

Ad Infinitum 441

Chapter 441: Realization

On the roof of a tall building far away from Apex Gladiator Arena.

After Bai Chen secretly mounted the Orange rifle, she took out the letter Jiang Baimian had given her and opened it to read.

She didn't wait until it was the last resort.

Bai Chen revealed a complicated expression from a quick skim. She was surprised, confused, and a little amused.

...

As the nursery-like rhyme echoed, the nobles stood up and walked to the bathroom in the walkway. This was also a relatively common scene in the past. It was a common choice for many people to relieve themselves and get spruced up before the gladiator match officially began.

Upon seeing this, the corners of Marcus's mouth curled up slightly as he shook his head indiscernibly. But suddenly, his expression became strange.

He also felt the bulge in his lower abdomen and an uncontrollable urge.

How can that be? A confused thought surfaced in Marcus's mind. I haven't drunk water since lunch. Furthermore, I had specially gone to the bathroom before leaving. Why am I in a rush to pee?

However, his body told him that this wasn't an illusion. His previous doubts weren't without explanation—they could be explained with the Red River proverb: "There are matters in life that are unpredictable and intolerable—love and diarrhea."

Marcus's first reaction was to hold it in, but the urge became stronger and stronger. It was so strong that he was afraid that he would wet his pants.

I still have to go. It's fine as long as I don't close the bathroom door when the time comes. It's fine even if it's closed since there are lights inside... Besides, there are two to three Awakened in the VIP room. Many of them have military experience. They aren't trash who panic when they encounter an accident... I also have professional bodyguards who are willing to block a shot for me... People always found explanations to convince themselves if it benefited them. Marcus quickly convinced himself, stood up, and led the four bodyguards to the bathroom.

Upon seeing this scene and not sensing any changes in the Virtual World, Long Yuehong heaved a slight sigh of relief.

Although immediately switching off the portable recording device could prevent the effects from worsening, lest even the Virtual World's owner began to feel urgent, Shang Jianyao didn't do so because it would appear too coincidental and purposeful. This would make it easy for them to be suspected.

Fortunately, they had considered what to do in such a situation when formulating the plan.

Jiang Baimian flipped her wrist to look at the time. She took out a silver-white phone and dialed a number.

The caller ID stated 'Max.'

"Hey, Max. Are you free tonight? We'd like to visit and discuss that matter..." At this point, Jiang Baimian turned around and patted Shang Jianyao's arm, gesturing for him to switch off the portable recording device and not affect her call.

Shang Jianyao naturally followed suit.

After the music stopped, Jiang Baimian continued, "I'll see you at 8 p.m. then. Give us at least 50 minutes."

"Alright." On the other end of the line was a deep male voice.

...

After Geneva hung up, he switched off the phone to prevent others from pinpointing his location. He then began counting down.

In the conversation they had, the first number was an invalid one used to confuse any listeners. Its only meaning was to tell Geneva that the latter was the key.

'50 minutes' meant that he was to cut the power in 50 seconds!

...

Jiang Baimian put away her phone and looked at the walkway to the bathroom in front of her. She saw that Marcus and his four bodyguards were about to enter.

She slapped Shang Jianyao's right hand that was 'attempting' to play the song again and deliberately spoke in a wheedling voice. "The match is about to begin. Make a quick trip to the bathroom."

"Alright." Shang Jianyao deliberately placed the portable recording device on the seat. He quickly stood up and walked to the walkway where the bathroom was with Jiang Baimian.

As a 'bodyguard,' Long Yuehong undoubtedly followed closely behind.

When they saw the male bathroom, Marcus and his bodyguards had already entered.

Logically speaking, Jiang Baimian should've turned to the right and gone to the female bathroom. But at this moment, Shang Jianyao stretched out his hand, hugged her waist, and pointed at the male bathroom with a naughty expression.

"You're so nasty," Jiang Baimian said angrily with her head lowered.

Ugh... Although Long Yuehong was mentally prepared for this line, he still felt nauseous. Furthermore, he was very afraid that his team leader would silence him later.

Shang Jianyao and Jiang Baimian then pushed open the door to the male bathroom that wasn't locked.

In First City's aristocratic circle—where the Mandara faith was relatively popular—this wasn't considered too rare. Not to mention male bathrooms, even gardens, garages, and rooftops had been attempted by people.

The male bathroom attached to the nobles' VIP rooms was different from other places. There were no urinals because many nobles would get their bodyguards to come in with them, worried about being attacked. Not everyone enjoyed urinating under everyone's gazes.

For decency, this place was designed very similarly to a female bathroom. It consisted of cubicles, and no other cubicle was directly adjacent to the other. There were empty areas between cubicles.

At this moment, Marcus had already entered a cubicle with the four bodyguards guarding outside.

Shang Jianyao and Jiang Baimian—who were hugging—walked to a cubicle in the corner. This posture made their actions rather slow.

As a bodyguard, Long Yuehong 'habitually' closed the bathroom door.

This was the best time to close the door! As there was still no power outage and the lights were still on, the bathroom's situation was far from being in a state of alert. It was enough for the Virtual World's owner to maintain normal operations; there was no need to add any additional details.

If he were a rookie who had just begun protecting Marcus, he might be beyond the limits of vigilance. But he had clearly been doing this for many years. He was definitely almost numb to certain details, so he closed an eye whenever he could.

With a click, the bathroom door closed.

Long Yuehong didn't dare to be at complete ease with regard to this. He wasn't sure if this was his illusion or if it was an illusion in the Virtual World.

In the real world, the bathroom door might still be in an ajar state. If that were the case, the Old Task Force could only accept the outcome of failure.

Less than ten seconds after he closed the door, the lights in the bathroom suddenly went out when Jiang Baimian and Shang Jianyao were still a distance away from the cubicle!

This happened without any warning—it didn't even flicker twice!

The place was immediately thrown into darkness. Only a breeze could be felt from the ventilation ducts.

Almost at the same time, Jiang Baimian suddenly felt her surroundings become light and see-through. It was like she had finally surfaced from the water after diving a distance.

Without anyone's reminder, she knew that the Virtual World had subsided. At the very least, it didn't envelop the male bathroom attached to the nobles' VIP room!

Such an environment and such a reaction also made her understand the price the Virtual World's owner paid—claustrophobia!

Even if the Mind Corridor-level Awakened could continue simulating a bright and sealed bathroom in the Virtual World, reality couldn't be changed. This would make him—who knew what was real and what was fake—feel terrified. He uncontrollably lost focus on the area.

Therefore, the Virtual World was eliminated from the bathroom.

Seizing this opportunity, Shang Jianyao stretched out his hand and grabbed the Destiny Pearl in his pocket. He didn't use Inference Clowning—which required more steps—and instead chose Destiny Connection!

With this, he could make his consciousness leave his body and directly invade the target's mind world. The other party might not be able to sense it.

The range of Destiny Connection was 30 meters, and the entire bathroom wasn't that large!

Green light lit up in his pocket without illuminating the darkness outside.

Shang Jianyao's consciousness instantly appeared in the Sea of Origins—which was shimmering with light and shrouded in fog.

Countless waves surged, revealing all kinds of scenes.

Shang Jianyao didn't go too far because Marcus was only six years old when Oray died. Even if there was something important, it was impossible for Oray to tell him directly.

There wasn't much time for him to review the memories. Shang Jianyao only chose two relevant pieces of information.

The first was if there was anything left behind for Marcus or his mother—Oray's daughter—before Oray died.

The second was what Marcus's mother had told him before she died.

The direction was clear enough, and the nine Shang Jianyaos were abnormally familiar with splitting up the work. It didn't take them long to find the information they wanted.

First, Oray didn't leave behind any secret items or information for Marcus and his mother. Only property and fields were passed down.

Second, Marcus's mother had indeed said a few words to him before she died: "Don't complain and don't expect too much. Continue living as an ordinary noble. Also, be vigilant of Mechanical Paradise and don't trust the Source Brain... Be careful—be careful of the Eighth Research Institute. Try your best to keep a distance from your cousin. She—she has something, something very, very dangerous... If you encounter a danger you can't avoid, tell the enemy that you know the password to enter Wasteland Ruin 13's laboratory. Yes, it's that: 'Messiah'..."

Shang Jianyao didn't have much time to continue retracing Marcus's memories. He knew when to stop and suddenly pushed the Destiny Pearl's power to its limits.

This made Marcus dizzy, and he felt his vision turn black. He felt like all kinds of things that had happened in the past inundated him.

This effectively concealed the slight daze and confusion he felt after Shang Jianyao invaded his mind.

Shang Jianyao then transferred the Destiny Pearl's remaining power to his Sea of Origins. This way, the bead wouldn't have any problems during the subsequent 'inspection.'

Conservation was a good virtue.

As the green light quickly dimmed, Jiang Baimian—who had been tapped by Shang Jianyao—took out her phone. She switched on the flashlight and shone it at the switch. She then pretended to be surprised and afraid as she shouted, "Why is there a power outage?"

"I don't know," Long Yuehong—who in his role as a bodyguard—replied cooperatively.

There was a certain distance between him and the switch. Anyone with eyes could tell that it wasn't him.

Jiang Baimian instructed in horror, "Quick, open the door!"

Their conversation and performance were all seen by Marcus's four bodyguards.

Marcus also recovered from his dizziness. He supported himself using the partition in the cubicle and opened the door.

Click! Click!

After Long Yuehong—whose heart couldn't help but race—opened the bathroom door, he pressed the switch repeatedly, but the lights didn't come on.

"It seems like the entire place has a power outage." He looked back at the walkway that led to the women's bathroom.

The lights there were also out.

Chapter 442: Acting

Almost a second before Jiang Baimian switched on the flashlight on her phone, Shang Jianyao threw the bead—which had lost its Destiny Connection power—into a trashcan in the bathroom.

Just as Long Yuehong made the judgment that there was a power outage everywhere, he saw several nobles walk to the male bathroom.

He also heard a slightly elderly male voice coming from the walkie-talkie in one of Marcus's bodyguards' hands. "Open the bathroom door."

"It's already open. The other noble's attendant opened it," Marcus's bodyguard replied briefly.

Marcus and Shang Jianyao weren't the only groups of people in the bathroom. There were also other nobles, their attendants, and bodyguards.

This was the environment Jiang Baimian was looking forward to—not many people—which wouldn't interfere with the operation—but there was also a sizable number. There were other 'suspects.'

An instant later, Long Yuehong inexplicably felt like the world around him had changed. Of course, he didn't know if this was his mind playing tricks on him or if he had really experienced the corresponding experience. After all, he had guessed that the Virtual World was about to envelop the area again after hearing the conversation.

The thoughts might evoke a sensual experience.

What had just happened convinced him that even if he didn't open the door, the sealed environment wouldn't last long. Not only could the Virtual World's owner instruct Marcus's bodyguards through the walkie-talkie, but he could also indirectly order the other nobles and their attendants to do his bidding. With one party inside and the other party outside, one side would eventually succeed.

