

Ad Infinitum 391

Chapter 391: An Unfamiliar Feeling

Frankly speaking, Jiang Baimian was a little confused after reading the telegram. This was because it wasn't Lehman's first time smuggling firearms. He had a considerable connection network in First City, and he also had a group of capable and powerful subordinates. He couldn't be considered high-profile, and he could even be considered cautious. How did he suddenly end up in danger?

"What happened to make Lehman seek help and give him time to send this telegram?" Bai Chen voiced her doubts.

Jiang Baimian turned to look at Shang Jianyao and Geneva.

The two of them shook their heads in unison. "There's insufficient information for analysis."

Upon seeing this, Long Yuehong deliberated and said, "Could this telegram be fake? After someone captured Lehman, they interrogated him about our contact information and specially sent a telegram to bait us?"

Jiang Baimian nodded and said, "This also means that Lehman is in danger."

Just as she said that, Shang Jianyao said with a pained expression, "Our military exoskeleton and T1 mechanical arm are also in danger."

For some reason, Long Yuehong and Bai Chen felt that this sentence hit the nail on the head.

Geneva analyzed another possibility. "Could our enemies have found Lehman and have reached an agreement to deal with us?"

He meant that the telegram was a trap in another sense.

"There's no need to do that, right? He could directly choose our transaction venue." Long Yuehong could now be considered an active thinker.

Jiang Baimian tersely acknowledged his words. "But when we make the deal with Lehman, we wouldn't do as he says. We will definitely choose to be in a position of power."

She looked at the telegram again and didn't harp on the topic. "No matter what, let's go to Cornet Street to take a look first. However, don't be in a rush to show your face. Focus on secret observation."

"Yes, Team Leader!" Shang Jianyao was very concerned about this matter.

...

Cornet Street was located at the intersection of Red Wolf Zone and Golden Grain Zone. It simultaneously had good public security and also all kinds of riffraff residents in the mix.

After many rounds of secret observation, the Old Task Force preliminarily confirmed that Apartment 55 wasn't monitored by anyone.

For this reason, they used the Ring of Blindness to enhance Shang Jianyao's perception range greatly and confirm if there were any human consciousnesses in the areas that afforded monitoring and sniping.

After completing this job, the Old Task Force split up again. Bai Chen and Long Yuehong wore their military exoskeletons and monitored their surroundings from a vantage point, ready to provide any reinforcements. Jiang Baimian, Shang Jianyao, and Geneva directly entered Apartment 55.

From the second floor, Jiang Baimian immediately saw Lehman's two subordinates. They had met the four Old Task Force members—excluding Geneva—at Redstone Collection.

"Long time no see!" Shang Jianyao greeted them in relief.

One of Lehman's subordinates nodded with a serious expression. "Why are you suddenly here? Haven't we not determined the transaction location and time?"

Isn't your boss asking for help? Jiang Baimian's eyebrows twitched slightly as she said seriously, "If we hadn't agreed to do the transaction here, how do you think we knew you were here?"

Lehman's two subordinates revealed confused and puzzled expressions. They felt like something had exceeded their expectations, and they were at a loss.

"Where's Lehman?" Jiang Baimian didn't give them a chance to think.

"The boss is on the third floor," one of Lehman's subordinates replied instinctively. He then emphasized, "But you can't go up."

Jiang Baimian's eyes darted around as she exchanged looks with Shang Jianyao.

Shang Jianyao immediately retorted, "Why can't we go up? We're acquaintances with Lehman, and we've also agreed to make a deal. Why can't we go up?"

Lehman's two subordinates fell into deep thought. After a few seconds, they said, "Indeed, you can..."

Shang Jianyao didn't say anything else and led the way by stepping past the duo in front of him.

Jiang Baimian and Geneva followed closely behind.

There were a total of six rooms on the third floor. Shang Jianyao wanted to shout, "Lehman, where are you?" but he was held back by Jiang Baimian.

Jiang Baimian lowered her voice and said, "Let Old Ge do a scan first..."

Before she could finish her sentence, the wooden door creaked open in one of the two rooms furthest from the stairs.

Lehman—who looked like an honest farmer—looked over at them.

The arms dealer immediately looked delighted. He waved his hand and suppressed his voice. "Here, here."

Upon seeing that Lehman was safe and sound but appearing very anxious, Jiang Baimian led Shang Jianyao and Genava over with a bellyful of questions and guesses and entered the room.

During this process, they didn't relax their observation, perception, or scanning of their surroundings.

Just as the three of them entered the room, Lehman looked outside and quickly closed the wooden door.

"You're finally here!" The arms dealer from United Industries heaved a sigh of relief.

"A cloud-piercing arrow is all that's needed to summon the aid of troops." Shang Jianyao spoke in Ashlandic seriously.

Although Lehman could speak basic Ashlandic, he didn't understand what Shang Jianyao meant.

Jiang Baimian didn't explain and asked, "Mr. Lehman, you seem fine. Why did you request our help?"

Before she spoke, she had already looked around and taken in the situation in the room.

This was an apartment with two rooms, one living room, and one bathroom. It had tables and chairs, and the environment was clean. There was even a television that could receive the only channel from First City's official television station.

Lehman revealed a confused and terrified expression. "Something strange happened that makes me feel that I'm in grave danger."

Jiang Baimian nodded thoughtfully and pointed at the floor. "Your subordinates betrayed you?"

"I wonder if it's considered a betrayal..." Lehman replied with a frown. He further explained, "I'm never careless when I come to First City. I'll definitely bring enough manpower and hire trustworthy Awakened bodyguards to ensure the safety of myself and the goods. It's the same this time. Yes, everything was normal for a while, but something strange happened after we moved to this apartment."

Lehman revealed a terrified expression again. “First, Richardson looks at me strangely as if I were a prisoner and he wasn’t a bodyguard but a prison guard. He watched me and forbade me from leaving the room. He said that this was all for my safety. I admit that he has self-consistent logic, but everything seems ridiculous when you consider our employer and bodyguard roles.”

“He’s crazy,” Shang Jianyao sincerely replied.

“No, no.” Lehman shook his head and said, “I took the opportunity to find Rondar when he went to the bathroom. He’s one of my subordinates, and I’ve known him for many years. After I told him that Richardson was acting abnormally, Rondar actually said, ‘Boss, Richardson is right. You should stay in the room.’”

Lehman’s face was filled with horror when he repeated Rondar’s words as if he still had nightmares because of this.

He suddenly sounded agitated. “The others have also changed. All of them have become strangers, trapping me here! I didn’t know what would happen next, so I could only find an opportunity to steal the radio transceiver and seek your help.”

Jiang Baimian quietly listened and consoled him. “I can understand your fear. Such strange matters are indeed terrifying. Don’t panic. Do you remember who Richardson came into contact with before the problem began?”

Lehman had long considered this question and shook his head. “Apart from some pedestrians we encountered on the way, he hasn’t interacted with anyone.”

Jiang Baimian nodded and smiled. “Then, let’s talk to Rondar and the others.”

As she spoke, she glanced at Shang Jianyao.

The reason they didn’t find Richardson first was that he was an Awakened. Lehman wasn’t too sure about his abilities and price.

Rondar was one of the people who had stopped Jiang Baimian and the others. He had blond hair and blue eyes. He was dressed in black and looked rather muscular.

“The transaction is completed.” Shang Jianyao smiled and walked over. “We established a friendly partnership with Lehman, and you are Lehman’s trusted subordinates. Therefore...”

Rondar and his companion came to a realization and smiled sincerely. “Don’t treat us as strangers. Is there anything we can do?”

Shang Jianyao then asked, “I heard that you’re not letting Lehman go out?”

“That’s right.” Rondar wore a matter-of-factly expression. “It’s so dangerous outside, so how can Boss leave so easily?”

He didn’t seem to find anything wrong with doing so. Furthermore, he still considered himself Lehman’s trusted aide.

Jiang Baimian frowned after hearing that. After some thought, she said to Shang Jianyao, “Why does it feel a little like yours?”

She was referring to the uniqueness of Inference Clowning.

“Is that so?” Shang Jianyao asked in an expectant tone.

At this moment, Rondar looked at the door to a room on the second floor and smiled. He raised his hand and waved. “Richardson, you’re awake?”

Chapter 392: The Dao and Electrical Appliance Repairs

Jiang Baimian, Shang Jianyao, and Genava turned around at the same time when they heard that. The door to a room on the second floor opened, and a man in his late twenties walked out.

He had black hair, blue eyes, and a thin face. His short hair was messy, and he wore a pair of round, black-framed glasses over his nose. He wore a dark shirt and pants. He was none other than Lehman’s highly paid bodyguard, Richardson.

He also came from United Industries. It was said that he was an engineer in the past and had worked with Lehman many times. He had always had a good reputation.

Richardson looked at Shang Jianyao and the others and asked in a deep voice, “You are?”

Rondar enthusiastically answered for them. “They are Boss’s friends and business partners. Part of the reason we came to First City is to trade with them.”

The thin-faced Richardson’s blue eyes sized up Jiang Baimian and the others through the slightly thick lenses. “Who told you about this apartment?”

“Lehman,” Jiang Baimian replied with a faint smile. “As the boss, doesn’t he have the right?”

Richardson fell silent for two seconds before turning to look at Rondar and Lehman’s subordinates. “Although they are partners, we can’t allow them to go upstairs. Safety is of utmost importance.”

“But...” Rondar was in a dilemma. “They’ve already gone upstairs.”

As Richardson’s eyes widened, Shang Jianyao and Jiang Baimian had already charged at him.

The next second, the two of them suddenly felt languid. They didn’t want to do anything but lie down and let time pass.

How troublesome. We still have to fight, draw guns, threaten, and investigate later. There’s a ton of things to do. It’s better to just slack off and hide by the side until Old Ge deals with them... Jiang Baimian felt the laziness she had accumulated over the years erupt at this moment.

Shang Jianyao lay down on the spot and firmly adhered to the principle of ‘never stand when sitting is possible, and never sit when lying down is possible.’

Such a performance stunned Richardson. Then, a bowl-sized iron fist surfaced before his eyes.

Thud!

Richardson fainted.

Jiang Baimian immediately escaped her languid state and became energetic.

“So this is his ability...” Jiang Baimian recalled the feelings she just had. Her charge was actually intentional. With Geneva backing her, she chose to personally experience the different abilities of different Awakened to accumulate experience for decision-making in the future.

Although Lehman didn’t know Richardson’s exact abilities, he could roughly determine the other party’s level from their few partnerships.

As for why Shang Jianyao was the first to rush out—and why he didn’t use his own abilities—Jiang Baimian couldn’t make a conventional guess.

Upon seeing the Old Task Force trio attack Richardson, Rondar and the others subconsciously raised their muzzles at this moment.

Shang Jianyao jumped up from the ground and solemnly said, “He’s a traitor, the person who wants to harm Lehman! Safety first—we have to deal with him immediately.”

