

Ad Infinitum 481

Chapter 481: Mortal Coil

Upon hearing Jiang Baimian's question, Garibaldi's body involuntarily trembled again. After a long while, he swallowed his saliva and said, "S-she's a mixed-blood. She's not very beautiful, b-but there's something very charming about her. Any expression of hers can m-make you..."

Garibaldi glanced at the two ladies in front of him and couldn't continue.

"They can generate desire in you?" Bai Chen asked rather directly.

"Yes, yes." Garibaldi lowered his head in shame. "Even if you are extremely exhausted, you can still feel it."

"The fact that you're still alive means that you have a pretty good body," Bai Chen commented coldly.

Long Yuehong imagined the scene and felt that Garibaldi probably wouldn't recover without a year or so.

Jiang Baimian rolled her eyes and looked at the ceiling. "Describe her appearance."

Garibaldi composed himself and began to recall.

According to his words, the Old Task Force obtained the ambusher's general appearance: She was less than 1.7 meters tall, and her hair was black, curly, and long. Her eyes were light brown, and her nose and lips didn't have any obvious characteristics. If not for her unique bearing and good figure, she would be the kind that blended in with the crowd if she walked on the street.

This lady's bearing wasn't always so unique. Most of the time, she was very restrained, just looking slightly more charming.

As for what her name was, Garibaldi didn't know. He only knew that Old K called her 'Hedonist.'

Garibaldi had also heard Old K talking to another 'Hedonist' outside the door. His attitude toward that person was clearly different from his attitude toward this person.

Both of them were women, but Old K's attitude for one was respectful and the other reverence. The difference was obvious.

Therefore, Garibaldi suspected that the person who ambushed the Old Task Force was a relatively special Hedonist in the Church of Paragon Desire. She might be able to advance to a higher level at any moment.

Jiang Baimian sighed with emotion when she heard that. "They actually think highly of us."

The 'us' here didn't refer to the Old Task Force, but Pangu Biology. This was because the Church of Paragon Desire wasn't targeting Jiang Baimian and company. In all the intelligence, they had already left the city. Otherwise, with the Old Task Force's previous performance, they wouldn't have just sent a 'Hedonist' that would be scared away by Zennaga. It definitely would've been a Mind Corridor-level Awakened.

Normally speaking, a large faction emphasized the secrecy, means, and channels available to the other party when it came to the enemy's intelligence network, not strength. When the Church of Paragon Desire was fishing for other intelligence personnel from Pangu Biology, sending such an outstanding one among the Hedonists indeed showed the importance they had toward them.

Jiang Baimian looked at Garibaldi and asked another question, "What exactly did you say?"

Garibaldi immediately turned ashamed. He lowered his head and blushed as he stammered, "I said whatever I needed to say... I-I didn't want to. You won't understand. In that sort of situation, in order to obtain satisfaction and in order not to endure the dreadful suffering, I cou-could even mutilate myself—do anything. S-she was like a devil from the abyss."

Shang Jianyao and Long Yuehong looked at each other and shook their heads, indicating their incapability to understand.

Jiang Baimian controlled her expression and nodded. "It's better to explain everything to the higher-ups so that they won't overlook any problems."

Garibaldi's emotions eased a little when he saw that his colleagues didn't blame him. He recounted the information he had told the Church of Paragon Desire in detail.

As he spoke, his expression suddenly turned adrift. He yawned a few times, and his tears and snot seemed to be about to flow out.

His body twisted slightly as if he was in pain.

Upon seeing this, Jiang Baimian sighed and turned to look at Shang Jianyao.

Shang Jianyao shot forward, raised his fist, and knocked Garibaldi unconscious. The Old Task Force then used the ropes prepared for wilderness survival to tie Garibaldi up tightly. Then, they covered his mouth and threw him onto the bed.

Not long after, Garibaldi woke up. He kept twisting and struggling, but nobody paid him any attention.

After he calmed down a little, Jiang Baimian said, “Bear with it. You don’t want to be crippled, right?”

Garibaldi understood that he was addicted, but he couldn’t control himself. He had the strong urge to bang his head against the wall.

Jiang Baimian turned to look at her team members. “He will have some level of resistance after bearing with it a few more times. With that, some of the company’s drugs will be effective. It won’t be so easy to commit the same mistake again in the future.”

She was clearly explaining to Shang Jianyao and the others, but she was actually giving Garibaldi hope.

Those who fell into the Church of Paragon Desire’s hands might not die, but it was sometimes worse than death.

Accompanied by Garibaldi’s painful struggling, the Old Task Force stayed in the room until 10 p.m.

An ordinary gray-robed monk came to deliver dinner—it was oatmeal with bland sausages.

“Get some rest.” Jiang Baimian glanced at the remaining two beds, looking like she didn’t need to say anything else about how they would be assigned.

At this moment, her vision blurred as she saw a deep corridor. She saw gray-robed monks hurriedly pressing their palms together.

This scene overlapped with the scene in the room, but it was also clearly separated.

“Did you see that?” Jiang Baimian asked in a deep voice.

“There are many ‘towers,’” Shang Jianyao replied.

At the same time, Jiang Baimian also noticed that the walls around the room seemed to turn illusory. They reflected stupas, iron towers, and steel refinery ‘towers’...

The changes continued.

Long Yuehong felt like he had obtained the vision of many people and saw a different scene: There were dark corridors, simple rooms, futons, gathered monks, statues of Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, and Wisdom Kings on the outer wall of Sikhara temple, and the night view of the streets around the temple...

They overlapped one another, causing Bai Chen, Shang Jianyao, and the others to feel an uncontrollable sense of dizziness.

“This is...” Jiang Baimian recalled the Buddhist scriptures and Old World entertainment information she had studied and frowned slightly. “Heaven’s Eye? Someone gave Heaven’s Eye to see the scene that all the monks in the temple are seeing?”

Clap! Clap! Clap!

Shang Jianyao didn’t forget to clap at this moment. He looked excited.

After a short wait, the four Old Task Force members ‘saw’ the gray-robed monks gather in the hall where the Buddha statue was sitting.

They were mainly of Red River ethnicity. Some were bald, some had inch-long hair, and their eyes were of various colors.

Among them was Zennaga.

Jiang Baimian saw a monk sitting in front of the Buddha statue through the Zen Master's eyes and also saw the Zen Master through the other people's eyes.

The monk sitting in front of the Buddha was very old. The muscles on his cheeks drooped, and his eyebrows were completely white. He swept his green eyes and said with a smile, "I view consciousness like a crystal, just like my take on Tathāgata. I've already entered the paradise of Buddha Subhuti. I'll allow all of you to gain the sight to behold the New World."

The old monk stood up as he spoke, and the scene in front of Jiang Baimian and the others changed again.

At the very center was the dark, wide, and deep hall. Beyond the hall were many tall buildings. The periphery seemed to be covered in glazed glass, and their shapes were like towers.

Between these buildings, bridges crossed in midair, and there was an endless stream of vehicles. The people inside were all Buddhist worshipers.

At this moment, pieces of paper of various colors fell from the sky, and balls of dreamy light bloomed.

Among them was a crystal-like sun.

Beneath the sun was a tall tower that penetrated deep into the clouds.

In the wide and dark hall, the monks chanted the name of Buddha in unison. "Namo Annutara-Samyak-Subhuti..."

Amidst such a scene, the old monk had already reached the top floor of Sikhara temple at some point in time.

He stood at the edge and used his Heavenly Eye to look at the monks. He then smiled and said, “I shall rid myself of my mortal coils, see through everything, and enter the New World.”

As soon as he finished speaking, the old monk suddenly jumped. His figure plummeted rapidly and hit the ground with a bang.

In Jiang Baimian and the others’ rapidly fading visions, they saw the old monk lying at the bottom of the platform. His head was cracked, and red and milky white gushed out.

“...” At this moment, all the Old Task Force members—including Shang Jianyao—were stunned.

The first part of what they had seen could barely be considered magical, dreamy, solemn, and sacred. Now, it felt like a murder case or a ghost story.

Is this what it means to rid one’s mortal coils? Why is it so heretical and terrifying? Long Yuehong inexplicably suspected that the monks in the temple would rip off their human skins at any moment to reveal their green faces and white fangs hidden beneath.

After a few seconds, everything disappeared. Shang Jianyao sighed and said, “Why didn’t he choose to hang himself?”

Chapter 482: Borrowing Scriptures

Nobody could answer Shang Jianyao’s question. Only Long Yuehong seriously thought about why the old monk had chosen to jump off a building rather than hang himself in order to rid his mortal coils.

Perhaps hanging himself would make him appear weak? He repeatedly compared the two and could only come up with this explanation.

At this moment, the scene in front of the Old Task Force members returned to normal. All that was left was simple furniture and the slightly mottled walls around them.

Jiang Baimian retracted her gaze and laughed self-deprecatingly. “I previously thought that the Crystal Consciousness Church was different from the Monks Conclave, having truly restored the Old World’s Buddhist teachings. From the looks of it, it’s because Master Zennaga is relatively special and compassionate.”

“Right... The scene just now reminded me of the cults in the Old World’s entertainment. Think about it—the night with dim starlight, a dark, wide, and deep hall, the gray-robed monks from everywhere, the different overlapping visions, the Buddha statue that watched it all quietly, a Zen master who claims to have achieved enlightenment but suddenly jumps down from the top of the temple... Are they not worshiping an evil god?”

“Evil Buddha.” Shang Jianyao corrected Jiang Baimian’s words.

Long Yuehong nodded and shared his thoughts frankly, “Indeed. I feel terrified when I think about what just happened.”

Bai Chen recalled and said, “Even if the Crystal Consciousness Church is evil, it can’t be too evil. It’s definitely better than the Monks Conclave. I never hear about them doing anything excessive during my time in First City. The heretics should be referring to internal members.”

It was obvious that Bai Chen hated Jingfa to the core. Even her evaluation of the Monks Conclave was extremely low.

Jiang Baimian thought for a moment and exhaled. “Let’s get some sleep. If we can’t find an opportunity to escape tomorrow and have nothing to do, I’ll borrow the Crystal Consciousness Church’s tomes and scriptures from the monks who deliver the food. I’ll see if their philosophy is different from the Monks Conclave, as well as compare them to the Buddhist scriptures left behind from the Old World.”

She made it clear that she was looking for an opportunity to escape. She wasn’t afraid that Zennaga would ‘hear’ her.

In any case, nobody would believe the Old Task Force’s claim that they had already accepted their fate and were willing to stay for ten days.

Shang Jianyao immediately occupied a bed.

Jiang Baimian then glanced at Bai Chen.

“Get some sleep first. I’ll keep watch with Little Red.” She pointed at another empty bed.

Even if they were being watched and even if they were within the Crystal Consciousness Church's Sikhara Temple, they didn't dare to show the slightest bit of carelessness. They still maintained the habit of taking turns for night duty.

Zennaga was compassionate and a good person, but it didn't mean that other monks were the same. There was a high chance that many of them had something wrong with their heads. Furthermore, the strange and foul incident that had just happened made every Old Task Force member wary.

As for why they were reorganized, it was because Jiang Baimian wanted to ensure that each team on night duty had the ability to sense a human's approach.

"Alright." Bai Chen didn't question her.

At this moment, Garibaldi—who was struggling in pain—reached his physical limit and fell asleep again.

...

The night passed uneventfully.

Not long after the sun rose, Han Wanghuo, Zeng Duo, and Genava drove away from the wilderness nomad settlement with an old radio transceiver they had traded for. They returned to the black wasteland from the North Shore Mountains.

"There's a small Hunter team over there." Han Wanghuo—who was driving—looked into the distance and asked, "Should we go over to ask for directions and leave some traces?"

