

Ad Infinitum 621

Chapter 621: Present Situation

The Old Task Force didn't directly head to Wasteland Ruin 13 to investigate the Holm Fertility Center because they still had some preparations to do.

On the one hand, their planned route was to enter from the cave which the white wolf used in the North Shore Mountains. After all, their destination was closely guarded by First City's army, leaving only a single gap. However, the Old Task Force had previously exposed their identity as Ruin Hunters, and First City had a mission to investigate the missions they had previously participated in.

Jiang Baimian wasn't sure if this large faction—which had plenty of powerhouses—had grasped this secret passage and placed it under surveillance.

The lone Hunters who had explored Wasteland Ruin 13 with the Old Task Force back then were either dead or gone. Jiang Baimian wasn't worried that First City would obtain the relevant information from them, but apart from these people, the Old Task Force had also hired a guide. This meant that there was a possibility of a leak.

The Old Task Force could only find an alternate way to enter Wasteland Ruin 13 if such a thing really happened. Therefore, Jiang Baimian hoped to confirm this problem from multiple sources.

She didn't want to fall into an open net.

She had already learned from the company and the vulgar parrot's owner, Kanna, that First City's Hand of Order had originally wanted to investigate the missions the Old Task Force had taken on. However, a series of matters later happened, including the far-reaching uprising. The corresponding investigations were left on pause.

On the other hand, Wasteland Ruin 13 was a very dangerous place. Genova was also suspected to be the Source Brain's contingency plan. The Old Task Force had to make sufficient preparations, get in tip-top condition, and resolve the latent dangers before heading over.

The jeep drove for more than ten minutes before stopping in front of a yellowish-brown building that was only three stories tall.

This was Ugo Hotel, which Jiang Baimian and the others were very familiar with.

The hotel's business seemed to have deteriorated. When the Old Task Force walked into the lobby, only the slightly haggard, tanned, and blond boss—Ugo—was inside.

While tidying up stuff, his face was pale, and his hair was wet as if he had just undergone torture.

Shang Jianyao excitedly walked over and suppressed his voice. “Did you abuse yourself again? Did you sense your true self this time?”

Ugo looked up at him and calmly said, “I can't share my feelings with people who have never experienced it.”

“Ooo.” Shang Jianyao looked eager.

Ugo cast his gaze at October Xue and Qian Bai. “How many rooms do you want?”

“We aren't staying in the hotel this time.” Jiang Baimian laughed.

Ugo wiped the sweat from his forehead with a tattered towel. “Then, what are you doing here?”

As Bai Chen subconsciously looked around, Jiang Baimian smiled and replied, “I want to inquire about something from the general.”

The general referred to General Phocas—the most senior and most prestigious general in First City—who was in a semi-retired state and only controlled a portion of the city defense forces.

He had converted to February's Kalendaria, Dawn, and was a high-ranking member of the True Self Church. The hotel owner, Ugo, also belonged to this Church.

Ugo glanced at Long Yuehong, Genova, and the others and said calmly, “The city defense forces are no longer under the general’s command.”

“He has fully retired?” Shang Jianyao asked curiously.

Ugo shook his head. “The new consul, Marshal Gaius, attaches great importance to the general. He requested him to return to the field and replace him as commander of the Eastern Army Corps. The general set off a week ago and isn’t in the city.”

Gaius has plenty of tricks up his sleeve...?Jiang Baimian’s first reaction was to sigh inwardly when she heard that.

As the new consul and military commander-in-chief who relied on an uprising to climb to power, Gaius definitely had to have the city defense forces under his control to feel at ease.

However, Phocas—who previously helmed the city defense forces—had qualifications, prestige, and background. It wasn’t that easy to deal with him, and a slight mistake might trigger another uprising.

In the face of such a situation, Gaius chose to compromise for a strategic advantage. He promoted Phocas and gave him more power, allowing him to take over his Eastern Army Corps.

This way, it was naturally inappropriate for Phocas to remain as the city guard commander. Furthermore, Gaius had painstakingly managed the Eastern Army Corps for many years. It was impossible for them to disobey his orders just because of a change in commander.

Gaius also indirectly expressed his goodwill toward the True Self Church that backed Phocas and the February Kalendaria—Dawn—that the True Self Church believed in. It could be considered killing two birds with one stone.

The art of transactions...

Just as this thought flashed through Jiang Baimian’s mind, Shang Jianyao blurted out with regret and pain, “He still owes us a celebratory feast!”

He ran off just like that!

Ugo's expression changed a little.

Jiang Baimian quickly coughed and said, "We don't need the general in the city or the city defense forces to know what we want to know. As long as he uses his connections slightly, he can resolve our problems."

Ugo returned to his indifferent expression as if he wouldn't flee even if someone was hanging themselves in front of him. "What can you offer to move the general?"

What can we use to move him? I haven't talked about how we were screwed over by your general—how we bumped into Asus and Christina, which almost killed Little Red! Jiang Baimian's heart palpitated, but she smiled. "We plan on visiting Wasteland Ruin 13. We wish to know if there are any safe routes we can take. Haven't you guys always wanted the information Oray hid in that secret laboratory? We will share anything we find with you later."

Heh heh, we will only go to the Holm Fertility Center. It's impossible for us to gain much from it. When the time comes, we naturally won't be able to share anything. This can't be considered as us violating our promise...? At this moment, the scene of Shang Jianyao describing his actions on the 'cruise ship' surfaced in Jiang Baimian's mind—in order to reenact the truth, he made a face and made a 'bleh bleh bleh' sound.

Ugo digested Jiang Baimian's words. "I can help you relay the message, but I can't make any promises."

Jiang Baimian made a terse grunt. "If there's no safe route, I'll have to trouble the general to provide the guard situation regarding Wasteland Ruin 13's tunnels. We'll find a solution ourselves."

She didn't mention the North Shore Mountains passage and instead tactfully sought confirmation in order to prevent Phocas and First City's military system from learning about this information when they weren't aware of it originally. It would only breed trouble.

If the guard situation provided by Phocas didn't include information on the North Shore Mountains, the Old Task Force could preliminarily confirm that the passage was safe based on Kanna's feedback.

"Alright." Ugo agreed. "How should I contact you in the future?"

“We’ll visit you regularly.” Jiang Baimian chose the safest method and didn’t even leave a telegram frequency.

As for the regularity, it was naturally up to the Old Task Force to decide. After all, Ugo spent most of his time in his hotel.

Upon seeing that Ugo didn’t object, Shang Jianyao changed the topic. “Your business has deteriorated. Did something happen?”

Ugo glanced at him. “Many lower-class citizens have joined the army and undergone training. The number of Ruin Hunters in First City and the surrounding area has dropped significantly.”

At this point, Ugo seemed to recall something. “When you were still in First City last year, an Awakened jumped down from a helicopter and died. Was it your doing?”

The Virtual World’s owner?

Before Jiang Baimian could decide if she should answer, Shang Jianyao patted his chest with a proud expression. “Yes, I did it!”

Ugo revealed a rare confused expression and sized up the fellow. He didn’t know the actual situation and only knew that General Phocas was rather concerned about this matter.

The Old Task Force left the hotel and returned to the street after a short chat about the changes the city had undergone.

After getting into the jeep, Shang Jianyao nagged, “First City’s business environment has deteriorated significantly. I wonder how Su Na and the others’ fast-food restaurant is doing...”

Su Na...? Long Yuehong was stunned for a moment before he recalled that she was the Ashlandic woman his team had rescued from Wolf’s Den.

Jiang Baimian nodded slightly and said, “U-turn and take a look. Then, disguise yourself and go to the Hunter’s Guild. We’ll further confirm First City’s current situation through the missions issued.”

Bai Chen didn't object and drove the jeep to the port.

As it was daytime, there weren't many pedestrians in the Green Olive Zone. It didn't take the Old Task Force long to reach the port.

Upon seeing boats coming and going, with many sailors and supplies being transported to the warehouse, Jiang Baimian immediately understood the situation of Su Na and company's fast-food restaurant.

First City—which was about to expand—was crazily stocking up on supplies. The port was abnormally prosperous, and the sailors were enough to support the fast-food restaurant's business.

Just as Jiang Baimian had expected, Su Na and the others were still busy and smiling on the ground floor of the building where Wolf's Den was.

"When First City officially expands, the situation here will most likely change significantly. Their business might not be able to continue." Jiang Baimian retracted her gaze and sighed. "Find an opportunity to remind them so that they can make preparations early."

"Yes," Bai Chen was the first to respond.

For some reason, Long Yuehong recalled the wilderness nomad settlement that had been massacred by the Heartless.

Peace in the Ashlands was always so fragile.

The longer people lived in such an environment, the more numb they became. In the end, they had to believe in a Kalendaria and use 'Them' as a spiritual crutch.

...

After circling to First City's Hunter's Guild, the disguised Old Task Force split into two teams and entered the lobby.

As she scanned the area, Jiang Baimian saw an acquaintance.. It was the Ruin Hunter they had previously cooperated with—Oudick.

Chapter 622: Collective Dream

Oudick was still wearing the same thick, black tweed coat, making one wonder if he had any other clothes. But considering that it was still spring and the wind was relatively cold, it didn't seem like a problem for him to be dressed in such an outfit.

At this moment, he—who was more than 1.8 meters tall and had both Ashlandic and Red River characteristics—had rather deep facial features. He looked up and stared at the mission information displayed on the large screen with his blue eyes and slightly red nose as he frowned slightly.

Jiang Baimian immediately grabbed Shang Jianyao—who was attempting to reunite with his friend—and mouthed to him: “We are still wanted criminals. Don't expose our identities in public!

Jiang Baimian didn't know if Shang Jianyao understood her. In any case, she immediately cast her gaze at the gigantic screen hanging in First City's Hunter's Guild lobby after seeing him behave. She tried to make the best use of her time to figure out which mission had made Oudick frown.

The corresponding content quickly reflected in her eyes: “Mission: Investigate the reason behind a collective dream.

“Description: Recently, citizens in the Green Olive Zone have been suffering from nightmares. They have been suffering from insomnia, headaches, nausea, fatigue, and poor appetites for days. After preliminary investigations, 161 such personnel have been confirmed. The nightmares they described are very similar—an indiscernible monster crawls out of the darkness that either bites and swallows them or forces them into a prolonged run before they collapse out of exhaustion, only to be enveloped by the cold.

“Reward: Any clue that passes the review and is confirmed effective will receive a minimum of 20 Oray, with a maximum of 800 Oray. If you manage to truly investigate the truth behind the matter, you will obtain a 5,000 Oray reward. For those who can directly resolve the problem, 20,000 Oray.

“Mission rank: Clue-searching requires C-rank and 100 credit points. Investigating the truth requires B-rank and 1,000 credit points, whereas resolving the problem requires A-rank and 10,000 credit points.

“Mission requirements: None

“Commissioner: Hand of Order and the Hunter’s Guild’s First City branch.”

“Wow.” Shang Jianyao praised sincerely. “If I can complete such a mission, I can directly become a Senior Hunter. No, I’ll just be a little short.”

