

## Ad Infinitum 461

Chapter 461: Learning About the Path Through A Cat

Startled, Zeng Duo instinctively retreated to the door and pulled out her gun. As a Ruin Hunter who had been traveling and risking her life in the North Shore wastelands all year round, it wasn't that she had never seen mutated creatures. However, this was the first time she encountered one in First City.

Han Wanghuo's reaction was about the same as hers, but it wasn't that big. This was because he saw that October Xue, Zhang Qubing, and the others remained calm. They did what they had to do without panicking at all—they didn't even spare a second glance.

"Meow~" Slumber Cat meowed again, laid down, and stretched its body.

At this moment, Jiang Baimian's heart palpitated. She put down the kitchen knife in her hand and walked to the balcony.

She squatted in front of Slumber Cat and deliberated for a few seconds before smiling and greeting it. "You came back from the North Shore wastelands?"

Slumber Cat shot a glance at her without making a sound.

"Which path did you take? Did you not encounter anyone from First City?" Jiang Baimian asked directly. She saw the hope of the Old Task Force, Han Wanghuo, and Zeng Duo leaving First City through Slumber Cat's unhindered traveling to the North Shore wastelands.

"Meow," Slumber Cat replied.

"..." Jiang Baimian was stunned and subconsciously smiled awkwardly and politely. Only then did she remember that she had no 'skill' to communicate with feline creatures.

Slumber Cat's previous performance always made her overlook this problem.

Upon seeing this, Long Yuehong turned his head to prevent himself from laughing out loud. When he turned his head, he saw Bai Chen pursing her lips tightly.

Shang Jianyao's eyes lit up as he played the game. He prepared to ask for permission to pause the game and help translate.

Whether the translation was accurate or not was another matter.

At this moment, Xiaochong muttered, "It said that it had just returned from the North Shore Mountains. The path it took didn't have any First City officials."

He really can translate... But how can a simple meow contain so much information? As Jiang Baimian sighed silently, she quickly looked at Slumber Cat and asked, "Is the path drivable?"

"Meow!" Slumber Cat sounded a little impatient.

Xiaochong replied as he played the game, "Yes."

Jiang Baimian didn't hide her joy and asked frankly, "Can you lead us to that path?"

"Meow!" Slumber Cat's meow became short.

Xiaochong looked at the computer screen and said without turning his head, "Pick a time between six in the evening and six in the morning."

Upon hearing this, Long Yuehong, Bai Chen, and the others—who had snapped to their senses—shared Jiang Baimian's previous puzzlement.

How is so much information contained in a single meow? Is this cat language?

Uh, Slumber Cat really can understand human language. Xiaochong didn't even help us translate...

At this moment, Zeng Duo and Han Wanghuo also realized that Xiaochong was abnormal. They now had a certain level of understanding of why October Xue's team had specially come to cook and clean his place during such a dangerous situation.

Jiang Baimian pondered for a moment and replied, "7 p.m. then."

If it was later, there would be fewer pedestrians on the streets. There wouldn't be many cars coming and going, making it easy for them to attract attention. Before seven, the summer sun had yet to set completely, and there was natural light.

This time, Slumber Cat didn't make a sound and yawned in response.

"It said: 'OK, follow it when the time comes.'" Xiaochong dutifully completed the translation work.

After confirming this matter, Jiang Baimian stood up. She glanced at Han Wanghuo and Zeng Duo and smiled. "Don't just stand there. Clean up the bedroom."

She deliberately didn't say, "Rest by the side if you aren't feeling well." She only assigned the two of them the easiest tasks.

Han Wanghuo and Zeng Duo immediately agreed.

...

When night fell, the Virtual World's master—Nasis—remained in the building beside the parking lot northwest of Antanna Street. However, he had changed from standing to sitting.

In the room next to Nasis's, the middle-aged gentleman—Konstanz—asked hesitantly, "Could the Enlightened's prophecy be inaccurate?"

Theodore stared straight ahead. "Prophecies are always fulfilled in a way that even the prophets can't predict, so there's no need to take them too seriously. Furthermore, those monks often only have a vague hint in their prophecies. It's very normal to make mistakes during interpretation."

Although Theodore's previous mistakes would definitely be exposed if they relied on the prophecy to capture October Xue and Zhang Qubing's team, he still spoke his mind, not letting his expectations affect his judgment.

“It seems like we have to wait here until midnight.” Konstanz looked around. “Bring over all the surveillance footage from before. We might be able to find the details that the prophecy points to. We don’t have anything to do anyway.”

After they ‘took over’ the parking lot because of the prophecy, the Hand of Order mobilized supplies and replaced all the broken cameras with intact ones.

“Alright.” Theodore rubbed his eyes. He couldn’t move his eyes, so it was easy for him to get eye fatigue.

At this moment, the wall-like Sheriff Wall returned to the room.

“How was it? Did you find anything from your line?” asked Konstanz.

Wall nodded. “We can now confirm that the person October Xue and Zhang Qubing saved on the street is problematic. From various feedback, he’s suspected to be an intelligence agent of a particular faction.”

“Caught anyone?” Theodore perked up.

Wall sighed and shook his head. “He appeared this morning, but nobody has seen him since.”

“It seems like he received a warning.” Konstanz nodded slightly.

Wall then said, “However, I found someone who has a complicated background with him. That person’s name is Old K—he has connections with a few Elders and many nobles. On the surface, he’s a merchant who does imports and exports. He has business dealings with the White Knights, United Industries, and the Salvation Army. I don’t know what he’s actually doing for the time being.

“The person October Xue and Zhang Qubing saved is called Giuseppe. He was once Old K’s assistant and won his deep trust. Later, he slept with Old K’s mistress and jumped ship to his competitor, Red Shirt Army.”

“Old K actually didn’t try to kill him?” Konstanz—who roamed the circle of noblewomen all year round—teased with a smile.

Wall laughed. “Why do you think October Xue and Zhang Qubing saved him? Yes, I’ll find him as soon as possible.”

Konstanz nodded. “If we can figure out which faction he works for, the entire matter will become very clear.”

At this point, Konstanz looked at Theodore, who was still observing the parking lot. He raised his right hand and said, “Get something to eat first. We’ll look at the surveillance footage later and wait for the workers who are investigating the vehicle’s source to return. Sigh, I hope we can gain something.”

...

At 7 p.m., the Old Task Force moved all their weapons and supplies to the cars.

In order to express their calmness, they didn’t let Han Wanghuo and Zeng Duo separate. Instead, they allowed the other party to drive the dark SUV. They only sent Genava over to help—if not, the jeep filled with all kinds of things wouldn’t have space for sitting.

Jiang Baimian looked at Slumber Cat that sometimes jogged in the shadows of the street and sometimes walked on the roofs of the buildings. She stepped on the accelerator and started the car.

She didn’t let Bai Chen drive because Slumber Cat would often travel through the streets unseen in order to avoid humans. One could only rely on bioelectric sensing and mutated biological consciousness to locate it.

Therefore, only she and Shang Jianyao could take turns driving.

The two cars drove out of the Golden Grain Zone and headed north.

Upon seeing this, Jiang Baimian heaved a sigh of relief. This was because she didn’t know the extent the Hand of Order’s temporary checkpoints had been set up to. She believed that there was a high risk of exposure if they headed in the direction of Antanna Street and the Factory Zone.

Just like that, they passed through the Red Wolf Zone and entered the Green Olive Zone. Finally, under the illumination of the street lamps, they saw a familiar area.

West Port!

First City's West Port!

At this moment, many ships were docked at the edge of the Red River. Warehouses and containers were stacked quietly in the darkness. From time to time, port guards patrolled the area.

Slumber Cat jumped out of the shadows by the roadside and walked gracefully toward Pier 1 with its proud head up.

Its so-called path is here? This thought flashed across Long Yuehong's mind.

Chapter 462: "Believe"

The grayish-green jeep and the black SUV followed Slumber Cat to a container dump.

Jiang Baimian and the others didn't dare to continue forward because their vehicles were large. There was nothing that could provide them concealment on route to Pier 1, and the street lamps along the harbor were relatively intact.

The night sky also wasn't that dark. This made it easy for the people at Pier 1 to see cars approaching—if there was anyone there.

Slumber Cat turned around and glanced at Shang Jianyao and the others. Without stopping, it passed through the containers and walked through the various shadows toward Pier 1.

Jiang Baimian suppressed her voice and said to Shang Jianyao and the others, "Observe the area."

She took out a pair of binoculars from her tactical backpack, pushed open the door, and alighted. She found a good spot and looked in the direction of Pier 1.

Long Yuehong and Han Wanghuo did similar actions.

As for Genava, he didn't use binoculars. He had such functions integrated.

At this moment, the street lamps around Pier 1 were no different from the surroundings. But scattered sporadically around the many stacked wooden crates below were humans.

The Red River beyond the port had a wide body of water—it was pitch-black and without light. In this moonless and starless night, it seemed to be capable of devouring all the ships.

In the darkness, a ship sailed out and approached Pier 1 extremely quietly. Only the sound of water splashing and the rotation of the turbine could be vaguely heard.

Under the navigation light's guidance, the ship stopped at Pier 1 and opened the door at its 'abdomen.'

At the door, the plank bridge extended outward and opened up a path for vehicles to drive on. The people waiting at the dock either drove small trucks and directly entered the ship to move goods or used forklifts, cranes, and other tools. All of them got busy.

All of this happened in a nearly silent environment. There was no noise or conversation.

"Smuggling..." Jiang Baimian—who was holding the binoculars—nodded in enlightenment.

After moving all the goods on the ship, the people began to send the wooden crates that had been piled on the dock into the ship's belly.

At this moment, Slumber Cat approached from the side. With its relatively small size, agile movements, and silent footsteps, it easily avoided the eyes of most humans and arrived beside the ship.

Suddenly, a human guarding the ship's door closed his eyes. His head drooped, and his entire body swayed as if he had fallen asleep.

Seizing this opportunity, Slumber Cat dashed into the ship's belly and hid behind a pile of wooden crates.

The 'dozing' person suddenly woke up as his body sank. He rubbed his eyes in fear and yawned.

This is how Slumber Cat enters First City without being discovered by the officials... By relying on smuggling ships... They should be closely related to the First City army patrolling the Red River... Long Yuehong roughly understood what was happening when he saw this.

Han Wanghuo lowered the binoculars in his hand and asked Jiang Baimian with a solemn expression, "How are we going to drive the cars into the ship? There are so many people here. Once a conflict erupts, it will attract sufficient attention even if it's on a small scale and can be resolved in less than a minute."

