

Ad Infinitum 691

Chapter 691: Entering the Borders

“Lunatics?” Not only was Shang Jianyao not disappointed, but his eyes lit up. “The correct term should be ‘mentally ill.’”

Ding Ling waved her hand. “I’m used to it. In short, their brains are abnormal. Ignore them.”

Shang Jianyao continued asking, “How abnormal are they?”

Upon seeing that October Xue and the others were also a little interested in this question, Ding Ling simply explained, “There’s something wrong with their brains. In the words of our organization, they have some persecution complex. They keep having the feeling that someone wants to harm them and control them.”

“What’s the reason?” Shang Jianyao was rather curious.

Ding Ling pointed at her left chest. “They were scared out of their wits by the Heartless disease. They suspect that most of the Supplies Management Committee’s commissioners have already degenerated and are in cahoots with some factions that lurk in the darkness while being responsible for the Old World’s destruction. They secretly use mind controllers to influence everyone, making them obey unconsciously. Even their thoughts are no longer free.”

Mind controller... They are indeed sick...?Long Yuehong had only seen such things in Old World entertainment.

Ding Ling continued, “Once anyone notices that something is amiss and has the intention to resist, their ability to think will be wiped away. All that’s left is biological instinct, which results in them becoming Heartless. Yes, that’s how they explain the cause of the Heartless disease.”

Mind controllers, erasure of thought, Heartless disease...?Jiang Baimian had to admit that those Salvation Army members had creative minds. Furthermore, their theory sounded plausible and couldn’t be completely denied.

This was because the logic behind this claim was self-consistent. However, the existence of a mind controller was a whole other matter. Now, nobody had discovered the source of the Heartless

disease that could provide a strong retort. Even the Old Task Force only felt that this had a certain connection with the New World and the darkness, but they lacked sufficient evidence.

“Is that so...” Shang Jianyao looked like he was about to be convinced. “Then, why do they put the aluminum pots over their heads?”

Ding Ling said with uncertainty, “Maybe the mind controller controls the human brain via affecting brain waves. Only by placing the entire head under the aluminum pot’s protection can one maintain the freedom of thought and see the truth of the world. Therefore, they wear aluminum pots at all times, even when sleeping at night.”

They are indeed mentally ill...? Long Yuehong was once again convinced.

Shang Jianyao clapped. “What excellent behavioral art! Besides...”

He turned to look at Geneva. “This is essentially the same as you wearing an electromagnetic shield.”

“Indeed.” Geneva was very honest.

Long Yuehong shivered and quickly asked, “Then, did any of them contract the Heartless disease?”

“Definitely,” Ding Ling replied very bluntly.

Long Yuehong heaved a sigh of relief, vexed that he had been tricked by Shang Jianyao again without realizing it.

Bai Chen thought about this from a different perspective. “With your Salvation Army’s style, why do you allow these people to walk the streets openly and not send them to a mental hospital?”

“They keep promoting the idea that if they are targeted, it means that their suspicions are correct: most of the Supplies Management Committee’s commissioners have already degenerated. They want to use mind control to forever dominate the world generation after generation.” Ding Ling scoffed. “In any case, they only have relatively unique actions in this regard. It doesn’t affect their work. Furthermore, some of them are hidden relatively well. They won’t directly wear aluminum

pots. Instead, they will get aluminum foil and sew it into the lining of their caps. They look like normal people.”

Jiang Baimian nodded thoughtfully. “There has to be a source for such thoughts, right? You didn’t find the person who first spread this theory and throw them in prison?”

“I’m not too sure about that.” Ding Ling turned around and pointed at the ten-story, gray high-rise building behind her. “It’s getting late. I’ll get you a pass first.”

Long Yuehong focused his gaze and saw a few vertical signboards with black words on a white background hanging by the building’s door. “Ubei Administrative Committee.”

“Entry Office.”

“Tax Office.”

“Security Inspection Office.”

...

As Ding Ling led Jiang Baimian and the others into the building, she casually explained, “Actually, most of us don’t need to pay taxes. The corresponding portion is deducted when the negotiables and change are handed out. The tax office is set up for people like you who enter our borders—cross-border traders and Ruin Hunters. They belong to the same system as the entry and security inspection offices.”

Jiang Baimian inhaled lightly and said, “Then, won’t the supplies we bring in have to be taxed?”

This was much stricter than First City.

Ding Ling laughed. “That’s why I got you to exchange a large portion of supplies for negotiables.”