Therefore, the key to this operation is the time difference. We had to make good use of the Destiny Pearl... Long Yuehong nodded indiscernibly as if he was confirming his judgment of the blackout.

"Seriously, how long has it been since the gladiator arena's circuits were repaired?" Jiang Baimian grumbled. She had also read the book Shang Jianyao bought—An Actor Prepares.

“Who knows?” replied another noble in the bathroom. “It almost made me fall.”

This wasn't a deliberate attempt to strike up a conversation. In the pitch-black environment, he couldn't see Jiang Baimian's face clearly. He was only expressing his feelings.

Jiang Baimian then shone the flashlight on Shang Jianyao and weakly said, “Let's go out. It's dark and terrifying.”

Upon hearing Jiang Baimian speak in such a tone, Long Yuehong inexplicably imagined the scene of his team leader hitting the Blackmarsh Iron Snake with her 'Thunder Spear.' Back then, the mutated creature was so large and terrifying.

Shang Jianyao smiled. “It's an environment like this that makes it more exciting.”

“Pui.” Jiang Baimian spat. “Do it yourself.”

She broke free of the other party's hand and walked out of the bathroom.

Shang Jianyao shrugged and didn't mind that the Virtual World had already returned. He walked into a cubicle, unzipped his pants, and really used the toilet.

At a time like this, whoever had the smaller dick was the embarrassment.

Jiang Baimian didn't go far. She waited for Shang Jianyao outside the men's bathroom.

She observed the nobles passing by as if nothing had happened, but she didn't discover anyone that matched the voice on the walkie-talkie.

One of the nobles entered the bathroom, and his eyes met Marcus, who had just washed his hands.

Marcus slowly shook his head—he meant that nothing had happened.

He couldn't say that he felt somewhat dizzy because he was seemingly claustrophobic in the dark environment. Such a triviality would only attract mockery if he told others. Besides, he had returned to normal.

After Marcus and his four bodyguards left the bathroom, Shang Jianyao had finished relieving himself and came out to meet Jiang Baimian with Long Yuehong.

They returned to the VIP room and entered their personal room.

After putting away the portable recording device, Shang Jianyao adjusted his sitting posture and looked into the arena, waiting for the match to begin.

Jiang Baimian's attention seemed to be focused on the arena, but the various thoughts in her mind didn't calm down at all. Although nothing wrong happened to Marcus, and everything seems normal, the Virtual World's owner will more or less be a little suspicious. After all, coincidences are always disturbing. For experienced experts, they wouldn't ignore them... But since nothing seems to have happened on the surface, his response won't be that intense...

If I were him, I would instruct the arena's security personnel to stop the nobles, their attendants, and their bodyguards who were in the bathroom with Marcus after the match ends for the purpose of assisting in the investigation... Whoever leaves early is more suspicious...

In addition, while waiting for the departure of everyone, I would also get First City's relevant departments to cooperate and investigate two matters. First, the origins and backgrounds of the people in the bathroom back then. Second, the real reason for the blackout...

The former will take a relatively long time—it requires the questioning of many people. After all, we obtained the tickets through unofficial means. We got it through the smuggler, Lehman, who is no longer in First City...

The latter isn't complicated. First, the city's power department will locate the malfunction point and figure out the exact reason. It won't take more than 15 minutes... In other words, we have to evacuate the arena in 15 minutes, or the consequences will be unimaginable...

Having obtained Marcus's memories, they might not be easily ransomed. They might even be silenced.

...

After confirming that the Apex Gladiator Arena had a blackout, Bai Chen waited for a few minutes as instructed before taking out another phone. She then dialed Jiang Baimian's number.

...

Ring! Ring!

Jiang Baimian—who was watching the gladiator fight—picked up her phone and said 'hello' a few times.

As the venue was filled with thumping and shouting and the environment was very noisy, she couldn't seem to hear what the other party was saying. Or rather, she could only stand up and walk to the VIP room's exit.

She finished the call at the periphery of the walkway. It was about a friend having encountered an emergency and needing their help.

Jiang Baimian then raised her hand and waved at Shang Jianyao.

Shang Jianyao walked over with Long Yuehong.

After briefly explaining the matter, Jiang Baimian anxiously said, "Let's go."

"It's just begun..." Shang Jianyao fully revealed his reluctant attitude.

Long Yuehong's only emotion was: Fortunately, I don't have any lines or scenes. Otherwise, my acting might be the greatest flaw.

Jiang Baimian pleaded again, and Shang Jianyao finally agreed reluctantly.

After Long Yuehong returned to the hotel to pick up his bag, the three of them walked through the walkway to the exit.

Just as the exit was at hand, two men dressed as security guards suddenly came from the side and stopped them.

“Sir, Madam, there’s something we need your help with,” said a muscular man with dark-green eyes in a deep voice. It was obvious that Long Yuehong—who was their bodyguard—was nothing but an accessory in his eyes.

“We still have something on.” Jiang Baimian frowned.

“What’s the matter?” Shang Jianyao flipped his wrist and looked at his watch. “I’ll give you ten minutes.”

The dark-green-eyed man who had just spoken wore a stoic expression. “What are your names, which family are you from, and where do you live?”

“My name is Sangri Drace,” Shang Jianyao replied proudly.

Drace was one of the giants who established First City. His name was made into a currency unit like Oray.

He was the noble with the most descendants and had made his name a family name.

The Old Task Force—who had expected to be interrogated—had long combined the information provided by the company and other channels to create an aristocratic identity for Shang Jianyao and Jiang Baimian.

This was definitely fake, but the point was to make it sound real while ensuring that it was difficult to determine the veracity of the matter.

After Jiang Baimian also gave her name, Shang Jianyao said another address that existed but didn’t belong to them. Furthermore, it was relatively remote and difficult to find.

Just as they answered the other party’s question, the other ‘security guard’ smiled. “Alright, the two of you can leave now. If any further investigations are required, we’ll pay you a visit.”

He looked ordinary. Apart from his flaxen hair and eyes of the same color, he had almost no characteristics that stood out. He didn't draw any attention.

"Huh?" Shang Jianyao appropriately expressed his surprise.

"Aristocrats like yourself are trustworthy," the 'security guard' replied with a smile.

Jiang Baimian naturally could guess why: the other party had just used an Awakened ability to complete a lie test.

However, the Old Task Force had formulated several plans. One of them was precisely for such personnel.

They had already used Inference Clowning to convince themselves that they were nobles. However, there was no contradiction between whether they were nobles or members of Pangu Biology, or whether they had probed Marcus.

Jiang Baimian felt that the other party's mentality was: This kind of person—who clearly comes from a noble family—can run, but they can't hide. We can take our time in the future, so there is no need to fall out on the spot.

In the Old Task Force's plans, they were most afraid of encountering Awakened from the Last Man domain or the Subhuti domain. The solution was to immediately shout the moment they sensed something.

"Personnel from the Anti-intellectualism Church! The Anti-intellectualism Church is wreaking havoc again!"

Shang Jianyao praised the security guard's reply and nodded. "Not bad."

He didn't waste his breath and led Jiang Baimian and Long Yuehong through the exit.

The weather outside was perfect, but just as Long Yuehong was about to heave a sigh of relief, another person suddenly walked over.

The person had thick shoulders and a wide body. He stood there like a wall, leaving a deep impression.

Jiang Baimian knew him. He was a sheriff in the Red Wolf Zone named Wall, and he was also a descendant of a certain noble.

She and Shang Jianyao had previously encountered this sheriff because they had saved Pangu Biology's intelligence agent, Garibaldi.

In other words, the three of them had met and spoken to each other.

Wall grumbled, "Why is there a power outage here? Did something happen? I was still planning on charging my car somewhere here..."

As he spoke, he cast his gaze at Shang Jianyao, Jiang Baimian, and Long Yuehong.

Chapter 443: The Harrowing, Silent Danger

Meeting Wall was definitely unexpected for the Old Task Force.

Although Jiang Baimian and Shang Jianyao had disguised themselves sufficiently to make themselves appear to be of Red River ethnicity, they didn't dare to bet that Wall wouldn't recognize the two people opposite him as Ruin Hunters who had done a Good Samaritan act on the street.

They had previously encountered General Phocas as well, but the two parties didn't have any direct or head-on contact. At most, their eyes swept past each other and were separated by a considerable distance.

In addition, there were many nobles back then, and there was no lack of people familiar with General Phocas. Jiang Baimian, Shang Jianyao, and Long Yuehong were only three inconspicuous people on the periphery, so they wouldn't attract the other party's attention at all.

Apart from the two 'security personnel' at the entrance to the noble area, there was currently only the Old Task Force trio. Unless Wall was a particularly sloppy or careless person, it was impossible for him not to size them up and examine them.

The various details of their previous encounter told Jiang Baimian that not only was Wall not sloppy or careless, but he was also meticulous, serious, and experienced. He was a relatively capable sheriff.

At the same time, recognizing people was also an ability most sheriffs had. This made Jiang Baimian afraid of betting that Wall wasn't focused and that he wouldn't recognize the two 'unfamiliar' nobles.

Once he discovered something and pointed it out, all of the Old Task Force's efforts would be in vain.

Failure wasn't terrifying. What was terrifying was that they had failed at this very moment—their path of retreat was no longer solid.

More importantly, Jiang Baimian believed that they were still in the Virtual World. If Shang Jianyao tried to use his abilities, he would definitely be discovered by the Mind Corridor-level Awakened who was definitely paying attention to them.

As these thoughts raced through her mind, Jiang Baimian raised her left hand and very naturally brushed the hair hanging by her ear as Wall looked over.

...

Atop a building relatively far from the colosseum, Bai Chen—who had switched off her phone—placed her eye behind the Orange rifle's scope and observed the inspection area of the nobles' VIP room.

Suddenly, she changed her position and aimed the muzzle at a metal sign on a nearby street.

Bang! Ting!

The sound echoed and spread far across the street in the afternoon.

Bai Chen didn't stop. She fired three consecutive shots, shocking the pedestrians into ducking for cover in a sorry state. It also evoked enough panic that cars began to accelerate or brake.

...

In the aristocratic VIP room's security area, Wall heard an obvious gunshot just as he looked over at the people at the entrance.

Accompanying the gunshot was a commotion that came from a nearby street.

As a sheriff, a local sheriff whose jurisdiction was in this area, and a sheriff with a background and ability to raise his status constantly, Wall's expression immediately changed.

He turned his ear and listened, not missing the subsequent gunshots. At the same time, Wall drew his Red River pistol.

"Something seems to have happened..." the sheriff muttered to himself. He no longer tried to talk to the 'security personnel,' Jiang Baimian, and the others. After figuring out the reason for the blackout, he turned around and ran toward his electric vehicle.

His subordinates were still waiting for him.

