

Ad Infinitum 451

Chapter 451: Exchanging Information

The figure wore a loose gray robe. His earthen-yellow hair was rather sparse, but he looked like a majestic lion in terms of aura or appearance.

General Phocas!

This person was General Phocas, who the Old Task Force had previously cooperated with. At the same time, he was also an Elder of the Senate, one of the city defense commanders, and a representative of the Centrist faction.

This made Jiang Baimian unable to hide her surprise. Ugo's friend is General Phocas? There is no intersection between their identities, status, and experiences! The world is truly wonderful. Many things are forever outside of your inference...

As Jiang Baimian composed herself, Shang Jianyao smiled and greeted him. "General, you still owe us a celebratory feast."

Phocas raised his eyebrows. "Aren't you surprised that it's me?"

"I might be surprised if the one sitting in your seat is a real lion." It was unknown which of the nine Shang Jianyaos wore such a calm expression.

At this moment, Jiang Baimian returned to normal and smiled. "The point isn't who said it, but what they say."

She was very curious as to why General Phocas would seek them out. Furthermore, it was through Boss Ugo.

Phocas sat straight, showing the old-school temperament of a war veteran. He then calmly said, "I want to know what you got from Marcus."

This... Jiang Baimian imagined many answers, but none came close.

How did he confirm that we did it in such a short period of time? When Shang Jianyao obtained the information from Marcus, this general wasn't even present! Although Jiang Baimian was mentally prepared for her identity to be exposed, she didn't expect it to happen so quickly. She expected it to be at least two to three days later.

Furthermore, they had received the news during the Old Task Force's casual return to Ugo Hotel. It had been many days since General Phocas had wanted to meet them. Back then, they had just escaped from Apex Gladiator Arena and obtained the key information from Marcus's memories.

As soon as this happened, General Phocas confirmed that it was us? Jiang Baimian controlled herself and didn't frown.

Shang Jianyao didn't do any concealment and asked curiously, "How did you recognize us?"

General Phocas smiled. "All of you are still too young and lack sufficient understanding of this world's complexity. Furthermore, you should've been very lucky all this time to lose your reverence toward certain matters."

After speaking in an old, experienced tone, he added, "There are too many strange abilities in the Ashlands, and there are all kinds of advanced technologies that originate from the Old World. A disguise doesn't ensure absolute safety. At the very least, it's useless to me.

"I recognized you back when you first came to the Apex Gladiator Arena to observe Marcus and get a feel for the environment. I just felt that there was no need to expose you and wanted to see what you were trying to pull off. In the end, your performance was better than I imagined."

Upon hearing this, Jiang Baimian couldn't help but look at Shang Jianyao. She had never expected such a thing.

Although this was mainly a mistake due to insufficient information, General Phocas was right. In a situation where the Old Task Force lacked sufficient understanding of the world's complexity, certain choices were too risky.

An ability or technology that makes disguises ineffective? Technology doesn't seem like it. Back then, he didn't emit any other electric signals. A result of biological experiments? Jiang Baimian's thoughts raced. She didn't ask how General Phocas had identified them because this clearly involved his secrets.

Shang Jianyao had no qualms about this. He raised his hand and stroked his chin. “A certain ability? A hound’s nose? You remembered our smell?”

This is possible... I need to remember to use strong perfume next time... Jiang Baimian’s mind was on the problem and didn’t correct Shang Jianyao’s rudeness.

General Phocas nodded calmly. “I’ve seen similar abilities before. It can indeed see through your disguise unless you spray something in advance. Yes, it’s a result of some research in the biological domain.”

Information-based perfume? Jiang Baimian was no stranger to this, and she understood what General Phocas meant: “I used another ability.”

Upon seeing that the other party was clearly unwilling to answer, Jiang Baimian returned to the topic and smiled. “After Oray died, you played a critical role in First City’s political climate. Yet, you don’t actually know what secrets Marcus possesses.”

Phocas maintained his dignified attitude, but his tone was very calm. “I did contribute a little, but it’s not as important as you imagine. Many people from that period who experienced the Chaotic Era are still alive.”

“Is that so?” Shang Jianyao directly said.

Jiang Baimian then asked, “As First City’s Elder and the most senior general, why do you want to know about this?”

“You don’t need to know.” Phocas was as direct as Shang Jianyao.

The experienced Jiang Baimian didn’t choke. She raised her eyebrows and said, “We obtained very important information. Give me a reason to sell it to you.”

Phocas had long thought of this question. He said unhurriedly, “Money and supplies shouldn’t be of much value to you.”

Who said that? We have been short on money until recently, but even so, we still owe Terrence 6,000 Oray—three-fifths of Little Red... Jiang Baimian objected inwardly.

Of course, the Old Task Force was essentially a team that pursued ideals because its team leader and its important member—Jiang Baimian and Shang Jianyao—were idealists.

Phocas continued, “I can provide you with two rewards: First, you should still be doing some things in the future, and I can give you the necessary help. I know that this is just a non-binding promise in your eyes, but as long as you understand my past, you should know that I have fulfilled all my promises and never violated them.

“Second, I’ll give you two pieces of information that pertain to your future safety.”

Jiang Baimian listened quietly and smiled noncommittally. “Aren’t you afraid that we’ll give you false information?”

“My choice of meeting you to communicate isn’t my only choice.” Phocas raised his chin slightly. “I have the ability to ensure the authenticity of the information. Believe me; you can still speak to me equally because I don’t want to blow things up.”

“That’s right. A general’s sudden death into a grave is indeed a serious matter.” Shang Jianyao was never inferior to others when it came to sophistry.

This was similar to causing a hooha by hanging oneself.

As Phocas narrowed his eyes, Jiang Baimian suddenly smiled and said, “Deal.”

She agreed so readily that Phocas failed to react.

At this moment, Jiang Baimian added, “But there’s another condition: 6,000 Oray.”

,000 Oray? When Phocas heard the first half of the sentence, he had already perked up, prepared to evaluate the other party’s request. However, the condition only made him find it ridiculous.

This was akin to trading strategic weapons like nuclear warheads—apart from large amounts of firearms, oil, batteries, food, and other conditions, the seller had also made an additional request for a set of novels. Or, he successfully obtained a 10-Oray discount after bargaining.

“Sure, I’ll leave it with Ugo.” The absurdity didn’t affect Phocas’s judgment. He quickly agreed.

Jiang Baimian didn’t hide anything and recounted all the information she had obtained from Marcus, including the passcode: Messiah.

“Very good.” Phocas nodded in satisfaction. “My two pieces of information are: First, the Hand of Order is about to lock onto your identities. Second, apart from the Hand of Order, other factions are also looking for you. Among them, there’s no lack of people that even I find dangerous. I suggest that you don’t go out too often and don’t meet people.”

That’s fast... Jiang Baimian nodded slightly and raised another question. “Why didn’t First City kill Marcus and Avia and completely bury those secrets?”

“That will lead to something worse,” Phocas replied vaguely. With that said, he slowly stood up and said, “You know where to find me when you need help.”

...

On the way to the safe house after retrieving the computer, Long Yuehong blurted out in surprise after hearing his team leader’s recount. “You—you really sold the information? Without seeking the company’s opinion?”

This information was important enough to reach the Board of Directors.

Jiang Baimian chuckled. “The company didn’t forbid us from selling this information.”

She then stopped smiling and educated him seriously, “When out on the field, the situation changes rapidly. How can you consult the company for everything? Besides, it’s too late. As long as the company doesn’t specify that we can’t do it in advance, we don’t have to have much scruples. Also, we’re in a dangerous place. The subsequent situation is unpredictable, so it’s best to have an additional helper.”

Bai Chen nodded. “Be it Avia or the secret laboratory in Wasteland Ruin 13, they are very dangerous. Letting them be the vanguard might not be a bad thing.”

“Did you hear that? I didn’t say that. The evil one is Little White.” The smile on Jiang Baimian’s face indicated that she actually thought the same.

After joking, she tersely grunted. “After we return, we’ll comb through all the details and see if there are any latent dangers that have leaked the details of our current safe house.”

...

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

The development of the matter exceeded the expectations of Wall, Theodore, and Konstanz. It had only been a short while since the target’s ‘true’ identity was revealed to them.

“Ashlandic.”

“October Xue, Zhang Qubing, Qian Bai, Gu Zhiyong...”

“Apart from Qian Bai, the others’ earliest missions are recorded in Weed City. Last year... This means that they are likely from a major faction.”

As they conversed, Wall’s gaze suddenly froze.

October Xue and Zhang Qubing’s team had actually accepted the mission to capture themselves!

Chapter 452: Breakthrough

As Wall saw this, Theodore also noticed it. He suddenly felt ridiculous and angry. “They also accepted the mission we issued! What do they plan on doing?”

This was a provocation—an insult even!

The middle-aged gentleman, Konstanz, thought for a moment and said, “Maybe they want to use this method to provide us with wrong information?”

Many Hand of Order personnel present agreed with this surmise because it sounded most reasonable.

One of the sheriffs smiled and said, “That’s the only explanation. It can’t be for the bounty we are offering, right?”

“Haha.” The other Hand of Order personnel laughed; they were clearly amused.

After the mood returned to normal, they—who felt that they had been provoked—actively threw themselves into their work in an attempt to find useful clues from the information provided by the Hunter’s Guild.

“They took on the North Shore Mountain Range’s white wolf mission.”

“We can contact the troops stationed at the advance base camp and see what they know.”

“They likely came from Weed City.”

“Another piece of information shows that they have a grudge with the Anti-intellectualism Church—they once helped General Phocas hunt down those heretics. Yes, they were present when we discovered that Elder Varro was related to the Salvation Army and the Anti-intellectualism Church.”

...

The Orderly aides and sheriffs racked their brains and brainstormed.

During this process, Wall acutely captured the term ‘Anti-intellectualism Church.’ His heart skipped a beat as he recalled what had happened last time, and he quickly turned to look at Theodore.

Bang!

He tapped the table to indicate that he needed silence. He then looked at Theodore and said in a deep voice, “Do you still remember the real Father’s death?”

Theodore was a Hand of Order member for many years. The reason he could be promoted to his present status was mainly due to his capabilities, so he immediately understood what Wall wanted to say.

He turned his neck and looked over. With a solemn expression, he asked, “Do you think it was October Xue and Zhang Qubing’s team?”

He didn’t consider that the person he was talking to was someone he hated.

“They have the motivation and the ability!” Wall recalled the case and felt that it was very similar in style to the arena’s intelligence theft.

The target had made a detailed plan prior to this. During the execution, they had firm wills and staid minds. During the evacuation, they paid attention to all kinds of details and left almost no clues for investigation.

If it weren’t for the accident and the chance encounter with himself, Wall felt that the team wouldn’t have been locked onto so easily.

“How impressive. The real Father had been wreaking havoc for years, so he definitely didn’t expect to die so miserably.” The middle-aged gentleman, Konstanz, sighed.

As they discussed this matter, the troops stationed at the advance base camp returned with a telegram.

The sheriff in charge of the decoding couldn’t help but raise his voice. “Th-they have three military exoskeletons! They also have a robot.”