It’s good to have someone familiar with the ways...? Long Yuehong sighed with emotion.

Jiang Baimian then asked about something else. She pointed at Genava and said, “Robots should be controlled products. Will they really not affect the distribution of a pass?”

“It’s not a big problem,” Ding Ling replied confidently. “You just have to add one more entry to the pass. You can’t bring this robot into the settlement lest it suddenly becomes uncontrollable and leads to a tragedy. As for Ubei, there are many robots.”

What she meant was that Ubei had the strength to suppress any rampaging robot.

“That’s good, that’s good...” Jiang Baimian heaved a sigh of relief.

Since robots were fine, there shouldn’t be any problems with the rest.

Shang Jianyao looked at Genava sympathetically. “You’re so pitiful.”

“Sigh,” Genava echoed cooperatively.

As they conversed, Ding Ling got her subordinates to leave and treat it as a vacation. She then led Shang Jianyao and the others into a hall on the side of the first floor.

Here hung the signboard ‘Entry Office.’

Ding Ling didn’t greet the staff present and directly entered an office deep in the aisle. She smiled at the elder inside and said, “Grandpa Hong, there are a few Ruin Hunters here who want to get a pass.”

The elder looked to be in his sixties or seventies. His white hair was sparse, his eyes were sharp, and he had a stiff bearing. He wore neat blue clothes that represented an administrative officer instead of a military officer.

He seemed to only notice that someone had approached when she greeted him. He glanced at the door and nodded at Ding Ling. “Let them in.”

Ding Ling then introduced October Xue and the others. “This is Director Hong, Director Hong from the Entry Office. He also holds the position of Director of the Tax Office, an old comrade of my deceased grandfather.”

Shang Jianyao was immediately excited. He took a few steps forward and said, “Are you an old Salvation Army warrior who experienced the Chaotic Era and the early years of the New Calendar?”

Hong Guangming sized up Shang Jianyao warily. “I was born in the early Chaotic Era and joined later. I guess I’ve experienced a lot.”

Shang Jianyao straightened his back and pressed his right hand to his left chest. “For all of humanity!”

Upon seeing Hong Guangming’s suspicious expression, Jiang Baimian quickly explained, “He’s a fanatical admirer of your Salvation Army. He’s a big fan of what all of you did in the late Chaotic Era and the early years of the New Calendar.”

Hong Guangming heaved a sigh of relief and stood up. “Since you’re brought here by Little Ling, give me a simple run-through of your origins and goals. I’ll check what supplies you brought and if you have any weapons that can cause mass destruction. Then, I’ll give you a pass.”

He chuckled. “If it were anyone else, they would have to go to the Security Inspection Office first.”

After he stood up, Jiang Baimian realized that his left arm and right leg were clearly abnormal. It seemed like he had transplanted a mechanical prosthetic limb of an unknown model. This could be seen from the iron-black color on his left palm and his actions of getting up.

Upon sensing her gaze, Hong Guangming didn’t get angry and smiled. “I lost it in a battle, just like your companion.”

Long Yuehong’s mechanical arm was rather obvious.

Shang Jianyao cast a respectful gaze at him.

“Sorry to trouble you, Grandpa Hong.” Ding Ling made way for him.

Hong Guangming limped over.

The problem with him wasn't his mechanical right leg but his left human leg. It seemed to be unable to keep up with the mechanical right leg's rhythm due to its age, and it appeared a little incongruous.

Ding Ling didn't attempt to help Hong Guangming. She also signaled for Shang Jianyao and the others not to do so as if she was afraid of injuring his self-esteem.

Getting injured in battle was a medal he wore proudly, but getting old was another matter.

After leaving the Ubei Administrative Committee building and arriving beside the Old Task Force's jeep, Hong Guangming looked at Jiang Baimian and said, "You can tell me your origins and goals."

Jiang Baimian simply repeated what she had said to Ding Ling and emphasized, "We are really wanted by First City."

"The Hunter's Guild does have a bounty for them..." Ding Ling helped testify.

"Wanted by First City for plotting a major plot?" Hong Guangming smiled casually. "What plot?"

"That's an excuse they came up with." Shang Jianyao was just about to answer truthfully when Jiang Baimian beat him to it. "In fact, we stole some information and later killed some of their people during the pursuit."

Hong Guangming glanced at them again and joked, "Don't tell me you really carry weapons capable of mass destruction?"

As he spoke, he signaled for Long Yuehong to open the trunk for him to examine.