"Things haven't been peaceful recently..." Shang Jianyao sighed with emotion as he looked at the block where there had been a gunshot.

Long Yuehong was also very surprised. He didn't expect a shooting to happen.

Although he preliminarily determined that Bai Chen was the one who had fired the shots based on the gunshots' direction, he couldn't understand or believe it. This was because this wasn't included in the plans that had been formulated in advance.

Long Yuehong knew that even if Little White really wanted to fire, it was to cover their retreat and not to fire at random places.

Jiang Baimian heaved a long sigh of relief.

A plan couldn't prevent such an accident. She hadn't set up any secret signals for such matters. At this critical moment, she could only gamble on Bai Chen's brain, memories, and reaction.

She remembered that when she and Shang Jianyao encountered Wall, Bai Chen was also in charge of remote surveillance. She believed that this team member should still remember him. After all, Mr. Wall's figure left a deep impression.

Jiang Baimian then signaled for Bai Chen to take action by brushing the hair by her ear with her left hand.

As for the action to take, this secret signal couldn't spell anything out. It could only be determined by Bai Chen herself.

Bai Chen didn't disappoint her. She didn't rashly shoot Wall and create chaos. Instead, she chose to make a diversion and lure him away.

A good teammate can really protect half a life... As Jiang Baimian sighed silently, she pretended to be terrified and said to Shang Jianyao, "Let's leave quickly. It's not safe here."

Shang Jianyao turned his head and looked at the two security guards. He smiled and confirmed, "So can we leave?"

The security guard with dark-green eyes didn't respond, but the one without any special characteristics nodded.

Jiang Baimian, Shang Jianyao, and Long Yuehong turned around and walked to the parking area. Their footsteps were clearly faster than before.

This was normal. A shooting had just happened in the nearby block, so most people were definitely in a rush to leave.

Long Yuehong's heart remained hanging—he felt that it wasn't time to relax yet. He believed that he had to get into the rented car and drive out of the Apex Gladiator Arena's vicinity to escape danger!

As he walked, he suddenly heard a voice coming from the two security personnel's walkie-talkies behind him.

Due to the distance, he didn't hear clearly what was said, but his body almost stiffened.

This voice at the critical moment gave him a bad premonition, afraid that all their efforts would be in vain.

At that moment, Long Yuehong wished he could run. But that would only expose himself, a revelation of the very thing he wanted to hide.

They took a few more steps before the dark-green-eyed 'security personnel' suddenly shouted, "Wait!"

This... Various scenes of them running at the ends of their ropes instantly surfaced in Long Yuehong's mind.

Jiang Baimian's back muscles almost tensed up.

Shang Jianyao calmly turned around and asked unhappily, "What is it now?"

The two 'security personnel' ran over and pointed at the spot covered by his left sleeve. "What's that?"

Bangle of Blindness... Jiang Baimian replied inwardly. She roughly understood what was going on.

The Virtual World's owner was filtering the 'data' of the people in the bathroom back then and realized that Shang Jianyao was wearing a rather strange accessory on his left wrist.

Shang Jianyao raised his chin and smiled smugly. "It's woven from someone's hair. You should know what I'm talking about."

He pulled up his sleeve without hiding anything and showed the accessory woven from black hair.

Jiang Baimian's heart palpitated as she immediately cooperated and snorted. "I'll burn it one day!"

The two 'security personnel' looked at each other, and the one with dark-green eyes said, "Let us take a look."

Shang Jianyao reluctantly took off the Bangle of Blindness and handed it over.

Each of the two 'security personnel' examined it. As Long Yuehong's heartbeat quickened slightly, they indicated that there was nothing wrong.

The security guard that lacked any special characteristics picked up the walkie-talkie and put it to his ear. After listening for a few seconds, he said to Shang Jianyao and the others, "Sorry, you can really leave this time."

"Let this be the last," Shang Jianyao grumbled and turned around.

It was only then that Long Yuehong understood why Shang Jianyao was so calm.

When dealing with the Destiny Pearl, he had transferred the Bangle of Blindness's power into his mind world!

This would be a considerable risk, but it was worth it compared to the importance of this operation. Therefore, the Bangle of Blindness Shang Jianyao handed over was indeed only an ordinary hair accessory.

Jiang Baimian had long known that he had done something similar. At this moment, she made some connections. In fact, the Bangle of Blindness's ability isn't that useless. At least from the looks of it, it counters the Virtual World's owner very well... As long as one can't see, isn't it equivalent to being in a confined space? It might directly scare him to death... Unfortunately, we can't lock onto the Virtual World's owner's location...

Amidst her thoughts, Jiang Baimian followed Shang Jianyao through the rows of cars and boarded the rental car rented by the Old Task Force.

Long Yuehong was in charge of driving.

The car slowly drove out of the parking lot.

During this process, Long Yuehong didn't dare to blink as he drove seriously. He only heaved a sigh of relief when they were far away from the Apex Gladiator Arena.

He felt a dense layer of cold sweat on his back.

He, Shang Jianyao, and Jiang Baimian didn't completely relax because they still had to do something to confirm that they had truly escaped the Virtual World.

At this moment, Long Yuehong swept his gaze around and seemed to see a familiar figure. He quickly turned his head to look at the corresponding spot, but the area he saw was empty.

It was the entrance to an alley.

Long Yuehong deliberated for a few seconds and said in the Red River language, "I think I saw Old Han."

First City's nobles could also know Old Han, so it wasn't a problem to say such a thing.

"Where?" Shang Jianyao became thrilled.

Chapter 444: The Matter of the Town

Han Wanghuo carried a paper bag and returned to his rented apartment in the Green Olive Zone with Zeng Duo.

"Preparations are almost done." He nodded at the short, thin, and sickly Zeng Duo. "Only the last two matters are left."

"I know. It's been hard on you." Zeng Duo—who had short hair and malt-colored skin—took the paper bag from Han Wanghuo. "I'll do the cooking."

Han Wanghuo fell silent for a moment before saying, "You don't have to do this. You aren't my servant."

Zeng Duo looked down at the brown shoe on her foot and frankly said, “My requests are indeed more excessive than what you will receive. I want to make it up to you as much as possible while I’m alive.”

The request she made as a condition for selling her heart was to ‘save a town.’

That town was called Early Spring Town, and it was an Ashlandic settlement. Compared to most places, the production capability around Early Spring Town was relatively high—enough to feed the residents. The only unfortunate thing was that the surrounding water resources were somewhat polluted.

Due to the food sufficiency, Early Spring Town’s people didn’t dare or bear to leave. After a long time, they suffered from many diseases, and newborns often became abnormal.

Zeng Duo was one of the few healthy children in a cohort of children, and she had seen her fair share of such tragedies.

When she was almost an adult, she learned of the Ruin Hunter occupation from a passing caravan and chose to leave with them. She wanted to find a better settlement so that her people who were in suffering could have a place to relocate.

Her efforts suffered a setback from the beginning—the caravan suddenly turned hostile after leaving Early Spring Town and sold her to a slave owner.

Fortunately, she encountered a riot among the slaves before she suffered much. She took the opportunity to escape and entered a large town.

What she saw and heard later firmed her ideals as she gradually became a real Ruin Hunter. During this process, she was infected in the North Shore wastelands—her heart and other body parts underwent some level of mutation.

Unlike the people in her hometown, she realized that this mutation brought more benefits. It gave her greater endurance and greater explosive strength, allowing her to become an outstanding warrior quickly.

As she traveled in search, she returned to Early Spring Town several times. Before the New Year, when she felt that her goal was about to be achieved, she suddenly realized that the town seemed to be controlled by First City's soldiers. They did some nasty experiments there because there were many infected mutants or genetic mutants in the town.

Zeng Duo—who had already found a new settlement—busied herself with saving Early Spring Town. Unfortunately, signs of her physical problems started showing, and her condition quickly deteriorated.

After getting a check-up at an unlicensed clinic, Zeng Duo realized that her mutations weren't without their disadvantages. They had been lurking unseen and slowly fermenting until they were irreversible.

In her despair, Zeng Duo came up with the idea of selling her organs to get help. In fact, she no longer looked forward to saving all of Early Spring Town. She only wanted to save as many townsfolk as possible.

Han Wanghuo had been making preparations for this all this while. Be it weapons, ammunition, supplies, or getting reliable helpers, they weren't easy to obtain.

“Since I've already agreed to it, it means that it's fair.” Han Wanghuo thought for a moment and deliberately said with a cold expression, “To me, my life is more important than your entire town combined.”

Zeng Duo didn't repeat her previous words and nodded slightly. “It's not like I have anything to do. Someone has to do the cooking anyway, and I also need to eat.”

Han Wanghuo didn't stop her and watched Zeng Duo walk to the kitchen with the paper bag containing the ingredients.

Before entering, Zeng Duo turned around and said after some hesitation, “Rest more. Don't tire yourself out; this will accelerate the deterioration of your condition. Yes, I don't want you to collapse before the mission is completed.”

I'll take a gamble in advance and see if I can knock you out and drag you to the clinic... Han Wanghuo wanted to threaten her, but he ultimately didn't say a word and only nodded indiscernibly.

Zeng Duo first prepared the ingredients. When it was almost evening, she methodically cooked three dishes.

Han Wanghuo picked up a piece of roasted pork butt and looked at Zeng Duo—who was sitting to the side and eating the leftovers from yesterday—with a frown. “You don’t have to do this, right?”

Zeng Duo swallowed the rice and quickly said, “We can’t waste the food.”

Just as Han Wanghuo opened his mouth to speak, similar scenes from the past few days suddenly flashed across his mind.

He failed to persuade Zeng Duo each and every time. Although this woman wasn’t tall, she was unimaginably stubborn.

Therefore, Han Wanghuo chose to focus on eating.

...

Jiang Baimian was first delighted when she heard Long Yuehong’s words. She then hesitated for a few seconds and spoke as if nothing had happened. “I didn’t see him. Maybe he has already turned into another street. Yes, we’ll find him after we’re done here.”

She was worried that they were still in the Virtual World. That would drag Han Wanghuo down with them.

Since they already knew that the other party had shown up in the vicinity, it wouldn’t be too late to ask after they were out of their current situation and back to their original selves.

Long Yuehong also understood this problem. As a bodyguard and driver, he only replied with one word: “Alright.”

Shang Jianyao looked at the window beside Jiang Baimian regretfully and took the opportunity to instruct Long Yuehong, “Drive faster.”

Long Yuehong followed the plan and drove the car to a building not far away as if he wanted to enter an underground parking lot.

At this moment, there was still a power outage in this area—the cause of the accident had yet to be determined. The underground parking lot was pitch-black, and only the emergency lights were switched on in certain places.

Taking the opportunity of it being dark, Long Yuehong pretended to switch off the headlights carelessly.

An instant later, a dark, sealed space formed in the car.

Jiang Baimian, Shang Jianyao, and Long Yuehong didn't sense any abnormalities. This meant that they hadn't been enveloped within the Virtual World for quite some time.