The Hunters around him couldn’t help but turn their heads to glance at him. “So you are just an Official Hunter? Why are you considering an A-rank mission?”

To go from Official Hunter to Intermediate Hunter, one needed 1,000 credit points. From Intermediate Hunter to Senior Hunter, one needed 10,000 credit points. Therefore, as long as an Intermediate Hunter completed this A-rank mission, they could directly become a Senior Hunter.

But in fact, such matters rarely happened. Only Advanced Hunters had the strength to participate in missions rated as A-rank missions by the Hunter’s Guild.

Of course, a Hunter’s rank and strength weren’t equivalent. Some people could drive out fellows who were definitely more dangerous than Grade A and S from this world not long after they became Official Hunters.

Little White can become a Senior Hunter just by finding a single clue...? Long Yuehong’s thoughts were stirred by Shang Jianyao’s words.

However, the Old Task Force members were wanted criminals. Their original Hunter identities definitely couldn’t be used in First City’s sphere of influence. They couldn’t take on missions even if they wanted to.

This situation didn’t affect the Old Task Force from accepting missions in the territories of other factions or raising their Hunter rank. After all, what did First City’s wanted criminals have to do with the Salvation Army?

Only those who seriously violated the Hunter’s Guild’s rules and no longer had any credibility would be blacklisted by the various branches and become Dark Hunters.

Jiang Baimian didn't pay attention to Shang Jianyao and Long Yuehong's reactions and muttered to herself, "The description of this mission is very strange and terrifying... Is that why the Hunter's Guild designated the completion difficulty as A-rank? What has this got to do with powerful Awakened in the Dawn domain? Does the True Self Church—which Ugo and the others belong to—know anything? Yes, Oudick has Awakened the abilities of the Dawn domain and is involved in dreams. It's no wonder he frowned when reading the mission description..."

As these thoughts raced through her mind, Jiang Baimian studied the other missions.

This was their goal in coming to the Hunter's Guild.

Through some of the missions, the Old Task Force confirmed one thing—First City's war machine was slowly awakening. It was still in the stage of shaking off the dust and cleaning itself.

The target is the Salvation Army? Once these two factions start a war, the stable lives of countless people will crumble...? Jiang Baimian retracted her gaze and led Shang Jianyao and the others—no, she followed Shang Jianyao and the others—out of the Hunter's Guild.

Oudick had already disappeared by then.

After returning to the jeep, Shang Jianyao asked, "Can we go greet Oudick now?"

In his heart, not only was Oudick a friend, but he was also a good person. He had once lent them a car and had even fought alongside them to deal with the fake Father and Weed City nobles.

Jiang Baimian glared at him. "Remember your identity: A wanted criminal with a high bounty. Even if you don't respect the law enforcement's Hand of Order, you have to consider whether you will implicate Oudick."

"Alright." Although Shang Jianyao—who valued relationships—understood, he was still displeased.

Bai Chen—who was driving—asked about something else. "Which area are we staying in tonight?"

Jiang Baimian smiled. "Find a rented apartment near Ugo Hotel."

Hence, the Old Task Force returned to the Green Olive Zone and found a rented apartment where they could see Ugo Hotel from a distance.

There were no longer any more citizen demonstrations in First City. Jiang Baimian and the others tried a dinner made of pork sausages, sweet vegetable mixed soup, oatmeal bread, and roasted potato peel.

During this process, they didn't forget to boil water and soak the dried mushrooms to enhance the variety of dishes.

After having their fill, Jiang Baimian generously allowed everyone to play on their laptops for two hours after returning to the rented apartment.

After entertainment time ended, Genava took turns guarding the night. The others returned to their rooms and prepared to tuck in.

However, Jiang Baimian and Shang Jianyao still had things to do before sleeping.

...

In the Sea of Origins, Jiang Baimian landed on the island of fear again.

After a few explorations, she had already confirmed that this place presented an abandoned and uninhabited Pangu Biology underground building. This might very well correspond to her fear of losing her family, friends, colleagues, and familiar life.

There were no enemies here for Jiang Baimian to deal with, nor was there any special state that required her to crack. She could only wander around the empty company every time like a lost sheep. She would sit in a daze and stare blankly like a lingering ghost.

When her mind was exhausted through the passage of time, Jiang Baimian ultimately had to leave and return to reality.

She had already tried three different plans, but they had failed to produce any effects.

Regarding this, she was very envious of Shang Jianyao. She felt that if it were him facing such a situation, he would definitely split off into many different selves and play different roles to make the underground building lively and less lonely.

But upon careful thought, Jiang Baimian felt that this was a deeper level of loneliness with indescribable grief.

Phew, I'll tour the underground building from top to bottom today to see if I missed anything or if there's anything that can give me inspiration... After that, I'll put down my pride and discuss it with Hey and the others. I hope they can give suggestions from different angles...

Jiang Baimian looked at the underground building's entrance and fell into deep thought. She then carefully identified her bearings, confirmed the way, and walked into the elevator.

...

Mind Corridor, Room 912, on the cruise ship.

Shang Jianyao realized that he had returned to the time when he had just climbed onto the deck.

The sea breeze blew, and the sky was bright. People gathered in groups of three to five around the cruise ship as they conversed.

Near the cabin entrance, the man with the black mole at the end of his eyebrows and his companion—who couldn't bear to light the wrinkled cigarette in his mouth—stood there, just like when Shang Jianyao first saw them.

Shang Jianyao stroked his chin. "As expected—there will be a time skip every time I enter. When it skips to the end, things return to the beginning."

After this period of experiments, they had already grasped the pattern of this psychological trauma.

One: under normal circumstances, they would return to the nearest room when they last left.

Two: if they escaped on the last day of this ‘world’ and entered again, they would return to the first day they arrived on the deck and appear where they had first stepped foot.

Three: the time flow wasn’t fixed between every entry, but it followed a pattern—day and night took turns strictly. In other words, it would be daytime on one entry and definitely night on the next entry. The reverse was also true.

Four: everyone on the cruise ship was normal during the day and had food to eat. At night, most people would enter a chaotic and deranged state. Once Shang Jianyao used his abilities, he would quickly be assimilated. If he was attacked and died here, he might very well become a vegetable.

Five: this psychological trauma consisted of four days and three nights in total.

Six: the period before they boarded the cruise ship seemed very special. It didn’t appear again after that.

“The sixth point is very worth exploring...” The timid Shang Jianyao was the only one who could keep up with the calm and rational Shang Jianyao when it came to thinking.

“Unfortunately, we can’t return.” The Shang Jianyao that sought novelty was greatly disappointed.

The timid Shang Jianyao sneered. “Just because we can’t do it doesn’t mean that others can’t. If we can capture a Mind Corridor-level Awakened and force him into this room, he should be able to appear at the dock. This might bring about some changes.”

Clap! Clap! Clap!

The honest Shang Jianyao definitely clapped when it was time.

...

Jiang Baimian walked to the end of an aisle and saw darkness behind the half-closed door. This reminded her of Eidolon Nun, and she suddenly felt a little terrified.

At this moment, she felt the floor and walls shake gently.

A change??Just as this thought flashed through Jiang Baimian's mind, she saw a bloody, pale palm that stuck close to the ground reach out from the darkness.

Chapter 623: 'Monster'

As an experienced warrior, Jiang Baimian's first reaction wasn't fear. Instead, she leaned against the wall and avoided being right in front of it.

At the same time, she raised her arm and aimed the Death rocket launcher at the darkness surging out from behind the door and the bloody palm on the ground.

Jiang Baimian then shrugged her left shoulder gently, dispelling the expected recoil.

A rocket flew out and headed straight for the target.

Boom!

Amidst the explosion, the rich darkness didn't waver at all as it completely engulfed the blooming fiery-red flower.

The bloody, pale palm retracted and stretched forward at intervals. It alternately propped itself up on the ground with the other hand to help its body crawl.

They were also unaffected by the violent explosion, and there were no signs of damage on their surfaces.

The body they were connected to was hidden in the rich darkness; only its outline could be vaguely seen. Some angles resembled a human's, and some angles looked strange.

Upon seeing that the bombardment wasn't effective, Jiang Baimian immediately threw away the Death rocket launcher. But rather than retreating, she advanced and stretched out her left palm at the unknown monster that seemed to possess human consciousness.

With sizzling sounds, silver-white electric arcs leaped out one after another and wrapped around each other before crashing into the rich darkness.

The entire corridor became as bright as day, but it couldn't illuminate the terrifying darkness that hid the unknown monster.

It was like a black hole mentioned in many of the Old World's books—even light couldn't escape its devouring.

While countless electric sparks remained in Jiang Baimian's vision, she didn't hesitate to turn around. She dashed, attempting to distance herself from the heavy crawling monster in the darkness.

This was an aisle with no fork on both sides, so Jiang Baimian didn't have to worry about getting lost. After all, she just needed to run in the opposite direction of the enemy.

As she ran, she locked onto the terrifying creature chasing after her and used Spatial Hallucination on 'him!'

She wanted the other party to lose his bearings and slam into a room on either side of the aisle to help her escape her predicament.

However, the unknown monster—which had its bloody palms stretched out in the darkness and its elbows constantly alternating—kept crawling along the aisle as it approached.

My abilities are useless against 'him?''As Jiang Baimian ran, she took out the doll wearing grayish-green camouflage with a mirror embedded in its face.

With this item, she used Stimulation Disorder on herself and modified her reaction to such a scene to the feeling of being suddenly burned by flames.

Her body suddenly jolted as her body rapidly pumped adrenaline.

Thud! Thud! Thud!

Jiang Baimian's running speed seemed to exceed a human's limits.

Her target was the intersection at the end of the aisle.

...

Shang Jianyao—who was in the wilderness—was also facing the thick darkness that surged over like a tide.

At the edge of the darkness, two bloody, pale hands were propped up on the ground with their elbows. They constantly alternated, allowing the indistinct figure behind to constantly approach the target.

The Shang Jianyao that sought novelty assumed a posture, raised his right hand, and snapped his fingers. At the same time, he leisurely said, “Limbs Immobility.”

The alternating bloody palms paused before continuing to move forward.

“F*ck!” The timid Shang Jianyao cursed and made the military exoskeleton fire.

A grenade was fired, and a metal bullet wrapped in electric sparks that followed arrived first. A bright red laser almost instantly crossed the distance between Shang Jianyao and the darkness as glistening yellow bullets rained down.

This was the superior firepower theory that Zen Master Redemption advocated.

However, most of them were swallowed by the darkness. Although the rest struck the bloody palms and the figure connected to them, they only produced sound and didn’t cause any real damage.

“A monster!” The honest Shang Jianyao jumped up, turned around in midair, and ran.

Amidst the thumping sounds, he took out a blue and white loudspeaker and raised his voice. “As the saying goes, it’s better to resolve enmity than worsen it. I advise you to know better. Stop immediately, or you will have to bear the consequences!”

This was Thought Guidance.

It was unknown if the monster in the darkness didn't understand Shang Jianyao's words or if it could resist such an influence greatly. 'He' only paused for a moment before continuing to crawl forward with 'his' alternating elbows.