"Some canned food... A single-man combat rocket launcher—heh heh, this doesn't count. Its power is limited..." Hong Guangming checked them one by one and pointed at the four crates inside. "What's in these?"

“Three military exoskeletons and two sets of bionic artificial intelligence armor,” Shang Jianyao replied honestly.

Amidst Ding Ling’s exasperation, Hong Guangming laughed. “As expected of a wanted criminal whose value is in the tens of thousands of Oray. Open it for me to see.”

Long Yuehong, Bai Chen, Shang Jianyao, and Genava each dragged out a crate and opened it on the spot.

The scene suddenly fell into extreme silence.

Ding Ling stared blankly and suddenly felt that it made sense for this team to be wanted. Could it be that they really stole three military exoskeletons and two sets of bionic artificial intelligence armor from First City?

Hong Guangming was someone who had seen the world and experienced life and death. He quickly recovered and looked at Jiang Baimian and the others. “You guys really aren’t simple... These equipment are all controlled items.”

Ding Ling suddenly came to her senses. She took a few steps forward and came to Hong Guangming’s side. She then took out a stack of notes and suppressed her voice. “Grandpa Hong, make an exception. They really just want to explore the ruins in Icefield.”

These negotiables were equivalent to the profits she had earned from her previous transaction with the Old Task Force.

Hong Guangming checked the negotiables and nodded slightly. “Since you are putting it that way.”

He then warned the Old Task Force, “Well, you can’t bring these items into the settlement. I’ll write it clearly on the pass.”

Jiang Baimian heaved a sigh of relief and subconsciously glanced at Shang Jianyao.

Shang Jianyao’s expression was blank as if he had become a statue.

Chapter 692: Sharing Intelligence

Upon sensing the change in Zhang Qubing's gaze and recalling that October Xue had said that he was a fanatical believer of the Salvation Army, Hong Guangming put the stack of notes in his pocket and muttered, "I worked so hard my entire life. Wasn't it just to let my descendants lead a better life?"

He then waved his hand. "Alright, I'll go in and get your pass done."

He waved his non-mechanical right hand.

Upon seeing Hong Guangming limp back to the Ubei Administrative Committee building, Jiang Baimian turned her head to glance at Shang Jianyao.

Shang Jianyao's expression was solemn as if he were a little jaded and disappointed.

"Let's go. Weren't you mentally prepared?" Jiang Baimian urged him.

Shang Jianyao sighed. "You don't understand."

Upon seeing Jiang Baimian narrow her eyes slightly, he quickly added, "Reality is reality, but ideals are ideals. When differences between the two appear, one will inevitably be affected emotionally. For example, Little Red..."

"Stop!" Jiang Baimian and Long Yuehong shouted at the same time, interrupting Shang Jianyao's magical analogy.

Ding Ling didn't really understand their interactions; she only watched quietly without interjecting.

The Old Task Force quickly returned to Hong Guangming's office.

As Hong Guangming lowered his head to write the pass, he said, "Surrender all your negotiables. I'll check them."

“These need to be checked too?” Jiang Baimian was puzzled.

Hong Guangming was rather tolerant of polite and good-looking women. “It’s a routine inspection. I’m mainly afraid of you bringing in a large number of fake negotiables into our borders.”

Ding Ling added, “Our negotiables are all made from pressurized plastic. Ordinary people can’t forge them at all. They have neither a source for the raw materials nor the corresponding machines. However, large factions like First City can do it. Therefore, one of the responsibilities of the border settlements, the various Entry Offices, and security checkpoints is to intercept fake negotiables.”

I see... In the Old World, any small factory or even a family workshop can create those small plastic cards. Yes, this was the convenience brought about by the highly mature industrial system back then. In the current Ashlands, just obtaining oil is a difficult task...?Jiang Baimian suddenly sighed.

This was the difference between the New and Old Eras.

Ding Ling then said to Hong Guangming, “Grandpa Hong, I was the one who exchanged all the negotiables that they have with them yesterday.”

“Then, there’s no problem.” Hong Guangming’s steel arm flicked out a key, opened the mechanical lock of the drawer below, and took out the official seal and sealing wax.

Thud!?

He embossed the pass with a large red seal.

After Jiang Baimian received the pass, she realized that there were indeed two more sentences besides the usual content: “This pass isn’t applicable for smart bots.

“When the corresponding four people enter settlements, they are prohibited from bringing heavy weapons, high-tech equipment, or crates.”

“Thank you, Director Hong.” Jiang Baimian finally thanked him sincerely.

