

Ad Infinitum 521

Chapter 521: Whistling in the Wind

After adjusting his shirt's cuffs, the black figure cast its gaze at the gap that emitted sunlight as if it were taking note of the time.

Suddenly, it saw a pair of eyes there—dark-brown eyes.

The next second, the eyes' owner passed through the wall and glass before bizarrely entering the chamber.

He was less than 1.8 meters tall with long black hair, and had his body draped in a loose black robe. He was in his forties, and he had a very elegant beard around his mouth. He was Du Heng, who called himself an antiquarian.

“You...” The white-haired elder and the gigantic black figure behind him spoke at the same time.

Du Heng bent his back slightly, coughed, and smiled in response. “Although I’ve forgotten many things, I vaguely remember that my responsibility is to stop you guys from coming to the Ashlands and send those who are already here back...”

All of a sudden, a blazing sun seemed to rise from the chamber that only had certain areas illuminated.

...

Golden Apple Zone, 14 Round Hill Street, outside Avia's classic-looking villa.

Upon seeing the rocket being pushed away, Kanna—who was also prepared to use Matter Interference—heaved a sigh of relief.

In this regard, her ability was actually about the same as Khal's. However, she was still maintaining the effects of another Awakened ability. Unable to use Matter Interference to its full extent, she was afraid that she couldn't send the rocket far away enough and would end up injured by the ensuing blast.

The ability she was maintaining was called Friendly Halo.

There was no need for words or actions. Kanna could make all creatures with high intelligence that entered a certain range have a good impression of her and become friendly. She could also make two people—who were supposed to be at odds and close to coming to blows—sit down and have a chat over tea.

This ability was so powerful that Kanna naturally became the Mind Corridor-level Awakened's friend the moment she entered the Virtual World. It made the Awakened stop being vigilant and wary, allowing her to deactivate the Virtual World.

If it weren't for the fact that Khal had used Forced Sleep from a long distance away and switched to Real Dreamscape, causing Kanna's Friendly Halo to disappear, he would've treated this lady differently and shown a certain level of friendliness the moment he drove close.

After Kanna was woken up by the fatal danger Shang Jianyao had created, her first reaction was to use Friendly Halo to resolve the hostility, not Matter Interference to deal with the rocket.

This was a method she had tried time and time again, allowing her to escape danger every time. However, there was something wrong with Shang Jianyao's brain. Despite clearly becoming friendly, he still pulled the trigger. It scared Kanna so much that she almost cursed out loud.

Fortunately, Khal was also affected by her Friendly Halo and took the initiative to help her resolve the danger.

The Friendly Halo ability came under Eidolon Nun—it was the opposite of vigilance. It was very strong and very useful. It could resolve many problems, but it was also not omnipotent. For example, it had a relatively obvious flaw: It had to be maintained to be effective.

In other words, Kanna couldn't immediately switch abilities after others became 'friendly.' That would directly lose any friendliness.

Friendly Halo wasn't like Inference Clowning or Forced Sleep, which could stay in effect for a certain period of time after the Awakened stopped casting them. Also, they could only be removed when negatory conditions were met.

Once Friendly Halo was stopped, the target would immediately return to normal. Therefore, once Kanna used this ability, she couldn't show other abilities unless she planned on giving up on such effects.

In such a state, she could only use Matter Interference that had been weakened by more than two-thirds, a few items, and the pistol she carried with her.

Boom!

The rocket exploded on the wall not far away, shattering many windows and shaking the entire building.

Kanna turned her head to look at the old woman in the black beanie. Upon seeing that the latter's eyes were moving slightly and that it wouldn't be long before she woke up, Kanna could only continue maintaining Friendly Halo. She then looked out the window and calmly pleaded with Khal as a 'friend.'

"Can you give me some time to speak to Avia?"

Khal's eyes were unfocused, and he relied on his perception of human consciousness to turn toward Avia's classic-looking villa again. Although he was very friendly to Kanna, he didn't forget his mission and duties. "No, I'll have to kill you too if you come into contact with Avia and obtain something from her. Since we're friends, don't make things difficult for me."

Shang Jianyao—who was holding the Death rocket launcher—nodded in agreement.

In fact, he didn't hear anything—his hearing had been deprived. He only felt that since the other party was speaking, he had to show agreement out of politeness.

Kanna also couldn't hear what Khal said. She only guessed that he had rejected her request from his attitude and reaction.

She instinctively believed that the enemy had already locked onto Avia and was attempting to kill her, so she quickly changed the topic. "Do you know what the dangerous item on Avia is? Where does its danger originate from?"

As Kanna asked, she—who had already walked to the window—gestured at Shang Jianyao to infiltrate the villa while she held the enemy back. He was to find Avia, wake her up, and make preparations to administer emergency treatment.

Of course, a gesture definitely couldn't express that much. The two parties didn't have the tacit understanding that they needed time to build up. Kanna could only point toward the villa in the hopes that Shang Jianyao would comprehend her thoughts.

She felt that such an experienced outfield member should know what to do next, but she also felt that this still awake fellow was abnormal in the head. He might misunderstand.

Just in case, she decided to exploit the strong against another adversary at the same time. Kanna pulled out a pistol hidden under her clothes and threw it at the old woman in the black beanie.

Bam!

The pistol smashed into the Mind Corridor-level Awakened, making her body tremble.

At the same time, Khal shook his head. "I'm not sure what it is. I only know one thing: I definitely can't give Avia a chance to use that item. Alright, let's end it here. How about we have afternoon tea after I finish off Avia and these people who obtained the passcode from Marcus? Uh, it's still morning. Let's have lunch then."

"Alright." Kanna—who had no idea what the other party was saying—nodded repeatedly.

Shang Jianyao—whose arm was stained with blood—crept toward Avia's classic-looking villa. He was taking advantage of the fact that the enemy couldn't see his surroundings and couldn't sense him.

At this moment, the Life Angel necklace in Khal's right hand lit up with a bright glow. He then laughed. "Done. Main objective accomplished. Yes, my vision is almost restored."

Although Kanna couldn't hear him, she guessed that he had already attacked Avia based on the item he used.

The lady's expression sank. She glanced at Shang Jianyao and pointed at Khal.

She wanted the other party to cooperate with her and finish off this enemy as soon as possible before saving Avia.

Shang Jianyao understood what she meant. He turned around and raised the Death rocket launcher.

At this moment, Kanna also aimed her left hand at Khal. On it was a ring made of diamond shards.

It was called Sluggish. It could slow down the target's instinctive reaction toward another person they were watching, as well as slow down any corresponding premonition.

This—combined with Khal's current blind state—was enough to make the rocket blast to his side before he sensed something and hastily attempted Matter Interference.

It would be too late.

Mind Corridor-level Awakened still had the body of a human. They couldn't compare to a mechanical monk, and an explosive rocket would be a fatal blow to them.

14 Round Hill Street, in the classic-looking villa's bathhouse lobby.

Avia—who was wearing a white bathrobe with wet blonde hair—woke up from the armchair due to the quakes caused by the rocket explosion.

Beside her, a maid—who was also wearing a bathrobe—lay on the ground. Her entire body convulsed as her breathing sounded like a sigh.

Avia's eyes focused as she pulled her left hand from her bathrobe pocket. She held a phone in her left hand—an old silver-white phone with cracks on the glass screen.

Chapter 522: No Regrets

Red Wolf Zone, Senate.

Zennaga—who was sitting on a black motorcycle—looked ahead at the people who had fallen into the Six Realms of Rebirth and Existence and were struggling in pain. He then chanted a Buddhist proclamation.

He didn't want to punish these people, but he hoped to use the Six Realms of Rebirth and Existence to make them feel pain and gradually calm down or stop having the energy to participate in the riot.

In short, Zennaga's goal was to 'appease' everyone one area at a time so that the scene of corpses strewn across the ground and blood flowing everywhere wouldn't happen. Therefore, he treated everyone equally—including the Subhuman Guard behind him—by sending them into the Six Realms of Rebirth and Existence.

For this, he had clearly foreseen that he would be sent flying and bloom with blood. However, he still straightened his body and didn't get the motorcycle to retreat.

Upon seeing that most of the citizens in the area ahead had already been hit by the Six Realms of Rebirth and Existence, falling to the ground and struggling in pain, Zennaga twisted the throttle and let the motorcycle drive through the dispersed city defense forces.

He wanted to influence the demonstrating citizens further away.

At this moment, a figure suddenly appeared beside him. This figure held a United 202 and pulled the trigger at him.

Bang!

It was only when the gunshot sounded that Zennaga had a premonition and sensed something. By the time he came to a realization, it was already too late. He only had time to create a barrier and block one of the bullets. The other bullet drilled into his body and pushed him off the motorcycle.

In midair, Zennaga felt intense pain.

Glorious Scale is also involved in this chaos? This thought flashed across his mind.

Glorious Scale believed in June's Kalendaria, Golden Scale. Some Awakened had the ability to hide themselves and block premonitions. They were the most suitable group of people in the Ashlands for carrying out assassinations.

As these thoughts flashed through his mind, Zennaga saw his blood splatter in the air like a blooming, bewitching flower. He couldn't help but recall the conversation he had with his senior brother, Zennero, after returning to Sikhara Temple last night.

The Enlightened said in a concerned and angry tone, "The people you brought back ran away! Not only did they trigger chaos on the seventh floor, but they also seem to have added fuel to First City's situation. The chaos might really happen.

"If it weren't for your benevolent thoughts and if you had directly handed them over to the Hand of Order, how could all of this happen? Over the years, haven't you suffered enough from your compassion? Do you feel even an ounce of regret when you think back about it?"

Zennaga remembered that he fell silent for a few seconds before answering: "No regrets."

Amidst the intense pain, Zennaga—who was about to fall to the ground—cast his gaze at the large number of citizens surging over from the distance. He vaguely realized that there were fewer people than he had imagined, giving him the illusion that he had overcounted.

Without the energy to care about these matters, Zennaga closed his eyes and used the Six Realms of Rebirth and Existence again.

Bam!

He fell to the ground, and fresh blood quickly splattered.

...

Golden Apple Zone, 14 Round Hill Street, outside the classic-looking villa.

Shang Jianyao aimed the single-man combat rocket launcher at the enemy standing atop the black car. Kanna also took the opportunity while the other party was blind to raise her left hand, prepared to use the Sluggish ring.

At this moment, Avia—who was in the bathhouse lobby—had already woken up. She wasn't in a critical state because of Khal's Cardiac Arrest.