The blood 'he' left behind was consumed by the darkness that followed.

Shang Jianyao—who was wearing a military exoskeleton—ran faster as the ground trembled slightly.

It was unknown which one of him made the decision, but he stretched out his right palm and suddenly pressed down.

Bang!

The ground in front of the bloody palm suddenly collapsed, forming a large crater.

The monster in the darkness couldn't stop readily and plunged in.

"I'm actually that strong?" The honest Shang Jianyao observed his right palm in surprise. How could my Matter Interference be strong enough to cause the ground to collapse out of thin air?

His initial plan was to create a slight obstacle to slow down the other party.

While Shang Jianyao reeled in surprise, the darkness continued surging forward, flooding the crater.

The bloody, pale palms stretched out from the edge of the darkness again and propped themselves up on the ground. They then moved their elbows forward alternately.

Shang Jianyao—who had turned around to observe—happened to see this scene. He strode forward again as if his butt was on fire and ran.

"That's too much!" Shang Jianyao raised the blue and white loudspeaker and threatened his adversary using Thought Guidance. "Let me tell you something: I know many people and have many friends. If you dare to chase after me, I'll get them to beat you up! It's not too late to give up now. Isn't it better for everyone to listen to Buddhist recitals?"

The darkness surging behind him and the monster that alternated its elbows to propel its body forward remained the same. It maintained its previous pursuit speed and vaguely showed signs of acceleration.

The rash Shang Jianyao immediately turned ruthless. “Fine! I’ll see if a gank works!”

As he spoke, a few figures split out of his upper body. One was calm and rational, one was weak and timid, one was compassionate, and the other abhorred evil.

Some of them stretched their hands into the void as if they were summoning their friends. One held the Six Senses Beads as his eyes turned deep. Another held the Life Angel necklace, prepared to lock onto the target.

“Consciousness Deprivation!” Zen Master Redemption spoke solemnly and loudly.

Green light rose from the Six Senses Beads. The monster in the darkness paused its hands that were propped up on the ground.

However, ‘he’ quickly returned to normal. Furthermore, ‘he’ became violent and crawled quickly as if Shang Jianyao had something he yearned for.

Cardiac Arrest!

The Shang Jianyao that abhorred evil used the Life Angel necklace in succession, but the monster with bloody, pale hands didn’t stop.

“Are you done!?” the honest Shang Jianyao shouted guiltily.

The monster was about to catch up to him, and the darkness would drown the world.

At this moment, the timid Shang Jianyao pulled out a figure from the void. It was Xiaochong—who was wearing yellow clothes and carrying a red school bag.

In another direction, the calm and rational Shang Jianyao also found a helper—Du Heng, who was wearing a black robe and had his hair draped over his shoulders.

As soon as the two of them appeared, the darkness that was about to drown Shang Jianyao froze. The monster—which was crawling on the ground with its elbows alternating—stopped.

In the blink of an eye, the two collapsed like a castle made of sand inundated by waves.

The entire wilderness turned illusory as if it were a dream or an illusion.

Shang Jianyao suddenly opened his eyes and sat up on his bed. He calmly spread his arms, raised his body, and sincerely said, “Everything is but a dream. Why so serious?”

Jiang Baimian—who was on the same bed—shook her head and thoughtfully asked, “You had a dream too? I fell asleep unknowingly?”

She still remembered that she was originally studying the island of fear in the Sea of Origins.

The two rented rooms only had one bed each. Jiang Baimian and Shang Jianyao could only place pistols and other items in the middle of the bed.

For humans who often traveled the wilderness, this wasn’t something worth paying attention to. Such conditions didn’t even exist in the wilderness. Therefore, Jiang Baimian faced it calmly. She was only a little ‘worried’ that Long Yuehong—who was in the other room—wouldn’t be able to sleep.

“Otherwise?” the honest Shang Jianyao asked in response.

Jiang Baimian didn’t mind the honest Shang Jianyao’s attitude and continued asking, “Did you also have a dream of a monster chasing after you in the darkness, just like the Hunter’s Guild’s mission description?”

Smack!

Shang Jianyao clenched his right fist and punched his left palm. “I was wondering why it seemed so familiar!”

Jiang Baimian raised her right hand and rubbed her forehead. “But I don’t feel a headache, nausea, or fatigue. I can still fall asleep again at any time. You woke up while running as well?”

“No.” Shang Jianyao shook his head. “I had the intention of making an attempt and summoned Teacher Du Heng and Xiaochong. The monster in the darkness seemed to have been scared away because of this. So it’s a dream. It’s no wonder I could summon them. Besides, Teacher Du Heng and Xiaochong didn’t display any conflict...”

This was the rash Shang Jianyao, who had just figured out the situation.

“That actually worked?” Jiang Baimian began to suspect that the reason she could escape the nightmare and be unaffected was that Shang Jianyao had scared the monster in the darkness away from this area.

Chapter 624: Imagination

Shang Jianyao spread his arms again, raised his body, and answered Jiang Baimian’s question in an intoxicated tone. “Everything is but a dream. Why so serious?”

Jiang Baimian once again realized that this sentence was versatile and could be used to handle anything. However, this encounter involved a dream, so it did seem like a reasonable fit.

She thought for a moment and said, “Ask Little White and Little Red if they had such dreams.”

“You want to wake them up?” Zen Master Redemption had a ‘you’re a bad person’ expression.

Before Jiang Baimian could respond, he had already switched personalities and excitedly said, “I’m on it!”

Jiang Baimian looked up, got off the bed, and opened the door.

“Going to the bathroom so soon?” Geneva—who was in charge of watching over the living room—asked.

As a smart bot that respected humans, he didn't monitor his companions' rooms.

Although Geneva's question was a valid one, Jiang Baimian felt that his train of thought was slipping in Shang Jianyao's direction.

The thought of two—no, eleven Shang Jianyaos in her future team gave her a headache.

Jiang Baimian slowly took a deep breath and said, "Do you still remember the A-rank mission we saw in the Hunter's Guild during the day?"

Genava quickly analyzed Jiang Baimian's hidden meaning. "You guys also encountered that nightmare?"

"Yes." As Jiang Baimian nodded, she saw Shang Jianyao tip-toe to the bedroom where Bai Chen and Long Yuehong were.

With a creak, Bai Chen opened the door before Shang Jianyao could knock.

"Little Red and I had the same nightmare," Bai Chen said bluntly. "It's very similar to the Hunter's Guild's mission description."

Long Yuehong followed behind and echoed, "Yes, yes."

"Us too." Jiang Baimian recounted her encounter with Shang Jianyao.

"Therefore, you ultimately relied on Xiaochong and Du Heng to scare away the nightmare?" Bai Chen wasn't accustomed to calling Du Heng 'teacher.'

Shang Jianyao stroked his chin and replied before Jiang Baimian could. "When you have eliminated the impossible, whatever remains must be the truth. At least we don't show any adverse symptoms; there's no dizziness, nausea, fatigue, or insomnia."

Long Yuehong listened solemnly and raised a question. “If the nightmare has its own consciousness and can be scared away, why is it doing all of this? Spreading nightmares? Love watching everyone suffer from insomnia and dizziness?”

These reasons didn’t convince Long Yuehong; he found them wanting.

A ‘nightmare’ that could affect so many people at the same time and prevent Shang Jianyao—a Mind Corridor-level Awakened—from escaping should have a more ‘lofty’ motivation. Otherwise, why would they take the risk to cause trouble in First City?

There were many powerhouses here!

Jiang Baimian thought for a moment and said, “There are no deaths at the moment, nobody has gone crazy, nor are there any obvious abnormalities... The entire matter appears very mild.”

She suspected that an Awakened in the dream domain had made a breakthrough and was experimenting with his abilities in a relatively low-profile manner.

“Not necessarily at the moment.” Shang Jianyao suddenly became excited. “After I used the Six Senses Beads in my dream, the monster in the darkness became violent. It seems like ‘he’ still knows what’s good and that it’s very precious.”

Shang Jianyao’s Six Senses Beads had been modified by a Buddhist Holy Land.

Long Yuehong was shocked. “Will ‘he’ come knocking on our door in reality?”

“I don’t think so for the time being.” Jiang Baimian consoled her teammates. “Since ‘he’ can be scared away by Teacher Du Heng or Xiaochong, he definitely won’t rashly deal with us. At the very least, ‘he’ has to eliminate the possibility that Xiaochong or Teacher Du Heng are hiding around us, right? How can Xiaochong and Teacher Du Heng be so easily discovered?”

Even if the nightmare could influence dreams and learn from the Old Task Force members that they hadn’t met Du Heng and Xiaochong recently, there was still the worry that this was a trap specially set for ‘him.’

Bai Chen said, “We would’ve already left the city and gone to Wasteland Ruin 13 by then, distancing ourselves from this ‘nightmare.’”

Long Yuehong nodded to indicate his comprehension.

“What’s the source of this nightmare?” Genova steered the topic back on track.

Jiang Baimian first raised the theory of ‘experimenting abilities’ from the perspective of how mild the entire matter seemed. She then said, “In addition, there’s another possibility: there’s an uncontrollable ‘node’ that connects to the New World in the city. The aura there is slowly seeping in, but it hasn’t reached the point of causing people to contract the Heartless disease. It only brings about large-scale nightmares.

“First City’s leaders hope to discover the node’s location through the Hand of Order and the Hunter’s Guild. But this doesn’t explain why the nightmare was scared away by Teacher Du Heng or Xiaochong.”

Clap! Clap! Clap!

Shang Jianyao clapped. “You’re getting more and more imaginative!”

That’s not a good thing...? Jiang Baimian shot him a glance and concluded, “We don’t have to worry too much about this. This is First City. There will definitely be someone to hold it up even if the sky collapses. As long as we are aware of the information retrieval speed and leave First City before the nightmare figures out that Teacher Du Heng and Xiaochong really aren’t lurking in the surrounding area, there won’t be any major problems. Yes, we can also ask Boss Ugo. Their True Self Church believes in the dream domain’s Kalendaria, Dawn, so they won’t be uninterested in such matters.

“Also, report this to the company and see what the big shots above think of this matter and what comments they will give. Any other suggestions?”

“No.” Long Yuehong was the first to shake his head.

After Bai Chen, Shang Jianyao, and Genova replied one after another, Jiang Baimian found the radio transceiver and sent Pangu Biology a report immediately.

Employees were constantly on duty at the radio within Pangu Biology.

After finishing this matter, Jiang Baimian clapped her hands. “Continue sleeping. Don’t hide any strange dreams you might have.”

Shang Jianyao cast his gaze at Long Yuehong.

Your gaze is very strange, bastard! Long Yuehong restrained himself and replied to his team leader in a terse affirmative manner.

At this moment, Shang Jianyao looked at Jiang Baimian and asked in a joking tone, “Big White, any progress on your island of fear?”

Jiang Baimian hesitated for a moment and decided to share her difficulties. She recounted the details of Pangu Biology’s underground building—which was equivalent to an abandoned and uninhabited island of fear. Then, she stiffened her neck and took the initiative to say, “This might correspond to the fear of losing my family, friends, companions, and familiar way of life.”

