

## **Ad Infinitum 381**

Chapter 381: The Embarrassed Shang Jianyao

In a relatively high-end apartment in the Red Wolf Zone.

The fake Father—Sandel—switched on his computer as usual and browsed through a document.

As he had Hypnotized many people to do things for him, he was worried that he would forget a number of the personnel and key details and make mistakes that he shouldn't have. Therefore, the first thing he did when he returned was to record who he had Hypnotized, how he had Hypnotized them, what he wanted to achieve, and whether he didn't have to care about the subsequent matters.

Before learning to use a computer, he carried a small notebook with him at all times to jot down matters.

Now, he could only sigh with emotion: Computers are so convenient!

At an agreed time, he stood up and walked to the radio transceiver. He switched it on and tuned it to the corresponding frequency to see what instructions the Ruin Hunter team—which opposed the real Father—had.

Before long, Sandel received a telegram. He began translating the code with a heavy and worried heart.

Gradually, the telegram's content appeared: "We've already killed the real Father, Alex..."

Just as he translated the first sentence, Sandel's pupils dilated rapidly. The real Father is dead? He was killed by the Ruin Hunter team just like that? Are you lying to me? Are you sure it's the real Father?

As a fake Father, Sandel knew very well how terrifying and how meticulous the real Father was, making it very difficult to find him. Therefore, he had no confidence in being avenged. However, he couldn't take it lying down and wanted to give it a try.

Similarly, he didn't believe that the Qian Bai Team could finish off the real Father in a short period of time.

It was impossible!

But the truth overturned his beliefs and shattered his understanding.

For a moment, Sandel's emotions were mixed. He didn't know to be happy, worried, or confused.

After a while, he translated the rest of the words: "You are free; you can choose your future life. I hope you will turn over a new leaf. If we learn that you are back to your old ways, we will look for you, we will find you, and we will kill you no matter where you are in the Ashlands. It will be just like finding the real Father."

Upon seeing this, Sandel truly believed that the Qian Bai Team had indeed killed the real Father. Otherwise, they wouldn't have given up on him.

A few seconds later, muffled and slightly deranged laughter echoed in the room.

"Haha, dead, really dead... You aren't that great yourself, huh? Weren't you still killed by others?" Sandel laughed for a while until the corners of his eyes moistened.

He wiped his eyes with the back of his hand and felt relaxed. He no longer felt like he was carrying a boulder.

He had been fantasizing about the future for the past few days. It was to leave First City and live elsewhere after finishing off the real Father or confirming that there was no way to take revenge. It was best if that place was an area that the Anti-intellectualism Church had no influence over.

Sandel believed that with his abilities and intelligence, he could lead a good life anywhere as long as he didn't pursue the top of the pyramid.

His gaze returned to the paper and landed on the last sentence. For some reason, he couldn't help but shiver.

From his point of view, it was a waste not to use one's abilities when one had the ability. When using abilities, strictly distinguishing good from bad was an act that bound oneself.

He wanted to mock the Qian Bai Team for being too naive and actually warning him not to do anything bad, but he couldn't bring himself to laugh.

If it were a few minutes ago, he wouldn't have such a reaction. But now, he had to seriously consider the possibility that this warning could become fact.

Apart from his ridiculous self-esteem, Sandel had to admit that the real Father's abilities, intelligence, available resources, and hiding skills far exceeded his own.

It was precisely such a terrifying figure that seemed impossible to lock onto that was found by the Qian Bai Team in a matter of days before snuffing out his life.

As these thoughts raced through his mind, Sandel suddenly saw that he had downloaded a photo from the First City Public Network computer he was connected to.

He quickly focused his gaze and realized that there was a person in the photo.

This person was slumped against a wall, his head drooping. However, it revealed obvious dark eye circles and a bluish-white face. It was obvious that he had lost all life and was a corpse.

There was a streak of red on the ground in front of the corpse and a piece of paper stuck to its chest.

Two lines in the Red River language were printed on the paper: "I'm Father.

"I'm guilty."

I'm guilty... Sandel shivered again. For the first time in his life, he had the thought of being a law-abiding citizen.

...

Red Wolf Zone, 25 Stern Street.

Terrence sat in the living room with the curtains drawn and electric lights switched on. He looked at the person opposite him and said respectfully, “Hedonist, what made you specially visit me?”

The person opposite him unwrapped a piece of candy’s packaging and stuffed the candy into his mouth. “I happened to receive a piece of information and was in the area, so I came to visit you.”

This person seemed to be a Church of Spiritual Transcendence clergyman.

“What information is it?” the bloated Terrence asked curiously.

The person opposite him sucked the candy and said in satisfaction, “The real Father is dead.”

“...Really?” Terrence blurted out. Although he had never interacted with the real Father and had only been secretly affected once, he knew from various sources how difficult and troublesome this person was.

How could such a figure be so easily killed?

The person opposite Terrence smiled and sighed. “We’ve compared fingerprints and various biological materials. We’ve confirmed that it’s the real Father unless the person who assassinated Sols wasn’t him.”

“Who did it?” Terrence asked anxiously. Without waiting for the person opposite him to answer, an idea flashed in his mind. “I-Is it the Qian Bai Team?”

“I’m not sure.” The person opposite him peeled open a piece of new candy. “Currently, we can determine that there are at least three participants and a robot.”

“Robot... That’s basically them.” Terrence was shocked but also extremely glad. It was simply too wise for me to choose to cooperate a few days ago and not take revenge! Otherwise, someone else would be receiving the news that the Blackshirts’ second boss, Terrence, had been killed.

The person opposite him nodded. “That team isn’t simple. If we rope them in, we might be able to use them to teach those heretics a lesson. If those heretics seize power in First City, we will be in danger.”

Terrence was just about to nod when he suddenly heard the phone in the living room ring. He thoughtfully picked up the connected phone in the activity room and, as expected, heard Zhang Qubing's voice.

“The Anti-intellectualism Church's operations should be temporarily suspended for some time.” Shang Jianyao shared this information.

This is only natural... A real Father was inexplicably killed. As long as the Anti-intellectualism Church's higher-ups are normal, they will stop all operations and investigate the latent dangers to prevent the entire Church from being implicated... As Terrence criticized inwardly, he smiled and said, “I've already heard that the real Father died.”

On the one hand, he was hinting that he was well-informed. On the other hand, he wanted to get information out of Zhang Qubing.

“I had wanted to tell you myself.” Shang Jianyao felt a little regretful.

It really was your team... Terrence glanced at the person opposite him and nodded slightly.

At this moment, Shang Jianyao hesitantly said, “Th-there's something I need your help with.”

After receiving approval from the person sitting opposite him, Terrence asked enthusiastically, “What is it?”

Shang Jianyao laughed. “I knew we were brothers!”

He then lowered his voice and mysteriously said, “Well, here's the situation...”

Terrence listened very attentively.

Shang Jianyao maintained his mysterious tone. “We want t-to borrow some money from you.”

“...” Terrence almost suspected that he had heard wrong. The Qian Bai Team—who has just done something major—actually wants to borrow money from me?

...

In a safe house prepared by the Old Task Force.

“What did he say?” Long Yuehong asked Shang Jianyao and Jiang Baimian, who had returned from their trip.

Jiang Baimian was in a good mood and smiled. “I really didn’t expect you to stutter and feel embarrassed.”

Shang Jianyao immediately explained, “Even blood-related brothers have to square the accounts.”

Jiang Baimian didn’t answer and casually explained the situation. “Terrence said that he doesn’t have that much. There are very, very few people in First City who can afford to buy a manor in one go. But he will try to gather it from the Blackshirts’ boss and the Church of Spiritual Transcendence. If it really doesn’t work out, we can only think of another solution.”

Upon seeing that the transaction date with Lehman was drawing close, the Old Task Force actually came up with the idea to borrow money from Terrence in order not to choose one of the two options.

Having the authority earned from killing the real Father, it felt like they were charging others protection fees.

“I guess that’s all we can do.” Long Yuehong sighed.

At this moment, Jiang Baimian clapped her hands and said, “After finishing the trivial matters, we can discuss the matters in Father’s memories.”

Just as she said that, Shang Jianyao’s eyes widened. “Shouldn’t we get something delicious to celebrate first?”

“It’s not even dinner time yet,” Jiang Baimian snapped back angrily.

“We can have afternoon tea...” Shang Jianyao suddenly frowned before he could finish his sentence.

Genava analyzed Shang Jianyao’s facial expression and inquired before Jiang Baimian could.  
“What’s wrong?”

Shang Jianyao looked down at the black-haired accessory on his wrist and said with a heavy expression, “I don’t feel like I have an appetite.”

He then took off the accessory and placed it to the side.

“There it is again.” Shang Jianyao smiled. “The problem indeed lies with it.”

This item called the Ring of Blindness was one of the spoils of war they had obtained from the real Father, Alex.

As for the real Father’s other two extraordinary items, they seemed to have completely returned to normal due to excessive consumption. They were no longer magical.

Bai Chen thought for a moment before saying, “Apart from obtaining an ability, this item that has condensed an advanced Mind Corridor Awakened’s aura will also have a certain price attached to it?”

“Probably.” Shang Jianyao looked at Jiang Baimian with an expectant gaze for afternoon tea.

Jiang Baimian frowned and said, “But the Coward and Destiny Connection Pearl we previously obtained didn’t show such characteristics...”

Chapter 382: A Small, Small Price

“Maybe not every extraordinary item has an additional price?” Long Yuehong guessed the reason. Of course, he felt that there was another possibility—Shang Jianyao had deliberately not said anything back then.

Jiang Baimian shook her head. “In theory, no. Since such items are produced in the same way, they should conform to the same pattern.”

She wasn't too sure about this. After all, she had yet to figure out the essence of the Mind Corridor and Awakened auras.

"It's also possible that the price attached to Coward and Destiny Pearl is too small that Shang Jianyao neglected it." Genava gave his analysis results.

Upon hearing this, Shang Jianyao clenched his right fist and punched his left palm. He then said in a tone of enlightenment, "I understand why. The price attached to Coward and Destiny Pearl is nothing to me. It doesn't affect me at all."

Jiang Baimian listened quietly and had a new train of thought. As she tucked her hair behind her ear, she thoughtfully said, "The Destiny Pearl is from the Subhuti domain. We can basically determine that Shang Jianyao is in the Master Zhuang domain. I remember that certain prices in these two domains are very similar."

She then gave an example. "For example, mental problems."

As Long Yuehong vaguely understood something, Bai Chen nodded slightly. "DiMarco is very brutal, and his emotional state was very unstable. This might come from the price he paid, and this led to a serious mental problem."

"The Destiny Pearl is only formed from his remnant aura. Its abilities are inferior to his original abilities, so the price one has to pay will definitely be reduced significantly. Since Shang Jianyao is officially certified as a patient by a doctor—" Jiang Baimian voiced her judgment based on Bai Chen's analysis of DiMarco. "—perhaps for Shang Jianyao, that price might only be about two kilograms for a person weighing 75 kilograms. It's very difficult for people who don't pay attention to their own weight to sense it."

Long Yuehong weakly raised his hand. "What about Coward?"

"Maybe the additional aura's price is related to mental problems as well," Jiang Baimian speculated after some deliberation.

Her core idea was: "Shang Jianyao was ill enough, so much so that he neglected the price."