He believed that October Xue's team had the ability to deal with these smugglers. However, what was needed now wasn't to deal with them but to resolve the problem silently without causing so much as a stir.

This was very difficult. After all, they had many people.

Jiang Baimian didn't answer immediately. She looked around and observed the environment.

Her gaze quickly landed on a street lamp at Pier 1.

There was a PA system set up there. It was usually used for reporting the situation and commanding the loading and unloading.

This was the basic configuration of the port.

Before Jiang Baimian could speak, Shang Jianyao smiled and said, "Treat them to a song. If it doesn't work, they can listen to it another time."

Do you want to make everyone at the dock use the bathroom? The Red River is just there. They can resolve it on the spot... Long Yuehong couldn't help but criticize. He naturally knew that Shang Jianyao definitely wouldn't make such a flawed suggestion. However, this fellow preferred songs over the PA system.

Jiang Baimian then looked at Genava. "Old Ge, hack into the system and take over those speakers."



“Alright.” Genova immediately ran to the nearest street lamp with a PA system.

Han Wanghuo and Zeng Duo were confused. They didn’t know what October Xue’s team was up to and how they could achieve their goals.

Listen to music? Use the PA system? What’s the use? The two of them had relatively calm personalities. They didn’t ask questions and only observed.

Before long, Genova gained control over a few speakers at Pier 1. Shang Jianyao then walked to his side, took out his portable recording device, and connected it to a certain circuit.

Jiang Baimian retracted her gaze and smiled at Han Wanghuo and Zeng Duo. “Next, cup your ears.”

...

At Pier 1, Gauden and the others were busy finishing their first business of the night. Suddenly, they heard a few loudspeakers on nearby street lamps emit sizzling static.

Gauden—who was in charge of commanding—cast his gaze over, confused and wary.

An unprecedented encounter made him unable to guess what would happen next. He was more willing to believe that this was a malfunction of the port PA system—perhaps a thief had entered the command room and caused a series of accidents due to a lack of corresponding knowledge.

Although there was some sense of anticipation, Gauden didn’t let his guard down. He immediately got his subordinates to urge the others to work as quickly as possible, transferring some of the supplies on the dock over and making preparations for an attack.

In the next second, the PA system sounded in the quiet night. “Therefore, we have to remember that when facing things we don’t understand, we have to humbly seek guidance and put down the prejudices brought about by experience. Do not be filled with conflicting emotions from the beginning. Adopt an attitude of accepting everything and learn, understand, grasp, and accept...”

The slightly magnetic male voice echoed in the area and entered the ears of every smuggler.

As soon as the voice sounded, Gauden and the others entered their intended positions and waited for the enemy to appear.

However, no subsequent attacks happened. Even the male voice on the radio calmed down after repeating the same words twice.

Everything was so quiet.

Gauden and the others looked at each other in confusion. If not for the fact that they still hadn't moved a majority of the goods, they definitely would've immediately evacuated the dock and distanced themselves from this strange matter.

But now, wealth gave them courage.

"Continue! Hurry!" Gauden left his hiding spot and hurried his subordinates. Just as he said that, he saw two cars drive over one after another.

One was a gray-green jeep, and the other was a black SUV.

In the SUV, Han Wanghuo and Zeng Duo were very nervous. They felt that they were like children playing house by heading straight to Pier 1 without making any preparations.

They had no confidence at all and felt seriously insecure.

The bearded Gauden was just about to raise his submachine gun and summon his subordinates to respond to the attack when someone in the grayish-green jeep held a loudspeaker and shouted, "Friends!"

Yeah, they're friends... Gauden believed the statement.

His men believed it as well.

The two vehicles drove into Pier 1 one after another.

Jiang Baimian, Shang Jianyao, and the others acted very friendly and put away their weapons.

“Did the transaction go smoothly today?” Shang Jianyao stuck his head out the window and asked in a familiar manner.

“Not bad.” Gauden heaved a sigh of relief. Since they were friends, the alarm could be lifted.

Shang Jianyao pointed at the ship at the dock. “Didn’t you say that you’d give us a ride across the river?”

“Haha, I almost forgot.” Gauden pointed at the door to the ship’s belly. “Go on in.”

He and his subordinates believed Shang Jianyao’s words without any doubt.

The two vehicles drove into the belly of the ship one after another. There were many wooden crates stacked here, but there was still ample space.

Han Wanghuo and Zeng Duo were stunned by the development. They had all seen Awakened abilities, but they had never seen such ridiculous, exaggerated, and terrifying abilities!

If not for following them the entire time, they definitely would’ve thought that October Xue’s team had long known these smugglers and had even cooperated with them before. They could obtain help simply by alerting them of the situation slightly beforehand.

Just a PA broadcast made everyone who heard the content choose to help us? Han Wanghuo managed to compose his chaotic thoughts with great difficulty. He didn’t let the car deviate from the route and stopped inside and near the ship’s belly door.

From his point of view, this had already exceeded the category of superpowers. It was almost akin to a myth left behind by the Old World.

At this moment, the two of them raised their judgment of October Xue’s team’s strength again.

Han Wanghuo felt that the other party was clearly much stronger than back in Redstone Collection—much, much stronger.

After a while, the loading of cargo was done. The plank bridge in the ship's belly was retracted, and the door closed.

With the whirring sound of machinery, the ship left Pier 1 and headed for the opposite shore of the Red River. On the way, it encountered the patrolling First City coast guards.

The other party didn't stop the ship. Just as the two parties brushed past each other, they sent someone to shout, "If you can push the transactions back, do so. The situation is a little tense now, so the higher-ups might send people over to inspect and supervise at any moment!"

The ship owner replied, "No problem."

As time passed, a hidden dock surrounded by mounds and hills appeared diagonally ahead of the ship heading upstream.

Many torches were lit here, mixed with some electric lamps that illuminated the surrounding area.

At this moment, many cars and people were waiting at the dock.

The ship sailed over and stopped at the designated spot.

The door to the ship's belly opened again, and the drawbridge was set up.

Upon seeing this, the ship owner and the smugglers' leader on the deck heaved a sigh of relief.

At this moment, they heard a revving sound. Right on the heels of that, a grayish-green jeep and a black SUV flew out of the ship's belly and onto the shore.

They didn't stop or slow down. They slammed through the obstacles and crazily raced toward the mounds and hills.

Bang! Bang! Bang! Da! Da! Da!

After a few seconds, the smugglers remembered to fire. However, the two cars had already pulled away.

Before the gunshots subsided, all that was left behind was their back figures that disappeared into the darkness.

Chapter 463: Storm

Raindrops fell to the ground, splashing up white mist. The blackened soil was already muddy, and the low-lying areas were filled with puddles.

Selma and his companions drove a battered multi-purpose vehicle through a house that had been abandoned for countless years.

“Damn it! There’s almost zero visibility!” Selma stared ahead and tapped the steering wheel.

The windshield wipers worked hard amidst the downpour, but they could only provide a clear view for a second.

“Find some shelter from the rain,” Sandro—who was in the passenger seat—suggested. “It’s not like you don’t know that the wastelands are prone to extreme weather. It’s still summer.”

They were a Ruin Hunter team of four who lived in the wastelands. They often came here and were familiar with such situations.

“Alright.” Selma sighed. “I thought we could reach the river tonight and return to the city in the morning.”

Although there was no need to worry about accidents when driving in the North Shore wastelands, with the population size and density of vehicles here, it was very unlikely that one would bump into one of their kind despite the heavy rain and low visibility. But as an Intermediate Hunter, Selma knew very well that the danger wasn’t this.

In such inclement weather, the North Shore wastelands were trouble itself. You’d never know if the ground would suddenly collapse in front of you, and you wouldn’t be able to determine how deep

the potholes ahead were. In the pouring rain, your car might disappear while driving, and everyone would drown in the rain-filled Old World channels or in a buried river of the past.

In addition, there were natural disasters such as landslides.

With the headlights' help, Selma could barely see his surroundings.

This place belonged to the Old World's suburbs, but back then, many people with a certain amount of wealth in the Red River Zone liked to live in such places. The unattached house had a lawn and a garden, so Selma saw many buildings at a glance.

Some of them had collapsed, and some were still intact. However, they were covered in green snake-like vines.

Under the dark sky and the violent storm, the trees, weeds, and houses gave off a feeling that everything was about to crumble.

Following his memory, Selma drove the car higher.

Along the way, they kept searching for shelter from the rain. After all, they couldn't always stay in the car. This would increase the energy consumption, and they only had one container of gasoline left.

As Ruin Hunters with relatively rich experience, Selma, Sandro, and the others knew that houses used for rain shelter couldn't be randomly chosen. Although the buildings left behind by the Old World looked relatively intact and seemed to be able to stand for many years, some of them had long rotted inside. They might collapse after being battered by the storm for a few hours.

Countless Ruin Hunters believed that they had found a safe place to hide from the elements and relaxed their vigilance. In the end, they were buried alive under bricks, wood, and cement.

As the houses swept past, Sandro pointed at the tallest spot and said, "That building seems fine. It has the best terrain and hasn't suffered much damage. It's just that there are more vines—Patterned Mosquitoes love such places."

"We have insect repellent," Denise replied from the back seat with a smile.

They quickly came to an agreement and drove the car under the dark sky, braving the violent storm, to the back of the house that stood above everything in the vicinity.

The muddy road posed quite a hindrance to them. Fortunately, there were no deep puddles, so there was no need to circle around.

About ten minutes later, they arrived at their destination and turned to the front of the house.

Suddenly, Selma and Sandro's eyelids twitched.

Inside the house, a yellowish glow spread out and tainted the area!

"Other Ruin Hunters?" Denise also saw this scene.

This was the most reasonable deduction in the current situation. Other Ruin Hunters would also choose to take the high ground when seeking shelter because of the storm.

They didn't think about whether there were still people living in the house in front of them because it was impossible. The farmland in the surrounding area was severely polluted, and the things planted couldn't be eaten. In other words, it was impossible to form a settlement of a certain size in the vicinity.

Only a few people could be fed through hunting. In the face of natural disasters, Heartless, mutated creatures, and bandits, just a few people could hardly put up a fight. Of course, they couldn't rule out the possibility that this was just a temporary cabin for some Hunters.

"Are we still going over?" Sandro asked in a deep voice.

Meeting a peer in the North Shore wastelands wasn't necessarily a good thing for both parties.

Selma was just about to answer when he saw the corresponding situation clearly.

The rusty iron-grilled gates of the house in front of him were open; the overgrown garden had been flattened by the wheels time and time again; a gray-green jeep and a black SUV were parked

outside the main building under a car porch. In the foyer, a fire had been lit, and a portable stainless steel pot was cooking. Beside the fire were six people—three men and three women.