Upon hearing the words ‘safety first,’ Rondar and the others revealed enlightened expressions. They didn’t care if there was any evidence—they seemingly chose to believe anything without reservation as long as it was related to safety.

What kind of thinking pattern is this? The logical structure of Shang Jianyao’s sentence doesn’t seem like he used Inference Clowning... Jiang Baimian’s gaze moved back and forth between Rondar and the others. She then looked at the stairs that led to the third floor and slightly raised her voice before shouting, “You can come down now.”

About ten seconds later, Lehman—who looked like an honest, old farmer—quietly walked down the stairs to the second floor.

“Boss, you shouldn’t be out.” Rondar and the others advised him one after another.

Shang Jianyao replied seriously, “This is to deal with the traitor; safety is of utmost importance!”

Although the two halves of the sentence didn’t have any necessary connections, Rondar and the others still ‘understood’ and supported Lehman’s decision.

Tsk, Shang Jianyao seems to have found the keyword to success... Jiang Baimian laughed inwardly when she saw this.

This keyword was 'safety.'

There was a certain difference from Inference Clowning. Inference Clowning could only lead one to a conclusion and make those who came to the conclusion believe it. In subsequent experiences, if those people encountered matters that were opposite and contradictory to the conclusion, the effects or desired outcome would come to an end. It wasn't something that could continue just by repeating the conclusion.

From Jiang Baimian's point of view, this was more like Hypnosis. Hypnosis was triggered by keywords. Once one heard the keywords, they would unconditionally believe the speaker's Hypnosis. But if it's Hypnosis, there are better ways to go about... Besides, he has hypnotized everyone around Lehman. Why not Lehman as well?

As Jiang Baimian's thoughts raced, Geneva followed standard operating procedures and asked Lehman, "He's a bodyguard you hired with a high salary. Why doesn't he live on the same floor as you?"

Lehman looked at Rondar and the others and felt much more relaxed than before. "He originally lived in the room next to mine. But after he suddenly became distant, he moved to the second floor as if he had deliberately turned the third floor into a prison."

Shang Jianyao then looked at the unconscious Richardson and eagerly said, "Then, let us reveal the answer."

"There's no rush. Save it." Jiang Baimian knew that Shang Jianyao wanted to use the Destiny Pearl to flip through Richardson's memories.

Rondar's previous performance indicated that their encounter could avoid Inference Clowning to a certain extent.

This didn't mean that Inference Clowning wouldn't have any effects, but they believed that everything was normal. Even if they became Shang Jianyao's friends, they couldn't tell that anything was wrong.

After stopping Shang Jianyao, Jiang Baimian pointed at Richardson's room and said, "Let's go in and search for clues."

She then turned to speak to Rondar and the others. "Stand guard outside. Safety first!"

Rondar and the others immediately replied solemnly, "Safety first!"

Jiang Baimian, Shang Jianyao, and Lehman walked to Richardson's room together. Genava dragged Richardson and followed closely behind.

The room was as messy as its owner's hair. Along with a radio, there were electric wires, switches, magnets, and other items piled up.

As Shang Jianyao's eyes lit up, Lehman introduced, "This is Richardson's hobby. He likes to fiddle with mechanical and electronic products. He studies this to begin with and likes to tinkle around."

Jiang Baimian nodded slightly, put on her gloves, and checked every item in the room.

Shang Jianyao also did something similar, but he went straight for the radio.

"Richardson also likes to listen to the radio. He said that in First City, apart from the official frequencies, there are also some small radio stations. It's very interesting." Lehman glanced at the radio and casually explained, "But I don't like this and didn't pay much attention to it."

As Jiang Baimian and Genava nodded slightly, Shang Jianyao switched on the radio.

Sounds of static quickly sounded.

"Find some records later and see which radio stations Richardson likes to listen to. There might be clues hidden inside," Jiang Baimian instructed.

Upon seeing that there was no other sound, Shang Jianyao smacked the top of the radio in disappointment and checked the items that might have words on the table.

After some work, the Old Task Force trio didn't find any useful clues.

From the looks of it, we can only use Destiny Pearl... Jiang Baimian sighed inwardly.

At this moment, a rather magnetic male voice sounded from the radio. "Welcome, everyone, to 119.2, the Dao and Electrical Appliance Repairs radio station. I'm your friend, Wu Meng, who likes to preach."

It was broadcast in the Red River language, and Wu Meng translated it directly.

Dao and Electrical Appliance Repairs? Jiang Baimian couldn't help but glance at the radio.

Wu Meng's voice continued. "Love is about equivalence. Blindly giving and begging for it will only lead to bad results. Fairness is very important, but in the Ashlands, having the ability to achieve fairness is even more important.

"Emphasizing safety is never an issue. To protect a person, you have to put them in an environment without outsiders, preventing danger from coming into contact with them..."

His magnetic voice gradually deepened and echoed in the room.

This... Jiang Baimian's mind suddenly became a little confused.

Shang Jianyao suddenly walked to the door and said, "I have to lock Little Red up and keep him away from danger. Also, you guys..."

Before he could finish speaking, his voice suddenly sank as he retorted himself, "I just need to scare him back to the company."

Shang Jianyao then stopped and nodded. "Why should I believe in this broadcast? He didn't give any specific examples!"

Chapter 393: Radio Station

Upon seeing Shang Jianyao's performance, Jiang Baimian jolted. It was as if a 'soul' that didn't belong to her had been expelled from her body—or rather, a thought.

Lehman looked around in confusion, confused by Shang Jianyao's strange reaction. It was obvious that he had nobody he desperately wanted to protect at the moment.

"There's something wrong with that sentence." Geneva analyzed the anomaly from his companion's situation and reminded them solemnly.

Jiang Baimian retracted her gaze from Shang Jianyao and cast it at the radio.

The magnetic man's voice still echoed in the room through the loudspeaker. "I've finished explaining the principles. Let's return to the topic at hand.

"In the field of electronics, the fundamentals are in 0s and 1s. This can combine into different numbers, and it can also represent true and false, on and off, serial and parallel...

"0, 1, and the large number of states they produce form the entire electronic world...

"This is very similar to the Dao. Yin, Yang, and the many things they produce form this world. As the saying goes, the Dao begets one, one begets two, two begets three, and three begets all things...

"When repairing different appliances, any problem will become simple as long as one can grasp the hidden underlying..."

The latter part doesn't have that strange effect... Jiang Baimian—who was prepared to cover her ears—frowned and said, "Let's go out first. Old Ge, stay here and record the content that is broadcast later. At the same time, figure out the radio station's approximate location."

"Alright." Geneva sat down—his butt only touching the chair by a sliver.

After leaving Richardson's room, Jiang Baimian closed the wooden door to prevent the strange radio's sounds from transmitting out.

"Are you awake?" She then looked at Shang Jianyao.

Shang Jianyao shook his head frankly. "No."

He smiled and explained further, “But it only affected one of us. I’ll have a meeting later and have a chat. The problem will be resolved.”

...Your problem is much more serious than that problem... Jiang Baimian didn’t respond in front of outsiders.

Of course, she wouldn’t do so under normal circumstances to prevent agitating Shang Jianyao and causing the relatively harmonious Shang Jianyaos to split.

“Is there a problem?” Lehman looked at them in confusion and asked in his awkward Ashlandic.

Jiang Baimian looked at Rondar and the others. “I’ll answer you later.”

Just as she said that, Shang Jianyao walked toward Lehman’s subordinates and asked with a smile, “Have you listened to the radio recently? Any good private radio station recommendations?”

Rondar replied in a rather relaxed manner, “I didn’t listen to the radio in the past, but I listened in with Richardson twice and found it rather interesting. It’s about appliances and maintenance. It’s practical and fun...”

Shang Jianyao was immediately excited. “Is it the Dao and Electronic Appliance Repairs?”

“Yes, yes, yes. You listened in too?” Rondar asked in a tone that suggested he had found something in common.

Shang Jianyao didn’t answer and asked, “All of you listened in before?”

“That’s right. Here in First City, we aren’t able to go home outside working hours. We also can’t go out to have fun, or else we won’t be able to protect our boss in time. We can only stay in our rooms to watch television programs and listen to the radio with Richardson. Sigh, there are only two or three channels on television, and there aren’t many programs...” Rondar rambled.

Shang Jianyao gave a look of agreement. “After arriving in First City, how can you not go to the bathhouse? Not only can you enjoy a sauna and take a hot bath, but you can also eat a buffet, read newspapers, watch performances, and get a massage...”

Upon hearing this, Lehman vaguely understood what was going on. He couldn't hide his surprise as he looked at Jiang Baimian and suppressed his voice. "Did the problem with Richardson, Rondar, and the others happen because they listened to that radio station?"

The radio station's owner named Wu Meng didn't show his face; yet, by simply using a radio broadcast from an unknown distance, he had made the bodyguards around him unfamiliar and strange. They had worked together to put him under house arrest?

Isn't this too unbelievable? Just the thought of this made Lehman's legs tremble. He was no ordinary person but an arms dealer accustomed to combat. However, he was still shocked by Wu Meng's almost godlike performance.

Jiang Baimian didn't hide anything and thought for a moment before saying, "From the looks of it, we were almost affected by the Dao and Electric Appliances Repairs radio station. You seem fine?"

The strange radio station and the mysterious host surreptitiously changed their minds without warning. Together, all these factors combined into a terrifying matter.

Fortunately, Jiang Baimian had once imagined that after Shang Jianyao's Inference Clowning ability was raised to its limits, he could successfully achieve the goal of misleading a target with a similar method by making a call. This strange radio station had only advanced this idea a step further. Therefore, she didn't panic.

But no matter what, the person named Wu Meng was terrifyingly powerful.

In the face of Jiang Baimian's question, Lehman shook his head. "There was nothing wrong with me when I listened to the radio..."

He then muttered to himself, "No, there was a little. I actually thought of protecting someone midway. As you... all of you know, Lars is already dead."

He had changed the term 'you' to 'all of you' because Shang Jianyao had walked back.

“The focus of that sentence is ‘protection’ and ‘safety?’” Jiang Baimian muttered to herself and replied without any anticipation, “We aren’t sure that’s the case for the time being. We need to ask Richardson first.”

As she spoke, she looked at Shang Jianyao.

About two minutes later, Shang Jianyao and Richardson—who had been thrown out of the room after being woken up by Genava—had their arms wrapped around each other’s shoulders as they giggled.

This time, Shang Jianyao still used Inference Clowning to not waste Destiny Pearl’s powers.

“I also like to listen to radio programs, especially those that broadcast ghost stories.” Shang Jianyao asked seriously, “What recommendations do you have?”

Richardson seriously thought for a moment and said, “The most recommended one is from our United Industries. I established a radio station with a few fellow enthusiasts, and it mainly talks about the daily lives of the company’s middle and lower-ranking employees. Many people like it. As for First City, there’s a program called ‘Awakening Your Ears’ every night on the official radio. It mainly talks about the Old World and all kinds of erotic stories in the current era. The female anchor’s voice is soft and sweet...”