This plan also used the fact that the Virtual World's owner had claustrophobia as a test to see if they were still in an illusion.

Before taking action, they couldn't determine the exact price the other party paid. They only came up with different solutions based on various guesses. Of course, if their guesses weren't right, Jiang Baimian and the others wouldn't have been able to 'approach' Marcus or obtain his memories. They could directly switch to surrendering.

Long Yuehong switched on the headlights again and seized the opportunity to leave through another exit.

Following that, they escaped their imaginary tailing, switched vehicles, and removed their disguises according to the plan.

...

In the aristocratic VIP room, the blackout didn't affect Marcus and the others' enthusiasm for watching the gladiator match.

The gladiator named Joey had fought an Icelander slave today and finally killed him at the cost of being injured.

After the thumping and shouting subsided, a noble's phone rang. His friend told him: "Another 'rat' has caused damage. There's a huge power outage in the city..."

Before the noble could ask about the details, he suddenly heard static coming from the phone—the signal here seemed to be problematic!

He vaguely sensed some anger.

On the other side, having learned the same information, Marcus's expression suddenly turned livid.

...

After returning to the safe house, the four Old Task Force members—who had rendezvoused again—cast their gazes at Shang Jianyao.

Jiang Baimian was in no rush to ask about the harvest and first asked in concern, "Is there any problem with the remaining power in the Bangle of Blindness?"

Shang Jianyao had transferred the remaining aura in the Bangle of Blindness into his mind world after all. This was a taboo among Awakened because it was very likely that the corresponding aura's owner would locate their mind world and descend directly.

Awakened at the Mind Corridor level often did such things in the Mind Corridor.

It was precisely because of this that Shang Jianyao could hide from the Virtual World's owner.

Shang Jianyao smiled casually. "It's fine; I've locked it up with the Destiny Pearl's remaining power. Maybe they will fight first."

Whoa, driving a tiger to devour a wolf... Jiang Baimian criticized inwardly and asked, "Any gains?"

Shang Jianyao seriously spoke about the words Marcus's mother had left behind. The main points were: First, be vigilant of Mechanical Paradise and don't trust the Source Brain.

Second, be careful of the Eighth Research Institute.

Third, maintain a distance from Avia. She has something very dangerous and impressive.

Fourth, Wasteland Ruin 13 has an Old World laboratory. The password is Messiah.

After hearing Shang Jianyao's recount, Genova fell silent. He didn't know why the Source Brain wasn't to be trusted.

Jiang Baimian glanced at the smart bot and deliberated before saying, "After all these twists and turns, we've circled back to the Eighth Research Institute. Also, it seems like Oray does have some secrets. I wonder if he hid them with Avia or in Wasteland Ruin 13's laboratory... Yes, this is probably how some of his research results were handled."

Oray was an artificial intelligence and robot expert.

Chapter 445: Bounty

Jiang Baimian added the latter sentence because she knew that this was what Genova cared about the most.

On the one hand, he wanted to find the information and research results left behind by Oray and see if there was a way to remove the various restrictions in a smart bot's core module to see if it could produce a soul. On the other hand, he wanted to know how this scientist suspected to be the Source Brain's father thought of smart bots. This was often reflected in one's last words.

"Therefore, we can either continue finding opportunities to come into contact with Avia or take the risk to go to Wasteland Ruin 13 and open that laboratory?" Long Yuehong didn't like the two possible developments.

Both choices were too dangerous, many times more dangerous than the Old Task Force's operation today.

They could keep the authorities in the dark regarding Marcus for 15 minutes. The Virtual World's owner and First City's higher-ups were likely aware that something had happened. With them being vigilant and prepared, this meant that with the Old Task Force's current strength, their chances of success were extremely slim even if they could get Xiaochong's help.

In comparison, the laboratory in Wasteland Ruin 13 might be safer. After all, Wu Meng and Xiaochong were of similar levels in the Old Task Force's mind.

Of course, nobody knew what was hidden in such a place other than the dead Oray and the others.

Jiang Baimian deliberated for a moment and consoled Long Yuehong. "We can't make the decision on this matter either. We have to report this to the company and see what their subsequent arrangements are."

Shang Jianyao stroked his chin and smiled at Long Yuehong. "Actually, the company doesn't mind letting you do these two things as long as you're willing to die."

Do you think I asked that question because I wanted to take the risk? Long Yuehong rationally gave up arguing with Shang Jianyao.

At this moment, Bai Chen frowned and said, "I thought we could get some important information from Marcus, but it only points elsewhere."

Jiang Baimian smiled and said, "The term 'Eighth Research Institute' alone is significant."

She paused and said, "Besides, if Marcus doesn't have important information, will First City give him the Virtual World treatment? Just because he's Oray's grandson? Mind Corridor-level Awakened in the Shattered Mirror domain aren't commonplace. Therefore, I think..."

Jiang Baimian looked around and said seriously, "The passcode 'Messiah' is very critical. It has a critical role."

Long Yuehong and Bai Chen thought about it and felt that her analysis made sense.

Shang Jianyao smiled. "Unfortunately, they didn't cooperate with the Anti-intellectualism Church. Otherwise, things would've been much simpler. They could've just deleted Marcus's and Avia's memories and not waste any more manpower."

Jiang Baimian chuckled. "How do you know they aren't fishing?"

“Their fishing technique is terrible if that’s the case,” Shang Jianyao commented sincerely.

Not only had the Old Task Force eaten the bait, but they had also successfully returned to the sea.

Jiang Baimian didn’t answer and looked out of the window for the weather. “Let’s get some food first. After this, we’ll go to the safe house to send a telegram to the company.”

“Alright!” Shang Jianyao was the first to respond. He was already rubbing his stomach.

As the quintet walked to the door, Shang Jianyao patted Genova’s shoulder and made a clang. “Are you looking forward to the information and words Oray left behind?”

He smiled at his smart bot companion and said, “When you obtain them, you will understand why Oray is wary of the Source Brain and why he left Mechanical Paradise back then. It’s not rare for father and son to become enemies.”

“The relationship between us isn’t really father and son either...” Genova replied according to his program, but he stopped before he could finish speaking.

...

The next morning, the Security Department’s Deputy Minister—Xenny—entered her office on the 646th floor. After methodically brewing some tea, Xenny checked the intranet and picked up the first document beside her.

It was a telegram from the Old Task Force.

Another telegram? Do they require funding or information this time? Xenny chuckled and muttered to herself. She really wanted to delay reading this telegram to the end, in case a not-too-difficult but relatively troublesome matter spoiled her beautiful morning.

When the time came, the minister might write a comment in his approval notice: “Minister Xenny, please explain why they applied for funding three times in a short month?”

Phew... Xenny exhaled, opened the sealed envelope, and took out the telegram inside. She quickly skimmed through it, and her expression gradually lit up.

“They broke through the Virtual World and obtained information from Marcus so quickly?” Xenny couldn’t help but say it out loud.

From her point of view, the chances of success weren’t high even if they sent a Mind Corridor-level Awakened. Otherwise, the secrets that Marcus and Avia had grasped would’ve long been retrieved after all these years.

Yet, the Old Task Force had actually completed this extremely difficult mission!

Even if they didn’t choose Avia—who was more ‘dangerous’ and harder to break through—it would be very difficult for them to come into contact with Marcus, get that passcode, and retreat from the Virtual World safely.

The Eleventh Old Task Force’s strength had exceeded what the company had estimated.

Xenny continued reading the rest of the telegram and unconsciously slowed down. She quickly figured out the key to success for the Eleventh Old Task Force—which was also Jiang Baimian’s team.

They first used the conflict between the Clam Dragon Church and the Mirror Church to get the price that the Mind Corridor-level Awakened was most likely to pay. Then, they recorded a sentence from the Dao and Electrical Appliance Repairs radio station as they waited.

After making the corresponding preparations, they edited the recording that retained its power into a song, making everyone who heard it have the urge to go to the bathroom.

“They actually came up with a way to record Wu Meng’s words? Don’t they know that this is very dangerous? Once Wu Meng notices, they will be in trouble,” Xenny muttered in surprise and amusement. “However, this is indeed a solution, but it depends on luck. Maybe they won’t encounter words they can use for days or even a year. Yes, I have to remind them to try their best to reduce such attempts.”

At this point, Xenny already understood the reasons behind the Eleventh Old Task Force’s success. Their strength didn’t rise explosively for no reason.

“Brain is indeed better than brawn most of the time,” praised the deputy minister. She then frowned. “They took action despite so many uncertain factors? They didn’t consider what would happen if they failed?”

As these thoughts raced through her mind, Xenny combined the various failures from before and roughly guessed what Jiang Baimian’s preparations were. She then picked up the porcelain teacup in exasperation and amusement before taking a sip.

As for Jiang Baimian’s team’s inquiry for any subsequent arrangements, it wasn’t something a Security Department deputy minister like herself could decide as it involved important matters. This had to be discussed by the Board of Directors.

...

In the morning, the Old Task Force quintet—who no longer disguised themselves—arrived at First City’s Hunter’s Guild.

Their goal today was to find Han Wanghuo and ask if the previous mission they commissioned had been completed by a Hunter—the mission to search for Waite and his companions’ families.

After finding the corresponding kiosk, Long Yuehong took out his commission form and his Hunter’s Badge and anxiously asked, “Any results?”

The female staff behind the window checked and said, “Yes. Do you need to talk to the person who completed it face-to-face or just look at the printed information?”

Long Yuehong was just about to say the first when he heard Bai Chen say, “Just the information is fine.”

Uh... Amidst Long Yuehong’s confusion, he raised another question. “I thought this matter was very simple. Why didn’t anyone complete it until today?”

“Yesterday,” corrected the female staff. She then added, “There were two completions previously, but we confirmed them to be fake. Some Ruin Hunters wanted to scam you of your supplies.”

“Huh?” Long Yuehong was momentarily confused.

Bai Chen explained softly, “Given the conditions, the guild will verify the results. Credibility is key to the guild’s operation.”

Is that so... It’s no wonder the Hunter’s Guild can develop to such a level... As Long Yuehong sighed with emotion, he waited for the information to be printed.

At this moment, Shang Jianyao and Jiang Baimian were idling as they looked at the large screen to see if there were any special missions recently.

They soon noticed a high bounty: “Capture any of them to receive 10,000 Oray. There’s no limit.”

“We can pay off the rest of the debt just by capturing one...” Shang Jianyao’s gaze moved up as he read the main content with interest.

Jiang Baimian also became a little interested.

The next second, Shang Jianyao scratched the side of his mouth and muttered to himself in confusion, “Sangri Drace... This name sounds a little familiar.”

The corners of Jiang Baimian’s mouth twitched as she couldn’t help but glance at the fellow. Isn’t this your fake alias?

Chapter 446: The Road to Wealth

As expected, Jiang Baimian also discovered her fake alias after she finished reading the mission description.