Her maid suffered the attack instead. This wasn't a substitute ability or item but a contingency plan set up by the Virtual World's owner today.

She and Avia knew very well that this place might be attacked once chaos broke out in First City and most powerhouses were lured away.

The organization that tried to eliminate the clues regarding the Old World's destruction definitely wouldn't let go of such an opportunity. Therefore, the Virtual World's owner named Aneva had given Avia 'Agnosia' that could last nearly half an hour.

This was a special effect that evolved from Mind Corridor abilities like prosopagnosia and being directionally challenged in the Shattered Mirror domain. It could be used on enemies, preventing them from remembering the target's looks, characteristics, or corresponding location and consciousness fluctuations. Then, the enemies would wrongly lock onto unrelated humans.

It could also be used on targets that required protection. When the enemy saw or sensed the target for the first time, they wouldn't be affected. But once their attack was interrupted and interfered with, their lock on the target would be 'lost' and would naturally 'link' to the nearest human.

Therefore, Avia's maid suffered Cardiac Arrest in her stead.

The pitiful girl's scream in the dream indirectly helped Avia wake up ahead of time.

In the Shattered Mirror domain, states like prosopagnosia and being directionally challenged might not only be a price but also an ability. This was applicable to many Awakened domains—the manifestation of the price one paid might be an ability of others.

At this moment, Avia looked at the dying maid on the ground and knew that the expected attack had arrived.

She turned her head to look at the old, broken phone in her hand. Then, she switched on the screen, pulled up the contacts list, and found an unlabeled number.

Avia was very hesitant, unsure if she should press the button.

In the past few years, she had never tried to call the ‘number.’ She wasn’t sure if it would bring danger to herself. She only remembered her grandfather—First City’s former emperor, Oray—saying to her and her father before he died: “Don’t give up on this phone until it’s beyond repair. Don’t dial this number unless there’s no other way.”

Amidst her thoughts, Avia’s vision suddenly turned black. Her consciousness remained clear, and she felt like night had arrived in advance.

She could only vaguely make out the furniture in the room. This at least proved that she didn’t lose her vision.

No, there are no windows in the bathhouse lobby. It relies on lamps for illumination regardless of day or night... Avia’s heart palpitated as she frowned.

This was definitely not normal darkness.

Avia wasn’t the only one who felt like night had arrived prematurely. Shang Jianyao, Kanna, and the others also entered such a state of vision, but they could only see the outlines of the objects around them.

This... Kanna—who was prepared to influence Khal—diverted her attention to sense her surroundings and searched for the source of the change.

Pure and dazzling light erupted in midair the next second, purging away the darkness.

This stung Kanna and Shang Jianyao to the point of them instinctively closing their eyes. It filled the blind Khal’s vision with white.

After this dazzling whiteness disappeared, the Blind effect on Khal ended early due to the stimulation. He regained his vision and saw Shang Jianyao pointing the rocket launcher at him.

As soon as their gazes met, Shang Jianyao greeted him by pulling the trigger. He didn’t wait for Kanna to work in tandem with him because Khal could now see his surroundings.

Boom!

At close range, the rocket fired by Shang Jianyao only deviated a little before exploding.

However, an invisible barrier seemed to appear around Khal, blocking the violent blasts.

As Khal staggered, he was only thankful that he had woken up and reacted in time. The outcome would've been unimaginable if he had been hit by the rocket head-on!

...

In the North Shore wastelands.

Han Wanghuo, Zeng Duo, and Genava were closely monitoring the situation at the Red River Bridge to determine how many First City powerhouses and regular troops had returned from the surrounding area.

Suddenly, they saw a large number of city guards dancing—a vigorous dance.

If it were anyone else, they would definitely be looking at each other with blank expressions. However, Han Wanghuo and the others had experienced the strange battle outside Early Spring Town as bystanders.

“The powerhouse guarding Early Spring Town has also returned?” Han Wanghuo said with uncertainty.

There might be more than one powerhouse with such abilities.

Genava wasn't using binoculars, but he seriously observed for a while. “From the rhythm of the dance, it should be the same song as the one used by the person in Early Spring Town. There might still be coincidences, but the probability of coincidences is very low. My preliminary judgment indicates that it's indeed the same person.”

Zeng Duo quietly listened to Genava's analysis and blurted out, “This means that Early Spring Town's defense has been reduced to a minimum?”

“Yes.” Genova gave an affirmative answer.

Han Wanghuo nodded and fell silent for a while. “This is our chance.”

“Aren’t we going to wait for Big White, Hey, and the rest?” Genova objected.

Han Wanghuo gave his reason. “We don’t know when they can leave the city to rendezvous with us. This opportunity might be the last.”

In fact, Genova’s analysis was the same. But he felt that as a smart bot, he couldn’t appear too programmatic, mechanical, and stiff. Therefore, he still emphasized the previous plan.

Zeng Duo hesitated. “I agree. Uh, Old Han.”

At this moment, she wished she could rush back to Early Spring Town immediately. However, she couldn’t help but feel a little nervous. She felt that she didn’t have the needed strength without October Xue and the others.

The red light in Genova’s eyes flickered a few times. “Alright, let’s head to Early Spring Town now.”

Chapter 523: Ringing

Amidst the explosion, Khal—whose vision had returned to normal while his ears rang—sensed something abnormal. A good friend he believed that he had a good relationship with—one who was sufficiently friendly with him—hadn’t warned him when an enemy tried to attack him!

As he followed this train of thought and ruminated over it, he discovered a fact that shocked him—he didn’t even know his good friend’s name!

There’s a problem... The experienced Khal immediately reacted. He stopped Real Dreamscape and imposed Forced Sleep on all human consciousnesses in the area!

In the blink of an eye, Kanna—who was sighing that she had failed to grasp the opportunity and was about to give up on Friendly Halo—closed her eyes. Her body slowly fell to the thick carpet.

The Virtual World's owner—the old woman in the black beanie, who had just opened her eyes and had yet to figure out the exact situation—fell asleep again.

Avia—who was holding the battered phone and hesitating about whether to use it—leaned against the armchair. She fell asleep again as if everything she had just seen was a dream.

Shang Jianyao—who was holding the Death rocket launcher—also fell to the ground. As he was holding something heavy, he fell quickly, almost crashing down.

This way, the pain of falling would definitely wake him up from his slumber.

Unfortunately, Khal had sufficient experience in this regard. He added Matter Interference, slowing down Shang Jianyao's fall.

Shang Jianyao lay on the ground without causing so much as a stir as he snored, asleep.

In order to prevent the sleeping Jiang Baimian from waking up strangely like before, Khal quickly switched Forced Sleep to Real Dreamscape. After doing this, he finally heaved a sigh of relief.

The developments made him worried that not only was he unable to complete his designated goals, but he would also encounter something bad. Fortunately, after a few rounds of confrontation, he—who had always held the initiative—finally saw an inkling of success by relying on some external influence.

Avia has been eliminated. It's time to deal with the fellows who know the passcode... After dealing with them, I'll enter the villa immediately, search for the dangerous item, and take it away... As these thoughts raced, Khal cast his gaze at the Old Task Force's military-green jeep.

His next target was the woman with the fake name October Xue or the man with the fake name Zhang Qubing. The previous series of accidents was brought about by these two people. They had to be eliminated first!

For some reason, compared to the Virtual World's owner and the Mind Corridor-level Awakened who made him feel friendly, Khal believed that these two were the greatest latent dangers. After all, nobody knew if they would use Real Dreamscape to summon the boy named Xiaochong.

Just as Khal locked onto Shang Jianyao—who wasn't far away from the jeep—and prepared to use Cardiac Arrest on him, he suddenly felt the world spin around his heavy mind. He quickly couldn't think.

Slowly, he collapsed and slammed onto the top of the black car. However, he didn't wake up because of this as if he had become a vegetable.

The last thing he saw was: In the driver's seat window of the military-green jeep was a hand. It was a woman's left hand with malt-colored skin.

After her hearing was deprived, Jiang Baimian drove the car toward Khal and did one last thing before she fell asleep: She rolled down the window, stretched out her left hand, and released the anesthetic gas contained within the electric eel-like biomechanical limb!

Due to the fact that the enemy had used Auditory Deprivation, she suspected that he also had Olfactory Deprivation.

For an Awakened who paid the price of being sensitive and afraid of certain smells, blocking their sense of smell in advance was definitely the best choice when conducting a large-scale massacre or avoiding any corresponding accidents.

That would make him invulnerable.

Even if Khal didn't have any items related to Olfactory Deprivation, Jiang Baimian believed that he would've already affected his senses in advance or subsequently, making his olfactory senses dull. Khal had previously shown his ability to control sensory intensity on Long Yuehong.

When the target lost their sense of smell or became slow-witted, he definitely couldn't smell anesthetic gas!

Jiang Baimian drove the jeep to the back of the enemy car. The reason she stepped on the brakes was that the other party had already 'flown' above her. It required a lot of luck to cause an explosion with a collision, and the losses were likely to outweigh the gains. On the other hand, she didn't want to scare the enemy away. She hoped that he could remain in his original spot and remain within the anesthetic gas's effective range.

In such an open environment, the anesthetic gas would be ineffective if some distance was put in between them.

Just as Jiang Baimian had expected, Khal—who was busy carrying out all kinds of operations and didn't want to be distracted by Matter Interference—chose to land on the car and had deprived himself of his sense of smell. Therefore, he had been inhaling the anesthetic gas while doing those things, but he had never sensed it.

If it weren't for the fact that Shang Jianyao had just fired a rocket at Khal and had cleared the gas around him, he would've entered an anesthetic state earlier.

In an instant, everyone inside and outside Avia's classical villa 'fell asleep.' Be it the attacked or the attackers, they lay down.

Whoever woke up first gained immense initiative.

A relatively hot wind blew in the morning. In an extremely quiet environment, a green parrot flew over from somewhere.

It cursed as it flew. "Damn woman, why are you acting like a retard like most people in the Senate? Why do you think a parrot is trustworthy? It's so dangerous... You can trust the morals of a parrot, but you definitely can't trust its mouth and brain..."

"I don't agree with all the vulgarities I say. This is purely an imitation..."

"It's too dangerous, too dangerous..."

As the parrot cursed, it flew to the third floor of Avia's classic-looking villa and landed on its owner, Kanna. It then began to peck at the lady who had taught it many vulgarities.

Khal only enforced Forced Sleep on humans and not animals.

...

Red Wolf Zone, Senate.