At this moment, Shang Jianyao recalled and said, “Back when I used Coward, I felt that my mental state was very good. The few of us had active thoughts, and we each pushed our characteristics to the limits and successfully deceived DiMarco.”

“...” Jiang Baimian was stunned for a second before she laughed involuntarily. “It seems like there’s no need to think about other possibilities.”

The price attached to Coward might be a split personality. This allowed the nine Shang Jianyaos to be like fish in water, thereby not showing any problems.

Shang Jianyao turned to look at the Ring of Blindness beside him and said with lingering fear, “It can actually make me lose my appetite.”

This item’s effect was to make a person lose their vision for a certain period of time and become blind. Its range of influence reached 130 meters.

Compared to the original version, its weakened version might not be able to work on multiple targets at the same time.

“An accurate description should be a desire for food...” Jiang Baimian thought for a moment and said, “This might be effective against certain Awakened in the Mandara domain.”

To eat or not to eat—that was an eternal question.

After ending the topic, Shang Jianyao took out the Destiny Pearl and pointed at it, which had dimmed significantly. “It probably can’t be used much longer—not more than ten times.”

“Try your best to save two to three uses for the main targets.” Jiang Baimian felt that it was a pity. The Destiny Pearl was really useful.

Their main targets were Oray’s granddaughter and grandson—Avia and Marcus.

Investigating the reason for the Old World’s destruction and the Heartless disease’s origins were their team’s primary mission. Eliminating Father was only to eliminate latent dangers and take revenge.

Upon mentioning their primary objective, Jiang Baimian looked at Long Yuehong, Bai Chen, and Geneva. “Father’s matter has been resolved. Next, we’ll be living a quiet and simple life. Yes, this is mainly to prevent the Anti-intellectualism Church’s crazy revenge.”

At this point, Jiang Baimian simply mentioned the information Shang Jianyao had dug out from Father’s memories. “Father has always been in charge of dealing with us because of the Anti-intellectualism Church’s habits. This can be seen as a test from the Anti-intellectualism Church’s higher-ups. If he can eliminate a latent danger like us, Shepherd Bouillon might consider removing his Hypnosis and returning his tampered memories to normal. That way, he will have a chance to enter the Mind Corridor.

“The point of what I’m making is that the matters we previously exposed are no longer in the Anti-intellectualism Church’s control after Father’s death. We don’t have to be too worried that they will use Wolf’s Den, Ugo Hotel, and those people and places to take revenge on us.”

“Doesn’t Father leave any paper records?” Long Yuehong asked cautiously.

“Yes, but he brings them with him. We obtained it all.” Jiang Baimian pointed at the bag beside the Ring of Blindness.

Inside were items that Father carried with him, including but not limited to: 75 Oray and 12 Drace worth of notes, 7 Cass coins, a meticulously made but very old wallet, a palm-sized notebook, five Ralph candies, a pack of Flagship cigarettes, a white mask without facial features, a Red River pistol, and nine bullets.

Jiang Baimian immediately added, “Shang Jianyao confirmed it through Father’s memories. He didn’t leave a backup record elsewhere.”

“That’s good, that’s good.” Long Yuehong heaved a sigh of relief.

Jiang Baimian smiled and changed the topic. “However, Shepherd Bouillon can read other people’s memories on a large scale without causing a commotion.”

This was information they had obtained from the fake Father, Guo Zheng. Part of fake Father Sandel and real Father Alex’s memories also proved this.

“In other words, Shepherd Bouillon should be able to determine that we did it by flipping through the memories of those streets’ residents.” Jiang Baimian consoled Long Yuehong when she saw his expression turn solemn. “Fortunately, I considered this in advance. When we evacuated, I made you pass through deserted and intersecting alleys so as to sever Shepherd Bouillon’s tracking.”

The cameras in those places had been hacked by Geneva.

After explaining the situation, Jiang Baimian concluded, “The Anti-intellectualism Church’s current focus is still on stirring up internal strife in First City. Furthermore, they aren’t a religious organization that can publicize their activities. They are currently being tracked by an unknown number of people. Therefore, as long as we reduce the frequency of going out and narrow down our range of activities, there won’t be any problems as long as we don’t directly bump into them.

“In addition, our hibernation is also to wait for First City’s situation to turn chaotic. When the time comes, we will have a chance to make contact with Avia and Marcus.”

Upon seeing her team members nod, Jiang Baimian clapped her hands and said, “We completed the operation at noon. Everyone must be exhausted. Let’s eat something before discussing the matters that appeared in Father’s memories. Heh heh, treat it as an internal celebratory feast.”

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

After Long Yuehong and the others replied, Jiang Baimian glanced at the fellow. “What will you do if I don’t give you additional servings?”

“I’ll play music,” Shang Jianyao replied sincerely. “I’m so hungry, so hungry, so hungry. I’m really hungry...”

As he spoke, he started singing.

Jiang Baimian quickly interrupted him and turned to ask Bai Chen, “What local delights are there in the Green Olive Zone?”

She had previously not bothered to ask about this.

Bai Chen replied calmly, “Fish—all kinds of cooking methods for fish. Fried fish, roasted fish, stewed fish, etc., etc.”

Long Yuehong was confused. “Can residents in the Green Olive Zone often eat fish?”

This didn’t match his understanding of lower-class citizen life.

Bai Chen glanced at him and nodded slightly. “Yes. This is because they eat fish from the Red River.”

Long Yuehong fell silent, not knowing what to say.

The Red River was seriously polluted. It had both high levels of radiation from the Old World’s destruction and the sewage from the upstream factory district. Therefore, there were certain problems with the fish inside. Bad mutations were common.

If such fish were to be eaten over a long period of time, all kinds of illnesses would definitely arise.

However, humans sometimes had no choice. They had to choose between starving to death in a few days or dying of an illness in a few years.

Bai Chen broke the short silence and said, “I remember a bakery named Dimichel. The rye bread it bakes isn’t bad. Although it uses rye, it’s not that hard or crude. It’s very fragrant and chewy.”

“Then, let’s have rye bread with coffee!” Jiang Baimian made the final decision.

Shang Jianyao smiled. “Celebrating Father’s death, T+1:28!”

“Celebrating Father’s death, T+1:29!” Genava very ritualistically mimicked Shang Jianyao.

Jiang Baimian’s eyes darted up as she sighed quietly.

Chapter 383: Enjoying a Moment of Peace

In a bath that was filled with white steam, Long Yuehong picked up a towel beside him and wiped the sweat from his forehead.

“First City’s citizens sure know how to enjoy themselves,” he sighed with emotion.

Here, even the lowest-ranking citizens could go to cheap bathrooms every few days as long as they could survive and earn a little extra money. There was no exception, be they men, women, old, or young.

This was more cost-effective than boiling water and showering at home.

Shang Jianyao—who was also soaking in hot water—spread his arms to the sides and placed them on the edge of the pool. He smiled and replied to Long Yuehong, “It’s not like you haven’t been in one when you were young.”

Inside Pangu Biology, most employees had no place to shower at home. They could only go to the public bathroom, which was filled with showers.

But children under the age of three didn’t need to care about such things. They could boil a pot of water at home, get a basin, and adjust the temperature before throwing the child in for washing.

“I have no impression of that at all,” Long Yuehong said honestly. “If it weren’t for the fact that I still see children bathing in basins, I would’ve doubted that I had such an experience.”

After finishing off the real Father, Jiang Baimian specially brought Shang Jianyao, Bai Chen, and Long Yuehong to a relatively large bathhouse in the Red Wolf Zone to reward the entire team.

Shang Jianyao ignored Long Yuehong’s answer and sighed. “Unfortunately, Old Ge can’t soak in it.”

Although this robot was waterproof, it couldn’t keep soaking in hot water.

“What suits him is a pool of engine oil, but that’s too extravagant,” said Long Yuehong with a smile.

After taking a steam bath, he felt relaxed all over. Even his mind was less tense.

Therefore, he casually said, “I wonder how the Church of Spiritual Transcendence will deal with Cynthia... Actually, they can find a middleman to directly reveal the information to Superintendent Alexander and make him vigilant. This way, they might even establish a relationship with this big shot.”

Shang Jianyao leaned his head back slightly and smiled. “They really should hire you as a consultant.”

Long Yuehong suddenly felt a little nervous and asked unconfidently, “Is there a problem?”

Shang Jianyao glanced at him. “What if Alexander and Cynthia are in cahoots?”

“That’s true...” Long Yuehong thought for a moment and realized that he couldn’t rule out this possibility. In that case, the Church of Spiritual Transcendence would be exposed and targeted.

Shang Jianyao smiled and said, “If it were me, I would find an opportunity to invade First City’s radio station and television station. I would then bring the radio announcer under control and play a piece of news on loop: Attention, attention. Cynthia is a Church of Paragon Desire member and is in cahoots with the Anti-intellectualism Church. She’s currently looking for an opportunity to establish contact with Superintendent Alexander.”

As he spoke, he revealed an eagerness to try.

Long Yuehong imagined the scene Shang Jianyao described and couldn’t help but laugh. “In that case, Superintendent Alexander and Cynthia have to maintain sufficient distance regardless of what relationship they have.”

“Actually, we can also fabricate some news of romance between him and Cynthia and link him to the Church of Paragon Desire. It will make all the citizens who see and hear the news despise and spurn him.” Shang Jianyao placed his right hand in the water and patted his thigh. “Unfortunately, that newly-promoted Elder—Gaius—didn’t hire the two of us as consultants. Otherwise, he would’ve succeeded in leading the Reformists’ coup.”

“Why am I included?” Long Yuehong subconsciously asked.

Shang Jianyao said seriously, “I’m in charge of coming up with bad ideas, and you’re in charge of eliminating the wrong ones.”

As Shang Jianyao had admonished even himself, Long Yuehong was momentarily at a loss for words.

Feeling that he was done with soaking, he turned his body around in embarrassment and crawled out of the bath. He then picked up the towel beside him and tied it around his waist.

“You have to be confident.” Shang Jianyao educated Long Yuehong sincerely. Then, he calmly got out of the bath, picked up the towel, and walked all the way to the showers.

After cleaning themselves, he and Long Yuehong put on their bathrobes, buckled their belts, and walked into the buffet restaurant on the first floor.

The food here couldn't be considered a spread, but there was no lack of bread, bacon, fried fish, vegetables, sausages, and macaroni.

Jiang Baimian and Bai Chen had also taken a bath. They coiled their hair, wore bathrobes, and picked out food to place on their trays.

Jiang Baimian sighed with emotion when she saw Shang Jianyao and Long Yuehong enter. “Why do I feel that 1 Oray per person is a very good deal?”

Long Yuehong had never seen a woman in a bathrobe after she took a shower. He was a little embarrassed to look up.

“Unfortunately, I can't come every day. Otherwise, I will make the boss go bankrupt with my eating.” Shang Jianyao casually picked up a tray.

He then mocked Long Yuehong. “You won't be able to see where the food is if you continue that!”

Jiang Baimian felt that it wasn't a good idea to tease Little Red in this regard. She smiled and changed the topic. “Let's sit separately later. Otherwise, I'm afraid the boss will include me in the future blacklist.”

“That's right, that's right.” Long Yuehong found an opportunity to counterattack.