As he spoke, he revealed a ‘you get what I mean’ expression.

As Jiang Baimian was beside him, he didn’t go into detail and said, “There are a few private radio stations that play music, promote certain religions, and entice you to go to the casinos. They aren’t too interesting, but there’s a radio station called Dao and Electrical Appliances Repairs. The radio host is interesting, and his professional knowledge is excellent. It’s not bad.”

“How did you discover this radio station?” Jiang Baimian interrupted and asked.

Richardson replied truthfully, “I was randomly tuning the frequencies and accidentally discovered it. I do such things in every large city.”

This wasn’t targeted at Lehman, or did they specially use such a method knowing that Richardson had such a habit? But isn’t this too complicated? How can someone who can do such a thing not be

able to deal with Richardson and Lehman's other bodyguards? Jiang Baimian furrowed her brows even more tightly.

She looked at Lehman and asked seriously, "What's the purpose of your visit to First City?"

Lehman didn't dare to hide anything and said with a confused expression, "Apart from transacting with you, it's to sell a batch of firearms to a large client. The deal has been completed—nothing happened. We only moved here after that."

He was also very confused about this encounter. He spread his hands and continued, "If they want to take away the military exoskeleton and mechanical arm I reserved for you, it's been a few days, but nothing has happened. If they plan on kidnapping me and placing me under house arrest to obtain ransom, intelligence, or some evidence from me, why did they only affect Richardson, Rondar, and the others, but not me?"

Jiang Baimian nodded and added, "They also gave you a certain level of freedom, giving you an opportunity to send a telegram."

Lehman's heart palpitated. "The target is you?"

"That's what I'm looking forward to. Sigh." Shang Jianyao felt very regretful.

Jiang Baimian then said, "Ignoring the fact that nobody in First City should know that we know each other and have a transaction to close, the development of the matter isn't right even if someone beside you leaks this information. At least until now, we haven't sensed any danger other than the radio station's influence. Even so, it's a difficulty our team can overcome."

A difficulty that you can overcome... Lehman looked at Richardson, Rondar, and the others, and the polite smile on his face became increasingly sincere.

He thought for a moment and decided that he would reserve a bodyguard robot from Mechanical Paradise as soon as possible through Redstone Collection, no matter the price.

"What does the radio station owner want?" Lehman asked after some deliberation.

Jiang Baimian paced around and thought for a moment. “Maybe the target isn’t you. Maybe he doesn’t even have a specific target.”

“What?” Lehman was confused.

Shang Jianyao immediately helped Jiang Baimian explain. “This is called indiscriminate killing!”

Nobody has died yet... Lehman was also an experienced person. He roughly understood what Jiang Baimian and the others wanted to say. “Do you mean that the radio station’s owner has been using the radio to influence possible listeners, regardless of their identities, where they come from, or what they want to do, and that we were just unfortunate to encounter it?”

This misfortune came from Richardson’s hobby.

This guess terrified Lehman the more he spoke. A scene even surfaced in his mind: An unknown existence so mysterious that it was a question of them being human could constantly influence the cognition and thoughts of listeners who chanced upon the radio station...

“I can only say that this is very likely.” Jiang Baimian didn’t give a definite answer to Lehman’s guess.

After waiting for a while, Geneva opened the door to Richardson’s room and walked out. “The radio broadcast has ended. The subsequent content was mostly knowledge pertaining to electronic appliance repairs, mixed with some Daoist theory. There’s nothing special about it, nor were there any strange fluctuations. Of course, I’m not a carbon-based being. I can’t be sure if it was completely without problem, but I’ve recorded everything that needed to be recorded.”

Jiang Baimian nodded and directly asked, “Did you detect the radio station’s general location?”

Geneva moved his metal neck up and down. “It’s probably somewhere at the intersection of the North Shore Mountains and the wastelands. It’s slightly northeast, and the straight-line distance from here is less than 40 kilometers. After comparing it with the map, I can preliminarily confirm that it belongs to an Old World city ruin. First City labels it 13.”

Chapter 394: Wasteland Ruin 13

Wasteland’s Ruin No. 13? Jiang Baimian raised her eyebrows in surprise when she heard Geneva’s answer.

Lehman took two steps back in horror as though he had heard a horror story.

Anyone who had a certain level of understanding of First City was no stranger to Ruin No. 13. On both sides of the Red River—north of the Taiwei River and south of the North Shore Mountains—was one of the Old World's most prosperous and lively areas. A large number of cities were situated here, forming a metropolitan area with a large population and dense industrial layout.

When the Old World was destroyed, most of this place had become a wasteland. Cities either suffered physical destruction or transformed into a hotbed for Heartless and mutated creatures.

After First City was established from a relatively well-preserved city and amassed a certain level of strength, they began to explore the different ruins in the area to obtain resources and expand.

Logically speaking, First City was nominally the number one faction in the Ashlands. After decades of hard work, it was impossible for the city ruins under their noses to remain the same. They had definitely taken away the most important and most useful resources, leaving only scraps for wilderness nomads and Ruin Hunters.

However, there was an exception—Ruin No. 13. It was very close to First City, but it didn't seem to have been effectively developed. At the very least, the local Ruin Hunters had never encountered any supplies or technology that came from it.

What was even stranger was that First City not only didn't explore it but also sent an army to guard all roads that led to it and prevented anyone from entering Ruin No. 13.

Therefore, rumors gradually spread among the people that Ruin No. 13 hid something very dangerous. Even the troops sent by First City vanished and failed to return.

There were also rumors that First City had discovered some information related to the Old World's destruction in Ruin No. 13. They were organizing manpower to establish a secret laboratory there and carry out forbidden experiments.

In short, after constant embellishment, Ruin No. 13 had already become a mysterious and terrifying place in the hearts of First City's civilians.

The Dao and Electronic Appliances Repairs radio station was actually located there!

Recalling how Wu Meng had ‘controlled’ all his bodyguards through the radio, Lehman shivered. He no longer treated the rumors regarding Ruin No. 13 as a joke.

At this moment, Shang Jianyao said with bright eyes, “This can be used as a blueprint for a horror story.”

Then, you will submit a manuscript to our company’s radio station? Jiang Baimian subconsciously guessed Shang Jianyao’s goal. She then restrained her thoughts and said to Genava, “Investigate again tomorrow and see if there are any changes to the location.”

“Alright.” Genava spoke in a slightly synthetic male voice.

Jiang Baimian turned to look at Lehman and smiled. “Based on the current situation, the probability that you were targeted is very low. The probability is almost equivalent to the accidental encounter of a horror event.”

Lehman’s expression changed slightly as he asked in a deep voice, “Rondar, Richardson, and the others have returned to normal?”

“Probably. Such matters are like magic—it won’t be effective once exposed,” Jiang Baimian consoled.

At least, it was the same this time.

But some aren’t... Shang Jianyao’s words were just about to leave his mouth when Jiang Baimian glared at him.

Lehman nodded slightly when he heard that. “After completing my transaction with you, I’ll leave First City.”

According to Richardson, this was the first time he had listened in on the Dao and Electrical Appliances Repairs radio station since arriving here.

You don't even need us to urge you... Jiang Baimian laughed inwardly and nodded. "Then, shall we complete the transaction today? We have a manor here. The farm covers an area..."

After Lehman heard all the conditions offered by the Old Task Force, he frowned and said, "It is very troublesome dealing with a manor. It will take at least four to five days..."

Jiang Baimian could tell that this arms dealer from United Industries wished he could leave First City that very night.

"Maybe we can help..." Shang Jianyao volunteered.

Lehman ignored his words and struggled for a few seconds before saying, "Alright, it's settled. We'll do the delivery tomorrow—the corresponding Oray will be deposited into this bank account."

The large sum of cash was borrowed from the Blackshirts' second boss, Terrence. The same batch of supplies would be handed over along with Left Bank Manor.

Not bad, as expected of a real profiteer. It fully demonstrates the saying of 'humans die for wealth, and birds die for food...' Jiang Baimian thought that she could take the opportunity while Lehman was in a rush to escape First City to lower the price and obtain the manor's subsequent management rights.

In that case, she wouldn't need to tell Lehman about the women in Wolf's Den. Who knew that Lehman would rather take a little risk to save on this 'fee?'

At this moment, Lehman deliberated for a moment and said, seemingly distraught, "It's all thanks to you saving me this time. I-I'll give you another discount..."

Clap! Clap! Clap!

Shang Jianyao clapped for his 'forthrightness.'

Jiang Baimian held in her laughter and said, "There's no need for a discount. Just agree to our two conditions."

“What are they?” Lehman perked up.

Jiang Baimian roughly mentioned Su Na, Li Qiong, and the others’ fast-food restaurants and the need to provide them with the lowest price up to a certain date.

“It’s very difficult to sell such a manor at a good price like this...” Lehman muttered before agreeing. “Alright, this is equivalent to giving you a 10% discount!”

He asked in one go, “What’s the second condition?”

Jiang Baimian looked like she was just casually asking, “Do you have a way to get tickets to the aristocrat VIP room at the Apex Gladiator Arena?”

Lehman glanced at her, Shang Jianyao, and Genava before smiling like an old, humble farmer. “This isn’t too difficult, but I have a premise.”

“What?” Jiang Baimian’s eyes flickered.

Lehman sincerely said, “I can only provide the tickets on a date after I leave First City.”

Very sharp... As expected of an arms dealer who has lived to this day... Jiang Baimian nodded and said, “No problem. There are a total of three colosseums, and I want five tickets for each.”

“That many?” Lehman blurted out, not hiding the difficult position he was in and the heartache. This seemed to cost him a sizable sum of favors, money, and supplies.

Upon seeing Jiang Baimian look at him with a faint smile, Lehman returned a polite smile. “Although it’s indeed a lot, it’s nothing compared to my life.”

As he still had to get tickets for the colosseums, he pushed the delivery time to 8 p.m. the day after tomorrow.

After leaving 55 Cornet Street, Jiang Baimian and the others circled around twice before getting into their modified jeep.

After waiting for a while, Bai Chen and Long Yuehong returned to the car with a crate containing the military exoskeleton.

After hearing his team leader's recount and Shang Jianyao's recount as though he was telling a horror story, Long Yuehong said in horror, "That Wu Meng is very powerful..."

If he really affected the radio listeners indiscriminately, he could destroy a city given sufficient conditions! Furthermore, he doesn't care about life, others, or order at all.

Jiang Baimian tersely acknowledged his words and said, "Actually, his name reminds me of an idiom: 'Amon[1] under the Wu'—an ignoramus."

Bai Chen instantly understood what her team leader meant. "This is a name he gave himself. Does it mean that it's different from the past?"

"It might also be something his parents gave him to express their beautiful wishes." Geneva gave another possibility that he managed to analyze.

Jiang Baimian didn't answer Bai Chen's question and thoughtfully said, "In the Chaotic Era when the Old World was first destroyed, many people escaped the restraints of social order. After obtaining certain abilities or resources, they showed extreme disregard for other people's lives and individualities..."