Two of them were in charge of guarding the area, and two of them watched the fire. The remaining two were huddled on the chairs and armchairs they had brought over to catch forty winks.

Selma, Sandro, and the others weren't most concerned about the number of enemies but what weapons they carried.

Short Neck... Assault rifle... United 202... After quickly confirming the situation, Selma deliberated and said, "It's not good to just leave like this. If they take the opportunity to fire at us from above and blow up our tires, it will be dangerous."

In this weather and on this road, the consequences would be unimaginable if their tires burst.

"Yes, it's not too late to go over, greet them, and show off our muscles before leaving," Sandro agreed.

Denise said, "Perhaps we can exchange for useful information."

With the support of his companions, Selma drove the car toward the gates of the building. When the Ruin Hunters on the opposite side raised their guns and aimed, they stopped.

"Where do you come from?" Selma asked loudly as he rolled down the window.

"First City!" Shang Jianyao replied in a louder voice than him before his companions could speak. "What about you?"

The Old Task Force, Han Wanghuo, and Zeng Duo—who had successfully fled First City—were preparing dinner while getting shelter from the rain. At this moment, Jiang Baimian and Shang Jianyao were tending to the fire and heating the canned food. Long Yuehong and Bai Chen patrolled the surroundings and were on guard for any accidents. Han Wanghuo and Zeng Duo—who were in poor health and had been traveling for more than a day—seized the opportunity to rest.

As for Genava, he had nothing to do. He was exploring every floor and room in this house to see if he could find any books, newspapers, or information that came from the Old World.



“North Anheford.” Selma’s voice penetrated the wind and rain and entered Jiang Baimian and the others’ ears.

North Anheford referred to an area in the wastelands on the northern shore of the Red River. It shared a similar name from the Old World.

There were no clear boundaries between these regions. They were purely products of experience.

Without waiting for Shang Jianyao and the others to respond, Selma shouted, “Can we have a chat?”

“You can park the car over there before coming over.” Shang Jianyao stood up and pointed at a spot by the side of the house.

From there to the foyer was a covered path that provided shelter from the rain.

Selma drove the car to the designated spot calmly but carefully. Then, they each brought their weapons and alighted.

One of them was using the Tronge assault rifle produced in First City. The others carried a Sour Orange submachine gun, a light machine gun, and a Hawkeye sniper rifle. Their firepower was terrifying.

This was one of the reasons they always received friendliness.

Before they came close to the foyer, they smelled the strong fragrance of food at the same time. They felt that the smell drilled into their hearts through their lungs.

“Potato and beef canned food... They have plenty of supplies...” Selma and the others perked up and walked to the foyer.

With the light from the fire, they finally saw Jiang Baimian, Shang Jianyao, and the others clearly.

Ashlandics... Genetically enhanced ones? They have some background... As his eyes lit up, many thoughts flashed through Selma's mind.

As an experienced Ruin Hunter, he and his companions had interacted with members of the White Knights. He knew about the various signs of genetic enhancement, and Shang Jianyao and Jiang Baimian perfectly matched the corresponding characteristics.

This made Selma and the others even more solemn.

Jiang Baimian—who was sitting cross-legged by the fire—looked up and asked, “You came from North Anheford?”

Zeng Duo's Early Spring Town was in that area.

“Yes, the pollution there isn't that serious. We could stay there for a long time...” As Selma replied, he felt the fragrance of roasted beef and potatoes surge into his mind, almost disrupting his train of thought.

They had already taken nearly two weeks of risks in the North Shore wasteland. They had long gotten sick of eating dried food and gamey meat that tasted strange.

Jiang Baimian didn't stand up to greet them. She glanced at them and smiled. “If you don't mind, we can eat together. Of course, I can't share the beef and potatoes with you since they belong to my companions. However, you are allowed to dip your rations in the gravy.”

Selma, Sandro, and the others looked at each other and felt that this wasn't a bad thing.

The other party also had to eat the food. It was fine as long as they didn't let down their guard.

Sandro and Denise held their weapons, wary of any accidents. Selma and Tolle sat by the fire.

“How's the situation in North Anheford?” Jiang Baimian asked.

Selma thought for a moment and said, “It’s no different from before. It’s just that a particular army division from First City seems to be having exercises there. Once we approach certain places, we will encounter them and can’t go deeper.”

Is that so... Jiang Baimian turned around and looked at Zeng Duo, who was sitting in the armchair beside her.

The lady had already opened her eyes.

Selma took the opportunity to ask, “Anything happened in the city recently?”

Jiang Baimian fell silent for a few seconds before tersely grunting. “The Hand of Order is pursuing a group of people, causing a storm in the city.”

Chapter 464: Report

“To stir up such a storm... What did those people do...?” another of Selma’s companions, Tolle, asked in surprise.

They had been in First City for many years, and it was rare for the Hand of Order to cause such a commotion in order to pursue a target. Although the other party didn’t go into detail, a description like ‘a storm in the city’ still gave Selma and the others a direct visualization of the situation, albeit a vague one.

Shang Jianyao—who was fiddling with the fire—answered for Jiang Baimian. “A grand plot against First City.”

“What?” Sandro and Denise—who were in charge of security—blurted out. They could’ve written off what he said as a joke, but combining it with the Hand of Order’s reaction, the problem appeared rather serious.

Shang Jianyao kindly explained, “This is the mission description. It’s a one-sided accusation by the Hand of Order, so it might not be true.”

Why does that sound weird... Selma thought for a few seconds and inquired, “The Hand of Order issued a mission at the guild? How much is the bounty?”

He felt that he couldn't base the severity and urgency of a matter on a subjective description. Comparatively, the bounty might be a better indicator.

Jiang Baimian smiled and said, "You can obtain 10,000 Oray if you capture a single person from the target team. Of course, this is the price they offered before we left the city. It's unknown if there are any changes now."

"10,000 Oray per target?" Selma, Tolle, and the others instantly felt a headache.

A bounty at this level made them shrink back—they didn't believe that they had any hope of completing it. The corresponding risk was definitely too great to bear.

We can only see if we have a chance to obtain some clues and exchange them for money... This thought flashed through their minds at the same time.

"I think it's too low," Shang Jianyao responded to the Ruin Hunters opposite with a sincere expression.

"It's not low, not low at all." Selma shook his head repeatedly. "There aren't many of such missions every year."

Jiang Baimian didn't continue the topic and frankly asked, "This wasteland has been explored for decades. There shouldn't be any valuable gains, right?"

The Old Task Force members were all Ashlandic, so it was normal for them to be unfamiliar with the wasteland around the Red River's northern bank. There was no need to hide anything.

Upon hearing this, Selma immediately made a judgment: This is a Ruin Hunter team that has just come to the surrounding area for an expedition.

The other party's appearance and kindness, as well as the simple and ordinary question, made him not hide anything. He smiled and said, "It's not what you think. Many places here are highly polluted, and it has only been restored to a minimum in recent years. It can be explored—uh, and there are some areas that aren't recommended for entry now unless you can wear chemical or radiation protective clothing the entire time.

“Apart from exploring the ruins, hunting mutated creatures is also a choice. They have very high research value. First City’s officials are buying them, and some private researchers will offer prices that are tempting enough. That or they directly put up bounty missions.”

At least two-thirds of those private researchers are official and unofficial personnel, as well as intelligence personnel from the various large factions. They specialize in gathering biological materials for the organization... Jiang Baimian muttered inwardly and deliberately asked, “Is there any city ruin in North Anheford that can be entered only in recent years?”

“Of course.” Selma nodded. “It’s no secret.”

As the two parties conversed, the pot of roasted beef with potatoes was already heated. Shang Jianyao and the others took out oatmeal bread and ate it.

Selma, Sandro, and the others watched enviously, but they could only swallow their saliva and take out their biscuits that were turning soft. They then dipped them in the soup and filled their stomachs.

Even so, the rich fragrance and the taste that slushed in their mouths still moved them.

After taking turns with dinner, Selma suggested that they were leaving.

Although this Ashlandic team looked friendly and didn’t have any ill intentions, they still felt that they should maintain a sufficient distance. That way, the people on night duty wouldn’t be too stressed.

After displaying their strength, Selma felt that the other party wouldn’t take the risk of attacking them if there were no serious conflicts of interest.

As Sandro, Denise, and Tolle remained on high alert, Selma drove slowly to another spot with a relatively high vantage point.

The heavy rain soon covered their tracks.

Jiang Baimian retracted her gaze and covered her mouth to yawn. “Let’s make the best use of our time to rest. We still have to continue our journey later.”

After arriving at the Red River's northern bank, the Old Task Force, Han Wanghuo, and Zeng Duo chose to travel all night—something against the norm—in order to avoid being found by First City's drones.

Although they had Genava—a smart bot who wouldn't have his 'vision' affected because of the dark environment—which meant they didn't have to worry about any latent dangers compared to other teams, they didn't dare to drive too fast. They focused on a safe and steady pace.

When it was daytime, they continued on their way while the sky remained dark with poor visibility. Finally, they left the detection range of First City's drones before the storm arrived. First City had several outposts and observation points in the North Shore wastelands, and they were similarly equipped with drones and other equipment.

Just as Jiang Baimian said that, Genava had already walked down from the second floor of the main building. Red light flickered in his eyes as he asked, "Why did you let me stay up there for a while longer?"

Jiang Baimian's eyes darted around slightly as she replied with a smile, "We mustn't scare the guests..."

...

The storm subsided in the middle of the night, and Selma and the others waited until dawn before continuing their journey.

Their journey was smooth. They arrived at the Red River coast and returned to First City via a bridge.

As they had taken on several missions, they didn't rest and went straight to the Hunter's Guild.

As she waited for her companions to complete the handover, Denise habitually sized up the large screen in search of missions that they could take on later.

"Selma, look. That mission from the Hand of Order." Suddenly, her eyes lit up as she patted the team leader's shoulder.

Selma looked in the direction of the voice and found the content described by the Ashlandic team.

“A grand plot to target First City... The bounty i-is 20,000 Oray per person? What did they do to increase it so quickly?” Selma became more and more alarmed.

In just a few days, the bounty had doubled. It was inevitable for people to suspect that the severity of the matter was still increasing!

For Selma and the others, First City’s stability was the foundation of everything.

Having experienced dangers in the North Shore wastelands—their bodies and minds exhausted—the last thing they wanted was the inability to relax after returning to First City.

Sandro and the others also looked at the mission. Soon, the targets’ names and photos were reflected in their eyes.