“What?” Theodore and the others widened their eyes.

This telegram gave them a fright.

The team was stronger than they imagined. If they didn’t know this and pursued blindly, it was unknown how many of the present Hand of Order members would die in the line of duty.

Theodore himself wasn't confident. After all, his abilities were useless against robots.

After a brief silence, Konstanz exhaled and said, "Let's look at the remaining mission records. Maybe there are other clues hidden."

...

In a safe house in the Green Olive Zone.

The five Old Task Force members were combing through the various matters related to their Hunter identities to see if there were any latent dangers involved.

"The missions we completed reveal too much information," said Long Yuehong with a frown.

Shang Jianyao laughed. "What has Zhang Qubing's actions got to do with me, Shang Jianyao?"

"Yes. Although those missions allow them to reconstruct a portion of our experiences and allow the enemy to have a more precise grasp of our strength, they can't threaten the present us. It's not like we will rashly rush out and fight them to the death." Jiang Baimian also voiced her thoughts.

Her meaning was simple: This was information that they had specially severed from their current selves. It wouldn't lead to the Old Task Force's current hiding spot being dug out.

"That's true." Long Yuehong heaved a sigh of relief.

At this moment, Bai Chen raised another hidden possibility. "Apart from accepting missions, we also issued missions."

"That's right. Will they find Waite's family?" Long Yuehong's heart tightened. He didn't want to implicate those poor families who had lost their fathers, mothers, husbands, wives, sons, and daughters because of him and the others.

Jiang Baimian consoled Long Yuehong. "They will likely investigate, but the possibility of them making things difficult for the families isn't high. They don't even know who we are. For this

matter, we acted as if we had accepted a mission and were hunters who specially provided ‘bereavement’ to the victims’ families. There’s actually no connection between us, and that’s actually the truth. It’s impossible for the Hand of Order not to be able to figure out such a simple matter from their investigations.”

With that said, she looked at Bai Chen—who was about to say something—and smiled. “I know what you want to say. Do you want to say that the lower-ranking public security officers will take the opportunity to plant a crime on those pitiful people and seize their ‘bereavement?’”

Bai Chen nodded. “Don’t have too much confidence in the integrity of First City’s sheriffs. A large number of them have nothing of that sort.”

Jiang Baimian sighed. “The main point is that this matter has blown up. Many people above them are watching. They probably won’t go overboard, but extorting some benefits in passing is inevitable. Since Waite and the others’ families live in First City and have lived here for so many years, they definitely know the principle of avoiding disaster by spending money. Besides, apart from us, nobody knows how much ‘bereavement’ they received. It won’t affect them much if they offer a little.”

“Yes.” Bai Chen accepted this analysis.

At this moment, Shang Jianyao stood up and spat out two words. “Old Han!”

That’s right! We even offered a bounty to find Old Han, and we said he’s our friend! Long Yuehong was shocked.

Jiang Baimian’s expression became rather solemn. Bai Chen pursed her lips tightly and didn’t say a word. The red glow in Genava’s eyes flickered a few times.

...

Han Wanghuo carried his rifle and said to Zeng Duo, who was beside him, “After we get that batch of firearms, we’ll meet up with the others and set off for your town.”

“Alright.” Zeng Duo’s black eyes lit up a little.

They went downstairs and walked to the intersection, prepared to turn into Antanna Street.

Suddenly, Han Wanghuo saw a familiar intelligence peddler.

The intelligence peddler hid in an alley and peeked out.

Upon seeing Han Wanghuo, he immediately waved his right hand, indicating for him to go over.

Han Wanghuo looked around warily. After seeing that nobody was paying attention to him or that there was anyone suspicious, he quickly walked toward the intelligence peddler.

“Be careful.” The intelligence peddler retreated into the alley and suppressed his voice. “The Hand of Order is looking for you. They are putting in a lot of effort!”

Han Wanghuo frowned. “Why?”

“I’m not sure either. I’m only here to remind you.” The intelligence peddler sighed and said, “The remuneration is plenty, and I’m also very tempted. If it weren’t for the fact that you previously helped me get my son’s illness treated in time, I definitely would’ve chosen to take the bounty. Leave quickly. The next time we meet, we’ll be enemies.”

Because I helped you? Han Wanghuo’s mouth moved after hearing the other party’s explanation, but he didn’t say anything.

...

In a safe house in the Green Olive Zone.

Hiss.

Long Yuehong drew a cold breath. “Old Han shouldn’t be implicated by us, right...? He can just tell them the truth. We only cooperated in Redstone Collection and can barely be considered acquaintances. We have no other relationship. Yes, the Hand of Order will definitely be able to confirm that he’s telling the truth.”

Jiang Baimian nodded. “In theory.”

Although she said that, her expression didn’t relax at all.

After exhaling silently, Jiang Baimian added in a deep voice, “But Old Han is a Subhuman.”

First City’s citizens hated everything related to genetic research and mutation through pollution, and they were very prejudiced against Subhumans. After the Senate established the Subhumans Guard, there was an intense hatred beyond the discrimination.

Once Subhumans were captured, they might be tortured to death even if they didn’t commit any crimes. Their only hope was that they had special abilities and were physically strong. They would then be selected to join the Subhumans Guard under the Senate’s employ.

“What should we do?” Long Yuehong asked anxiously. He felt that what Jiang Baimian said was indeed a problem.

Discrimination against Subhumans was widespread in every corner of the Ashlands, and First City was considered one of the relatively serious places.

The encounters of Blackrat Town’s residents left a deep impression on Long Yuehong. He still occasionally had nightmares because of it.

Jiang Baimian glanced at the serious Shang Jianyao and deliberated before saying, “Disguise yourselves—we’re heading out. We have to find Old Han before the Hand of Order does!”

Chapter 453: Every Second Counts

Han Wanghuo—who had learned the news from the intelligence peddler—avoided most pedestrians with Zeng Duo and returned to his rented room.

“Did... you do something?” Zeng Duo looked at Han Wanghuo in confusion and broke the silence.

Han Wanghuo frowned slightly. He also didn’t understand why he was in such a situation.

“Even if I’ve done nasty things and offended others, it was done elsewhere.” He thought for a long time but couldn’t think of anything that required the Hand of Order to make such a big fuss. He felt that even if his Subhuman identity was exposed, it was impossible to attract such attention.

Could it be that someone I’ve been in contact with recently did something major? Han Wanghuo looked out the window and said in a deep voice, “There’s no time to consider why. We have to move immediately.”

“Yes,” Zeng Duo agreed.

They definitely couldn’t blindly move. The two of them quickly used the materials around them to disguise themselves so that they wouldn’t be recognized or remembered by others on the way.

They went downstairs separately and moved the supplies they had been preparing into the car. After doing this, Han Wanghuo closed the door and drove his black, battered SUV to the other end of Antanna Street.

After circling around a bathhouse with good business, the vehicle drove into a relatively quiet alley and stopped in front of an old apartment.

“Second floor,” Han Wanghuo said simply.

Zeng Duo didn’t ask further and followed him up to the second floor. She watched as he took out a key and opened a brownish-red wooden door to a particular apartment.

Under her slightly confused gaze, Han Wanghuo casually said, “This was prepared in advance. It’s never wrong to be careful in the Ashlands.”

“I understand. A cunning rabbit has three burrows.” Zeng Duo nodded slightly.

Upon seeing Han Wanghuo look over in surprise, she smiled and explained, “Although our town has many infected and mutated people, we have always had plenty of food. The environment is relatively stable, and we retained much of the Old World’s knowledge.”

Han Wanghuo nodded indiscernibly. “Stay here and rest. I’ll go to Antanna Street and retrieve that batch of weapons before the arms dealers learn about this. Yes, I’ll go back to the previous place

and drive your car. We won't unload the supplies on this car for now since we don't know when we'll need to move again."

"I'll go with you," Zeng Duo said very calmly.

"There's no need for you to take this risk," Han Wanghuo habitually advised.

Zeng Duo smiled. "To a person like me who doesn't have long to live, achieving a goal is more important than life. I don't wish for the helper I found with great difficulty to vanish. I don't have any time left to find another batch of helpers."

Han Wanghuo fell silent for a few seconds before replying concisely, "Alright."

The disguised duo walked downstairs again.

Zeng Duo looked at the stairs in front of her and suddenly said, "I thought you would let me leave by myself because the Hand of Order is looking for you, not me. That's how you usually act—you always prioritize others."

Han Wanghuo glanced at her and coldly said, "That's because it hasn't harmed my core interests yet. This time, your heart concerns my life, just like how that batch of weapons concerns whether the mission can be completed. Therefore, I won't give up. Even if I have to take a slight risk, I have to retrieve it. Don't think of me as a good person; that was just me pretending."

Zeng Duo didn't turn around and glanced at the slightly fierce-looking man from the corner of her eye. "If you weren't a good person, I'd already be dead. It's easier to finish me off than face First City's army."

"In a situation where you have a choice, keeping a promise will allow you to gain more in the future." Han Wanghuo left the apartment and walked to his battered jeep. "You saw it just now. My good deed was rewarded."

Zeng Duo didn't say anything else. Only when she got into the car and sat in the passenger seat did she mutter softly, "But from the looks of it, you don't seem to believe in karma. You only think that it was a coincidence."

Han Wanghuo started the car and didn't seem to hear this.

...

Near Antanna Street, the two cars rented by the Old Task Force drove on different roads.

In order to deal with the Hand of Order, they didn't even rent a car personally. Instead, they used Shang Jianyao's Inference Clowning and 'requested help' from two Ruin Hunters.

As for the problem of Inference Clowning's effects disappearing over time, they didn't consider it at all because it would happen in a few days. The Old Task Force had long given up on the two cars they rented.

Jiang Baimian—who was sitting in one of the cars—picked up the walkie-talkie and instructed Long Yuehong, Bai Chen, and Genava on the other car. “If nothing unexpected happens, the Hand of Order and some Ruin Hunters will definitely be able to know that Old Han lives nearby through the Hunter's Guild's mission records and carry out an investigation. Our solution is to drive and disguise ourselves as Ruin Hunters who are in search of clues and observing the surroundings for any activity.

“Once you discover any commotion, rush over immediately and try to save Old Han before he is arrested. Uh... We can't give up on observing pedestrians during this process. Maybe we'll be lucky enough to encounter an undisguised Old Han, who hasn't been discovered?”

After Long Yuehong conveyed his team leader's message to Bai Chen—who was driving—he asked, “If Old Han doesn't live nearby, won't we return empty-handed?”

“We'll have to thank the heavens if that's really the case!” Jiang Baimian replied in amusement. “That means that Old Han won't be in danger for the time being. Alright, we'll each be in charge of an area according to our previous arrangements.

“By the way, the focus is on the short and thin woman when observing passersby. If Old Han has disguised himself, his characteristics won't be too obvious. However, his companion won't be like that; this is also something the Hunter's Guild doesn't know.”

After giving these instructions, Jiang Baimian turned her head and said to the driving Shang Jianyao, “Let’s go to Antanna Street and wait. The probability of Old Han appearing there is very high.”