"It wasn't only in the Chaotic Era," Geneva added according to the data he had. "There are many examples even in the New Calendar."

"He's inflated himself," Shang Jianyao commented.

Therefore, Wu Meng might be the same? He obtained terrifying power from Ruin No. 13? Long Yuehong voiced out his guess and sighed with emotion. "First City really has hidden talents..."

The Old Task Force had only been here for a few days, but they had already encountered so many hidden and terrifying powerhouses. For First City to maintain above-average order, their strength was obvious.

“Therefore, we can’t think that we can dominate First City just because we’ve successfully killed the real Father.” Jiang Baimian took the opportunity to educate her team. “Next, we need to keep a low profile. I repeat, we need to keep a low profile—a very low profile—and seriously push forward our primary mission.”

After confirming that they could obtain tickets to the colosseums through Lehman, the Old Task Force finally took a substantial step in their main mission of making contact with Oray’s descendants.

The reason Jiang Baimian wanted tickets for the three arenas was that she didn’t want to rashly ‘acquaint’ themselves with Oray’s grandson, Marcus. She planned on observing him one to two times and acting according to the situation.

...

While waiting for Lehman to get the tickets, the Old Task Force didn’t idle either. They split up again to search for Xiaochong and Han Wanghuo.

Antanna Street, underground black market.

Bai Chen and Long Yuehong found the organ merchant, Yan Miao.

“Are you here to buy or sell? If you want to sell, we have to see if there’s a buyer or how many buyers there are before a final price can be determined...” Yan Miao rattled on.

As Bai Chen listened carefully, she noticed that Yan Miao was constantly observing her and Long Yuehong’s reactions as he spoke.

She nodded indiscernibly and didn’t waste her breath. She took out Han Wanghuo’s portrait. “Have you seen this person?”

Yan Miao glanced at it and chuckled. “Would you believe me if I said I’ve never seen him?”

“No.” Long Yuehong felt that this was the right answer at this moment.

Yan Miao smiled and said, “There’s nothing I can do if you don’t believe me.”

“...” Long Yuehong was momentarily at a loss for words.

Fortunately, Yan Miao said, “I’ve seen him. He came to buy a heart and wanted to undergo a transplant, but he didn’t manage to get a match.”

“When was this?” Bai Chen asked calmly.

Yan Miao put on a reminiscing expression. “Yesterday. Yes, yesterday afternoon.”

What are you reminiscing about when it was yesterday afternoon? Long Yuehong barely resisted voicing out his criticism.

Chapter 395: Success or Failure; Depends on Who’s Using The Tools Available

Without waiting for Bai Chen and Long Yuehong’s response, Yan Miao sighed and said, “He’s a Subhuman, so how can it be that easy to find a suitable heart? Even if he’s a normal human, it still depends on luck! I have many customers here who haven’t found a suitable organ after waiting for two to three years. Heh heh, there aren’t any others who have waited longer. If a match doesn’t appear, it basically means death, or they will use other methods.

“Why are you looking for him? Does he owe you a lot of money? Did he cheat you? He doesn’t look like he has any background. Although he looks fierce, he’s quite amiable...”

There’s no need to say so much... Long Yuehong gradually felt like a large swarm of mosquitoes were buzzing in his ears.

Bai Chen nodded and inquired, “Do you know where he lives?”

Yan Miao laughed. “I do want to know, but he’s unwilling to tell me. Everyone who comes to the black market knows that they mustn’t expose their true identities and addresses here. You will never be able to imagine how many nasty people are hiding in Antanna Street. Even a dog squatting by the roadside pooping might have once tailed an unlucky person, pounced on him, dragged him into a quiet alley, and eaten him.”

This time, Long Yuehong didn’t mind that Yan Miao was talkative because it was rather interesting.

There were many mutated creatures in the Ashlands. A dog could also be very dangerous.

In the Green Olive Zone, stray animals were food in the residents' eyes. A dog really couldn't survive without some abilities.

Bai Chen then asked, "Can I buy his compatibility information?"

Yan Miao stopped smiling and said seriously, "It doesn't seem like it's your first time here in Antanna Street. You should've heard of me. Don't you know that I became an organ merchant that's relatively famous in First City because of my tight lips and integrity?"

At this point, he smiled and said, "Even if I wanted to scam you, I would do so openly—in a way that you would willingly accept it."

Bai Chen ended the topic and asked about the illegal organ merchants in First City.

After leaving the underground black market, Long Yuehong sighed and said, "Old Han sure is unlucky."

From the fact that Yan Miao could say keywords like 'Subhuman' and 'heart,' they could confirm that the other party had really met Han Wanghuo.

In the area where organ transactions were most active, Han Wanghuo had failed to find a match. It was obvious what kind of results he would have with other channels.

"There's still us and mechanical hearts," Bai Chen said calmly.

The slave trader, Eugene—who had captured her—previously had a mechanical artificial heart transplant. Although this technology seemed to have many problems and had all kinds of side effects, it was completely sufficient to maintain one's life and even give one explosive power that exceeded that of an ordinary person.

Isn't it said that it's very expensive and that it's controlled? Even the slave-hunting team leader, Eugene, could only find cheap workshops and transplant some shoddy product. Long Yuehong muttered inwardly but didn't say anything.

Although Bai Chen seemed to have escaped her past trauma, he still felt that he should minimize the mention of Eugene's name.

He found something to talk about and asked, "That organ merchant shouldn't be lying. What do you think?"

Bai Chen glanced at him. "We can only be sure that Han Wanghuo came to him and talked about a heart transplant. I'm not sure if the rest is true, but I noticed something. When he observes us or wants to hide something, he becomes more talkative. In short, we'll still keep an eye on him while also dealing with the other organ merchants."

"Alright." Long Yuehong was very proactive when it came to finding Han Wanghuo.

In the underground black market area belonging to Yan Miao.

The organ merchant turned around, walked to the room at the back, and gently knocked on the door.

"You can come out now," he said with a smile.

The door creaked open, and a tall, thin man walked out.

He had a buzz cut, his eyes were white, and his hair was blond. His eyebrows were messy, and there were two scars on his face—one horizontal and one vertical. He looked very fierce. He was Han Wanghuo, who the Old Task Force was searching for.

Han Wanghuo—who slung a rifle on his back—exhaled indiscernibly as he looked at the road leading to the black market's exit.

"Enemies?" Yan Miao asked with a smile.

Han Wanghuo shook his head. "A few friends I used to know."

“Then, why don’t you want to meet them?” Yan Miao asked curiously.

Han Wanghuo simply replied, “You don’t have to know.”

Yan Miao chuckled. “If it weren’t for my kindness allowing you to hide in the room, you would’ve long been discovered by them. What’s there to keep from me? It’s always the following: I don’t want to implicate my friends; I don’t want my friends to see me in my current state; we’re just superficial friends and other reasons...”

Han Wanghuo remained silent and didn’t answer until Yan Miao finished droning on.

Yan Miao didn’t harp on this matter and asked, “Why are you here today? How can a match be done so quickly? It will take some time even if you are running a machine! Would you trust a compatibility report produced in a day? You’re looking for a heart transplant. If something goes wrong, you won’t even be able to get off the operating table. Ah right, you have to pay my intermediary fees in advance when the time comes. I don’t want to charge the dead...”

After droning on for a while, Yan Miao suddenly smiled. “But there’s a high chance this time. It just so happens that there’s a person who volunteered to sell their heart and is in a similar situation as you. Maybe it will be compatible with yours.”

“Why do you say it’s similar?” Han Wanghuo’s tone carried a hint of anticipation.

Yan Miao smiled. “She—yes, a woman. She was originally a normal person, but she was later infected in the North Shore Wastelands and suffered a certain degree of mutation. This was mainly due to her heart. She also contracted a certain disease because of this. Dragging it out until now is almost equivalent to terminal illness. Don’t worry—her heart is fine and can be transplanted. However, she has a request. This is also the reason why she’s willing to sell her organs.”

Han Wanghuo quietly listened and asked, “What request?”

Yan Miao simply changed the topic. “I can’t tell you now; you can chat when the match is done. I can only warn you that it’s a little difficult.”

He then looked in the direction of the black market exit. “Are you really not going to meet those friends? They seem to be doing well and have some strength. They should be able to help in the future.”

Han Wanghuo fell silent for a moment before slowly shaking his head. “There’s no need.”

...

In the Green Olive Zone, Jiang Baimian and Shang Jianyao visited each household using the Heartless disease epidemic information they had previously obtained.

After they couldn’t narrow down the range by forcing Xiaochong out with a power outage, they employed their original method, hoping to find clues from the Heartless cases.

Of course, the premise for all of this was that the Heartless disease outbreak was related to Xiaochong. However, this might not be true.

“Sigh...” Jiang Baimian looked down at the information in her hand. “We’ve gone everywhere. I think we’re more professional than the sheriffs in these streets, but nobody gave us salaries.”

Shang Jianyao stroked his chin and mimicked Jiang Baimian’s usual tone. “We have to change our train of thought.”

“How?” Jiang Baimian snorted. “We’ve already investigated the direction we should be investigating.”

“Therefore, we have to jump out of the norm and change targets...” Shang Jianyao said very correct but useless nonsense.

Jiang Baimian was stunned for a moment. “Change targets?”

“That’s true... Xiaochong isn’t alone. No, he’s alone, but he still has two pets—Nightmare Horse and Slumber Cat.” Jiang Baimian turned to look at Shang Jianyao and thoughtfully said, “Let’s pause our search for Xiaochong and instead seek out Nightmare Horse or Slumber Cat?”

Clap! Clap! Clap!

Shang Jianyao clapped. He then smiled and said, “Nightmare Horse and Ghost Cat don’t stay at home all day. They seem to like going out.”

“Also, they are animals. We humans have many ways to fish out animals.” Jiang Baimian’s face gradually lit up.

Shang Jianyao was also excited. “Yes, as long as we capture Qiao Chu, we can use him to lure the Nightmare Horse over!”

“...” The corners of Jiang Baimian’s mouth twitched slightly. “First, you have to find Qiao Chu.”

The two of them paid attention to the few pedestrians around them and controlled their volume as they discussed how to fish out a horse and cat in the city forest.

As they spoke, they returned to Labe Street and saw Ugo Hotel.

Jiang Baimian’s heart palpitated as she smiled. “I actually forgot that we had such a helper.”

“I haven’t befriended Boss Ugo...” Shang Jianyao had a confused expression.

Jiang Baimian put on her trademark smile. “There’s no need to make friends. Let’s tempt him with benefits. Do you still remember what abilities Boss Ugo has? Dream influence! Do you think he will be interested in the Nightmare Horse? He seems to have a secret Church backing him, so he should have plenty of manpower. It’s perfect for ‘helping’ us find someone...”

Upon seeing Shang Jianyao’s gaze turn a little strange, Jiang Baimian subconsciously added, “This isn’t exploitation. People aren’t born differently, but when it comes to success or failure, it depends on who’s using the tools available!”