Hmph, if I say it out myself and do it frankly instead of having someone else guess it, it won’t damage my image as a lady warrior!

Shang Jianyao tersely acknowledged it with admiration written all over his face. “You actually didn’t get lost inside!”

Jiang Baimian quietly gritted her teeth.

“There are no enemies or abnormalities. It’s indeed a little confusing,” Bai Chen discussed seriously.

Long Yuehong immediately echoed, “That’s right.”

He then voiced his thoughts. “Those islands correspond to psychological trauma and inner fear. If you want to resolve it, the most important thing is to base it on reality. Just like how Team Leader was able to clear the first island, the real reason was that you dared to face a coma that implied

losing control. You attempted an Awakening and underwent surgery. Therefore, once you found a solution, you naturally broke through. You have to face it bravely this time...”

Long Yuehong suddenly paused.

As Jiang Baimian’s friend, companion, and part of her familiar life, it seemed wrong to persuade her to face such fears head-on...

Isn’t that obvious? But how can I deliberately seek to face such matters head-on? Am I to proactively create an opportunity to wipe out my teammates like the weak and timid Hey??Jiang Baimian smiled bitterly inwardly.

Without needing her response, Geneva analyzed the entire matter and raised two solutions. “The first is to make yourself cold and fade your feelings for others. This way, you won’t be too sad to lose them and won’t be traumatized.”

“Why does that sound so familiar?” Shang Jianyao dug his ears.

The honest Shang Jianyao immediately scoffed. “Isn’t this what you previously thought?”

As the Shang Jianyaos argued, Geneva continued, “The second is to make yourself strong enough, strong enough to believe that you can protect everything.”

That’s too idealistic... Besides, this becomes a vicious cycle. Only by becoming sufficiently strong can one defeat this psychological trauma. But only by defeating this psychological trauma can one continue forward and become sufficiently strong...?Jiang Baimian didn’t voice her criticisms.

At this moment, the busy Shang Jianyao took the time to say, “You can also try to understand the meaning of sacrifice, the value of life, and understand what it means to have a common will that’s as strong as a fortress. This way, you will learn that losing something is just having it accompany you in a different way and become the meaning and motivation for your journey.”

That actually makes sense...?Jiang Baimian tersely acknowledged it and asked, “What did you gain from your exploration of the cruise ship?”

Shang Jianyao explained the pattern of the discovery and said, “Since we can’t capture a Mind Corridor-level Awakened to help us scout the way in the meantime, we can consider finding Room 522’s owner during the day when everything is normal.”

“How do you find him?” Long Yuehong asked.

Shang Jianyao smiled. “From the sequence of his psychological trauma, he should’ve already become an Awakened when he boarded the cruise ship. In other words, he has been to Iron Mountain City’s Second Food Company. As long as I keep finding people to talk about this topic, I’ll have a chance to identify him.”

“That’s a solution, but you have to be careful of triggering any abnormalities,” Jiang Baimian commented.

After the discussion, they returned to their rooms and went to bed again.

The night passed uneventfully. There were no more nightmares.

The next day, after breakfast, Bai Chen asked, “Shall we visit Boss Ugo today?”

Jiang Baimian thought for a moment and said, “Sure.”

Chapter 625: ‘Aftermath’

Long Yuehong went downstairs, got into the car, and sized up the street through the glass window in the backseat. He saw more than ten people lined up outside a clinic not far away. Their faces were pale, tired, and haggard.

From Long Yuehong’s understanding, such a scene was definitely abnormal. This was because most of the residents in the Green Olive Zone were struggling to survive. They wouldn’t see a doctor unless they were especially sick; they would rather suffer and hold out until it turned better.

It didn’t make sense for so many seriously ill people to appear in the nearby streets.

As these thoughts raced through his mind, Long Yuehong thought of his encounter last night and the Hunter's Guild mission. He guessed, "Are these the people who had that nightmare last night?"

"Probably." Bai Chen—who was on the same side as Long Yuehong—agreed.

"Let me see, let me see," Shang Jianyao shouted as he crossed Genava and Long Yuehong.

Long Yuehong ignored him and continued, "But the nightmare last night came to an abrupt end. We didn't show any dizziness, nausea, or fatigue."

"This might very well differ from person to person." Jiang Baimian deliberated and said, "We are all experienced warriors; we have good strength and relatively firm wills. Even in a dream, we will definitely last longer than most of the residents in the Green Olive Zone by relying on our instincts. There's a high chance that those residents were caught by the monster and had drowned in the darkness before Hey used Xiaochong and Teacher Du Heng to scare away the 'nightmare.'"

Therefore, they had the corresponding symptoms and felt some discomfort.

Genava moved his metal neck up and down and held Shang Jianyao's body up with his hand. "There are definitely more people affected than those lining up at the clinic's entrance. Most people will choose to hold out for a day and have a good night's sleep to see if they can recover in such a situation."

He made this judgment based on the human behavioral database he had established.

Jiang Baimian tersely acknowledged his words and said to Bai Chen, "Let's go. We'll go to Ugo Hotel after circling around."

This could effectively hide the fact that they lived nearby.

As the jeep drove forward, a few public security officers in grayish-blue uniforms came out of the clinic. They raised their hands to gesture for Bai Chen to stop the car.

Long Yuehong quickly glanced at Shang Jianyao—who had just sat up straight—and signaled for him to prepare Thought Guidance.

Knock! Knock! Knock!

One of the public security officers bent down and rapped on the glass window in the passenger seat.

Jiang Baimian—who had disguised herself—rolled down the window and pretended to be nervous. “Sir, what’s the matter?”

The public security officer asked seriously, “Did you have any nightmares last night? What kind?”

The corners of Jiang Baimian’s mouth curled up as she took out her Hunter’s Badge and waved it. “Sir, we saw the collective dream mission in the guild yesterday.”

She didn’t say that she hadn’t taken on the mission or that she was unaffected by the nightmare. However, her actions and words naturally misled people into thinking in the direction she planned.

They were a group of Ruin Hunters that had accepted a mission and came to investigate today. They didn’t live here last night, so they undoubtedly didn’t have nightmares.

The public security officer didn’t hide his disappointment and waved his hand. “Don’t cause trouble; behave yourselves! Report immediately if anything happens!”

“Yes, sir.” Jiang Baimian raised her hand and saluted indifferently, making herself appear like a slippery Hunter who had been in First City and the surrounding area for a long time.

After she rolled up the window, Bai Chen drove the jeep and circled the block.

On the way, the Old Task Force would stop the car from time to time to ask passersby to see if they had any nightmares or what kind of nightmares they had.

After asking five people, they obtained three definite answers. Furthermore, the nightmares the three of them had were almost identical.

They were either in the wilderness or abandoned buildings when a monster—which was hidden in the darkness and had bloody, pale hands and elbows that alternately propped itself off the ground—

chased after them. They were eventually drowned by the coldness due to a lack of stamina or an unfortunate trip, only to wake up. They more or less suffered from headaches and dizziness today.

“It’s similar to Team Leader’s guess,” Long Yuehong said sincerely.

Jiang Baimian looked out the window and sighed worriedly. “If only the nightmare’s influence stops here...”

She was afraid that the problem would worsen and eventually spiral out of control.

At this moment, the jeep arrived at the yellowish-brown, three-story Ugo Hotel.

As Ruin Hunters who were here to investigate the ‘nightmare,’ it was very reasonable and normal for them to go door to door.

As soon as he entered the lobby, Shang Jianyao sighed regretfully. “Nobody’s here.”

He referred to Ugo.

There were actually some scattered rooms on the first floor with a few guests. Therefore, Shang Jianyao only confirmed that Ugo wasn’t around when he entered the lobby and observed the environment.

Jiang Baimian suppressed her voice and muttered to herself, “He went to the True Self Church?”

She could now control her volume freely and didn’t have to worry about her whispering being too loud.

At this moment, the front desk was empty. The wooden door to the room behind it was tightly shut.

As Bai Chen looked around, two customers—who lived in the hotel—returned. As they passed through the lobby, they rubbed their foreheads and casually conversed.

“I thought I could have a good sleep after leaving the wilderness, but I actually had a nightmare. I was so scared that I couldn’t sleep for the rest of the night.”

“Me too. Maybe I’ve been under a lot of pressure recently. If it’s still the same in the future, I plan on going to the clinic to get a doctor to prescribe some medicine. Although it definitely won’t be cheap, as Ruin Hunters, it’s more important to maintain tip-top condition.”

“I suspect that something abnormal happened in this block. The boss didn’t even get up in the morning. I was the one who helped him open the door.”

“Really? You opened it?”

“Of course. You came out too late; you only arrived after I was done opening the door.”

Bai Chen’s eyes flickered when she heard the two customers’ conversation, and she had an ominous feeling. She quickly cast her gaze at Jiang Baimian and realized that her team leader had also frowned slightly.

After the two guests returned to their rooms, Bai Chen voiced her thoughts. “Even if Ugo has something to do elsewhere, he won’t forget to open the hotel’s door.”

Shang Jianyao looked at the room behind the front desk.

The wooden door was tightly shut, and no sound came from it.

“Go take a look.” Jiang Baimian seemed to be giving orders, but she was actually walking to the front desk herself.

Genava, Long Yuehong, and Bai Chen naturally dispersed and entered combat positions. They could fire at any moment to cover their teammates.

Shang Jianyao followed Jiang Baimian and seriously observed her direction.

“Oh, you didn’t get lost.” Shang Jianyao was rather gratified.

It's only a few meters away, and the target is big and obvious. How can I get lost??Jiang Baimian tried her best to maintain a serious expression.

She circled around the front desk and arrived at Ugo's room. She then stretched out her right palm and turned the doorknob.

The wooden door slowly retreated.

Jiang Baimian's nose twitched, and her expression immediately turned solemn.

As the door opened, the scene in the room reflected in her eyes.

A bed was placed against the left wall; beside it was a wooden table. On the table were messy piles of sewing needles, old knives, black leather whips, many ropes, and a small candle chunk.

The tanned hotel owner—Ugo—had his upper body bare. He was lying on the ground with his face covered by a translucent blue plastic bag.

His eyes were wide open, and there were signs of incontinence in his lower body. A faint stench filled the room.

He no longer had a human consciousness and had lost his life.

Grief flashed across Jiang Baimian's face as she turned her body and said to her team members outside in a deep voice, "Boss Ugo is dead."

Dead? Boss Ugo is dead??Long Yuehong found it a little unacceptable.

The hotel owner was fine yesterday and had even promised his team leader to contact General Phocas. Why did he suddenly die today?

Shang Jianyao raised his left palm vertically and sighed. "Namo Annutara-Samyak-Subhuti. May he reach Paradise."

Jiang Baimian walked into the room step by step, constantly paying attention to not destroying the scene.

After Shang Jianyao arrived at the door, she squatted down and roughly checked the area.

After a few minutes, Jiang Baimian straightened her back and said in confusion, “The cause of death seems to be suffocation. From the scene, Boss Ugo covered his head with the plastic bag and tightly tied its mouth. He suffocated himself to death...”

