watching Alex leave his house, the man in the blue beanie smiled at his wife. “I picked up a hat on my way back.”

His wife replied sadly, “But a thief came to our house, and we lost some clothes.”

Outside, Alex walked along the aisle toward the side exit.

There was a small alley that led to the Red Wolf Zone at the side exit. As long as he entered the Red Wolf Zone, Alex believed that he would be completely out of trouble with the crowd there.

In fact, he didn't find it very dangerous now. He was sure that he had already shaken off all the stalkers and monitors.

The reason he remained vigilant and high-strung was that he couldn't figure out how he had been exposed and targeted. He always hid himself behind layers of disguises like the very famous Matryoshka dolls in the Old World, hoping to place himself in an absolutely safe environment.

Before this, apart from having to take action personally and face the target, he had never encountered a situation in which an enemy had locked onto his position and almost entrapped him.

What's the problem? To the proud real Father—Alex—this was a question that dealt a heavy blow to his confidence and made him lose a lot of sense of security.

If he didn't figure out the answer to this question, such things would definitely happen again with no end. When the time came, Alex didn't think he could successfully escape again and again.

He was still human, and there were always limits.

After some thought, Alex still couldn't figure out what he had done wrong. He even suspected that the other party had chanced upon him by luck.

No, it can't be luck. I haven't been out during this period of time. Everyone else's memories have been modified. Even if those people are sufficiently lucky, it's impossible for them to know that I'm in Alpha Building without setting off the alarms... Even Elder Bouillon doesn't know my exact

location. I'm the only one who knows... It must be that some detail wasn't handled well, and I left behind clues that can be traced... I have to investigate it as soon as possible and nip the latent danger in the bud... As Alex thought coldly, he gripped the door handle and pulled it open.

He lowered his head slightly and leaned forward as he walked into the alley.

The only benefit from this experience was that the intense stimulation and tense atmosphere made him highly excited. He was no longer tired and had regained the absolute clarity he had lost for a long time.

At this moment, he felt a still human consciousness in front of him. It was unknown what it was doing.

Alex instinctively looked up, and his pupils abruptly dilated.

Shang Jianyao—who was wearing a gray camouflage uniform—stood in the middle of the alley. Beside him was a man with a bearing and characteristics similar to Alex's.

Upon seeing Alex, Shang Jianyao put on a pair of Old World-style sunglasses and smiled brightly. "Mr. Father, long time no see."

Further away in a corner that was shielded from bullets, a song sounded. "Hey, I really miss you..."

Chapter 377: 'Exchanging Blows'

To Father Alex, it was indeed considered a 'long time' since he met Shang Jianyao because they had previously encountered each other outside Weed City's Hunter's Guild. Shang Jianyao had also exhorted him to rest more and improve his sleep quality.

Unexpectedly, after many twists and turns, the two of them actually became opponents and officially met.

At this moment, this problem was the least of Father Alex's concerns. Instead, he was wondering how he was still intercepted by Zhang Qubing when he had clearly shaken off any stalkers and avoided the surveillance personnel above. He had even changed clothes.

This makes no sense! Could it be an Awakened ability that marks the target? Father Alex—who had dark eye circles—bent his back slightly and tensed up.

At the same time, he 'blurted' out, "How? How did you know that I would leave through this alley?"

Shang Jianyao—who was wearing sunglasses and holding his left hand tightly—smiled amidst the echoing song. "Mr. Father, have you forgotten that there's a smart bot in our team? He can install additional modules and modify himself to temporarily act as a small base station that covers what I wouldn't consider a huge range. As long as we determine that you are in Alpha Building, we can install cameras in many key areas. They can directly connect to his base station wirelessly, allowing him to review the surveillance footage and find your escape route in a timely manner.

"You should know that robots have far greater computational ability than us carbon-based humans. It won't take long for them to examine the footage frame by frame. Before you entered this apartment, we were already rushing over. After realizing that you weren't coming out any time soon, we decided to split the work and guard an exit each. "Therefore, you were unlucky to meet me, not that we chanced upon you."

Father Alex's expression changed slightly when he heard that. He felt like a combat style had exceeded his understanding, habits, and experience.

Shang Jianyao then smiled. "Times have changed, Mr. Father. Technology changes lives. The only flaw is that it requires a lot of money."