At this moment, Bai Chen suddenly asked Long Yuehong a question. “If you face a female enemy in the future and she suddenly takes off her clothes, will you be embarrassed to watch and miss the opportunity to attack?”

“Uh...” Long Yuehong felt that no female enemy would do such a strange thing.

Jiang Baimian replied on Long Yuehong’s behalf. “The process of undressing is enough for Little Red to kill her eight times.”

They stopped chatting and continued choosing their food separately.

After lunch, the four of them entered a lounge. They each occupied a recliner and covered themselves with a thin towel before falling asleep.

“This is called enjoying a moment of peace...” Jiang Baimian sighed in satisfaction.

Nobody replied.

As the four of them were in a state of reverie, they heard chatting from elsewhere in the lounge.

“The masseuse upstairs is very good. You can give it a try next time.”

“Is the massage you mentioned proper?”

“Of course. I haven’t been sleeping well recently, and I’ve always had nightmares. I fell asleep shortly after the massage.”

“Heh heh, you couldn’t sleep well because you had something on your mind?”

“No, I encountered a terrifying mutated creature when I passed by the Green Olive Zone some time ago. It scared the bejesus out of me... Sigh, how many years has it been since the New Calendar? Why are there still mutated stray animals in the city?”



“It might’ve slipped in from outside the city. As you know, the city defense forces can only defend against people and not these things. Oh right, what does it look like? Should we report it to the Public Security Department in case we encounter it again and get injured?”

“It’s very similar to a cat—no, like a baby leopard. Its entire body was blood red as if it didn’t have any skin. Its tail was like a scorpion, and there were white spikes on its shoulders. Oh right, it had four ears...”

Shang Jianyao opened his eyes and sat up.

At the same time, Jiang Baimian and the others had similar reactions.

As they looked at each other, Shang Jianyao excitedly mouthed: Xiaochong!

The mutated creature described by the person was very similar to Xiaochong’s pet—Slumber Cat or Ghost Cat!

...

In the lobby of First City’s Hunter’s Guild.

Long Yuehong—who had disguised himself—asked casually, “Do you think Team Leader and Shang Jianyao can find Xiaochong?”

The Old Task Force was now acting separately. Long Yuehong and Bai Chen went to the Hunter’s Guild to gather information. Jiang Baimian and Shang Jianyao went to the Green Olive Zone to find Xiaochong, Nightmare Horse, and Slumber Cat.

As for Genava, it was temporarily inconvenient for him to go out because he was too eye-catching. After all, the news that a robot in the Golden Apple Zone had kidnapped a man was rather terrifying.

“Difficult,” Bai Chen replied simply.

The Green Olive Zone was much larger than the Golden Apple Zone. The permanent residents and registered residents numbered more than a million. It was almost impossible to find Xiaochong, who had the intention to hide.

He wasn't like Father, who would take the initiative to do certain matters and leave behind certain traces. He would only stay at home and play games.

"It's quite easy to be seen and remembered if the Nightmare Horse enters the city," Long Yuehong muttered.

At this moment, he was holding a bag of documents. Inside was some of the information about the Anti-intellectualism Church obtained from Father's memories.

In this regard, Father actually didn't know much. This was because the Anti-intellectualism Church's style was that they were each in charge of their own businesses, and applications for help needed permission from the higher-ups. Therefore, Father only knew the matters under his charge and some of the matters related to Shepherd Bouillon.

In his memories, Shepherd Bouillon's immediate subordinates had code names such as Father, Doctor, or Trashman. However, they rarely contacted each other. Nobody knew what the other was doing.

As for Shepherd Bouillon, Father couldn't remember him either. Only when he encountered him would he come to a realization and recover his corresponding memories.

Like the fake Father, he only had an impression of Shepherd Bouillon's croaking voice that sounded like a result of an unrecovered injury. However, Jiang Baimian suspected that this was a fake characteristic that Shepherd Bouillon had deliberately created because he had concealed everything else except this one.

The real Father actually thought the same.

Therefore, the more valuable parts in Father's memories were the matters he was in charge of and the situation of his immediate subordinates. The Old Task Force had sorted them out and planned on mailing them to First City's Hand of Order. As was customary, they didn't leave their names when doing good deeds.

At the same time, through confirmation using the real Father's memories, the Old Task Force was completely certain that the Anti-intellectualism Church's next target was General Phocas. However, the real Father was only a deputy in this operation when assisting Shepherd Bouillon. He didn't grasp the complete plan.

As they spoke, Bai Chen and Long Yuehong went up to the second floor and saw the old man—Friedrich—who had previously received them.

Friedrich—who was wearing a black robe—glanced at them and smiled. “I almost didn't recognize you.”

“We realized a few enemies were in First City,” Bai Chen explained calmly.

Friedrich nodded and didn't ask any further. He smiled and said, “There are clues to the person you previously commissioned us to find. A Ruin Hunter saw him.”

Han Wanghuo has been found? Long Yuehong was pleasantly surprised.

Chapter 384: Black Street

Bai Chen believed in the Hunter's Guild's credibility in this regard and didn't question it. She directly asked, “Where was he?”

“Antanna Street.” Friedrich said a name.

Bai Chen was no stranger to this. Antanna Street was synonymous with the black market in First City.

It and its surrounding streets hid countless wanted criminals, illegal clinics, smugglers, slave traders, desperadoes, and gang members. First City had a saying: “Over there, you can buy any contraband as long as you have enough money.”

Although this was exaggerated, it was enough to indicate the characteristics of Antanna.

For a gang like the Blackshirts, they had a second boss who was in charge of Antanna's business. His status was higher than Terrence's in the organization.

Upon seeing Bai Chen and Long Yuehong silent, Friedrich added, “A Ruin Hunter went to Antanna Street to get a single-person rocket launcher and ended up encountering him. If the portrait you gave me is right, it should be him. At least the color of his eyes is memorable—it’s very similar to some snakes.”

“I’m just wondering why he’s in Antanna Street,” Bai Chen replied.

Friedrich shrugged and chuckled. “Everyone has a reason for being at Antanna Street.”

This was the famous saying credited to First City’s former Chief Hunter.

“I believe in the guild’s credibility. We will pay the Ruin Hunter.” Bai Chen had never had the habit of being excessively garrulous.

As Friedrich nodded slightly, he glanced at Bai Chen and Long Yuehong.

He laughed. “Where’s your robot? It didn’t follow you this time?”

He smiled meaningfully as if he had guessed something.

This... By not getting Old Ge to follow us, it will arouse the suspicion of those who have seen us before? Fortunately, Father’s death is a good thing for First City. The officials won’t carry out intense investigations... Long Yuehong was momentarily speechless.

Bai Chen calmly said, “We’re a large team. It has other things to do.”

She deliberately used ‘it’ in the Red River language.

“The information you registered indicates...” Friedrich stopped short.

Bai Chen glanced at him. “There’s not much real information on it. Maybe we have a hundred-odd people behind us, or even a thousand.”

She was telling the truth. Pangu Biology was the Old Task Force’s strong backer.

Friedrich smiled casually. “In the past two days, teams with robots have been questioned. You can also fill in a form so that we can explain to the Hand of Order. Heh heh, I think there’s a saying among Ashlandics that makes sense. People have to bow their heads when under the eaves of others.”

As Qian Bai and Gu Zhiyong opposite him were Ashlandic, Friedrich didn’t use a similar Red River proverb—‘a jackal by a lion’s side can only serve it.’

He casually handed over two forms. On them were questions like name, age, the number of members in the team, the purpose of coming to First City, where they lived, where they had been, and what they had done in the past few days.

When it came to providing fake information, everyone in the Old Task Force had undergone professional training.

Long Yuehong watched Bai Chen fill in the form as he filled his. He almost indicated that he was a woman.

When she wrote down the number of team members, Bai Chen’s pen flew. After October Xue and Zhang Qubing were the names of Lei Yunsong, Wang Beicheng, Lin Feifei, and others.

It was obvious that it was a large Ruin Hunter team.

Long Yuehong held in his laughter and copied the answer seriously.

Bai Chen—who had written many names except Genova’s—briefly described the first few days according to the previous team discussion. This included but wasn’t limited to visiting City Hall to complete the manor’s settlement and visiting the injured who they had previously treated.

This was actually something they had done, but they had deliberately made the exact timeline vague, making the team’s schedule appear packed. It was obvious that they had no time to deal with the real Father.

Friedrich took their forms and casually scanned through them. His mouth suddenly opened, and he almost couldn’t close it.

“You guys earned a manor in just a few days of entering the city?” asked the slightly grizzled elder in surprise. He had also been a Ruin Hunter in the past and had done well. He was very capable, but he had never earned a manor so quickly from a short-term mission!

If such things happened two or three more times, he wouldn't even need to take on his guild post in his advanced age. Of course, there was also a reason why he couldn't stay idle.

“The employer is relatively generous, and the mission was very dangerous,” Bai Chen explained simply.

In any case, the matter regarding the Zhao family manor wasn't handled by the Hunter's Guild. She could say whatever she wanted.

Friedrich fell silent for a few seconds before laughing self-deprecatingly. “Why didn't I encounter such a good employer when I was young?”

“Scare and shock him first, and things become easier.” Bai Chen sneered without a smile.

This made Long Yuehong suspect that Little White had also been infected by Shang Jianyao.

“Good idea.” Friedrich nodded and put away the two forms. “You can leave now.”

After leaving his office, Bai Chen thoughtfully said, “It seems like Han Wanghuo didn't become a Ruin Hunter...”

Long Yuehong habitually wanted to ask why, but he understood Bai Chen's judgment after some thought.

If Han Wanghuo was a Ruin Hunter, he definitely would've come to the guild's lobby even if he didn't form a team and acted as a loner. With his undisguised state, he wouldn't have been discovered only by chance encounters at Antanna Street.

“Maybe he found another job?” Long Yuehong guessed.

Bai Chen nodded. "Maybe the job is around Antanna Street. We can go there later."

Antanna Street was actually close to the pier, but it was further west than the Wolf's Den, almost in the vicinity of the Factory Zone. The people coming and going there were from all walks of life, and the roads led in all directions. It was very suitable for escaping. If it really didn't work out, one could jump into the Red River and gamble on their luck.

This section of the Red River Zone was seriously polluted. There were many mutated fish, and there was no lack of them that grew teeth and loved flesh. They were numerous and fearless. Once someone encountered them in the water, they would be doomed unless they had special abilities or the corresponding equipment.

...

In a narrow alley at the Green Olive Zone.

There were many houses on both sides of the street. Bamboo poles, wooden poles, and all kinds of clothes were being sunned. They blocked out the sunlight, making the environment appear rather gloomy.

After ending the questioning of the surrounding residents, Jiang Baimian sighed and said, "None of them saw Slumber Cat."

They were now acting as a Ruin Hunter team that was searching for a mutated creature.

In order to obtain cooperation and not pay, Jiang Baimian deliberately described the Slumber Cat as very dangerous and capable of eating humans.

In a sense, she was right. The Slumber Cat's actual danger exceeded her description.

Shang Jianyao nodded and said, "From the looks of it, the Ghost Cat happened to pass by on a stroll."

He still wanted to use the name he came up with for the mutated creature.