If it were anyone else, Jiang Baimian would definitely think that the real culprit had deliberately created the scene. However, she felt that it wasn’t impossible for it to happen to Ugo and the True Self Church’s pious believers.

These people always sought to abuse themselves in various ways, hoping to sense their true selves through such actions. This was equivalent to dancing at the edge of a cliff—any accident could result in one’s death.

Without waiting for a response, Jiang Baimian added, “His estimated time of death is between 11 p.m. and 4 a.m. last night.”

Last night...? Long Yuehong’s heart palpitated as he blurted out in horror, “Could it be a result of that nightmare?”

Chapter 626: Getting Help

Jiang Baimian glanced at Long Yuehong and sighed. “We can’t rule out that possibility.”

Genava analyzed the information regarding Real Dreamscape and gave his opinion. “If it’s a result of the nightmare, the reality will reflect what one encounters in the dream. But even if Boss Ugo died from suffocation in the dream, it’s impossible for him to take the initiative to wrap himself in such a plastic bag in reality. Instead, it should have various characteristics of direct suffocation.”

“That’s right, that’s right,” said the Shang Jianyao that habitually echoed.

Bai Chen nodded. “Either Boss Ugo abused himself too intensely and had an accident, or someone suffocated him to death and forged a suicide scene.”

Among the Old Task Force members, Bai Chen and Ugo knew each other the longest and had the deepest friendship. However, she recovered quickly, and there was nothing abnormal about her now. It was as if she was already accustomed to the deaths of people she knew.

“Old Ge, come in and scan the scene. Be careful not to damage anything or leave anything behind.” Jiang Baimian stood up and left the mission to Genova—who was more professional than her.

She—who had already put on her gloves—began searching the entire room.

She picked up the sewing needles, old knives, and other items one by one before putting them back. She then pulled open the desk drawer.

There were some coins and notes in the drawer, as well as a stack of documents that were half a thumb thick.

Jiang Baimian swept her gaze and realized that this was the arrangement of First City’s troops in Wasteland Ruin 13’s periphery.

Boss Ugo has already contacted General Phocas and obtained the information we need? The fact that the information isn’t gone means that Boss Ugo’s death isn’t related?

?As these thoughts raced through her mind, Jiang Baimian reached out to pick up the stack of documents and casually flipped through them.

After confirming that there was no mention of the entrance to the North Shore Mountains, she placed the documents in her tactical backpack.

She then checked the bed and bathroom again, but she didn’t find any clues worth paying attention to.

Genova had also completed his work. He spoke in a slightly synthetic male voice. “As I can’t autopsy the corpse, I can’t give a precise time of death. My preliminary judgment is that it happened between 11 p.m. and 1 a.m. last night. There are no traces of anyone else at the scene. Boss Ugo should’ve been alone back then...”

Ugo suddenly crawled up in the middle of the night to abuse himself with suffocation??Long Yuehong couldn't convince himself of such a reason.

Based on most First City residents' way of living, that was the time people slept most soundly.

“What should we do now?” Long Yuehong deliberated and said, “Leave it to the Hand of Order?”

Jiang Baimian shook her head. “Once we call the police, we will definitely earn the Hand of Order's attention. This isn't a good thing for wanted criminals with a high bounty in First City.”

This was what Long Yuehong was worried about. He strongly agreed. “It's better to pretend not to notice anything and quietly evacuate. The customers in the motel will notice that something has happened to Ugo sooner or later.”

Jiang Baimian pointed at the door. “Have you forgotten that there are cameras there? Have you forgotten that customers living in the motel have seen us? As long as someone calls the police, the Hand of Order will definitely notice us if they investigate.”

Long Yuehong wanted to suggest destroying the camera and the corresponding surveillance footage. At the same time, he wanted Shang Jianyao to ‘persuade’ the two hotel guests from before. But after careful thought, he felt that it only served to reveal what they intended to hide.

The more coincidences there were, the more the Hand of Order would place importance on them. They might even get an Awakened in the Last Man domain to help.

“Then, what should we do?” Long Yuehong could tell that his team leader had a plan.

Jiang Baimian carefully walked out of Ugo's room and closed the wooden door. “Find the True Self Church and get them to deal with it. They are inextricably linked to First City's higher-ups, so it shouldn't be a problem for them to help us cover it up. Phew. Fortunately, the hotel's business has deteriorated recently. Nobody entered or left when we checked the scene.”

Long Yuehong immediately recalled that the True Self Church had a nearby stronghold. The Old Task Force had previously seen General Phocas lashing himself half-naked there.

As the team leader, Jiang Baimian took off her gloves and led the way to the hotel's main entrance.

“The side door...” Shang Jianyao reminded her ‘gloomily.’

Jiang Baimian exerted outstanding strength in her waist and abdomen and forcefully turned her body.

Under Shang Jianyao's guidance, the Old Task Force members left the hotel from the side door, passed through an alley, and arrived in front of an apartment.

This apartment only had five floors and looked ordinary.

As soon as he entered the apartment, Shang Jianyao took out a blue and white loudspeaker and spoke to the stairs that led to the basement. “You've been surrounded!”

Jiang Baimian couldn't help but facepalm with her empty right hand. She then suppressed her voice and said, “We're friends with Boss Ugo. Something happened to him.”

Soon, an ordinary-dressed man appeared from the shadows at the bottom of the stairs. He clenched his fists and gently rapped his head. “The true self lives forever!”

The current Shang Jianyao didn't imitate him. He seemed to be still immersed in the grief brought about by Ugo's unexpected death.

The True Self Church parishioner walked up the stairs and said to Jiang Baimian and the others, “Follow me.”

It was as if sandpaper was stuffed into his throat.

Shang Jianyao readily agreed and was the first to follow behind the man.

They arrived at the innermost room on the apartment's left and saw a thin, middle-aged man.

This elder's brown hair was mixed with a large number of silver strands, and his black robe was patched. His appearance and bearing were ordinary. If he stood at the apartment's entrance, he would most likely be treated as a guard.

"What happened to Ugo?" the elder asked. After asking, he recalled the need to introduce himself. "You can call me Cliff, a Dreambreaker."

Jiang Baimian—who didn't know much about the True Self Church's ranks—nodded slightly as a form of greeting.

After the door was closed, she replied, "Boss Ugo is dead."

"Cause of death?" Cliff's expression changed slightly before quickly returning to normal.

"Asphyxiation," Jiang Baimian said concisely and didn't add any additional descriptions. "He wore a translucent blue plastic bag over his head. He died between 11 a.m. and 1 a.m. last night. There were no traces of anyone else at the scene..."

Cliff didn't interrupt her recount. He waited for her to finish before nodding. "We will further investigate the exact situation. Thank you for your information."

Jiang Baimian made a terse grunt. "When carrying out the investigation, please help hide our existence. As you know, we're still wanted."

"No problem." Cliff made a promise. "Did you discover Ugo's demise while retrieving the information from him?"

"Yes," the rash Shang Jianyao replied enthusiastically. "We found the information in his drawer; it wasn't lost."

"Please make confirmation." Jiang Baimian took off her tactical backpack and took out the stack of documents. "See if there's anything missing or anything extra."

Cliff sized her up and praised, "Very careful."

He then took the documents and flipped through them carefully. “There aren’t any problems.”

As Jiang Baimian took back the documents, she deliberately sighed with emotion. “We visited Boss Ugo today to ask about the Green Olive Zone’s collective dream. To our surprise, he had already obtained the information we wanted. You guys are too efficient; it hasn’t even been 24 hours.”

Cliff fell silent for a moment before truthfully saying, “Because we were planning on going to Wasteland Ruin 13 to explore the secret laboratory.”

“We might be able to cooperate when the time comes,” Jiang Baimian said politely.

Cliff then talked about the recent anomaly. “We’ve already noticed the collective dream and are searching for the root cause of the problem. This matter isn’t that simple. It might bring great danger to the investigators, so it’s best if you don’t participate.”

“Thank you.” Jiang Baimian expressed her gratitude.

After leaving the apartment and returning to the jeep, Shang Jianyao stroked his chin and said, “The True Self Church is already investigating the source of the collective dream. Boss Ugo’s death might be related to this...”

Ugo’s death was indeed too close to the time of last night’s nightmare. It left one unable to help but suspect something.

“Yes.” Jiang Baimian nodded. “That seems to be what Cliff suspects as well. At least, that’s the feeling he gives me.”

Upon hearing his teammates’ conversation, Long Yuehong suddenly understood a problem.

He made a sound, hoping to develop the discussion. “The reason why nothing terrible happened to the others after experiencing the nightmare other than feeling a little dizzy, nauseous, weak, and insomniac, while Ugo strangely suffocated to death, is that he Awakened dream abilities?”

Most people couldn’t carry out an effective investigation when facing a nightmare, but Ugo could!

Bai Chen—who was driving—thought for a moment and agreed with Long Yuehong’s guess. “I think so.”

Just as she said that, Shang Jianyao and Jiang Baimian blurted out at the same time, “Oh no!”

“Not good!”

“What’s wrong?” Long Yuehong trembled.

Jiang Baimian turned around and frowned. “Oudick also has Awakened dream abilities.”

“I hope nothing happens..” Shang Jianyao prayed.

Chapter 627: Dream Guardian

Jiang Baimian and Shang Jianyao were the only ones among the Old Task Force who had fought alongside Oudick.

Bai Chen was nonplussed about it. She looked at the road ahead through the windshield and said, “Shall we confirm his situation and find an opportunity to warn him?”

“Alright!” Shang Jianyao agreed without hesitation.

“How?” Long Yuehong was more concerned about this question.

The Old Task Force members were ‘infamous’ wanted criminals in First City’s sphere of influence.

Jiang Baimian pondered for a moment and replied, “We’ll do it the old-fashioned way. Hey, use Thought Guidance to find a Ruin Hunter to issue a mission at the guild that’s about how Oudick’s friend is looking for him. We can then wait for the other Ruin Hunters to help us confirm Oudick’s current situation and location.”

When the Old Task Force was previously wanted by the Hand of Order, they had relied on similar methods to deal with various matters in First City.

“No problem.” The rash Shang Jianyao began to crack his knuckles eagerly.

After completing the preliminary ‘work,’ the Old Task Force drove the jeep to a street near the Hunter’s Guild and parked at a relatively inconspicuous spot.

In less than an hour, Shang Jianyao’s new friend—a First City citizen who was too old to join the army and could only continue being a Ruin Hunter—entered this street.

His name was Autun. He wasn’t tall, and his black hair was very short. There were already fine wrinkles around his blue eyes.

At this moment, he looked around professionally. After confirming that nobody was paying attention to him, he walked to the Old Task Force’s jeep.

Shang Jianyao rolled down the window, stuck his head out, and waved at him.

Autun approached, bent down, and suppressed his voice. “There’s news regarding the Advanced Hunter you’re looking for.”

He didn’t continue and only smiled at Shang Jianyao.

“Are we still friends?” Shang Jianyao muttered as he took out three 5-Oray notes.