Upon seeing the less exhausted Father remain silent, Shang Jianyao continued, "It might not be a good thing to be too careful. You are overly careful, so much so that you missed the best opportunity to escape. Therefore, you have to remember this lesson in the future—if you still have a future..."

Shang Jianyao paused before explaining what he meant. "You shouldn't have found an opportunity to change and disguise yourself. If you entered the Red Wolf Zone from this alley in one go and turned into another street, we wouldn't have been able to catch up. Back then, we were still a long distance away from this apartment. This alley was already at the edge of the surveillance cameras, at the limits of Old Ge's temporary base station. Once you walked out of here, we would lose track of you. Unfortunately, you were too careful and wasted your most precious escape opportunity on changing clothes."

Upon hearing this, Father Alex suddenly looked up at Shang Jianyao's sunglasses. As a non-purebred Ashlandic, he had deep black eyes and a Red River name.

At this moment, tiny vortices surfaced in his pitch-black eyes that resembled the dark night. It was as though they could suck away the souls of those looking at him.

Almost at the same time, he strode forward as if he wanted to step past Shang Jianyao.

At this moment, Shang Jianyao seemed to have become a mud puppet as he stood there motionless.

“You are my servant.” Father Alex’s voice was deep and magnetic. It also had a strange, penetrating feeling as if it could pierce into the target’s soul.

Upon seeing that he was about to cross the obstacle, Father Alex’s spread arms suddenly stiffened. They felt like they had lost all coordination.

He—whose gait was already slightly unsteady—immediately staggered.

Shang Jianyao—who was standing blankly—had already turned his body, grabbed his shoulder, and slammed him into his knee.

With a gasp, Father Alex’s mouth opened, and his body bent like a shrimp.

Shang Jianyao then took off his sunglasses and showed the inner side of the pieces of paper to the real Father.

“Are you surprised?” he asked with a smile.

Father Alex’s pupils dilated as he couldn’t believe that he had made such a mistake. I didn’t even discover that I hadn’t established real eye contact! I actually began taking action without even confirming the preconditions of Hypnosis!

“Ah, right. I forgot to tell you that I made you believe that it’s not a good thing to be careful from the very beginning.” Shang Jianyao had an exaggerated expression.

The part about being too careful might not be a good thing was used as an inferential guide for Inference Clowning!

At this moment, everything in front of Shang Jianyao suddenly turned illusory. Something that looked like a reflection on the water surface shattered as a stone smashed into it.

He returned to the moment when he ‘reunited’ with the real Father.

What had just happened was a show that Father Alex had started—an improved version of Dream Journey!

Everything seemed to return to the past, but Father Alex had grasped the various responses Shang Jianyao would make.

No, there was still something different.

The sunglasses-wearing Shang Jianyao revealed a confused expression as if he couldn’t remember why he had come to this alley and who the human consciousness in front of him represented.

Upon seeing this, the corners of Father Alex’s mouth curled up slightly. His right hand—which had been hanging down—touched the glass bead ring on his left pinky.

This ring solidified Shepherd Bouillon’s Memory Tampering ability. This ability was only effective at a range of ten meters without the need to make eye contact.

This was actually a duplicate of Father Alex’s abilities, but he had still chosen such a ring when offered a reward. This was because it could allow him to secretly tamper with the other party’s memories while using Dream Journey.

The ring’s solidified memory tampering ability also covered a range five meters more than Alex’s.

In an Awakened battle, not to mention five meters, even one meter could lead to a watershed victory.

Therefore, even though wearing this ring added a certain abnormality to his self-awareness, Alex always carried it with him.

At such a critical moment, he didn't use Dream Journey for the ability to preview and determine the subsequent fight but to use this opportunity to hide his true goal. He wanted to close the distance and secretly tamper with Shang Jianyao's memories so that he would 'release' him!

While Shang Jianyao was in a befuddled state, Father Alex had already quickened his pace and rushed to the alley's exit. He was now certain that he would be liberated from danger the moment he escaped this area.

Suddenly, he had a thought and pounced to the side.

Bang!

Stone chips splattered, and a bullet hole appeared at the spot he had been.

Someone fired from afar—this came from Jiang Baimian!