"Yes," Genava—who was in the middle of the back row—replied.

Zeng Duo, on the other hand, was stunned because she didn't see any small Hunter team.

After driving for a few more seconds, she realized that there was a multi-purpose car in the distance.

His vision is that good? Zeng Duo turned her head to look at Han Wanghuo in surprise. She wasn't surprised that the smart bot, Geneva, could resolve objects from that distance. But as an ordinary human, could Han Wanghuo actually accomplish such a feat?

Thinking of Han Wanghuo's yellowish eyes, Zeng Duo thought to herself, He has mutations too?

Soon, Zeng Duo recovered and replied to Han Wanghuo's suggestion. "Sure."

Han Wanghuo immediately drove the car behind a small mound. As he disguised himself, he said to Geneva, "Stay here and pretend like you're here to back us up. We can't let others know that we only have three people left. We have to let them think that there are more people hiding over here."

Geneva was rather satisfied with Han Wanghuo's easy admittance that he was a 'person.' "No problem."

After he pushed open the door and got out of the car, he found a spot to 'hide.'

Han Wanghuo drove the black SUV and approached the white multi-purpose vehicle with Zeng Duo.

When there was still a long distance between the two parties, Han Wanghuo took the initiative to stop the car. He leaned out, waved his hand, and shouted, "I have something to ask!"

If he didn't greet them in advance and directly went over, he would easily be treated as a bandit or a Ruin Hunter that was a part-time bandit.

The white multi-purpose vehicle also stopped. A man wearing an Old World cowboy hat walked out from the passenger seat.

He wore a white shirt and an unzipped brown vest. He had a revolver at his waist and a sharp dagger spinning in his hand.

The man with rough skin and traces of the elements looked at Han Wanghuo for a few seconds before replying loudly, "Come over and talk. It's too tiring to shout like this."

One of his hands was already on the revolver at his waist, indicating that he wasn't unprepared.

Han Wanghuo observed the man and didn't immediately start the car.

At that moment, Zeng Duo frowned slightly and said, "He should've just entered the wasteland a few days ago."

This was the judgment of a Ruin Hunter who had been in the wasteland all year round.

The water, food, and environment here were all in terrible condition. As long as humans entered—no matter how well prepared they were—they would become 'dirty' and tired after five to six days. They wouldn't be as energetic and clean as the other party.

Han Wanghuo agreed with Zeng Duo's judgment and nodded slightly. "First City is relatively nearby. Since they came from First City, they must've seen our bounty. With our current 'disguise,' it's impossible for them not to recognize us."

At this point, Han Wanghuo paused. "Since they recognized us and still want us to go over, it means that they have a certain confidence in dealing with us. Yes, before our 'reinforcements' arrive."

"Indeed." Zeng Duo looked at the man in the cowboy hat again and felt that his attitude was indeed suspicious.

Han Wanghuo no longer hesitated. As he stepped on the accelerator, he turned the steering wheel and made the black SUV turn toward the small mound where Geneva was hiding.

When the man in the cowboy hat saw this, he sighed in disappointment. He then took out a walkie-talkie and said in a deep voice, "Target spotted."

...

The sixth floor of Sikhara temple.

Jiang Baimian looked at the young monk who had delivered plenty of oat bread and water as she asked with a smile, “Zen Master, we are very interested in your Church after what happened last night. Can we borrow a few scriptures to read?”

The young monk hurriedly lowered his head and said a Buddhist proclamation. “This is our Church’s original intention as well.”

Jiang Baimian was about to thank him when Shang Jianyao suddenly turned around and asked, “Why are there so many monks out today?”

“The Chief has passed on and entered Paradise, which is what ordinary people like you call the New World. Therefore, we have to send people to the Five Great Holy Lands to hold the corresponding ceremony,” the young monk answered frankly.

“Five Great Holy Lands?” This was the first time Jiang Baimian had heard of this practice. “Which five?”

The young monk shook his head in embarrassment. “The Buddha said, ‘It cannot be said, it cannot be said.’ This Penniless Monk can’t lie but can choose not to answer.”

“Why can’t you tell?” Jiang Baimian asked curiously.

The young monk explained simply, “The Five Great Holy Lands are related to Buddha Subhuti and Loke?vara-Tathāgata. It’s either the place where ‘They’ passed on, the place where ‘They’ descended, or the place where ‘They’ preached in the ancient times of the Old World. To prevent outsiders from destroying the Holy Lands, we keep the corresponding situation a secret.”

At this point, the young monk smiled honestly. “Actually, I don’t know which are the Five Great Holy Lands either. I only have a general idea. In our Church, only monks who have activated their sixth sense can come into contact with matters pertaining to the Holy Lands.”

“Alright.” Jiang Baimian exhaled regretfully.

She didn’t get Shang Jianyao to ‘make friends.’ After all, how could they act so wantonly when they were under another’s roof?

What would happen if it provoked Zennaga into turning nasty?

Not long after Jiang Baimian and the others finished breakfast, the young monk from before delivered a few Crystal Consciousness Church scriptures.

As the four Old Task Force members flipped through each book, Long Yuehong suddenly exclaimed, "There's a piece of paper inside."

Jiang Baimian, Shang Jianyao, and Bai Chen cast their gazes over in unison.

Long Yuehong curiously took out the piece of paper and smiled as he unfolded it. "It's quite new."

As soon as he finished speaking, his expression suddenly froze.

"What's wrong?" Jiang Baimian and Bai Chen got up and walked toward Long Yuehong.

Shang Jianyao even jumped over.

Long Yuehong snapped to his senses and said in confusion, "On it is the information regarding the Five Great Holy Lands..."

This... Jiang Baimian and the others squeezed to Long Yuehong's side and cast their gazes at the piece of paper.

The paper was written in the Red River's cursive language. The first line read: "Five Great Holy Lands..."

The second line had a specific name: "1. Iron Mountain City's Second Food Company."

"..." Long Yuehong was momentarily at a loss for words. This seems wrong? Is this the so-called Holy Land? Your Holy Land is the Second Food Company?

Jiang Baimian also had similar thoughts. Her gaze quickly moved down as she looked at the third line: "2. Long River City's United Steel Plant."

Long River City's United Steel Plant? Jiang Baimian suddenly turned her head and looked at Shang Jianyao and Bai Chen.

Wasn't this the Old World's original name for the steelworks factory ruins we encountered in the Blackmarsh Wilderness? It wasn't a coincidence that Jingfa appeared there?

Chapter 483: Misery Loves Company

The Old Task Force originally thought that encountering the mechanical monk, Jingfa, was a matter of coincidence and bad luck—Jingfa had happened to pass by the Blackmarsh Wilderness's steelworks factory ruins and entered to search for the fated. In the end, he encountered Shang Jianyao and Long Yuehong and heard a woman's voice through their walkie-talkies, thus going crazy.

Excluding the reason why Jingfa—who was mainly active in the Monk Wastelands—suddenly came to the Blackmarsh Wilderness, the rest didn't seem to be problematic. The development adhered to basic logic, so it was just a case of the Old Task Force being unlucky.

Jiang Baimian and the others didn't find anything strange about it after the incident. Humans always encountered all kinds of people and all kinds of unlucky matters. Even if there wasn't Jingfa, there might be other powerhouses.

They now suddenly realized that some of the coincidences in this matter might not be coincidences.

Jingfa came to the Blackmarsh Wilderness and entered the steelworks factory ruins, not because he left the 'Pure Lands' for no reason. It was actually one of the Five Great Holy Lands of the Crystal Consciousness Church!

As for the Monks Conclave and the Crystal Consciousness Church, they worshiped the January Kalendaria, Subhuti. It was completely reasonable for them to have similar holy lands!

After more than ten seconds, Shang Jianyao came to a realization. "So Zen Master Jingfa went to the steelworks factory ruins to pay respects to Buddha. His devotion to those blast furnaces was real."

Upon hearing Shang Jianyao's words, Long Yuehong immediately recalled the mechanical monk, Jingfa, bowing to the blast furnace. A line that often appeared in the Old World's entertainment appeared in his mind: "Excellent, excellent."

“So that’s how it is…” Jiang Baimian nodded in relief. “But how can this be a holy land? What relationship can this Buddha have with the steelworks factory? Could ‘He’ have passed away thanks to the blast furnace, molten steel, or smog?”

“‘His’ immaculate body might’ve been forged in that steel factory.” Shang Jianyao let his imagination run wild.

Bai Chen tried her best not to imagine the scene Shang Jianyao described and said with uncertainty, “What’s related to Kalendaria Subhuti might not be the steelworks factory but something else that’s located there…”

Before she could finish speaking, she paused as if she had thought of something.

Following that, she, Jiang Baimian, Shang Jianyao, and Long Yuehong said in unison, “Medical records!”

This wasn’t referring to the medical record itself but the volunteer described in it—who had become a vegetable due to a car accident and was sent to a place in the north to receive novel treatment.

This was similar to Jiang Xiaoyue’s experience in Room 503 of the Mind Corridor. Not only did the latter have a room that could be opened in the Mind Corridor, but she had also infected a Clam Dragon Church Dream Protector that had accidentally entered her room with the Heartless disease.

“Combined with some rumors related to the Old World’s destruction, the experiment involving Jiang Xiaoyue and the vegetative man from the steelworks factory might’ve breached the forbidden zone of the gods. This angered the Kalendarium and caused the Heartless disease to descend, depriving humans of their intelligence?” Jiang Baimian recalled the various apocalyptic theories she had come into contact with. She picked out some theories that were related to the current discovery and used them to form a logical guess.

Bai Chen made a further assumption. “When Kalendaria Subhuti unleashed ‘His’ anger, ‘He’ used that vegetable, and it happened to happen in the steelworks factory ruins?”

“There’s a certain possibility, but there’s no way for us to verify it now.” Jiang Baimian nodded.

To this day, the reason for the Old World's destruction was still a guess.

At this moment, Shang Jianyao raised his hand and stroked his chin. "Isn't it inappropriate for us to discuss this in a temple?"

"..." Long Yuehong was first stunned before he felt a sense of fear.

Ignoring the fact that the Old Task Force had already said those words, Zennaga could hear them clearly with his Mind Reading even if they were only letting it run through their minds.

Would this be blasphemous toward monks who cultivate day and night and piously worship Buddha? Long Yuehong was especially afraid that he would experience the pain of being frozen again the very next second.

Fortunately, his worries were unfounded.

Jiang Baimian made a terse grunt. "Indeed. In the Crystal Consciousness Church temple, we should hold back on saying certain words to prevent offending them and causing unnecessary trouble. In any case, this is just empty speculation. There's no need to discuss it further."

Long Yuehong and Bai Chen agreed with this statement.

The four Old Task Force members cast their gazes at the piece of paper again and read the subsequent content.

"3. Icefield's Tai City's No. 1 Senior High School.

"4. Under the old pagoda tree in Linhe Village, Dajiang City.

"5. Holm Fertility Center in Fakh region."

Although they were shocked by the intelligence regarding the steelworks factory ruins, Jiang Baimian and the others couldn't help but question when they saw the subsequent holy lands.

“What kind of holy lands are these?”

“Won’t the Crystal Consciousness Church monks suspect anything when they see these names?”

“This absurd, rustic, and comical feeling is very unconvincing. Could it be that someone is deliberately playing a prank?”

“Also, did Subhuti descend into this world through the Fertility Center? Is ‘He’ so law-abiding, or was ‘He’ preaching there?”

“Fakh is the region where Wasteland Ruin 13 is located?”

After a while, Jiang Baimian calmed down and muttered to herself, “This shouldn’t be anyone’s prank. Even if a normal person was joking, they wouldn’t think of using the United Steel Plant as a holy land...”

And this was actually related to some secrets.