As they had confirmed that this mission required them to explore the Holm Fertility Center in Wasteland Ruin 13—which definitely required them to pass through First City’s sphere of influence—the supplies Jiang Baimian had applied for when the Old Task Force left Pangu Biology included notes worth 1,000 Oray.

In a sense, this might be one of the most convenient supplies to carry in the Ashlands.

Autun took the notes, raised them against the sun, and checked their authenticity. He then lowered his head and smiled. “Don’t you Ashlandics have a saying: Even brothers keep careful accounts? I took the risk and ran around to help you commission the mission and confirm the information. I deserve something for that, right!?”

Of the 15 Oray that Shang Jianyao had given him, 10 Oray was the mission payment that Autun had paid. In other words, he had only earned 5 Oray after all that work.

Of course, if it weren't for the Old Task Force's conscience, he would most likely suffer a loss of 10 Oray under Thought Guidance, much less earn money.

Shang Jianyao didn't retort Autun. He restrained the expression on his face and asked seriously, "How's Oudick now? Where is he?"

Autun subconsciously looked around to confirm that nobody was paying attention. After he retracted his gaze, he replied in a deep voice, "That Advanced Hunter named Oudick has gone crazy."

"Crazy?" As Jiang Baimian narrowed her eyes, Shang Jianyao's face revealed unconcealed anger.

"Yes." Autun nodded heavily. "It likely happened yesterday morning. After his family discovered it, they sent him to the Red River Mental Hospital for treatment."

Red River Mental Hospital was located in the Red Wolf Zone. It was the only specialized mental hospital in First City.

If one didn't go there, they could only go to a few general hospitals' psychiatry departments.

Sigh, something really went wrong... Another victim...? Long Yuehong had always been compassionate and empathetic. Furthermore, this wasn't a stranger he didn't know or hadn't come into contact with.

Jiang Baimian glanced at Shang Jianyao, calmed down, and asked Autun again, "Any specific symptoms?"

"I'm not sure. It seems to be random shouting and smashing of things," Autun replied. "I learned about it from a friend of his; he visited him at the mental hospital in the morning. If you want to know the exact situation, you have to pay attention to the time. Visiting hours at the mental hospital end at 6 p.m."

Jiang Baimian nodded. "Alright, sorry to trouble you."

“Thank you.” Shang Jianyao waved his hand weakly.

After Autun left, Jiang Baimian turned around and said to Bai Chen, Long Yuehong, and Genava, “It seems like Boss Ugo really died from the nightmare. Otherwise, there wouldn’t be such a coincidence.”

Advanced Hunter Oudick—who also had Awakened abilities in the dream domain—went crazy on the same night!

Before Bai Chen and the others could speak, the rash Shang Jianyao said in a deep voice, “I plan on visiting Oudick in the afternoon. I hope we can find the truth behind that nightmare!”

Jiang Baimian didn’t mention that the tragic encounters of acquaintances were a daily occurrence in the Ashlands. She nodded and said, “Alright.”

...

At 2 p.m., in the Red River Mental Hospital’s lobby.

The Old Task Force met Oudick’s wife, Laurice. She and Oudick had been married for less than a year.

“We’re Oudick’s friends. We heard that he’s sick and wish to visit him.” Jiang Baimian used the euphemism of being sick as a substitute for being crazy.

Laurice looked to be in her mid-twenties. She had brown hair and green eyes. She was of average build and wore a dark-colored culottes that made it easier for her to move in.

Jiang Baimian speculated that her family background before marriage was pretty good. At the very least, it afforded her the freedom not to get married at 15 or 16 years old.

Her words and actions also confirmed Jiang Baimian’s judgment. “It’s not convenient for Oudick to meet people now. It’s better if you wait for his condition to stabilize before visiting again.”

Before Shang Jianyao could speak, Jiang Baimian took the initiative to say, “We are also Ruin Hunters. We believe that there might be some hidden reason why Oudick fell so suddenly. If we can find some clues on him, it might help him recover as soon as possible.”

This sentence hit the nail on the head, and Laurice’s green eyes instantly clouded over.

As Laurice wiped the corners of her eyes, she sobbed and said, “You definitely won’t believe it. All I did was take a nap before waking up to find my reliable husband irritable, crazy, and difficult to communicate with. Nothing happened before that; everything was just like usual... It’s been a while since he took on missions that required him to go to very dangerous places!”

Jiang Baimian, Shang Jianyao, Bai Chen, and the others looked at each other and deliberated before saying, “Actually, we have some guesses. We met Oudick in the Hunter’s Guild’s lobby yesterday. He planned on taking on a mission called collective dream...”

As she wasn’t sure if Oudick eventually took it, Jiang Baimian used ‘planned.’

After describing the nightmare’s situation, she didn’t ‘hide.’ “Could Oudick’s sudden illness be related to that nightmare?”

Laurice’s expression changed a few times as she muttered to herself, “His fellow parishioners seem to have mentioned this...”

“Parishioners?” Shang Jianyao acutely grasped this term.

Laurice slowly exhaled and said, “My husband has always believed in February’s Kalendaria, Dawn, and has joined one of the Churches. They insist that dreams are dangerous. Nightmares will devour a person’s soul, causing the Heartless disease and various diseases to appear. It might even kill them directly. Therefore, Guardians are needed to patrol dreams and defend humanity. I think he—he might’ve been injured last night while fighting a nightmare...”

The more she thought about it, the more she felt that there was a certain connection between the nightmare and her husband’s madness.

Uh, the Dawn’s Morning Star doctrine...?Jiang Baimian first heard about this from Wang Beicheng. Later, she obtained the corresponding information from Pangu Biology.

At the same time, she also speculated that the Dream Keepers of Dawn's Morning Star were rather proud of their identities. They were very willing to inform their parents, spouses, and children while keeping it from outsiders.

Without giving Laurice a chance to compose herself, Jiang Baimian made another request. "Madam, let us meet Oudick. There might very well be clues needed for his recovery hidden in his words and actions."

Laurice hesitated for a few seconds before gritting her teeth. "Alright, I'll talk to the doctor."

Seven to eight minutes later, she led the Old Task Force members to the third floor.

At the end of the third-floor corridor stood a doctor in a white coat and a blue surgical mask. He said to Jiang Baimian and the others in the Red River language, "The patient is very aggressive. It's best if you communicate through the iron door."

Aggressive? Oudick clearly didn't use his abilities. Otherwise, how could you still be standing?? Just as Jiang Baimian had these thoughts, she heard thumping sounds coming from the iron door.

Oudick's voice sounded in agitation. "A person on the left, a person on the right, with a small picture frame in the middle! One of your eyes is big, and the other is small. You're not a good person. I'll help you dig them all out!"

Chapter 628: "Communication"

"Let me out! Let me out!" Oudick slammed the iron door and shouted. He used the Red River language that he was more accustomed to, a language that came naturally to him.

"See, he's proving what I said." The doctor in the white coat and blue surgical mask shrugged. "Carry on. Come to my office if you have any questions."

He didn't exhort them further because he felt that it was impossible for them to communicate with Oudick in any other way other than having the iron door stand in between them since he hadn't given them the key.

Laurice wiped her eyes and said to Jiang Baimian and the others, “You can ask Oudick now. If you need me gone, just tell me.”

Jiang Baimian made a terse grunt. “Then, please leave for the time being. Don’t worry; we’ll be fast.”

After Laurice—who was wearing dark culottes—turned into the stairwell and disappeared from the Old Task Force members’ field of view, Jiang Baimian turned to look at Shang Jianyao and sighed. “Go. Try communicating.”

Shang Jianyao walked to the room enclosing Oudick with a serious expression.

The iron door to the room was blue-green in color. There was a small hole at the height of a person. In front and behind the hole were welded metal bars for isolation.

Through the hole, Oudick saw Shang Jianyao approach. He immediately became excited, stretched out his hands, grabbed the metal bars, and shook them forcefully. “Let me out! Let me out!”

His face—which couldn’t be considered handsome but proper—flushed red. His warped expression made it seem as if he wanted to devour someone.

Shang Jianyao glanced at his extremely fragile nose that wasn’t obvious. He then asked seriously, “Do you still remember us?”

“Let me out! Let me out!” Oudick slammed the iron door crazily, making it clang repeatedly.

“Oh, I apologize.” Shang Jianyao suddenly came to a realization and politely apologized. “We disguised ourselves, so it’s normal for you not to recognize us. Do you still remember October Xue and Zhang Qubing?”

Oudick glanced at him fiercely, and his expression turned a little adrift. He shouted agitatedly, “A person on the left, a person on the right, with a small picture frame in the middle! One of your eyes is big, and the other is small. You’re not a good person. I’ll help you dig them all out!”

Jiang Baimian exhaled silently when she heard that.

It was obvious from their communication that Oudick had gone mad. If he had faked this, Jiang Baimian could only praise him for his flawless acting.

Shang Jianyao sighed and said, “Look, we resisted the fake Father together. Together, we controlled Weed City’s nobles. So...”

At the Mind Corridor level, Shang Jianyao didn’t need to follow a strict Inference Clowning format. However, he was a ritualistic person—if he remembered.

Oudick fell silent as he brought his face to the hole in the door and allowed the metal bars to press against his skin. He then smiled, suppressed his voice, and carefully said, “Let me out! Let me out!”

As he spoke, he became agitated again, and his voice rose again. “Let me out if we’re friends!”

Bang! Bang! Bang!

He crazily slammed the iron door.

Shang Jianyao quietly listened and watched. After he calmed down, he asked, “What did you discover in that nightmare?”

Oudick’s warped expression relaxed, revealing some confusion and stupidity. “A person on the left, a person on the right, with a small picture frame in the middle! One of your eyes is big, and the other is small. You’re not a good person. I’ll help you dig them all out!”

He widened his slightly vacant blue eyes and repeated his previous words in a mutter.

Shang Jianyao stared fixedly. He suddenly spread his arms, raised his head slightly, and closed his eyes. “Everything is but a dream. Why so serious?”

He then turned around and looked at Jiang Baimian. “He can understand my words to a certain extent and can be affected by abilities similar to Inference Clowning, but he can’t communicate effectively.”

Shang Jianyao was certain that his Inference Clowning had taken effect. As for how effective it was, he couldn't determine from the current feedback.

Jiang Baimian looked around and confirmed that nobody else was in the corridor; there were no patients living in the nearby rooms either. Only far into the distance could she hear muttering, intermittent singing, loud laughter, and loud cries.

Looking at Oudick behind the iron door, Jiang Baimian thought for a moment and said, "The two sentences he keeps repeating are the information he obtained using his abilities in the nightmare? A person on the left, a person on the right, with a small picture frame in the middle... One eye is big, and the other is small. Not a good person. Hoping to dig them all out with excessive agitation..."

"The former is very symmetrical, and the latter is asymmetrical... Is this some OCD? But that's not the price Oudick paid... Also, why doesn't he use his abilities when he's agitated and desperately trying to escape?"

Long Yuehong was a little confused and couldn't help but ask, "Team Leader, there doesn't seem to be a necessary connection between your first sentence and the subsequent three sentences."

Could it be that the information Oudick obtained is OCD?