“October Xue... Zhang Qubing...” Selma’s gaze suddenly froze.

His companions were no exception—their expressions were blank. We’ve seen this group before! It was the Ashlandic team that had described this mission to us!

After coming to their senses, Selma and the others couldn’t be bothered to be shocked. Their hearts were filled with fear and relief.

We actually communicated with such a dangerous team—each worth 20,000 Oray—for nearly half an hour. We even freeloaded their canned soup!

If we had said something wrong back then, we might not have been able to see the sun today... Selma couldn’t help but raise his hand and wipe the cold sweat from his forehead.

Who would’ve thought that a Ruin Hunter team we casually encountered in the wilderness was such a dangerous existence! Yet, the other party had chatted about the bounty mission involving them.

After a while, Denise broke the silence and asked her teammates, “Selma, do you want to hand over the information? I think the payment won’t be bad.”

The highest was 300 Oray, and the lowest was 50.

Selma deliberated for a few seconds before saying, “Report it. The chances of encountering them in the future are very, very low, so there’s no need to worry too much. As Ruin Hunters, how can we miss such an opportunity?”

...

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

“October Xue’s team encountered a Ruin Hunter team and focused on inquiring about the situation in North Anheford...” Theodore entered the meeting room, picked up the materials on the table, and read them under his breath.

They had already learned from certain informants that the target had escaped First City through some means and had escaped to the North Shore wastelands.

This was also the main reason why they raised the bounty. The Hand of Order was in charge of internal security and the manors in the suburbs, and it was very rare for them to send people directly into the wastelands to capture targets. They mainly relied on the military and Ruin Hunters next.

“I thought they would return to their faction directly.” Wall was a little confused about the actions of October Xue’s team. Why stay in the North Shore wastelands after receiving such important information?

At this moment, his superior—Red Wolf Zone Orderly, Trevis—rapped the table. “Regardless, release this information and let the Ruin Hunters and the military pay more attention to that area.”

...

In an Old World town that had been abandoned for many years, the ground was littered with bones and feces.



Jiang Baimian and the others parked the car in a hidden spot. At the top of a building, they used binoculars to observe the black wasteland outside town.

“Many Ruin Hunters have gone over,” Han Wanghuo voiced out his observations.

Jiang Baimian chuckled. “From the looks of it, the information we took the initiative to send back has taken effect. Next, we’ll get these Ruin Hunters to help us probe the First City army in North Anheford. We can’t be rash when saving people, and it’s even more so when rescuing a town.”

Zeng Duo—who was beside her—was stunned. She never expected that the ‘invitation’ she extended to the Ruin Hunters during their chance encounter hid such a goal.

Clap! Clap! Clap!

Shang Jianyao applauded.

Chapter 465: Selection

Beep. Beep. Beep.

“The amount of nuclear pollution in the water here isn’t that serious. It’s within the purifiable range.” The silver-black robot, Geneva, squatted beside a stream that flowed across the black lands and completed the test.

The weeds grew densely here and were long, and the color green almost filled the area as far as the eye could see. But compared to the areas with more severe nuclear pollution, they weren’t considered exaggerated. In those places, the grass was often nearly half the height of a person. It wasn’t rare to see wild onions growing nearly three meters tall.

Although such an environment wasn’t a key criterion for judging pollution, it could help Ruin Hunters make preliminary judgments from a distance and reduce the difficulty of the screening.

“Finally...” Long Yuehong heaved a long sigh of relief after hearing Geneva’s words.

During North Shore wasteland expeditions, the most serious and realistic problem was the acquisition of water resources. Here, many water sources were severely polluted, exceeding the limits of the water filter chip's normal operating range. If one just drank the filtered water, one might not be poisoned, but there was a high chance that they would be plagued by subsequent diseases or even mutation.

It was precisely because of this that Ruin Hunters who came to the North Shore wastelands not only carried weapons and food, but they also prepared water filter chips and learned of the distribution of lightly polluted water bodies.

The Old Task Force was wanted, so there were many places they couldn't go. They could only rely on Zeng Duo's experience, Jiang Baimian's knowledge, and Genava's pollution tests to find new water sources.

With not much potable water left, they finally gained something after repeated failures.

Amidst these wistful feelings, Long Yuehong, Shang Jianyao, and the others filled the corresponding containers with the stream water and relied on the water filter chip to process it.

Taking this opportunity, Jiang Baimian looked around and said, "From the looks of it, there are about two companies of First City troops guarding Early Spring Town. They usually take turns patrolling the surrounding area in platoons, pretending to be conducting an exercise to prevent Ruin Hunters or wilderness nomads from approaching Early Spring Town..."

"Preliminary speculation is that one company stays behind while the other patrols..."

The Old Task Force had learned about the time, location, and details of First City's army from the Ruin Hunters who had entered the North Anheford area during this period of time by disguising themselves as 'friends.'

With this information, it was much easier to analyze the enemy's situation. For example, it was determined that there were only two garrison companies because the Ruin Hunters kept encountering the same people, finding them familiar after a few times.

"They have at least two tanks, two armored vehicles, six drones, heavy machine guns, single-man rocket launchers, and grenade launchers. As for Awakened and genetically modified humans, it's impossible to tell from the surface, so there's no way to speculate..." Jiang Baimian briefly explained the situation and said, "Based on this level of understanding, I don't think it's a good idea

to take action now. What we need to save is a town. Once we get trapped and surrounded without the corresponding contingency plans, us being wiped out won't be a joke."

Her words made Han Wanghuo and Zeng Duo fall silent. This wasn't because they felt that October Xue—whose nickname was Big White—was wrong. On the contrary, it was just too right.

It left them somewhat depressed.

Genava had already analyzed the outcome and probed, "Old Han, what was your previous plan? Tell me for reference. Perhaps it will bring about some inspiration."

Jiang Baimian and Long Yuehong almost facepalmed themselves. They had forgotten to stop this robot with his worrying EQ.

Han Wanghuo's lips quivered as he said awkwardly, "I haven't had the time to formulate a plan."

Wasn't his goal to sneak into the vicinity of Early Spring Town and take advantage of the night to launch a surprise attack? Then, by coordinating from the inside and outside, he could escape the encirclement and head to the Land of Hope that Zeng Duo had chosen? If it didn't succeed, he wouldn't be able to live for long anyway. All he needed to do was use his life to cover his teammates' retreat.

As the former sheriff and town guard captain of Redstone Collection, it wasn't that Han Wanghuo didn't know that this plan was riddled with loopholes. But with the resources and strength he had, this was all he could do.

To prevent Genava from inquiring further, Long Yuehong asked Zeng Duo, "Does Early Spring Town have tunnels?"

Just as he said that, he heard Shang Jianyao's laughter. His heart skipped a beat as he felt that he had probably neglected something and was about to be mocked.

Jiang Baimian said with a calm expression, "In the early days, this was a good idea. However, First City has been in control of Early Spring Town for months. With their resources and abilities, it's unlikely that they don't know of such a situation. Choosing the tunnels is almost equivalent to walking into a trap."

As Long Yuehong muttered to himself after he realized his foolishness, Zeng Duo answered his previous question: “There are no tunnels. To us, the town is our last bastion. It’s even more dangerous without it, so there’s no need to dig tunnels.”

In the North Shore wastelands were many Heartless and mutated creatures. It wasn’t safe to instate the tunnel’s exits randomly. In comparison, it was better for the entire town to retreat in batches in times of danger.

“Is there a river around town? Are there mountains nearby?” Bai Chen joined the discussion.

“What do you want to do?” Shang Jianyao had a look of ‘fear.’

Bai Chen didn’t hide her thoughts. “Artificially triggered natural disasters create opportunities.”

“There’s only a small river and stream around the town. It’s at the edge of a hill, so there aren’t any mountains.” Zeng Duo’s answer made Bai Chen’s suggestion fail before it reached the refinement stage.

Jiang Baimian nodded slightly. “It’s very difficult to control the damage caused by an artificially triggered natural disaster. It’s not that there’s no other way. Try not to make such attempts.”

At this point, she suddenly sighed. “The most important problem now isn’t how to save Early Spring Town. This is something that needs to be considered in the future. We can only formulate an effective plan after figuring out First City’s military situation. What I’m most worried about is that this matter has a Mind Corridor-level Awakened or an aberration at the corresponding level presiding over it. In that case, the level of trouble will rise exponentially. Besides, those two companies might have a few military exoskeletons or artificial intelligence bionic armor.”

With the Old Task Force’s equipment and the strength displayed by the garrison at Early Spring Town, they didn’t dare to say that they were confident. At the very least, they had a high chance of succeeding with the night raid.

However, the problem was that the other party might not have revealed all their strength.

Han Wanghuo and Zeng Duo—who had been informed of what the Mind Corridor was by the Old Task Force—had rather solemn expressions.

If First City's experiment in Early Spring Town wasn't that important, Jiang Baimian's worry wouldn't be a problem. But if that experiment covered many aspects, it was almost guaranteed that a powerhouse would preside over it.

“But how do I figure out the situation? I can't contact the people in town.” Zeng Duo didn't hide her worry.

Just as she said that, Shang Jianyao sighed. “It's all those Ruin Hunters' fault for being cowards.”

“Huh?” Long Yuehong wasn't the only one who didn't understand. Han Wanghuo, Zeng Duo, and company were also confused.

Jiang Baimian smiled and explained, “What he means is that the Ruin Hunters will retreat the moment they encounter First City's army and will have no intention of continuing deeper. That way, there won't be any conflict. If there's no conflict, it means that there's no opportunity for the First City troops to showcase their true strength. Yes, if there's a Mind Corridor-level Awakened, they will definitely stay in Early Spring Town and monitor the surrounding hundreds of meters. They won't go out to patrol...”

If I were a Ruin Hunter, I wouldn't get into a conflict with people from large factions if I didn't have any stake in the matter... Besides, those troops are in units of platoons. With 30 to 40 people moving together and with excellent weapons and equipment, how would ordinary Ruin Hunters dare to offend them? They will only be worried that they will be forcefully accused of being bandits and plundering... Long Yuehong muttered inwardly.

“Shall we try fighting a patrol team?” Han Wanghuo suggested.

Jiang Baimian pondered for a moment and smiled. “That's the idea, but there's a better solution. It's best if we don't appear personally to prevent alerting the enemy.”

Without waiting for Han Wanghuo to ask further, she looked at Zeng Duo. “Are there any powerful bandits in the North Anheford area and the surrounding area? Where do they often appear?”

“You want to instigate bandits to attack the army?” Han Wanghuo asked in enlightenment. “But why would they do such a thing...”