Long Yuehong took the opportunity to ask a question he wanted to ask previously. “Who put this piece of paper in the scriptures? We just asked about the Five Great Holy Lands before breakfast and were told that it was a secret. Isn’t it too much of a coincidence to get the answer now?”

“This is called willing it to happen!” Shang Jianyao clenched his right fist and punched his left palm.

Jiang Baimian rolled her eyes at him and looked at the mottled wall. “Who left this behind? Was it specially left for us?”

Nobody answered her.

“From the looks of it, the Zen Master isn’t listening to our thoughts.” Shang Jianyao smiled.

While Long Yuehong heaved a sigh of relief, he also felt rather regretful. With Zennaga’s honesty, he might really tell them the answer.

Jiang Baimian thought for a moment, took the piece of paper, and carefully wrote a few words without any clear direction. Then, she smiled and said, "I'll ask the monk who delivered the food later to see if he recognizes this handwriting."

In the following period of time, the Old Task Force would occasionally read scriptures or control Garibaldi when his addiction flared up. Soon, lunch arrived.

Jiang Baimian took out the pieces of paper and asked the young monk, "We found these things in the scriptures. Do you know who wrote them? The handwriting is quite nice."

The young monk took it and said indifferently, "It was written by the Chief. He always likes to tuck drafts into scripture."

"Chief?" Jiang Baimian's pupils dilated slightly.

"Yes." The young monk nodded. "The one who passed on last night."

Jiang Baimian, Shang Jianyao, and the others immediately recalled the bloody and evil scene: An old monk jumped down from the top of the temple and fell to the ground, his brain and blood gushing out.

And before that, he had stuffed a piece of paper with the Five Great Holy Lands' names into a particular piece of scripture.

...

In the North Shore Wastelands, after Han Wanghuo rendezvoused with Genava, he looked at the rearview mirror and said in a deep voice, "There might be something wrong with that Ruin Hunter team. Where's the nearest city or town ruin?"

Zeng Duo immediately replied.

Han Wanghuo didn't delay. He floored the accelerator and drove straight to his destination.

In the blink of an eye, they arrived at the ruins of a small city. Han Wanghuo then drove the car into a relatively intact underground parking lot and left it near the entrance.

Zeng Duo was about to say, “Isn’t this reaction a little overboard?” when she suddenly heard the sound of a drone flying outside.

The sound circled the city ruins a few times before gradually fading away.

“How harrowing...” Zeng Duo followed Geneva—who was checking the surroundings—out of the car and sighed with emotion. “I’ve never been chased by a large faction before.”

She had no experience in this area.

In the Ashlands, there were actually quite a number of people who had similar experiences and were still alive. After all, there were no man’s lands everywhere. Once they left their strongholds, the various major factions’ control over the wilderness wasn’t that strong.

As soon as Zeng Duo finished speaking, she suddenly frowned. Her face turned pale, and her sickness became more obvious.

Han Wanghuo—who had already alighted—wanted to reach out to help her up when his heart stopped. He staggered and almost fell backward.

He finally took out a small bottle, poured a pill from it, and stuffed it into his mouth. Han Wanghuo then bent his back and supported his knees with his hands. He panted heavily and slowly calmed his heart palpitations.

He saw Zeng Duo doing the same thing. He saw himself in her eyes, and his expression wasn’t good either.

As they silently stared at each other, Zeng Duo laughed at herself.

The two of them maintained their current posture and continued to pant.

Nobody spoke—it was quiet.

“Actually, you should be able to last a little longer with a pacemaker.” Geneva—who had returned from patrolling the surroundings—broke the silence.

Chapter 484: The Funeral Rites

Han Wanghuo slowly straightened his body and turned to look at Geneva. “It’s a solution, but we might not be able to find the proper equipment and doctors. If I really need it to hold out a little while longer, I can consider it.”

As he spoke, Han Wanghuo subconsciously glanced at Zeng Duo. I can rely on the pacemaker to barely survive, but what about her?

...

Jiang Baimian looked around and frowned slightly. “The Crystal Consciousness Church’s Chief just committed suicide last night. No, he rid himself of his mortal coils and passed on. Today, we found a draft he left behind in a scripture book. The content on it happens to be the secret we wanted to know. He even considerately wrote the title ‘Five Great Holy Lands’...”

She spoke in Ashlandic.

When communicating in this room, the Old Task Force mostly used Ashlandic. As for whether Mind Reading was ‘obstructed’ by language, they had no idea.

Shang Jianyao immediately replied, “Two answers: One, it’s 100% since it happened.

“Two, there’s a 0.03% chance that such a coincidence will happen.” After saying that, he quickly added, “A guess.”

Regardless of whether Shang Jianyao was spouting nonsense, in Bai Chen and Long Yuehong’s hearts, the probability of such a coincidence happening was indeed so low that it was almost negligible.

“Could it be that the Chief deliberately left us this information?” Bai Chen guessed after some deliberation.

“Why?” Long Yuehong subconsciously asked.

Jiang Baimian was momentarily unable to answer.

Shang Jianyao nodded seriously. “Because our goal is to save all of humanity, and the Chief’s dream is to deliver all living beings from suffering. Since everyone is like-minded, it’s normal to help each other.”

“How do you know that the Chief’s dream is to deliver all living beings from suffering?” Long Yuehong asked in exasperation and amusement.

“A guess,” Shang Jianyao replied without stuttering.

Jiang Baimian thought for a moment. “I might have to ask Master Zennaga about this later.”

She didn’t explain how she would do so. After waiting for a while and seeing that Zennaga didn’t ‘reply,’ she smiled and said, “Regardless of whether the Five Great Holy Lands written on the piece of paper are fake or not, they hold considerable interest. Look...”

Upon hearing this familiar catchphrase, Long Yuehong subconsciously shrank his body and had the urge to cover his ears. Fortunately, he quickly came to a realization and quietly listened to his team leader’s words.

“We’ve never been to Iron Mountain City’s Second Food Company, Icefield’s Tai City’s No. 1 Senior High School, and the old pagoda tree in Linhe Village, Dajiang City. We don’t know much about them. We also don’t even know where the last two places are. Let’s not discuss them for now.

“Long River City’s United Steel Plant should be the steel factory ruins in the Blackmarsh Wilderness. Therefore, the mechanical monk—Jingfa—specially went to pay his respects to Buddha. And the Holm Fertility Center in the Fakh region is clearly related to Wasteland Ruin 13. In other words, these two holy lands are more or less strange and have many secrets.”

Long Yuehong nodded. “But we didn’t find anything in the steelworks factory ruins other than that medical record. Perhaps the Ruin Hunters who explored that place previously took it away?”

The Blackmarsh Wilderness's steelworks factory ruins came under the kind of ruins that had been 'mined.' There were only things like blast furnaces that couldn't be moved and clearly worthless remains.

"Could it be that medical record?" Bai Chen deliberated and guessed.

As Jiang Baimian nodded slightly, she turned to look at Shang Jianyao. "What do you have in mind?"

Shang Jianyao raised his hand and stroked his chin. "The monk previously said that the Five Great Holy Lands are where the Kalendarium—Subhuti and Master Zhuang—descended, passed on, or preached. This means that the Kalendarium were once active over the land? At least, that's what they believe."

Jiang Baimian made a terse grunt. "So the biggest secret hidden in the Five Great Holy Lands is actually someone's whereabouts? It will be interesting if we discover that anyone in the Old World has been to three or two of the Five Great Holy Lands..."

After a brief silence, Long Yuehong suddenly had an idea. "Could the secret laboratory in Wasteland Ruin 13 be the former Holm Fertility Center in the Fakh region?"

"We can't rule out that possibility." Jiang Baimian deliberated and said, "But I think that although there's a high chance that the two are related, they aren't completely the same. The Crystal Consciousness Church has always gone to the Five Great Holy Lands to pay respects to Buddha. It's impossible for them to just ignore the one at their doorstep, right? They probably don't have the pass to enter the secret laboratory in Wasteland Ruin 13."

At this point, Jiang Baimian chuckled. "After encountering Jingfa, I specially read some of the Old World's Buddhist scriptures. Combined with this matter, I discovered a very interesting point. Do you still remember the passcode to the secret laboratory in Wasteland Ruin 13?"

She no longer cared if Zennaga was using his Mind Reading to monitor them.

"Messiah," Long Yuehong replied.

Jiang Baimian nodded slightly. "In the Buddhist scriptures, there is a future Buddha named Maitreya, and Maitreya and Messiah originate from the same word stem. In other words, they

developed from the same word in a language from the Old World's ancient times. In addition, in the teachings of the Crystal Consciousness Church and the Monks Conclave, all the Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, and Wisdom Kings other than Subhuti and Lokeshvara-Tathāgata are the embodiments of these two Kalendarium, including Maitreya.”

This formed a preliminary connection between one of the Five Great Holy Lands—the Holm Fertility Center in the Fakh region—and the secret laboratory of Wasteland Ruin 13.

Of course, there was a high possibility that this was a coincidence.

As the Old Task Force discussed these matters, Garibaldi had already recovered from another bout of his cold turkey. He could understand every word, but he didn't know what they meant when they were strung into a sentence.

Jiang Baimian and the others knew when to stop and didn't continue the corresponding topic. However, this was mainly because they had too little information.

At four in the afternoon, the monk who delivered the food knocked on the Old Task Force's door in advance.

“Where's the food?” Shang Jianyao—who was in charge of opening the door—looked down at the young monk's hands.

The young monk pressed his palms together and said a Buddhist proclamation, “Patrons, are you willing to participate in the Chief's funeral?”

Cremation ritual? Long Yuehong automatically translated it in his mind.

Thinking of the piece of paper in the sutra, Jiang Baimian nodded. “That happens to be in line with our wishes.”

The Old Task Force quartet then left Garibaldi in the room and followed the young monk all the way down to the bottom of Sikhara Temple before arriving at an indoor square at the back.

There stood an iron-black and strange 'tower.'

At this moment, many monks had already gathered in the square. They sat cross-legged, either chatting softly or cultivating with their eyes closed.

Jiang Baimian, Shang Jianyao, and the others walked forward for a distance before they finally saw Zennaga.

Zennaga—who was so thin that he was almost all bones—stood there and stared intently at the pagoda.

“Zen Master,” Shang Jianyao greeted him politely.

Zennaga turned around and nodded slightly.

Jiang Baimian suddenly recalled something and hurriedly said, “Zen Master, I need your help with something.”

After saying that, she moved her eyes from side to side, signaling to him that it wasn’t convenient to talk here.

Zennaga held one hand vertically in front of him and pointed to his chest with the other, indicating that she only needed to ‘think.’

Yes, Zen Master, I have two friends who are terminally ill and need treatment urgently. That’s the reason for our return to First City. We have their blood samples and want to send them to a trusted medical organization or corresponding laboratory for examination. We hope to determine their condition completely and find more suitable medicine... Jiang Baimian quickly organized her thoughts.

What she meant was that the Old Task Force couldn’t do anything regarding the matter as a result of being watched over in Sikhara Temple.

Lives were at stake!

Zennaga chanted a Buddhist mantra. “Leave this matter to This Penniless Monk.”

“Thank you, Zen Master.” Jiang Baimian heaved a sigh of relief and found a place to sit cross-legged with Shang Jianyao and the others.

It was much more reliable to find medical institutions through the Crystal Consciousness Church than to do it on their own or use the company’s intelligence network.

As the sun set in the west, four monks carried out the old monk’s corpse.

A mortician had processed his head. It no longer looked ghastly and instead appeared dignified, and the surface of his body was coated with a faint golden substance.

The four monks placed the Chief’s corpse in front of the iron-black tower and scattered to the sides before chanting Buddhist proclamations.