Shang Jianyao came to a realization. “So the boss is a tool.”

A tool.

“...” Jiang Baimian was momentarily unable to retort.

Fortunately, Shang Jianyao didn't continue the topic and sighed with emotion. “This is called: likes-attract.”

“What the hell?” Jiang Baimian scolded jokingly and muttered to herself, “Awakened and mutated creatures in the same domain might attract each other...”

At this point, she dragged out a terse grunt for a few seconds before saying, “But we have to remind him of how dangerous Xiaochong is. It's fine borrowing someone else's strength, but not when it will cause them harm.”

“That's what friends are! Friends...” Shang Jianyao almost sang. Fortunately, Jiang Baimian stopped him in time.

The two of them quickly entered the hotel and saw the simply dressed Ugo sitting at the front desk, calculating the latest bill.

“Boss, have you seen such a creature?” Jiang Baimian described the Nightmare Horse's appearance.

Ugo glanced at her as if she were an idiot. “Didn't you ask before? No.”

Laughing, Jiang Baimian took the opportunity. “Haha, the description last time was too simple and not detailed enough. I wanted to ask again to prevent myself from missing anything. This mutated creature can affect a human's dream and cause the target to die silently in their sleep...”

Ugo's gaze at Jiang Baimian and Shang Jianyao immediately froze.

Chapter 396: Completion

Without waiting for Ugo to ask, Jiang Baimian continued, “We once encountered it in a city ruin...”

She recounted how a large number of Ruin Hunters had died in dreams created by the Nightmare Horse and how they had experienced that ability without making many changes. She wanted the details to be detailed and convincing.

Ugo silently listened to this matter and swept his gaze between Jiang Baimian and Shang Jianyao a few times.

“You actually survived,” he said in his usual flat tone.

The only thing Jiang Baimian didn't mention was how the Old Task Force escaped the Nightmare Horse's Real Dream.

“No, we're already dead,” Shang Jianyao replied solemnly. “What you see now is only our ghosts. They exist because of our ideals.”

Upon seeing that Ugo was at a loss, Jiang Baimian smiled and said, “We have companions.”

She was speaking the complete truth. Back then, she had mainly relied on Shang Jianyao's sudden inspiration to utilize Inference Clowning. But combined with the Old Task Force's current situation, it made people directly believe that the robot had played an important role.

Ugo's eyelids drooped for a moment before returning to normal. His head seemed to move indiscernibly.

Jiang Baimian continued, “What's even more surprising is that the horse has an owner. Its owner has even tamed many Superior Heartless, making him very dangerous. An elder we know told us that the horse's owner can destroy this city once the number of Awakened at the Mind Corridor level here drops to a certain level.”

Ugo didn't ignore Jiang Baimian's warning. His indifferent expression became a little more solemn than before.

From the conversation they had, he also captured a detail: The team in front of them had a powerful background. When the elder they knew discussed the horse's owner, his tone was relaxed and natural. He acted like equals.

“That's about it. If you see anything, please inform us. We'll pay you.” Jiang Baimian didn't say much and ended the conversation in the most normal way. She then slapped her forehead. “Gosh, I almost forgot. If we aren't staying in the hotel that day, write down the corresponding information and stuff it under the door to our rooms.”

Ugo looked at her and Shang Jianyao. He didn't agree or say no.

After leaving the hotel, Jiang Baimian heaved a sigh of relief and said, "Let's go back and get some rest. We'll see when the boss can give us an update."

It wasn't a solution to employ methods no different from searching for a needle in a haystack.

Shang Jianyao looked back at the hotel and sincerely gave his well-wishes. "I hope Xiaochong doesn't scare the boss and his Church."

...

Time quickly passed as they waited and observed. In the blink of an eye, it was time for the Old Task Force and Lehman's transaction.

"Check the goods." Lehman got Rondar and the others to carry out two cardboard boxes.

Long Yuehong and Bai Chen opened one each and seriously confirmed if there was anything wrong.

"An AC-45 military exoskeleton. Although it's not the latest model, it can already be loaded with many modules. You can even play games through the helmet visor..." Lehman casually introduced. "The T1 multi-purpose mechanical arm is produced by United Industries. The strengths are very clear, but it's not bad at all when it comes to precision. It can be used to complete all kinds of things that have high requirements for precision. Yes, it's said that Pangu Biology provided the technology needed for the reconnection with human nerves. Heh heh, although Pangu Biology doesn't have a good reputation and terrifies people, its technologies are really nothing to scoff at. It's no wonder many people think it's one of the possible culprits for destroying the Old World."

Jiang Baimian, Long Yuehong, and the others resisted the urge to look at each other. Yes, we are from this supervillain organization...

"What other functions does it have?" Shang Jianyao eagerly asked about the mechanical arm.

Lehman glanced at the iron-black mechanical arm and recalled. “It has an energy module that can provide additional help, and it allows you to deliver extremely explosive punches that can snap an ordinary person’s neck... It can flick out blades, syringes, jet pipes, and other objects. The exact effect depends on what you have installed in advance...

“It has a laser module that can extract energy from its reserves and fire a laser with considerable strength. However, this can’t be compared to a military exoskeleton, and it can’t be used too many times...

“...”

Finally, Lehman flaunted, “The alloy used by such mechanical arms is very strong. Someone once tanked a cannonball head-on...”

“They blocked it with such a mechanical arm?” Long Yuehong interrupted in surprise.

Lehman shook his head. “No. What I wanted to say is that although his entire body was blown to pieces, his mechanical arm remained intact. The damage wasn’t serious.”

What’s the point... Long Yuehong imagined himself being blown to smithereens, leaving only his mechanical arm intact. He found it indescribably ridiculous.

Shang Jianyao didn’t mind this matter and asked regretfully, “Can’t it be used to open canned food?”

“...” The simple and honest Lehman was stunned for a moment. “It’s not impossible. Can’t you just install a can-opener? Besides, with its strength, it won’t be a problem to forcefully open it.”

“Ooo.” Shang Jianyao looked eager.

After confirming that the two items were fine, Jiang Baimian handed over Left Bank Manor’s deed and the batch of supplies.

As for how to transfer ownership of the manor in the future, Lehman had his ways. He didn’t need them to appear and only needed them to provide the necessary information.

As for the large sum of Oray, the Old Task Force—who had mortgaged the old military exoskeleton to the Blackshirts yesterday—had already deposited it into the bank account Lehman had given them.

Lehman watched his subordinates put away the various supplies and heaved a sigh of relief. “Phew, it’s finally done.”

He then took out a stack of colorful printed items from his pocket. “These are the tickets to the aristocratic VIP room you wanted. The earliest one is three days later. Heh heh, I should’ve left First City by then.”

“Not bad.” Jiang Baimian smiled and took the stack of tickets.

...

At noon, the five Old Task Force members sat in their modified jeep outside Wolf’s Den and watched the noisy fast-food restaurant on the first floor and the busy Su Na, Li Qiong, and the others from afar.

Ever since Left Bank Manor was handed over to the Old Task Force, this fast-food restaurant named Cass had officially opened.

Su Na and the other Ashlandic prostitutes used a value-for-money strategy. Even the given name was the smallest currency denomination in First City.

They relied on their resource channels and the advantage of cooking on a large scale to make the slogan ‘cheaper than eating at home.’ If not for this, the fast-food restaurant wouldn’t attract a large number of dockworkers and the surrounding lower-class citizens.

On this matter, Su Na and the others showed maturity that exceeded Jiang Baimian and the others’ expectations. For example, the rye bread they sold was always the lowest price in the nearby area, but it wasn’t so low that it made it impossible for local citizens to run a bakery. At the same time, they would also give a complementary cup of cold water—as long as customers chose to eat in their shop.

Therefore, the fast-food restaurant's business became better and better as their fame gradually rose. The pots of dishes and reserved bread that were prepared in advance could be sold out in less than an hour.

Of course, they didn't earn much money. They could, at most, maintain a balance and have a little surplus. The greatest benefit was that the restaurant owners would never starve. No matter what, they had something to eat.

Over the past few days, there had been no lack of people coming to cause trouble. However, Wolf's Den still belonged to the Blackshirts in name. There were also many Blackshirts who 'helped.' Su Na and the others easily dealt with them, but this also made them hone their marksmanship harder and train their bodies.

Long Yuehong looked out the window and unknowingly smiled. "From the looks of it, they look spirited and energetic despite all the exhausting and busy work."

He turned around and asked, "Shall we greet them?"

Jiang Baimian shook her head. "There's no need. We've now offended the Anti-intellectualism Church, so it's best not to contact them if we can avoid contact with them. Little White, drive. Let's go to Terrence and exchange for the military exoskeleton."

Although Shang Jianyao had shown his desire to install a mechanical arm, the item was indeed useless to the Old Task Force for the time being.

Red Wolf Zone, 25 Stern Street.

Terrence's gaze momentarily froze when he saw the iron-black multi-purpose mechanical arm.

"You can return the military exoskeleton to us," Jiang Baimian said.

Terrence retracted his gaze and secretly took a deep breath. "Alright, no problem!"

At this moment, there was only one thought in his mind: What kind of terrifying team is this?

On the one hand, they had an Awakened. On the other hand, they had casually produced a military exoskeleton and a mechanical arm. It was unknown what they had bought using all of that as a mortgage!

Although such a team couldn't compare to a regular army's elite team, they were definitely top-notch among Ruin Hunters and gangs!

After a pause, Terrence smiled and probed, "Are you selling these two items?"

Be it the Blackshirts or the Church of Spiritual Transcendence, they had a strong desire for such equipment.

"What do you think?" Jiang Baimian asked with a smile.

Terrence exhaled and said, "I know. Such controlled items are very difficult to obtain. Unless it's out of no choice, nobody is willing to sell them."

Jiang Baimian thought for a moment and said, "Oh right, there's something else I need your help with."

"What?" Terrence instantly became vigilant. Don't tell me you want to borrow money again?

Jiang Baimian smiled and said, "I want to buy some hair dye through you..."

She listed the names of many items in one go. Her goal was to make themselves less eye-catching when watching the gladiator fights like a normal Red River person.

Upon seeing Terrence stunned, Shang Jianyao laughed and added, "Don't worry—we'll pay this time."

He appeared a little excited.

Chapter 397: New Image

Three days later, the Old Task Force was in a safe house in the Red Wolf Zone.

Shang Jianyao stood up and walked to the cracked full-body mirror in the room. In the mirror, his hair was brown. His eye sockets had also been cleverly circled, making them appear rather deep.

His facial contours also became more three-dimensional under the makeup and other things. This made him look ethnically like a Red River person.

Under Jiang Baimian's skillful disguise, Shang Jianyao became less handsome. It was to prevent him from being noticed in the nobles' private rooms and attracting suspicion.

However, his tall figure and masculine bearing remained. In any case, this wasn't that obvious among First City's nobles—who appeared to advocate strength and force.