Han Wanghuo’s voice gradually softened as though he had recalled something. Long Yuehong’s inner mutter was the same.

“They’re easy to get along with and persuade.” Shang Jianyao revealed a friendly and amiable smile.

Jiang Baimian laughed as well. “Sometimes, it’s not up to them.”

For some reason, Zeng Duo silently mourned for the bandits. She then quickly snapped to her senses and tried her best to find a possible target from her memories.

This made her feel like she was choosing some unlucky bastard.

Chapter 466: Vultures

In the North Anheford area, in a city ruin that Ruin Hunters no longer visited.

Yass stood at the top floor of the tallest building and looked at the scenery through the relatively intact and clean floor-to-ceiling windows.

The Old World city was so huge that most of the scenes he saw were still all kinds of buildings, wide or narrow streets, and rusted cars that had zero repairability.

They spread out, painting a lost and desolate picture across the land. However, it was different from the Old World.

At that moment, the city was enveloped in green. All sorts of plants grew, and large numbers of mosquitoes flew around like a real forest.

Yass was the leader of the Vulture bandits. In the North Shore wastelands, their reputation was only slightly inferior to Nois and a few other peers.

Frankly speaking, Yass looked down on bandits like Nois. He believed that they were brainless and never considered any repercussions. They would only do things that would harm their future interests, such as participating in the slave trade.

From Yass's point of view, the human population was the most precious resource. Everyone in the wasteland could create wealth for him, so it was extremely foolish to sell them to slave merchants.

He believed that not only did he have to keep the wilderness nomad settlements, but he also had to provide some protection to prevent First City's slave hunters from finding and destroying them.

This was because wilderness nomads always followed their instincts that ran deep in their pulse. They established settlements in places that were suitable for farming. Every time they were about to harvest food, Yass would lead the Vulture bandits to plunder them.

Relying on this strategy and gathering points of various sizes, the Vulture bandits never worried about food—they lived every day with great confidence. For this reason, they wouldn't take away all the food when they robbed those settlements. They would almost certainly leave a portion behind.

This way, with the help of hunting in the wilderness, a large number of the wilderness nomads could survive the winter and live to the second year. They could continue farming, thus forming a cycle.

Of course, the Vulture bandits wouldn't directly say that this was their goal. Yass would use a tone of charity to get the people in the settlements to sacrifice the women they had chosen to satisfy his and his subordinates' desires in exchange for the corresponding food.

If the other party refused, Yass wasn't stingy with using bullets, blades, and blood to let them know who was lord. Then, he would use violence to achieve his goal in front of them.

Yass—who liked to read Old World history books—had even considered implementing *droit du seigneur* in areas his bandits could project power. He eventually gave up on the idea because it was impossible to implement.

They couldn't really take the settlements for themselves. First City's slave hunters, the army that pursued the bandits, the other bandits, and the Ruin Hunters that occasionally worked as bandits who reached a certain scale could cause harm to those settlements.

The reason why the people in the Ashlands still called the residents of these settlements wilderness nomads was that they couldn't stay in one place for long. Every seven to eight years or even shorter, they would be forced by reality to migrate elsewhere.

Fortunately, the other bandits only made deals with slave merchants and didn't dare to cooperate with First City's slave hunters directly, afraid that they would become the other party's spoils of war. Otherwise, there wouldn't be many settlements left to provide food for the Vulture bandits.

As for the bandits who controlled the mineral resources and attacked settlements to gather slaves for their businesses, Yass felt that their actions were understandable. It was even enviable.

With the basic guarantee of food, the Vulture's style was in line with their name. They liked to 'hover' around their prey, waiting for the other party to show their weak side and peck at the fattest part.

This was also the reason why Yass always liked to find the top floor of high-rise buildings to look around every time he entered a city ruin. This gave him the satisfaction of overlooking the world and controlling everything.

In his eyes, every person and team in the North Shore wastelands were dying prey as long as they showed signs of weakness. He and his bandits were waiting to turn them into corpses and rotten meat.

As night fell, the city ruin was gradually swallowed by the darkness. Yass reluctantly retracted his gaze and walked down the stairs.

To him, climbing a building was also a form of training. Compared to when he came up, the journey down was much easier. But Yass—who liked reading Old World books—still put on knee pads to protect his joints.

Knowledge is power... Every time he encountered such a scene, Yass would recall this Old World proverb. This was what he had heard from his teacher when he was young.

Back then, he was still living in a wilderness nomad settlement. Every week, there would be adults taking turns as teachers to teach the children.



When he reached adulthood and could go out hunting, the feeling of not being able to fill his stomach for extended periods and his strong desire for various things made Yass leave with a group of companions and go down the path of being bandits.

To this day, he still remembered the Old World proverb that had prompted him to make up his mind: We do not sow!

As for the original wilderness nomad settlement, after the older generation that looked down on bandits passed away, the remaining people either followed Yass or migrated elsewhere.

As he recalled, Yass returned to the ground floor of the building. His subordinates gathered in groups of three to five, playing cards, drinking the batch of wine they had snatched yesterday, or hiding in other rooms deep in the corridor to fornicate with one another.

In the Ashlands, female bandits weren't rare. Guns made them equally dangerous.

Raising his hand to touch his shaved temples, Yass shouted to his subordinates patrolling outside the building, "It's about to rain. Don't let your guard down!"

This was one of the strongholds of the Vulture bandits.

Yass liked such city ruins. In such a huge place, it was no different from finding a needle in a haystack if the enemy wanted to find the building they lived in.

"Yes, Boss!" Outside the building, the bandits with submachine guns responded.

Yass nodded in satisfaction and circled the bottom floor.

Two armored vehicles, several cannons, and many machine guns flashed past his eyes.

At that moment, the storm that had been brewing for a long time finally released its load. It wasn't too heavy, but it made the night appear misty.

Apart from this building, the entire city was dead silent.

Suddenly, a loud voice sounded from somewhere outside. “You are surrounded!”

“Drop your weapons and surrender!”

It came from a man.

Yass’s eyes suddenly widened as he waved his hand, gesturing for all his subordinates to be prepared for an enemy attack.

The voice outside didn’t stop—it was as though it had changed into a different person. It became slightly magnetic and was accompanied by static. “Therefore, we have to remember that when facing things we don’t understand, we have to humbly seek guidance and put down the prejudices brought about by experience. Do not be filled with conflicting emotions from the beginning. Adopt an attitude of accepting everything and learn, understand, grasp, and accept...”

In the quiet rainy night, this voice echoed as though it was accompanied by an electric current.

This... Puzzled thoughts surfaced in the bandits’ minds. They didn’t understand why the enemy was preaching, especially when it had nothing to do with the current situation.

Yass had a bad feeling. Although he didn’t know what was going on, his years of experience told him that anything abnormal meant trouble.

After the voice faded away, two figures—each holding a black umbrella—walked toward the building where the Vulture bandits were.

“Halt!” Yass shouted.

The abnormal situation prevented him from giving the order to fire.

One of the two figures answered, “We’re here to make friends!”

Yass gaped his mouth, feeling that the other party wasn’t lying.

Soon, two figures entered the world of light outlined by flashlights and torches from the extremely dark city ruins.

They were a man and a woman. The man was tall and handsome, while the woman was beautiful and valiant.

They had kind smiles on their faces.

...

My name is Yass, the leader of the Vulture bandits. I like to look down at city ruins from high above; it makes me feel like I'm the master of this world.

I'm different from the other bandits. I know how precious the farming population is and how important it is to stabilize a food source. In my eyes, Nois and company are indeed powerful, but they are brainless. To earn some supplies, they work with slave merchants to sell the wilderness nomads on the wastelands. Perhaps they have never considered the future.

My bandits and I plundered every target we could. We are like vultures in the sky, treating every weak target as rotten meat.

I thought that my life would continue like this. I thought that my bandits would grow in strength day by day and ultimately become the ruler of the North Shore wastelands until the day the two of them came to visit.

...

That night, the leader of the Vulture bandits—Yass—and his subordinates believed without a doubt that the garrison at Early Spring Town was beyond weak.

Chapter 467: Probe

With the patrol routes, drone surveillance patterns, and the surrounding terrain of Early Spring Town provided by his 'friends,' Yass led the Vulture bandits to drive the armored vehicles and drag their cannons down a road that provided relatively more cover to the target location.

The moon hung high in the sky, its light scattering down and dyeing the black and green land with a sheen of silvery light.

Early Spring Town stood beside a stream that flowed down a hill. It was suspected to have been modified from a large farm—a relic of the Old World—but the fences had been replaced with stone. There were many more buildings inside, and they were all relatively simple.

First City's garrison was split into four parts. One was in town, one was at the main entrance, one was at the rear exit, and the other was a few hundred meters outside town.

They didn't gather together to prevent themselves from being wiped out all at once.

Through the binoculars, Yass examined the khaki-colored armored vehicles and tanks of the same color blocking the entrance. He smiled at his trusted aides and said, "It's indeed as the intelligence described. They are relatively well-equipped, but there's no morale among them. All of them miss home and have slacked off. As long as we complete this 'business,' our firepower will be ranked first among all the bandits in the wastelands. When the time comes, we will have the confidence to recruit people with special abilities."

One of Yass's trusted aides said hesitantly, "Boss, this will anger First City and incur their crazy revenge."

Although he also believed that this was a rare opportunity, he still felt that there would be serious repercussions.

"It's not like they haven't organized an army to besiege us all these years. However, the wastelands are so vast, and there are ruins everywhere. As long as we are careful and hide well, we don't have to worry too much about such matters. Would First City send an army to search for us in the wastelands for years? If that's the case, we can still head north and stay in the White Knights' sphere of influence for a period of time," Yass replied confidently.

His trusted aides no longer had any objections. According to their leader's instructions, they organized the bandits under them into different groups and took on the corresponding missions.

With everything in place, Yass used his binoculars to glance at the few pairs of soldiers patrolling Early Spring Town. He then raised his right hand and swept it down. "Artillery battery, attack!"

The cannons dragged by the tractors entered the preset positions.

They were split into two groups. One group fired at the garrison camp a few hundred meters outside the town, while the other targeted the enemy at Early Spring Town's entrance.

Boom! Boom!

On a night illuminated with only moonlight, flames appeared one after another as salvos sounded incessantly.

One shell after another was fired, carpeting the two target areas.

Smoke and dust soared as air blasts raged out. The successive explosions caused the ground to tremble.

"The armored vehicles are ahead. Men, charge!" After catching the defenders of Early Spring Town off-guard, Yass decisively gave the second order.