At the same time, the confused Shang Jianyao smiled. He said to Father, "When did you have the illusion that I wasn't on guard? I've been quietly watching you tamper with my memories."

As he spoke, he released his tightly clenched left fist, revealing the green night pearl in his palm.

Destiny Pearl—the Destiny Pearl from DiMarco!

Shang Jianyao had been using the night pearl's power to monitor his memories and hide a portion of his key information!

The rolling Father's eyes suddenly froze when he heard that.

Shang Jianyao continued smiling. "I stalled for time by cooperating with your performance so that my companions could rush over."

He then stretched out his right hand and uttered his long-awaited line. "Mr. Father, are you going to fight me one-on-one or be ganked? A one-on-one involves you fighting each of us. A gank would involve us beating you up as a group."

At this moment, the speaker in a safe area was still playing the song: “Hey, I really miss you...”

Chapter 378: Choices

Father Alex ignored Shang Jianyao’s words. After tumbling to a corner that was out of Jiang Baimian’s sight, he immediately responded.

The strange accessory woven from black hair on his right wrist suddenly lit up as if it were on fire.

With the previous few shots’ help, he roughly grasped Jiang Baimian’s position and confirmed that she was within the Ring of Blindness’s range.

With the Ring of Blindness—which he named—Alex could sense human consciousnesses at that distance and lock onto the corresponding target.

In the blink of an eye, Jiang Baimian—who had climbed onto a tree—saw darkness. She couldn’t see anything.

Right on the heels of that, Father Alex’s eyes turned deep as he used the Awakened ability—Dream Journey—on Shang Jianyao again. But this time, his goal of using this ability wasn’t to preview the development or stall for time, nor was it to approach the target and tamper with his memories. Instead, he wanted to use this to produce a fake version of himself and hide his human consciousness.

He could then maintain Dream Journey’s effects and attract Zhang Qubing’s attention elsewhere while secretly escaping in another direction.

His Dream Journey could cover an area of more than 30 meters. It was enough for him to open up a safe distance and obtain a chance to escape.

This was his method of escape that he had carried out several times. Therefore, he began to suspect that he had been affected by a certain ability of Zhang Qubing’s as soon as he saw him.

He became very corny and unreasonable—he wanted to maintain his poise and swagger away instead of fleeing in a sorry state. Therefore, he chose to use Dream Journey to hide himself and

quietly approach Zhang Qubing, tampering with his memories so as to facilitate his leisurely departure.

If he had used his old methods previously, Father Alex felt that he should've already escaped his predicament.

The next second, Shang Jianyao sensed a human consciousness step past him and run toward the alley's exit.

Beyond the exit was the Red Wolf Zone!

He then took off his sunglasses and saw Father's back as he ran.

With Father's physique, Shang Jianyao seriously considered giving him a handicap of ten meters first.

At the same time, the real Father Alex secretly returned to the previous apartment along the route he had taken. He only dared to jog now, afraid that he wouldn't be able to maintain Dream Journey's effects.

Suddenly, his chest heated up as if he had sensed something. Without thinking, he pounced to the side and rolled.

Bang!

Another bullet flew over, sending rocks flying.

How can this be? Father Alex was inexplicably shocked. I was clearly still maintaining the Blind effect. Why was the sniper able to target me? Is the person still human? Could it be that a robot is hiding beside the target consciousness?

Father didn't have the luxury of time to think about it. Through his item, he maintained the effects of Dream Journey and Blind as he rolled and ran in a zig-zag manner in a mad dash for his destination.

During this process, he relied on the bodhi bead on his chest to sense the danger ahead of time and dodged in time several times.

For him—who was in poor physical condition—this was an indescribable journey of suffering.

Finally, the apartment's side door was a few meters away.

But at this moment, Father Alex's gaze froze again.

A silver-black robot in a dark-green military uniform rushed out of the door. The red glow in its eyes lit up as its fists exuded firmness and power. Genova—who had been assigned to the furthest exit—had also arrived!

Upon seeing this, Father Alex no longer had any wishful thinking. He gritted his teeth and raised his left hand.

The glass bead ring on his pinky suddenly emitted pure, bright light.

With this beam of light, the ring itself split into two. Among them, one ring was corporeal, just like before. The other ring became illusory and melted into the air bit by bit.