Looking at the corpse sitting cross-legged, the monks on the square chanted Buddhist scriptures with hushed voices. “Paradise is serene and solemn. There is no suffering, no difficulties, no evil, no frustration, and no seasons, day or night, winter or summer, rain or drought...”

Long Yuehong instinctively prepared to lower his head to show his respect when he heard this chant that sounded similar yet different from the Old World’s Buddhist scriptures. During this process, his gaze swept past the Chief’s corpse and face.

He realized that there was an indescribable, irremovable pain on that golden and solemn face.

The moment he jumped off the building and landed on the ground, the physical pain overwhelmed his crystal consciousness? Just as this thought flashed through Long Yuehong’s mind, he told himself in horror that he couldn’t let his imagination run wild.

There were countless monks in the square who could Mind Read!

After a simple ritual, the four monks beside the iron-black tower stepped forward again, opened the heavy ‘tower door,’ and carried the Chief’s corpse inside.

It was only at this moment that Jiang Baimian recognized that this wasn't a pagoda but a cremation furnace!

Seeing the monks' respectful attitude toward Buddha, she felt that the cremation furnace was also a tower. It was no different from the iron-forging and steel-forging towers. They could also enjoy the treatment of being a stupa.

Bang!

The door of the cremation furnace was tightly shut, and the Chief completely disappeared from this world.

After the funeral ended, Jiang Baimian found Zennaga again and asked thoughtfully, "Was the Chief also good at Prophecy?"

Zennaga held one hand in front of him and spun the prayer beads with the other. He fell silent for a few seconds before saying, "Yes."

Chapter 485: Buddha's Nirmanakaya

In a room on the sixth floor of Sikhara Temple—the Old Task Force's prison.

"Could it be that the Chief prophesied something and deliberately left us this piece of paper before entering the New World?" Long Yuehong originally wanted to look around to confirm the situation before discussing this problem, but after some thought, he felt that it was meaningless. Anything could be heard in the Crystal Consciousness Church's base. No matter how he guarded against it, they would be heard.

Jiang Baimian thought for a moment and smiled self-deprecatingly. "What makes us deserving of that?"

In terms of strength, the Old Task Force could barely be considered average in First City's muddy waters. In terms of closeness, not to mention the monks in the temple, the Old Task Force would never stand a chance with the relationship between the Crystal Consciousness Church and First City's officials.

They couldn't possibly say that it was because they were backed by Pangu Biology, the 'villain' faction, right?

Pangu Biology had plenty of intelligence personnel in First City and teams that carried out other missions!

Shang Jianyao thought for a moment and said seriously, “Perhaps he foresaw that we would save all of humanity and is willing to provide some help before entering the New World.”

“...” Long Yuehong didn’t mock Shang Jianyao for his self-aggrandizing thoughts. After all, these monks who were good at Prophecy were all strange. It wasn’t surprising for them to do such an action for any reason.

Zennaga was a living example!

“Are we really that important?” Jiang Baimian replied to Shang Jianyao in a joking tone.

Bai Chen raised another question. “If the Chief really left that piece of paper behind, why didn’t he write down the relevant information more clearly? Just knowing the locations of the Five Great Holy Lands will allow us to make more guesses at most, but it won’t be of much use.”

Shang Jianyao walked toward the shadows in the corner of the room, making his face half-hidden in the darkness. He then said gloomily, “Maybe something bad will happen if he wrote it clearly...”

Although Long Yuehong knew that this fellow was doing this on purpose, he couldn’t help but shiver. The bloody scene of the Crystal Consciousness Church’s Chief jumping down from the top of the temple and falling to the ground with his brains splattering surfaced in his mind again.

Jiang Baimian glanced at Shang Jianyao and raised another possibility. “It’s also possible that the Chief doesn’t know what secrets the Five Great Holy Lands are hiding. He only prophesied that this was very important, so he deliberately left it to the nearest outsider.”

Team Leader’s words are quite in line with the style of these charlatans... Long Yuehong used words learned from Old World entertainment to describe the monks who were good at Prophecy.

Jiang Baimian swept her gaze and saw that Garibaldi had already calmed down. He was lying there and listening to their conversation dazedly.

Her heart stirred as she gestured for Long Yuehong to help Garibaldi up. He leaned him against the headboard and took out the cloth that was stuffed into his mouth.

“What do you know about the Crystal Consciousness Church?” Jiang Baimian asked Pangu Biology’s First City intelligence agent.

Garibaldi looked around. “So we’re in Sikhara Temple... No wonder there are so many monks.”

He composed himself and recalled. “I’m mainly in charge of intelligence regarding the nobles. I don’t know much about the religious factions. According to what I know, the Crystal Consciousness Church appeared not long after First City was established. It used this place as its base to preach to the surrounding settlements.”

“This is the headquarters of the Crystal Consciousness Church?” Long Yuehong was shocked. He originally thought that Sikhara Temple was a relatively important branch of the Crystal Consciousness Church, but he didn’t expect it to be the headquarters!

This was no different from being captured by the mechanical monks and brought back to their so-called ‘Pure Lands!’

Garibaldi nodded. “It’s likely the case. Although the Crystal Consciousness Church preaches and recruits believers, they aren’t that proactive. They place more emphasis on self-cultivation. When recruiting monks, the method they use is very similar to the Old World’s master-disciple system. Therefore, the Crystal Consciousness Church isn’t that famous in First City. Many people don’t know about it.”

“Right, if they had often handed out food, First City’s bottom-level citizens and foreign wanderers would’ve long treated this place as a holy land.” Shang Jianyao believed that Garibaldi was right.

“The Crystal Consciousness Church monks are different from the Monks Conclave’s mechanical monks. They still need to eat and drink. Their food might only barely be enough for themselves, so they can only provide alms to outsiders occasionally.” Jiang Baimian laughed.

Furthermore, the Crystal Consciousness Church’s relationship with First City might not be as harmonious if they actively recruited believers and were passionate about preaching.

Jiang Baimian looked at Garibaldi and deliberated for a few seconds. “Do you know which faction in First City is close to the Crystal Consciousness Church?”

Garibaldi said with uncertainty, “They seem more interested in maintaining order than in enacting changes. In any case, as long as the environment allows them to survive, they will focus on their own cultivation so as to enter the New World.”

From the looks of it, they’re more inclined toward the Conservatives... Long Yuehong interpreted what Garibaldi was trying to say.

Just as this thought flashed through his mind, Garibaldi added, “The ‘Crystal Consciousness Church’ isn’t entirely united. Their Enlightened have their own ideals and ideas. Oh, their upper echelons are called Enlightened.”

“Is that so...” Jiang Baimian nodded slightly. “What else do you know about their hierarchy? By the way, how should I address you? I can’t keep calling you Garibaldi, right?”

“Just call me Giuseppe,” Garibaldi said casually.

That didn’t seem to be his real name either.

He paused for a moment and continued to talk about the Crystal Consciousness Church he knew. “I really don’t know much. There are specialists in the company that are in charge of this. Yes, they call believers People of Five Senses. Above them are Hexion, Heptadite, and Enlightened...”

After Giuseppe gave them all the relevant information, the summer night finally fell.

It was time for the Old Task Force and company to send and receive telegrams. They took out the radio transceiver and sat on the edge of their beds, patiently waiting for Pangu Biology’s reply.

After a few minutes, the radio transceiver responded—there was quite a lot of content this time.

Jiang Baimian took a while to translate it. She held the piece of paper with the telegram’s contents and looked at Garibaldi. “The company already knows about your situation and doesn’t think you’ve done anything wrong. Under such circumstances, nobody can withstand it apart from a few people with unique traits.

“You have two choices. The first is to stay in a city-state or other faction under First City and continue serving the company. Someone will bring you the corresponding treatment medicine. The second is to return to the company and get transferred internally.”

Having been exposed in First City, Garibaldi couldn't stay.

Giuseppe was dazed for a moment. “Return to the company...”

Upon seeing and hearing this, Jiang Baimian asked emotionally, “Have you never been to the company?”

“Yes, my father is an employee of the company. He sacrificed himself in First City, and I took over as the company's intelligence agent.” Giuseppe slowly exhaled.

Most of the company's outfield employees are married... Long Yuehong muttered inwardly but didn't say it out loud.

Jiang Baimian's eyes flickered as she asked, “How many years had your father been in First City?”

“Almost 20 years.” Giuseppe recalled and said, “He went back to the company every few years to provide a report. I haven't gotten my chance.”

Doesn't the company's outfield employees have a cycle of three to five years? Unless someone applies for it, they shouldn't be sent outfield for the same mission... Long Yuehong remembered the relevant rules.

Jiang Baimian didn't say anything else and sincerely suggested, “You can take this opportunity to return to the company to provide a report. After that, you can decide whether to stay or be deployed elsewhere as an intelligence officer.”

Giuseppe was silent for a moment before he slowly nodded. “Alright.”

After settling this matter, Jiang Baimian said to Shang Jianyao and the others, “The company said that they would negotiate with the Crystal Consciousness Church as soon as possible.”

Negotiate? Long Yuehong repeated this word in his heart.

Jiang Baimian continued, “The company also provided some information regarding the Crystal Consciousness Church. Their religious leader is known as Buddha’s Nirmanakaya. He has long entered the New World and relies on his divided consciousness to maintain his body in the Ashlands. Therefore, he sleeps all year round and occasionally shows activity.”

“Sleeps all year round?” Long Yuehong couldn’t help but look up at the ceiling.

Since Sikhara Temple was the Crystal Consciousness Church’s headquarters, the Buddha’s Nirmanakaya was theoretically sleeping in a room here.

“This is similar to Yama Tiger,” Shang Jianyao said with interest.

Upon hearing this, Bai Chen’s expression froze as she repeated the corresponding words. “Do not spend more than 15 minutes in the temple. You can’t exceed half an hour in the temple’s vicinity, and you can’t exceed three days elsewhere on the island.”

Th-these were the precautions the company gave when exploring Yama Tiger’s temple... I-if that Buddha’s Nirmanakaya shares a similar state as Yama Tiger, then these precautions should also be applicable... W-we’ve already been here for a day and a half! Long Yuehong’s heart tightened as his imagination ran wild.

“There should still be a difference. At the very least, the monks in the temple are fine,” Jiang Baimian consoled her team member.

Shang Jianyao then looked at Long Yuehong and solemnly said, “Don’t speak.”

Long Yuehong shut his mouth.

Jiang Baimian lowered her head again and read the contents of the telegram. “When the Buddha’s Nirmanakaya sleeps, the Crystal Consciousness Church’s specific matters will be handled by the Enlightened’s Chief.”

The Chief who passed on last night? Bai Chen, Long Yuehong, and the others finally understood what ‘Chief’ meant.

Jiang Baimian thought for a moment and said with a solemn expression, “In other words, that person was the strongest person in the Crystal Consciousness Church on the surface. His death is a huge blow to the fragile balance of First City...”

The telegram ended there as the Old Task Force members busied themselves with other matters.

...

A solemn monk’s corpse with golden skin was being carried into the incineration furnace. Before the steel furnace door closed, the corpse’s face suddenly warped and became extremely ferocious.

Bang!

As the furnace door closed, a miserable scream came from inside.

Long Yuehong opened his eyes and broke out into cold sweat from the nightmare.

Chapter 486: Middle of the Night

Long Yuehong slowly sat up and wiped the sweat from his forehead as he picked up the waterskin beside him. During this process, he used the faint moonlight shining in from the window to see Shang Jianyao—who was on night duty—sizing him up.

“Were you jolted awake by fear?” Shang Jianyao asked with a smile.

Long Yuehong was alarmed and blurted out, “You had that nightmare too?”