The Vulture bandits' armored vehicles drove out and, under the anti-tank cannons' cover, charged toward the entrance of Early Spring Town. The rest of the personnel either drove or jogged as they followed behind in echelon formation.

Amidst the rumbling explosions and gunshots, First City's army—which had indeed slacked off—was thrown into chaos. They couldn't organize an effective counterattack in a short period of time.

With the town in sight, Yass became increasingly convinced of the information his friend had provided. He no longer had any doubts about the weakness of the garrison here.

Just as the salvos subsided, music suddenly sounded in Early Spring Town.

Its melody and rhythm were extremely strong. Together with the passionate singing, it made one involuntarily want to dance.

This wasn't an illusion. Sitting in the armored vehicle, the Vulture bandit leader—Yass—couldn't help but gyrate his waist.

Amidst his alarm and confusion, he subconsciously looked around. He saw the armored vehicle's driver stand up, raise his hands, and shake them crazily, completely ignoring the vehicle's condition.

Go, go, go

Ale, ale, ale!

Amidst the passionate singing, the Vulture bandit members raised their guns, stopped in their tracks, raised their hips, or waved their hands as they rhythmically moved their bodies.

In an instant, the sound of the salvos and gunshots stopped. The black battlefield outside Early Spring Town turned into a square filled with revelry.

The defenders of Early Spring Town weren't affected. They took this opportunity to reorganize their troops and launch a counterattack.

Ta! Ta! Ta!

The heavy machine gun's sweeping fire was like a sickle harvesting wheat in autumn, causing the bandits to fall one after another.

Boom! Boom!

The two khaki-colored tanks fired as they steamrolled outward.

Blood and pain jolted many bandits awake—they couldn't believe that they had actually attacked First City's army head-on!

Yass was the same. He had a feeling that he had been blinded by the devil and had only returned to normal now. How can a band of bandits fight against First City's army? Furthermore, the other party is fully equipped and aren't defeated troops that have been left stranded!

Under the ferocious firepower, Yass and company attempted to escape, but they were still affected by the passionate song. They couldn't utilize their full strength and could only gyrate and sway as they counterattacked with their weapons.

There was definitely no accuracy to speak of.

...

At the top of the hill, Jiang Baimian held the binoculars and sighed. "The Vulture bandits are finished..."

Although she knew that it was impossible for the Vulture bandits to succeed and that they would ultimately suffer a tragic defeat, she never expected them to be defeated so quickly and cleanly.

However, the Old Task Force's goal had been achieved. They had probed the existence of a Mind Corridor-level Awakened in Early Spring Town.

This kind of powerhouse could play an unimaginable role on such a battlefield!

Of course, Jiang Baimian wasn't too surprised by this. After using Wu Meng's recording to easily gain the 'trust' of so many Vulture bandit members, she knew how terrifying a Mind Corridor-level Awakened was when dealing with ordinary people. Ones that had explored the depths were even more unimaginable.

This wasn't something the off-form DiMarco and Tarnan's Superior Heartless could compare with.

"What a pity..." As Shang Jianyao echoed Jiang Baimian's words, he gyrated his waist and moved according to the rhythm.

He didn't look disappointed at all; instead, his face was filled with anticipation. Although he couldn't hear the music coming from Early Spring Town from so far away, the dancing of the Vulture bandit members allowed him to keep up with the beat.

"Let's retreat first to prevent ourselves from being discovered." Jiang Baimian lowered the binoculars.

Apart from Shang Jianyao, nobody had any objections. They had witnessed the encounter of the Vulture bandits and were filled with fear toward the powerhouse who hadn't appeared.

Of course, the Old Task Force still had some things to do before retreating.

Jiang Baimian cast her gaze at Bai Chen, Han Wanghuo, and Genava and nodded at them.

Bai Chen—who had set up the Orange rifle—had already moved her eyes behind the scope. The muzzle kept following a certain figure.

Finally, she saw an opportunity.

A bullet flew out of the muzzle, crossed Early Spring Town, and arrived at the entrance of one of the Vulture bandits' armored vehicles. It drilled into Yass's head.

With a bang, the bandit leader—who had finally overcome his urge to dance and escaped the out-of-control armored vehicle—had his head explode into a bloody firework.

Almost at the same time, Han Wanghuo and Genava completed their long-range sniping.

Amidst the gunshots, Yass's two trusted aides collapsed.

These were the people who had communicated with Jiang Baimian and Shang Jianyao face-to-face. They could describe their general appearances. At the same time, these people definitely had those scenes in their memories.

As for the other bandits, it was almost impossible for them to see Shang Jianyao and Jiang Baimian's faces from afar on a dark rainy night with the illumination provided by the torches.

As the few 'witnesses' were eliminated, the Old Task Force and Han Wanghuo followed Zeng Duo down a relatively hidden road and returned to their cars before heading to a distant town ruin.

Behind them, the sound of gunfire continued for a while.



...

In the ruins of the collapsed town, in what was once a police station.

Jiang Baimian looked around and said, “Two things can be confirmed: First, Early Spring Town’s First City army has Mind Corridor-level Awakened. Second, one of his abilities is to make a large number of targets dance to the music.”

“Why isn’t it a problem with the music itself?” Long Yuehong subconsciously asked.

The recordings of Wu Meng and Xiaochong proved this possibility.

Shang Jianyao smiled. “Those First City soldiers didn’t participate in the mass dance.”

That’s right... Long Yuehong agreed with this reason.

Every time the Old Task Force used Wu Meng’s recording, they had to stuff their ears in advance.

The attack had come so suddenly that First City’s soldiers had clearly fallen into disarray. Even their counterattack was haphazard, so they definitely didn’t have time to stuff their ears.

“Which domain is this?” Han Wanghuo asked in deliberation. During this period of time, he and Zeng Duo had learned a lot of Awakened ‘general knowledge’ from October Xue’s team.

Shang Jianyao replied without hesitation, “Door of Scorching!”

Just as he said that, he twitched his body and did a dance as if he had been scalded.

. From The Cup of Life, Ricky Martin.

Chapter 468: Report

Apart from Han Wanghuo and Zeng Duo—who were a little dumbfounded—the others were already used to Shang Jianyao’s behavior.

Jiang Baimian ignored him and said, “As far as we know, the only domain related to dancing is indeed the Door of Scorching. It seems like this can be a price or an ability. Yes, when facing a Mind Corridor-level Awakened, finding their weakness and targeting it might be the best and only way.”

If there was only one powerhouse on the other side, the Old Task Force could consider suppressing them with abundant firepower from a safe distance. During this process, they would take turns attacking, not giving the other party a chance to rest. They would drag it out until the target was mentally exhausted and couldn't continue any longer before launching a comprehensive attack.

Of course, this was a very idealistic plan. After all, the other party hadn't lost their mind and was in good condition. It was impossible for said person to stay in place and wait to be exhausted by them. The Awakened could find an opportunity to close the distance, influence them, or use the environment to evacuate.

Jiang Baimian only felt that such a scenario was better than the current situation.

That Mind Corridor-level Awakened was now under the protection of two companies. Furthermore, their firepower wasn't inferior to that of the Old Task Force on the surface—it might even exceed theirs.

This prevented Jiang Baimian and the others from gaining an advantage.

Long Yuehong recalled the information provided by the company and slowly said, “The common price paid by Awakened in the Door of Scorching domain is that they can't help but dance when they hear music. They have weak muscles, are afraid of the cold, are often sleepy in winter, and their emotions are unstable...”

“The first possibility can be ruled out. None of the Awakened we know of have the same price and ability,” Jiang Baimian said after some thought. “It's summer now. Unless we encounter extreme weather, it's difficult to determine if the other party's price is related to winter...”

Upon hearing this, Long Yuehong recalled the lone hunter—Gray—who was afraid of the cold. He had previously guessed that the other party was an Awakened in the Door of Scorching domain.

Later, according to Genava's feedback, he felt that the other party was likely a member of the Furnace Church or the Dance of Frenzy.

"Not necessarily. Even in the summer, they will show a certain degree of fear of the cold if that's the price." It was rare for Long Yuehong to pick at his team leader's words.

Jiang Baimian clearly thought of Gray and agreed with Long Yuehong. "Indeed, but the problem is that we can't see that person. We can't determine if they're afraid of the cold based on their performance."

"Even if they're really afraid, we can't target them now." Bai Chen participated in the discussion.

It was summer.

The Old Task Force could wait until the turn of autumn and winter, but Han Wanghuo and Zeng Duo couldn't.

"No, no, no." Shang Jianyao shook his head. "It can snow in June. We might even encounter hail."

Long Yuehong was about to say that many things in the Old World's entertainment couldn't be taken seriously when Zeng Duo nodded and said, "There are indeed such instances in the wastelands, but not many."

The environment here was chaotic, and all kinds of extreme weather emerged.

"But that can only be chanced upon." Jiang Baimian sighed. Her eyes moved slightly as she muttered to herself, "Muscle weakness can also be determined through a superficial performance. The problem is the same as before: We can't see that person at all..."

"If their emotions are unstable, we can try to find clues based on the reactions the garrison troops in Early Spring Town have toward this attack..."

"This is only the price we know. It doesn't mean that it's everything..."

Jiang Baimian said a bunch of things, and the general meaning was that the matter was rather troublesome. Ignoring the probability of success, just thinking of what to do and how it should be done was a headache.

Zeng Duo listened quietly and smiled bitterly. “This matter is countless times more difficult than I imagined. I actually thought that I had a chance of completing it by finding a Ruin Hunter team with a certain level of strength.”

The reality was that the powerful team the Hand of Order had offered a reward of 20,000 Oray per person for was also in a difficult position when saving Early Spring Town.

“This can only mean that First City’s experiment in your town is very important.” Jiang Baimian didn’t know if she was comforting her or agitating her.

Zeng Duo was silent for a few seconds before exhaling. “Everyone, I’m very grateful for your help during this period of time. If there’s really no hope of completing this matter, feel free to give up.”

Without waiting for Jiang Baimian and the others to respond, she looked at Han Wanghuo, lowered her head, and smiled. “I’ll still definitely try it myself; I won’t live for long anyway. If I fail, I will try my best to hold out and return to give you my heart.”

After a brief silence, Jiang Baimian smiled before Shang Jianyao could speak. “There’s no need to be in a hurry to say depressing words. We still have at least two months to plan or wait. By then, even if we don’t find that person’s weakness, accidents might happen. For example, they might suddenly suffer from the Heartless disease, or chaos might erupt in First City that requires these powerhouses and the corresponding troops to provide reinforcements urgently...”

Fat chance... Long Yuehong didn’t dare to voice his criticism. To be honest, he was also looking forward to similar developments.