Genova actually ignored this scene and stepped past Father Alex to rush toward the alley's exit. The environmental information he had gathered told him that the real Father was fleeing in that direction!

All the electromagnetic signals around him were disrupted!

This was Father Alex's trump card for dealing with robots. He knew from Shepherd Bouillon that there was more than one or two Awakened at the Mind Corridor level who could affect electromagnetic signals.

This was actually a relatively common basic ability.

Shepherd Bouillon had informed him that after entering the Mind Corridor, Awakened would be divided into two 'factions' according to their respective domains. They would each obtain a type of basic ability.

These two basic abilities were Electromagnetic Signal Interference and Matter Interference. Awakened in the Last Man domain obtained the former.

At the same time, according to Shepherd Bouillon, powerful Awakened might be equipped with both abilities from exploring the Mind Corridor's depths.

Just now, Father Alex had completely 'burned' the ring that Shepherd Bouillon had given him. He had activated the remnant aura obtained from a Last Man domain Awakened at the Mind Corridor level, hoping to distort the various electric signals in the alley for a certain period of time.

This would reduce the ring to an ordinary item.

Without feeling the pinch, Father Alex quickened his pace and rushed to the side door of the apartment.

The next second, a howling wind blew past his ear. A figure rushed past him like they were in a race and blocked the door.

Shang Jianyao had returned.

This... Father had the urge to vomit blood.

Shang Jianyao didn't wear sunglasses this time. He turned around, held the Destiny Pearl in one hand, and waved his other hand.

At the same time, he scoffed. "Are you stupid? Gunshots keep sounding here. Can't I guess that the real you wants to escape in the opposite direction? With your physique, it's too difficult for you to climb the high walls. Therefore, there's only one answer..."

Father Alex naturally wouldn't tell him that he wouldn't have heard the gunshots outside the illusion if he wasn't affected by the sniper and couldn't focus on maintaining Dream Journey.

In the face of Shang Jianyao's punch, Father Alex subconsciously wanted to dodge and parry the blow. However, he had only raised his hands halfway when he stopped.

It was as if he had forgotten what to do.

At this moment, Father Alex also sensed that he might encounter fatal danger if he dodged to the right. This was clearly thanks to the distant sniper.

Why can she still aim? What did I do wrong? As Father Alex roared inwardly, he could only force himself to lower his body and dodge to the left.

Unfortunately, he was too slow. As if he had lunged forward, he used his face to meet Shang Jianyao's punch.

Thud!

Alex felt his head spin as he involuntarily spat out several bloodstained teeth.

After the gunshot, he staggered to his right as if he were flying.

Father Alex wasn't in the mood to care about the swelling on his face. He rolled the moment he landed, attempting to circle around Shang Jianyao and enter the apartment.

From the development at Wolf's Den, he could tell that his current enemies were too benevolent and kind. He believed that this was something he could exploit.

After entering the apartment, he planned on using hostage tactics if he couldn't escape.

Shang Jianyao didn't give the real Father a chance. He nimbly turned around and blocked Alex outside the door.

This also resulted in their eyes meeting.

The real Father instinctively used Hypnosis, causing deep and illusory vortices to appear in his eyes.

Shang Jianyao was immediately stunned, but he raised his hands as if he had another personality commanding him.

Unlike before, he had already stuffed the Destiny Pearl back into his pocket at some point in time. He held Ice Moss in one hand and United 202 in the other.

The two black muzzles were respectively aimed at Father's body and Father's left profile.

The right side was reserved for Jiang Baimian. This was something they had paid special attention to during training.

Upon seeing this, Father Alex couldn't help but feel vexed. I'm really stupid, really...

He clearly knew that the man opposite him was immune to Hypnosis to a certain extent. It would take five to ten-fold the normal time to affect him, but he couldn't help using Hypnosis just now.

This reminded him of Zhang Qubing's words—'are you stupid?'—after intercepting him. He suspected that he had been affected by the other party's abilities since then.

At this moment, he could sense that the right side was the most dangerous. If he stayed in place or turned left, he might be injured, but it might not be fatal.

He only had three choices.

As this thought flashed through his mind, Father Alex smiled contemptuously.

He chose the right. At the same time, he completely activated the bodhi bead hanging in front of his chest.