Just as he said that, Long Yuehong realized that something was wrong. Hey was clearly still on night duty and hadn’t slept at all. How could he be dreaming?

Shang Jianyao smiled—just as he expected. “What kind of nightmare did you have?”

Their conversation attracted the attention of another night duty personnel—Bai Chen. Even the sleeping Jiang Baimian was roused.

In the entire room, only Giuseppe, aka Garibaldi—who had been exhausted from cold turkey—was still sleeping soundly.

Long Yuehong deliberated for a moment and said, “I dreamed of the Chief that passed on. I dreamed that when his body was carried into the cremation furnace, he showed a ferocious expression and even screamed tragically.”

After a simple description, Long Yuehong looked at Jiang Baimian. “Team Leader, did you have a similar nightmare?”

Jiang Baimian shook her head. “I slept very well.”

Long Yuehong heaved a sigh of relief and analyzed himself in disappointment. “Perhaps the scene of the Chief committing suicide by jumping off a building was too shocking. It left a deep impression on me, so much so that I combined it with the funeral ritual. I ended up scaring myself.”

“From the looks of it now, that might not be the case.” Shang Jianyao raised his hand and stroked his chin. “Since you said so, that’s most likely not the reason.”

“Hey.” Long Yuehong didn’t have the strength to stop this fellow’s nonsense.

Jiang Baimian yawned, picked up a waterskin, and took a sip. “Go back to sleep. Anyway, that Chief has already turned into ashes—uh, relic. Even if there’s really a problem, it won’t be a problem.”

“Ghosts exist in this world...” Shang Jianyao suppressed his voice and said ethereally.

Long Yuehong was about to retort when Shang Jianyao gave an example: “DiMarco.”

Jiang Baimian and the others were momentarily speechless.

After DiMarco's body was destroyed by the Old Task Force, he had indeed existed in the form of a ghost for a long time.

He was an Awakened of the Subhuti domain, and so was the Chief. Otherwise, he wouldn't have mastered the Heavenly Eye.

In other words, there was a high chance that the Chief's consciousness could survive outside of his body for a period of time. In layman's terms, that was a 'ghost.'

After a few seconds, Jiang Baimian exhaled and said, "Without a physical body, DiMarco couldn't survive for long. That Chief died last night—uh, entered the New World."

"He's definitely stronger than DiMarco," Shang Jianyao retorted.

"But it's impossible for such a huge qualitative change to happen unless he can still move around in the Ashlands after entering the New World." Jiang Baimian turned her body and looked out the window at the night sky. "Sleep. Why are we discussing ghosts in the middle of the night?"

Shang Jianyao didn't continue the topic and said, "I'm wondering..."

"Stop wondering," Jiang Baimian replied in disdain. But her attitude wasn't too harsh, and there were hints of a joke.

"I'm wondering if Master Zennaga needs to sleep..." Shang Jianyao seemed to be facing an eternal problem.

In other words, how much did Mind Corridor-level Awakened need to sleep?

Bai Chen—who was near the door—immediately replied, "He likely has to. At least DiMarco needed sleep."

If not for this, the Old Task Force wouldn't have had the chance to destroy DiMarco's body back then.

Shang Jianyao then said, "Then, is Master Zennaga sleeping now?"

“I don’t think he’s the kind of person who’s a night owl.”

Uh... If Master Zennaga is sleeping now, there’s no way to use his Mind Reading to monitor us and prevent us from escaping? Upon hearing Shang Jianyao’s question, such thoughts instantly flashed through Long Yuehong’s mind.

It was the same for Jiang Baimian and Bai Chen.

This was what Shang Jianyao wanted to express.

“Zen Master, are you asleep?” Shang Jianyao posed his question to the air.

Nobody answered him.

Upon seeing this, Bai Chen deliberated and said, “You want to suggest running away now?”

“Just because Master Zennaga isn’t watching us doesn’t mean that there aren’t other monks watching.” Jiang Baimian shook her head. “This is the Crystal Consciousness Church’s headquarters. There are many powerhouses here.”

“That’s right, that’s right.” Long Yuehong strongly agreed.

If it weren’t for the series of bizarre events and miraculous coincidences that had occurred since last night, he would think that staying obediently in Sikhara Temple was the best choice.

In any case, the Old Task Force’s plan was to wait for turmoil to happen in First City. Was there any difference waiting elsewhere?

If chaos were to happen in First City within ten days, the Crystal Consciousness Church probably wouldn’t have the time and manpower to watch them.

“How will we know if we don’t try?” Shang Jianyao encouraged his companion.

“Dying after trying?” Jiang Baimian reflexively used a sentence she had learned from the Old World’s entertainment. She then said, “Besides, Master Zennaga is good at Prophecy. Perhaps he predicted that we wouldn’t be able to escape tonight, so he boldly went to sleep.”

“There are always errors and ambiguity in a prophecy.” Shang Jianyao relied on his rich knowledge of Old World entertainment to raise an example. “Perhaps the prophecy means that we won’t escape through the door, but we can climb through the window and climb down floor by floor.”

“That’s a little dangerous,” Long Yuehong said truthfully. He was mainly referring to himself.

Shang Jianyao’s genetic enhancement was effective, and he had great balance. He wasn’t much worse than an ape. Back in Redstone Collection, he could walk on collapsed buildings as if they were flat ground.

As for Zennaga, although he was very lenient when watching over the Old Task Force, he didn’t allow them to bring the military exoskeletons into the room. He only allowed them to hold light weapons.

“It’s also possible that Master Zennaga hasn’t slept at all and has been secretly watching us. He wants to grasp our escape plan and figure out what abilities we are hiding.” Jiang Baimian urged angrily, “Go to sleep.”

Mind Reading wasn’t omnipotent. If the Old Task Force members didn’t think about a particular ability, Zennaga wouldn’t know.

Shang Jianyao sighed in disappointment when he saw his team leader remain adamant.

Long Yuehong had long calmed down from the nightmare. He lay down again, pulled up the blanket, and prepared to continue sleeping.

At this moment, a ‘dong’ sound came from their door.

Someone seemed to be knocking on the door.

Dong!

Another knock echoed.

Jiang Baimian—who had yet to lie down—had an abnormally solemn expression.

Shang Jianyao turned to look at the wooden door and said sinisterly, “The ghost is here...”

Bai Chen originally wanted to open the door and see who had come to them in the middle of the night, but she noticed Jiang Baimian and Shang Jianyao’s unusual reactions as she swept her gaze across the room.

“What ghost...” Long Yuehong muttered and sat up.

At this moment, Jiang Baimian asked Shang Jianyao in a deep voice, “Is there nobody?”

Nobody... Long Yuehong’s expression froze.

“There’s no human consciousness outside.” Shang Jianyao no longer used his ghost-story tone and instead answered seriously. With the knocking on the door—a form of ‘interaction’—even an Awakened who could hide their consciousness couldn’t hide from his senses.

This made Long Yuehong and Bai Chen even more afraid and tense.

From Jiang Baimian’s reaction and the question she raised, they could tell that their team leader also believed that nobody was outside!

The next second, there was another knock.

“Open the door and take a look.” Jiang Baimian pulled out her Ice Moss pistol.

Shang Jianyao had long wanted to do this. He suddenly reached out and opened the door.

The corridor outside was dark and quiet, and there were lamps affixed at long intervals. The warm night breeze passed through freely without encountering any obstruction.

Indeed, there was nobody.

Long Yuehong got off the bed and picked up his pistol.

“There’s nobody.” Shang Jianyao stuck his upper body out into the corridor and looked around. He dragged out his voice and inquired, “Who’s knocking?”

Nobody answered him.

This mental fortitude... Long Yuehong thought enviously after he finally calmed down.

“Wait a little longer,” Jiang Baimian instructed Shang Jianyao.

She wasn’t too nervous. This was the Crystal Consciousness Church’s headquarters after all, and Zennaga was a benevolent monk.

As long as this Zen Master didn’t turn evil autonomously, the probability of a severe problem arising wouldn’t be high.

The Old Task Force waited for a while, but they didn’t hear another knock.

“Lame...” Shang Jianyao shook his head and closed the door.

Dong!

Shang Jianyao had just closed the door when another knock sounded.

Long Yuehong almost jumped up in fright.

Jiang Baimian thought for a moment and said, “Let’s see how long ‘he’ will knock.”

“Alright!” Shang Jianyao became excited again.

Dong! Dong!

The sound rang out from time to time, and it stopped for a long time after the seventh knock.

This caused Giuseppe to wake up dazedly.

“Seven knocks,” Jiang Baimian concluded. She looked at Bai Chen and the others and pondered for a moment. “What do you think is going on?”

Shang Jianyao had already prepared what to say as he directly replied, “Soul Returning Night! The Chief’s Soul Returning Night!”

“Then, why did he knock on our door?” Long Yuehong asked in horror.

“Because he left us the note!” At times like this, Shang Jianyao’s logic was always very clear.

“Then, why seven? No more, no less?” Long Yuehong asked again.

Shang Jianyao laughed. “Seven-story stupa! Seven is the lucky number of the Crystal Consciousness Church.”

“But nothing happened after we opened the door...” Long Yuehong refused to give in.

“Nothing will happen until we open the door after the seventh knock.” Shang Jianyao put on a stance that said, “If you don’t believe me, I’ll open the door for you now.”

At this moment, Jiang Baimian cleared her throat and said, “I remember that Awakened in the Subhuti domain can interfere with matter after entering the Mind Corridor. Could it be that someone manipulated the air and changed the wind pressure to create a sound similar to door knocking?”

Just as she finished speaking, another sound came from the door.

Dong!

Chapter 487: Knocking

The dull knocking echoed in the small room as if it were striking everyone's hearts.

It's here again... Long Yuehong's heart palpitated.

There was no end to this!

Jiang Baimian frowned and thought for a few seconds before saying to Shang Jianyao, "Loudly ask who it is."

She wanted to use this method to attract the attention of the monks on the same floor so that the Enlightened could use whatever abilities they had to resolve this very peculiar matter.

Shang Jianyao—who was beside the door—shouted without inhibitions, "Who is it?"

His voice spread out, but nobody responded. It was as if there was an endless abyss outside.

Dong!

The same knocking sounded again, and the wooden door seemed to tremble a little.

If they didn't open the door or sense it, Jiang Baimian and Shang Jianyao could naturally imagine a person standing outside just based on this outcome.

He was only one door away from Shang Jianyao.

"Sounds don't seem to be able to travel too far." Bai Chen—who was also by the door—shared her feelings.

"We've been isolated and cut off?" Long Yuehong's heart tightened.

Jiang Baimian thought for a moment and said, "If there is indeed someone who uses the ability to interfere with matter to manipulate the air, change the wind pressure, and simulate the sound of knocking on the door, then they can naturally limit any sounds to the vicinity."

Dong!

Just as Jiang Baimian said that, the door trembled again. The person outside the door appeared impatient about entering.

“Should we open the door?” Shang Jianyao sought his team leader’s opinion.

Jiang Baimian fell silent for a moment before saying, “Wait a little longer.”

After waiting for nearly half an hour, there was complete silence outside the door.

The person at the door seemed to have completely given up after the bitter wait.

Jiang Baimian got off the bed and walked to the door. She seriously sensed for a while and said, “I’ll try to open the door. Be prepared.”

Bai Chen took two steps back and aimed the gun in her hand at the wooden door. Long Yuehong did the same, but he was in front of the bed that was further away from the door.

Shang Jianyao took off the flashlight hanging from his belt and took out a mirror.

Upon seeing Jiang Baimian look at him, he explained seriously, “I learned this from Abbess Zhou. What if it’s really a ghost?”

But Abbess Zhou’s tricks aren’t meant to deal with ghosts... Jiang Baimian slowly took a deep breath and exhaled. She then raised her left hand in the air and twisted the doorknob with her right palm that was holding the Ice Moss, pulling it open.