Jiang Baimian immediately smiled bitterly. "The first sentence was a guess of the meaning behind the two sentences. The subsequent sentence is an analysis of the information they might hide."

Bai Chen thought for a moment and said, "Maybe Oudick is just describing the scene he saw in the nightmare before he went crazy. A person on the left, a person on the right, with a small picture frame in the middle, one eye is big, and the other is small. 'Doesn't seem like a good person' and 'help dig them out'—I think Oudick added those lines after he went crazy. It should be treated as noise that needs to be eliminated."

"That makes sense." Jiang Baimian agreed. She then laughed and shook her head. "Oudick now suffers from OCD after going mad? He likely didn't have such a problem when we interacted with him previously."

Jiang Baimian's smile carried obvious wistfulness. "The most important thing is still the question you just asked. It's impossible for a crazy Awakened to be imprisoned so easily."

Shang Jianyao stroked his chin. “Could it be that he subconsciously doesn’t want to harm the innocent?”

Just as he said that, Oudick—who had been muttering words like ‘a person on the left, a person on the right’—flew into a rage again. He shook the metal bars around the hole and shouted, “Let me out! Let me out!”

After the Advanced Hunter calmed down a little, Jiang Baimian sighed and said, “Unfortunately, the Destiny Pearl has long been used up, and it’s not like I chose Last Man domain abilities.”

Otherwise, they could directly flip through Oudick’s memories to search for clues.

After a short silence, Long Yuehong asked, “What should we do now?”

“Oudick has Dawn’s Morning Star backing him. They will definitely continue investigating.” Jiang Baimian returned to her staid state. “Even if we want to interfere and avenge him, it’s best to cooperate with the True Self Church to prevent more people from dying or going crazy.”

They had established basic cooperations with the True Self Church, but they had almost no dealings with Dawn’s Morning Star. Their partnership with Oudick originated from the Hunter’s Guild.

Bai Chen, Long Yuehong, and Genava agreed with their team leader’s suggestion.

Shang Jianyao looked at the doctor’s office near the stairwell. “I want to ask if Oudick can be treated.”

“Okay.” Jiang Baimian didn’t object.

Shang Jianyao had always been a man of action. He knocked on the door and entered the doctor’s office to find the person from before.

He had already taken off his mask, revealing a slightly thin face.

After hearing Shang Jianyao’s question, the doctor said with a serious expression, “Your friend’s condition is rather serious. If he’s just agitated, short-tempered, has violent tendencies, and can’t

control himself a little, it's still considered simple. He can be controlled with drugs, but it's obvious that he has already treated his fantasies as reality and lives in his world. He keeps repeating words that we can't understand and can't communicate effectively. As to the extent of the treatment's results, it will require long-term observation and constant refinements."

Doesn't this mean that it's very difficult to treat him??Long Yuehong muttered inwardly.

In the Ashlands, people who couldn't be treated within a certain period of time would definitely be abandoned unless they were truly rich; otherwise, it would be a waste of resources.

Shang Jianyao didn't say anything else and nodded calmly. "I got it."

The five of them left the doctor's office and walked to the stairwell.

Jiang Baimian sharply spotted Oudick's wife, Laurice, squatting in the shadows at the bend and burying her face in her arms, which were on her knees.

Upon sensing the commotion, Laurice suddenly stood up. Perhaps it was because she was too fast, but she staggered and almost lost her balance.

"Are you done? Did you find out anything?" she asked anxiously, her eyes red.

Jiang Baimian nodded. "The words he repeats might be clues, but further investigation and confirmation are needed."

At this moment, Shang Jianyao suddenly took a step forward and said, "I can relieve Oudick's condition slightly. Do you want to give it a try?"

Ah??Jiang Baimian glanced at Shang Jianyao in surprise and realized that his expression and eyes were serious.

"Really?" Laurice was excited.

Shang Jianyao nodded sincerely. "I have sufficient experience and unique solutions when it comes to treating mental disorders, but this can't resolve Oudick's problem completely. He will still show

abnormalities from time to time, and he requires long-term observation and treatment. But most of the time, he will still be that husband you remember.”

Laurice would've doubted Shang Jianyao if he had promised to fully treat Oudick. But after hearing that it was only to relieve his symptoms, she couldn't help but feel hopeful. “I have no problem with that. You can give it a try.”

In any case, it couldn't get any worse.

The corners of Shang Jianyao's mouth curled up as he revealed an indescribable smile. “My treatment plan is relatively special. I need you to tell me in detail what kind of person Oudick is. The more detailed you are, the higher the chances of the symptoms being alleviated.”

Bai Chen and Long Yuehong remained confused when they heard this, but Jiang Baimian had a guess. Her eyes revealed unconcealed grief.

Laurice didn't notice her performance. She looked at Shang Jianyao and excitedly said, “Do you want to wake Oudick up bit by bit using details from his daily life? Alright, I'll tell you!”

She then looked around and smiled apologetically. “I think it will take some time. W-we should find a place where we can sit down and chat.”

Chapter 629: Treatment

In a doctor's conference room in the mental hospital, Laurice sat opposite the long table. She had one arm placed horizontally across the table to prop herself up as she held the other unclasped hand to her mouth.

She recalled and said, “Actually, Oudick and I have only known each other for less than two years. He was introduced by a friend. He's an Advanced Hunter, and I know what that entails. I thought he would be very arrogant or rude on our first official meeting, but that wasn't the case in reality.”

Shang Jianyao, Jiang Baimian, and the others didn't interject. They watched as Laurice moved her hand—which was placed by her mouth—to her ear and combed the hair that fell to her temples.

Her tone unconsciously softened. “He was very polite, not the superficial kind of politeness, but the kind of politeness that shows true respect toward a person...”

“He had sufficient knowledge, experience, and strength. No matter what he did, he did it calmly, confidently, and methodically with great composure. He could resolve almost everything that I found relatively difficult. He made me unconsciously rely on him and trust him...

“He’s very gentle, but it’s not gentleness in the colloquial sense. He remembers all my hobbies, knows what I don’t like, and what I hate. He always arranges everything to my liking before I realize it...

“If he didn’t confirm it himself, I wouldn’t have believed that he had been a Ruin Hunter for more than ten years. He has wandered the wilderness for a long time and killed many bandits...

“He was very proud of being a Dream Guardian and felt that he was contributing to the continuation of humanity...

“He likes children very much. We planned on having children next year. As First City’s citizens, we would receive a fertility allowance...

“He hates stimulating smells, especially things that smell like vinegar...

“He’s very responsible and never shirks...

“He kept promises, and he promised me that he wouldn’t take on very dangerous missions or go to very dangerous places again. He never did so after the promise...” As she spoke, her eyes turned vacant, and a faint smile appeared on her face.

Shang Jianyao unfolded a black, soft leather notebook in front of him and recorded her words with a fountain pen.

After the other party finished speaking, he asked, “Can you go into detail regarding your interactions with him?”

Laurice hesitated for a while before continuing to recall. “Although he’s an Advanced Hunter, he hasn’t saved up much money or supplies over the years. This is because their Church has many believers living in true hardship, so he’s always happy to provide help. Before we got married, he was worried that I would mind. He even specially took me to see those people and understand their

lives. Although my parents have a relatively decent job in First City, it's not like I don't know anything. Among the neighbors around me, there are often people who lose their lives because of the Heartless disease, war, bandits, and various diseases. This impoverishes the entire family. I lost several of my childhood playmates because of this.

"I remember the day when I told him that I understood him and was willing to support him. As long as he didn't sacrifice his family and himself for this, not only would I accept it, but I would also help him. He was so thrilled that he hugged me tightly as if he wanted to fuse me into his body..."

As Laurice recounted her memories, Oudick's image became clearer and more three-dimensional in Jiang Baimian and the others' minds.

Finally, Shang Jianyao stopped recording and smiled at Laurice. "What you described is very helpful for the subsequent treatment. I'll give it a try now. Of course, you have to stay away, lest we agitate him."

"Alright." Laurice nodded with anticipation.

The Old Task Force quintet returned to Oudick's ward on the third floor.

The crazy Advanced Hunter sensed the commotion outside and rushed to the iron door again. Through the small hole, he shouted, "Let me out! Let me out!"

Bang! Bang! Bang!

The sound of him banging on the iron door sounded incessantly.

After Oudick calmed down a little, Shang Jianyao looked into his eyes with a deep gaze and said in a deep and mellow voice, "You're Oudick, an Advanced Hunter. You're very polite, which isn't an act, nor is it the superficial kind of politeness, but the kind of politeness that shows a person true respect..."

"You have sufficient knowledge, experience, and strength. No matter what you do, you do it calmly, confidently, and methodically with great composure. You can resolve almost everything that others find relatively difficult. You make others unconsciously rely on you and trust you..."

He repeated Laurice's words almost verbatim. He only added additional descriptions in certain places and modified the pronouns.

As Shang Jianyao's voice echoed, Oudick completely calmed down. He listened with a slightly confused expression.

Long Yuehong and Bai Chen finally understood what Shang Jianyao's so-called treatment method was: Thought Implantation!

Jiang Baimian watched silently and didn't attempt to stop him.

"You are a Dream Guardian of Dawn's Morning Star. You fight the dangers in dreams and protect humanity... The way you express your intense feelings for your wife is to hug her tightly... You plan on having a child next year... You won't attack your family, friends, or innocents, nor will you use your abilities on them unless they threaten your life..." After an unknown period of time, Shang Jianyao finally finished repeating and fabricating. He spoke in a long-drawn, tedious, and detailed manner.

Behind the iron door, Oudick's eyes gradually turned clear. He slowly sighed and said, "I'm sorry to trouble you. I didn't expect to see you again in such a state. I haven't been there since I left Weed City."

Holy sh*t... Oudick remembers us? Although he went mad, his memories aren't damaged?? Long Yuehong was dumbfounded.

Shang Jianyao laughed. "This world is always filled with all kinds of accidents, so there's no need to worry too much about it. Who you need to comfort the most now is your wife. She has been wallowing in pain the entire day because of you and has constantly been seeking a way to treat you."

Oudick nodded. "I feel very guilty about this."

"It's good that you understand." Shang Jianyao turned his body and shouted, "Mrs. Laurice, you can come over now!"

In just a few seconds, rapid footsteps came from the stairs.

Laurice—who was wearing dark-colored dress culottes—rushed over as if she were jogging. She looked at Oudick behind the iron door and noticed the gentleness on his face.

“Oh, honey, are you really okay now?” Laurice raised her hands and covered her mouth. Her eyes couldn’t help but redden, and she became very agitated.

Oudick gently replied, “Sorry to worry you. I’ll be careful in the future; I won’t put on a brave front when facing nightmares. I understand that I’m no longer alone.”

Laurice’s tears fell. “It’s fine, it’s fine. It’s fine as long as you’re fine! I-I’ll go get the doctor and get him to take a look to confirm it!”

She was afraid that this was a beautiful dream and that she would wake up once it burst.

Thud! Thud! Thud!

Laurice ran to the doctor’s office.

Long Yuehong looked at her back and then at Oudick, suspecting that the latter was really no longer crazy. He couldn’t help but ask, “What did you see in the nightmare?”