“That’s right.” Shang Jianyao echoed Jiang Baimian. “Perhaps a blizzard will suddenly sweep through this area and freeze that person to death.”

Do you think you’re the Kalendaria’s son? Long Yuehong resisted the urge to mock him.

Jiang Baimian laughed at Shang Jianyao's example. "Maybe they hibernate? Yes, we'll rest and reorganize tonight. Tomorrow, we'll find an opportunity to observe the reactions of the guards in Early Spring Town."

When it was almost dawn, Han Wanghuo and Zeng Duo replaced Bai Chen and Long Yuehong and took on night duty.

Looking at the dark ruins, Han Wanghuo turned to Zeng Duo and suppressed his voice. "No matter what, I have to give it a try since I promised you."

Zeng Duo was stunned for two seconds. She opened her mouth, lowered her head, and smiled. "You really are a good person..."

Han Wanghuo frowned but didn't retort.

After dawn, Jiang Baimian looked around while Han Wanghuo and Zeng Duo went to get water for purification. She deliberated and asked, "What are your thoughts on Early Spring Town?"

This time, Bai Chen was the first to speak. She pursed her lips and said, "If it's really impossible, I think we should give up."

Jiang Baimian and Long Yuehong fell silent and didn't respond. Shang Jianyao thought for a moment and raised his hand and did a zipping action at his mouth.

"If only I knew what that person's basic abilities are." Geneva went straight to the crux of the discussion. What he meant was that it was currently impossible to determine if the basic abilities obtained by Mind Corridor-level Awakened in the Door of Scorching domain were electromagnetic interference or matter interference.

If it was the latter, Geneva felt that he had the ability to put up a fight.

Jiang Baimian nodded thoughtfully. "We can think of a way to test it out."

...

As they continued to observe Early Spring Town, time passed quickly, and it was night again.

The Old Task Force switched on the radio transceiver again at a fixed time to see if the company had any instructions.

They didn't avoid Han Wanghuo and Zeng Duo. After all, these two could guess that there was someone backing the Old Task Force.

To Long Yuehong's pleasant surprise, Pangu Biology finally replied.

Jiang Baimian memorized the code and translated it onto the piece of paper before showing it to Shang Jianyao and the others.

Pangu Biology's subsequent arrangements for the Old Task Force were: "You can consider finding an opportunity to talk to Avia."

We are to talk to her, not retrieve information... Jiang Baimian read the hidden meaning behind the short message.

Apart from this, the message also revealed a very obvious layer of meaning: There was no need to go to the secret laboratory in Wasteland Ruin 13.

Jiang Baimian was already mentally prepared for this.

First City had been in control of the passcode for decades, but the secret laboratory still existed. The corresponding danger was obvious!

"From the looks of it, we still have to return to First City..." Long Yuehong sighed softly.

"Let's wait until this matter is over and the scrutiny passes." Jiang Baimian pondered for a moment before picking up the ballpoint pen produced by First City and scribbled on the paper.

She was clearly preparing a reply to Pangu Biology.

Long Yuehong and Shang Jianyao leaned over curiously to see what their team leader had written: “We have already escaped First City and are temporarily hiding in the North Shore wastelands. We discovered that there’s a secret experiment site in the North Anheford area here. They are suspected to be in control of a town with many infected and mutated people. Furthermore, the guards are abnormally strong...”

This... Team Leader wants to use First City’s genetic experiment to lure the company into helping rescue Early Spring Town? Long Yuehong looked around but didn’t find any lies or exaggerations in the telegram. Furthermore, he felt that it was indeed feasible!

After sending the telegram, Jiang Baimian burned the piece of paper and smiled at Han Wanghuo and Zeng Duo. “Let’s wait a little longer. Perhaps something good might really happen.”

...

In Early Spring Town, First City’s Major Malov—who had been thinking for a day and night without understanding why the Vulture bandits dared to attack his team—finally ushered in the moment when a few captives woke up.

Most of the Vulture bandits had been wiped out. A few had escaped, and the few who had been captured were injured and in bad shape.

#### Chapter 469: Intersection of Clues

In the room that originally belonged to the mayor of Early Spring Town, Malov looked at the three dispirited bandits in front of him and asked in puzzlement, “Who gave you the courage to launch an attack here?”

In this major’s eyes, even the most powerful Nois bandits in the wastelands didn’t dare to challenge First City’s army. Furthermore, the troops guarding Early Spring Town were clearly better than the average troops!

One of the bandits replied in frustration and fear, “Sir, w-we were deceived. We felt that your men had low morale after the long deployment in the wastelands, and we believed that you had nothing but equipment. One touch, and it will shatter.”

“That’s right, that’s right. Our boss also said that you are arrogant and careless. A single surprise attack will throw you into chaos. You won’t be able to organize any effective resistance and can only hand over the spoils of war,” another bandit hurriedly echoed.

Malov and the soldiers in the room didn't have their questions resolved. Instead, their faces flushed red.

This was because what the other party said actually matched the actual situation!

Their team had been guarding Early Spring Town for two to three months, and most of the residents here were suffering from malignant mutations. They had nowhere to relieve their desires and had long been extremely frustrated. They only wanted to end their tour early and return to First City to rest.

Coupled with their powerful equipment and First City's reputation, they were certain that they wouldn't be attacked. Be it their usual training or daily patrols, they gradually let down their guard and only maintained an empty shell.

Therefore, the sudden attack by the Vulture bandits during the night really threw them into chaos. If not for that existence, they might not have had the time to reorganize their defense and launch a counterattack.

As the leader of this unit, Malov felt that each of the captives' words were like slaps that constantly smacked his face. It made him want to pull out his Red River pistol and fire a few shots at these fellows.

Thankfully, nothing really happened. Otherwise, I would definitely be court-martialed... Malov took a deep breath and slowly exhaled. "Who told you all this? No, who deceived you?"

"A man and a woman. They found one of our strongholds," said a pale-faced bandit who had lost a lot of blood as he recalled.

"What do they look like?" Malov pressed.

"I didn't see them clearly." The bandit who answered first shook his head. He had a shaved head that was covered in dry black soil.



Another bandit helped explain, “It was nighttime, and it was raining. We didn’t have many torches in our stronghold, nor did we have many flashlights. Apart from the few who communicated with them face-to-face, probably nobody saw what they looked like.”

“None of you saw them?” Malov frowned slightly.

The bandits shook their heads in unison.

Is this a coincidence? The bandit leader must’ve communicated with those two people face-to-face, but he’s dead... Malov reined in his puzzlement and asked, “How did they convince you, uh—convince your leader, and how did your leader convince you?”

“They just said what we just told you...” The pale-faced bandit answered in puzzlement, “I don’t know why I believed the boss, uh—Yass back then. Someone will almost definitely raise questions during any major developments...”

Malov acutely sensed the problem. “How long did that man and woman talk to your leader for?”

“Less than five minutes. Definitely less than five minutes!” The bald bandit hesitated before confirming it.

“They didn’t show anything. It was just a conversation?” Malov followed his guess and raised a new question.

“None at all,” the bandits answered one after another.

Malov glanced at the soldiers in the room and paced back and forth. “Did the man and woman do anything when your leader started convincing you?”

“They were at the edge of the stronghold, hiding in the shadows. Only when our boss, uh—Yass convinced us did they provide us with your patrol routes, the drones’ surveillance patterns, and information on the surrounding terrain,” the pale-faced bandit answered truthfully.

Malov paced a few more steps and said to the soldiers in the room, “Watch them. I’ll be back soon.”

He quickly walked out of the room, followed the corridor to the other end, and knocked on a dark-red wooden door.

“Mr. Press, the current situation is...” He summarized the captives’ answers and gave a rough description.

After he finished speaking, a male voice that seemed to be restraining something came from the room more than ten seconds later. “Ask them what happened before the man and woman arrived.”

“Yes, Mr. Press.” Malov turned around and returned to the room. He stared at the captives and repeated Press’s question in a deep voice.

The bald bandit recalled and said, “They used a loudspeaker or boombox to inform us that we’re ‘surrounded.’ Then, they explained a bunch of baffling principles.”

“What kind?” Malov questioned.

The pale-faced bandit summarized the content based on his memories. He talked about humbly seeking advice when faced with something he didn’t understand, about not blindly resisting, about learning, understanding, and accepting...

Malov was confused. After repeatedly confirming this piece of information, he once again went to the outside of Press’s room and told him the information he had obtained.

Before Malov could finish his sentence, Press’s slightly shocked voice sounded from behind the closed door. “Wu Meng?”

...

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

The wall-like Sheriff Wall met his immediate superior—Red Wolf Zone’s Orderly Officer, Trevis.

“The military has sent some feedback.” Trevis picked up a piece of paper in front of him.

After Wall took it, the Orderly Officer of the Red Wolf Zone simply said, “They have troops carrying out a secret mission in the North Anheford area.”

“Isn’t this too much of a coincidence?” Wall—who hadn’t flipped through the information—asked in a deep voice.

What he meant was that after October Xue and Zhang Qubing’s team fled to the North Shore wastelands, they showed interest in the North Anheford area instead of escaping First City’s sphere of influence as soon as possible. Was this related to the military’s secret mission?

“It’s quite a coincidence, which is why I got you to take a look at this information.” Trevis sat behind his desk and nodded slightly. “Have a seat and read it slowly.”

Wall didn’t pretend to be polite. He sat down and quickly scanned the document in his hand.

Upon reading about the bewitched bandits and the voice that made one lose their guard, Wall’s expression gradually turned solemn.

He looked up at his superior. “When we were investigating how October Xue and Zhang Qubing’s team escaped the city, we obtained certain clues. They seem to have ‘convinced’ a group of smugglers in the form of a broadcast.”

This was very similar to the bandits’ encounter.

“You mean that October Xue and Zhang Qubing’s team are targeting the military’s secret mission?” Trevis nodded slightly.

“Yes. Otherwise, it wouldn’t be such a coincidence,” Wall said confidently. “The man and woman who ‘convinced’ the bandits match October Xue and Zhang Qubing in height. Although they disguised themselves and killed all the witnesses, these coincidences are enough to betray them.”

Trevis tersely acknowledged his words. “They definitely have their own motives for staying in the North Shore wastelands, and this matter also involves a certain dangerous existence.”

Wall didn’t ask which dangerous existence it was. Since Trevis didn’t say it directly, it was temporarily beyond his pay grade.

He planned on visiting his father-in-law—the newly promoted Elder and authoritative military figure, Gaius—to see what was going on.

After chatting for a while, Trevis heaved a sigh of relief. “I’ll submit the clues you found and your theories to the higher-ups.”