At this point, Jiang Baimian laughed. “Are you going to ask why? This is very simple. We have previously deduced that Old Han has accepted a very difficult mission in order to get a heart transplant. He’s searching for partners everywhere. Logically speaking, it’s not difficult for us to determine that Old Han is gathering weapons, ammunition, and canned food at the same time. This is a necessary condition for completing a complicated mission.

“If Old Han had already prepared all of this, he definitely would’ve set off long ago since his medical condition can’t afford to wait. If he isn’t done with his preparations, one possibility is that they don’t have enough manpower. The other possibility is that they don’t have enough supplies. What place is more suitable than Antanna Street for the latter?”

Jiang Baimian couldn’t be sure if Han Wanghuo was currently stuck with the problem regarding supplies or helpers, so she could only say that there was a certain probability.

Make bold assumptions and carefully verify them.

Shang Jianyao—who was driving—tersely agreed. “It’s not like I’m Little Red.”

This time, Jiang Baimian directly understood what he meant: He wasn’t Long Yuehong. He didn’t need anyone to enlighten him, nor did he take a long time to figure things out.

As they spoke, Shang Jianyao casually picked up a baseball cap and wore it on his head, lowering the cap very low.

“This is...” Jiang Baimian asked hesitantly.

Shang Jianyao replied seriously, “A disguise learned from the few fake Fathers.”

“You make us look like villains.” Jiang Baimian clicked her tongue and cast her gaze at the approaching Antanna Street.

This was First City’s largest, most famous, and most chaotic black market.

...

On Antanna Street, the houses were erected messily, and the environment was dark. The people coming and going had a certain level of vigilance.

Han Wanghuo—who was wearing a hat and glasses—walked into Old Reggie’s signboard-less gun shop.

Zeng Duo—who had also disguised herself—followed closely behind him and observed the surroundings with great experience.

“Is my batch of firearms there?” Han Wanghuo knocked on the counter in front of Old Reggie.

The bearded Old Reggie looked up at him and observed him for a moment before smiling. “It’s you; nice disguise. You don’t seem simple. I remember that someone was looking for you previously, and it was someone you know.”

“I remember that people in the arms business don’t ask the other party the reason for their purchase,” Han Wanghuo replied in a deep voice.

Old Reggie laughed. “No, I’ll still ask. It won’t be nice if they take the firearms and rob me on the spot. Haha, the goods you wanted are ready. I hope you brought enough money.”

Han Wanghuo patted the small bag on his shoulder. “It’s all here.”

Just as he said that, a few people entered the gun shop.

The leader wore a shirt and a vest. He was of medium build and had black hair, brown eyes, and ordinary looks. He also had a pair of wooden eyes that didn’t seem agile.

This was none other than a capable Hand of Order personnel—the Golden Apple Zone Orderly’s aide, Theodore.

A man beside him took out a restored photo, took a few steps forward, and handed it to Old Reggie. “Have you seen this person?”

The person in the photo had messy eyebrows and looked fierce. There were two scars on his face—one horizontal and one vertical. He was none other than Han Wanghuo.

Chapter 454: Eyes

When Old Reggie saw the photo, Han Wanghuo—who was wearing a hat and glasses—also realized that it was him. His body couldn’t help but tense up as his right hand—which was leaning against the inside of the shop—stealthily reached for his waist.

There was a pistol hidden there. Han Wanghuo planned to fire at the pursuers as soon as Old Reggie pointed him out.

He didn’t believe Old Reggie would cover up for him. They weren’t even close, and selling him out was a reasonable development.

As far as he was concerned, the only reason Old Reggie would keep his mouth shut was that he was there and that he would die with him if things went into a tailspin.

In fact, Han Wanghuo wouldn’t blame him at all if such a situation really happened. He believed that the other party had only made a choice the average person would make. Therefore, he only wanted to attack the pursuers and pave a way out.

Old Reggie’s eyes were fixed on the picture as if wondering where he had seen it before.

At this moment, Zeng Duo’s heart stirred. She approached Theodore and the others and said with uncertainty, “I think I’ve seen the person in the photo before.”

She noticed that the pursuer had only taken out Han Wanghuo’s photo to make an inquiry.

Han Wanghuo stiffened and subconsciously looked at Zeng Duo. The next second, he realized that this would expose him to the pursuers.

At this moment, it would be too obvious to turn his head back in a hurry—it would be suspicious. Han Wanghuo could only forcefully maintain his current state.

Fortunately, Theodore and his subordinates were attracted by Zeng Duo's words and ignored the other customer in the gun shop.

"Where have you seen him?" Theodore turned his gaze to Zeng Duo.

Zeng Duo recalled and said, "Over at Hammer Street, very close to here. The scars on his face left a deep impression on me."

Hammer Street was where Han Wanghuo had a rental previously.

Upon hearing this, Han Wanghuo resisted the urge to touch the scar on his face. It was covered by a thick layer of powder and a liquid that deepened one's skin color. It was impossible to notice without looking carefully.

Theodore nodded, took out a phone, and dialed a number. He contacted his colleagues at Hammer Street and informed them that their target was likely in that area.

After hanging up, Theodore said to his subordinates, "We'll split into two groups. One group will go over to help, and the other will stay here and continue investigating."

As he divided the teams, he frowned slightly. He had a nagging feeling that something was amiss—there was a certain level of illogicality.

Upon seeing this, Zeng Duo probed, "Will I get a payment for giving you clues? You should've issued missions at the Hunter's Guild, right?"

Theodore's brows relaxed, and he had no other doubts. He took out a notepad and a fountain pen that he carried with him and wrote a paragraph. "Take this to the Hunter's Guild and tell them what clues you've provided. If it's effective in the future, we'll give you the bounty through the Hunter's Guild. I think you can trust the Hunter's Guild's credibility."

Theodore handed Zeng Duo the note he had written. He already understood why he had felt that something was amiss.

There was no way people who frequented the black market on Antanna Street would actually give clues without asking for any compensation!

That didn't make sense!

As Zeng Duo accepted the note, Theodore arranged a team and led his two subordinates out of Old Reggie's gun shop and rushed toward Hammer Street.

His other subordinates began investigating the nearby shops.

They had forgotten that Old Reggie hadn't answered.

As they walked quickly, one of Theodore's subordinates hesitantly said, "Boss, the reaction of the customer in the gun shop seemed problematic. He was a little nervous."

Theodore nodded. "I noticed it too, but that's very normal. I can't say that every person who appears on Antanna Street has a problem, but 99% of them have committed crimes. It's understandable for them to be nervous when they see us and recognize us."

"Yes." His subordinate made it known that he shared the same thoughts.

He smiled and said, "If we lack a criminal quota in the future, we can just come here to arrest people."

As they chatted, they heard someone shout from behind them. "Sir! Sir!"

Theodore turned around and saw that the person who had shouted was the gun shop's owner.

Old Reggie said loudly, "I have clues!"

Theodore frowned and vaguely sensed that something was amiss. He quickly jogged back to the gun shop.

"What took you so long to come up with something? Why didn't you tell me earlier?" he asked.

Old Reggie spread his hands and said helplessly, “That person was right in front of me, quietly pointing a gun at me. How dare I say that?”

“That person...” Theodore’s pupils dilated. “The person in the hat?”

That was the target!

“Yes.” Old Reggie sighed and rambled. “I thought that since you didn’t notice, I’d pretend not to know. However, I felt that such actions were wrong after some consideration.”

You actually realize that it’s wrong... Theodore muttered inwardly.

Before he could question the target, Old Reggie continued, “When you gain something and discover that the target came to me, but I didn’t say anything, won’t I become an accomplice?”

Theodore was about to ask when a voice sounded from his pocket. He quickly picked up his phone and chose to answer.

“Sir, we’ve asked around. The target did appear on Hammer Street and seems to live in this area. Furthermore, he has a companion, a woman. She’s very short, no more than 1.6 meters.” The sheriff opposite him gave the latest information.

Female, very short, no more than 1.6 meters... Upon hearing these words, the blood vessels on Theodore’s forehead throbbed as he understood what the problem was. That group’s friends are equally bold and careful!

He quickly asked Old Reggie, “Did you see where they went?”

Old Reggie pointed ahead. “They entered that alley.”

“Go after them!” Theodore led his men and ran.

He chose to believe in Old Reggie because the more one had a certain status and property in a black market like Antanna Street, the more they didn’t dare to cross the Hand of Order.

They may not be able to find the target, but couldn't they find him?

The running Theodore and the others attracted attention. Many of them were Ruin Hunters who had accepted missions to search for Han Wanghuo.

Their hearts stirred as they quietly followed behind Theodore and the others.

There had to be a reason for the abnormal situation. In the current situation, they reasonably suspected that the people running wildly had discovered the target's whereabouts.

There were too many illegal buildings on Antanna Street, so the streets were set up narrowly. The alleys on the side were even more so. Coupled with the various items that protruded from above blocking the sunlight, this place appeared dark and gloomy.

With Han Wanghuo's female companion's height characteristics and their previous attire, Theodore could find a certain number of witnesses along the way to ensure that he didn't deviate from his tracking.

Finally, they arrived in front of an old building. According to witnesses, the target had just entered.

"Go to the back and watch the exit," Theodore instructed before rushing to the main door. As he ran, he suddenly took out his black leather wallet and threw it into the building's lobby.

With a bang, the wallet was pierced by a bullet and rolled around, spilling its contents onto the ground.

Upon seeing this, Theodore sneered but was also shocked.

He didn't expect his target's marksmanship to be so accurate. If not for his rich experience and carefulness, he felt that he wouldn't have been able to dodge in time and definitely would've been hit.

When the time came, whether he died on the spot depended on luck.

With the gunshot, Theodore locked onto a human consciousness inside.

There were too many people in the building, so he couldn't identify the target based on their consciousness.

Han Wanghuo immediately knew that things were bad the moment he hit the wallet. He immediately put away his rifle and prepared to shift positions.

His and Zeng Duo's plan was to find a place to counterattack and create an opening in the encirclement since there were pursuers behind and Ruin Hunters blocking the road ahead.

Just as Han Wanghuo bent down and walked quickly, his chest suddenly felt heavy. Then, he heard his heart beating like it couldn't bear the burden.

The next second, his vision turned black as he went into shock.

Upon seeing this, Zeng Duo quickly stopped in her tracks and tried to support Han Wanghuo. However, she quickly realized that her heart was beating abnormally.

She couldn't escape the untenable situation and quickly went into shock.

...

"Many people are rushing toward that region..." Jiang Baimian looked at the people walking in a hurry on Antanna street and thoughtfully said, "Did they discover Old Han?"

Without needing any instructions, Shang Jianyao—who was wearing a baseball cap—turned the steering wheel and made the car drive into the narrow alley with the crowd.

The road ahead widened after a while, and they saw a rather old building.

Two people were carried out of the building's main entrance.

Although the other party had disguised himself, Jiang Baimian still recognized one of them to be Han Wanghuo.

“His bioelectric signal is still there. He should be fine.” Jiang Baimian cast her gaze at the leader of the pursuers. She immediately noticed Theodore’s wooden eyes.

This... Jiang Baimian felt that she had seen or heard of such an anomaly somewhere.