Jiang Baimian didn't refute Shang Jianyao's guess and followed this train of thought. "Every animal has a relatively fixed area of activity. If it isn't affected by external forces, it should wander around its territory. Let's expand our range and search the surroundings and question people."

Jiang Baimian implied that the Slumber Cat lived in Xiaochong's room and that it shouldn't be too far from here.

Of course, she made the judgment based on the habits of ordinary animals. Although Pangu Biology's research showed that most mutated creatures followed this pattern, the differences brought about by Xiaochong could result in abnormal phenomena.

"Alright." Shang Jianyao was rather enthusiastic.

The two of them—who had disguised themselves—expanded their search range. They stopped different passersby on the surrounding streets and knocked on different doors.

Unfortunately, it was daytime. Most people in the Green Olive Zone were busy, and there were very few targets they could ask.

As she walked, Jiang Baimian suddenly found the street familiar. She felt like she had been here—she had even measured and observed it before.

She looked around and found the scene in her memories. She smiled and said, "Aren't we almost reaching Ugo Hotel?"

After circling around, they returned to an alley near Labe Street. This was also an area they had traversed several times when familiarizing themselves with the terrain.

"We can ask the boss. He might've seen it before," Shang Jianyao said with great anticipation.

The Old Task Force members unanimously agreed that Boss Ugo wasn't simple.

Jiang Baimian was just about to respond with a smile when her expression suddenly froze. She frowned and fell silent for a few seconds before saying, "I want to make a guess, but don't be angry. I know that Xiaochong is your good friend. I'm not finding fault with him; I'm just making a guess based on the phenomenon and identity."



Shang Jianyao smiled. “When have I ever been angry?”

He then became serious. “Speak.”

Jiang Baimian looked at Ugo Hotel and deliberated before saying, “Could the Heartless outbreak in these streets be related to Xiaochong?”

In her heart, Xiaochong was suspected to be the King of the Heartless!

Chapter 385: Slamming Through

Shang Jianyao looked ahead and smiled. “Actually, I have such suspicions as well. Therefore, I want to find him and keep an eye on him.”

“With our team’s abilities, we might not be able to accomplish something like that.” Jiang Baimian didn’t let killing Father get to her head. She solemnly warned him, “If it weren’t for the mysterious powerhouse—Du Heng—scaring Xiaochong away back then, it’s still unknown what kind of outcome we would’ve ended up in.”

Shang Jianyao nodded. “I plan on letting him understand through reasoning while moving him with emotion.”

Are you sure this will work? For some reason, Jiang Baimian’s mind was filled with certain scenes from the Old World drama serials. Among them was a ‘mother-in-law making a scene while wailing for her son to get a divorce.’

Of course, the scene Jiang Baimian imagined was still different from the original episode. For example, the mother-in-law was played by Shang Jianyao while Xiaochong was the son in her mind.

As they spoke, the two of them walked to Ugo Hotel.

To this day, they still had three rooms reserved here—they weren’t stingy when it came to setting up safe houses considering the large sum of money they had for their living expenses.

After passing through the hotel's door, Shang Jianyao and Jiang Baimian saw that there was nobody at the front desk. The door to the hotel owner's room behind it was tightly shut.

They were already accustomed to this. They looked at each other and nodded.

Without needing words, they easily understood what the other party meant. One confirmed that there was human consciousness in the room, and the other confirmed that there was a medium-large creature inside.

The two of them approached the front desk and patiently waited.

As she waited, Jiang Baimian heard heavy breathing and a beast-like roar of pain. She touched her metal cochlear implant and looked at Shang Jianyao in surprise.

She remembered that with her hearing, she had to circle around the front desk and walk to the hotel owner's room before she could hear such sounds. Now, she could hear it from beyond the front desk.

"It's a little intense this time." Shang Jianyao's evaluation confirmed Jiang Baimian's suspicions.

Jiang Baimian cast her gaze back at the room and muttered to herself worriedly, "Will there be any danger?"

"Shall we go in and take a look?" Shang Jianyao suggested.

If the disease was truly difficult to resolve, the earlier they discovered him and sent him to the hospital, the higher the chance of saving him.

Jiang Baimian's eyes flickered slightly. "Wait another minute."

She was worried that rushing in rashly wouldn't end up saving the life of the hotel owner—Ugo—but expose his secret.

"Alright." Shang Jianyao circled around the front desk and came to the door of the room. He assumed a posture, prepared to slam open the door when the time came.

Jiang Baimian followed behind him and also made the necessary preparations.

Time ticked by. Not only did the heavy panting and beast-like roars in the room not subside, but they also became more and more frequent and intense as if some kind of horror was brewing.

Crack!

The sound of many things being swept to the ground sounded.

Jiang Baimian glanced at Shang Jianyao and nodded slightly. She meant that they could take action.

Although there were still 17 to 18 seconds left before the minute was up, the commotion inside made her feel that they couldn't wait any longer.

Shang Jianyao—who was prepared—lowered his shoulder and immediately slammed into Ugo's wooden door, smashing it against the side wall.

With a clang, Jiang Baimian saw the situation in the room.

This was a standard one-bedroom apartment with no additional furniture. Needles, still-burning candles, many ropes, and old knives were scattered on the cement floor.

The tanned Ugo was standing in front of the bed with his upper body naked. There were whip marks on his body.

The whip was in his right hand.

He sensed a commotion at the door and turned around. His eyes were turbid as he lost what made him human. It was as though he had become a beast.

At this moment, the first thought that surfaced in Jiang Baimian's mind was: Heartless disease! Ugo has contracted the Heartless disease!

The next second, she smelled the thick stench of sweat that filled the air. It was a special smell produced by the burning of candles, the stench emitted by the toilet bowl, and all kinds of odors that wouldn't be so obvious usually.

Jiang Baimian felt that her sense of smell was almost comparable to a canine's. This made her feel disgusted, and she wanted to vomit out the remaining food and gastric acid in her stomach.

She then saw Shang Jianyao rush out and charge at the hotel owner, Ugo.

He's immune to such a state because of his mental problems? Jiang Baimian was a little surprised.

Just as this thought flashed through her mind, Shang Jianyao vomited. Furthermore, due to the close distance, the mixture of yellow and green sprayed all over Ugo.

Ugo—whose eyes were turbid and had a warped face—subconsciously wanted to dodge, but he couldn't. His entire body seemed to stiffen for a second.

Shang Jianyao seized the opportunity to turn his body and punch out, hitting the spot behind his ear with a bang.

Thud!

Ugo fainted and collapsed to the ground.

Jiang Baimian then smelled the sour stench of vomit. It was so intense and exaggerated that she finally couldn't control herself. She turned her body and vomited by the door.

After vomiting, she realized that her sense of smell had returned to normal. Although the smell of vomit was still ever obvious, it was no longer unbearable.

“He became a Superior Heartless?” Jiang Baimian frowned and approached Ugo—who was covered in vomit. The Heartless disease has begun erupting in these streets again?

Shang Jianyao fell silent for a moment before saying, “Very similar.”

“But what’s with the whip in his hand and the marks on his body?” Jiang Baimian looked confused. After a careful inspection, she discovered bloody needle holes, burn marks covered in a layer of wax, and old knife scars on Ugo’s body.

Shang Jianyao said seriously, “He wanted to light candles to make clothes, but he’s too clumsy.”

“Can he be so stupid that he covers his entire body in injuries?” Jiang Baimian muttered. “Does he have masochistic tendencies?”

“He’s using pain to suppress something?” Shang Jianyao immediately made the connection.

This time, Jiang Baimian didn’t retort and nodded slightly. “That’s possible.”

She paused and said, “Don’t be in a rush to find the sheriff. Let’s wait for Ugo to wake up and see what changes will happen.”

She felt that she could deal with a single Superior Heartless, not to mention that she had Shang Jianyao with her.

Shang Jianyao agreed tersely as if that was an idea he came up with.

More than a minute later, under the duo’s ‘help,’ Ugo’s eyes twitched twice as his eyelids slowly opened.

To Jiang Baimian’s surprise, the pair of light-blue eyes she saw was no longer turbid, only a little bloodshot.

The focus in Ugo’s eyes quickly returned. His eyes reflected the disguised Shang Jianyao and Jiang Baimian.

He suddenly sat up. Ignoring the filth on his body, he anxiously asked, “Who let you in?”

Jiang Baimian didn’t answer; instead, she asked, “Did you just contract the Heartless disease? You completely lost your mind and wanted to attack us.”

She used this sentence to hint that Ugo had opened the door himself. This wasn't to deceive him but to lighten the mood. In any case, Ugo would know the truth when he checked the door later.

Ugo's expression gradually turned gloomy. He didn't answer immediately and slowly crawled to his feet.

Ugo looked down, observed his condition, and fell silent for a few seconds before saying, "This isn't the Heartless disease; it just resembles it a little."

"It's more than a little." Jiang Baimian mercilessly poked holes in Ugo's excuse.

She originally didn't want to do so, but Ugo's condition resembled the Heartless disease in almost every way. As the Old Task Force's team leader, she felt the need to ask about it in the interests of her personal and collective goals.

At this moment, Shang Jianyao suddenly said in a whimsical tone, "Is this your price? You used the Heartless disease to exchange for abilities?"

"I'm not a fool." Ugo denied his guess.

He fell silent and looked around. Upon seeing that Jiang Baimian and Shang Jianyao had no intention of retreating, he could only add, "Since you've seen it, I won't have to hide anything. I'm an Awakened. The price I paid was 'rationality.' This resulted in me occasionally showing signs of only having biological instincts. It makes me look like I've contracted the Heartless disease. I was previously able to control myself to a certain extent and quickly relieve the situation. However, I might've suppressed it too many times. This bout was especially intense."

Shang Jianyao curiously asked, "Why did you choose rationality?"

Ugo glanced at him and coldly said, "This world is filled with pain, and so is life. What's the point of being rational?"

"Impressive." Shang Jianyao clapped.

What a ruthless person... Jiang Baimian added inwardly. She then thoughtfully said, "Could this be the Heartless disease's essence? The brain that's responsible for rationality goes awry, leaving the

person with only biological instincts. The difference is that your rationality is only suppressed and can be recovered while theirs has completely disappeared.”

“It’s not just about having biological instincts, but they also suffer from atavism. Their physiques, skills, and talent are enhanced.” Ugo didn’t answer and only raised something that Jiang Baimian’s hypothesis couldn’t explain.

Jiang Baimian tersely acknowledged his words and fell into deep thought.

At this moment, Ugo looked down at the vomit on his body and in the room. He calmly said, “If there’s nothing else, I’ll take a shower first.”

As a citizen who grew up in First City, the habit of washing things that were dirty was ingrained in his genes.

Jiang Baimian smiled apologetically and led Shang Jianyao out of Ugo’s room.

Thud!

The door closed in front of them.

Shang Jianyao looked at the wooden door with a pained expression. “What a pity. All that food I ate at noon was for nothing.”

Jiang Baimian didn’t continue the topic that would easily make her nauseous. She thought for a moment and said, “Ugo always says that there’s pain everywhere. The world is filled with pain, and life is also filled with pain. It sounds a little religious. He’s a member of a secret religion?”

“Dawn’s Morning Star?” Shang Jianyao immediately raised a possibility. This was a guess made from Ugo’s abilities.

“It doesn’t feel religious.” Jiang Baimian shook her head. “The focus of Dawn’s Morning Star is to fear and utilize dreams.”