To Father, he would either fail to fend off the attacks and die on the spot or forge a path of survival. He definitely wouldn't accept the outcome of being captured.

His pride didn't allow him to do so, nor did he allow himself to land in the hands of a mortal.

Bang!

Jiang Baimian sensed the change in the target's bioelectric signal and squeezed the trigger.

The Orange rifle's bullet instantly hit the real Father, but there seemed to be an invisible barrier around him, blocking the bullet.

The barrier only lasted for a second before silently shattering. The bullet ultimately drilled into Father Alex's body.

Blood splattered amidst two other gunshots.

I'm ultimately not at the real Mind Corridor level... Alex collapsed as such a thought flashed across his mind.

After he fell to the ground, he saw Shang Jianyao quickly approach him and heard him anxiously shout, "You must hang in there."

While Father Alex was confused, Shang Jianyao took out the Destiny Pearl. "I haven't searched through your memories!"

Upon hearing this, Father felt greatly insulted. The next second, he saw himself in Shang Jianyao's eyes—an ordinary, heavily injured, and dying person at the mercy of others.

Chapter 379: Sense of Ritual

Shang Jianyao split into nine. With the Destiny Pearl, he quickly scanned the real Father's memories. Although he focused on recent matters, he still gained a rough understanding of the real Father's life.

After exiting Father's mind world, Shang Jianyao realized that this Anti-intellectualism Church Awakened—Alex—had already ushered in his final moment in life.

Father Alex didn't say a word. He quietly looked at Shang Jianyao above him and tried his best to maintain a contemptuous attitude.

Suddenly, he saw a hint of pity in Shang Jianyao's eyes.

Shang Jianyao asked, "Do you still remember your origins?"

How can I not remember? Father Alex scoffed inwardly and patiently waited for the grand melody of death's arrival.

His mother was a descendant of First City's aristocracy, and his father was an outstanding Ashlandic warrior. The two of them came together and had him.

As a result, he was chosen by Shepherd Bouillon because he had displayed intelligence and caution that exceeded his peers since he was young. He was abducted and groomed as the Anti-intellectualism Church's future backbone.

He didn't disappoint Shepherd Bouillon's expectations. He successfully Awakened during the ritual and obtained the final victory in the subsequent battle for the title of Father. He turned many Awakened in the same batch into his puppets.

After becoming Father, he planned and implemented many plans. Most of them succeeded and made him famous.

Ignoring Father's lack of response, Shang Jianyao kindly said, "Your childhood memories should've been distorted by Shepherd Bouillon. You aren't a noble descendant, nor are you of Red River ethnicity. You are the descendant of two Ashlandic slaves in the city. I guess Shepherd Bouillon changed this portion of your memories to make you arrogant and conceited, leaving behind obvious weaknesses so that he could control you better. In this regard, he did other forms of Hypnosis. In a sense, you are actually considered his puppet, a puppet with greater autonomy."

Father Alex's eyes instantly froze. With his experience in the field of memories, he immediately sensed some problems that he had neglected in the past when Shang Jianyao raised the matter up.

He almost never took the initiative to recall his childhood!

I'm only a puppet... I don't have noble blood... My parents were slaves... Father Alex kept repeating these words in his heart, and he was pushed to the brink of a mental breakdown.

He felt like his faith was about to collapse. Transcending mortals was the thing he was most proud of in his life.

Shang Jianyao put away the Destiny Pearl and added, “Don’t you find it strange that you haven’t been able to fuse with your inner self and enter the Mind Corridor? When you fought for the title of Father, you actually almost failed. However, Shepherd Bouillon might’ve felt that you were relatively easier to control and secretly helped you...”

I-I’m not even smarter than the other fake Fathers? Father Alex immediately felt the world crumble before him. His heart was filled with torment, and his vision began to fade.

He had entered a critical state.

Shang Jianyao said truthfully, “Actually, your intelligence is pretty good, but you’re too conceited. You don’t have any trustworthy helpers.”

As he spoke, he bowed and gave him sincere wishes. “May you study hard in your next life.”

With that said, he added, “Sigh, I originally wanted to hang you up and beat you up. But seeing you in this state, I’ve decided otherwise.”

Father Alex made a gasping sound in his throat as if he wanted to respond. He wanted to say: “It’s better if you hang me up and beat me up. There’s no need to pity me; that will only be an insult.”