Shang Jianyao looked at the same spot and laughed. “An Awakened in the Arbiter of Fate domain.”

Yes! The Arbiter of Fate-domain Awakened captured by the company had similar abnormalities in his eyes. His name was Xiong Ming... Jiang Baimian instantly recalled the relevant details.

She quickly scanned and observed the area.

“Do we save him?” Jiang Baimian asked.

“Yes!” Shang Jianyao replied without hesitation.

...

Theodore informed the higher-ups that the target had been captured.

Next, it’s time to organize the manpower and interrogate this man and woman about the whereabouts of October Xue’s team... As he thought, he walked down the stairs, left the building, and returned to Antanna Street.

Their car was still parked there.

Suddenly, Theodore’s vision turned black, and he could no longer see anything.

Not good! Leveraging his memory, he threw himself to the side.

He remembered a stone statue there. This was also one of First City's unique characteristics.

Chapter 455: Ferocious Criminals

Bang!

Just as Theodore lunged for the stone sculpture, the step he had been standing on blew to bits, and an obvious crater appeared.

This sudden change alarmed his security officers, and they reflexively ran in different directions in search of cover.

As for Han Wanghuo and Zeng Duo, they were thrown onto the steps before they tumbled down.

These people were only ordinary citizens—none of them were nobles. To them, being a public security officer was just a job to feed their families. It wasn't a sanctified position, so they wouldn't risk death to protect the witnesses.

Even in their daily work, they would slack off whenever they could and avoid work whenever possible if they didn't have any ties with their superiors. Of course, they appeared very enthusiastic on the surface, but they would immediately drop their disguises once there was no supervision.

Following his memories, Theodore rolled to the stone statue. As he searched for the exact location with his hands, he sensed the assailant's location.

However, he sensed that there were many human consciousnesses in that area. It was impossible to tell who the enemy was, and he couldn't see anything with his eyes. Hence, it was difficult for him to make a comprehensive judgment.

"Those damn Ruin Hunters!" Theodore cursed softly as he moved behind the stone statue. He naturally knew why there were so many human consciousnesses in the corresponding area—many Ruin Hunters who had accepted the mission had followed them and wanted to see if there were any spoils.

In the face of such a situation, Theodore wasn't helpless. His choice was very simple—attack indiscriminately!

As a noble, he had a strong sense of honor. He was very concerned about First City's safety and stability, but he only looked up to people of the same level.

When facing ordinary citizens, Ruin Hunters, and wilderness nomads, he usually would show his pity and sympathy occasionally. But at this moment, he didn't hesitate to attack the innocent when the enemy's strength and numbers were unknown—especially when they directly threatened his safety.

Over the years, there had been chaotic battles during the Hand of Order's enforcement of the law. There had been no lack of casualties!

For this, Theodore usually taught his subordinates: "When carrying out missions, your safety is of utmost importance. You are allowed to use extreme means to nip the danger in the bud."

Such words and such an attitude made him—who was far inferior to Wall in the ways of the world—receive a large number of subordinates' support.

"Enemy contact! Enemy contact!" Theodore leaned against the stone statue and shouted. At the same time, a strange glow surfaced in his wooden eyes.

Seven to eight meters away, a Ruin Hunter—who had retreated into his car due to the sudden change in the scene—felt his chest tighten. His vision turned black as he lost consciousness and fainted beside the passenger seat.

Shock!

This was Theodore's Awakened ability, Shock! Its effective range was ten meters, so it could only be utilized on one person at a time for the time being.

Badump! Badump!

In the area where the suspected shooter was, several Ruin Hunters went into shock and fell in different places.

This, in conjunction with Theodore's shout of "enemy contact," made the Ruin Hunters—who were attempting to take advantage of the situation—sense the danger. They drove or ran away from the area.

At this moment, the car Shang Jianyao drove was still in the street corner. The straight-line distance from Theodore was 60 to 70 meters!

He relied on the immense advantage brought about by the Bangle of Blindness's range of influence. This was definitely nothing compared to a true Mind Corridor-level Awakened, but using it against a Hand of Order member—who was only at the Sea of Origins—was like an adult beating a child.

In the passenger seat, Jiang Baimian observed for a while and calmly made a series of judgments. "There are currently no powerhouses at the Mind Corridor level..."

"His ability to affect the heart is very direct and terrifying, but the range doesn't seem to exceed ten meters..."

"Based on the other Awakened's situations, the ability with the largest range of influence shouldn't exceed 30 meters..."

The reason why she didn't hit him with the United 202 previously was that she had focused on preventing any accidents. After all, she couldn't be sure if the other party was only at the Sea of Origins level or if he had special abilities that were even more difficult to deal with.

Furthermore, 60 to 70 meters was pushing it for a pistol. If not for Jiang Baimian's outstanding talent in marksmanship, the bullet wouldn't have hit the spot Theodore was standing.

As Shang Jianyao maintained the burning state of the Bangle of Blindness, he floored the accelerator and drove the car to the stairs outside the building where Han Wanghuo and his female companion were unconscious.

In an environment where many Ruin Hunters were scattering like startled birds and beasts with all kinds of vehicles driving in all directions, their actions didn't stand out.

Even if Theodore didn't shout "enemy contact" and didn't attack enemies in the corresponding range indiscriminately, Jiang Baimian could still use the shoulder-bearing, single-man combat rocket launcher to intimidate the Ruin Hunters into retreating, thus creating a similar scene!

The car stopped about 30 meters away from Theodore.

Shang Jianyao made the Bangle of Blindness on his left wrist stop emitting flames and return to its original state. Almost at the same time, the glass of his green watch emitted a glow.

Destiny Connection!

Shang Jianyao had solidified the last bit of Destiny Connection's power into the glass of his watch, and he didn't hesitate to use it.

At this moment, apart from reporting the situation to his superiors, Theodore—who was leaning against the stone statue and dodging the distant shots—was almost fully focused on sensing the surrounding area.

The moment he discovered anyone entering within ten meters of him and was suspected of saving Han Wanghuo and the woman, he would immediately use Shock on them.

His subordinates began to use their phones and walkie-talkies to request backup from their nearby colleagues.

Suddenly, a beam of light entered Theodore's eyes.

Stone steps, unconscious figures, and the chaotic scene on the street surfaced in his eyes at the same time.

He could see the world again!

The enemy has retreated? Just as this thought flashed through Theodore's mind, he shivered and felt a cold aura seep into his body.

This made his muscles stiffen, and none of his actions were under his brain's commands.

Shang Jianyao had directly ‘possessed’ him with Destiny Connection! Although Shang Jianyao couldn’t forcefully control the target like DiMarco and make them do things, he could exert control while the other party was unconscious.

However, he didn’t want Theodore to do anything now. He only wanted to use Possession to interfere with his ability usage.

The weakened Destiny Connection was more than enough.

Shang Jianyao controlled Theodore, and Jiang Baimian immediately pushed open the door and alighted.

She held a grenade launcher and constantly popped grenades at the spot where the public security officers and the remaining Ruin Hunters were hiding.

Boom! Boom! Boom!

Amidst the explosions, Jiang Baimian quickly walked to Han Wanghuo and his female companion as she fired.

She wasn’t stingy with the grenades at all. Another round of ‘bombardment’ suppressed the sheriffs and Ruin Hunters, preventing them from sticking their heads out from behind their cover.

Jiang Baimian bent down and used her left arm to pick up Han Wanghuo and the woman. She then dashed and returned to the car amidst the gunshots before throwing the two people in her hand into the backseat.

Jiang Baimian also entered the backseat and checked Han Wanghuo’s condition. She then shouted at Shang Jianyao, “Retreat!”

The green light on Shang Jianyao’s watch glass quickly dissipated, and there was nothing left.

After ending the Possession, Shang Jianyao didn’t turn the steering wheel. He floored the accelerator and drove the car out of the area at an extremely fast speed, returning to the corner where it had stopped.

With a screech, the car swerved and drove into another street.

Jiang Baimian picked up the walkie-talkie from the backseat and instructed Long Yuehong, Bai Chen, and Genava, “We’ve already found Old Han. Let’s meet at the parking lot northwest of Antanna Street.”

This was the evacuation plan they had planned before heading out.

After doing this, Jiang Baimian quickly gave Han Wanghuo and the woman first aid to confirm that they were fine for the time being.

On the other side, Theodore’s body returned to normal. However, he only had time to see the ordinary black car drive out of his vision.

Burning with rage and anxiety, he took out his phone and reported the situation, emphasizing the target vehicle’s appearance.

As for who the attacker was, he didn’t see it at all. He could only ask his public security officers later.

Shang Jianyao drove the black car and circled around Antanna Street. He then entered a parking lot in the northwest direction before the public security officers and Ruin Hunters could chase after him.

At this moment, Bai Chen’s dark SUV was parked in a relatively hidden corner.

Jiang Baimian looked around, pulled out the Ice Moss, rolled down the window, and shot all the cameras in the area. After that, she got Shang Jianyao to drive the car to Bai Chen and the others.

The two of them pushed open the door and got out of the car one after another. They carried one each and brought Han Wanghuo and the woman to the dark SUV’s backseat before squeezing in.

As the door closed, Bai Chen stepped on the accelerator and let the car leave through another exit.

The entire process was completed in silence, one done with tacit understanding.

Chapter 456: Deterioration

After Bai Chen drove off, Ruin Hunters and public security officers constantly rushed over. From time to time, they would stop and ask passersby on the street. Then, they would head for the parking lot based on the answers they received.

The most experienced among them chose to circle around to the other exit.

After they arrived at the corresponding area, they carefully observed the cars and compared them to the black car in the intelligence report.

The Old Task Force's dark SUV with a sunscreen plastering the windows passed by them and drove into the distance.

...

Before long, Theodore, Wall, and Konstanz arrived at the parking lot northwest of Antanna Street from different places.

“Have you discovered the target vehicle?” Theodore was the most anxious because he had the person under his custody snatched away by October Xue's team. He picked up his phone and questioned a subordinate who had arrived early.

In fact, there were people more powerful than them presiding over this search operation. However, powerhouses of such status definitely wouldn't personally investigate. Instead, they chose to stay somewhere and cover the target area as much as possible. The details were left to their subordinates.

What Theodore regretted the most was that after discovering that Han Wanghuo only had one female companion, he felt that he could easily handle it. He didn't request backup from the higher-ups and only got his colleagues to help chase and intercept them. By the time he was attacked and subsequently reported the matter to his higher-ups, it was already too late for that person to rush over.

There was no such thing as 'teleportation' in the Ashlands. Without any marking, even Mind Corridor-level Awakened would find it difficult to pinpoint the human consciousnesses. Thus, it was impossible to track them.

Theodore's subordinate quickly replied, "We're looking. There are many cars here."

Theodore looked around and issued a new order. "Send people to block the other exits first!"

They could search the parking lot slowly.

At the same time, Wall and Konstanz issued similar orders to their subordinates.

Unlike Theodore, Wall specially emphasized, "Check the surveillance footage in the parking lot."

After a few minutes, the public security officers reported, "Boss, we've found the target vehicle. It's parked in a corner, but nobody is there!"