It was obvious that the Virtual World’s owner and some of First City’s higher-ups had already come to a realization and knew that someone had stolen Marcus’s passcode. Hence, they tried to use the Hunter’s Guild to drive a large number of Ruin Hunters to help in the investigation.

Of course, this was definitely only part of the pursuit. The powerful figures in the Hand of Order and some of the military’s elite teams were most likely involved in finding the criminals.

“You only get 10,000 Oray for capturing one.” Unlike his initial excitement over the high bounty, Shang Jianyao was a little indignant. His tone indicated that the bounty was too low.

Jiang Baimian could understand the fellow’s ‘displeasure.’ They had obtained important secrets under the nose of a Mind Corridor-level Awakened who could create the Virtual World, but they were only priced at 10,000 Oray per person.

“This is much more expensive than a ton of flour.” Jiang Baimian casually consoled him, using Qiao Chu’s bounty as an example. “Back then, it was a ton of flour as long as we gave effective clues. This requires a capture.”

Shang Jianyao naturally wasn’t that easy to fool. The difficulty of the two was simply incomparable.

For the Qiao Chu mission, the Old Task Force could even split the information into several portions and have each portion exchanged for a ton of flour.

The payment for providing clues on the outstanding matter was divided into three categories: 50 Oray, 100 Oray, and 300 Oray.

Jiang Baimian didn’t harp on the topic and read the mission description again.

The entity which issued the bounty was the Hand of Order, an official organization with sufficient credibility. They didn’t mention that the reason the three targets were wanted was that they had come into contact with a key protected target in the arena and had stolen an important secret. They only categorized Jiang Baimian, Shang Jianyao, and Long Yuehong as accomplices of the previous assassination. The bounty was put up under the grounds that they were suspected to be plotting something big against First City; thus, the large incremental increase of the bounty.

Yes, it doesn’t matter if it involves confidential information or not. The fact that they didn’t capture us on the spot means that confidential information will definitely be leaked and that it’s no longer preventable... First City isn’t trying to stop the spread of information but to figure out which faction did it. Heh heh, it can give them an excuse to take revenge... Jiang Baimian looked at the large screen and thought calmly.

The sketches of the targets provided by the Hand of Order came from a camera. It wasn’t that high in resolution, and it had undergone some corrections with the help of witnesses. Shang Jianyao and

Jiang Baimian had also disguised themselves to make themselves look to be of Red River ethnicity. As long as they didn't encounter someone familiar, they weren't afraid of being recognized.

Although Long Yuehong had acted as an Ashlandic, he had also disguised himself. Furthermore, he didn't even leave a fake name. In the mission description, he was known as the 'Third Suspect.'

At this moment, he—who was waiting for the information to be printed—also discovered the mission with the sizable bounty.

Fortunately, the focus is on Team Leader and Shang Jianyao. They didn't describe me much... As he rejoiced, he sighed with emotion at the bounty amount. "That's really a lot..."

,000 Oray was enough to turn a wilderness nomad into a 'respectable person' with a house and shop in First City. As long as one maintained a stable lifestyle in the future, their life would be pretty good.

Upon hearing Long Yuehong's sigh, Shang Jianyao turned his head and smiled. "That's right. It's really quite a lot!"

As he spoke, he sized up Long Yuehong as if he were counting 10,000 Oray.

If you have the guts, hand yourself over! It wasn't that Long Yuehong didn't dare to speak this time but that the environment suppressed his urge.

With so many Ruin Hunters nearby, who knew if anyone had good hearing!?

Shang Jianyao retracted his gaze and looked at Jiang Baimian. "Should we take it? There's no punishment if we can't complete it anyway."

Jiang Baimian fell silent for a moment before smiling. "Sure. Even if we can't capture them, we can exchange some clues for a lot of money."

"..." Long Yuehong didn't expect his team leader to really agree.

Jiang Baimian pretended to sigh with emotion and added, “I only hope we can find effective clues before we leave First City.”

Long Yuehong understood what she meant. His team leader was implying that they would provide the Hand of Order with a few pieces of the team’s information when they were preparing to leave First City so as to extract any remaining value.

This is simply... too nasty... Long Yuehong ruminated for a long time before finally coming up with an adjective.

When Shang Jianyao took on the mission, Long Yuehong also obtained information on Waite and the others’ family members.

...

Red Wolf Zone, in a community of greater age.

The houses here weren’t too tall and had many signs of repair. They were connected to each other, forming a relatively sealed-off area.

Unlike the habit of living in the Old World’s Red River Zone, conflicts often happened when First City was first established due to the harsh environment and chaotic situation. Therefore, the group of people was often accustomed to living as neighbors to help each other or occupying villages that could produce food.

In that era, apart from certain Awakened and Subhumans, most humans had to band together to survive. Otherwise, how many Heartless and mutated creatures could one deal with through the use of firearms?

Due to such ‘folk tradition,’ the older neighborhoods in First City weren’t more than five stories tall. There were only a few entrances and exits, which made them similar to a city within a city.

Once chaos broke out, such a place could last a long time as long as obstacles were set in place. Of course, the premise was that the enemy didn’t possess heavy firepower.

To this day, such communities were filled with First City citizens who could maintain a certain status and income.

“Waite’s wife and children live here?” Long Yuehong looked at the community consisting of multiple buildings in front of him in surprise. If not for the fact that he had obtained the Hunter’s Guild’s proof, he would’ve suspected that he had encountered a cheat again.

Although Waite was an Awakened, he didn’t seem to be doing well.

“Maybe he took most of his harvests home and didn’t leave much on himself.” Bai Chen had seen many cases of such Ruin Hunters.

When they adventured in the wilderness, they might indulge themselves and release their stress. However, this didn’t stop them from being good to their family, and they were even willing to be harsh to themselves.

“Let’s go in.” Jiang Baimian looked at the silent Shang Jianyao and walked to the community entrance first.

After a registration and a simple inspection, they circled around the buildings and arrived in front of a five-story building.

Waite’s house was on the first floor.

Long Yuehong stood at the door and suddenly felt a little nervous. He wondered how Waite’s wife and children would react. Would they be overwhelmed by grief?

If I die outside, will Team Leader and the others have similar worries when they inform my family? Long Yuehong slowly exhaled and pressed the doorbell.

As the chiming echoed, footsteps approached, and the door was pulled open.

In front of the Old Task Force was a 27-year-old woman of Red River ethnicity, and she wore a white hoodie. Although her clothes were old, they were washed very clean.

Sunlight shone in from the outside, making the room appear bright and clean. The two children were sitting around the sofa and looking curiously at the door.

On the coffee table in front of them were some children's books excavated from the Old World's city ruins.

"You are?" the woman of Red River ethnicity asked hesitantly. She was a little vigilant and solemn as if she had a bad premonition.

Upon seeing Jiang Baimian and the others remain silent, Long Yuehong opened his mouth and said, "Are you Waite's wife?"

The color in the woman's face suddenly drained. She quickly asked, "W-where is he?"

"He died during an expedition." Long Yuehong didn't say that Waite had committed suicide.

The woman's body unconsciously staggered twice as she asked, "Where's his corpse?"

"In the forest outside the North Shore Mountains at No. 2 Advance Base Camp. We marked it..." Long Yuehong's words gradually turned fluent.

Energy in the mountains was precious, so it was impossible for such corpses to be cremated. It was already considered lucky that someone dug a hole for them to be buried.

After all, this was also food in certain areas.

The woman's lips quivered before she finally said the words: "Thank you."

She spoke very softly.

Jiang Baimian glanced at Shang Jianyao and signaled for him to confirm it.

Shang Jianyao completed this matter with Inference Clowning in an unnoticeable manner.

She was indeed Waite's wife.

Long Yuehong took out Waite's relics and handed them over. "These were on him."

Waite's wife took the bag and opened it. She couldn't help but look surprised—this was more than what Waite had gained every time he returned home!

A few seconds later, the woman anxiously said, "H-how much should I give you? I heard from Cuorgnè that a portion has to be paid to the returner as payment for such matters. Sorry, Waite is his fake name..."

As she spoke, the woman's eyes reddened, and her voice became choked.

Long Yuehong was just about to decline when Jiang Baimian replied, "We've already taken our portion."

She didn't make any small talk and waved her hand. "Bye."

Waite's wife wiped her eyes and repeated her previous words. "Thank you."

Shang Jianyao smiled at her. "Newborns are likened unto the sun."

These baffling words successfully stunned Waite's wife.

As the Old Task Force left, they heard a child's voice from behind. "Mommy, who are they?"

"They're Daddy's friends."

"Where's Daddy? Why isn't Daddy back yet?"

"Daddy went far away..." Waite's wife's voice remained gentle.

...

After sending the 'bereavement money' to the families of Waite's teammates, the Old Task Force arrived at another street in the Red Wolf Zone.

This was where Long Yuehong had seen Han Wanghuo's back.

He looked around and hesitantly asked, "Team Leader, where should we start the search? Do we go around asking people one by one?"

That would be quite a massive endeavor.

Jiang Baimian's eyes darted around as she chuckled. "This is also a question I want to ask."

"Huh?" Long Yuehong was a little confused.

Jiang Baimian smiled and said, "It's a temporary assessment to see if your ability to analyze problems and deal with matters has improved."

Team Leader, how can you launch a sudden attack? Long Yuehong tried his best to think.

Chapter 447: Progress

Seeing that Long Yuehong was frozen in place and unable to say a word, Jiang Baimian smiled. "Relax, it's not something urgent. You can think about it slowly."

Long Yuehong looked around and realized that nobody had any intention of rushing him. Even Shang Jianyao was looking at the street scene idly.

His anxiety eased as he recalled the information he had previously obtained. Old Han has a heart problem and is seeking a suitable organ transplant... He previously lived near the black market on Antanna Street... That's right. The black market is the most likely place one will get human organs. Unless something happens, Old Han probably won't move easily. Furthermore, he will move to the Red Wolf Zone, where the rent is more expensive...

As these thoughts surfaced in his mind, Long Yuehong vaguely grasped the direction needed for the search. He opened his mouth and deliberated before saying, "Old Han should be here to do something... Antanna Street isn't too close to here; it takes about half an hour on foot. Yes, he has a

car. He will definitely choose to drive over. Since he drove, he will definitely park as close as he can...”

Long Yuehong spoke more and more eloquently, and he even found his thoughts surging endlessly.

At this moment, Jiang Baimian smiled and picked out a small mistake. “That might not be the case. If Old Han doesn’t want others to remember his car, he will choose to park a little further away.”

“Yes, but it won’t be too far.” Long Yuehong nodded slightly, and his tone gradually became more certain. “In other words, since we saw Old Han walking, it means that he parked nearby and that his destination is nearby.”

This greatly reduced the scope of investigation.

Long Yuehong looked at the alley where Han Wanghuo had disappeared and spoke in pleasant surprise as if he had discovered a new continent. “There’s no way to drive there!”