...

North Anheford, in a city ruin.

“Early Spring Town’s defenses have become even tighter.” Han Wanghuo mentioned his observations.

Jiang Baimian nodded and turned her head to look at Long Yuehong, Bai Chen, and Genava.

“There are new troops heading this way from First City,” Bai Chen said calmly.

In order to obtain this information, she and Long Yuehong wore military exoskeletons.

As Han Wanghuo and Zeng Duo wore solemn expressions, Jiang Baimian smiled. “That’s a good thing.”

“That’s right, that’s right.” Shang Jianyao mimicked Long Yuehong.

Upon seeing Zeng Duo’s puzzled look, Jiang Baimian smiled and said, “First City should’ve already figured out that we were secretly instigating the Vulture bandits. From the looks of it, they aren’t too stupid. They didn’t disappoint the grand act we put up.”

“Why?” Han Wanghuo asked in puzzlement.

This would only cause the defenses of Early Spring Town to rise, making it impossible to rescue the locals.

Jiang Baimian smiled. “I’ve already provided the analysis. There’s almost no hope of saving Early Spring Town by ourselves unless we can wait until winter, and that’s just a guess. In that case, why don’t we get First City to send more elite teams and Mind Corridor-level experts to raise their defenses and pursue us? As for us...”

Jiang Baimian wiped the smile from her face. “We’ll return to First City.”

“Huh?” This time, Long Yuehong couldn’t understand his team leader’s train of thought.

Jiang Baimian chuckled. “First City’s situation is very delicate to begin with. It’s on the brink of chaos, and it isn’t easy for them to maintain the balance. After they deploy a large number of people and some powerhouses over, there’s a high chance that the balance will tilt. When the time comes, we will step in and find an opportunity. When First City is in chaos, most of the powerhouses and troops guarding Early Spring Town will be transferred back. When that happens, the defenses here will be empty.”

Upon seeing Long Yuehong, Zeng Duo, and company’s pupils dilate, Jiang Baimian smiled and added, “This is called a diversion attack.”

Chapter 470: Grouping

Upon hearing Jiang Baimian’s explanation, all the carbon-based humans present were rendered speechless as they found themselves immersed in complicated feelings.

Only Shang Jianyao mimicked Long Yuehong’s current posture and blurted out, “Did you plan this from the beginning?”

That’s right. If she had thought of this situation from the beginning and everything has gone according to plan, that would be terrifying! Long Yuehong echoed Shang Jianyao in his heart.

Jiang Baimian shook her head. “Apart from a smart bot like Old Ge who can conduct an exhaustive search for analysis, it’s impossible for ordinary humans to plan such a thing from the beginning. Back then, we still didn’t know if there were any Mind Corridor-level Awakened in Early Spring Town. We didn’t know that there were missions that required us to return to First City.”

She organized her words and said, “In the beginning, the plan was to seek out bandits to help us probe the situation of Early Spring Town’s garrison. My idea was that instigating the weaker ones wouldn’t have any effect. Affecting those with large numbers and abundant firepower would be too difficult if we relied solely on Shang Jianyao—it would take a long time. If we did a few batches at a time, we definitely can’t have anything that is at odds with our words happen. Using Wu Meng’s

recording was still the easiest and most convenient method. We didn't need to be afraid of any accidents at all.

“When we escaped First City, we also used Wu Meng's recording. It's normal for the Hand of Order not to receive any clues for a while, but if we think that they will be kept in the dark, we will be underestimating them. The similarity between these two matters will definitely make them put two and two together. As for the former, it can't be concealed. Every bandit needs to hear it after all, and silencing all of them is beyond us.”

“You even ordered us to snipe the witnesses,” Bai Chen said slowly.

Jiang Baimian smiled. “If we don't do this, how can we show that we were discovered because we weren't careful with the details and that it wasn't done on purpose?”

That's t-too treacherous. No, too cunning... Long Yuehong muttered inwardly.

Jiang Baimian continued, “That was what I thought at the time. Since Wu Meng's recording can't be hidden from others, we can consider using it to set up a trap. If we discover that there aren't any Mind Corridor-level Awakened in Early Spring Town, we can take advantage of the chaos caused by the bandits' night raid to rescue the townsfolk and bring them to a new settlement. There's no need to consider the follow-up. However, if First City's secret experiment is important and we can't achieve our goal with our strength, we can cover it up and make it such that we appear to be hiding our identities and have no wish to expose our true motives. This way, it can form a link with the Hand of Order's pursuit and bring about changes.

“I've been saying that we have to look forward to accidents in this matter; it's the same now. First City is powerful and has many powerhouses. Even if a portion of their forces is dispatched, tempting the ambitious ones among them, there still might not be any chaos. I can only say that this possibility isn't small. This is because even without the incident in Early Spring Town, the situation in the city is very tense. It can be triggered at any moment.”

Her last few sentences were for Zeng Duo, reminding her that her confidence in this matter wasn't high. Sometimes, they had to pray for good luck, so she shouldn't carry high expectations. Just handling it with a serious attitude ensured that she wouldn't be letting anyone down.

Jiang Baimian didn't mention Pangu Biology's latest instructions or her report. She categorized the latter as accidents and luck. It was naturally best if Pangu Biology could provide help; things would be much simpler then. Even without its help, it wouldn't affect the implementation of the entire plan.

Zeng Duo fell silent for a moment before laughing self-deprecatingly. “I didn’t expect the situation to develop into this. It has risen to a very high level.”

It was originally just dealing with two military companies and a Mind Corridor-level powerhouse, but it ended up expanding to the level of the entire First City. This meant a bigger army, more advanced weapons, enough firepower to blanket the entire North Shore wastelands, and countless powerhouses.

In the eyes of a normal person, this was raising the difficulty by hundreds or thousands of times. Nobody would be stupid enough to do such a thing. But following Jiang Baimian’s train of thought, she could really pull off the rescue of Early Spring Town.

To Zeng Duo, this was unbelievable.

Jiang Baimian smiled. “It’s mainly because there’s such a situation in the first place. We’re just using it to our advantage. If First City really didn’t have such serious internal conflicts, it would be a fool’s dream for us to stir up such a huge matter. And even now, we aren’t the ones stirring up trouble. We’re just doing our best to create a suitable environment for that to happen. Heh heh, we would’ve long been captured if First City could unite—even if it’s only at a lower level.”

Upon hearing this, Long Yuehong was convinced.

Clap! Clap! Clap!

Shang Jianyao’s applause was late but never absent.

“What should we do next?” Han Wanghuo took the initiative to ask Jiang Baimian.

Jiang Baimian made a terse grunt. “We’ll split into two groups. One group will stay on the North Shore and leave some traces from time to time to make First City believe that we still have our sights on Early Spring Town, that we are plotting something... Uh, plotting something.”

She had wanted to say that they were plotting something nefarious, but she realized that the word was a derogatory term when it reached her mouth, so she cut it short.

They couldn't treat themselves as villains, could they?

"The other group will return to First City and wait for an opportunity to strike." After Jiang Baimian finished explaining the plan, she looked around and said, "Zeng Duo, you're most familiar with the situation in the North Shore wastelands—stay here. Old Han, Old Ge, help her. Yes, I'll provide you with a military exoskeleton so that you can have sufficient mobility. Remember, don't force yourself. You should mainly skirt the periphery. Once you discover that you've been targeted by First City, immediately think of a way to retreat."

"Alright."

"No problem." Zeng Duo and Han Wanghuo answered separately.

They all knew that it was relatively safer to stay in the North Shore wastelands than to return to First City. After all, they didn't have to fight head-on, nor did they have to take the risk to approach and obtain information.

This heavily polluted area was so vast that it was too easy to hide two or three people. The reason why the Nois bandits had been able to escape the powerful encirclement and suppression of First City's army over the years was definitely due to the terrain.

The reason why Jiang Baimian got Genova to follow Zeng Duo and Han Wanghuo was partly because she wanted them to feel at ease. On the other hand, Genova's appearance was too conspicuous. Even if they returned to First City, he wouldn't dare to head out usually. He would definitely be interrogated once he was discovered, so he could only play a limited role.

Jiang Baimian then said, "Before that, we have to find some materials to disguise the vehicle that will be returning to the city."

"I know which city ruins have it." Zeng Duo fully expressed the advantage of being familiar with the North Shore wastelands.

"I'll be in charge!" Shang Jianyao was excited and eager to give it a try.

The corners of Jiang Baimian's mouth twitched as she glanced at the fellow. "You can do it, but don't make it fancy. My request is for it to be ordinary and nothing special."



If Shang Jianyao really sprayed cartoon graffiti on the jeep, how would they pass the city inspection?

“Alright.” Shang Jianyao was slightly disappointed.

...

22 Booney Street, Golden Apple Zone. Inside a house with a garden, lawn, and swimming pool.

Sheriff Wall entered the study and met his father-in-law—Gaius, the newly-promoted Elder, a figure of authority in the military, and the leader of the Reformists.

The general’s black hair was neatly combed back. The tip of his nose was hooked, and his cheeks were slightly sunken. He looked very stern and exuded an aura that made others nervous. However, his speech was filled with passion and was extremely provocative.

Gaius swept his dark-blue eyes and pointed across the desk. “Have a seat.”

Wall—who was calm in the face of his superior and many nobles—first greeted him and then sat down a little reservedly.

“What’s the matter?” Gaius asked. He was already in his forties and had been battle-hardened. It was inevitable that there were traces left behind by the elements on his face.

Wall roughly told him about October Xue, Zhang Qubing’s team, and the military’s secret mission in the North Anheford area. Finally, he asked, “Whose power did they borrow?”

Gaius rapped the edge of the table and nodded slowly. “The one in Ruin 13. Someone actually dared to record his broadcast... Perhaps that team has already become his puppet, or perhaps both sides have reached some agreement.”

As a descendant of a noble, Wall had a vague understanding of the dangerous existence sealed in Wasteland Ruin 13. He frowned slightly and said, “The faction behind October Xue’s team wants to release that demon?”

“That depends on how much they know,” Gaius said calmly. He then sneered. “Does the person in the ruins think that we haven’t found a way to completely destroy him after so many years? If not for...”

At this point, Gaius stopped and said to Wall, “Someone will take care of the situation in the North Anheford area. Don’t worry.”

He picked up his teacup and said casually, “Alexander’s youngest daughter is back.”

Alexander was First City’s current Superintendent and one of the three giants.

Wall was stunned. “Galoran?”

...

Under the night sky, in an abandoned town surrounded by deformed trees in the North Shore wastelands.

The Old Task Force was waiting for Pangu Biology’s reply.