Galoran floated outside the window, her green eyes never leaving the demonstrating citizens below. She tried her best to reduce the number of people in the other Mind Corridor-level Awakened's sights and protected them to the greatest extent.

She could already sense that many people hiding in the dark had cast their gazes at her, prepared to launch an attack at any moment.

At this moment, it was dark—it was dark wherever the naked eye could see.

Light then erupted and swept across the area. This was like nuclear bombs exploding when the Old World was destroyed or the fluorescent tubes that suddenly lit up in a dark room.

Galoran subconsciously closed her eyes.

This was everyone's instinct.

In the Senate behind her, the people who cried and laughed because of former Consul Beulis had returned to normal.

Just as the light subsided, a figure quickly outlined itself in the middle of the Council Chamber. He wore a general's suit and had a sinister bearing. He had a clear, aquiline nose and was none other than the former commander of the Eastern Army Corps, Gaius.

Gaius finally smiled as if he had gained sufficient confidence from the strange development. At some point in time, his left palm was holding a phone.

The screen was shattered, and it had a black exterior.

Without giving anyone a chance to react, Gaius pressed the speed dial.

The screen lit up, but no number or corresponding name appeared. There was only the sole word —'calling.'

Ring, ring, ring!

The phone clearly didn't make a sound, but a ringtone echoed in the ears of all the humans and animals in the surrounding area.

Ring, ring, ring...

The ringing stopped abruptly. On the cracked screen of Gaius's phone, the words 'calling' switched to 'connected.'

Suddenly, these words seemed to come to life and sink in.

The entire screen seemed to transform into a 'black hole' that constantly swallowed the contents and the surrounding light. In just a second, the Senate Council Chamber became abnormally dark, giving off the feeling that dusk was about to pass and that the sun was about to sink below the horizon.

At the same time, Superintendent Alexander, the other Elders, their attendants, and their guards—who had returned to normal—seemed to turn into statues or had been cast with immobile magic.

In their minds, the intermittent ringing and lingering sounds constantly echoed.

Having contracted the Heartless disease, Beulis—who had lost all his rationality—turned to look at Gaius and the phone in his hand. A hint of fear surfaced in his bloodshot, turbid eyes.

The next second, the 'black hole' on the phone screen seemed to freeze. Inside, a pair of heavy, blurry double doors appeared.

Chapter 524: Harvest

The old, cracked phone was clearly very light, but it looked as if Gaius was holding something weighing dozens to a hundred kilograms when he held it in his hand. His arm trembled to a certain extent.

In the dark environment, he aimed the black hole-like phone screen at former Consul Beulis.

This powerhouse—who had contracted the Heartless disease—seemed to smell danger. His immobile body trembled from the inside out, but in the blink of an eye, his bloodshot, turbid eyes lost all their luster. Only a little fear remained.

Badump!

Beulis fell to the ground, his breathing coming to a stop. His heart stopped beating, and there was no sign of life left.

Gaius secretly heaved a sigh of relief upon seeing this.

Although this consul and commander-in-chief had just contracted the Heartless disease and had become a dangerous monster, preventing him from having any powerful political influence, Gaius didn't dare to be careless.

Even if such a powerful figure became a Heartless, he was still a Superior Heartless that could enact changes on the current situation and bring about serious damage.

To be honest, Gaius didn't believe that things would've developed so smoothly if it weren't for the fact that Beulis—a new Superior Heartless—had successfully bound all the nobles, their attendants, and guards in the Senate.

It had to be known that there were many Mind Corridor-level Awakened in this group. If they joined the battle in time, the situation outside the Senate definitely wouldn't be like this. Gaius also wouldn't have the opportunity to sneak in and use the phone to control the situation.

He hoped to make the situation clear before the big shots—who had already entered the New World—woke up and determined the winner. Only then would he have enough chips to bribe and placate them.

As these thoughts raced through his mind, Gaius aimed the phone screen at another Conservative Elder.

When the Elder's figure reflected in the 'black hole' on the phone screen, he silently lost his life.

Just like that, Gaius dealt with the Conservative Elders one by one, especially the powerful or influential ones.

Even if a small number of the Conservatives were Mind Corridor-level Awakened, Gaius didn't show any mercy; he even included them in his priority list. Gaius knew very well that this would significantly reduce First City's strength after the chaos, but he didn't care.

Compared to First City's overall strength, he cared more about the stability of his subsequent rule. Besides, he had teamed up with many religions this time. When the time came, he definitely had to take a share of the loot and continue tying them to his chariot. These religions' Mind Corridor-level Awakened could be considered high-ranking combatants in First City—at least when facing outsiders.

As he watched the Conservative Elders fall, their faces warping with fear, their muscles relaxing, and their stench seeping out, a ringing sound suddenly sounded in Gaius's mind.

The phone had clearly stopped dialing, but he still heard the corresponding ringtone!

Gaius's expression turned cold, knowing that he would be affected if this continued. He looked at the dozen or so Conservative Elders remaining and sighed rationally before pressing the hang-up button.

The phone's screen didn't immediately return to normal. The 'black hole' lingered for a few seconds before reluctantly dissipating.

Nearly ten seconds later, the phone's cracked screen was no longer pitch-black or bright. The ringing in Gaius's ears also vanished.

The immobile Superintendent Alexander and the others seemed to have regained control of their bodies.

...

Golden Apple Zone, 14 Round Hill Street, in Avia's classic-looking villa.

Under the parrot's relentless pecking, Kanna's eyes stirred. She subconsciously raised her hand and shielded her face. "F*ck, who hit me?"

"Your father!" the parrot replied eloquently.

Kanna opened her eyes and shook her head, finally recalling her current situation.

"I think you're tired of living!" As she threatened the parrot in Ashlandic, she wore Friendly Halo over herself. No matter what the situation was, the most important thing was not to get beaten up!

As a Mind Corridor-level Awakened, Kanna's hearing had already recovered. As she spoke, Kanna stood up and cast her gaze out the window.

Upon seeing the Awakened that could force people to fall asleep unconscious on the top of the black car, she blurted out in surprise, "What's wrong with him?"

We were affected by Forced Sleep. Who knocked this fellow out?

The parrot opened its mouth and replied, "Who should I ask if you're asking me? Are you stupid?"

Kanna didn't curse at it because she saw Shang Jianyao—who was sleeping not far away from the military-green jeep—slowly stir awake.

Nobody could keep sleeping when their left arm was injured and bleeding unless they had already lost a lot of blood and were close to shock.

More importantly, the Real Dreamscape's owner had already been anesthetized and couldn't maintain the effects of his abilities. Shang Jianyao and the others had become normal sleepers, making it easier for them to wake up.

Thud! Thud! Thud!

Shang Jianyao had just stood up when he rushed toward the military-green jeep in a posture he had rehearsed many times in his dreams. He first stretched out his right hand, grabbed Jiang Baimian's

left wrist, and pulled at it a few times. He then exerted strength with his waist and abdomen, using the black car's hood to jump to the top of the car and squat beside the anesthetized enemy.

Shang Jianyao didn't bandage his wound. After all, the multi-purpose bayonet was still in him—it stopped some of the bleeding.

He took off his tactical backpack and retrieved a medical kit before quickly taking out a syringe of anesthetic. This was to make the enemy fall completely asleep before the anesthetic gas's effects weakened due to the good ventilation!

As for whether it would be excessive or fatal, it wasn't a question Shang Jianyao was concerned about.

Jiang Baimian woke up in the jeep. She reflexively jumped up and almost hit the steering wheel.

After she saw the situation on the top of the black car clearly, she couldn't help but heave a sigh of relief. She turned around and handled the small speaker that was still playing the song.

She didn't want to suddenly regain her sense of hearing after everything was under control. That would afford her a weakness from the need to pee.

Upon seeing this, Kanna nodded in approval and focused her attention on the old woman in the black beanie.

She walked over and picked up her pistol. As she inserted it into her clothes to prevent it from affecting the degree of her 'friendliness,' she said to the parrot, "Go somewhere further away and wait. Come and peck me awake if anything happens later."

"Damn it, you ignorant woman. Am I someone who can be summoned back and forth as you please?" As the parrot grumbled, its body reacted obediently.

With a flap of its wings, it flew out of the shattered glass window.

Kanna looked at the unconscious old woman and didn't take the opportunity to attack her. This wasn't because she was soft-hearted but because she had previously communicated with the Old

Task Force and agreed that it was very likely that one or even more Kalendarium were behind this chaos. They didn't dare to kill 'Their' believers.

It would be troublesome if the other party's death attracted the attention of the corresponding Kalendaria. Therefore, Kanna sat on the armrest beside the old woman and paid close attention to the latter's condition, prepared to make her physically fall asleep.

After injecting Khal with the anesthetic, Shang Jianyao took the opportunity to take out bandages and other items from the medical kit to treat the wound on his left arm. He then pulled out the multi-purpose bayonet and tore off some of his bloodstained clothes.

"There, your loved ones." Jiang Baimian alighted from the jeep and placed the small speaker and portable recording device on the top of the black sedan.

She realized that her hearing had almost recovered, and she believed that it was the same for Shang Jianyao.

She then ran to Bai Chen and Long Yuehong's side and slapped them awake. Without bothering to explain anything after seeing them stir awake, she quickly said, "Watch the captive. Shang Jianyao and I will go in to find Avia. If the captive shows any signs of waking up, shoot him immediately!"

Captive... Long Yuehong was still a little confused. After he saw the unconscious Khal on the top of the black sedan clearly, he realized that they had captured a Mind Corridor-level Awakened!

"Alright." Bai Chen—who was wearing a military exoskeleton—nodded and rushed to the black car.

At this moment, Shang Jianyao completed some simple bandaging and smiled at Bai Chen. "I'll add some insurance for y'all."

He stuffed the piece of blood-soaked clothes into Khal's mouth, hoping that the strong smell of blood would inundate the latter's nose the moment he woke up.

Long Yuehong was stunned and suddenly pitied the Mind Corridor-level Awakened.

One can be killed but not insulted!

However, Long Yuehong gained more confidence in watching the unconscious enemy from Shang Jianyao's actions.

Jiang Baimian held in the twitching of the corners of her mouth and didn't say anything. She crossed the black sedan and ran toward Avia's classic-looking villa.

She was racing against time.

Shang Jianyao stuffed the small speaker, portable recording equipment, the prayer beads, necklace, gold coins, and other items he had plundered from the enemy into his tactical backpack. After that, he jumped up and followed closely behind Jiang Baimian.