As far as Jiang Baimian knew, a large portion of the genetic enhancement liquid and drugs exported by Pangu Biology every year were delivered to First City and shared by the nobles.

On the one hand, they promoted the idea that the Old World's destruction came from forbidden experiments and called on everyone to resist unnatural genetic technology. On the other hand, they secretly enhanced their genes to prove to the subordinates that nobles had bloodlines, legacies, and were favored by the heavens.

Therefore, a large number of nobles in First City were above 1.8 meters tall. They were tall, muscular, and good-looking.

Looking at his reflection, Shang Jianyao suddenly sighed. "Sigh..."

"What's wrong? You don't find yourself handsome enough?" Jiang Baimian teased with a smile.

With Shang Jianyao's train of thought, this definitely isn't the reason... Long Yuehong muttered silently. Of course, he couldn't figure out why Shang Jianyao sighed.

Shang Jianyao retracted his gaze with a regretful expression. "It's too ordinary. It's rare to dye my hair, so how can there only be one color?"

"You want it to be rainbow-colored?" Jiang Baimian laughed.

Shang Jianyao thought for a moment and said seriously, “It’s too eye-catching. Three colors are enough.”

That’s also very unconventional, alright? Long Yuehong criticized inwardly.

Jiang Baimian ignored Shang Jianyao’s complaints and tidied herself up in the mirror.

She was very satisfied with her black hair, so she didn’t change its color. After all, there were black-haired ethnicities among the Red River people. This was even mainstream among the people who first established First City back then—they came from the Akson area.

The Old Task Force had patronized a restaurant near Ugo Hotel. Its boss was an Akson, and his hair was as black as an Ashlandic’s.

Jiang Baimian had only draped her hair down and curled it a little. She then used a pair of beautifying contact lenses that the Blackshirts had painstakingly obtained.

It didn’t correct eyesight, and it was an antique from the Old World. Although the packaging was still intact, Jiang Baimian didn’t know if it could still be used.

She could only rely on her superior constitution as a ‘Chosen One’ to wear it according to the instructions. It would only take two to three hours anyway.

This made her eyes blue like a quiet sea under the sun.

Her facial features, facial contours, and facial lines had also been altered to make her more like an Akson, and she became less beautiful.

This time, she would be watching the gladiator fight as Shang Jianyao’s female companion.

“There’s only one pair of such contact lenses. Little White, why don’t you and Little Red continue being Ashlandic? However, you have to alter your looks to prevent the Anti-intellectualism Church from recognizing you.” Jiang Baimian brushed her hair and looked at Bai Chen. “In any case, there are a few Ashlandic slaves among those nobles.”

Bai Chen fell silent for two seconds before saying, "I'd better not enter the arena and just wait for you outside with Old Ge."

Genava was considered a 'heavy weapon' and couldn't be brought into the arena, much less the nobles' VIP room.

Jiang Baimian nodded thoughtfully. "Alright."

She didn't ask why.

She then smiled at Long Yuehong. "Do you want to dye your hair or maintain your current state?"

"Let's keep it this way." Long Yuehong was still rather resistant to dyed hair.

Nobody in Pangu Biology dyed their hair!

"Alright, sit down. I'll help you pad your nose, fix your eyebrows, and apply some eyeliner. In short, I'll make you look like another person." It wasn't Jiang Baimian who spoke, but Shang Jianyao.

He mimicked Jiang Baimian's tone as if he had already mastered the corresponding skills.

Long Yuehong naturally didn't dare to be his experimental subject. He took a step back and muttered, "I'm afraid you'll make me look like a woman."

Someone like Ruhua[1]!

Shang Jianyao smiled. "Isn't that a good thing? A perfect disguise!"

"Sit down; I'll do it." Jiang Baimian glared at Shang Jianyao and walked away. She smiled and said, "Actually, the most skilled person in this regard is Old Ge. As long as he obtains the corresponding data, he can immediately become a makeup master. My auxiliary chip isn't that strong, and it's inferior to a smart bot in terms of control."

Genava moved his metal neck. “From his height, build, and facial features, feminization would be a better direction if Little Red wants to disguise himself as a Red River noble.”

Although Long Yuehong knew that Old Ge was telling the truth and just didn’t know the ways of the world, he still choked from the blood figuratively rushing into his throat. He exhaled and said, “I’m an Ashlandic slave.”

Jiang Baimian held in her laughter and began putting on his makeup.

During this process, Long Yuehong asked in confusion, “Team Leader, why did you make Shang Jianyao pretend to be a noble? He can also be an Ashlandic slave.”

It was common for Red River female nobles to have tall Ashlandic slaves by their sides in First City.

Long Yuehong wasn’t jealous of Shang Jianyao, but he felt that Shang Jianyao’s brain would spasm at any moment. It was impossible to know what would happen if he exchanged pleasantries with others in the noble’s VIP room.

“That would be too eye-catching,” Jiang Baimian replied as she busied herself. “The primary requirement this time is to keep a low profile and not attract attention. Besides, if there’s a chance, he can communicate with the target as a noble and use Inference Clowning.

“Yes, although we’re past the Chaotic Era and the use of firearms has closed the gap between men and women’s physiques, there are also many female nobles in First City’s so-called high society with a high status. But those who are passionate about watching gladiator fights and aren’t accompanying their male friends are limited. Everyone should know each other.”

Shang Jianyao smiled. “Actually, we can make Little Red pretend to be a noble. You and I will be his servants. I’m just afraid that his legs and stomach will tremble when he discovers that he needs to carry the entire matter alone.”

“How is that possible...” Long Yuehong subconsciously retorted.

He didn’t continue the topic.

After finishing their disguises, the Old Task Force quintet synchronized the time and set off separately.

This time, Geneva and Bai Chen drove the modified jeep. Jiang Baimian, Shang Jianyao, and Long Yuehong sat in a newly rented and rather imposing black car.

The Apex Gladiator Arena was in the Red Wolf Zone, not far from the Golden Apple Zone. There were fewer buildings around it, and the terrain was open.

After parking the car, Shang Jianyao took a big stride forward and went straight to the private entrance of the nobles' VIP room.

Jiang Baimian grabbed him and gave him a 'sweet' smile. She then held Shang Jianyao's arm and dutifully played the role of a female companion.

Long Yuehong carried the bag containing pistols and followed behind as a servant and bodyguard.

At the entrance, the burly security guard first checked the tickets. He then looked at Jiang Baimian and Shang Jianyao's clothes—which probably couldn't hide any heavy weapons—and politely indicated that they could enter.

Long Yuehong was carefully searched from top to bottom.

The aristocratic VIP room was located in the best area, giving the best angle and distance among the southern stands in the colosseum. Compared to the surrounding open-air seats, it had a roof that shielded one from the sun and rain, bulletproof glass walls, and small, half-enclosed, transparent rooms.

Shang Jianyao, Jiang Baimian, and Long Yuehong found the small room corresponding to their tickets and sat down.

As soon as his butt touched the soft chair, Long Yuehong realized that none of the servants in the nearby small rooms were sitting, even if they had entered with a ticket.

After being stunned for a second, Long Yuehong forcefully pulled himself out of his seat, walked behind Shang Jianyao and Jiang Baimian, and assumed a 'professional' posture.

At this moment, another group of people entered the nobles' VIP room.

Long Yuehong, Jiang Baimian, and Shang Jianyao looked over and saw a familiar face—the lion-like General Phocas!

Why is he here? Long Yuehong was alarmed.

...

In a small shop selling private brews near Antanna Street.

“You're pretty lucky. You managed to get a match the first time!” As the organ merchant led Han Wanghuo in, Yan Miao smiled and said, “Maybe it's like the Ashlandic proverb: good people will be rewarded. Heh heh, although I'm also Ashlandic, I grew up in First City and don't know much about Ashlandic culture...”

Han Wanghuo ignored his droning and directly asked, “Is it the lady you previously mentioned?”

“Yes, you'll meet her later.” Yan Miao turned into a booth at a corner of the shop and pointed opposite. “Wait about 15 minutes.”

“I thought you would be very punctual,” Han Wanghuo said calmly. Shouldn't a similar black market transaction be precise to the minute? How could one wait so long?

Yan Miao smiled. “What are you worried about? Even if we encounter a sheriff, the one who should be afraid is the boss here, not us. What else can it be other than a meetup between a man, a woman, and their introducer?”

Han Wanghuo nodded and sat down. He didn't know how to respond to Yan Miao's words and could only remain silent.

Chapter 398: Target

Han Wanghuo didn't wait long. Five to six minutes later, a woman walked into the private brewery shop.

Yan Miao raised his right hand and gestured. “Over here.”

Han Wanghuo looked over and saw the person clearly.

She was very young and looked to be about 20 years old. She was relatively short and didn’t reach 1.6 meters tall. Her facial features weren’t beautiful or ugly, and she had the unique softness of an Ashlandic.

At first glance, Han Wanghuo noticed that the woman didn’t look too good. She was slender and thin, giving off the feeling that she was ill and unhealthy.

She had short hair, and her skin was tanned. She wore a black, short-sleeved T-shirt and a pair of blue pants with a thick, diagonally-patterned cloth around her legs. She also wore large brown shoes.

This set was clearly obtained from an Old World city ruin. It didn’t have any patches or cracks, but it was very old.

This woman walked to Yan Miao’s side—opposite Han Wanghuo—and slowly sat down.

From her gait, Han Wanghuo couldn’t tell that she had a terminal disease. At the same time, he realized that the woman’s waist was bulging.

She was likely hiding a pistol.

“I’ll do the introductions,” Yan Miao said with a smile. “Zeng Duo, an organ donor volunteer. Heh heh, I don’t know if it’s her real name, nor do I need to know. It’s just a code name.”

He then said to Zeng Duo, “Old Han—he only gave his surname and didn’t say his name. Stumped, I can only address him that way. We’re all Ashlandic, so there’s no need to be too reserved.”

“Hello.” Zeng Duo nodded at Han Wanghuo.

Han Wanghuo replied with the same action. “Hello.”

“Want something to drink? The private brew here is pretty good. The boss used to be a brewer at a certain aristocratic manor.” Yan Miao livened up the atmosphere as if he were really arranging a blind date. “Haha. Of course, it’s not my treat. Do I look like a generous person?”

“Forget it then.” Zeng Duo paused and said, “I don’t drink.”

“It’s my treat.” Han Wanghuo felt a little sympathetic when the thought that the girl opposite him didn’t have long to live came to mind. After all, he had been a sheriff at Redstone Collection’s smuggling node for so long. He had also saved up a lot of supplies, so he had plenty of money.

Zeng Duo shook her head again. “I don’t drink because I hate it. It’s a waste of food; many people in the Ashlands are starving.”

Yan Miao sighed. “Why bother? The food can’t get to them, so it’s better to comfort our stomachs. You’re saving money for Old Han.”

He ended the topic with a regretful expression and said to Han Wanghuo, “Zeng Duo is willing to donate her heart to you, but the payment she needs isn’t low.”