Chapter 386: Aisha

Shang Jianyao thought for a moment and came up with the 'best' suggestion. "Let's ask him directly later."

"..." Jiang Baimian deliberated for a few seconds. "Let's forget it. What if it's a secret religion that can't be known by others? We have to respect the privacy of others."

Shang Jianyao's train of thought had already run off in an unknown direction. He continued, "That religion's ritual is to whip oneself, drip oneself with candle wax, prick oneself with a needle, and cut oneself with a knife?"

Jiang Baimian felt that something was amiss the further he went. "Why does it feel strange..."

Could this be the legendary masochism religion? She dragged out a long sound and came up with another explanation. "Maybe Ugo uses such pain to suppress his biological instincts?"

I wonder where he learned these methods...

As the two of them discussed, Ugo's door creaked open.

Ugo had changed into a linen shirt. His blond hair was very wet, and his face was slightly pale.

The vomit and all kinds of junk on the cement floor in the room had been cleaned up.

Shang Jianyao was just about to speak when Jiang Baimian glared at him, so he forcefully changed the topic. "Boss, have you seen a cat that looks like a ghost?"

Ugo looked up and coldly replied, "I've never seen a ghost."

Jiang Baimian exhaled silently. "It's a mutated creature that has infiltrated the city. We took on a mission and are searching for it and its companions..."

She roughly described the appearance characteristics of the Slumber Cat and Nightmare Horse.

Ugo shook his head. "If I encounter such an obvious aberration, I'll try hunting it."



“Then, have you seen a child? He likes to play games and wears tomato scrambled eggs. Oh, you don’t know what tomato scrambled eggs are. It’s a set of clothes that match red and yellow,” Shang Jianyao said.

Ugo looked at him and asked, “Is that also a mutated creature?”

“No, he’s my friend. He should’ve come to First City,” Shang Jianyao explained sincerely.

Ugo thought for a moment and said, “I’ve never seen him.”

He then answered a few of Shang Jianyao and Jiang Baimian’s questions and didn’t mention a word about what had happened in the room.

Jiang Baimian knew when to stop and led Shang Jianyao out of the hotel.

She looked back at the surveillance camera at the door. “I’ll get Old Ge to flip through the surveillance footage during this period. It’d be good if it captured Slumber Cat, Nightmare Horse, or Xiaochong. Yes, he’s the most efficient.”

“What should we do then?” Shang Jianyao asked.

Jiang Baimian pointed in a direction. “Go to Patient Zero’s home for the recent Heartless epidemic. Patient Zero is always the most special; it often reveals something.”

Patient Zero in the recent Heartless disease epidemic was Aisha. She lived on the fourth floor of an apartment at 19 Bar Street.

Her husband was a dockworker, and she didn’t have a fixed job. She did clothes, accessories, and certain components to cover some of her family’s expenses while taking care of her two children.

In the Green Olive Zone, there were many such non full-time female workers. They were mainly concentrated in the garment industry. As a large number of factories had relatively old production lines and hadn’t been modified, many small accessories for clothes—such as flowers of different parts and special buttons—required workers to use their hands to complete them.

This wasn't complicated, but the quantity needed was tremendous. For a factory, it wasn't worth it to hire a large group of people just for this. On the one hand, they would receive a fixed salary every month. On the other hand, the next batch of clothes didn't necessarily need such processing. Maybe four to five people could complete it with a machine.

Therefore, the owners of small and medium-sized clothing factories chose to find contractors. The contractors would distribute and pay for the flowers, buttons, and other accessories that needed to be processed per piece, allowing women like Aisha—who didn't have a fixed job—to complete them at home.

There were only two things a contractor needed to do. The first was to find a skilled worker to train Aisha and the others before distributing the materials. The second was to pay the gangs a certain fee. Not only could they prevent any damage, but they could also use them to deter the non full-time female employees from selling the materials they had received. The money couldn't be recouped and could only be made up with their lives.

Bar Street wasn't far from Ugo Hotel. Jiang Baimian and Shang Jianyao only took five minutes to reach their destination and enter Apartment 19.

This place was very humid. Winter was bone-chilling, and it was like a large steamer summer. Fortunately, it wasn't the hottest months yet, so it only made Jiang Baimian feel a little stuffy.

The two of them walked up the mottled stairs to the fourth floor and knocked on Aisha's door.

"Who is it?" A young boy's voice sounded from behind the dark-red wooden door with many scratches and peeling spots. His tone revealed undisguised vigilance.

Shang Jianyao replied in all seriousness, "Would you believe me if I said that I'm here to make friends with you?"

"No," replied the boy behind the door without hesitation.

Jiang Baimian had already thought of an excuse and smiled gently. "We are Ruin Hunters, just like adventurers in stories. We are investigating a strange cat and want to ask if you've seen it."

“What kind of cat...” An even younger girl’s voice sounded.

The boy quickly interrupted her. “Don’t talk to strangers. Daddy said that there are bad people outside and that they will sell us! We can only open the door when he returns.”

The little girl no longer made a sound.

Jiang Baimian took the opportunity to ask, “What about your mother? Isn’t she home?”

At this moment, she suddenly felt a little guilty and felt that she was digging into the child’s wound.

The two children behind the door fell silent for a while before the boy replied, “Daddy said that Mommy is sick and went far away. She can only come back after she recovers.”

Phew... Jiang Baimian exhaled and prepared to inquire.

At this moment, Shang Jianyao asked on her behalf, “Did you see how Mommy became sick?”

The boy’s tone became very depressed. “I saw it...”

“Did she fall sick at home?” Shang Jianyao asked.

The boy sobbed. “No. That day, she went to Auntie Anna’s house to get flowers for work. She wasn’t back by noon, and Sia and I kept waiting for her. We were so hungry... Later, we heard voices on the street, so we went to the window and looked out. We then saw Mom. Her eyes were red, and she kept shouting. She was very sick...”

Jiang Baimian and Shang Jianyao knew of the subsequent developments. Aisha had hurt a few people, avoided the sheriff’s pursuit, and was shot to death near Labe Street.

Shang Jianyao asked, “Were there those flowers around her?”

“No,” the boy replied before emphasizing, “I can’t talk to you anymore!”

Shang Jianyao took out a few Ralph candies and placed them in the gap at the bottom of the door. “Thank you for your answers; this is your payment. This kind of candy will make you have diarrhea. You can’t eat too many, or you’ll get sick.”

As he spoke, Jiang Baimian also squatted down and picked up three of the Ralph candies. She shook her head at Shang Jianyao and suppressed her voice. “The children here have no resistance to sweets. They will definitely eat too much.”

She then smiled at the tightly shut door. “Each person only gets one. Don’t fight for it.”

She stuffed the two Ralph candies in one after another and confirmed that they had been obtained by the boy and girl.

“I won’t get diarrhea if I lick it a few times, right?” the little girl asked innocently.

“I’m not sure either. Why don’t you ask your father when he returns?” Jiang Baimian maintained her tone used to speak to children.

The boy acknowledged it a little loudly.

Jiang Baimian and Shang Jianyao stood up one after another and left Aisha’s house.

Jiang Baimian analyzed as she walked down the stairs. “From the answer of Aisha’s son, she should’ve obtained the batch of handmade flowers she needed to make before her illness acted up...”

This was because Aisha’s house wasn’t far from the subcontractor, Anna’s house. She didn’t walk for more than 15 minutes. Even if one counted the training time, she definitely walked back before her illness acted up. This was also the result of the sheriff’s investigation. From the fact that the batch of handmade flowers didn’t scatter around her, it was highly likely that she had suddenly contracted the Heartless disease on her return journey.

The sheriff in charge of this matter didn’t investigate this clearly. It seemed like he couldn’t determine the exact location of Aisha’s Heartless attack because the batch of handmade flowers had been picked up by passersby.

At this point, Jiang Baimian suddenly turned around and glanced at Aisha's door. She sighed and said, "After the Heartless disease acted up and turned her into a beast, she still made it all the way here..."

Shang Jianyao didn't respond.

Jiang Baimian quickly composed herself. "We'll simulate Aisha's route later and see where we'll pass on the way. We'll first visit the residents on the floors below. These were the people Aisha might've encountered when she left."

"It's also possible that it's someone from above. They happened to encounter Aisha in the corridor." Shang Jianyao helped perfect the details like he usually did in team discussions.

This time, his thoughts weren't that jumpy.

"Yes." Jiang Baimian exhaled again. "We'll pay them a visit as well."

For the next half an hour, they knocked on doors one after another and saw all kinds of residents.

There were Ruin Hunters who had risked their lives in the North Shore wastelands and were injured; a family with a husband who was busy at the factory with his wife and part-time street girl; a temporarily empty room; a couple who had painstakingly entered First City after saving up a sum of supplies and had yet to obtain citizenship while living very arduously; a middle-aged couple who had been sick and had lost their loved ones because they had been drinking untreated water and eating Red River Fish for a long time...

Finally, the two things fixed in Jiang Baimian's mind were: Narrow, dark stairs; nobody above the age of 50.

"Let's go." Jiang Baimian left the apartment first.

She and Shang Jianyao followed Aisha's possible route to the subcontractor, Anna's home. Along the way, they questioned the residents on both sides like official sheriffs, wanting to completely determine where Aisha contracted the disease.

After a patient investigation, the two of them roughly locked onto an area. There were seven to eight-story condominiums here that lined together, making the street ‘cramped.’

Jiang Baimian looked up and casually asked Shang Jianyao, “What do you have in mind?”

Shang Jianyao replied seriously, “Wait for a power outage.”

Chapter 387: Clinic

On Antanna Street, Long Yuehong and Bai Chen walked forward step by step.

The duo returned to their safe house and waited for Jiang Baimian and Shang Jianyao’s return before having a discussion. They decided to continue splitting up.

This time, Genava drove a gray jeep and waited outside Antanna Street. He was in charge of receiving them.

After killing Father, the Old Task Force returned the red SUV to the rental car company. They then found another company and rented a new vehicle.

Antanna Street was filled with houses that didn’t meet the building code. The originally spacious street was squeezed to the point that it could barely accommodate two small cars side by side, and it was rather dark as well.

Long Yuehong casually scanned the area with his lensless glasses a few times and saw extended balconies, bamboo poles with clothes hanging on them for drying clothes, an attached room that blocked the sidewalk, and a swaggering, armed man.

He had bought this pair of glasses at Labe Street. A Ruin Hunter had picked it up from a city ruin in the North Shore wastelands. Only the frame was left, and it was very cheap.

In any case, this was only a disguise for Long Yuehong—who had good eyesight. There was no need for it to be too good.

Long Yuehong retracted his gaze and sighed with emotion. “I really wouldn’t be able to tell that this is Black Street that sells anything if I were just passing by.”

Although there were gun shops, bars, and casinos here, they weren't illegal in First City. As long as they didn't sell heavy weapons, psychedelic drugs, or alcohol drinks produced by non-designated companies or illegally detain debtors, they wouldn't be shuttered by the Hand of Order. At most, they would give the sheriff an additional fee to reward him for his hard work.

In the first few years of the New Calendar, First City issued a ban on alcohol and strictly implemented it in order to ensure food supplies. Back then, countless gangs fought over the supply chains for private hard liquor and fought every few days. In the past decade, the ban on alcohol had relaxed significantly, allowing designated companies to buy grain and brew alcohol.