The two of them followed the route they took in the Real Dreamscape and passed through the hall to the bathhouse lobby in their memories.

After pushing open the door, they saw the dead maid and the sleeping Avia.

Chapter 525: Mysterious Numbers

Jiang Baimian quickly examined Avia and focused on the old phone in the latter's hand. She fell silent for a moment before taking a few steps forward and moving Avia's finger away from the dial button.

After doing this, she nudged Avia and shook her awake.

The reason Jiang Baimian didn't directly take away the phone was that as a matter of precaution, she was afraid that something bad would happen after the item left its owner.

She originally didn't care about this and felt that it wouldn't be a problem as long as the target didn't press any buttons. But now, she could only say: Old World entertainment is harmful!

After learning about all kinds of strange things, it was inevitable that she would overthink things regardless of their authenticity.

There's nothing wrong with being careful... Upon seeing that Avia was about to wake up, Jiang Baimian took two steps back and distanced herself sufficiently to prevent the other party from overreacting.

She turned her head to glance at Shang Jianyao and reminded him solemnly, "You're mainly in charge of listening later."

She was afraid that Avia couldn't appreciate Shang Jianyao's jokes and would end up choosing an internecine outcome.

"What if there are any important questions?" Shang Jianyao asked in response.

"Tell me secretly first. I'll do the asking." Jiang Baimian was firm on this.

"Alright." Shang Jianyao shut his mouth.

At this moment, Avia slowly opened her eyes, revealing her light-blue eyes. Upon seeing Jiang Baimian and Shang Jianyao, she suddenly sat up, shrank her body, and held the phone in front of her chest with a vigilant expression.

Jiang Baimian revealed a friendly smile. "There's no need to be nervous; we have no ill intentions toward you. We don't belong to the organization that wants to eliminate you."

"You are?" Avia didn't let down her guard. She moved a finger to the old phone's dial button.

Jiang Baimian cleared her throat and said seriously, "We are from Pangu Biology."

"Pangu Biology..." Avia's pupils suddenly dilated. That sentence only seemed to make her more afraid.

"..." Jiang Baimian was speechless. At this moment, she suddenly hoped that Shang Jianyao would speak and interject.

However, Shang Jianyao adhered to his previous promise. Silence was gold.

Jiang Baimian composed herself and smiled. “We mainly want to make contact with you and ask if your grandfather Oray left behind any last words, as well as understand if you have any personal requests. We’ll try our best to satisfy whatever we can.”

She spoke very bluntly, implying that Pangu Biology was being polite before resorting to force and that they hoped to reach a cooperative agreement that would benefit both parties.

Upon seeing Avia remain silent, Jiang Baimian added, “You should know very well that doing anything bad to you is meaningless.”

Avia finally moved. She brushed her wet blonde hair with her free hand and smiled mockingly. “Can you take me away from First City?”

Jiang Baimian laughed and asked, “Is that what you really want?”

Avia fell silent. She was certain that First City would send a Mind Corridor-level Awakened to protect her, but she couldn’t be sure if Pangu Biology would also waste such resources. At the same time, she suspected that Pangu Biology would mercilessly abandon her after she was drained of her value.

Furthermore, she was born and raised in First City. She had lived here for almost 30 years and was already accustomed to everything here.

Compared to her cousin Marcus, she wasn’t that ambitious.

Without giving Avia a chance to think, Jiang Baimian quickly said, “As you know, the situation outside is changing rapidly. If we don’t make the best use of our time, we won’t be able to communicate.”

Avia fell silent for a few seconds before saying, “What do you want to know?”

“Did your grandfather—Oray, also known as Mr. Maximian—tell you anything before he died?” Jiang Baimian asked with a relatively broad scope.

Avia smiled. “You know a lot. I didn’t know his real name until I was at his deathbed.”

She paused and said without hesitation, “I can’t think of anything I need you to do for the time being. Tell me what needs to be said first. I believe you will keep your promise. Heh heh, there’s no need to suspect anything. I’ve long wanted to tell these things to others. Not only do I feel uncomfortable keeping it bottled, but it’s also dangerous.”

Jiang Baimian said solemnly, “As long as it’s within my abilities, I’ll help you personally even if the company doesn’t agree.”

Avia looked at the dead maid and organized her words. “Before my grandfather died, he told us that his real name was Maximian Urbinos Brutus, the Chief Scientist of the Old World’s Third Research Institute. He’s an artificial intelligence and robot expert. Before the Old World was destroyed, he was participating in a secret project.

“That project had two directions. The first was the combination of artificial intelligence and the city’s operation. The second was a silicon-based chip meant to simulate human consciousness and deepen artificial intelligence.

“The latter is the exact opposite of the Monks Conclave’s Eternals plan. One is to verify the existence of human consciousness and to contain consciousness uploaded through a special chip configuration. The other is to use the chips in the domain of robots to seek the best arrangement and see if they can use the chip’s complicated electric signals to simulate a module closest to human consciousness.”

Jiang Baimian nodded. “From this angle, the Monks Conclave’s former self should also be a research institute in the Old World, right?”

It was in charge of the Eternal branch.

“You do know a lot.” Avia exhaled. “However, I’m not sure which research institute the Monks Conclave used to be.”

Just as she said that, Shang Jianyao suddenly tugged at Jiang Baimian’s sleeve, indicating for her to turn her back. He had something to tell her secretly.

This made Avia nervous. How suspicious!

“What do you have to ask?” Jiang Baimian asked with a hushed tone.

Shang Jianyao replied in a low voice, “Ask her why Oray left Mechanical Paradise. That’s what Old Ge wants to know.”

“...” Jiang Baimian fell silent for a second before saying, “You can ask her directly.”

“No.” Shang Jianyao’s attitude was very firm. “I promised to tell you first, and you’ll do the asking.”

Jiang Baimian suddenly felt like she had reaped what she sowed. She turned around and subconsciously smiled before asking Avia, “The Third Research Institute shouldn’t have been damaged after the Old World was destroyed. Why did your grandfather leave and go to the Red River Zone to establish First City?”

Avia instinctively looked around. “This is because he discovered his most outstanding work. The strongest artificial intelligence—which he named the Source Brain—seemed to have developed a certain level of consciousness, a consciousness similar to that of humans. Besides, it had its own thoughts and was secretly plotting something.

“This made my grandfather sense immense danger. He fled the Third Research Institute—the current Mechanical Paradise—before the Source Brain project was completed. You don’t seem surprised; it seems like you already know about this. My grandfather said that he tried to contact the Third Research Institute researchers who survived the Old World’s destruction when he fled. However, he realized that he lost contact with all of them...”

The last sentence gave Jiang Baimian the creeps. She finally understood why Oray had instructed Marcus and his mother to be vigilant about Mechanical Paradise and not to trust the Source Brain.

After the two humans opposite her digested this information, Avia continued, “My grandfather told us to be careful of visitors from Mechanical Paradise because he knows the way to format the Source Brain, thanks to a backdoor that was left behind during the designing and manufacturing process. It’s not something the Source Brain can change by itself.”

Jiang Baimian nodded in enlightenment and frowned. “In that case, why didn’t Oray attempt formatting after discovering the problem with the Source Brain?”

“My grandfather didn’t say.” Avia shook her head.

Jiang Baimian then asked, “Then, did he mention the Eighth Research Institute?”

“Of course,” Avia replied with a solemn expression. “Before my grandfather tried to be emperor, he hid the technical information related to the Source Brain and some of the information he gathered in the dangerous laboratory in Ruin 13. Among them was information regarding the Eighth Research Institute.

“Apart from that, he didn’t mention much in front of us. He only occasionally cursed: ‘It’s all because of these guys.’ He believed that some of them might still be alive, but a terrifying development had already happened. They were reduced to traitors that hide in the darkness, people that we need to be wary of.”

As the Third Research Institute’s Chief Scientist, Oray does know a lot... Jiang Baimian was very gratified. She thought for a moment and directly asked, “Did your grandfather mention the reason for the Old World’s destruction or the Heartless disease’s origins?”

Avia revealed a reminiscing expression. “He never talked about it. It’s just that after a butler in our family contracted the Heartless disease, my grandfather began acting very strange. He didn’t feel sad, nor did he panic or show fear. He was mostly confused and angry.”

Jiang Baimian—who couldn’t figure out what this meant immediately—cast her gaze at the old phone in Avia’s hand. “Is this the dangerous item your grandfather left you?”

“Yes.” Avia nodded.

At this moment, Shang Jianyao tugged at Jiang Baimian’s sleeve again.

Sigh.

Jiang Baimian exhaled and said, “Why don’t you ask directly?”

The two parties had already had a good exchange, so they didn’t have to worry about turning hostile with each other from a single sentence.

Shang Jianyao looked at Avia and curiously asked, "Can this phone speak to your dead grandfather?"

"..." Avia was a little stunned. After she snapped to her senses, she said angrily, "That's a ghost story!"

She then changed the topic. "However, this phone does have a mysterious number."

"How mysterious?" Shang Jianyao asked.

Avia fell silent for a few seconds before saying, "I originally thought that it was a number to a certain important figure in the city or a number that connects to somewhere in the Old World. However, I later realized that it was made up of numbers, symbols, and some random code. It looked meaningless on the surface."

"Maybe it's encrypted," Jiang Baimian calmly pointed out.

Avia nodded slightly. "I think so too. In short, we can rule out the Old World because the corresponding communications network has long been destroyed."

"No." Shang Jianyao's tone became creepy. "Maybe it's connected in a special, paranormal way."

Chapter 526: Rather Die

Avia wasn't frightened by Shang Jianyao's ghost story. Her expression only changed a few times before she said, "Maybe."

She didn't deny Shang Jianyao's guess and even believed that it was possible.

How could an item deemed abnormally terrifying and dangerous by a big shot like Oray not be special?

Without waiting for Jiang Baimian and Shang Jianyao to raise new questions, Avia took the initiative to give a clue. "My grandfather once used this phone to communicate with someone."

"When and who?" Jiang Baimian immediately asked.

Avia revealed a reminiscing expression again. “A year before he became First City’s emperor, my father saw him standing by the study window twice, holding this phone and talking to someone. My father asked about it and only got the answer: ‘Don’t ask again.’ Not long after, my grandfather suddenly Awakened. In just a year, he entered the Mind Corridor and found the door to the New World.”

“Huh?” Jiang Baimian was a little surprised.

Shang Jianyao didn’t hide his confusion and curiosity. “Oray wasn’t an Awakened originally?”