"Sir, the surveillance cameras here were destroyed."

...

Information was sent back to the three-man team, allowing them to determine the current situation quickly. Almost at the same moment, a phrase flashed across their minds—change of cars!

Wall immediately issued a new order. "Check the existing surveillance footage and see which cars entered the parking lot in the past hour!"

Konstanz added, "Ask the people in the parking lot if any cars are missing."

They were considering two possibilities. One was that October Xue's team had someone waiting in the parking lot, and the other was that they had stolen another car.

As the surveillance cameras outside the entrance had been smashed, there was no recording of which vehicles had left in the past ten minutes. Therefore, Wall and the others could only use such a tedious method.

Obviously, this would waste them a lot of time investigating.

After hearing Wall and Konstanz's words, Theodore's heart palpitated as he anxiously instructed, "Check the surveillance cameras on the streets outside!"

This allowed them to see which vehicles had passed by in a short period of time. They included the parking lot's exits.

Theodore didn't believe that October Xue's team would shoot every camera along the way. That was equivalent to leaving clues behind.

Before long, his subordinate reported to him. "Boss, there are no surveillance cameras along the streets outside the three exits. This is the Green Olive Zone; it's very close to Antanna Street."

The Green Olive Zone was a place where low-ranking citizens and foreigners gathered. Security had always been poor, and the corresponding funding was insufficient. How could it be like the Red Wolf Zone and the Golden Apple Zone, where there were enough cameras to monitor the streets?

Here, there were people who were hungry and willing to risk their lives for food. If the Hand of Order really dared to spend a large sum of money to install a large number of cameras in the Green Olive Zone, these people would dare to dismantle these electronic products and exchange them for a few loaves of bread. The major gangs would also hire some lower-ranking citizens to 'deal with' the surveillance cameras.

It was a game of who was faster—arrests or destruction of property.

The other Green Olive Zone streets were the same—how could Antanna Street, famous for its black market, be an exception? How could people here allow surveillance cameras to exist nearby?

Only in private property like the parking lot would the boss install a few because cars were lost all year round.

Han Wanghuo had chosen this area to live in back then not without such considerations.

His subordinate's report made Theodore's face turn livid. He wanted to flare up, but he didn't know who to vent it on.

His subordinates definitely wouldn't screw up this matter. After all, this wasn't their usual area of jurisdiction.

Theodore didn't know much about this himself. He was active in the Golden Apple Zone and the Red Wolf Zone all year round and only came to the Green Olive Zone for the occasional case.

...

Bai Chen drove the vehicle all the way to the Green Olive Zone's port. Along the way, the team members remained silent and were on high alert for any accidents.

After passing through alleys and streets, the dark-colored SUV stopped in an empty corner.

During the day, the Green Olive Zone was much quieter than at night.

Shang Jianyao and the others pushed open the door, got out of the car one after another, and walked to another corner.

The team's modified jeep was parked there.

They walked quickly, worried that someone would suddenly pass by and see them.

If such a situation really happened, the Old Task Force really couldn't bring themselves to pull out a gun to kill the witness or use other methods to make the other party disappear. They would only choose to use Shang Jianyao to make the target ignore what they saw through Inference Clowning. However, this couldn't prevent the Anti-intellectualism Church's Shepherd, Bouillon.

Genava held Han Wanghuo while Jiang Baimian carried the short and thin woman to the jeep and sat in the backseat.

The Old Task Force had considered this situation in advance, so they didn't place all the military exoskeletons in the car. Due to this, there was relatively more space.

"Sit in the back," Shang Jianyao quickly said as he looked at Long Yuehong. His hand had already opened the passenger door.

Long Yuehong didn't ask why—this wasn't a good time to argue.

After all the team members got into the car, Bai Chen stepped on the accelerator.

Long Yuehong asked Shang Jianyao, "Why do you suddenly want to sit in front?"

"You're only 1.75 meters tall. Your body is relatively thin, so you take the least space," Shang Jianyao replied seriously with an academic tone.

For a moment, Long Yuehong didn't know if this fellow was being honest or if he was taking the opportunity to humiliate him. He blurted out, "Old Ge occupies more space than you. Even if you want a swap, it should be him and me."

Just as he said that, he heard a slight creaking sound from Geneva's body.

The smart bot 'retracted' his limbs and folded a portion of his body. If he didn't have to carry Han Wanghuo, he definitely would've stuffed himself into a crate meant for the military exoskeleton.

"I can take up a small amount of space." Geneva used a fact to prove Long Yuehong wrong.

Long Yuehong was speechless.

After changing to the jeep, the Old Task Force headed for the Golden Grain Zone. When there was nobody around, they quickly brought Han Wanghuo and his female companion back into their safe house.

...

Han Wanghuo woke up in a daze and saw a few familiar faces. They were October Xue, Zhang Qubing, Qian Bai, and Gu Zhiyong.

"You're awake?" Shang Jianyao asked happily.

Jiang Baimian and the others smiled as well.

Han Wanghuo was first stunned before his brain started to function. His heart stirred as he blurted out, “You’re actually the ones wanted by the Hand of Order?”

Jiang Baimian’s smile immediately stiffened. After a few seconds, she laughed dryly. “Sort of. It was purely an accident—an accident.”

Han Wanghuo confirmed his guess and turned to look for Zeng Duo. Before he could ask, he saw the other party lying beside him.

At this moment, Zeng Duo was gradually waking up. She looked at Shang Jianyao and the others in confusion and vigilance.

“My friends.” Han Wanghuo sat up straight and explained simply, “They are wanted by the Hand of Order.”

Zeng Duo’s eyes widened slightly as she couldn’t help but cough. How did this team get so valued by the Hand of Order that they made such a big fuss? What did they do?

“Ahem.” Jiang Baimian cleared her throat. “That’s a separate matter, and we’ll talk about it later. Old Han, no matter what mission you accepted, it doesn’t seem like it will be easy to complete it now. We have to lie low for a while. Yes, we know about your matter. Have you considered a mechanical heart?”

“That’s too expensive,” Han Wanghuo replied calmly. “Besides, even if you have channels and discounts, you can’t find anyone to install it for me.”

Yeah... Jiang Baimian replied inwardly, feeling a headache coming on.

In a situation where they were being pursued by the Hand of Order all over the city, it wasn’t suitable for them to appear in public, much less come into contact with a workshop that could perform a mechanical heart transplant.

Long Yuehong sighed with emotion at the hidden meaning in Han Wanghuo’s words: In the Ashlands, human hearts aren’t as valuable as mechanical hearts.

“What about artificial hearts?” Shang Jianyao suggested another solution.

“How long would it take?” Han Wanghuo didn’t question if the other party had the technology and directly asked the most important question.

We’ll first have to bring you back to the company, examine your body, extract your DNA, and do all kinds of analysis. Finally, it will confirm a strategy and officially execute it... Jiang Baimian deliberated and said, “At least five months.”

This wasn’t the Old World. If things were urgent, they could take a plane and send a sample back to save time.

Han Wanghuo slowly exhaled. “I should only have three months or less.”

“Didn’t the doctor say that medicine alone can last two years?” Jiang Baimian asked in confusion.

Han Wanghuo wasn’t surprised that they knew of his situation. He looked at Zeng Duo and said, “That was originally the case, but my heart was affected just now. I can sense my condition deteriorating.”

Chapter 457: Suggestion

After hearing Han Wanghuo’s words, Shang Jianyao wore a look of ‘agreement.’ “After discovering that the person is an Awakened in the Arbiter of Fate domain, I was rather worried about your heart.”

Arbiter of Fate-domain Awakened... Han Wanghuo had once been Redstone Collection’s sheriff and town guard captain. He had interacted with the Vigilance Church and faced the Murloc Oracle directly, so he didn’t lack knowledge of such matters.

However, Zeng Duo was different. She only knew about the Kalendarium and the Awakened. She had encountered certain churches but didn’t know the division of domains and their details.

At this moment, when she heard Shang Jianyao’s description, she suddenly felt like they weren’t in the same world.

Jiang Baimian didn't reprimand Shang Jianyao for his honesty and instead consoled Han Wanghuo. "It can only be confirmed after a detailed examination. What you feel can't override an instrument's reading; there will often be a large error."

"Where can we do the check?" Han Wanghuo asked.

Just as he said that, he felt that his tone was a little rash. He subconsciously said, "Sorry, I'm not in a good mood."

"I understand." Shang Jianyao had a sympathetic expression.

Jiang Baimian also made it apparent that it was fine. She tried asking herself inwardly, When you're terminally ill, don't have much time left, and just as you've finally found a cure—allowing you to see the light of day and fight for it—a group of people who call themselves your friends suddenly appear and disrupt all your plans, making everything less certain. Would you be angry?

Jiang Baimian's answer was: Even if the other party had no ill intentions and the screwing up of his plans was purely an accident, he would still be very angry.

Under those circumstances, rationality was often scarce.

She temporarily avoided the topic of checking his body and deliberated before asking, "So, you've already found a suitable heart and are waiting to complete a mission to raise enough money to exchange for it?"

"You can say so." Han Wanghuo deliberately didn't look at Zeng Duo.

"What mission is it?" Shang Jianyao asked curiously.

At this moment, Zeng Duo got off the bed and stretched her body. "Actually, that mission is to save my hometown. The reward is my heart."

She could tell that these people were friendly to Han Wanghuo and felt that there was a need to clarify the situation. Otherwise, given the current situation, she and Han Wanghuo might not even be able to leave the city, much less organize enough people to rescue Early Spring Town.

Ah... Long Yuehong never expected Shang Jianyao's previous guess to be correct—Han Wanghuo really brought the organ provider with him!

H-he's not disgusted? Long Yuehong thought for a moment and believed that normal people wouldn't do this if they didn't really have any other choice.

Perhaps she felt that Zeng Duo resembled her in some aspects, so Bai Chen took the initiative to ask, "You chose to sacrifice yourself for your hometown?"

"It's not a sacrifice." Zeng Duo smiled. "It's the effective usage of trash."

She further explained, "I'm also terminally ill. These organs will be useless when the time comes."

"What illness?" Jiang Baimian asked.

Zeng Duo didn't need to think about it and directly said, "I'm not too sure what exactly the blood disease caused by the mutation is. The clinic doctor said a bunch of terms that I don't understand."

That might not be a terminal illness... It's necessary to do a detailed examination... Jiang Baimian didn't say these words. This would make it seem like she was undermining Han Wanghuo and blocking his path to salvation.

Before giving a new, concrete plan, she decided to remain silent on this matter. Although she sympathized with Zeng Duo, they didn't have any ties in the past.

That kind of pity wouldn't affect her choices.

"Is that so..." Shang Jianyao nodded slightly and assumed Jiang Baimian's usual posture. "What happened to your hometown? Why do you need to save it?"

Zeng Duo briefly explained how Early Spring Town had been reduced to First City's experimental zone.

Long Yuehong and the others wore strange expressions as they listened. Aren't biochemical experiments and genetic research standard for our own company? This is also one of the reasons why Pangu Biology doesn't have a good reputation. But now, First City has actually begun to conduct similar experiments. Furthermore, they're conducted under coercion, not voluntarily. Did they get the wrong script?