Bai Chen tugged at the thin scarf around her neck. "This is a form of respect for the sheriff in charge of the surrounding blocks."

Long Yuehong nodded and pointed at the shops on both sides. "Shall we continue asking?"

He and Bai Chen had brought along printed portraits of Han Wanghuo.

This was the result of Geneva scanning Jiang Baimian's portrait of Han Wanghuo and revising the details. It was almost identical to the real person.

Bai Chen shook her head and simply explained, "Here, if you don't find the right person, you won't be able to get anything out of them. You might even become the target of some people's blackmail and deception."

"Is that so..." Long Yuehong learned something again; however, he felt that Shang Jianyao would definitely say: "Isn't this a good thing?"

He could make another killing!

He followed Bai Chen all the way to a gun shop without a shop sign.

The gun shop owner was an old man with a white beard. He was focused on doing gun maintenance of a United 202 pistol.

"Ol' Reggie, not dead yet?" Bai Chen switched to her former character as a Ruin Hunter.

Ol' Reggie looked up and glanced at her. "Might outlive ya."

Bai Chen took out Han Wanghuo's portrait and slammed it on the table. "Have you seen this person?"

Ol' Reggie chuckled. "I'll charge you for asking such questions next time."

Does that mean that it's still free this time? Long Yuehong suddenly felt a little happy.

Ol' Reggie glanced at the portrait and shook his head. "I've never seen him before. If the characteristics aren't obvious, who will remember them?"

Bai Chen didn't ask any further. She put away the portrait and walked out of the gun shop.

Long Yuehong looked back and couldn't help but grumble, "How can this be called non-obvious?"

Apart from his white eyes and blond hair, Han Wanghuo also had two scars—one horizontal, one vertical—on his face.

"He means that he hasn't encountered him on the streets and that people resembling him have never tried to buy heavy weapons," Bai Chen said calmly. "Ol' Reggie is the underground guild president supported by the weapons merchants on Antanna Street. If he says no, it means that Han Wanghuo's goal in coming here isn't for weapons."

"Maybe Han Wanghuo is just working nearby and happened to pass by." Long Yuehong suggested another possibility.

Bai Chen shook her head. "With Han Wanghuo's judgment and knowledge, he will know that this street isn't simple and that there's a huge problem as long as he passes by it once. If it weren't for the fact that something needs to be completed on Antanna Street, he would definitely choose to take a detour."

It had probably been a long time since Han Wanghuo arrived in First City. It was unlikely that he had only passed Antanna Street for the first time during this period.



Bai Chen and Long Yuehong then went to bars, casinos, black markets, and other places to ask the same question to different people.

The answers they obtained were ‘never seen him.’ This meant that Han Wanghuo didn’t come to Antanna Street to gather information, buy contraband, drink, or gamble.

Of course, these choices were only a preliminary elimination. It was very likely that something had been missed.

“We’ll go to the unlicensed clinics and ask them next,” Bai Chen said methodologically.

“Alright.” Long Yuehong thought for a moment and felt that Han Wanghuo had a high chance of seeking medical assistance here.

After all, even if Han Wanghuo didn’t become a Ruin Hunter, it was very likely that he would engage in other risky professions. Considering his Subhuman status, it was reasonable for him to choose an unlicensed clinic once he was injured.

Bai Chen and Long Yuehong soon entered a clinic that also didn’t have a signboard.

The doctor in the clinic wore golden-framed glasses. He leaned back in his chair and flipped through a newspaper that was from ages ago.

“Feeling unwell somewhere?” He glanced at the two of them.

Bai Chen didn’t waste her breath and directly took out Han Wanghuo’s portrait. “Have you seen this person?”

The doctor looked at it carefully for a few seconds, put down the newspaper, and smiled. “I have professional ethics.”

Bai Chen took out a 5-Oray note and placed it in front of him.

“Ahem.” The doctor cleared his throat and said, “He came to me a few days ago. As you know, I’m best in the business in Antanna Street.”

Professional ethics? What professional ethics is there to talk about when you’re running an unlicensed clinic?

“Was he injured?” Long Yuehong asked in concern.

The doctor nudged his glasses and shook his head. “No, it’s a heart problem. You should know that while Subhumans have abnormalities, they often have certain flaws. Therefore, they rarely live past their prime even if they aren’t killed. This person was born with a problematic heart. As he grew older, the problem became more and more serious. It has already reached a very obvious level. Unless he can find a suitable heart and undergo surgery to replace it, he won’t be able to live for more than two years by simply relying on drugs.”

This... Long Yuehong suddenly sympathized with Han Wanghuo.

He had endured for so many years and worked hard for his identity as a human. But after his dream shattered, he realized that there was a major problem with his body—a major problem stemming from being Subhuman.

Bad things often happen to people who were already unlucky.

Upon seeing Bai Chen and Long Yuehong remain silent, the doctor took the note and added, “It’s very difficult for Subhumans to find a suitable heart that doesn’t reject the host. If he’s the only one left in his race, there’s almost no hope.”

After a few seconds of silence, Bai Chen asked, “Do you know where he lives?”

The doctor shook his head. “Which doctor in Antanna Street would ask this? To pass on their inheritance? Yes, the medicine I prescribed for him can last a month. It’s been a few days.”

Bai Chen quietly listened and simply replied, “Thank you.”

...

Ugo Hotel, in Jiang Baimian and Shang Jianyao's room.

“How tragic. It even feels like the wheels of fate.” Jiang Baimian sighed sincerely after hearing about Han Wanghuo's situation.

Shang Jianyao immediately asked, “Can the company treat him?”

Jiang Baimian recalled and said, “If it were an ordinary human, it wouldn't be a problem. Even without a suitable heart, the company can artificially create one. But regarding Subhumans, I've been away from scientific research for too long, so I'm not sure of the current state-of-the-art. Yes, it should be possible in theory. However, it will take time to analyze his genes, and the risks won't be trivial.”

“There's another way! Get Old Han to upload his consciousness and become a mechanical monk to escape his mortal coils!” Shang Jianyao suddenly became excited.

He began to address Han Wanghuo as ‘Old Han.’

Bai Chen also said, “First City seems to have mechanical heart technology, but it's not that mature. Furthermore, it's very expensive.”

“Yes, we'll talk about it when we find Han Wanghuo.” Jiang Baimian ended the topic.

The five Old Task Force members discussed Xiaochong again.

“If we were to search every building in that area, it might take more than half a month with our numbers to complete it.” Jiang Baimian revealed the results of her discussion with Shang Jianyao. “Let's see how Xiaochong—who can't play games—will react after a power outage.”

“I wonder when the next power outage will be...” Long Yuehong muttered softly.

“It seems like there will be a power outage tonight.” Shang Jianyao was rather pleased.

Long Yuehong was already numb to this and didn't even have the mood to retort. Naturally, he also knew that the possibility of a power outage tonight was quite high because water and electricity often stopped in the Green Olive Zone.

Water and electricity often stop... As his thoughts raced, Long Yuehong had an idea and blurted out, "If I were Xiaochong, why would I choose a place that often has power outages?"

Chapter 388: Old Friend

Jiang Baimian and the others were a little dumbfounded by Long Yuehong's question. Only Shang Jianyao thought for a moment and replied seriously, "He might not know."

Xiaochong didn't know that the Green Olive Zone often had water and electricity outages.

This time, Jiang Baimian stood on Long Yuehong's side. "It's normal not to know about this early on, but once you live in the Green Olive Zone for a few days—not even more than a week—you will definitely know that this place often suffers from power outages. It's been a while since the customer at the bathhouse encountered Slumber Cat."

She meant that even if Xiaochong had chosen to live in the most chaotic Green Olive Zone—where he would go under the radar during his initial arrival at First City—he should've moved to Red Wolf Zone, Golden Grain Zone, and other places by now.

"If Xiaochong is indeed related to the Heartless outbreak in these few blocks, he won't be too far from here." Genova's chip did rapid calculations and eliminated all kinds of impossibilities.

This judgment was based on a certain logic: If Xiaochong could influence a large area, the previous Heartless disease cases wouldn't be so concentrated spatially.

Upon hearing Genova, Jiang Baimian, Shang Jianyao, and Bai Chen cast their gazes at the hotel window.

They stood in the room. Through the not-so-clean glass, they could also see the Third Avenue that separated the Green Olive Zone and the Red Wolf Zone.

At this moment, a group of people marched obstreperously, shouting, "We want land!" and "We want work!"

“Xiaochong is in the few blocks around Third Avenue?” Long Yuehong reacted.

“That’s possible.” Jiang Baimian nodded slightly.

Shang Jianyao said, “Xiaochong’s train of thought isn’t too normal either. It might not follow our expectations.”

That’s why he’s your good friend? Long Yuehong criticized inwardly and said awkwardly, “If Xiaochong is in those few blocks, it will be more troublesome. It’s safer there, making it virtually impossible to check each household. Besides, it’s not that easy to have power outages.”

The main reason why it was difficult to carry out an investigation on each household was that they were in a relatively tight situation. The Old Task Force had to hide from the Anti-intellectualism Church. If they pretended to be sheriffs and entered a fixed area for more than ten days in a row to visit different residents, it was very easy for them to be targeted.

Jiang Baimian smiled after hearing Long Yuehong’s words. “If those blocks don’t suffer from power outages, we’ll make it suffer one. The hospital is relatively far away anyway.”

Clap! Clap! Clap!

Shang Jianyao suddenly clapped.

Looking at his team leader’s pleasing smile, Long Yuehong suddenly had a feeling that they might really be villains.

...

The next day, 3 p.m.

Jiang Baimian, Shang Jianyao, Long Yuehong, and Bai Chen separately went to the top of two buildings that allowed them to see the target area. They used binoculars to monitor different areas.

“Ten, nine, eight...” Shang Jianyao began counting down ritualistically.

Just as he shouted ‘one,’ the few blocks near Third Avenue in the Red Wolf Zone suddenly suffered a power outage. In the few spots that had light bulbs installed, none of them could resist the sunlight.

The reason the Old Task Force chose to have a power outage in the afternoon instead of nighttime was that Xiaochong gamed 24 hours a day. It wouldn’t be fixed at a particular period. If they had a power outage at night, it would be pitch-black everywhere.

The difficulty of monitoring the area would rise exponentially for Jiang Baimian and company.

In addition, most of the people in the Red Wolf Zone were at work during this period. It wouldn’t affect the Old Task Force’s observation. At night, especially after the power outage, it was unknown how many people would enter the streets. With the Old Task Force’s manpower, they couldn’t keep track of everyone.

After confirming that there was indeed a blackout in the target area, Shang Jianyao praised, “Old Ge is really punctual. He’s never a second too late. We carbon-based people really can’t compare to him in this regard.”

“I can.” Jiang Baimian raised her left hand. She meant that she had an auxiliary chip that could also make her actions precise to the second.

As she spoke, she didn’t get distracted. She continued using the binoculars to observe the target area and see if anything had changed.

Shang Jianyao was the same.

One by one, people—who had left the building and entered the street—entered their sights.

More than ten minutes later, Jiang Baimian heard Bai Chen’s report. “Didn’t discover anyone suspected to be Xiaochong. No anomalies in the rooms.”