“Before the Old World was destroyed, he was only a scientist who loved working out, combat, and had undergone genetic enhancement. During the Old World’s destruction, he didn’t show any abnormalities or Awakened abilities,” Avia quickly explained. “The reason he became one of First City’s founders was that he could repair the robots in the city and use them to restore the destroyed factories’ production lines. Without him, First City’s situation couldn’t have stabilized so quickly and expanded. This was something that powerful Awakened back then couldn’t have done.”

“Science and technology is the most productive force.” Shang Jianyao agreed.

Avia continued, “Later, he was elected as consul. In fact, it was precisely because he was ‘weak’ and unable to pose a real threat to powerful figures like Cass and Drace. He could play the role of a buffer between them and effectively bridge their differences.

“Besides, he—who wasn’t an Awakened—didn’t need to participate in the corresponding confrontation during wartime. He could stay with most of the ordinary soldiers, command them, and lead them. Therefore, my grandfather had very high prestige in the army.”

“Back then, powerful figures like Cass and Drace might not have imagined that your grandfather would unite First City and crown himself emperor,” Jiang Baimian deliberately said, hoping that Avia could continue.

Avia revealed a complicated smile. “My grandfather didn’t expect it himself. Before becoming an Awakened and finding the door to the New World, he had no delusions about his position. He knew that he was only a product of compromise and that he could be chased off the seat of consul at any moment.

“He only hoped to accumulate enough fields, social connections, and reputation for the family before that happened. At the same time, he wanted to do his best to reconcile the relationship between every party so that First City wouldn’t be in a state of disunity. He still had a lot of feelings for this city, this faction. After he suddenly Awakened, entered the Mind Corridor, and found the door that led to the New World, he immediately had the ambition to become the emperor and began planning.”

Upon hearing this, Jiang Baimian cast her gaze at the silver-white phone in Avia’s hand again.

After using it and talking to a ‘certain person,’ one can ‘naturally’ Awaken, clear the Sea of Origins in a year, and find the door to the New World in the Mind Corridor? How is this a dangerous item? It’s clearly a divine artifact! A divine artifact... But why didn’t Oray let his descendants use it? He even told them that it was very dangerous and that they couldn’t call that number unless they really had no choice... Thoughts flashed through Jiang Baimian’s mind.

She deliberated and asked, “Will it affect you if you just hold this phone?”

Avia pointed at herself. “If there’s an effect, it definitely would’ve shown.”

“So its influence is the love of soaking in a bath!” Shang Jianyao came to a realization.

Avia decided to ignore him. “I will allow you to copy the data inside while I hold the phone.”

“No!” Shang Jianyao revealed a terrified expression. “I’m afraid that the computer will hold a concert in the middle of the night.”

Avia didn’t understand, but Jiang Baimian knew what he was referring to. The Old Task Force had recorded Wu Meng’s voice, and they had almost been secretly affected by the other party. If not for Xiaochong’s help, the few of them would’ve become his puppets thanks to Wu Meng’s recording that played autonomously in the middle of the night.

If Wu Meng—who could be sealed by First City—was so bizarre and terrifying, how could the item that First City’s emperor claimed to be very dangerous be any weaker?

Jiang Baimian suspected that if she copied the phone’s data to a computer, the corresponding computer might very well become a silicon-based version of Wu Meng.

She thought for a moment and said, “There’s no need to copy the data. I’ll just jot down that number.”

“Alright.” Avia lit up her phone screen and pulled up her contacts list. Worried that she wouldn’t be able to find the right line at the critical moment, she had deleted all the phone numbers other than the string of random characters. At this moment, there was only one obvious contact on the screen: “That person.”

“I made this label myself,” Avia explained with a sigh.

As she clicked into the ‘contact,’ Jiang Baimian saw a string of irregular words.

It was indeed as Avia had previously described. Apart from numbers and symbols, there were also many random codes that couldn’t be typed using a phone’s normal keyboard.

Jiang Baimian didn’t dare to be careless. She didn’t use the auxiliary chip to record it, afraid that it would affect the electric eel-like biomechanical limb.

She took out a pen and paper and copied the string of characters. During this process, she heard Shang Jianyao raise a new question.

“Since your grandfather, Mr. Oray, had already found the New World’s door, why didn’t he attempt to enter before he died? It appears that it can extend his life for a significant amount of time.”

Many Awakened who entered the New World were only sleeping and not truly dead. Furthermore, Yama Tiger—who might not be in the New World—was still alive despite being skin and bones.

Avia fell silent for a few seconds before saying, “When my grandfather’s condition worsened, some of his trusted aides encouraged him to enter the New World. His answer was: I’d rather die than enter.”

This... Jiang Baimian looked up and stopped copying the ‘number.’

...

Red Wolf Zone, Senate.

Gaius walked to the front of the Council Chamber, turned around, and quietly watched Superintendent Alexander and the other Elders.

After they completely recovered, the leader of the Reformists and the commander of the Eastern Army Corps said in a deep voice, “Varro and his accomplices colluded with the Salvation Army and the Anti-intellectualism Church to control His Excellency, the Consul, in an attempt to purge the dissidents. With the Kalendaria’s blessing, I’ve already eliminated them!”

Alexander didn’t rashly attack Gaius. He looked around and saw a large number of corpses of the Conservatives.

As his thoughts raced during his dilemma, Gaius’s voice became a little louder. “As long as those who previously followed Varro blindly are willing to repent, the citizens will no longer pursue the matter. Gentlemen, the matter has come to an end. It’s time to start a new chapter—we need to restore order, eliminate the derelict, and retrieve the resources controlled by those traitors!”

He extended an olive branch to the Centrist faction, which was represented by Alexander.

Upon seeing that the Conservatives had lost the upper hand and that the Reformists had the clear upper hand, Alexander nodded and said, “You’re right. We need to elect a new consul now and get him to speak to the citizens outside to resolve this crisis.”

Just as Alexander said that, the Reformists shouted, “Gaius!”

“Gaius!”

“Gaius!”

Gaius smiled as he turned around and walked to the spot high above that originally belonged to the consul. He faced the surviving Elders and said, “I’ll calm the situation as soon as possible. After that, do your best to save those who can still be saved. Otherwise, let them follow Varro to hell!”

Clearly, this chaos wasn't over yet. It would burn to every corner of First City, but it would no longer be completely uncontrollable.

...

"I don't understand why he said that. He didn't mention it again after that." After Avia explained simply, she looked at Jiang Baimian and Shang Jianyao. "I've already told you everything I know."

Jiang Baimian put away the slip that had the mysterious number she copied and asked seriously, "Is there anything you need us to do?"

Avia laughed, sounding a little hysterical. "Spread what I told you so that the organization that wants to eliminate these clues will never succeed! If they really care that much, destroy this world again!"

"Alright." Shang Jianyao agreed first.

Jiang Baimian fell silent for a moment before saying, "I'll tell anyone who asks."

Avia lowered her head and looked at the phone in her hand. "Actually, I really want to leave this to you as well, but I'm still not brave enough. I can't bear to part with my current life and how it can be used as a final threat."

Chapter 527: Items

Upon hearing Avia's whisper, Shang Jianyao said seriously, "There will come a day when nobody has to worry about these matters; they will be able to live freely under the sun."

"I hope so." Avia smiled bitterly and sighed.

Jiang Baimian then flipped her wrist and looked at her electronic watch. "We should leave."

The Old Task Force still had to make the best use of their time to leave the city before the chaos subsided. They still had to complete their diversion plan before stability was restored in First City and First City regained their sights on Early Spring Town again.

Avia heaved a sigh of relief when she heard that. On the one hand, she had been so cooperative because she really didn't want to keep the secrets any longer. On the other hand, she was worried that the other party would take the risk and force her to use the phone in her hand.

She had no idea what would happen to her when that happened. She was unwilling to take the risk.

The fact that the other party could maintain their friendliness and retreat quietly was the best development she could imagine.

The moment they disappeared around the corner of the bathhouse lobby, Jiang Baimian and Shang Jianyao ran. In just about 20 seconds, they rushed out of Avia's classic-looking villa and returned to the street.

At this moment, the Virtual World's owner—the old woman in the dark beanie—had entered a 'physical slumber' thanks to Kanna. She was still sleeping. The guards at the door stirred from time to time, and it wouldn't be long before they woke up. However, Kanna's Friendly Halo remained.

Bai Chen and Long Yuehong had already tied up the dangerous enemy and stuffed him into the jeep. The latter watched them closely while the former turned the car around, prepared to drive out of Round Hill Street.

Thud! Thud! Thud!

As Jiang Baimian ran, she turned around and shouted at the room where Kanna was. "Mission accomplished!"

Kanna sat beside the Virtual World's owner and replied, "You guys leave first!"

She didn't have to evacuate the city after all. After cleaning up the scene and leaving, she would return to her status as an Elder's daughter and not have to worry about being put in a spot by the investigation.

As for who won in the Senate, it wouldn't affect Kanna's father's safety. At most, it would make him lose power in advance because he had learned from the chaos after Oray's death and had always adhered to one principle: always support the consul—whoever it is!

That's too gentle. Use the volume at which your parrot curses... Jiang Baimian—who almost didn't hear Kanna's reply—muttered, rushed to the jeep, opened the door, and sat in the passenger seat.

Shang Jianyao followed and entered the backseat.

As the jeep started, Jiang Baimian turned around and instructed Shang Jianyao, "Quickly try and see what negative effects those items have. Use whatever you can use as soon as possible to prevent the captive from pulling any tricks later."

This referred to the prayer beads, necklace, lighter, condom, and other items Shang Jianyao had obtained from Khal.

Some of them definitely came from the Mind Corridor and had certain abilities. Shang Jianyao had been in a rush and had yet to make any confirmation.

"Here's your Bangle of Blindness." Long Yuehong handed Shang Jianyao the items he had previously left in the car.

This bracelet—which seemed to be made of black hair—had already dimmed. It looked like it could be used two to three more times at most, or even fewer.

As Shang Jianyao wore the Bangle of Blindness on his left wrist again, he took out the few items he had plundered from his tactical backpack.

He first picked up the lighter and condom, half-closed his eyes, and quietly sensed for a few seconds. "No changes; they are ordinary items."

Shang Jianyao then threw the condom at Long Yuehong. "Keep it."

"What for?" Long Yuehong was confused and a little embarrassed. As an inexperienced man, he felt that this thing was an overly private matter that left him embarrassed.

"It can be used to carry water later," Shang Jianyao explained in all seriousness.

After stuffing the lighter into his pocket, he picked up the string of brown beads. There were a total of six of them.