But in the end, he didn’t say anything. With his eyes wide open, he took his last breath.

...

The ridiculously muscular city guard major and his colleague—Ducas and Cassiel—led a team of soldiers to a street near Hurst Apartments.

“Seriously, isn’t it just a kidnapping? Why did you get us to come over? Are all the Hand of Order members dead?” Cassiel looked around and grumbled.

The Hand of Order was equivalent to First City's police department. The highest-ranking officer was also called the Hand of Order. Under him were the city's enforcers, orderlies, sheriffs, and a large number of public security officers.

Ducas glanced at his colleague and coldly said, "It's not like you don't know the current situation. Even the slightest commotion in the Golden Apple Zone can easily make the Elders uneasy. Compared to the Hand of Order, our city defense forces' personnel and equipment are clearly stronger."

As he spoke, drones were searching the surroundings for clues.

Before long, a soldier led a few witnesses over.

"What happened?" Ducas asked.

A witness in his twenties quickly replied, "Sir, a robot kidnapped a man on the street and dragged him into that alley."

"Robot?" Cassiel blurted out in surprise. It's easy for a team with robots to earn money, but they had to kidnap or mug?

"Yes, a robot this tall!" The other witnesses echoed.

Ducas nodded slightly. "It seems like things aren't simple..."

...

In another street nearby.

Beside a mailbox near a coffee shop, a man with brown hair, blue eyes, and sculptured outlines had his hands in his pockets as he watched his subordinates busy themselves.

He was the Golden Apple Zone's Orderly Officer deputy, Konstanz. He was 1.87 meters tall and nearly 50 years old. His sideburns were a little white, but his figure was maintained well. Years added to his handsome looks, making him appear more mature and attractive.

This made him very popular among upper-class ladies.

“Sir, there was indeed a kidnapping, and he was very arrogant,” a public security officer reported to Konstanz.

Konstanz—who was wearing a thin black trench coat—nodded. “Are there any facial composites of the suspect?”

“Yes.” The public security officer handed over a piece of paper in his hand.

Konstanz took it and looked at it.

He realized that the kidnapper was a man in sunglasses. His face was covered in a beard, making him appear rugged and rash. However, Konstanz couldn't tell if he was of Red River ethnicity, Ashlandic, or mixed.

How dare he kidnap someone in the Golden Apple Zone... Konstanz muttered under his breath.

This was the area with the most surveillance cameras. Although it couldn't compare to the legendary Mechanical Paradise, it was enough.

Before long, Konstanz received a report and blurted out in surprise and anger, “What? The cameras in this area were destroyed at the same time?”

...

As they headed to the alley the case reporter had mentioned, the other Orderly Officer deputy of the Golden Apple Zone, Theodore, saw the person he didn't want to see—Sheriff Wall, who resembled a wall.

They had a conflict in the first year they entered the Hand of Order. Later, due to their backgrounds and abilities, nobody gained the upper hand of the other.

When Theodore was finally promoted and became the Orderly Officer's assistant, allowing him to rank higher than Wall, this fellow married the daughter of the newly promoted Elder, Gaius.

"Why are you here?" Theodore snorted.

Wall smiled and said, "That alley is under my jurisdiction. I have to come."

He looked at Theodore's wooden, immobile eyes and shook his head inwardly.

Other than this relatively obvious characteristic, Theodore had a medium build and ordinary looks with black hair and brown eyes. As an Orderly Officer deputy, he didn't have to wear a grayish-blue uniform at all times. He could choose clothes that he preferred.

Today, he was wearing a shirt, long pants, and a black vest.

Surrounded by public security officers, Theodore and Wall passed through an apartment and entered the alley with high walls that lined the sides.

Of course, they could also choose to circle in from both sides of the apartment, but that would be a waste of time.

After walking along the alley for a distance, a figure appeared in front of Theodore and Wall at the same time.

The figure wore very ordinary clothes, and his body was covered in blood. He quietly lay against the wall, no longer breathing.

His face had completely lost its luster, but his dark eye circles remained obvious. His eyes were wide open in indignation.

There was a wide trail of blood in front of him as if someone had dragged him to this spot.