“Same here,” Jiang Baimian replied.

At this moment, Geneva had also finished watching the surveillance footage copied from Ugo Hotel. “There are no creatures suspected to be Xiaochong, Slumber Cat, or Nightmare Horse.”

“It seems like Xiaochong’s train of thought is indeed different from normal people...” Jiang Baimian sighed with emotion in a low voice. “Hey, if it were you, what would you do?”

Shang Jianyao thought for a moment and said, “I’d throw a die and let the heavens decide. When I don’t even know where I’ll choose, the people who want to find me won’t know either.”

Jiang Baimian wanted to say, “What would you do if your luck at dice sucked and provided you the option of having an enemy as a neighbor?” But after careful consideration, she felt that it wasn’t a problem.

Similar wrong answers could be eliminated before throwing the die.

“We can only guess bit by bit based on the range of the Heartless disease outbreak this time...” Jiang Baimian exhaled.

Xiaochong’s connection with the Heartless outbreak was only a guess.

At this moment, Shang Jianyao suddenly became excited. “I see him! I see him!”

“Xiaochong?” Jiang Baimian quickly turned the binoculars to where Shang Jianyao was looking.

Through Shang Jianyao’s ‘guidance,’ she finally locked onto a person.

This person was in his forties. He wore a dark robe and had long black hair. He also had a very elegant beard around his mouth.

He wasn’t Xiaochong, but he was also an acquaintance of the Old Task Force. Furthermore, he knew Xiaochong to a certain extent.

Du Heng!

The mysterious powerhouse—who claimed to be an antiquarian and historian—that had just become an Official Hunter, Du Heng!

“He chased Xiaochong all the way to First City?” Jiang Baimian nodded slightly. This made her further confirm that Xiaochong had come to First City.

“Shall we go and greet him?” Shang Jianyao suggested excitedly.

“Let’s wait and observe a little longer.” Jiang Baimian didn’t want to waste the power outage she had worked so hard to create.

After the maintenance personnel handled the malfunction and restored the power supply, they still didn’t discover Xiaochong or any abnormalities.

Jiang Baimian didn’t stop Shang Jianyao any longer. She took the elevator down with him and quickly rushed to the street where Du Heng was.

The two of them were relatively lucky—Du Heng had yet to leave when they arrived.

In fact, they weren’t too worried even if Du Heng left because Bai Chen and Long Yuehong remained on the roof to observe the mysterious expert’s whereabouts.

Upon seeing Shang Jianyao and Jiang Baimian approach, Du Heng—who was definitely a handsome man in his youth—laughed. “I was wondering who was watching me. So it’s you guys.”

He spoke in Ashlandic.

Aren’t you too sharp? We even disguised ourselves... Jiang Baimian smiled and said, “It’s inevitable to be excited when meeting an old friend in a foreign land.”

“That’s right, that’s right.” Shang Jianyao agreed deeply.

They also switched back to Ashlandic.

Du Heng looked up at the tall building where Bai Chen and Long Yuehong were and smiled. “Let your companions come over as well. I ate your roasted rabbit last time, so I have to treat you to something good this time.”



“Quick, there’s a feast!” Shang Jianyao immediately informed Long Yuehong, Bai Chen, and Geneva through the walkie-talkie.

The Old Task Force quickly gathered and invited Du Heng to board one of the cars. Under the other party’s guidance, they chatted and laughed as they drove to a certain spot in the Red Wolf Zone.

In the other car, Long Yuehong suddenly sighed.

“What’s wrong?” Bai Chen—who was driving—turned her head.

Long Yuehong looked ahead and said with a complicated tone, “Du Heng is an acquaintance of ours, and so is Han Wanghuo. Seeing that Du Heng is doing so well, I’m even more worried about Han Wanghuo. I wonder how he’s doing...”

...

In the Green Olive Zone, in a rented apartment with poor lighting.

The originally thin and tall Han Wanghuo looked thinner than before.

He poured out two tablets and gulped down a cup of clear water.

After checking the pistol and rifle he carried with him, Han Wanghuo walked out of the room with a slightly gloomy expression. He then drove his car and arrived at Antanna Street.

This time, he didn’t go to Dr. Metz’s clinic. Instead, he relied on his rich experience to find the underground black market and meet a businessman with the means to acquire human organs.

“Do you have hearts?” Han Wanghuo asked bluntly.

“Yes, I have all kinds of organs that you would need. I can’t guarantee where they come from because I don’t know either. I won’t delve into these things. It will make my conscience prick, and if I don’t do it, there will be plenty of people doing it.” The black market merchant was amiable, and he went on and on for no reason.

He was a young Ashlandic, looking around 25 years old. He was 1.75 meters tall and looked a little scholarly.

Han Wanghuo fell silent for a few seconds before asking, “Are there any hearts from volunteers?”

“Volunteers?” The black market merchant laughed. “You’re already at the point where you need to change your organs. This is the Ashlands, so why do you care if it’s voluntary?”

The muscles on Han Wanghuo’s face twitched slightly as he asked, “Are there?”

“Yes, but not many. The probability of a successful match is very low.” The black market merchant shook his head.

Han Wanghuo slowly exhaled and said, “Let’s see if it’s compatible first.”

Chapter 389: In Order to Take, One Must Give

The black market merchant smiled and said, “No rush. Come with me to draw some blood and do a checkup. Come over every few days to see if there’s a successful match. If there’s none, wouldn’t it be rather awkward to meet a volunteer donor now? Furthermore, it’s easy to leak my sources.”

“Alright.” Han Wanghuo didn’t think there was a problem. He wasn’t too worried that his Subhuman identity would be exposed because, in a sense, the black market merchants, unlicensed doctors, and arms dealers on Antanna Street treated everyone equally.

In short, it didn’t matter if one was a normal human or a mutated Subhuman. They were welcomed if they had money, supplies, and strength. If they didn’t have any of those, they were unwelcome. As for those who had money and resources but lacked strength, they could only work in cahoots with each other.

The organ merchant led Han Wanghuo to a room behind him and casually said, “Let me introduce myself. Yan Miao. I’ve been very talkative since I was young, so don’t take offense. How should I address you?”

Han Wanghuo cautiously glanced at the black market merchant and didn’t answer.

Yan Miao laughed. “I just want to be friends with you. Although a good person like you is almost extinct in the Ashlands and I have no intention of developing to be one, it’s great to be friends. Do you understand Ashlandic? Yes, you are likely one who’s willing to sacrifice yourself for your friends.”

His last sentence was changed to an Ashlandic idiom.

Han Wanghuo looked ahead and walked at a moderate pace. “You think too highly of me.”

“In any case, I don’t lose anything from making friends. At most, I’ll give you a discount.” Yan Miao chuckled. “At critical moments, friends can be used to block a gun—no, save lives.”

He acted like he only wanted to make friends.

For some reason, Han Wanghuo thought of someone. Although that person was completely different from Yan Miao, they said the same things.

...

“What a huge fish!” Shang Jianyao exclaimed as he looked at the fish skewered over the grill.

This fish was about the length of Long Yuehong’s arm.

At this moment, the five Old Task Force members followed Du Heng to a restaurant in the Red Wolf Zone that specialized in roasted fish.

Du Heng smiled and introduced, “This comes from Lake Arna in the middle of the Taiwei River. Before First City’s expansion, nobody had set foot there for decades. The fish were fat and huge, and there were very few pollutants. Originally, it was only people in the Green Olive Zone who liked to eat fish. Now, the Red Wolf Zone and the Golden Grain Zone have such customs.”

At this point, he added meaningfully, “After all, it’s relatively cheap and easy to obtain.”

His habit of being a teacher hasn’t changed... Jiang Baimian was rather gratified. This meant that they might be able to obtain a lot of important information later.

Shang Jianyao and Long Yuehong's attention was on the grill as they watched the chef flip the large fish from time to time and smear the condiments.

"It seems like you've experienced a lot." Du Heng's gaze swept across the five Old Task Force members and sighed with emotion. "You've grown quite quickly."

Jiang Baimian glanced at the chef in charge of roasting the fish. "That's right."

The meaning behind her words was that it was a pity that there were outsiders here. Otherwise, they could share their experiences during this period of time.

"Can't you just use Ashlandic?" Du Heng smiled. "Besides, he can only hear what I want him to hear."

He still spoke in the Red River language, but the cook ignored him as if he were the only one left in the world roasting fish.

Clap! Clap! Clap!

Shang Jianyao clapped for the mysterious expert, Du Heng.

"Your performance reminds me of an old friend." Du Heng smiled without any surprise. "But I can't remember who he is."

The price he paid is related to memories? Jiang Baimian muttered inwardly. She then roughly recounted their experiences in Weed City, Redstone Collection, and Tarnan.

Although she focused on sharing the different characteristics of the local folklore, she still mentioned Yama Tiger's condition, the New World, Jiang Xiaoyue's problem, Room 503, and DiMarco's actions. This included the portion of information that the Old Task Force had yet to report to Pangu Biology.

Jiang Baimian knew the principle of ‘in order to take, one has to give.’ She knew that it was best to be open and make an ‘equivalent’ exchange since she wanted to obtain key knowledge from Du Heng without offending him.

The parts she mainly hid were the changes in Shang Jianyao’s strength and the equipment obtained by the Old Task Force—including the two exoskeletons, the Destiny Pearl, and the Ring of Blindness.

During Jiang Baimian’s recount, Shang Jianyao was very cooperative. He often interrupted and rambled on about some unimportant details. Bai Chen, Long Yuehong, and Genava also echoed from time to time in a bid to create an open and harmonious environment for communication.

Du Heng maintained his state of occasionally asking a few questions. He waited until the Old Task Force finished sharing their experiences before nodding and smiling. “If it weren’t for the fact that I’m not old and muddle-headed, I would’ve suspected that the last time we met was a few years ago. You guys have been having such a wonderful time.

“A few details of your experiences are still useful to me. It makes me believe that the path I’m taking now might be the most correct one. Tell me, what do you want to know?” He looked like he had seen through Jiang Baimian’s thoughts.

As Jiang Baimian almost laughed dryly, Shang Jianyao directly asked, “Teacher, how should one defeat oneself at the Sea of Origins’s end?”

Teacher? Whoa, aren’t you trying to establish ties too quickly? Jiang Baimian found it funny.

Long Yuehong had a similar thought.

On the other hand, Bai Chen and Genava didn’t care about this at all. They were mostly looking forward to Du Heng’s answer.

Du Heng looked at the grilled fish that was gradually changing color and waved his hand with a smile. “I don’t take in disciples. I can’t afford to be called a teacher, but you can add my name and call me Teacher Du Heng. This is an honorific form in the Old World.”

You clearly look like you’re enjoying it... Jiang Baimian shut her mouth, afraid that she would accidentally voice out her criticisms.

Without waiting for Shang Jianyao to say it again, Du Heng cleared his throat and said, “The final self in the Sea of Origins is often the extreme you. This might come from certain matters, experiences, or pain. It might also come from the other side that you have always been repressing. It’s very difficult to defeat oneself. Most people choose to reconcile, accept, and control them to a certain extent.

“I’m not you. I can’t make a choice for you, but you can make an attempt from two directions.

Shang Jianyao fell into deep thought. It was unknown what strange plan he was planning.