Although there were many restrictions, the Old Task Force's subsequent journey would be much easier with such a pass. It would be especially convenient to replenish their supplies, allowing them to head straight to Icefield without any worries.

After leaving the Ubei Administrative Committee, the Old Task Force drove the jeep and followed Ding Ling's green mountain car to the Ashlands Hotel at the edge of the city.

Although it was called a hotel, it was actually modified from an Old World warehouse. It occupied a large area, and parking was very convenient. However, it was only three stories tall.

"This is specially for foreigners like you." After Ding Ling helped the Old Task Force check in, she followed them to one of the rooms and said with a smile, "You have no right to stay elsewhere—not even with a pass."

They have two separate systems for foreign and domestic...?Jiang Baimian nodded in thought. "Sorry to trouble you for the past two days. How many negotiables did you give Director Hong previously? We'll compensate you."

"There's no need." Ding Ling shook her head and smiled. "Those were profits I earned from you previously. Besides, I can have some of it reimbursed later."

Long Yuehong and the others immediately found the latter half of the sentence familiar.

Ding Ling looked around, took the initiative to close the door, and said seriously, "You previously said that you stole some intelligence from First City. Which aspect is it regarding? Is it possible to sell it to us?"

She originally didn't believe it, but after seeing the three military exoskeletons and two sets of bionic artificial intelligence armor, she felt that October Xue's team might really not be bragging.

As expected of a team with a bounty worth more than 100,000 Oray!

Jiang Baimian and the team members looked at each other and smiled at Ding Ling. "There's actually no need to hide that information. The people in question even requested us to publicize it

widely. Here's the thing—we tried to make contact with Oray's descendants in First City. You know Oray, right? First City's consul, who also was emperor for a period of time.”

“It's in our textbooks.” Ding Ling nodded and said solemnly, “Continue.”

Jiang Baimian made a terse grunt. “Oray still has two descendants. One is his granddaughter, Avia, and the other is his grandson, Marcus. These two people wield some of the secrets Oray left behind. They are closely protected by First City, which is also a form of surveillance.

“There's no need to elaborate on the exact process. In short, we spent a Herculean effort before we finally came into contact with these two Oray descendants and obtained the corresponding intelligence from them. This includes a secret laboratory in Wasteland Ruin 13. Oray hid his guess regarding the cause of the Old World's destruction and his understanding of the New World, as well as the information on how to deal with Mechanical Paradise's Source Brain. The intelligence also includes Avia having a mysterious phone that Oray had once used. It can be used to dial a string of random codes to connect to an unknown and terrifying existence. We also got the secret laboratory's password: Messiah...

“We later infiltrated Wasteland Ruin 13 and found the secret laboratory. We relied on the passcode to open the door, but there was nothing inside. All the information Oray left behind was gone.

“All of this originated from a brand new artificial intelligence, Future, that he created in his later years. It can control electromagnetism and the computers within the laboratory through a New World node. It had long moved away the information Oray left behind and turned the laboratory into a trap...”

Jiang Baimian knew what she could and couldn't say. She mainly wanted to publicize what Oray had left behind.

Upon hearing this, Ding Ling was stunned. This was her mental journey: Why do they want to publicize that piece of information?

It's related to First City's former emperor... That piece of information is indeed relatively important.

This team is really strong. They can bypass First City's tight protection and make contact with key personnel.

Although I don't really understand, it sounds pretty impressive.

Wait, what is she talking about? What's this about a New World node or artificial intelligence that controls electromagnetism...

Toward the end, Ding Ling became even more confused. She felt like the other party was speaking in a language she understood.

After Jiang Baimian finished speaking, she subconsciously gulped and said, "I-I'll report this matter. If—if it's really valuable, we might compensate you with some supplies or negotiables."

After expressing her friendly attitude, Ding Ling composed herself and asked, "How's the secret laboratory now?"

Although she didn't know what had happened back then as if she were listening to Greek, her experience told her that the secret laboratory was one of the key points. She didn't need to understand the terms and just needed to grasp the key points.

Jiang Baimian hesitated for a moment and said, "It was destroyed."

The honest Shang Jianyao quickly added, "Don't misunderstand. We didn't destroy it; it was to escape the predicament set up by Future. We had no choice but to trigger the laboratory's self-destruct mechanism."

This sounds even more terrifying...?Ding Ling nodded. "I understand. I'll report this matter before the end of the work day. There should be an outcome tomorrow."

With that said, she waved her hand. "See you tomorrow."