After careful thought, Jiang Baimian felt that this was completely understandable. Any large faction had a natural desire to improve its shortcomings. As long as there was a chance, they definitely wouldn't let it go!

But First City's way of doing things is too crude and brutal, right? According to this lady, there are countless people with abnormalities in Early Spring Town. Their lives are usually very miserable, so they could've used the excuse of medical consultation or directly explain your experiments that require genetic screening, which will also result in the development of treatments. That way, you can recruit a batch of fully cooperative volunteers. There's no need to make the situation so impassable and tense... Are your people really worthless? Jiang Baimian couldn't help but criticize.

From her point of view, First City's method was far inferior to Pangu Biology's efficiency. It could only be maintained by having a large population and being able to station troops everywhere.

"From your... Uh, how should I address you?" Only then did Jiang Baimian remember that she hadn't asked the lady's name.

Zeng Duo simply gave her name.

Jiang Baimian continued, "From your description, First City's experimental level in your town shouldn't be low. The security must be very high."

At this point, she looked at Han Wanghuo and said, "Old Han, it looks like you can't count on the manpower you organized."

After what happened today, how could the Ruin Hunters dare to cooperate with Han Wanghuo? It would be considered noble of them not to betray him.

"We haven't obtained the firearms we ordered either." Han Wanghuo couldn't help but exhale. The only thing he was glad about was that the partners he found didn't know the specific mission and wouldn't affect his plans with Early Spring Town.

Upon hearing Han Wanghuo's sigh, Shang Jianyao smiled.

Before he spoke, Jiang Baimian said, "We are responsible for this matter, so how about this? We'll be your helpers—it's voluntary work. Uh, it's not considered voluntary work. You have to give us a copy of the information or samples in Early Spring Town's laboratory."

The reason why she added the last sentence wasn't because of her professional habit of being a Pangu Biology villain but because she was worried that Han Wanghuo—this awkward fellow—wouldn't agree to take advantage of her.

Upon realizing that he wouldn't be able to find other helpers for the time being, Han Wanghuo fell silent for a few seconds and said, "Alright."

Jiang Baimian smiled. "You don't have to worry about weapons. We have quite a number, and we'll even throw in a killing machine."

As she spoke, Shang Jianyao turned around and made way.

Zeng Duo and Han Wanghuo then saw Geneva charging by the wall.

Robot... Han Wanghuo and Zeng Duo were alarmed before they turned delighted.

In the Ashlands, a robot with a complete set of modules was indeed a killing machine!

After he calmed down his pleasant surprise, Han Wanghuo couldn't help but ask, "Why are you being pursued by the Hand of Order?"

This team seems to cause trouble everywhere. Back in Redstone Collection, they got into conflict with the arms dealers and crossed the Subhuman Alliance. They were never idle.

Jiang Baimian thought for a moment. "I don't know how to tell you either. Why don't you directly look at the bounty mission issued by the Hand of Order? Old Ge, project it for them."

Genava immediately changed his identity and projected the information he had previously recorded onto the wall.

Han Wanghuo and Zeng Duo had only seen such high-tech methods in a few places like the Hunter's Guild.

They composed themselves and read the corresponding content: "Participated in the gladiator arena assassination and plotting a major plot against First City..."

After reading the first part of the description, Han Wanghuo and Zeng Duo's eyelids twitched. Who are these people?

Although Han Wanghuo could tell that October Xue's team was likely from a large faction, he never expected them to be at odds with First City directly.

Jiang Baimian immediately coughed. "Slander—this is all slander. We only stole some information."

"That's right. They are too narrow-minded," Shang Jianyao echoed.

Han Wanghuo nodded and recalled. "I remember that the Hand of Order didn't cause such a stir during the previous gladiator arena assassination..."

As he spoke, he couldn't continue. According to this logic, what October Xue's team had done was much more serious than assassinating a noble in the arena. Otherwise, they wouldn't have received such 'treatment!'

As his body tensed, Zeng Duo saw the bounty.

"10,000 Oray per person?" blurted out the Ruin Hunter from a town of mutants in surprise.

The area she was active in was mainly within First City's sphere of influence. The missions she usually accepted could often be converted to Oray. In all these years, she had never seen such a handsome bounty that only involved a few humans!

Although the bounty didn't necessarily represent the targets' danger level, the figure of 10,000 Oray still made Zeng Duo feel that everyone here was rather terrifying. It was similar to the characters used in various stories in the Ashlands to scare children and make them stop crying.

For an ordinary Ruin Hunter like her, 10,000 Oray was more than enough to buy her life.

Who are they? Zeng Duo shut her mouth and swept her gaze across Long Yuehong, Bai Chen, and the others.

"That's about it." Jiang Baimian vaguely ended the topic. She then frowned and said, "In this situation, we won't be able to find a place to perform an organ transplant even if we complete Zeng Duo's mission."

This wasn't a minor surgery. It required a lot of medical equipment, or the mortality rate would be extremely high.

Han Wanghuo fell silent for a moment before saying, "Doctors at Antanna Street's unlicensed clinics care more about money than their lives."

"Yes, we'll see." Jiang Baimian couldn't think of any other solution. Although she could make the real Doctor Geneva download the corresponding information and attempt to complete such an operation, the Old Task Force didn't have the corresponding medical equipment for him.

Jiang Baimian then exhaled. "These are all subsequent problems. The most important problem now is: How do we leave First City?"

Chapter 458: Getting a Car

What Jiang Baimian raised was indeed the most pertinent problem at hand. If it wasn't resolved, the matter in Early Spring Town would never be completed. Therefore, Han Wanghuo and Zeng Duo actively responded.

Han Wanghuo jogged his memories of First City and expressed his opinion. "It's the hardest to travel through the North Shore. As long as they lock down the bridge and send out ships and drones to patrol the river, we won't be able to break through at all."

Zeng Duo added, "The inspection will only be stricter if we approach the Golden Apple Zone toward the east. The manors are there if we head south. There will be more passersby, so we can

consider it. However, this won't escape the Hand of Order. They will definitely set up many checkpoints in that direction.

“Comparatively speaking, entering the Factory Zone in the west is the best choice. Every morning and evening, a large number of workers go to work and get off work. The Hand of Order's personnel can't check all of them even if they had ten times more people. Once we enter the Factory Zone, there's a chance of escaping the city with the environment there.”

The Factory Zone occupied a large area, including the suburbs in the traditional sense. There were countless buildings, so it was very difficult to seal off the area completely.

Jiang Baimian nodded. “This is an idea, but there are two problems. First, there are only a few workers who come and go on bicycles. Most of them rely on walking, so we will stand out like fireflies at night if we drive and mix among them—so bright and eye-catching. If we don't drive, we won't be able to carry the supplies with us at all. Unless we can think of another way to send out the needed firearms, food, and other supplies through other channels, this isn't a good choice.”

Apart from some factory management, only Ruin Hunters who had taken on missions drove to the Factory Zone. There weren't many of them, so it was very easy to check them.

Jiang Baimian paused and said, “Second, there are very powerful Awakened among the people sent by the Hand of Order this time. Even if we mix among the workers, we might not be able to hide from them.”

She had learned her lesson from General Phocas.

Upon seeing that Han Wanghuo and Zeng Duo only knew that there were powerful enemies without having a clear idea of how powerful they were, Jiang Baimian thought for a moment and said, “Old Han, do you still remember the Murloc Oracle?”

“I remember.” Han Wanghuo's expression turned solemn. He still remembered that he had been affected despite being nearly 100 meters away.

Shang Jianyao said before Jiang Baimian could, “The powerful Hand of Order Awakened are several times stronger than the Murloc Oracle, or even more than ten times.”

“...” Han Wanghuo was speechless.

Shang Jianyao continued, “They should be about the same as DiMarco in his optimal condition, but I’ve never seen DiMarco in optimal condition. Thus, I’m not sure how strong he is.”

“DiMarco?” Han Wanghuo was no stranger to this name. After being Redstone Collection’s sheriff and town guard captain for many years, he had a deep impression of the Underground Ark and Mr. DiMarco. This mysterious Underground Ark owner was actually an abnormally powerful Awakened?

“Yes.” Shang Jianyao revealed a reminiscent expression. “We fought him and obtained his bestowments.”

“Bestowments?” Han Wanghuo couldn’t keep up with Shang Jianyao’s train of thought.

“A bead, but it’s already gone. There’s also the Underground Ark—the servants inside have become the masters!” Shang Jianyao said without any fabrications.

He was proud of that.

The Underground Ark became a bestowment? Han Wanghuo felt that everything he had experienced over the years wasn’t as magical as today. He probed, “How is DiMarco now?”

“Dead,” Shang Jianyao replied concisely.

Upon hearing this, Han Wanghuo roughly understood that October Xue’s team had raided the Underground Ark after he left and killed DiMarco.

They actually did such a big thing? And succeeded!?! Han Wanghuo couldn’t hide his shock and surprise. The next second, he thought of the present and became suspicious of October Xue’s team’s goal in First City.

At this moment, he only had one thought: They might really be plotting a major plot against First City!

Seeing that Zeng Duo clearly didn't know what the Underground Ark, DiMarco, and the Murloc Oracle represented, Jiang Baimian probed, "Who do you think is the most terrifying bandit group in the North Shore wastelands?"

"Nois," Zeng Duo subconsciously replied.

Countless Ruin Hunters had died at the hands of this bandit group, and their harvests plundered. Not only were they well-equipped, but they also had Awakened.

What proved their strength the most was that they had escaped the encirclement and suppression of First City's army over the years.

Jiang Baimian nodded. "The powerful Awakened from the Hand of Order can finish off the Nois bandits single-handedly. Yes, the premise is that they can find the target."

"..." Zeng Duo's eyes flickered. She finally understood how terrifying powerful Awakened were.

The team in front of us actually suspected that the Hand of Order would send such powerful Awakened to deal with them! Who the hell are they? How strong are they? What have they done? A series of questions flashed through Zeng Duo's mind, making her wonder if working with these people was a mistake.

The trouble they bring might be far greater than what we'll encounter in Early Spring Town! With no other helpers, Zeng Duo buried her suspicions deep down.

Upon seeing that Han Wanghuo and Zeng Duo didn't have a better solution, Jiang Baimian sighed quietly. "There's no rush. Regardless of how we leave the city, we have to hide for a few days to avoid any stings. We still have plenty of time to think."

At the same time, she muttered inwardly, Do I have to use General Phocas's help, or do I have to find Elder Meyers? Yes, let's wait for the company's reply...

Although Pangu Biology had yet to make further arrangements for the Old Task Force's subsequent missions and was waiting for the Board of Directors to convene, Jiang Baimian had already drafted a telegram indicating the changes in the situation during this period of time and her team's current situation. Before she left to search for Han Wanghuo, she had sent it back to the company.

On the one hand, she wanted to see if the company could provide assistance. On the other hand, she wanted to remind the intelligence agent—Garibaldi, who was their liaison—to hide himself quickly.

Jiang Baimian looked around and deliberated before saying, “There are so many of us now. We have to get another car.”