Zeng Duo nodded, indicating that Yan Miao was right. She then thought for a moment and added, “If you’re worried that I won’t fulfill the contract and secretly escape, I’ll stay by your side from now on and be under your watch.”

Han Wanghuo’s messy and fierce eyebrows twitched. “Aren’t you afraid that I’ll find a chance to knock you out and bring you to a clinic? That way, I don’t even need to pay.”

“Ha, you’re really a nice guy. You actually warned her.” Yan Miao laughed and shook his head, expecting better from him.

Zeng Duo calmly replied, “I have the necessary self-preservation abilities.”

Han Wanghuo took a deep breath and slowly exhaled. He looked into her eyes and said, “Tell me, what’s your request?”

Zeng Duo frankly replied, “Save a town.”

...

In the aristocratic VIP room at Apex Gladiator Arena.

Upon seeing General Phocas lead a group of people in, Jiang Baimian, Shang Jianyao, and Long Yuehong only took a glance before retracting their gazes to avoid attracting the other party's attention and being discovered.

Phocas ignored them and casually swept his gaze around before entering his room and sitting down.

Shang Jianyao looked over and said regretfully, "Ducas didn't come."

He was referring to the city guard major that was obsessed with muscles.

"Cassiel didn't come either." Jiang Baimian nodded. "They are city defense officers, not Phocas's personal bodyguards. It's impossible for them to follow him at all times."

Long Yuehong wanted to ask Shang Jianyao why he was regretful that Ducas wasn't here, but he forced himself to shut his mouth when he considered his identity as a servant.

Fortunately, Jiang Baimian 'helped' him ask, "What, do you want to use your current appearance to arm-wrestle with him?"

Shang Jianyao cast his gaze at the arena below and shook his head seriously. "No, I want him to arm-wrestle with the current you again. If he doesn't recognize you, he would imagine that he has lost to women twice in a row. He would definitely suffer a huge blow and stop believing in muscles. That will stop him from looking down on women who don't have exaggerated muscles."

"How kind of you..." Jiang Baimian didn't know if this was good or bad for Ducas. She then nodded indiscernibly and muttered to herself, "Without Ducas and Cassiel, General Phocas is still surrounded by guards and no bodyguards... This means that he's very confident in his strength..."

As they spoke, nobles led their servants and bodyguards into the VIP room.

About ten minutes later, Long Yuehong's eyes lit up when he saw one of the two targets for this First City trip: Oray's grandson, Marcus!

He didn't look too similar to his cousin Avia. His hair was more yellowish rather than gold, and his eyes were light blue. His nose was relatively sharp, and his lips were very thick. His face was slightly wide, and his overall appearance was very ordinary. The only thing to speak of was his 1.85-meter-tall height.

Marcus constantly wore a smile on his face as he walked, but there was no sincerity in his eyes. He didn't look at others, and he even looked sinister.

Jiang Baimian tried her best to suppress her voice and evaluated softly, "It seems like he doesn't have a good temper. Maybe the environment is too oppressive."

Although Marcus and Avia received plenty of preferential treatment and strict protection as Oray's descendants, they were also guarded against. They could neither enter the army nor become Elders. They had almost no say in First City's matters, making them akin to caged pets.

Anyone who had some ambition and wanted to achieve something would find such an environment very oppressing.

Shang Jianyao immediately suggested, "We should arrange for him to get some Old World entertainment."

"Not everyone will be obsessed with that. Some prefer to achieve something in reality." Jiang Baimian retracted her gaze and stopped sizing up Marcus to prevent herself from being noticed by the powerhouse protecting this Oray descendant.

Of course, Shang Jianyao deliberately made eye contact with Marcus according to the plan. He also nodded slightly as a greeting.

This was mainly to make them familiar with each other.

Marcus returned with a polite nod as if he were facing another noble. He didn't find it odd that he found Shang Jianyao unfamiliar. After all, after two to three generations of reproduction and through a steady stream of military contributions, there was no lack of people in First City's upper-

class society. Unless one was normally in the same circle or had prominent parents and high statuses, it was normal for nobles to find each other unfamiliar.

And this didn't include the existence of many illegitimate children.

Of course, once they reported their family lineage, one would still know whose child it was.

After she stopped sizing up Marcus, Jiang Baimian secretly glanced at the four bodyguards he had brought with him.

They were tall and muscular, and they wore black. Their sunglasses made it impossible to tell where they were scrutinizing.

This behavior was too professional, making Jiang Baimian suspect that there were no Awakened, mutated humans, or modified people among them. They were only ordinary bodyguards used to make everything appear normal.

As for the hidden expert, she temporarily didn't discover any traces of him.

Not long after Marcus sat down, the doors on both sides of the venue opened, revealing the situation behind the iron fence.

On the right side of the aristocratic VIP room was today's gladiator. He was usually locked in the room behind the iron fence and existed solely for the fight.

He was of Red River ethnicity, standing at nearly 1.9 meters tall. He had short blond hair and wore leather armor. He held a shield in one hand and a spear in the other as if he came from the classical age.

This gladiator had a thick beard, and his eyes revealed obvious anger and grievance.

According to the promotional information before the match, Jiang Baimian knew that he was originally a citizen. He was brave in battle and had a bright future. Unfortunately, he violated a noble officer's orders in an operation and caused the team to suffer losses. He was arrested, sentenced, and became a slave.

After that, he took the initiative to apply to be a gladiator, wanting to use his life to obtain freedom.

This time, his opponent was a mutated creature.

Even from afar, Long Yuehong felt the creature's immense pressure.

This was a black tiger that was bigger than ordinary tigers. It had two heads growing from its neck, and it let out a threatening growl at the same time.

Bang! Bang! Bang!

Most of the spectators in the colosseum thumped their specially made armrests, creating a drum-like commotion.

The atmosphere became lively.

Jiang Baimian noticed that Marcus was also thumping and acting very fanatical as if he was immersed in it.

At this moment, a noble picked up his cup and drank a mouthful of water.

He suddenly choked and coughed.

This wasn't a big deal, but the noble couldn't stop coughing. His face quickly flushed red, and his body curled up as he fell to the ground.

Chapter 399: Farce?

Amidst the thumping sounds that ignited the atmosphere in the arena, the noble's coughing was completely drowned out. Apart from his companions, nobody else heard him.

But his act of falling to the ground, his flushed face, his warped expression from the pain, his bulging eyes, his bending body, and the cup that had been shattered to pieces made it impossible for anyone in the room to ignore him.

At this moment, Long Yuehong seemed to see a tragic scene. It was a tragic scene of him quickly heading for death due to a trivial accident.

This traumatized every eyewitness.

Jiang Baimian subconsciously wanted to provide emergency treatment, but she stopped just as her butt left the chair. She then pressed down on Shang Jianyao's arm, indicating for him not to be anxious.

At the same time, she cast her gaze at the room where General Phocas was.

This lion-like general stared at the noble—who had already entered a suffocating state. He wasn't in a rush, nor was he panicking or showing signs of rashness. He quietly watched as if he were watching a play.

After a few seconds, he seemed to figure out what had happened and said to the guard beside him, "Be on guard."

He had no intention of sending his subordinates—who were more experienced in emergency treatment—to save the noble.

As for the other nobles in the VIP room, they either watched in confusion or led their servants over to help due to closer ties.

One of the Old Task Force's two targets—Oray's grandson, Marcus—wasn't too familiar with the noble. He only retracted his gaze from the arena and glanced at the other party, whose face was beginning to turn blue.

The corners of his mouth curled up slightly as he revealed a slightly mocking smile. However, this smile didn't seem like it was directed at the unlucky noble who choked himself to death.

Jiang Baimian retracted her gaze in confusion. Just like Shang Jianyao, she followed General Phocas and the guards' gazes and sized up the aristocratic VIP room's surroundings.

The situation in the arena that they had previously observed reflected in their eyes again.

The audience seats circled the arena below. They were stacked at increasingly higher levels, leaving different aisles between them. Apart from the nobles' VIP room, the rest of the seats were open-air with special armrests for thumping.

In every area was another sign. At the top of the sign was a large mirror that could reflect a person's entire body.

The numerous mirrors reflected the sunlight and reflected the bulletproof walls of the nobles' VIP room.

Jiang Baimian didn't know if this was First City's folklore. After all, she had never heard of it before.

As she swept her gaze across the area, she and Shang Jianyao saw several security personnel walking toward the aisle from the entrance as if they wanted to maintain order in the overly enthusiastic atmosphere.

They quickly walked to a spot about 20 meters away from the nobles' VIP room and signaled for an audience member to come with them.

"Why?" asked the audience member loudly. He looked like an Icelander or possibly a Yargai—a branch of the Red River race. He was more than 1.9 meters tall, and he had blond hair, blue eyes, and a stocky build.

At this moment, his face was filled with anger.

The leader of the security guards coldly said, "We have the authority to do so. There's a case that requires you to assist in our investigations. Don't worry. It won't affect your watching of the match—as long as there's nothing wrong with you."

As he spoke, he and his subordinates raised the submachine guns in their hands.

The audience member muttered, "You better figure out something."

He stopped resisting and left his seat before slowly walking to the aisle.

Upon seeing the security guards surrounding him, he suddenly strode forward and made a break for the exit.

This came without warning.

The security guards were caught off-guard as he broke through their encirclement. They could only turn around quickly and attempt to chase after him.

But as they turned around, they seemed to degenerate into children who had just learned how to walk. They couldn't balance themselves.

Badump! Badump! Badump!

Without any resistance or interference, the security guards fell to the corridor's steps, and their heads spun.

If not for the fact that their submachine guns were slung over their bodies, they definitely would've lost their weapons.

Awakened... Was he also the one who choked the noble to near-death? At this distance, it should still be at the Sea of Origins level... How did they lock onto the murderer? Jiang Baimian's heart palpitated as she turned around and glanced at the victim.

The noble was on the ground and was surrounded by a few companions, receiving emergency treatment from another noble.

The spilled water soaked the floor around him, accentuating the white cup's shards.

Jiang Baimian quickly cast her gaze at the fleeing Awakened.

This fellow was very muscular and fast. He distanced himself from the security personnel quickly and ran straight for the exit. During this process, he deliberately used other audience members as cover to prevent himself from being shot—either from afar or nearby.

The gunmen in the distance were naturally other security personnel, and some spectators were around them.

It had to be known that First City's citizens were born warriors. It was common for them to draw their guns when they encountered such matters.

Bang! Bang!

Amidst the sporadic gunshots, the tall, muscular, blond, and blue-eyed man had already approached the exit. There were also a few security personnel there.

Without any fear, he rushed over with a confident expression.

At this moment, he suddenly staggered.

Thud!

He fell heavily on the flat ground that was without obstacles.

In Jiang Baimian's eyes, his legs had stiffened at that moment as if they had been filled with lead, making them no longer belong to him.

"Legs Immobility?" Shang Jianyao said in a soft voice and a slightly excited tone.

"Seems like it." Jiang Baimian nodded slightly.