There was also a piece of paper stuck to his chest. On the paper were two printed lines in the Red River language: "I'm Father.

“I’m guilty.”

Father... Wall and Theodore’s pupils dilated at the same time.

Chapter 380: Report

Theodore and Wall were no strangers to the name ‘Father.’

The assassination of Elder Sols had embarrassed the Hand of Order. The middle and upper echelons were so ashamed that they couldn’t raise their heads in front of nobles for a long time.

It wasn’t that they had never thought of capturing the cult’s elite, nor did they slack off. But no matter how they tried, they couldn’t find the real Father. The combination of Memory Tampering and Hypnosis allowed this Awakened—who had yet to truly grow to his full potential—to escape the scene like a drop of water returning to the sea. There was no way to lock onto him.

The Hand of Order had used many Awakened and used all kinds of methods, but they could only capture fake Fathers and ordinary puppets that couldn’t even be considered fake Fathers.

Today, they suddenly saw Father’s corpse.

The corpse was even arranged to look as if it were repenting. There was a piece of paper that admitted to being guilty plastered across its chest.

The knowledgeable Wall and Theodore doubted their eyes at this moment. Is it that easy to find the real Father and kill him?

After a few seconds, Wall muttered, “Could it be that it’s still a fake Father...”

Theodore’s eyes darted around as he turned his head and glanced at his colleague. “It’s impossible for the person who killed him not to confirm it. Since he dares to write it this way, he definitely has a high level of confidence.”

Wall admitted that Theodore made sense, but he was unwilling to say so. He muttered, “If I were the Anti-intellectualism Church’s Shepherd Bouillon, I would immediately introduce another Father and say that the one who died now is fake.”

Theodore coldly replied, “It’s not like we haven’t gathered the real Father’s fingerprints. Wouldn’t it be clear if we compare them?”

It was a clue left behind by the real Father in the assassination of Elder Sols. At the same time, there were also some other biological materials.

As he spoke, Theodore strode toward the corpse that was leaning against the wall with its head slightly lowered.

Wall followed closely behind.

Just as they approached, they saw two people on the ground around a bend in the alley.

These two people looked a little similar to corpses. There was also a piece of paper stuck to their chests respectively.

On the paper was the same sentence: “We are accomplices.”

“The fake Fathers were also captured...” Wall muttered in surprise.

Father has been wiped out by someone? Theodore looked at the two puppets before looking back at the corpse. He was momentarily at a loss for words.

He quickly thought of the Anti-intellectualism Church’s recent activity and the tense situation in First City. He immediately sneered and said, “Father seems to have offended someone or a faction he shouldn’t have offended.”

Wall quietly stared at the corpse for a while before slowly exhaling. “Quick, report this to Officer Delion and get him to confirm it with the specialists.”

Delion was the Orderly Officer of First City’s Golden Apple Zone and Theodore’s immediate superior. But due to this zone’s special nature, he was of the same rank as the city’s enforcers and only listened to the Hand of Order’s orders.

Similarly, if Theodore and Konstanz were transferred to another zone, they could directly become Orderly Officers. If they were willing to go to large settlements at the border, they could also become the highest-ranking officers that maintained a city's order.

Theodore didn't retort and nodded. "I hope it's the real Father."

...

After disguising, evacuating separately, and getting into the rented, crimson SUV in the distance, Long Yuehong asked in disbelief, "We really killed Father?"

"When he saw that he couldn't escape, all he hoped was for death." Jiang Baimian never felt the need to respect the dead. She scoffed and said, "Does he think we care about that? What we wanted was for him to die!"

Shang Jianyao echoed as well, "Once you join the Anti-intellectualism Church, your intelligence will become that of a nobody."

Long Yuehong heaved a sigh of relief and raised a question he was too embarrassed to ask. "Team Leader, why did we have to use a fake fire to force out the real Father? Actually, we can think of a way to blow up the water pipes here or block the sewers in Alpha Building. That way, the real Father—who has been suffering from chronic diarrhea—will definitely take the initiative to go downstairs and head to the public bathroom. It's not something he can hold in or have his puppet use the bathroom in his stead."