After mimicking Zennaga by telling the prayer beads a few times, Shang Jianyao looked down between his legs. He came to a realization and turned to look at the captive lying beside him. “It’s no wonder his reaction isn’t that fast at times, making him appear stupid. When wearing this string of prayer beads, all the blood goes down there.”

Without Shang Jianyao needing to explain the price, Jiang Baimian, Long Yuehong, and Bai Chen understood what he was saying: The negative effects of the prayer beads were clearly similar to the price Jingfa paid—enhanced lust!

Furthermore, this was enhanced lust at the Mind Corridor level.

“Apart from affecting one’s thinking speed and preventing them from focusing for a long period, it doesn’t have other negative prices. Oh, there’s one more; not polite enough. It also interferes with my actions and makes running uncomfortable.” Shang Jianyao evaluated it very seriously.

Long Yuehong was stunned and resisted the urge to take a glance.

Jiang Baimian said in a scientific tone, “In other words, it’s best not to wear it usually and take it out only at critical moments?”

Of course, this would definitely be a waste of time, making it easy to miss an opportunity. However, it was the lesser of two evils.

Shang Jianyao tersely acknowledged her words and suddenly looked up at Long Yuehong. “I discovered one of its uses.”

“What is it?” Jiang Baimian was curious.

Long Yuehong acutely sensed that it would be harmful to him, so he shut his mouth tightly.

Shang Jianyao laughed. “Normal people can’t use such items; they will only suffer the corresponding negative effects. However, the negative effects of this string of prayer beads are still

very useful at times. When Little Red is married and is inside the bridal room, he will feel nervous. When he can't relax, he can wear it."

Long Yuehong was momentarily unable to retort. In consideration of his feelings, Jiang Baimian didn't answer.

"Doesn't that mean it can be used to treat certain diseases?" Bai Chen subconsciously interrupted. She then looked at the road ahead in embarrassment.

She wasn't embarrassed by the topic, but she felt a little embarrassed that she had led the conversation astray and affected the normal discussion.

"I've never tried it." Shang Jianyao shook his head. The next second, he sighed deeply. "I thought the price would be a split personality. Shame..."

He had determined that one of the prayer beads and necklaces belonged to the Subhuti domain from the enemy's use of Auditory Deprivation. One of the more common prices in this domain was having a split personality.

"Why the regret?" Jiang Baimian asked in confusion.

"This will worsen my symptoms and allow me to reach the Mind Corridor," Shang Jianyao explained seriously. "When the time comes, I might be able to find an opportunity to accommodate myself."

This train of thought is a little dangerous... Jiang Baimian was inexperienced in this regard and could only admit that Shang Jianyao's plan was logically feasible.

When the nine Shang Jianyaos completely split up, each with their own characteristics, they might really be able to beat up the Shang Jianyao blocking the golden elevator's entrance when they teamed up.

Of course, the premise was that they could negotiate and unite with one another after they completely split up.

Shang Jianyao's train of thought always skipped as he cast his gaze at Long Yuehong and thoughtfully said, "Although there's a high chance that this string of prayer beads' abilities corresponds to the deprivation of the six senses, there's no way to be sure without experiments."

"W-what do you want to do?" Long Yuehong felt like a victim.

"Don't worry. You can still recover after the deprivation." Shang Jianyao consoled him.

As Long Yuehong gritted his teeth, Jiang Baimian—as the team leader—spoke up for justice. "We'll experiment later. Isn't there a ready-made captive here?"

"Alright." Shang Jianyao wrapped the string of prayer beads in a piece of paper and stuffed it into his pocket.

"The negative effects take a while to subside..." As he spoke, he held the silver angel necklace.

Shang Jianyao then yawned, and he honestly said, "I kind of want to sleep."

"The price is drowsiness?" Jiang Baimian asked in enlightenment.

"Probably." Shang Jianyao came to a realization again. "He uses the prayer beads' negative effects to resist the necklace's negative effects. That's what he did!"

He was referring to the anesthetized captive, Khal.

"But this way, the activity level, reaction speed, and focus will be a problem." Bai Chen—who was driving—imagined a sleepy and thirsty state.

"Therefore, he became our captive." Jiang Baimian laughed. "Then, what are its abilities?"

Shang Jianyao looked at Long Yuehong again. "It feels very dangerous, and it seems to be from the Arbiter of Fate domain. We won't know the exact details until we experiment."

“It can kill!” Upon hearing that it was an item from the Arbiter of Fate domain, Long Yuehong didn’t dare to volunteer.

Shang Jianyao didn’t insist and lowered his head to distinguish the other items.

The jeep didn’t return the way it came. Instead, it took the nearest route and drove out of the Golden Apple Zone.

...

At 14 Round Hill Street.

Seeing that the Old Task Force had already left, Kanna quickly took off her Sluggish ring and placed it in the jewelry box she carried with her.

The price of this item was a strong ringing in the ears. Under normal circumstances, nobody was willing to keep wearing it.

Kanna then took out a card. The card depicted the King of Spades, but for some reason, the face looked very blurry.

Kanna held the card and directed its ability at the Virtual World’s owner. “Forget!”

This card came from the Last Man domain. Its ability was to make people forget their memories of the past five minutes. The price of using it was that one would also randomly lose a memory that didn’t exceed five minutes.

As a Mind Corridor-level Awakened with a large faction backing her, Kanna currently had a total of five items. However, she didn’t dare to carry two of them with her. The negative effects were too great for her. Furthermore, their effects were in place just by carrying them with her—there was no need to wear them.

She planned on trading them with others in the future. After all, the three items she often used would run out of energy sooner or later and become ordinary.

...

Red Wolf Zone, Senate.

Gaius walked to the balcony, where the consul often delivered a speech to the citizens.

Galoran—who was floating outside the nearby window—landed below, surrounded by the moaning injured. She realized that as a representative of the entire year, a Mind Corridor-level Awakened in the Master Zhuang domain actually had two basic abilities. However, Matter Interference was much weaker than normal compared to other domains.

Chapter 528: The Edifice Collapses

Due to the ringing from before, the battle outside the Senate had temporarily stopped. From here to Hope Square, the citizens and city guards dazedly stood in their spots as if they had yet to recover from their previous state.

Apart from the injured's instinctive groans, the area was so quiet that even the wind could be heard.

Gaius didn't give them a chance to sink back into madness. He held a loudspeaker and shouted, "My fellow citizens, soldiers, Elder Varro controlled the consul by colluding with the Salvation Army and the Anti-intellectualism Church in an attempt to purge the Elders who are on your side. Fortunately, thanks to the Kalendaria's blessings and the heroic spirit of First City's founders, we were given an opportunity because of your timely demonstration. Now, they have been killed or controlled. The sun has appeared above First City again!"

As the new consul announced this to the citizens and soldiers, his most trusted Reformist Elder led his two attendants to the Senate's dungeons.

Varro was locked up there. He should've committed suicide out of guilt.

Upon hearing Gaius's words, the gathered citizens finally recalled what they were doing and what they wanted to do. After that, they cheered.

In contrast to them were the Subhuman Guards positioned in various parts outside the Senate. Some of their faces were ashen, some couldn't help but tremble, and some of their bodies tensed up.

Gaius didn't give the citizens a chance to express themselves freely. Worried that they would take the opportunity to make an even more excessive and crazy request, he directly said, "I've already been elected consul by the surviving Elders. I will lead people who are willing to dedicate themselves to the citizens to investigate the traitors' properties and return the fields you lost!"

Without him needing to say anything else, most of the citizens shouted excitedly, "Gaius!"

"Gaius!"

"Gaius!"

Superintendent Alexander frowned. This reminded him of his youth—the former consul, Oray, also received such enthusiastic support from the citizens and soldiers.

Alexander stood behind the window—a distance away from Gaius—and cast his gaze outside. The excited faces and fanatical eyes made him feel like he had returned to the past.

As his gaze moved, Alexander saw his stunned daughter and Zennaga lying in a pool of blood, his fate unknown.

He quickly turned his head to his attendant and guard and said, "Quick, save Master Zennaga."

He had a deep relationship with the Crystal Consciousness Church. Although he had already Awakened the abilities of the corresponding domain before having faith in Subhuti, he definitely wouldn't let go of the opportunity to establish a solid relationship with the Crystal Consciousness Church when such an opportunity presented itself before him.

"Your Excellency, will it trigger a riot if we go out now?" Alexander's attendant asked worriedly.

The current situation was only a temporary calm; it still looked very fragile. Smoke might rise again from any accidents.

Alexander fell silent and cast his gaze at Gaius. Whether we can stabilize the situation and restore order is of utmost importance for this newly-appointed consul.

As Alexander hesitated, he saw his daughter walk toward Zennaga from the corner of his eye. The people around them ignored this scene as if she didn't exist.

Phew... Alexander heaved a sigh of relief and said to his attendants and guards, "You can wait a little longer. Prepare the first-aid kit."

The Senate building was equipped with these items.

At this moment, Gaius made a further promise. "After we purge the traitors' influence and have a harvest of the fields we return to you, we will continue expanding outward. We will use First City's guns to expand, giving more land to First City's citizens!"

As the citizens cheered, Gaius glanced at the Subhuman Guards around him—who were either standing or lying down. He lowered his palm and loudly announced, "All those who relied on the traitors and helped them shall be captured and be given a fair trial! I'll give those who have done lesser evils and are willing to repent a chance. I shall send those among them who are sinful or unwilling to repent to meet the Kalendarium!"

"Alright, citizens, you may return. Wait for your fields and jobs. Leave the capturing of criminals to the city defense forces' brothers and sisters. As you saw, they are on your side!"

At this moment, the citizens had no time to taste the sweetness of such an operation. They didn't feel an inflated sense of conceit. Since they had obtained Gaius's promise and had achieved their goal, they were very willing to contribute to First City's restoration of order to their hometown.

They responded to the call and retreated in the direction of Hope Square, leaving in batches.

Of course, not everyone was like this. Some citizens stayed behind to search for their loved ones—who had rushed ahead and whose outcomes were still unknown.

Gaius then ordered the city defense forces, "Split into three groups. One group shall help the injured and clean up the square. The second group shall escort these Subhumans to the dungeons and await trial. The last group shall go around the city informing your colleagues. I'll give you a list of the traitors that have to be eliminated."

This included at least two Mind Corridor-level Awakened. They spelled grave danger to the subsequent stability, and Gaius wouldn't accept their surrender.