“Steal one?” Bai Chen suggested.

Now, she could calmly show her original style in front of her team members. Very few people could fake such a thing forever.

As Han Wanghuo frowned slightly, Zeng Duo agreed. “There’s definitely no way to rent a car. Every car rental company’s boss and employee must’ve received the notice. Even if they don’t expose us on the spot, they will report what car we rented to the Hand of Order later.”

“It’s not like we have to do it ourselves...” Long Yuehong muttered softly. With Inference Clowning around, who in the world will know better?

Long Yuehong wasn’t very opposed to stealing cars, so he then added, “We can leave the car owner compensation.”

“He will report the case, and we don’t have enough time to modify the vehicle.” Jiang Baimian smiled and rejected Bai Chen’s suggestion and the details that Long Yuehong had tried to perfect.

She planned on getting one through Shang Jianyao’s good brother, the Blackshirts’ second boss—Terrence.

At this moment, Han Wanghuo said, “I have a spare car that I obtained in the North Shore Wastelands. I later found an opportunity to get it into First City. Nobody should know that it belongs to me.”

Zeng Duo looked over in surprise.

She had no idea.

Thinking of the second residence that Han Wanghuo had prepared, she felt that it was only natural. I don't know what this man has experienced in the past to be so cautious.

As these thoughts flashed through Zeng Duo's mind, Shang Jianyao raised his arms, crossed them, and took a step back. "Always be vigilant!"

In a daze, Han Wanghuo felt as though he had returned to Redstone Collection. His experiences over the past few years had strengthened the word 'vigilance.'

Jiang Baimian rolled her eyes at Shang Jianyao and pondered for a moment before saying, "Old Han, where's the car? We'll drive it back now to prevent any accidents from happening."

"In a parking lot on Antanna Street," Han Wanghuo replied truthfully.

What a coincidence... Jiang Baimian thought for a moment and said to Bai Chen and Long Yuehong, "You and Zeng Duo stay here. Me, Hey, Old Han, and Old Ge will go get the car."

"Alright." Bai Chen didn't mind.

The military exoskeletons in the room were enough to ensure their combat strength.

Jiang Baimian looked at the two crates in the corner and tersely agreed. "Let's bring another one over to prevent any accidents."

There was one in the jeep.

What's that? Zeng Duo curiously sized it up but didn't dare to ask. To her, the Old Task Force was still a stranger.

"Military exoskeleton?" Han Wanghuo asked in enlightenment.

One of the military exoskeletons in the Old Task Force was obtained through him.

“Yes, we later obtained two more. One was given to us by DiMarco, and the other was bought from Lehman,” said Shang Jianyao in a tone like he was introducing toys.

Military exoskeletons? More than two? Zeng Duo almost forgot to breathe. She had only seen such equipment once or twice. Most of the time, she had only heard of them.

This team is really strong. It’s no wonder that the Hand of Order places so much importance on them and sends out powerful Awakened... Th-they should be able to finish off the Nois bandits with their own strength... For some reason, Zeng Duo suddenly felt a little excited.

She gained some confidence in saving Early Spring Town. As for the trouble the Old Task Force was facing, she didn’t care that much. After all, Early Spring Town had to resist First City if it wanted to escape its control.

As Zeng Duo’s thoughts undulated, Geneva carried a crate and walked out the door with Shang Jianyao, Jiang Baimian, and Han Wanghuo before heading down the stairs

Chapter 459: Repayment

Zeng Duo watched Han Wanghuo and the others disguise themselves and walk out the door before retracting her gaze. She walked to the living room window and looked out.

“It’s seven to eight floors high...” she said in surprise.

Her experience as a Ruin Hunter was to choose a street-facing apartment on the second or third floor so that it would be conducive for jumping out the window and escaping.

Seizing the chance that nobody else was here to explain it to her, Long Yuehong immediately said, “This is called doing the opposite. This way, it won’t become the main target of a large-scale investigation.”

“But since it’s an investigation, they’ll come up sooner or later.” Zeng Duo was still a little confused.

“We would’ve already sensed it by then and made preparations in advance.” Long Yuehong suddenly felt the emotions his team leader usually had when explaining to him. With a hint of complacency, fun, and anticipation, he hoped that the target would comprehend it on her own without needing to go into detail.

Zeng Duo frowned. “Then, how do we escape?”

“With a military exoskeleton, this height is nothing,” Bai Chen said simply.

In particular, there were balconies, pipes, and all kinds of protruding objects outside the building. It was particularly easy for someone wearing a military exoskeleton to climb down from the seventh or eighth floor.

Upon hearing this answer, Zeng Duo felt like a country bumpkin.

Due to the Shock she suffered, she wasn't in good physical condition. She pointed at the armchair in the living room and politely asked, “Can I sit down?”

“Make yourself at home.” Bai Chen continued looking out the window. She was using the height of the building to observe the surrounding streets.

This was also the reason why the Old Task Force chose to rent a high floor. As a team with snipers, they knew the importance of high ground.

With the military exoskeleton, they didn't have to worry about evacuating.

Zeng Duo smiled when she heard Bai Chen's answer. “But I can't treat myself as the mistress.”

She lives with pretty much... zero qualms... Long Yuehong thought for a long time and finally came up with an adjective from the Old World's entertainment.

Bai Chen turned around and looked at Zeng Duo, who was slowly sitting down. “That's all the questions you have? Don't you care about the Old Task Force's origins and goals?”

Zeng Duo thought for a few seconds and laughed self-deprecatingly. “I won't live long, so there's no point in caring about this. As long as I can save everyone in town, I don't care about anything else.”

Bai Chen pursed her lips and didn't speak again.

...

In the jeep that was slowly moving.

Jiang Baimian—who was driving—glanced at the rearview mirror and smiled at Han Wanghuo. “You seem to have long known that we’re looking for you?”

Han Wanghuo—who was on the left in the backseat—slowly nodded. “Yes.”

“Then, why didn’t you contact us?” Shang Jianyao asked from the passenger seat.

Han Wanghuo fell silent and didn’t answer.

Jiang Baimian smiled. “It’s fine; say whatever you want. We’re all in the same boat, so there’s no need to be so formal.”

Han Wanghuo turned his head to look at Genava beside him and frowned. “Why were you looking for me?”

“We care about you and want to observe you.” Shang Jianyao really couldn’t speak any more seriously. As for how the other party understood his words, that was another matter.

Han Wanghuo didn’t ask further. He raised his hand to touch the scar on his face. “I don’t think we are very close with each other. An overly enthusiastic attitude will only make one wary. You are also Ashlandics, so you should know the proverb: One who is unaccountably solicitous is hiding evil intentions.”

Jiang Baimian laughed. “What do you think you have that’s worth us stealing?”

Han Wanghuo fell silent.

Jiang Baimian could actually tell that Han Wanghuo definitely had been injured because of someone who claimed to be a friend. One of the two scars on his face or both might’ve been left behind in this manner, which was why he was so vigilant against any unsolicited approach.

Furthermore, with his awkward personality, he probably doesn't want to expose his fragile state to us... As Jiang Baimian's thoughts raced, Shang Jianyao smiled and said, "Even if it's rape, I don't think you would be suffering a loss regardless of which one of us does it. Uh, we can discuss Little Red separately."

Han Wanghuo didn't answer the topic and replied emotively, "There are also other reasons. For example, your origins are unclear. I'm afraid of getting embroiled in bigger trouble. Yes... Your mental state isn't too right either. I'm more worried."

"Only him. Thank you very much," Jiang Baimian quickly replied. She didn't want to be categorized in the same group as someone with a doctor's certification.

Shang Jianyao had a puzzled look. "We're very normal. What gave you the illusion that our mental state isn't right?"

Han Wanghuo thought that 'we' referred to October Xue, Qian Bai, Gu Zhiyong, and the others. He didn't delve into the matter and deliberated before asking, "Do you really want to provide help?"

Since the conversation had already begun, he felt that it was necessary to clarify the matter. In this regard, he didn't have much scruples because it concerned his life.

"You hope it's fake?" Shang Jianyao asked with a smile.

Han Wanghuo fell silent and inquired, "Why?"

Shang Jianyao replied seriously, "First, we're friends."

Friends... Han Wanghuo opened his mouth but didn't make a sound.

"Second, we did bring you trouble. We messed up your arrangements, making the chances of you completing the mission become slim," Shang Jianyao continued.

Although Han Wanghuo didn't dare to say this out loud, he did have such thoughts.

Shang Jianyao's expression gradually became serious. "Third, our dream is to save all of humanity. Those people from Early Spring Town are also humans, and they haven't done anything bad."

Han Wanghuo once again confirmed that there was something wrong with the other party's mental state.

At this moment, Jiang Baimian casually replied, "Besides, we have to leave the city to lie low. We can help you in passing."

Han Wanghuo's gaze shifted between the man and woman a few times before he finally gave up asking.

"Do you want to listen to a song?" Shang Jianyao asked enthusiastically. He had already taken the small speaker out of his tactical backpack.

"There's no need." Han Wanghuo cautiously rejected his suggestion.

Shang Jianyao sighed in disappointment and turned to Geneva. "Old Ge, stop pretending. We're all friends."

Geneva—who had been acting as an ordinary robot and hadn't interrupted the conversation—stretched his metal joints and said with a red glow in his eyes, "If I have the corresponding tutorials and instruments, I can attempt an organ transplant."

Han Wanghuo suddenly turned to look at the robot.

"It—it's a smart bot in the medical field?" Han Wanghuo asked October Xue and Zhang Qubing in confusion.

Such functional and lifelike robots only existed in large factions. For small teams, it was too extravagant, and their abilities were very limited.

"No, I'm a real smart bot. I have the same learning ability as humans and higher efficiency." Geneva extended a silver-black metal palm to Han Wanghuo. "Let me introduce myself; Geneva, the former mayor of Tarnan and the first president of the Underground Ark Management Committee."

Han Wanghuo was stunned when he heard that. He only came to a realization after a long while. “You’re from Mechanical Paradise?”

As Redstone Collection’s former sheriff and town guard captain, he knew Mechanical Paradise and Tarnan well. He just didn’t expect October Xue’s team to abduct a real smart bot.

He looked at Genova’s extended metal palm and hesitated for a moment before shaking it.

“Yes.” Genova mimicked a human and sighed.

Han Wanghuo was just about to ask further when he suddenly realized that there was a problem with the car’s route. “Aren’t we going to Antanna Street?”

Antanna Street was in the northwest direction, close to the Factory Zone, but the jeep was now heading northeast. Although it would still reach the Green Olive Zone, it was already a little diametrical to their destination.

Jiang Baimian smiled and replied, “We are going somewhere else to complete something first.”

After a long time, the jeep stopped outside Ugo Hotel.

“Let’s go in together. Old Ge will guard the car.” Jiang Baimian nodded at Han Wanghuo.

Upon seeing them enter, Ugo didn’t say a word and took out an old blue bag.

“What you wanted.” He pushed the slightly bulky bag to Jiang Baimian—it contained the 6,000 Oray promised by General Phocas.