The light from the distant corridor lamps gushed into the room through the gradually expanding gap, illuminating the Old Task Force members’ faces.

Nobody passed through the corridor. Even the shadows in places where the corridor lamps couldn’t reach seemed to be in silence.

“There’s indeed nobody.” Jiang Baimian carefully observed for a while and came to this conclusion. She then carefully closed the door again to see if there were any more knocks.

The Old Task Force waited for more than half an hour, but there were no more thuds. This made their previous experience seem like an illusory dream.

If not for Jiang Baimian, Shang Jianyao, and Bai Chen still waiting there, Long Yuehong would definitely think that there was no knocking and that everything was just his illusion.

“It seems like it has stopped...” Jiang Baimian gave a terse grunt.

Bai Chen frowned and said, “Why did that ‘person’ knock on the door? He ‘left’ without doing anything... Could it be that something bad would’ve happened to us if we opened the door after three thuds?”

Shang Jianyao laughed. “What gives you the illusion that we didn’t encounter anything bad? Perhaps we have been unknowingly affected, but it hasn’t acted up, just like when we were in Wasteland Ruin 13.”

Long Yuehong couldn’t help but shiver when he thought of the three Hunters who had committed suicide because of Wu Meng’s surreptitious influence. “No way...”

“We can’t rule out this possibility.” Jiang Baimian didn’t dare to be careless. “Anyway, we shall take turns for night duty and watch each other. Once we discover anything abnormal, we’ll immediately warn each other.”

They had some experience in this aspect.

Giuseppe—who was still tied up and had been enjoying the treatment of being fed—interrupted, “I don’t think there’s a need to worry too much. This is the Crystal Consciousness Church’s headquarters. No ghosts can cause trouble here. When there are ‘hauntings’ in certain places in First City, they often invite monks from the Crystal Consciousness Church to exorcise them.”

“I’m just afraid it’s not a ghost.” Jiang Baimian sighed. She didn’t explain further to Giuseppe as she muttered to herself, “If there’s anything abnormal, we can indeed inform the Crystal

Consciousness Church monks and seek their help. If there's no surreptitious influence, then the main point of what happened just now is the act of 'door knocking.' Yes, this doesn't conflict with any surreptitious influence. Since Wu Meng can use radio waves to transmit his powers, it's not too unacceptable for that person to rely on knocking to exert influence.

"Apart from this, 'door knocking' might be to pass us some information, just like the paper in the scriptures." Jiang Baimian associated the 'door knocking' incident with the previous Holy Land catalog. After all, this happened after they entered Sikhara Temple and witnessed the death of the Chief.

"Passing of information..." Bai Chen's eyes darted around slightly. "The first set of knocks happened seven times, and the second set had three knocks. What does this mean?"

The Old Task Force had special classes to train in secret codes and passwords.

"From a simple and direct perspective, it represents the two numbers 'seven' and 'three,'" Jiang Baimian replied. "Since the person wants to pass a message to us as an outsider, it won't be too complicated."

"Seven, three..." Long Yuehong began to think about the meaning of the two numbers.

"In addition, it's early in the morning." Shang Jianyao 'confidently' gave his thoughts. "The answer is that we have to meet them seven days later at three in the morning."

"Do you think they struck your head three times?" Jiang Baimian couldn't help but laugh.

She had already shared the corresponding story about the three strikes on the Monkey King's head with the Old Task Force.

Without waiting for Shang Jianyao's response, she asked, "So, where should we meet?"

"I don't know," Shang Jianyao replied very bluntly.

Long Yuehong helped think of a reason. "Maybe seven days later, at three in the morning, they will come here to find us again?"

“Then, why didn’t they come in directly just now? Why wait seven days?” Jiang Baimian skillfully found a loophole.

Long Yuehong was tongue-tied and couldn’t answer.

“But according to your logic,” Bai Chen joined the discussion, “they can just enter directly if they want to pass any message. Why leave a secret message by knocking?”

“That’s indeed a problem.” Jiang Baimian nodded. “Perhaps the person who knocked on the door can’t communicate with us directly and can only use this method. Uh, so we can’t rule out the possibility that they can talk to us seven days later and will visit us at three in the morning. But why did they knock on the door in advance? Why not wait patiently until then?”

“A ritual!” Shang Jianyao rushed to answer. “They are in a special condition, so they have to complete the knocking before they can communicate with us seven days later.”

Bai Chen raised another possibility. “Maybe they’re afraid that we’ll escape from Sikhara Temple in the next few days.”

Jiang Baimian nodded slightly. “Both explanations are reasonable. The only way to verify them is to wait seven days.”

At this point, Jiang Baimian looked up at the ceiling. “Seven and three might have other meanings. From the Crystal Consciousness Church’s point of view, ‘seven’ represents the seven-storied stupa and also represents the seven-storied Sikhara Temple—which represents the floor above us.”

This is very reasonable... Long Yuehong nodded indiscernibly.

Compared to Shang Jianyao’s seemingly empty guess, Jiang Baimian’s guess based on the Buddhist organization’s characteristics was more reliable.

Jiang Baimian continued, “If ‘seven’ represents Sikhara Temple’s seventh story, then ‘three’ might be the number of a room there. The person knocking on the door wants us to look for them there?”

This... Long Yuehong and Bai Chen looked at each other and felt that this explanation was indeed highly possible.

“Shall we go now?” Shang Jianyao asked eagerly.

Jiang Baimian fell silent for a while before saying, “There’s no rush. What if it’s a trap? It’s currently impossible to determine if that person is good or bad. Perhaps... it’s not good for them to directly fight against Master Zennaga and vie for the Chief position. They can use this method to lure us over and accuse us of violating the temple’s rules to implicate Master Zennaga...

“Perhaps their strength is limited to that room, and only a small portion of it can leak out. They have to lure us in to be of use...”

Upon hearing his team leader’s hypotheses, Long Yuehong felt that it was better to be cautious.

At this moment, Jiang Baimian looked around and said, “I’ll find an opportunity to find out what’s on the temple’s seventh story at dawn and who’s staying in Room 3 before making a decision. Okay, go to sleep. The people on night duty will watch each other and guard against any abnormalities.”

The discussion ended there. The Old Task Force didn’t encounter anything strange that night.

...

In the morning, the young monk from before delivered oatmeal porridge and toast.

Jiang Baimian casually asked, “Who lives in the rooms on the top floor of your temple? There seemed to be movement last night.”

The young monk said with a puzzled look, “Nobody lives there.”

“...” Long Yuehong really experienced what a ghost story was at that moment.

“Is it a place where the scriptures are stored?” Jiang Baimian asked further.

The young monk nodded. “There’s also a small hall that worships our Buddha Subhuti.”

“There’s no Loke?vara-Tathāgata?” Shang Jianyao interrupted curiously.

“We mainly worship Buddha Subhuti.” The young monk didn’t hide the fact that could be learned anywhere.

Jiang Baimian began to beat around the bush. “What else? What other rooms are there on the seventh floor? Perhaps a rat entered?”

The young monk thought for a moment. “That’s impossible. The security is very strict... There’s also a room with magical artifacts and...”

His expression suddenly turned solemn. “And the meditation room where Buddha’s Nirmanakaya sleeps.”

Chapter 488: Rumors

The meditation room where Buddha’s Nirmanakaya sleeps... This sentence was like a thunderclap that exploded in the Old Task Force members’ ears, leaving them shell-shocked.

Jiang Baimian barely controlled her expression and asked with a smile, “There aren’t any Enlightened living on the seventh floor?”

“That’s the place where Buddha Subhuti is worshiped, and it’s also the place where Buddha’s Nirmanakaya sleeps.” Although the young monk didn’t give a direct answer, his explanation clearly told Jiang Baimian and the others that with the Enlightened’s pious hearts toward Buddha, they wouldn’t allow themselves to be on equal footing with the Kalendaria.

“Aren’t you afraid of thieves sneaking in?” Shang Jianyao asked curiously.

The young monk whispered a Buddhist proclamation. “The Buddha’s Nirmanakaya naturally has its mystical aspects surrounding it. It’s not afraid of external devils. Besides, although the Enlightened don’t live there, they guard it on rotation.”

At this point, the young monk looked around and lowered his voice. “I have to remind you of something.”

“We mustn’t barge into the seventh floor?” Shang Jianyao immediately said.

Are you stupid? We can’t even leave this room... Long Yuehong—who was listening by the side—criticized helplessly.

The young monk maintained a kind attitude: “I don’t think you have that intention.”

He paused and suppressed his voice again. “It’s rumored that a terrifying devil is suppressed in the place where Buddha’s Nirmanakaya slumbers. Although it can’t move freely, it can still leak some of its power and create all sorts of abnormalities since the Buddha’s Nirmanakaya is sleeping.

“Therefore, no matter what temptation you encounter or what you see, you mustn’t head to the seventh floor and approach the meditation room where Buddha’s Nirmanakaya is sleeping. Otherwise, you will die in all sorts of strange ways. There were monks who disappeared without a trace because of this, never appearing again.”

Isn’t this what happened to us last night? The strange knocking, hinting to us, and bewitching us to head to the seventh floor... Long Yuehong felt a lingering fear as he rejoiced that his team leader had chosen to be cautious.

Jiang Baimian nodded with a slightly solemn expression. “Didn’t you say that there are Enlightened on duty? How could they let someone enter the seventh floor so easily?”

“The Enlightened can sometimes be lazy and off-guard.” Shang Jianyao had an expression that said, “Humans indeed have bad habits.”

The young monk shook his head. “No, it should be that the influence created by the devil can blind the Enlightened’s senses, causing an exploitable oversight during their watch.”

“That devil is really strong,” Jiang Baimian commented. This reminded her of Wu Meng in Wasteland Ruin 13.

“That’s why we need the Buddha’s Nirmanakaya to suppress it personally.” The young monk’s logic formed a closed loop.

Jiang Baimian thought for a few seconds and asked, “You said it’s a rumor, so you mean you haven’t seen it yourself?”

“Yes, a monk doesn’t lie.” The young monk pressed his palms together and gave a Buddhist proclamation. “This is also because the monks in the temple often head out to walk the Ashlands. They use this to temper their minds and cultivate their consciousness. Many of them set off on a whim while the other fellow disciples aren’t aware of their departure. They might not be able to return alive, so it’s equivalent to them going missing.”

How casual... The Crystal Consciousness Church’s upper echelons are really broadminded in this aspect... Long Yuehong muttered inwardly.

Without saying anything else, the young monk closed the door and left, leaving the Old Task Force members looking at each other with varying expressions.

“I thought such a strange and terrifying thing wouldn’t happen at the headquarters of such a large religion.” Long Yuehong sighed after a while.

“That’s not what you said yesterday and the day before yesterday,” Shang Jianyao pointed out.

Long Yuehong had a nightmare when he saw the Chief jump to his death to rid himself of his mortal coils.

Long Yuehong cleared his throat awkwardly. “What I mean is that strange and terrifying things won’t happen to outsiders like us. As for their members, they naturally have their own special characteristics. This situation makes me feel like I’m not staying in First City or the Crystal Consciousness Church headquarters, but Wasteland Ruin 13.”

“We can just ignore it.” Bai Chen gave her opinion.

This was in line with Long Yuehong’s thoughts.

Jiang Baimian turned her head to look at Giuseppe, who had fallen asleep again. “Sometimes, you can’t just avoid it by ignoring them. Mm, the devil talk might not be true. It might just be a cover-up of some other matters.”

“For example, it’s to prevent the monks from entering the seventh floor, where they might discover some secrets?” Shang Jianyao raised his hand and stroked his chin.