Behind the iron door, Oudick’s expression warped, and his eyes turned vacant.

He muttered to himself, “A person on the left, a person on the right, with a small picture frame in the middle! One of your eyes is big, and the other is small. You’re not a good person. I’ll help you dig them all out!”

After repeating it twice, Oudick’s gaze swept across Shang Jianyao and the others at the door. He restrained his abnormal expression and sincerely said, “I’m sorry; I can’t provide you with effective clues.”

This was extreme politeness and calm.

Long Yuehong stared blankly and listened, speechless. He inexplicably felt that the wind in the corridor was cold.

At this moment, Shang Jianyao replied to Oudick. He raised his arms, raised his body slightly, and looked into the void. "Everything is but a dream. Why so serious?"

With that said, he turned around and walked to the stairwell without looking back. He didn't stop even when he encountered Laurice, who had brought a doctor over.

...

In the jeep, Shang Jianyao sat on the left in the backseat and remained silent for a long time.

Long Yuehong looked at the sky and said, "Where to next?"

Jiang Baimian had a plan in mind and calmly said, "We'll circle the Golden Apple Zone and the Red Wolf Zone a few times before finding a safe house at Xiaochong's previous rented place. We won't be returning to the Green Olive Zone tonight. I hope we can use this opportunity to escape the nightmare's attention."

"Alright." Bai Chen found it a very safe decision.

The jeep drove for a while longer.

Genava patted Shang Jianyao's shoulder and provided his suggestion. "Actually, there's no rush. You can gather some more information and establish Oudick's behavior database through me. This way, he can deal with most situations after we reinsert the information."

Shang Jianyao suddenly laughed after quietly listening. He spread his arms again, raised his body slightly, and smiled. "Everything is but a dream. Why so serious?"

Chapter 630: It's Over?

In the Red Wolf Zone, in a three-bedroom apartment not far from the apartment Xiaochong rented.

Jiang Baimian stood by the window and looked out at the light that far exceeded the Green Olive Zone's. She sighed with emotion. "First City has a deep heritage indeed."

After the dry winter, the electricity supply immediately became less tight.

Of course, First City definitely didn't only have hydropower. There was also a nuclear power plant left behind by the Old World and two power plants that used coal as fuel.

If it weren't for the fact that most of First City's industry was concentrated in this area and that it expended a lot of electricity, this city wouldn't have power problems.

After retracting her gaze, Jiang Baimian said to her team members, "Go back to your rooms and rest. Take turns being on night duty according to the schedule."

"Actually, I don't need a room or a bed. To me, switching on power-saving mode while lying down is no different from being on power-saving mode while sitting on the sofa. After all, there will be charging ports beside me," Geneva replied in a slightly synthetic male voice.

Before Jiang Baimian could speak, Shang Jianyao smiled and said, "As a human, lying down is definitely more comfortable than sitting. Don't you agree, Old Ge?"

Geneva quickly did some calculations and moved his metal neck. "Indeed."

The brief interlude ended. Jiang Baimian was just about to say that she would use the bathroom first when Long Yuehong hesitantly said, "Team Leader, what can we do about the nightmare?"

Be it avenging Oudick and Ugo or preventing similar situations from happening to more people, the Old Task Force seemed helpless.

If they were facing real-life enemies, Long Yuehong felt that the Old Task Force could play a considerable role in a large-scale war with their current strength and equipment. However, he really couldn't think of a way to resolve an illusory and difficult-to-reach enemy like the nightmare.

Wasn't Shang Jianyao—who was the strongest in the team and best at dealing with such matters—unable to do anything when facing the nightmare? Wasn't he barely able to scare the other party away only by using Du Heng and Xiaochong?

This was clearly a one-off.

Jiang Baimian fell silent for a few seconds before saying, “First, there has to be a source for the nightmare. This might be a corporeal existence, or it might even be a human, just like how Ugo and Oudick can also affect the dreams of others—the only difference is the degree.

“Second, we are constrained in First City. Even if we contribute, we can only be a supporting force. It will mostly rely on the True Self Church. They should be the same as Dawn's Morning Star, experts who deal with nightmares.

“Finally, if we don't have any clues, it's impossible for us to stay here for too long. The Holm Fertility Center in Wasteland Ruin 13 is our destination.”

Upon hearing his team leader's clear train of thought, Long Yuehong didn't say anything else. He lined up and waited to wash up.

After cleaning up and returning to her room, Shang Jianyao suddenly said before Jiang Baimian could sit down, “You didn't say that we could do our best to improve ourselves.”

Jiang Baimian shook her head and smiled. “Isn't this giving Little White and Little Red pressure? They haven't Awakened, so they can't advance in their mind worlds.”

She then lay down and said to Shang Jianyao, “Lights out!”

...

In the Sea of Origins, Jiang Baimian touched foot on the island of fear again. She conjured a map and slowly found the underground building's entrance again.

After passing through the familiar parking lot and arriving in front of the elevator that led underground, Jiang Baimian didn't enter. Instead, she sat cross-legged.

She began to recall how she felt when she heard that Oudick had gone crazy.

Compared to Ugo, who she had only interacted with a few times, Oudick—who had fought alongside them—clearly bothered her more. Although she was mentally prepared for a negative outcome pertaining to Oudick, Jiang Baimian was still rather sad, angry, disappointed, and depressed when she confirmed that he had gone crazy.

At that moment, she actually felt a little too weak—she was unable to provide effective help to her friends. A strong desire to improve surfaced in her heart.

After the incident, she vaguely felt that this might be a direction in which she could use to defeat the island of fear.

Apart from the truly cold-hearted ones, most people would be afraid of losing their family and friends or their familiar lives. However, this fear definitely wouldn't reach the point of a psychological trauma level for many people.

As she didn't choose a route to ignore her feelings and steel her heart, Jiang Baimian didn't believe that she wouldn't be afraid of losing her family and friends or her way of life after clearing this island of fear. However, such fears would be limited to an acceptable range when the time came, just like many people.

In that case, why not reduce the level of fear now or convert this fear into motivation to drive herself to be stronger?

Jiang Baimian sat cross-legged in front of the many elevators in the underground building. She recalled the various details back then in a bid to restore the anger, grief, depression, and disappointment brought about by Oudick's madness as much as possible.

These emotions were like fuel, fueling the burning desire in her heart.

After an unknown period of time, Jiang Baimian felt the ground tremble.

This vanished in the blink of an eye.

Jiang Baimian was delighted instead of being shocked because this was the first time she triggered a change in this island of fear after all her previous attempts. Although it was still very weak, it was enough to indicate that she had found a direction that might be effective!

It just trembled a little... That motivation isn't enough, so it can't drive me to move forward while carrying the fear in my heart? Or is there something missing?? Jiang Baimian thought wearily.

It was very mentally exhausting to keep allowing emotion to consume her.

...

Mind Corridor, Room 912, on the cruise ship.

Shang Jianyao exited and entered again, successfully dodging the chaotic night.

Under the sunlight from above, he casually found a target on the deck and approached.

"Long time no see!" he said to an Ashlandic excitedly.

The Ashlandic wasn't even 40 years old, but he was considered an elderly person on the ship. He asked Shang Jianyao with a confused expression, "You are?"

He was originally quite sure that he had never seen Shang Jianyao, but Shang Jianyao's enthusiastic attitude made him a little unsure.

Shang Jianyao smiled. "Look, we are both on a cruise ship. We're all Ashlandic, so..."

He had previously confirmed that using one's abilities in this psychological trauma wouldn't result in 'corruption' unless one was in the chaotic state.

"As the saying goes, it takes a hundred years to stay on a ship together," said the Ashlandic with a laugh.

Shang Jianyao immediately asked, “Have you been to Iron Mountain City Ruin?”

“How could I have gone there?” The Ashlandic was very surprised. “This is the Golden Waters; it’s so far from Iron Mountain City!”

What he seemed to know was the Iron Mountain City before the Old World was destroyed.

Shang Jianyao had a look of disappointment and waved his hand. “Since you’ve never been there, there’s nothing to chat about. Let’s catch up again later.”

He began searching for the next victim—no, the next target.

After busying himself for a long time, Shang Jianyao finally completed a one-on-one ‘chat’ with the passengers on the deck.

If not for the fact that he was afraid that influencing and inquiring them en masse might bring about unexpected changes, he definitely wouldn’t have used such a clumsy method.

This exhausted him.

None of the passengers was the owner of Room 522, who had been to Iron Mountain City Ruin.

That’s less than one-third of the people on the deck now. We have to continue working harder!?

Shang Jianyao cheered himself on as he left the psychological trauma.

He wanted to use sleep to restore his mind.

...

The next morning, the Old Task Force drove the jeep back to Ugo Hotel. They encountered the public security officers from yesterday again.

Jiang Baimian rolled down the window and took the initiative to greet them. “Any discoveries?”

The public security officer who interrogated them yesterday shook his head and snapped, “Everything was normal last night!”

Nobody had a ‘nightmare’ last night??Jiang Baimian retracted her gaze thoughtfully.

After the car started, Shang Jianyao made a guess. “Too scared to come again?”

“Maybe.” Long Yuehong wanted to say ‘hopefully.’

They circled around and arrived outside the True Self Church’s stronghold again.

At this moment, someone was already guarding the apartment door like a guard.

“We’re looking for Cliff.” Jiang Baimian simply stated her intentions.

The guard nodded. “You know where to find him.”

After entering the apartment and arriving at the innermost room on the first floor’s left, the Old Task Force met the Dreambreaker, Cliff, again.

Without waiting for Cliff to speak, Jiang Baimian asked, “Did you find any clues regarding the nightmare? Is there anything you need our help with?”

Cliff—who was wearing a black robe—sighed and said, “Under the Kalendaria’s watch, the nightmare has subsided. You don’t have to worry anymore. It’s over.”

Ah??Not only Bai Chen and Long Yuehong, but even Jiang Baimian and Shang Jianyao didn’t expect to hear such an answer.

They left the apartment where the True Self Church was in a daze. They only came to a realization when the sunlight outside stabbed into their eyes.?It’s over? It’s over.

Not only were Jiang Baimian, Shang Jianyao, and the others not happy, but they also became even quieter.

In the silent atmosphere, they got into their jeep.

Bai Chen drove it in another direction.

Before long, they passed by the building they had rented an apartment in.

At the building's exit, a man—more than 1.8 meters tall with golden-brown hair and wearing a black trench coat and dark sunglasses—walked out.

The jeep went past the building and drove along the street toward the Red Wolf Zone.

After about 300 meters, Geneva suddenly said, “Did you see that man? The one wearing black sunglasses?”

“What’s wrong?” Long Yuehong asked.

Geneva said in a deep voice, “I gathered and analyzed the light data related to his sunglasses and discovered something.”

The sunglasses weren’t completely opaque, or else the person wearing the sunglasses wouldn’t have been able to see the scene in front of them.

“What is it?” Long Yuehong asked.

The red light in Geneva’s eyes flickered a few times.. “The eyes behind his sunglasses are different in size—one big, one small.”