Shang Jianyao took the small bag, unzipped it, and did a cursory scan. He then threw it into the tactical backpack without counting the cash.

Quite a sizable amount... Han Wanghuo made this judgment just by glancing at the cash near the zipper from the corner of his eye.

“Is there anything I can help you with?” Ugo seemed to be asking on behalf of General Phocas. “I see that you’ve been in trouble recently.”

Jiang Baimian smiled. “Not for the time being, but we might need your help in the future to leave the city safely.”

She first gave this tidbit so that General Phocas could make some preparations.

“Alright,” replied Ugo calmly.

Jiang Baimian didn’t say anything else and turned to walk out. Although she, Shang Jianyao, and Han Wanghuo had disguised themselves, it wasn’t convenient for them to stay in the hotel lobby where people could come and go at any moment.

After doing this, they still didn’t go to Antanna Street. Instead, they came to Stern Street in the Red Wolf Zone to visit the Blackshirts’ second boss, Terrence.

This time, Han Wanghuo stayed in the car with Genava.

Jiang Baimian and Shang Jianyao entered through the back door. Only a brother from the Shang Jianyao Brotherhood met them and helped them open the door and lead the way.

“This is the final 6,000 Oray.” Jiang Baimian took out the cash she had just received and pushed it to Terrence.

She didn’t use the blue bag.

Terrence didn’t accept the money immediately. He looked back and forth between October Xue and Zhang Qubing in a daze and surprise.

He already knew that his good friend was being pursued by the Hand of Order. He thought that they would never dare to show their faces again and that the money they owed him was gone.

Who knew that despite being in peril, they didn't forget to return the money and take the risk to return the money!

What kind of spirit was this!?

Jiang Baimian smiled and reminded him, "Our mechanical arm."

Terrence came to his senses and said regretfully, "You could've returned it after the situation stabilized..."

It would be best if they never returned it. That would be equivalent to me using 6,000 Oray to buy a T1 multi-purpose mechanical arm. That's totally worth it!

"No, we have to keep our promises." Shang Jianyao replied righteously.

"Alright." Terrence counted the notes and reluctantly went to the upstairs safe to take out the Old Task Force's mechanical arm.

After this item was brought back to the car, Han Wanghuo's eyes widened.

"If we can obtain a new model of a mechanical arm, we have the ability to obtain a mechanical heart," Jiang Baimian said with a smile. "Sigh, I'm just afraid that we won't have enough time."

Without waiting for Han Wanghuo's response, she said to Shang Jianyao—whose turn was to drive, "We can go to Antanna Street now."

Chapter 460: Eternal Vigilance

On the way to Antanna Street, Jiang Baimian and the others saw many temporary checkpoints.

Fortunately, they had the smart bot, Genava—who discovered the checkpoints far in advance. This allowed the jeep to take a longer detour to not incur any suspicion.

On the other hand, these checkpoints' targets were mainly cars and pedestrians coming from Antanna Street. They weren't that strict toward cars heading to Antanna Street.

Therefore, the Old Task Force's jeep arrived at Antanna Street relatively smoothly. They also planned a safe route back.

"Stop by the side of the road." Jiang Baimian looked out the car window and gave instructions to the driving Shang Jianyao.

Shang Jianyao didn't question her. As he parked the jeep by the street, he smiled and asked, "Is it time to 'make friends?'"

"Yes." Jiang Baimian nodded slightly and habitually asked, "Do you know what we need your 'friend' to do later?"

Shang Jianyao replied confidently, "Be a scapegoat."

"..." Han Wanghuo—who was in the backseat—was confused, but the corners of his mouth twitched. So in your minds, are friends equivalent to scapegoats?

After Shang Jianyao parked the car, he turned around and smiled at Han Wanghuo. "There are three necessities for adventure in the Ashlands: Guns, knives, and friends."

Han Wanghuo could roughly tell that he was joking and didn't respond. He then asked, "Aren't we going straight to the parking lot?"

From his point of view, what they needed to do was actually very simple—disguise themselves, enter the parking lot that was no longer the focus of attention, and drive away the car that nobody knew belonged to him.

Jiang Baimian didn't answer immediately and said to Shang Jianyao, "Pick a suitable target and try your best to choose outlaws from Antanna Street."

The outlaws in Antanna Street naturally wouldn't tattoo the corresponding description on their faces or place it above their heads so that others could tell their identities at a glance. However, it wasn't that difficult to distinguish them.

Their clothes weren't that tattered, and they often hid pistols at their waists. They also looked more ferocious.

In just a few seconds, Shang Jianyao found a candidate to be his friend. He changed his baseball cap to a cap, put on his sunglasses, pushed open the door, and got out of the car. He then walked toward the young man with the bluish-black tattoo on his arm.

The young man saw such a fellow approaching from the corner of his eye and immediately became vigilant. He reached for his waist.

“Hello, I want to ask for directions.” Shang Jianyao smiled kindly.

The young man said coldly, “Nothing is free in these parts of town.”

“I understand, I understand.” Shang Jianyao reached into his pocket and pretended to pull out some cash for payment. “Look, we’re all adult men. You rely on guns and skills to earn money, and so do I. So...”

The young man’s expression changed as he gradually smiled. “Even biological brothers have lines that mustn’t be crossed when it comes to money. Yes, lines—that’s an especially good word. Our boss often says that.”

Shang Jianyao handed him a one-Oray note. “I need your help with something.”

“Leave it to me!” The young man took the note with one hand and patted his chest with the other.

Shang Jianyao quickly turned around and shouted at the jeep, “Old Tan, come here.”

Han Wanghuo was stunned in his seat, momentarily unsure who Shang Jianyao was calling. He instinctively believed that the other party was shouting for him and cast a look of confirmation at Jiang Baimian.

Jiang Baimian nodded slightly.

Han Wanghuo pushed open the door and got out of the car before walking to Shang Jianyao’s side.

“Tell him where the car is parked and what it looks like.” Shang Jianyao pointed at the young man with a tattoo in front of him and said to Han Wanghuo, “Also, give him the car keys.”

Although Han Wanghuo was suspicious, he still did as Shang Jianyao said.

After watching the tattooed young man leave with his car keys, he walked to the jeep and turned his head to ask, “Why did you call me Old Tan?”

What’s the connection?

Shang Jianyao said sincerely, “Your real name has been exposed, so there’s a certain risk in calling you Old Han. You were once the sheriff of Redstone Collection, and many Ashlandics there have the surname Tan.”

That’s true, but that’s quite a leap in logic... Han Wanghuo didn’t say anything else. He opened the door and returned to the jeep.

After Shang Jianyao returned to the driver’s seat, Han Wanghuo looked at Jiang Baimian and said, “There’s no need to be so careful, right?”

They found a stranger just to retrieve a car.

Jiang Baimian laughed self-deprecatingly. “There are too many strange abilities in this world, and you will never know which one you will encounter. Also, a faction as large as First City definitely doesn’t lack powerhouses. Therefore, you have to be careful where you can. Otherwise, it’s very easy to be disadvantaged.”

The Old Task Force had been taught a lesson in this regard. If it weren’t for General Phocas’s ulterior motives, they would’ve already failed terribly.

Having been a sheriff in Redstone Collection for a few years, Han Wanghuo—who had long interacted with the Vigilance Church—easily accepted Jiang Baimian’s explanation.

No matter how careful they were, could they be more exaggerated than those from the Vigilance Church?

“Is that person trustworthy?” Han Wanghuo was worried that the other party would drive away with the car.

As for selling them out, he didn’t think it was possible. This was because both he and Shang Jianyao had disguised themselves. The other party clearly didn’t recognize them as one of the few wanted by the Hand of Order.

“Don’t worry. We’re friends!” Shang Jianyao was filled with confidence.

Han Wanghuo’s eyes flickered slightly as he shut his mouth.

...

Northwest of Antanna Street, in a six-story building.

A figure stood in a room on the sixth floor and looked down at the parking lot not far away through the glass window.

He wore a black robe that was considered ancient even in the Old World. His hair was messy and abnormally fluffy as if he had encountered a bomb blast. His face was thin and long, and his cheekbones were relatively obvious. He had a lot of white hair on his head, and the wrinkles at the corners of his eyes and mouth also indicated that he was no longer young.

The elder maintained the same posture as he looked out the window. If not for the fact that his light-blue eyes occasionally moved, he looked more like a wax statue.

He was Marcus’s protector, the master of the Virtual World—Nasis.

He had learned from one of the Crystal Consciousness Church’s Enlightened that the target would return to this parking lot at some point in time today. Therefore, he had specially rushed over to monitor it personally.

At this moment, the parking lot was already covered by the Virtual World. People coming and going had to be filtered.

As time passed, people constantly entered the parking lot and took away their battered or old cars.

They didn't realize that their every move had been screened by the Virtual World. They didn't feel like whatever they did required the support of multiple programs.

A young man in a short-sleeved T-shirt with a bluish-black tattoo on his arm entered the parking lot. He swung his car keys and searched for a car according to his memories.

His relevant information was immediately replicated by the Virtual World and compared with the few targets.

The final conclusion was: No problem.

After spending a certain amount of time, the young man finally found the black SUV that 'he' had parked here for many days and drove it out.

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The grayish-green jeep and the black SUV drove out of the area around Antanna Street one after another.

Although Han Wanghuo didn't know if Jiang Baimian's caution had any effect, he didn't discuss it after seeing that the matter had been successfully settled.

Following a winding path that lacked temporary checkpoints, they returned to the safe house in the Golden Grain Zone.

"What took you so long?" Bai Chen asked. She knew very well how long it would take to return to Antanna Street.

Jiang Baimian casually said, "We got our payment, returned the money, and retrieved the mechanical arm."

She then said to Han Wanghuo and Zeng Duo, “We’ll rest today and won’t go out again. We’ll make a trip to Xiaochong’s place tomorrow.”

Xiaochong? Han Wanghuo and Zeng Duo couldn’t help but repeat this alias in their hearts.

Who was such a powerful team visiting in such a dangerous situation? Which faction in the city did this person control? How powerful is he? Furthermore, from his nickname, he shouldn’t be too old. He is definitely younger than October Xue.

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This is way too young... Zeng Duo looked at the black-haired boy sitting in front of the computer and almost couldn’t believe her eyes.

Han Wanghuo felt the same. What surprised and confused him even more was that part of October Xue’s team was playing games with the boy, another part was busy in the kitchen, and another part was cleaning the room.

This made them look like a professional team of nannies instead of a dangerous team that was wanted by the entire city with a bounty worth tens of thousands of Oray, having done many major deeds and daring to resist the Hand of Order.

This stark contrast stunned Han Wanghuo and Zeng Duo. They couldn’t blend in at all.

The scene in front of them was so harmonious that they looked like normal citizens living in their homes. It was filled with sunlight and filled with warmth.

Suddenly, Zeng Duo heard meowing.

There’s a cat as well? She subconsciously looked at the balcony and saw a creature that only existed in nightmares.

It had blood-red exposed ‘muscles’ Its body was a meter long, and its shoulders were covered in white bone spikes. Its tail was covered in a brown carapace and had barbs as if it came from a scorpion...