Long Yuehong immediately frowned. “The seventh floor is guarded by Enlightened. Ignoring ordinary monks, even Hexions and Heptadites can’t enter the seventh floor without permission.”

“What if the claim that Enlightened take turns to guard the seventh floor is half-true? Perhaps at some point in every day, even an Enlightened might not dare to stay on the seventh floor or even sense the surrounding area.” Shang Jianyao allowed his imagination to run free.

“Aren’t monks not supposed to lie...” Long Yuehong muttered softly.

Jiang Baimian chuckled. “This should only be a commandment for most Enlightened, not a price. There are bound to be times when commandments are violated.”

Upon hearing this, Shang Jianyao immediately sang: “Who’s whispering in my ear[1]...”

He subsequently shut up upon receiving Jiang Baimian’s glare.

Jiang Baimian took this opportunity to look around. “Since Yama Tiger’s sleeping place is fraught with all sorts of dangers, it’s reasonable for there to be some abnormalities with Buddha’s Nirmanakaya. However, we aren’t here to pry into the Crystal Consciousness Church’s secrets. Even if there’s anything related to the Old World’s destruction, it should be hidden in the Five Great Holy Lands. Let’s focus on our own matters.”

What was that? Find an opportunity to escape!

After Jiang Baimian said that, Bai Chen whispered, “That’s not what you said just now. We’re afraid that a situation will take its course regardless of our wishes.”

Jiang Baimian laughed dryly. “Yes, I was just talking about external objective conditions. Now, I’m talking about our subjective attitude.”

Bai Chen didn’t answer her and continued, “Perhaps the person who knocked on the door and is getting us to go to the seventh floor has some important information to tell us. The Crystal Consciousness Church spread the rumors of devils because they don’t want anyone to enter.”

“Before we figure out the general situation, I don’t recommend taking the risk. If it’s really about letting a situation take its course regardless of our wishes, we should talk to Master Zennaga about it.” Jiang Baimian’s expression turned serious. “Besides, we don’t even dare to leave the room. How can we talk about going to the seventh floor?”

Shang Jianyao immediately raised his hand and pointed at the ceiling. “There’s no need to leave through the door.”

“...” Jiang Baimian was speechless.

...

In the North Shore Wastelands, at the edge of a city ruin.

Han Wanghuo looked at the rearview mirror and said in a deep voice, “I have a nagging feeling that we haven’t shaken off the tracker yet.”

“All sorts of signs indicate that you’re right.” Geneva agreed with Han Wanghuo’s judgment.

“Is that so...” Zeng Duo whispered, feeling a slight headache. She originally believed that by relying on the wasteland’s vastness and the complexity of the environment, they shouldn’t be targeted as long as they persisted in wandering around the periphery and didn’t approach the area around Early Spring Town or deliberately provoke First City’s regular army.

Geneva moved his metal neck. “Apart from the power of technology, some Awakened abilities can also be used for tracking. For example, one can have a sense of smell as sensitive as a dog’s.”

Zeng Duo didn’t ask, “What should we do?” Instead, she began to think of a way to shake off their pursuers.

She thought for a moment and said, “Let’s go to areas with more serious pollution and more complicated environments to see if we can interfere with the enemy’s tracking. Yes, it’s not a problem as long as we don’t stay in those places for extended periods.”

“I have no objections.” Geneva wasn’t too afraid of pollution.

Han Wanghuo nodded. “There’s no other way.”

...

The Old Task Force met Zennaga again near noon.

The Enlightened visited personally to inform them of their previous ‘request.’ “The blood sample and scan results you provided have been sent to a professional medical institution. It will take about three to five days for the report to be released.”

“Thank you, Zen Master,” Shang Jianyao said sincerely.

Jiang Baimian looked out the door and deliberated before suggesting a new idea. “Zen Master, can we take a walk in the corridor after our meals? It’s uncomfortable staying cooped up in the room all the time.”

What gave you the illusion that we aren’t in jail? Long Yuehong couldn’t help but criticize his team leader.

They were ‘abducted’ by Zennaga.

Zennaga nodded. “As long as you don’t leave this floor.”

“Alright. Thank you, Zen Master.” Jiang Baimian’s voice involuntarily became brisk.

After Zennaga left, Long Yuehong asked curiously, “Team Leader, what’s the point of making this request?”

“I’m thinking that if we don’t go to the seventh floor, the person knocking on the door might give more ‘hints.’ If we walk around the corridors more, we might be able to discover something. Uh, Zen Master, if you’re ‘listening,’ please deal with this abnormality so that it doesn’t disturb us,” Jiang Baimian explained with a smile. “We’ll send a telegram to the company tonight and see what feedback we can get.”

Is that so... Long Yuehong heaved a sigh of relief when he saw that his team leader really didn't have any intention of taking the risk to go to the seventh floor.

Shang Jianyao excitedly walked down the corridor.

After the sky turned dark in the evening, they had just entered the corridor when they saw someone coming down from the seventh floor.

They were two gray-robed monks. Their expressions were wooden, and their eyes were dull. They carried a heavy crate between them.

Suddenly, the monk in front stepped on something and slipped. He staggered a few times and fell to the ground.

The crate also flew out of his hands and smashed down, flipping sideways.

The lid of the wooden crate fell, and its contents spilled out.

Long Yuehong—who was in the distance—saw a face using the light of the corridor lamps.

Its face was bruised, and its tongue was sticking out. Its expression was ferocious.

Chapter 489: "Choral Singing"

Long Yuehong—who had been looking over—abruptly shrunk his head back, and his heart involuntarily beat faster.

A dead person!

The crate carried down from the seventh floor contained a dead person!

Jiang Baimian turned her body and pressed her back against the wall at the side of the corridor. At the same time, she stretched out her left hand, grabbed Shang Jianyao's shoulder, and dragged him to their door.

Bai Chen nimbly took a step back and returned to the room.

In the indescribable silence, the sound of friction and the sound of wooden boards opening and closing came from the stairs one after another.

Jiang Baimian leaned forward slightly and carefully peeped out. She saw the two wooden gray-robed monks lift the crate again and walk down.

Throughout the entire process, even if there were accidental stumbles and the dropping of the crate, they didn't speak or communicate at all. What was even stranger was that they didn't observe their surroundings to confirm if anyone had seen them.

After the two gray-robed monks disappeared at the stairwell, Jiang Baimian turned her head and gestured for the other three Old Task Force members to return to the room with her.

Upon seeing his team leader close the door, Long Yuehong whispered in shock and fear, "Is this the consequence of being lured into the seventh floor by the devil?"

Becoming a corpse!

Jiang Baimian touched her cochlear implant and barely understood what Long Yuehong was saying. She then said in a deep voice, "He wasn't necessarily lured by the devil."

Upon seeing Long Yuehong's expression change slightly, Jiang Baimian added, "It's also possible that he entered the seventh floor for other reasons. In short, the corpse just now should be a monk. From the fact that he has no hair, we can make a preliminary judgment. His cause of death seems to be suffocation."

As for how he suffocated, Jiang Baimian couldn't come to a conclusion from a mere glance from that distance.

Regardless, Long Yuehong could only rejoice. "Fortunately, we didn't trust the person who knocked on the door and rashly entered the seventh floor. Otherwise, we would be the ones being carried down in the crate."

“In that case, I want to apply to match a song.” Shang Jianyao imagined the scene Long Yuehong described.

Unfortunately, nobody asked him which song he wanted to match with the scene.

Jiang Baimian ignored him and replied to Long Yuehong, “The one who killed that monk—or perhaps even lured him up—is unlikely to be the door knocker.”

“Uh...” Long Yuehong was momentarily confused.

Bai Chen pursed her lips. “Indeed. If the person who knocked on the door wants us to go to the seventh floor, he should restrain himself a little over the next two days and not cause any bizarre deaths. Otherwise, coincidentally seeing it might completely dispel our thoughts.”

“That’s true...” Long Yuehong slowly nodded.

Shang Jianyao added with a serious expression, “According to the information that Buddha’s Nirmanakaya and a devil are located above, who is the door knocker and who is the existence that killed the monk?”

Long Yuehong almost blurted out, “Of course, it’s the devil who knocked on the door to lure us over.” But on second thought, wasn’t this saying that the Buddha’s Nirmanakaya had caused the bizarre death of the monk who entered the seventh floor and that the Old Task Force happened to bump into the matter, thereby scaring them off?

In this way, who was the Buddha and who was the devil?

Jiang Baimian had been thinking about this question. “If Buddha’s Nirmanakaya planted us with the notion of heading up via the door knocking, then the one who killed the monk to stop us would be the devil. But if Buddha’s Nirmanakaya wants to see us, can’t he just go through the Enlightened guarding the seventh floor? This is simple, convenient, and fast! Could it be that even the Crystal Consciousness Church’s Enlightened doesn’t know his purpose in seeing us?”

“It’s also possible that the situation on the seventh floor is more complicated than we imagined. Perhaps the Buddha’s Nirmanakaya has nothing to do with knocking or killing. He’s just doing his best to suppress the devil and maintain balance,” Bai Chen shared her thoughts.

“That’s right, that’s right. Perhaps he has also split into 81 forms. Some want to lure us up to be killed, some want to use us to do something, some want to stop all of this, some want to mediate, and some want to strike on the wooden fish and chant Buddhist scriptures...” Shang Jianyao became more and more excited as he spoke.

Although Jiang Baimian felt that this sounded ridiculous and crazy, she felt that Shang Jianyao’s words might be the truth when she considered the price of the Subhuti domain. She then exhaled and said, “Associating with an existence at this level is often equivalent to danger. It’s better if we don’t do it.”

Long Yuehong wished he could raise both his hands and feet in agreement. Bai Chen also felt that this was the most rational choice.

Shang Jianyao glanced at Garibaldi—who had fallen asleep again—and sighed. “If that’s the case, I’d like to ask him how he accommodated himself.”

It wasn’t easy to encounter Awakened that shared the same price while being at a higher level, but all of that was Shang Jianyao’s guess. It might not be true.

At night, Jiang Baimian used the radio transceiver again and roughly described her encounters over the past two days.

In order not to be discovered by Zennaga and the other monks, she didn’t mention the Five Great Holy Lands. She had also previously instructed Shang Jianyao and the others not to think about such matters.

She planned on applying to head to the steelworks factory ruins after returning to the company to see what secrets this holy land hid.

Just as the telegram was about to be sent out, they heard meowing coming from some street in the area around Sikhara Temple.

Ao! Ao! Ao! Ao!

It was slightly mournful as if it were enduring some kind of pain.

All of a sudden, different but equally shrill cat meowing was heard in several places. They undulated and echoed each other.

“There are also cats in heat during this season...” Bai Chen looked out the window and muttered to herself.

“It’s not at its apex yet.” Jiang Baimian ended her work and looked up.

Bai Chen nodded. “It can only be found in the Red Wolf Zone. There are no living cats in the Green Olive Zone, except for those with special abilities.”

Many people in the Green Olive Zone didn’t have enough to eat every day. They would try to take a bite of any rats they saw.

Just as Bai Chen said that, Shang Jianyao had already rushed to the window and opened his mouth. “Meow!”

“...” Jiang Baimian, Long Yuehong, and Bai Chen were surprised but not surprised either. It wasn’t Shang Jianyao’s first time doing such a thing.

When the group first came to the surface last year, he howled in a symphony with a distant howl.

As Jiang Baimian waited for the company’s confirmation reply, she looked at Shang Jianyao, wanting him to know his place.

At this moment, she saw Shang Jianyao take out a blue-white loudspeaker.

Loudspeaker...

While Jiang Baimian’s gaze was a little blank, Shang Jianyao brought the loudspeaker to his mouth. “Meow!”