This time, it wasn't Jiang Baimian who was in charge of explaining but Bai Chen. "That will give the real Father plenty of time to disguise himself. Although wearing a pair of sunglasses in the middle of the day is more suspicious, he still has other ways to hide his relatively obvious characteristics. When the time came, it'd be very difficult for us to distinguish him based on his unsteady footsteps, inclination to lean forward, and staggering gait.

"Although not many people have such characteristics, there won't be only a handful. Only by using a fake fire can Father feel the urgency and not have the time to do anything further."

Disasters like floods and fires showed no mercy; it might be difficult for him to escape if he was delayed for even a second. Although the real Father felt that he had transcended mortals, he wouldn't imagine that he was immune to fire. It was impossible for him to be hypnotized or have his memories tampered with unless he had already become a mechanical monk.

Clap! Clap! Clap!

Shang Jianyao clapped for Bai Chen.

After the applause subsided, Bai Chen added, "It's not that there's no other way, but I don't agree with blowing up the main water pipe. Water is very precious."

At this moment, Jiang Baimian and Shang Jianyao nodded at the same time. They clearly thought so too.

"Which safe house are we going to next?" Long Yuehong raised a new question.

As Shang Jianyao shook the small bag containing his harvest, he firmly said, "Send a telegram. I want to tell my good brother, Xu Liyan, so that he doesn't have to worry about the real Father anymore."

"Yes, send one to Councilor Zhao as well. Follow the situation up with him to prevent him from making mistakes when communicating with General Phocas." When choices were amenable, Jiang Baimian always chose to be a good Ruin Hunter that tied matters up in a bow.

...

Weed City, Castellan Manor.

Xu Liyan had just woken up for an afternoon nap when he saw a trusted aide waiting outside.

"Castellan, there's a telegram for you." The aide handed over a piece of paper with both hands.

Xu Liyan took it and asked, "Who sent it?"

The aide secretly looked at the castellan's expression. "It's... It's from Zhang Qubing..."

Xu Liyan's forehead throbbed as he quickly read the paper in his hand.

This telegram had very little content and only informed him of one matter: “There’s no need for further worry. We’ve already eliminated the real Father.”

This... Xu Liyan was stunned. He had always felt that revenge on the real Father was a long-term and arduous goal. As for the Qian Bai Team, they had completed this matter not long after arriving in First City!

After quite some time, Xu Liyan muttered to himself, From the looks of it, they are also elites among the elites in Pangu Biology. They are in the upper echelons of all combat squads...

...

Weed City, Zhao Manor.

Zhao Zhengqi—who was vexing over how to deal with his second son—saw his eldest son, Zhao Yide, quickly walk in.

“Dad, a telegram from those people!” he said anxiously.

Zhao Zhengqi frowned. “Didn’t we end it all? Why are they sending a telegram over?”

He didn’t want to worsen things.

Zhao Yide gulped and said, “Th-they killed the real Father!”

“What?” Zhao Zhengqi couldn’t control his volume. He hurriedly took the telegram from his eldest son and read it a few times.

The real Father’s horror was something he had experienced from Elder Sols’s death and Weed City’s riot. It made him unable to muster the courage to fall out with the Anti-intellectualism Church completely.

But in just a few days, the Qian Bai Team had found the real Father—who was universally deemed to be difficult to find—and killed him.

Phew... Zhao Zhengqi exhaled and sighed. “Their abilities are terrifying, and their background isn’t simple either.”

They were actually not afraid of a behemoth like the Anti-intellectualism Church.

...

In the general’s residence, Phocas also received the information his subordinate had submitted.

“The real Father is dead?” The lion-like general couldn’t hide his smile. “This rat—who always likes to hide in the sewers—seems to have encountered its nemesis...”

In another spot, a figure violently threw the cup in his hand away and shattered it on the ground.

...

“Phew, I’m done.” Jiang Baimian exhaled.

“We haven’t reported it to the company,” reminded Bai Chen.

“That’s true.” Jiang Baimian nodded slightly and thought about how to write the telegram.

After a few seconds, the corners of her mouth curled up. “There’s no need to be so detailed. It’s better to be simpler.”

“In any case, the company won’t reward us for this matter.” Shang Jianyao agreed.

Long Yuehong actually found his words reasonable. He then heaved a sigh of relief when he saw Geneva nod gently.

Jiang Baimian quickly drafted the telegram to Pangu Biology. There were only four words: “Father has been killed.”