Jiang Baimian took the opportunity to ask, “Teacher Du Heng, what’s the meaning of the room numbers in the Mind Corridor? What do they represent?”

Uh, Team Leader has also started calling him Teacher Du Heng... Don’t you feel embarrassed? Long Yuehong was a little speechless.

Du Heng stroked his beard and said smugly, “You’ve asked the right person. Many Awakened at the Mind Corridor level have explored for decades, but they might not have figured out the pattern of those door numbers.”

He really knows... Bai Chen—who quietly ‘listened’—muttered inwardly, not daring to divert her attention away.

Du Heng looked at Shang Jianyao—who had come to his senses—and smiled. “According to my research, the first number of each door number represents a different Kalendaria and reflects the months ‘They’ control.

“Is that so...” Jiang Baimian had actually made similar guesses, but she had too many scattered thoughts in this regard. She imagined even more answers, but she lacked effective clues, preventing her from analyzing further.

“503 represents the third room in the domain of May’s Kalendaria, Monitor?” Bai Chen asked after some deliberation.

This was Jiang Xiaoyue's room. It was very likely the room that infected the Clam Dragon Church's Dream Protector with the Heartless disease.

"Yes, but the room order is actually irregular. We can't assume that 501 directly represents the Monitor's dream," Du Heng explained.

"What about Master Zhuang's? 13 or 0?" Shang Jianyao asked.

Du Heng shook his head and chuckled. "Master Zhuang might be 1, 2, or any number between 1 to 12. Yes, to put it simply, 503 doesn't necessarily represent the third room in the Monitor domain. It might also be a room in the Master Zhuang domain."

"Is this the uniqueness of the Kalendaria of the entire year?" Jiang Baimian came to a realization. "From the looks of it, Yama Tiger's last room might not be from the Subhuti domain. It might also be from the Master Zhuang domain."

The last room Yama Tiger explored was 102.

At this moment, Genova—who had finished analyzing—raised his question. "Then, what's the door number that represents an ordinary person's room? Isn't the domain only determined based on the price after Awakening?"

"An ordinary person doesn't have a door number, nor will their door lead to the New World," Du Heng replied simply.

"Then, Jiang Xiaoyue—a vegetable from the Old World—eventually became an Awakened?" Jiang Baimian acutely grasped the main point. Even though this Awakened might not have really woken up...

Du Heng didn't answer and only nodded slowly.

The five Old Task Force members fell silent for a moment because of the tremendous amount of information they had to process.

After a few seconds, Shang Jianyao asked curiously, "Teacher Du Heng, have you already entered the New World?"

How direct... Long Yuehong was shocked by Shang Jianyao's straightforwardness.

Du Heng laughed. "How should I put this? I've always believed that if we can't simultaneously find the New World's door in the real world, entering the New World's door in the Mind Corridor won't lead to true success. One might end up like Yama Tiger."

In other words, you found the door but didn't dare to push it open or enter. You're still working hard to find it in reality? Jiang Baimian speculated thoughtfully.

At this moment, the fragrance of roasted fish gradually spread, making Du Heng sniffle.

"I'm hungry after saying so much." He laughed self-deprecatingly.

"It seems like it still needs a little more roasting." Jiang Baimian glanced at the grill.

The fish was too large. Not only did the chef need to make many cuts in it, but the cooking also took a long time.

Shang Jianyao asked in concern, "Teacher Du Heng, did you come to First City to find Xiaochong?"

Chapter 390: Telegram

Upon hearing Shang Jianyao's question, Du Heng fell silent for a few seconds before saying, "Sort of."

His answer was rather vague, completely different from his previous performance of being a good teacher.

Jiang Baimian recalled what Du Heng had said in Swamp Ruin 1. If she wanted to know such important information, she had to exchange information of equivalent value. Jiang Baimian's mouth—which had planned on pressing on—closed again.

Shang Jianyao thought for a few seconds and casually asked, "Who exactly is Xiaochong?"



Du Heng smiled and said, “Actually, I’m not that sure. I’ve lost many of my memories, and I only know that one of my goals in life is to find him. He’s very dangerous, and he might be involved in some of the Old World’s secrets.”

“I have a way to retrieve your memories!” Shang Jianyao volunteered.

Long Yuehong and Bai Chen were relatively confident in this. After all, the Old Task Force had the Destiny Pearl.

Du Heng glanced at them and chuckled. “It’s useless unless you can find an Awakened from the Subhuti domain—who has truly entered the New World—to use Destiny Connection.”

You managed to guess that? Jiang Baimian was surprised. When she spoke about DiMarco, she had only briefly mentioned the Awakened’s actions and tried her best to be vague about his abilities.

Based on the bits and pieces of this experience and Shang Jianyao’s performance, Du Heng had guessed that the Old Task Force had an item that could use Destiny Connection.

Regarding this, Jiang Baimian could only sigh with emotion. As expected of a mysterious expert.

Shang Jianyao wasn’t angry at being underestimated and asked in confusion, “Were your memories erased by an Awakened in the Last Man domain?”

“I don’t think so.” Du Heng’s tone wasn’t that certain.

The topic reached a dead-end until Jiang Baimian asked, “How dangerous is Xiaochong?”

Du Heng pondered for a moment and laughed. “To be honest, I’ve never encountered him face-to-face until now. Yes... All kinds of signs indicate that his danger level exceeds your imagination. If this city didn’t have so many Awakened at the Mind Corridor level, he might have the ability to destroy this place.”

A humanoid nuclear bomb? Jiang Baimian’s eyebrows twitched.

Shang Jianyao laughed. “Fortunately, he only likes to play games and doesn’t like to go out.”

Du Heng didn't continue the topic. Just like how the Old Task Force shared their past encounters, he talked about his experiences during his subsequent journeys.

"That religion is really interesting. Based on the items and information excavated from the city ruins, along with the Kalendaria they worship, they independently created a very, very interesting set of teachings." As Du Heng sniffed the increasingly rich fragrance of the grilled fish, he spoke loudly. "They treat barbells, sandbags, and other things as sacred objects. They treat them as proof that the Old World had already begun worshiping their Kalendaria. They train their bodies diligently every day. Their slogans are 'only the body will not let you down,' 'muscle above all,' and 'only a strong physique can help you open the door to the New World...'"

A Gym Church? This word suddenly appeared in Jiang Baimian's mind. She then thought of Ducas, the city guard major.

This officer was infatuated with muscles.

Shang Jianyao didn't mind anything else and directly asked, "What's their Holy Communion?"

"High protein food. If there's a beverage similar to Old World protein powder, it will be considered a gift from God." Du Heng chuckled and said, "They worship the April Kalendaria, Shadow of Distortion."

"Pragmatically speaking, their teachings are actually more practical than many religions." Bai Chen gave her opinion.

Jiang Baimian laughed as well. "No matter how you look at it, it's not wrong to strengthen your body."

"Therefore, they have many believers. This is especially so in the army and among Ruin Hunters." Du Heng nodded. "A good body, coupled with good skills and marksmanship, is really a great treasure for Ashland survival."

Army... Jiang Baimian nodded thoughtfully.

Long Yuehong couldn't help but interject. "It's not that many people don't want to train, but they just don't have the qualifications."

If one didn't have enough to eat and drink, working out would only harm oneself.

"For example..." Shang Jianyao laughed, but he didn't name anyone.

Long Yuehong knew that it wasn't wise to continue the sentence. He would definitely be met with the statement: "Sigh, I'm only 1.75 meters tall after genetic enhancement..."

He shut his mouth and waited for Du Heng's answer.

Du Heng laughed self-deprecatingly. "I'm not too sure about how they evangelize, but I believe they offer food regularly."

This is the greatest weapon when it comes to proselytizing in the Ashlands... Jiang Baimian nodded slightly.

After chatting about this organization called the Holy Body Church, Du Heng spoke about his experiences in different places. He had even gone to the Spirit Island, which was controlled by the Church of Paragon Desire and the Church of Spiritual Transcendence. It was known as Paradise Island by many.

It was suitable for growing fruits, marijuana, and other things. It had mature supporting industries, allowing them to exchange for various supplies.

As he listened, Shang Jianyao suddenly asked, "Have you been to the Salvation Army?"

"Yes." Du Heng smiled. "That place isn't too unique, but their mental and physical appearances might be a little different. Furthermore, it has produced two extremes..."

Just as he said that, the chef was done roasting the fish. He separated the skin from the meat and filleted it before serving it to them.

The rich fragrance made everyone take deep breaths.

Genava faked it.

“We can eat now.” Du Heng took the initiative to fork a piece of fish steak. He half-closed his eyes and took a bite.

Shang Jianyao went straight for a piece of fish skin. It was imbued with the taste of the condiments and had its own unique characteristics. When the two were combined, it made one salivate crazily and left a fragrance in one’s mouth.

Everyone enjoyed this meal—even Genava charged several batteries.

When the Old Task Force bade Du Heng farewell, the sky had already turned completely dark. The pedestrians on the road were in a rush, and their numbers were many times greater than in the afternoon.

“Unfortunately, we didn’t get his contact details.” Shang Jianyao wasn’t the only one who felt regret. Jiang Baimian was also regretful.

Du Heng didn’t get a phone that worked with First City’s Internet, nor did he give an address or a telegram frequency. In the face of the Old Task Force’s inquiry, he only waved his hand coolly, turned around, and stepped into the crowd before disappearing around the corner.

Genava thought for a moment and said, “You want to freeload off his help?”

...Don’t be so direct... Also, when did you learn the word ‘freeload?’ Jiang Baimian’s expression almost stiffened. This crappy robot should learn the ways of the world!

Sigh, I should’ve left the role of being wistful to Shang Jianyao... Jiang Baimian couldn’t help but glance to the side.

Shang Jianyao said seriously, “As long as Xiaochong is still in First City, we will encounter Teacher Du Heng sooner or later. When the time comes, I have to learn from him how to make myself appear mysterious.”

“...Let’s hope so.” Jiang Baimian sighed and said to Long Yuehong and Bai Chen, “Let’s go back our separate ways.”

Their destination was one of their safe houses.

...

Upon seeing that it was about time, the Old Task Force switched on the radio transceiver. They were waiting for United Industries’s arms dealer, Lehman, to give them the time and place for the transaction.

Terrence from the Blackshirts had already given Shang Jianyao a reply. He said that it was indeed difficult to raise such a large sum of money, but it could be supplemented with supplies of equivalent value.

They could provide it to them interest-free, but they had to provide sufficient collateral.

Jiang Baimian’s plan was to use the old military exoskeleton as collateral first. After the transaction was completed, she would swap the collateral for the new mechanical arm. In any case, that thing couldn’t be used for the time being. She could leave it with Terrence first and slowly repay the debt.

Shang Jianyao had suggested using Geneva as collateral, but Terrence rejected him without hesitation.

Since everything was in place, they didn’t waste any time. They went to the designated safe house and contacted Lehman before waiting for a reply at the agreed time.

After a long time, a radio transceiver signal came in.

As Jiang Baimian received the telegram, she relied on the auxiliary chip to quickly and simply translate it.

Her eyelids twitched when she translated the first word. It was: “Help!”

Jiang Baimian sped up and quickly translated the entire telegram: “Help! 55 Cornet Street.”

Upon reading the telegram, Long Yuehong blurted out, "Lehman is in danger?"