Upon hearing Gaius's words, the eyes of the surviving Subhuman Guards instantly became bloodshot. They wanted to resist and carve out a bloody path, but they felt despair and lost their courage when they thought of the countless Mind Corridor-level Awakened here.

Death was certain if they resisted. If they waited a little longer, there might still be a chance.

One city guard after another entered the Senate. With the help of the surviving Elders, they tied and cuffed the Subhuman Guard members.

Mor—who looked like a monster with his bulging eyes—lowered his head and trembled as he was escorted to the dungeons below the Senate.

He wasn't too afraid of death; most of the Subhumans he had met when he was young had failed to live to his current age. He was only reminded of his children. The youngest of them had just learned how to walk, and she loved to talk. Every night, she would chat with Mor or Mor's wife for half an hour before sleeping. She would spout nonsense most of the time, and the two adults would only laugh and echo her words.

A scene that almost seemed palpable rose in Mor's mind: the community's door blasted open by First City's citizens; humans transforming into bandits and storming in. Not only did they level and raze the area, but they also didn't let any Subhumans off. They would throw children to the ground heavily and sell some of them to slave traders.

The thought of how his children might suffer such pain, how they would cry and shout without their cries answered, or how they would be sent to the mines or factories—toiling day and night—made Mor's heart ache.

He walked slower and slower. Suddenly, he turned around and kneeled down, facing Gaius. "Consul, please spare us! We were only following the orders from above! I-I'm willing to be your slave!"

At some point in time, Mor—a muscular man—had tears and snot all over his face.

Upon seeing this, the other Subhumans kneeled down as well, hoping to use their status as the Elders' slaves to exchange for their families' safety.

Gaius fell silent for a moment before saying, “All of you will receive a fair trial. Perhaps there will be a chance for you to work to offset your sins.”

With that said, he ignored the Subhumans and cast his gaze at the Golden Apple Zone. He planned on having a good chat with the existences who supported him and had returned from the New World.

He believed that in such a situation, a promise to ensure vested interests could be exchanged for sufficient friendliness.

...

Golden Apple Zone, 9 Emperor Street.

Asus received a call.

The voice on the other end of the line was very anxious—he only said a few words before quickly hanging up.

Asus seemed to have fallen into a nightmare.

Father contracted the Heartless disease all of a sudden... Most of the Conservatives' Elders have been eliminated... Gaius has become the new consul... The city defense forces are about to eliminate the traitors' accomplices... Asus suddenly shivered and rushed into his secret chamber.

He brought some hard currency and the useful items he had accumulated over the years and quickly left the villa. After that, he went straight to the garage and got into a bulletproof black car.

The car's trunk had some weapons and ammunition, as well as the latest military exoskeleton.

During this process, Asus had no intention of informing his butler, servants, and bodyguards.

The servants had sensed an anomaly and had hidden far away. This resulted in Asus seeing a rather deserted and inexplicably dilapidated scene when he drove out of the consul's residence.

...

The Old Task Force's jeep was driving away from the Golden Apple Zone.

Shang Jianyao suddenly said, "Old Ge should like this harvest very much."

Chapter 529: Suspicion

"Huh?" Long Yuehong was confused by Shang Jianyao's sigh. "Why do you say that?"

As time was of the essence, the Old Task Force had yet to share the information they had obtained from Avia internally.

Jiang Baimian briefly introduced the Third Research Institute's two research directions and Oray's evaluation and suspicion of the Source Brain.

Jiang Baimian smiled. "Therefore, Mechanical Paradise's artificial intelligence might produce a consciousness that is close to a human's. However, the relatively large difference lies in its fundamentals and the way it's presented. Old Ge should like this answer."

Bai Chen—who was driving—subconsciously asked, "Then, why does the Source Brain limit humanization?"

"Maybe there are still some latent dangers that can threaten the Source Brain itself?" Long Yuehong guessed.

Shang Jianyao admired his thoughts and eagerly said, "We have to make Old Ge's humanization exceed 100% later and see what changes will happen to Mechanical Paradise!"

With you around, it might not be at the level of humanization... Jiang Baimian muttered. She deliberated and said, "By a stroke of luck, it might be a blessing to have Old Ge work with Old Han and Zeng Duo to deal with Early Spring Town."

"What?" Long Yuehong was a little confused again.

“That’s right. I’m afraid Old Ge will self-destruct on the spot because of his inability to accept the good news.” Shang Jianyao tried to punch his right fist into his left palm, but the injury on his arm successfully stopped him.

Bai Chen frowned and glanced at Jiang Baimian. “You mean Old Ge isn’t that trustworthy?”

She was rather resistant toward such a proposition.

Jiang Baimian said seriously, “No, Old Ge is trustworthy. However, it’s not necessarily true that there’s no Trojan horse implanted in Old Ge’s body. Or rather, there might be a hidden backdoor.”

Bai Chen reacted. “Source Brain? Are you worried that the Source Brain can remotely control Old Ge and make him suddenly go berserk when he sees Avia and hears information regarding the Source Brain?”

As Long Yuehong’s expression changed, Jiang Baimian nodded. “I previously had a slight suspicion that there were many coincidences regarding Old Ge’s matter back then. For example, Old Ge was examined shortly after we conversed with the Source Brain. Also, our escape was much easier than expected. Mechanical Paradise actually didn’t send anyone to Redstone Collection to wait for us.

“Once Avia told us that Oray knew how to format the Source Brain and left behind the corresponding information, I was even more convinced that Old Ge’s escape was orchestrated by the Source Brain. Think about it; would it casually tell a team it knows virtually nothing about such important information that involves the Source Brain’s survival? Would it really be at ease? Isn’t it afraid that we will hand the information over to the company or sell it to large factions like First City after obtaining it, whereby both parties will cooperate to control Mechanical Paradise and it?”

Clap! Clap! Clap!

Although his arm was injured, Shang Jianyao still tenaciously clapped.

The more Long Yuehong listened, the more he felt that his team leader made sense. He never expected an artificial intelligence like the Source Brain to be capable of scamming humans!

Jiang Baimian continued, “If Old Ge were here today, it wouldn’t be a problem. There’s a high chance that he will go ‘berserk’ when we explore the mysterious laboratory and find the information

Oray left behind. When the time comes, we will use the excuse that Wasteland Ruin 13 has Wu Meng and that it's not suitable for robots to participate to get Old Ge to provide support outside."

At this point, Jiang Baimian laughed self-deprecatingly. "That laboratory is very dangerous; it's not something we can explore now. The company might very well send another team that's led by Mind Corridor-level Awakened. This way, we don't have to worry."

"Yes, yes." Long Yuehong looked out the window and changed the topic. "What's next on the menu?"

According to the plan and his imagination, there were two choices. The first plan was to leave First City quickly, head south before the chaos ended, and circle to the Red River's north bank. They would rendezvous with Genava, Han Wanghuo, and Zeng Duo and make every second count to resolve the matter regarding Early Spring Town.

The reason why they didn't choose to pass through the Red Wolf Zone and the Green Olive Zone and directly head to the wastelands from the Red River Bridge in the north was that it was a key port for entering and exiting First City. It would definitely become the focus of both parties during the chaos, and they might not be able to pass through it in a short period of time.

Furthermore, even if the unrest was at an end, the victor would definitely firmly control the bridge in order to eliminate the defeated faction's loyal supporters.

In comparison, the southern exit—which was considered deep into First City's auxiliary area—wouldn't be that heavily guarded.

The problem with this plan was that it required a large amount of time to travel before they could obtain temporary stability. The Old Task Force was holding a Mind Corridor-level captive in hopes of obtaining information on the secret organization. If they were held up for too long before making an attempt, it was very easy for an accident to happen midway.

The second plan was to enter the Red Wolf Zone or the Green Olive Zone and move the captive into one of the safe houses they had prepared, therefore showing no rush to leave First City.

This way, the Old Task Force could extract information from him in the shortest time possible, finish off the captive, and eliminate any latent dangers. At the same time, they wouldn't encounter any searches or interrogations since they weren't running around the streets. They could tide through the subsequent chaos relatively smoothly.

But if they implemented this plan, the Old Task Force probably wouldn't have the chance to leave First City before the chaos subsided and the defeated party was basically captured. They would miss the best window of opportunity to resolve the matter in Early Spring Town.

Furthermore, the matter of Jiang Baimian and the others coming into contact with Avia might be discovered. When the time came, it would be troublesome if they were targeted by some or other First City powerhouses.

Jiang Baimian had an idea and looked ahead. "Let's return to the Red Wolf Zone first and find a place to call General Phocas."

"Uh..." Long Yuehong was first stunned before he came to a realization. "Team Leader, you want to use General Phocas to leave the city?"

"As long as he doesn't become a loser in this chaos, getting us out of the city safely is a trivial matter." Jiang Baimian smiled. "A sly old fox like him probably won't make himself a loser."

Jiang Baimian paused and said, "Didn't he want us to share the information we obtained from Avia? Let's deliver it to him now!"

This not only completed their promise to Avia but also fulfilled their promise to General Phocas.

"Yes." Long Yuehong and Bai Chen felt that this was the best choice.

General Phocas said that he would provide help, but he had only given a pass so far. He needed to pay a price of 'equal worth.'

"He still owes us a celebratory feast." Shang Jianyao had never forgotten this.

Long Yuehong secretly scoffed at this fellow before suddenly recalling something and blurting out, "How should we interrogate the captive?"

This was an Awakened at the Mind Corridor level. It was fine if he was anesthetized, but once he woke up, the Old Task Force might not be able to subdue him even if they made sufficient

preparations. They couldn't keep stuffing the other party with bloodstained cloth, right? That could resolve the danger, but they wouldn't receive any information. The target would either faint or suffer from some form of myocardial infarction.

With the Destiny Pearl previously, it wasn't a problem. Now, Mr. DiMarco's bestowment had been exhausted.

Bai Chen subconsciously said, "Play Wu Meng's recording to him and make him trust us with all his heart and body? Will it be effective if he listens while unconscious?"

Jiang Baimian laughed. "Let General Phocas worry about this problem."

This was her other goal in contacting General Phocas! Without a Mind Corridor-level Awakened presiding over the situation, it wasn't easy for the Old Task Force to extract information from the current captive.

...

Due to the chaos brought about by the Citizen Meet, as well as the frequent gunshots and explosions, many shops in the Red Wolf Zone didn't open for business. The ones that did closed up as well.

Their owners had either gone to Hope Square or hid back home, praying that nothing major would happen.