Long Yuehong also noticed the situation over there. He saw a few security guards rush over from the exit, lower the submachine guns in their hands, and fire at the Awakened who had fallen to the ground.

The training they had undergone told them not to think that they could capture an enemy with such strange abilities alive unless the other party had fainted.

Ta! Ta! Ta!

Sparks spewed out of the black muzzles as a large number of bullets rained down on the blond, muscular man.

Sigh... Long Yuehong sighed softly when he saw this. In his heart, an Awakened was very strong compared to ordinary people, regardless of their level.

However, such powerhouses were still extremely weak in the face of firearms.

The gunshots soon stopped. The Awakened jumped up—not injured at all!

Long Yuehong's eyes bulged.

There's also an ability that makes one immune to gunshots? This was the only thought that echoed in his mind.

In a spot he couldn't see, countless bullet holes formed a human silhouette on the platform where the blond man had fallen.

All the bullets had 'avoided' the target and drew an outline of him!

In two to three steps, the Awakened reached the exit.

Suddenly, a rope fell from above.

The rope curled sharply. At a glance, it looked like a snake.

The Awakened's pupils dilated rapidly. Without thinking, he drew his weapon and fired crazily at the rope.

However, no gunshots sounded. What he pulled out was not a pistol but a lighter.

His pistol remained firmly holstered at his waist.

Amidst the clicking sounds, the lighter kept emitting flames, but it was useless.

Finally, the few security personnel from before rushed over.

This time, they didn't dare to use their guns again, afraid that they would encounter the unbelievable again.

Under such sweeping fire, they actually missed! This was simply a miracle!

They either pounced forward and restrained the other party, drew their electric batons, or waved their fists in an attempt to paralyze the target and knock out the enemy.

Strangely enough, their actions went surprisingly smoothly. The man seemed to be at odds with the rope the entire time, and he didn't realize that he was holding a lighter and not a pistol.

Finally, he fell to the ground again and lost consciousness.

Afraid of snakes, no—afraid of distorted creatures to the point of losing his mind? Upon seeing this, a term flashed across Jiang Baimian's mind: Shadow of Distortion!

April's Kalendaria, Shadow of Distortion

Upon seeing the Awakened being dragged away, Jiang Baimian—who had no idea what had happened—retracted her gaze and looked at Shang Jianyao and Long Yuehong.

“We just watched an assassination farce?” She laughed softly. As she spoke, she glanced at the noble who had almost choked to death from drinking water.

Her gaze suddenly froze.

The noble sat in his original spot, and there was no sign of him nearly suffocating. On the table in front of him, the porcelain cup—which had been smashed to pieces—was still intact.

The corresponding ground was dry, without any water stains.

Following Jiang Baimian and Shang Jianyao's gazes, Long Yuehong also discovered this scene. For a moment, he couldn't tell what was real and what was fake.

Amidst the thumping sounds, the iron railings on both ends of the arena below slowly rose.

Chapter 400: Security Mechanism

Jiang Baimian couldn't be bothered to watch the gladiators appear. She controlled the speed at which she turned her head and casually looked back at the spot where the conflict had happened.

At the exit, the security personnel returned to their original positions one after another. The surrounding audience members would glance over from time to time.

All of this meant that someone had probably been running for their life unless the person lurking in the darkness had affected the thousands of people in the area.

If not for the fact that she was in the aristocratic VIP room, Jiang Baimian really wanted to check if there were any bullet holes in the ground and if the brownish-yellow rope was still there.

Her intuition told her that it was most likely true.

She vaguely seemed to grasp something and had a guess.

When she turned around, she heard the noble's companions mocking him. "Haha, you almost became the first person in high society to choke to death from drinking water."

"Only that one person was more embarrassing than you."

"How was it? Tell us how you felt."

With a gloomy expression, the noble said, "This was an assassination attempt on me! I don't even know who I offended!"

He paused and exhaled. “Let’s watch the gladiator fight first. We’ll talk when we get back.”

It was only then that Jiang Baimian really paid attention to the noble’s appearance.

He was about 27 or 28 years old, and he was also an Akson. His black hair was tied into a small braid, and his blue eyes were relatively clear. He showed no signs of alcohol addiction.

He seemed to have undergone genetic enhancement. Although his facial features weren’t outstanding, he had a rather elegant bearing when all of them were put together. He gave off the feeling of an artist.

As for his height, Jiang Baimian couldn’t accurately determine his height because he was sitting. She could only believe that he wasn’t shorter than Long Yuehong based on her experience.

“Dino, don’t use assassination as an excuse,” the noble’s companions giggled and replied.

They had all seen Dino choke on his water and almost die... Dino definitely couldn’t hold the cup back then under normal conditions and would’ve let it fall to the ground... Dino insisted that he had suffered an assassination attempt, but he didn’t deny that he had choked on the water... The cup was placed on the table intact, and the rest of the water didn’t spill... Jiang Baimian extracted the details and tried to guess the possible truth.

She had heard of the person who was more ‘embarrassing’ than Dino. A certain aristocrat suddenly had diarrhea in the suburbs. He quickly found a farmer’s house and borrowed their latrine, but he accidentally fell in and died young.

At this moment, Jiang Baimian saw Oray’s grandson—Marcus—reveal a slightly mocking smile again. He then cast his gaze at the arena.

The next second, Jiang Baimian heard Shang Jianyao chuckle softly. “A virtual machine...”

Virtual machine... Jiang Baimian’s research direction in the past wasn’t in the electronic or computer field, but she had come into contact with such things since she was young. After installing the auxiliary chip in her biological prosthetic limb, she had a deeper understanding of the field and naturally understood what a virtual machine was.

A virtual machine was a computer operating system emulated by the corresponding technology. Its functions were the same as the original, and using it was no different from using the original.

Everything that happened in the virtual machine wouldn't affect the original version. After all, it was only a mirror image that could be used for relatively risky operations.

Shang Jianyao used a virtual machine to describe what had just happened. He meant that everyone had actually synchronized with a virtual world after entering the aristocratic VIP room and a specific area—or rather, a large-scale illusion. Everyone's data and reactions had been replicated. They would communicate inside, and the results of the communication would be filtered by the powerful Awakened who created this illusion and send the feedback to their real selves.

In other words, the people the Old Task Force saw and heard had undergone three rounds of conversion. When a person spoke in reality, the corresponding words, expressions, and actions were synchronized with the virtual world. Jiang Baimian and the others in the virtual world would hear those words and see the other party's expressions and actions. The data received by the images were then synchronized onto their bodies in reality.

Therefore, this seemingly normal private communication mechanism was abnormally complicated.

The complicated goal was to ensure safety.

To put it simply, everyone in this area's interaction—people with people and people with objects—had undergone a round of filtering in the virtual world.

This made Jiang Baimian think of the Old World's online games. She and the others were in control of an account that belonged to them to build a virtual world with other players and objects. What they saw and heard came from it, but the changes in their emotions were real.

The only difference was that most of the people present didn't realize they were 'playing games.' They believed that everything was real and normal.

No matter how much damage one suffered in the game, they would be fine as long as their emotions didn't exceed a certain limit.

In the current situation, this game also had a Censorship Mechanism installed. Gore, danger, and violent matters would be filtered out. It was to ensure that the players maintained a healthy body and mind while remaining emotionally stable.

Jiang Baimian had previously been wondering how First City could protect Oray's two descendants and prevent them from being killed by an organization.

It had to be known that Awakened had many abilities. They were also concealed and bizarre. When assassinating a person without showing any signs, even powerhouses of the same level as the assailant might not discover them.

Just like how the noble nearly choked to death after taking a sip of water.

According to Jiang Baimian's thoughts, the most effective way to prevent Awakened assassinations was to carve out a safe zone and prevent strangers from approaching. If they needed to travel, they could clear the area in advance and filter out the people coming and going.

But from her observations of Marcus and Avia, she realized that the two of them often went out—they participated in gatherings or watched gladiator fights. They never deliberately kept some distance from others.

This filled Jiang Baimian with confusion, but she couldn't find a suitable explanation.

Now, she roughly understood the reason: the Marcus and Avia people saw were actually in a virtual machine!

This way, whoever wanted to do something nasty would definitely be discovered by the virtual world's owner after the three layers of emulation and be stopped in time.

This ability is really interesting... In the virtual world, the aristocrat eventually choked on his water. This means that the first layer that synchronizes real-life data is an unconscious, instinctive replication. Therefore, it's impossible to filter out such dangerous information... This also explains why I can sense bioelectric signals and why Shang Jianyao can also detect human consciousness. This is a rigid mechanism that completely replicates every detail...

After that, the choking on water isn't reflected back to reality. Therefore, the noble is fine, and so is his cup... Here, the virtual world's owner discovered something amiss. In other words, the data filter is actually at this level...

He provided us synchronized feedback on this matter to see everyone's reactions? Yes... The subsequent performance of the noble choking to death was purely virtual. There's no longer any real-life basis... This means that the virtual world's owner has very strong control over this illusion...

By tracking the dangerous information, he easily locked onto the Awakened who used his abilities and found his location... This can explain most of what just happened... Thoughts flashed through Jiang Baimian's mind as she connected all the details.

Long Yuehong also knew what a virtual machine was. He roughly understood Shang Jianyao's meaning after some thought.

This made his eyes involuntarily widen a little. He increasingly found Awakened terrifying and strange.

Jiang Baimian then glanced at Shang Jianyao and didn't say anything about her guess or communicate with him. She knew very well why the latter had used the relatively professional term 'virtual machine' to describe the current situation. This was because their every word and action would enter the virtual world and be monitored and filtered.

It was normal for the virtual world's owner not to understand the meaning of 'virtual machine' if they weren't educated.

This should be considered an illusion ability. It's highly likely to belong to the Shattered Mirror domain... Previously, Avia also had Awakened in the Shattered Mirror domain... However, the Clam Dragon Church is mainly popular in areas where Ashlandic gather... According to the company's information, First City doesn't have any traces of Clam Dragon Church activity...

Jiang Baimian knew that only the thoughts in her mind were safe. Therefore, she cast her gaze at the colosseum and made all kinds of guesses as she watched the competition. Having one individual appear can be considered a special exception, but two might not be a coincidence. Could it be that they come from a Red River religion that worships Shattered Mirror? This religion has a very close partnership with First City?

In fact, they had said something that they shouldn't have said just now. However, the overall situation was still fine. It could be explained that the two of them had a certain level of understanding of Awakened and were relatively familiar with General Phocas. They knew the two city guard majors—Ducas and Cassiel—and had never met Marcus. They had only heard a little about him and thought that he was leading an oppressed life.

Such conditions would be common from any filtering amongst First City's high society. It wasn't considered special.

With their new discovery, Jiang Baimian felt that their operation today had been fruitful.

Amidst orderly and intense thumping sounds, the tall gladiator—who was wearing leather armor and holding a shield and a spear—walked out. The black double-headed tiger jumped out and looked at its prey with brutal and bloodthirsty eyes.