The meow echoed far and wide, causing the horny cats to stop meowing.

“Howl!” Shang Jianyao called out in another way, his voice shaking the clouds.

People with equipment were indeed different.

The next second, Zennaga’s voice sounded in Shang Jianyao, Jiang Baimian, and the others’ hearts. “Patron, please be quiet. It’s not appropriate to disturb others at night.”

“Indeed, it’s rude.” Shang Jianyao admitted his mistake and said, “I’m sorry.”

He stuffed the blueish-white loudspeaker back into his tactical backpack.

Silence at last... Long Yuehong heaved a sigh of relief inwardly.

When it was time to sleep, Jiang Baimian looked at Shang Jianyao—who was lying on the bed—and suddenly asked, “Will it work?”

“Very difficult.” Shang Jianyao sighed.

Ah? Long Yuehong—who was on night duty—was confused. After more than ten seconds, he vaguely understood what his team leader was asking.

He realized that it wasn’t solely because Shang Jianyao’s illness had acted up. He might’ve wanted to use his inability to stop his brain from spasming to attract the attention of Slumber Cat or Nightmare Horse.

No, I can’t think about it anymore. Otherwise, Master Zennaga will hear it... Long Yuehong quickly turned his attention to what tomorrow’s breakfast was. Sigh, there’s nothing to think about. It’s either oatmeal with bread or oatmeal with toast.

...

22 Booney Street, Golden Apple Zone, home of the Reformist leader, Gaius.

As the son-in-law of the Elder, Sheriff Wall came to visit again. He entered the study and saw his hooked-nose father-in-law sitting opposite the desk.

In fact, Wall didn't quite understand why his father-in-law—the commander of the Eastern Army Corps—didn't return to the army after coming to First City to attend the council of elders and convene a citizen assembly.

“Speak. What new information do you have?” Gaius leaned back in his chair, slightly relaxed.

Wall didn't hide anything. “I learned from an informant named Old K that the team which came into contact with Marcus and stole some secrets came from Pangu Biology.”

“Pangu Biology...” Gaius repeated and said with some relief, “No wonder they're interested in the matter in North Anheford. That's indeed their focus and not a ruse.”

Wall was puzzled by his words.

...

Early in the morning, dawn had just arrived.

The Old Task Force heard a knock on the door.

“Breakfast is here.” Although Long Yuehong despised the fact that there were only a few types of breakfast offered in Sikhara Temple, he could accept repeating the same food every day when he was hungry.

He walked over and opened the door.

It wasn't the young monk they were familiar with outside but a rather stoic, gray-robed monk.

This monk was also of Red River ethnicity. He had rather deep facial features and green eyes. Similar to Zennaga, he was also very thin, but not to the point of being only bone.

“Patrons, the new Chief invites you over.” The gray-robed monk placed his palm vertically in front of his chest and bowed.

“Why?” Shang Jianyao asked first.

The gray-robed monk replied unhurriedly, “About the strange sounds you’ve heard over the past few nights.”

Is he giving an explanation or dealing with it? Jiang Baimian nodded as she thought about it.

She didn’t reject the gray-robed monk. As prisoners, they had no right to refuse.

Following the gray-robed monk, the four Old Task Force members left the room and walked to the stairwell.

The gray-robed monk looked back at Shang Jianyao, Jiang Baimian, and the others before taking a step up the stairs as if to say, “Follow me.”

We’re going to the seventh floor... Jiang Baimian nodded indiscernibly.

The seventh floor! Her pupils suddenly dilated, and her outstretched foot froze in midair.

Chapter 490: Seventh Floor

After taking a step forward, Jiang Baimian realized that the gray-robed monk was about to bring them to the seventh floor of Sikhara Temple. This is the place where the Crystal Consciousness Church’s Buddha’s Nirmanakaya is sleeping. If we enter rashly, we will die a strange death!

Jiang Baimian’s abdominal muscles tensed up as she forcefully pulled her extended right foot back. At the same time, she shouted in a deep voice, “Stop!”

Shang Jianyao reacted almost at the same time as her. His back arched slightly as he looked at the gray-robed monk with dark and deep eyes. Corny Person!

He immediately used Corny Person.

Upon receiving Jiang Baimian's reminder, Long Yuehong and Bai Chen subconsciously wanted to stop, but they couldn't overcome their inertia and stumbled.

At this moment, Jiang Baimian—who stood on one foot and managed to retain her balance—stretched out her left palm.

A ball of silver-white lightning expanded rapidly, piercing through the air and landing on the gray-robed monk's torso.

However, the gray-robed monk's expression remained wooden; he didn't even flinch. There were no vicissitudes in his eyes as though he hadn't been electrocuted.

Similarly, Shang Jianyao's Corny Person failed to leave any traces on the monk. He maintained a silent and stiff attitude, half-turned his body, and stood there without doing anything irrational.

In an instant, the gray-robed monk's green eyes lit up with a strange glow. It was as if two bodhi seeds with condensed Destiny Connection were embedded in his face.

In a daze, Long Yuehong found himself back in the company and married a woman according to the results of the marriage assignment. After that, he was transferred elsewhere internally. He worked diligently to support his family consisting of one male and two females.

His body gradually deteriorated as he grew older, but the effect of genetic enhancement prevented him from needing frequent visits to the hospital. After 70 years of age, he truly experienced aging and the fear and helplessness of approaching death.

What made him even sadder was that his wife and eldest daughter eventually contracted the Heartless disease one after another, and all he could do was watch helplessly.

All kinds of pain left marks on his body. He couldn't help but wonder: As a human, am I always accompanied by suffering my entire life?

On his deathbed, he saw a world shrouded in glazed glass. There were dense bodhi trees and tall towers. Gold, silver, crystal, amber, and so on were everywhere, dotting the many buildings.

It was serene, peaceful, and free of hunger and pain. Long Yuehong felt that this was everything he wished for, so he took a step toward that world.

Shang Jianyao transformed into a beast. He sometimes howled and sometimes bit other animals, spending a short life in a daze.

The old him was finally hunted by other beasts and became their meal. Amidst the pain of being bitten, a voice seemed to say in his mind: “Is this form what you want?”

In his daze, Shang Jianyao saw a classroom—children and the sound of a lecture and recital.

He couldn't help but sing: “Bai Suzhen under Mount Qingcheng, cultivating this body for a thousand years in the cave, ah, ah~ Cultivating diligently to attain the Dao, so as to transform into a human[1]...”

At this moment, the teachers and children in class seemed to be stunned.

Shang Jianyao then walked in.

Bai Chen stood in the wilderness, holding an Ice Moss and United 202 in each hand. She kept running and shooting, taking down the wilderness bandits, nomads, and Subhumans who tried to attack her.

Blood gushed out and dyed the ground red. A strong stench drilled into Bai Chen's nose.

Such a life seemed eternal. Day after day, year after year, Bai Chen was always in combat and killing. This filled her with anger and exhaustion until she was shot due to a moment of carelessness.

Bang!

Bai Chen felt intense pain in her body and also felt the joy of finally being liberated. However, she had a vague idea that she would come back to life and continue to escape and kill.

No... At this moment, she saw a city.

It wasn't big, but it was serene. There was also sufficient order here, and people stopped their mad slaughtering of each other.

Bai Chen pursed her lips and rushed in impatiently.

Jiang Baimian found herself back in a laboratory. She was busy experimenting every day and was happy with the results that were produced.

There was no hunger.

She was also never under the weather, nor did she suffer fatigue in her life—there was only focus and detachment. But all of a sudden, she started to age.

Her body became unclean, and she became restless. There was no way to escape this state until she was on the verge of death and about to fall asleep in that eternal darkness.

She struggled with all her might, not wanting to lose consciousness just like that and lose all sense of the world.

Finally, her hand touched a door.

Behind this pair of black doors that opened outward, the earth was abundant, and the sun shone brightly. There was no famine, no monsters, no infection, no sickness, and no aging.

Jiang Baimian alternated her hands and tried her best to crawl through the door.

“Six Realms of Rebirth and Existence!”

The Six Realms of Rebirth and Existence descended at the same time! The suffering of humans, the lack of intelligence of animals, the killing of Asuras, and the decline of Devas.

The four Old Task Force members took the same step in different manners and ascended the stairs to the seventh floor. They walked up step by step and soon stepped into the quiet and empty corridor on the seventh floor.

At this moment, Shang Jianyao's mind twitched. His thoughts skipped as he switched personalities.

He seemed to gain some clarity and subconsciously turned around to look at the stairwell.

The gray-robed monk stood there, his face purple and his tongue out—he had died of suffocation at some point in time.

Thud!

The gray-robed monk fell heavily on the stairs and rolled two or three steps down.

With his death, the Six Realms of Rebirth and Existence's effects vanished.

Jiang Baimian, Long Yuehong, and Bai Chen stopped in their tracks in confusion and cast their gazes at the source of the noise. Then, they saw the corpse.

They saw the gray-robed monk—who had brushed off Corny Person's effects and the high-voltage electric shock—turn into a corpse.

On the surface of the corpse, other than the many charred marks caused by the electric current, there were only signs of suffocation.

At this moment, the first thought that flashed through Long Yuehong's mind was: Oh no, he's using suicide to frame us...

As for why it was suicide, it was because nobody else was around.

Reeling in shock, Jiang Baimian looked around and blurted out, "This is the seventh floor?"

"Theoretically, yes. Unless we walked another floor up and reached the eighth floor," Shang Jianyao replied.

However, there was no eighth floor in Sikhara Temple.

We reached the seventh floor? We unknowingly reached the seventh floor? Long Yuehong's body suddenly tensed up.

The seventh floor of Sikhara Temple wasn't a good place. Except for a few people, all those who entered would die mysteriously and silently!

The gray-robed monk who led them to the seventh floor had already suffocated to death in the well-ventilated corridor!

Bai Chen was also tense as she directly said, "We must leave now!"

As soon as she finished speaking, a gust of wind blew through the corridor.

Amidst the whooshing echo, a room close to the Old Task Force creaked.

Thud!

The corresponding door opened backward and slammed into the wall.

Under the dim light at both ends of the corridor, the area without corridor lamps was a diffused flurry of shadows.

Jiang Baimian saw that the already open door was deep and dark as though it could devour all light.

"From the left, this should be the third room." Shang Jianyao revealed his observation.

Sikhara Temple, seventh floor, third room... Isn't this where the door knocker hinted at? Long Yuehong almost gasped. He didn't know if it was too late to escape, but he felt that this was the only choice.

Bai Chen was the same. She felt that it wasn't appropriate to stay here for long.

In the blink of an eye, they seemed to have felt some kind of summoning.

There seemed to be something summoning them in that room, and this clearly wavered their will to escape. They didn't rush to the stairwell immediately and stayed where they were.

“Come over...”

“Come over...”

“Come over...”

A drawn-out voice sounded indistinctly in the four Old Task Force members' hearts.

“Uh-uh, no way!” Shang Jianyao used Corny Person on himself. He didn't forget to influence Jiang Baimian, Long Yuehong, and Bai Chen so that they could resist the summoning.

“I'm staying here. I'm not going anywhere!” Long Yuehong shouted. In his corny state, he was neither willing to respond to the summoning nor wanting to escape.

Jiang Baimian's reaction was similar to Shang Jianyao's. She composed herself and ordered in a deep voice, “Retreat to the stairs.”

Before she could finish her sentence, the open door seemed to be pushed by an invisible force, trying to close.

The howling of the wind increased in pitch, and the closing of the door slowed down significantly.

Just as the dark-red wooden door was about to close completely, a hoarse voice that seemed not to have spoken for many years sounded with difficulty. “Holm... Holm...”

Bang!

The door was completely closed, blocking out all stirrings.