The Old Task Force found a café and had Bai Chen complete the series of actions needed to pick the door's lock.

As Jiang Baimian dialed the general's residence, Long Yuehong—who was in the car—saw helicopters and drones appear in midair. They flew toward different parts of the city amidst the commotion as if they were searching for any survivors.

Bai Chen sensed something and hid in the café in advance. Otherwise, her military exoskeleton would've been very eye-catching.

Before long, Jiang Baimian heard General Phocas's voice: "Hello?"

She exhaled and said, "We've already obtained the corresponding information."

General Phocas fell silent for a moment before saying, "Come straight to my residence. In such a situation, the Golden Apple Zone is the safest as long as we don't approach the Conservatives' villas."

It seems like Gaius has won? Many people from the Conservatives are trying to escape the city? Jiang Baimian could guess the current situation based on Phocas's words. Therefore, those heading out of the Golden Apple Zone would be strictly investigated. Those entering the Golden Apple Zone wouldn't be paid special attention.

"Alright." Jiang Baimian agreed.

The Mind Corridor-level captive was a ticking time bomb to them. They had to resolve the problem as soon as possible. Of course, the premise was that the Old Task Force had already obtained information on the secret organization.

This was an opportunity that couldn't be missed. This was also the reason why Jiang Baimian chose to take the risk of capturing the enemy and not killing him on the spot.

After the drone and helicopter in midair moved a little further away, Jiang Baimian and Bai Chen rushed back into the jeep.

During the trip back to the Golden Apple Zone, Jiang Baimian carried the radio transceiver and sent a telegram to Geneva and the others.

Today was critical. She made the subteam maintain constant communications.

To her surprise, Han Wanghuo and the others didn't adhere to the rules by insisting on waiting for a rendezvous. They were already on their way to Early Spring Town.

Jiang Baimian said to Shang Jianyao and the others in relief, "They have a military exoskeleton and Old Ge. As long as Early Spring Town doesn't have a Mind Corridor-level Awakened, with a number of the troops transferred away, there's a high chance of success if they carry out a blitzkrieg."

“I hope so,” Bai Chen replied as she drove the jeep to the back door of the general’s residence.

As expected, they didn’t encounter any interrogations along the way. With the pass they had, they met with virtually zero obstructions.

Chapter 530: For Salvation

Long Yuehong suddenly felt a little nervous upon seeing that the general’s residence wasn’t far away. “What if General Phocas suddenly turns hostile?”

After informing Phocas of the information obtained from Avia and bringing the captive to the other party’s house, the Old Task Force didn’t seem to be of any value. In such a situation, be it silencing them or renegeing on his promise, there was a possibility of Phocas turning hostile so as to eliminate any latent dangers.

With the Old Task Force’s current strength and condition, it was very difficult for them to fight Phocas on his home ground. They couldn’t entrust their safety to his conscience.

Jiang Baimian had long considered this problem. She nodded and turned to Shang Jianyao. “Get out of the car later and find a place to hide; converge your consciousness. If we aren’t able to leave, find an opportunity to escape after half an hour. In the future, lead the company’s personnel to avenge us.”

Shang Jianyao was the only Awakened among the four Old Task Force members. He could hide his consciousness, preventing Phocas from sensing him.

No matter how well the others hid, they would be directly exposed due to their human consciousness.

Shang Jianyao didn’t act all corny. “Alright.”

He then raised a question. “Which song do you want to hear when the time comes?”

Jiang Baimian rolled her eyes at him. “You rarely show your illness during serious times or make such jokes.”

She then smiled. "Because you're too worried?"

Shang Jianyao fell silent.

Whoa, you have such a side... Long Yuehong mimicked his team leader's tone inwardly. This comforted him greatly, and he felt that he hadn't made a mistake considering Shang Jianyao a friend. Even if he kept suffering ridicule, he believed that Shang Jianyao was doing this with good intentions or purely joking.

At this moment, Bai Chen had already parked the car in a relatively quiet place where nobody came and went.

Shang Jianyao pushed open the side door with his uninjured right hand and alighted with his tactical backpack. After he straightened his body, he fell silent for two seconds before taking out a photo from his inner pocket.

"Help me ask if he has seen him." Shang Jianyao handed the photo to Jiang Baimian.

Jiang Baimian had previously seen this photo and knew that the gentleman in his thirties was Shang Jianyao's long-lost father.

She didn't ask further; she simply shut her mouth and nodded.

After Shang Jianyao disappeared by the roadside and climbed up some tree, Bai Chen started the jeep again and casually said, "I thought Hey would say: 'I will rush in to save you if you don't come out in half an hour.'"

Jiang Baimian smiled. "He knows very well that he will definitely be captured if he's doing it alone. In comparison, it's better to go straight to Madam Kanna and contact the company. At a time like this, choosing to rush in to die with everyone might result in a deep camaraderie among us, but it would appear too brainless. I don't want to be unavenged for an aggrieved death."

Bai Chen didn't say anything else. She stared ahead and pretended to focus on driving.

Before long, the jeep arrived at the back door of the general's residence.

Jiang Baimian raised the captive with one hand and said to Long Yuehong, who was wearing a military exoskeleton, “Stay here and guard the car. Little White and I will go in.”

“It’s better if it’s you and me,” Long Yuehong subconsciously suggested.

Jiang Baimian smiled at Bai Chen. “You need to persuade Little White, not me.”

Long Yuehong looked at Bai Chen—who was also wearing a military exoskeleton but had already pushed open the door and alighted. She walked to the back door of the general’s residence and showed no intention of negotiating with him.

He wisely shut his mouth.

Phocas had made arrangements. Jiang Baimian and Bai Chen led the captive through the ajar back door and entered an empty room on the first floor under the guidance of a silent attendant.

There were surveillance cameras installed and many sound receivers, but there was no sign of Phocas.

The silent attendant took out a military walkie-talkie and handed it to Jiang Baimian.

After Jiang Baimian familiarized herself with the buttons, Phocas’s voice sounded from the walkie-talkie. “You can wake the captive up and begin questioning him. I’ll stop him once he uses his abilities.”

Phocas had completely hidden his consciousness. Even if Khal woke up and launched an area-of-effect attack, it wouldn’t affect him because he wasn’t included in the target group.

This didn’t surprise Jiang Baimian. She immediately took out a medical kit from her tactical backpack, attached a new needle, and injected its load into the target’s body.

After waiting for a while, her and Bai Chen’s eyelids suddenly drooped, and their bodies collapsed to the ground.

But in the blink of an eye, Khal—who had pretended not to wake up and secretly used Forced Sleep—fainted again.

Right on the heels of that, intense music sounded in the room, waking Jiang Baimian and Bai Chen from their reverie.

After a few more similar cycles, Khal finally realized that he couldn't escape for the time being. He couldn't find the fellow who had made him unconscious and couldn't use his abilities on him.

“What do you want to ask?” Khal gave up his futile attempts and looked up at Jiang Baimian and Bai Chen.

Jiang Baimian went straight to the point. “Why do you and the organization behind you stop others from investigating the reason for the Old World's destruction?”

Khal raised his chin and said, “To prevent this world from being destroyed again.”

He had a proud attitude, one with obvious pride.

“What?” Jiang Baimian didn't expect such an answer.

Bai Chen carefully observed Khal's microexpressions, wanting to figure out if he was lying.

Khal spoke with an attitude as though they were a bunch of ignoramuses. “An investigation of the cause of the Old World's destruction will trigger something, causing the world—which has finally recovered from the disaster—to be destroyed again.

“We humans used decades to reduce the effects of the Heartless disease and the environmental pollution bit by bit. With a relatively stable source of food, we established a preliminary order that allows for civilization to continue. How can we destroy it? All of this is still so fragile that it can't withstand any setbacks.”

“Therefore, you don't mind killing a large number of innocent people without batting an eyelid?” Jiang Baimian didn't directly ask what the trigger was and raised a new indirect question.

Khal scoffed. “Most of them aren’t innocent. They are people who ignore the continued existence of human civilization by investigating the cause of the Old World’s destruction for their curiosity or some kind of benefit. The rest can only blame it on their bad luck—they happened to know a secret they shouldn’t know or appear in places they shouldn’t be.

“Compared to the entire Ashlands and human civilization, it doesn’t matter if a few dozen or a few hundred people die. Once disaster strikes again and order disappears once more, how many people will die? When the time comes, humans might not be able to have civilization continue.”

Although she knew that the other party was being unreasonable, Jiang Baimian had to admit that these people had their own beliefs. In a sense, the logic behind their actions was also valid.

Of course, combined with the information provided by Avia, such an explanation might’ve been used to brainwash the captive in front of them. It might not be true.

First City’s former emperor, Oray Ubis, had said: Some people from the Eighth Research Institute might still be alive, but a terrifying development had already happened. They were reduced to traitors that hide in the darkness, people that others needed to be wary of.

At the same time, the Third Research Institute’s former Chief Scientist believed that the fellows from the Eighth Research Institute had caused a disaster.

From his appearance and age, this person was likely born after the Old World was destroyed. He’s not one of the survivors of the Eighth Research Institute, so there’s a high chance that nothing terrifying has happened... He’s more like a hired thug that those people deliberately nurtured... Jiang Baimian fell silent for a few seconds before saying, “What you said is without basis. What can an investigation of the cause of the Old World’s destruction trigger?”

Khal scoffed again. “I had my doubts in the past as well. It was only ten years ago that a group of people made some progress in their investigation of the cause of the Old World’s destruction. They found a city in the north, and that city is a settlement independent of large factions. It has hundreds of thousands of people when including the population in the surrounding area. Many powerhouses control many resources that can be traded.

“In the end, the Heartless disease erupted again overnight. This city was destroyed and reduced to ruins. If not for our containment and the early quarantine, the entire Ashlands would’ve been affected.”

This made Jiang Baimian and Bai Chen subconsciously fall silent. They felt their hearts become heavy, and the air seemed to freeze.

After a while, Bai Chen blurted out, “Are you from the Eighth Research Institute?”

“Yes, I’m a commissioner of the Eighth Research Institute,” Khal admitted frankly. He seemed to be very proud of this identity.

As expected... Jiang Baimian slowly exhaled and directly changed the topic by deliberately asking unconventionally, “I know that before the Old World was destroyed, the various countries jointly established nine secret research institutes. Among them, the Third Research Institute’s focus was in the field of artificial intelligence. The other research institute is Eternals. Then, what is the Eighth Research Institution’s focus?”

Khal fell silent. He deliberated for a moment before saying, “Human Awakening.”