He seemed to have found the reason why Han Wanghuo didn’t park his car directly outside his destination—there was no way to travel the last leg by car!

Once he had this guess, Han Wanghuo’s destination became relatively obvious. There were several communities and condos in that alley!

The search range had shrunk again to a less troublesome extent.

Jiang Baimian smiled in relief. “Not bad; making bold assumptions and carefully verifying them. You’ll be in charge of what to do next.”

“Me?” Long Yuehong was surprised and nervous. He was surprised because he had been praised, having received his team leader’s approbation for his analytic ability. He was worried that he couldn’t lead the mission well.

“Yes, you’re now Team Leader Long Yuehong,” Jiang Baimian smiled and joked. She then pointed at Shang Jianyao. “If this fellow doesn’t listen to you, give him a good slap.”

“Yes!” Shang Jianyao gave him a look that goaded him into doing it.

Long Yuehong naturally didn't take it seriously. He composed himself and said, “Let's split up and ask the security guards or peddlers at the entrances to the few community districts and apartments. We'll see if they've seen Old Han.”

“Alright.” Bai Chen was the first to respond.

“Yes, Team Leader!” If not for their environment's restrictions, Shang Jianyao would've shouted very loudly.

After splitting up, they got something in less than 15 minutes.

Long Yuehong and Bai Chen found an apartment guard and learned an important clue from him by paying him 1 Oray.

The apartment guard had seen someone like Han Wanghuo enter the opposite community district with a short, thin woman.

“A woman?” Jiang Baimian repeated in surprise and amusement after hearing Long Yuehong's description. “Old Han dares to face his status as a Subhuman head-on and is willing to engage in coitus with a certain woman?”

“Maybe he just chose not to take off his clothes.” In the Old Task Force, Bai Chen was the only carbon-based being who could discuss such topics without batting an eyelid.

Genava could do the same, but he was a smart bot without any expressions or ticks.

“Pure collaborators?” Long Yuehong raised another possibility.

“Organ provider?” Shang Jianyao stroked his chin.

Long Yuehong imagined it. “Isn't this too terrifying?”

Who's willing to engage in coitus with their organ provider? Won't he have nightmares in the future?

Jiang Baimian was just about to clap and say, "Alright, we'll get the answer from asking him inside." However, she suddenly recalled that she was only an ordinary member of the team, Big White. She had no choice but to shut her mouth again.

Upon seeing his team leader's faint smile, Long Yuehong recalled that this was his mission. "Let's enter that community district and ask someone. Right, pay attention to those people's reactions. I'm afraid that they will snitch."

Impressive... Jiang Baimian laughed and praised him inwardly.

After some work, the Old Task Force found a few witnesses and confirmed that Han Wanghuo and the woman had entered Block 3.

Long Yuehong then made another arrangement.

Jiang Baimian and Bai Chen guarded the front door while Geneva monitored the area behind them to prevent any suspicious people from escaping after sensing the commotion.

He and Shang Jianyao entered Block 3 and investigated each apartment.

When they reached the fourth floor, they knocked on one of the doors and found a muscular man.

"What's the matter?" the man asked with confusion and vigilance. He was of Red River ethnicity.

"Have you seen this person?" Long Yuehong took out Han Wanghuo's portrait.

The man's expression changed slightly before he shook his head.

"You've seen him." Shang Jianyao smiled and interpreted his reaction.

The man was stunned for a few seconds before saying, "Yes, I've seen him. Why do you ask?"

Long Yuehong was delighted and blurted out, “Did he come to you for something?”

The mission he led had finally bore fruit, and the process was rather easy!

The man frowned and said, “He wanted to invite me to participate in a mission and said that it was relatively dangerous, but I rejected him. Heh heh, I don’t really want to take the risk now. I only do things that I’m confident in.”

“What mission was it?” Long Yuehong asked in confusion.

“I didn’t ask. I might not be able to refuse if I did.” The man’s mind was very clear. “I don’t know where he lives either. We only know each other and have worked together a few times.”

Shang Jianyao suddenly lowered his voice and asked gossipily, “Did he bring a female companion?”

“Yes,” the man said in confusion. “How can a sick woman be a teammate? Although being sick makes her willing to take on that mission, there’s no guarantee of her combat strength.”

Sick... Long Yuehong vaguely understood something.

After leaving the community district and returning to the car, he informed Jiang Baimian, Genava, and Bai Chen of his gains.

Jiang Baimian sighed and said, “Is Old Han taking on something risky to raise the money for the organ transplant? Does that woman have a similar problem? Sigh, our trail of clues has temporarily come to an end. We can only return to the Hunter’s Guild to see what high-value missions there are.”

“The capturing of us,” Shang Jianyao reminded.

Jiang Baimian shot him a glance. “Let’s busy ourselves with the other matter first.”

...

Red Wolf Zone, 25 Stern Street.

The Blackshirts' second boss, Terrence, received a call.

“Do you know a man named Sangri Drace and a...” On the other end of the line was a Ruin Hunter with deep connections with the major gangs.

Terrence then smiled. “I can make up ten of such names for you now.”

“I'll send you the photo and information. If there are clues, the payment won't be low,” the Ruin Hunter said with great deft.

In the evening, Terrence received the corresponding letter. After opening it and taking a closer look, his expression immediately turned a little strange.

He found the two people in the photo a little familiar.

He looked at their eyes and hair color again, and his forehead twitched. He recalled that he had once helped someone buy hair dye.

As this thought flashed through his mind, Terrence laughed. He picked up the phone and dialed the previous number.

“I've never seen them,” he replied very simply.

How could he betray his good brother? Furthermore, both parties had close cooperative ties.

At this moment, the Old Task Force's newly rented car was quietly parked at the corner of the street outside the house.

Shang Jianyao had previously visited Terrence and 'deepened' their friendship.

In fact, Bai Chen had suggested silencing him. However, she gave up on the idea when she thought of the Church of Spiritual Transcendence backing Terrence.

Killing him might not solve the problem.

...

After a busy day, the Old Task Force returned to Ugo Hotel.

After entering their room, Shang Jianyao raised his hand to look at the Bangle of Blindness on his left wrist while Jiang Baimian was washing up.

The corresponding powers had already returned to the strange accessory woven from black hair.

Shang Jianyao then massaged his temples, leaned against the pillow, and closed his eyes.

On the island with the golden elevator in the Sea of Origins.

Shang Jianyao sat in front of Shang Jianyao and cast his gaze at a mark in the air that couldn't be ignored.

The mark seemed to have pierced through the void as large swaths of redness surged inside.

As time passed, the redness gradually dyed gold before slowly turning orange as if it was changing with the sun.

“Can I finish you off with it?” Shang Jianyao asked Shang Jianyao.

His gaze remained fixed in midair.

Chapter 448: Clues

The Shang Jianyao sitting outside the golden elevator calmly replied, “It can also finish all of you off. Nothing will be missed.”

Shang Jianyao still looked at the tumbling red mark and suddenly sighed. “DiMarco’s remaining strength is useless.”

“That’s because he’s already dead while the Bangle of Blindness’s owner is still alive.” The Shang Jianyao at the golden elevator’s door naturally understood what the other party was saying.

He originally wanted to use the Destiny Pearl’s remaining strength and the aura in the Bangle of Blindness to balance each other. However, the green ‘bead’ was directly sent flying to the side, expending some of its energy for no reason. Now, it could barely be used once.

Shang Jianyao sighed. “I thought becoming a ghost would make me fiercer.”

As he spoke, he stood up and strolled around the golden elevator as if he were studying the situation elsewhere on the island.

“Aren’t you going to consider how to eliminate this latent danger?” asked the Shang Jianyao at the golden elevator door in amusement.

Shang Jianyao thought for a moment and said, “Leave it for now. Maybe the person on the other end is willing to befriend us and help us deal with you.”

“Don’t you get it? If you don’t resolve the problem in your heart, you will never be able to defeat me. At most, we will perish together.” The Shang Jianyao at the golden elevator’s door spoke calmly. “I know you will definitely say that there will be future generations even if we die, but that way, you will never understand why Daddy never returned.”

Shang Jianyao thought about it seriously. “That’s true.”

He appeared very calm. After all, it was his other self.

...

Red Wolf Zone, 19 Rosta Street, in a building with its own courtyard.

This was the headquarters of First City’s law enforcement department—Hand of Order.

Wall—who was as wide as a wall—entered the meeting room with a pen and paper. At a glance, he saw several familiar faces: Golden Apple Zone Orderly’s aide—the tall and handsome middle-aged gentleman, Konstanz; the Golden Apple Zone Orderly’s other aide, Theodore, who had a poor relationship with Wall...

Although the gladiator arena incident came under the Red Wolf Zone’s jurisdiction, the higher-ups attached great importance to it because it involved the aristocracy. Therefore, the Golden Apple Zone Orderly, Delion, had also sent a few capable subordinates over to help.

The person presiding over this meeting was Red Wolf Zone’s Orderly—Wall’s immediate superior—Trevis.

He was a noble. He wore a well-tailored formal suit, and he had black hair, black eyes, and a deep outline. He had a bearing that had been honed over time.

Trevis looked around and saw that everyone was already present. He nodded slightly and said, “There’s no need for me to repeat the details of this case, right?”

“There’s no need.” Wall tapped the paper with a capped pen.

“I don’t think I need to emphasize the importance of this matter. This is something the Senate directly handed to us, the Hand of Order.” After saying that, Trevis directly called out names. “Wall, what do you think?”

Wall looked down at the keywords recorded on the piece of paper and calmly said, “What puzzles me most is: What did that group of people do? Nobody seems to have been harmed at the scene, nor did anyone lose any important items.”

“They stole very important information,” Trevis replied in a rather friendly manner. “It was stolen from Marcus. As for the rest, it’s not something you can know. I’m not too sure myself.”

Wall was the son-in-law of the newly promoted Elder, Gaius.

Marcus? Konstanz, Theodore, and Wall repeated the name. They looked at each other and found some level of confusion on each other’s faces.

Although Marcus came from an illustrious background, he was also restrained by his background. He could neither enter the political arena nor the military. He was like a rare animal that was reared. He seemed to be respected, but he actually had no status.

What kind of very important information could such a person have? As his thoughts raced, Theodore realized that his eyes had met Wall's. He quickly turned his neck to look away.

He didn't hide his disgust and disdain at all.

Wall raised another question. "Sir, what information can be provided regarding the three suspects? I mean in terms of strength."

As there didn't seem to be a battle in this matter, almost no relevant information existed. To the Orderly's aides and sheriff—who took the front line—this was very important. It determined everyone's lives.

Trevis looked at his aide and got him to answer.

His aide picked up a document and read it out loud. "At least one of the three targets is an Awakened. He's relatively extreme, accustomed to taking risks, and doesn't take his life seriously. He has one or more extraordinary items..."

"The trio's cooperation successfully deceived an Awakened at the Mind Corridor level..."

Theodore, Konstanz, and Wall were originally relatively calm, but they couldn't help but stir when they heard the last sentence.

This matter actually involved an Awakened at the Mind Corridor level! The three targets had stolen important information from under the nose of such a powerhouse!

No wonder the Senate places so much attention on this matter... Wall nodded indiscernibly. "I don't have any questions for the time being. My exact train of thought is still a little fuzzy."

“Are you planning on getting inspiration from someone else’s suggestion?” mocked the black-haired, brown-eyed, and ordinary-looking Theodore. He then paused and thought for a moment before saying, “There are currently several directions for the investigation. First, use the images left behind by the three targets for a large-scale investigation. However, they had clearly disguised themselves. Unless we find someone who knows them, it’s very difficult to gain anything. Second, start with the vehicles they used. Third, question Marcus to see if any strangers had tried to approach him...”

Just as Theodore said that, a sheriff from the Red Wolf Zone added, “I’ve already investigated the targets’ vehicle—it comes from a car rental company. They left a fake name at the car rental company and had also disguised themselves.”

“Damn it. Can’t those guys seriously verify the rentees’ identities?” another aide of the Red Wolf Zone Orderly, Trevis, grumbled.

Nobody replied.

All the Hand of Order members present knew that it was impossible to achieve this with First City’s administrative abilities and the Ashlands’ chaotic environment.

Following that, all directions were offered—they were denied on the spot or entered an investigation process. However, none of them impressed the experienced ones.

Finally, Wall spoke again. “I’ll raise two points: First, I actually encountered the three targets back then, but a shooting happened and drew my attention. This prevented me from making any effective observations...”

He took the opportunity to mention his encounter about borrowing a battery at the colosseum and said, “I didn’t have any suspicions back then, but I now think the two cases can be combined. The shooting is likely an effort by the targets’ companions to provide cover for their departure. From the trajectory of the bullet, we can deduce where the targets’ companions fired and search for witnesses.”

Theodore immediately laughed. “The targets’ companions definitely disguised themselves.”

“Yes, but we can’t let go of any clues easily. Nobody can always maintain perfection without making mistakes, and mistakes might be hidden in those seemingly worthless clues,” Wall replied bluntly.

Konstanz nodded in agreement. “At least we now know that the target team might have more than three people. This is very important.”

Wall looked around, and his expression gradually turned serious. “This is the first matter. Second, what puzzles me is that apart from me back then, there were only two security personnel. What was the shooting meant to cover?”

“The shooting in the other blocks won’t affect the security personnel in the Apex Gladiator Arena. It would only make them more vigilant,” Konstanz analyzed.

Wall nodded. “Therefore, I made a preliminary judgment that the shooting was to lure me away. But why did they lure me away? I only went to ask the security personnel about the power outage and see if I had to wait.”

Upon hearing this, the Orderly’s aides and sheriffs present fell silent and revealed solemn expressions. With their experience, it wasn’t difficult for them to think of a possible reason.

“I suspect that I’ve seen the three targets before. They were worried that I would recognize them and had their distant companion fire to lure me away.” Wall gave his answer.

Theodore didn’t target him again and frowned. “But you just said that you don’t know the three people in the surveillance footage, nor do you find them familiar.”

Wall thought for a moment and said, “This can be explained. I might’ve only met them once or twice and had a short conversation. Hence, they barely left an impression on me.”

“Then, how should we investigate?” Theodore asked.

At this moment, the Red Wolf Zone Orderly—Trevis—who presided over the meeting said in a deep voice, “Visit the Crystal Consciousness Church and get their help so that Wall can browse his memories.”

...

At Ugo Hotel, the Old Task Force—which had finished settling their matters—returned to the lobby and prepared to check out.

After doing such a massive operation, they had to change a batch of safe houses and ‘cut’ any ties with the previous ones.

As he watched Ugo settle the checkout procedures, Shang Jianyao suddenly asked, “Is there any way to find a person? Given that one only knows his name, looks, and a general residential area.”

“Commission a mission for Ruin Hunters.” Ugo looked up. “Or find the monks who claim to be able to foresee the future regarding people and matters.”

Monk...

As Jiang Baimian muttered to herself, Shang Jianyao tersely acknowledged his words and said, “We encountered the Nightmare Horse in the North Shore Mountains. It’s chasing after the white wolf.”

At this moment, Ugo—who had always been expressionless—seemed to doubt his ears. He quickly returned to normal and looked at the Old Task Force. “Someone wants to see you.”

Who? Long Yuehong subconsciously wanted to ask.

Jiang Baimian deliberated and said, “Your friend?”

“Sort of,” Ugo replied.

Chapter 449: Three Points

Ugo’s friend wants to meet us? He wants to cooperate to capture the Nightmare Horse? With Xiaochong around, who would dare... This was the only reason Long Yuehong could think of in his puzzlement.

Xiaochong’s whistling left a deep impression on him—it was the same for his mind and body.

Jiang Baimian fell silent for a moment before saying, “Sure. The more friends you have, the more paths you have in life. But we have to decide when, where, and how we will meet.”

Although Ugo didn't understand how friends and paths could be connected, he still nodded.
"Alright."

Uh... Long Yuehong didn't expect this answer. From his point of view, Boss Ugo didn't have the right to agree on his friend's behalf since he was only a messenger.

Ugo glanced at him and simply added, "He knew that you would make such a request."

"Then, does he know which place we will choose to meet?" Shang Jianyao asked curiously.

"He's not one of those monks who claim to be clairvoyant." Ugo didn't choke at all and calmly replied.

Jiang Baimian stopped Shang Jianyao from speaking and nodded slightly. "We'll inform you when we determine the time and place."

...

"I wonder why Boss Ugo's friend is looking for us." As the car started, Long Yuehong—who was in the backseat—glanced at the hotel.

"Who knows?" Jiang Baimian chuckled. "In any case, we'll reject it if we have to. There's no need to be apprehensive."

She looked at the rearview mirror and added seriously, "This also reminds us that we have to cut ties with the people and matters from before as soon as possible. Otherwise, we won't know when they will come knocking on our door. Think about it. If we didn't check out and still returned to the hotel from time to time, wouldn't you have to worry about being betrayed after rejecting Ugo's friend?"

'You' specifically referred to Long Yuehong.

The Old Task Force had been busy dealing with the previous safe houses and changing to a batch of new ones.

“That’s true.” Long Yuehong had always been timid regarding such matters. He couldn’t help but ask, “Is there anything else that needs to be taken note of and dealt with in advance?”

Shang Jianyao—who was separated from him by Geneva—raised his hand and stroked his chin. “Three points.”

After Long Yuehong assumed a listening posture, Shang Jianyao laughed. “First, I can’t let you say things like ‘we’re finally safe,’ ‘there shouldn’t be anything else,’ or ‘we can return to the company’...”

I’m already very careful... Long Yuehong roared inwardly as he scoffed. “If it’s that effective, I’ll just say the opposite.”

Bai Chen—who was driving—automatically ignored the previous topic and asked Shang Jianyao, “What about the remaining two points?”

Shang Jianyao’s expression gradually turned serious. “In the character portraits and description given by the bounty mission, the Bangle of Blindness is mentioned. I’m afraid that the Anti-intellectualism Church’s Shepherd will notice it, confirm that we are the murderers who hunted the real Father, and get involved in the pursuit of us.”

“That will indeed be troublesome.” Jiang Baimian nodded in agreement.

Shepherd Bouillon was an Awakened who could read other people’s memories on a large scale.

“It won’t be a problem if it’s just the Anti-intellectualism Church alone,” Jiang Baimian said further. “We all have the ability to prevent such situations. What I’m most worried about now is that the Anti-intellectualism Church will help the Hand of Order anonymously in order to take revenge on us.”

Hand of Order was the name of First City’s Public Security Department.

“What will happen then?” Long Yuehong asked anxiously.

Jiang Baimian made a terse grunt. “For example, will Sheriff Wall—who was lured away by Little White—subsequently think about why he was lured away? It’s very likely that he suspects that he

has seen us before. This is also a fact, but it has been many days since we last met, and we didn't have much interaction. It's very difficult for him to recall it, and a sufficient opportunity is required. However, with the Anti-intellectualism Church's involvement, things will be different."

Many Awakened in the Anti-intellectualism Church were experts at memory manipulation. Shepherd Bouillon was one of them.

"If Sheriff Wall remembers you, things will become rather troublesome," Genava said.

After learning of the last words left to Marcus, he had been a little silent recently and only participated in the discussion occasionally.

Long Yuehong was alarmed and consoled himself. "I remember Team Leader a-and Hey disguised themselves back then."

Before meeting the company's intelligence agent—Garibaldi—Shang Jianyao and Jiang Baimian had indeed disguised themselves to a certain extent.

"Yes." Jiang Baimian nodded. "But Hey also said that we're still too eye-catching with our height and race. Besides, we didn't take precautions against the Anti-intellectualism Church's memory search back then. If they continue investigating, the Hand of Order will sooner or later create a portrait that's close to our true appearances. When the time comes, they will know who we are when they compare it to the photos in the Hunter's Guild."

Long Yuehong was shocked. "Then, we should stay away from the Hunter's Guild!"

But in the past few days, the Old Task Force had gone to the Hunter's Guild more than once.

Jiang Baimian smiled and said, "There's a process to the investigation. It takes time, and they won't be that fast. Just take note in the future."

Long Yuehong heaved a sigh of relief and thought of a question. "Aren't we still going to the Hunter's Guild to see if there are any high bounty missions and to find Old Han?"

Shang Jianyao smiled. "The one looking at the mission is Revan. What has it got to do with Zhang Qubing?"

That's right. Nobody knows that we are from the Qian Bai team after we disguise ourselves... When the Hand of Order finds out that Qian Bai's team has taken on the mission to capture Qian Bai's team, I wonder what expressions they will have... Long Yuehong realized that he had lost his clarity of mind from nervousness.

He subconsciously asked, "Who's Revan?"

"A Red River name I just came up with." Shang Jianyao asked excitedly, "Do you want to choose one? How about Ryder?"

Long Yuehong exhaled and decided to ignore this fellow. The next second, he recalled something and blurted out, "Didn't you say that we have to pay attention to three points? You only mentioned two."

"Weren't we discussing the third point?" Shang Jianyao was surprised.

"..." Long Yuehong took more than ten seconds to figure out that Shang Jianyao's third point was also referring to Sheriff Wall.

...

In a manor in First City.

A figure received a clue from his subordinate.

The investigation of the real Father's death had made progress.

Upon seeing the strange accessory that seemed to be woven from human hair on the portrait's left wrist, the figure unconsciously clenched the paper in his hand.

...

Hand of Order, Evidence Department.

Wall sat in front of a colleague. Combining the various eyebrows, eyes, and noses presented on the computer, he described the two people in his memories.

After repeated feedback and adjustments, the Evidence Department's Hand of Order personnel pointed at the portraits of a man and a woman on the computer screen. "Do they look like this?"

Wall looked at it carefully for a few seconds and exhaled. "Yes, something like that."

This was at least much more similar to the few he came up with previously.

Wall then added, "They might've also disguised themselves."

"We can combine this disguise and do a certain level of comparison and restoration." The Evidence Department's Hand of Order personnel indicated that the current technology allowed for this. However, he emphasized, "Don't place too much hope on the results."

"How long will it take?" Wall asked.

The Hand of Order personnel controlling the computer replied, "I'm not sure. It depends."

He didn't make any promises.

Wall nodded and stood up. "Then, I'll investigate in a different direction for now. It seems like there's something wrong with the injured person back then."

...

At the appointed time in the evening, the Old Task Force switched on the radio transceiver and waited for the company's instructions. However, they didn't receive a telegram from Pangu Biology.

"Isn't this taking too long?" Long Yuehong frowned.

Normally speaking, the company would reply to the Old Task Force's report or request for instructions from as early as that very night or up to two to three days. This time, it had been too long.

Long Yuehong couldn't help but wonder if the telegram hadn't been successfully sent and had been hijacked by Wu Meng or a similar powerhouse.

Of course, this was only a random thought. The Old Task Force had received confirmation back then, and this was in accordance with the passcode. Outsiders didn't know anything about it, so it was difficult to forge the content unless the other party could figure out the pattern and crack the passcode through a limited number of telegrams.

Jiang Baimian smiled thoughtfully. "This means that the response process has become longer, and this means that the problem's importance has elevated."

Bai Chen seemed to understand something and asked, "Board of Directors?"

Ah, our harvest has reached the Board of Directors? Long Yuehong suddenly felt a little nervous.

This was an organization that could determine the survival of every Pangu Biology employee.

Jiang Baimian smiled and nodded. "It seems like the company values it very much. It's just that it's impossible for the Board of Directors to convene in advance for us. We have to wait a while."

Chapter 450: Late Night

As Pangu Biology had yet to give any further orders, the Old Task Force could only choose to rest and recuperate as if they were skiving during working hours. They either read books, studied modules, or used the Old World's entertainment to kill time until it was late and quiet at night.

After the Old Task Force members returned to their rooms to rest, the living room was completely empty and dark.

The light shining in from the window made the objects here vaguely visible, highlighting a series of blurry outlines.

As the moon slowly moved, the portable transceiver on the table in the empty living room suddenly produced the sound of static. It was as if someone had set it to wake up at that very moment.

In the blink of an eye, the electrical appliance automatically played the stored content. “Therefore, we have to remember...”

As the slightly magnetic male voice echoed, the static noises in the background became obvious. It was like a noise that drowned out the sentence, making the corresponding content sound abnormally vague.

“Shh...”

“Shh...”

“Shh...”

Amidst the static, a child’s voice gradually became louder.

An instant later, everything returned to normal. The portable transceiver was still in its original spot, no different from before.

The next morning.

Jiang Baimian looked at Shang Jianyao—who was staring blankly at the food—and asked in confusion, “What’s on your mind?”

Isn’t eating the most important thing in the world?

Shang Jianyao sighed with emotion. “I dreamed of Xiaochong.”

Without waiting for Jiang Baimian, Long Yuehong, and the others to respond, he continued, “This means that we have to find him today and play games with him.”

“Whoa, your main point is in the latter half of the sentence, right?” Jiang Baimian asked in exasperation and amusement. She then deliberated for a moment and made a decision. “Since there’s nothing else, let’s go.”

This was the Old Task Force's trump card in First City. They definitely couldn't let go of the opportunity to pull strings.

Furthermore, Xiaochong physically resembled a child, and he also didn't have any relatives. Other than some 'followers,' he appeared to be alone and unattended.

...

Red Wolf Zone, 19 Rosta Street, Hand of Order headquarters.

Ducas drove through the gate after receiving a call. He didn't know why he had been summoned, but since his superior had given the order, he could only choose to obey.

As he walked, Ducas sized up the surrounding Hand of Order personnel and shook his head from time to time. This one is too thin.

That guy's physique is fine, but it lacks sufficient muscles.

It's obvious that all those muscles are without strength. The training method is inappropriate, and he only focuses on its appearance...

As he muttered silently, Ducas circled around the Hand of Order building and arrived at the back garden.

Just as he passed through the glass-window corridor and arrived at a corner with blooming flowers, the scene in front of him suddenly changed.

He was no longer in the garden. Instead, he came to a place with many rooms.

This place was luxuriously decorated and had an extravagant style. It was obvious that it was somewhere high class.

The aristocratic VIP room in the Apex Gladiator Arena? Ducas looked around and made a judgment.

As he looked around, he also saw figures. These figures were well-dressed and brought attendants. They were all famous nobles in First City.

They sat, stood, conversed with each other, or looked down. They were no different from real people.

At this moment, with Ducas's intelligence, he couldn't help but suspect that the Hand of Order building, courtyard, and garden he had previously seen were illusions.

As the figures walked, Ducas cast his gaze at a trio in the room beside him.

Two of them were nobles, and the Ashlandic was both a servant and a bodyguard.

At a glance, Ducas suddenly found the two nobles familiar.

The man among them had brown hair, deep eye sockets, and a well-defined outline. He also had a masculine bearing and was relatively good-looking. The woman was an Akson—her eyes were blue, and her long hair was slightly curled. Her skin was a little rough.

Just as Ducas was recalling where he had seen these two nobles, they conversed with each other.

“Ducas didn't come.” The male noble was the first to speak.

The female noble nodded. “Cassiel didn't come either. They are city defense officers, not Phocas's personal bodyguards. It's impossible for them to follow him at all times.”

“What, do you want to use your current appearance to arm-wrestle with him?”

Upon hearing this, Ducas's eyebrows twitched as he recalled something.

The next second, the male noble looked at the arena below and seriously said, “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.”

“...” The blood vessels on Ducas’s forehead throbbed uncontrollably. His face almost flushed red as he felt like he was about to die from embarrassment.

Suddenly, a slightly aged male voice sounded in his ears. “You should know them. Tell me their original identities.”

...

The Old Task Force knocked on Xiaochong’s apartment door again, bringing with them some ingredients.

“You guys are here.” Xiaochong greeted happily, but he didn’t move his butt and continued facing the computer. His attitude appeared even closer than before; it was as though he treated the Old Task Force as one of his own.

“What are you playing?” Shang Jianyao looked over as he entered the room.

“The same game as last time,” Xiaochong shouted. “Didn’t you say that you were bringing your computer with you this time to play online with me?”

“I can’t wait.” Shang Jianyao smiled and took off his tactical backpack.

Xiaochong thought for a moment and said, “Let me clear this area first.”

Upon seeing this, Jiang Baimian summoned Long Yuehong and Bai Chen and got them to help her prepare lunch.

With nothing to do, Geneva went to Xiaochong’s computer and observed it. After a few minutes, he voiced his opinion. “There’s something wrong with this game’s AI. It doesn’t make the optimum choices quite frequently. There might be flaws in the algorithm...”

“You shouldn’t do that. Something bad will happen...”

Over in the kitchen, Long Yuehong's heart palpitated when he heard that. Old Ge, you shouldn't be doing that! Aren't you mocking Xiaochong for being a noob despite his addiction? That he is equal to a retarded AI?

Be careful not to make him angry!

After Xiaochong heard Genava's words, he couldn't be bothered to respond and changed his plans.

After a moment, he cheered. "I've finally won!"

He quickly turned his head to look at Genava. "You're amazing! Teach me more later."

"You're using cheats!" Shang Jianyao protested. "How can you use real AI to help you play games?"

As they chatted and laughed, noon came.

Shang Jianyao and Xiaochong reluctantly left the computer and sat by the dining table.

Shang Jianyao looked around and asked, "Where's Slumber Cat?"

Xiaochong picked up his chopsticks and casually replied, "It went to the Red River's North Shore to find my horse and take a stroll while at it."

At this point, he finally recalled something. "Oh, right. If you record Wu Meng's voice, you need to be careful."

"Why?" Long Yuehong became vigilant.

Xiaochong gulped and said, "By using electronic products to store the power he leaves behind, he can sense the location if he senses its usage. He can also control it to a certain extent regardless of the distance."

This... Jiang Baimian cast her gaze at Shang Jianyao.

Shang Jianyao picked up his tactical backpack and took out the portable transceiver.

“Is there a problem with us saving it in there?” Long Yuehong asked before Shang Jianyao could.

“Yes,” Xiaochong replied honestly.

Long Yuehong’s expression turned blank. While Bai Chen and Jiang Baimian wore solemn expressions, Xiaochong continued, “It secretly activated last night, but I stopped it.”

Uh, Xiaochong means that he can do it too? Jiang Baimian nodded slightly.

Shang Jianyao’s eyes widened as he praised, “You’re amazing!”

Xiaochong waved his chopsticks and smiled in embarrassment. “H-he’s only a boss with low HP.”

What a description... Jiang Baimian asked, “In other words, even if Wu Meng notices it, he won’t be able to use it against us if it’s recorded in this machine?”

“You can’t record too many sentences. If there are too many, I won’t be able to stop it. Unless...” Before Xiaochong could finish speaking, he had already stretched out his chopsticks and picked up the sweet and sour pork strip that he had previously suggested.

“How many at most?” Jiang Baimian was abnormally rational. She didn’t ask further and began to focus on the details.

“Three sentences, no more than three sentences,” Xiaochong said in a muffled voice as he chewed.

“Will the preventive effects decrease if we use your whistling too many times?” Jiang Baimian was extremely careful when it came to this matter. This was because Wu Meng had already shown how impossible it was to guard against him.

“It’s the same before it becomes ineffective...” Xiaochong replied succinctly as he focused on eating the meat.

In other words, Wu Meng's remote control shares the same traits? Jiang Baimian focused her attention on the dishes in front of her.

...

In a temporarily uninhabited room in the Green Olive Zone.

Jiang Baimian and Shang Jianyao sat in front of the table and looked at the computer that had activated a certain program.

Long Yuehong and Bai Chen monitored from a vantage point in the surrounding area to prevent any accidents. Geneva acted as a signal base station nearby between the two groups.

This was the way the Old Task Force was meeting Ugo's friend: Using a 'network' that could be controlled by themselves to communicate via video!

This way, the Old Task Force would at most lose a computer even if an accident happened.

The other room was situated in a hotel. A figure entered with the room card the Old Task Force had sent to Ugo.

He then saw the computer on the table and a piece of paper pressed against it. The paper said which network to connect to and how to start the program.

Very professional... The person nodded and commented.

Before long, Shang Jianyao saw the video window expand, revealing a figure.

Jiang Baimian's pupils suddenly dilated.

She and Shang Jianyao knew that figure!