"See you tomorrow!" Shang Jianyao was always so enthusiastic.

Ding Ling thought for a moment and reminded him, "Don't be in a rush to do everything yourself if you encounter any situation, especially when using those equipment. Just report it to the Ubei

Public Security Council. There's a phone in the hotel room with the corresponding number written on it."

"No problem," Jiang Baimian agreed sincerely.

In any case, the Old Task Force's strongest wasn't the equipment or Geneva, but Shang Jianyao—who could secretly influence people.

After sending Ding Ling off, Jiang Baimian didn't ask what they were having for dinner because it was still early. Instead, she walked to the window and looked out to observe her surroundings.

Although the building was only three stories tall, the surrounding buildings generally weren't tall, so the view was relatively good.

As the few of them observed, Bai Chen acutely noticed that camouflage-green armored vehicles and tanks had driven past on a distant road. Along with them were armed soldiers in black uniforms.

The atmosphere seemed a little tense.

Chapter 693: Martial Law

Long Yuehong also noticed the situation and said in alarm, "Are they here to capture us?"

After all, they could be used to exchange money with First City or even be used as hostages.

As a wanted criminal, he still had some self-awareness and faced the corresponding psychological pressure.

"Doesn't seem like it." Bai Chen shook her head. "They should be heading toward the center of Ubei City."

The Old Task Force's current hotel, Ashlands Hotel, was located at the edge of the city.

“Maybe they are giving us more latitude for now to keep a tighter rein on us afterward. When the time comes, they might suddenly turn back.” Shang Jianyao began to showcase his rich imagination.

The honest Genova denied his guess. “It might be better off to say that it’s a cover to draw our attention while an elite team is secretly deployed to carry out an arrest mission.”

Shang Jianyao’s eyes lit up as he clapped. “As expected of the former mayor of Tarnan—you’re indeed more comprehensive than I am! Your solution is indeed more effective and pragmatic.”

He had always been one to admit his mistakes and provide deserving praise.

Jiang Baimian facepalmed with her right hand. “Can’t you guys think of something better? Why must it involve yourselves!? We did nothing bad in the Salvation Army—uh, nothing at all. We even kindly shared information with them for free. Why would we be targeted?”

“Bounty!” The honest Shang Jianyao gave a reason.

The cowardly but careful Shang Jianyao added, “Equipment!”

The Shang Jianyao that liked to joke was in charge of ending the conversation. “Beauties!”

“Thank you very much!” Jiang Baimian gritted her teeth.

As they casually chatted, Shang Jianyao and Jiang Baimian cast their gazes at the door at the same time. After a few seconds, there was knocking on the door.

“Who is it?” Shang Jianyao was rather excited. He seemed to have already imagined a long novelization of the subsequent developments—one derived from Genova’s hypothesis and the current situation.

“It’s the hotel manager; we met just a while ago. I have something to inform you,” the person outside the door quickly replied.

Jiang Baimian signaled Shang Jianyao with her eyes and got him to open the door and do whatever the situation called for.

Jiang Baimian didn't know if her eyes had expressed the latter meaning, but it didn't matter. She felt that Hey would've done the same with his enthusiasm and dramatic nature.

Shang Jianyao bent his back like a cheetah that was ready to pounce and walked to the door step by step. He then opened the door and realized that it was indeed the hotel manager he had seen in the lobby—an ordinary, balding, middle-aged man.

“What do you want to tell us?” Shang Jianyao wore an obvious look of disappointment and spoke coldly.

The hotel manager cleared his throat and said, “Here's the thing. Ubei will be under martial law from this moment forth. You can't leave the hotel unless you obtain the administration committee's permission.”

The Ubei Administrative Committee was a subordinate organization of the Ubei Supplies Management Committee. They were mainly in charge of administration and foreign registrations in this core city.

As they had previously observed the situation to lay the groundwork, the Old Task Force members weren't that surprised by this sudden development and found it reasonable.

Jiang Baimian curiously asked, “Why did martial law suddenly begin? What happened?”

“There's no need for you to...” Just as the hotel manager said these words, he saw Jiang Baimian walk over and hand over two negotiables.

They were made of red plastic. The top one read: “5 kilograms of pork.”

The hotel manager was first stunned before a smile gradually appeared on his face. “Since you have a pass and were led here by a captain-level warrior, it's fine to tell you.”

As he spoke, he took the two pork negotiables, skillfully checked them, and placed them in his pocket.

“Here’s the thing.” He subconsciously used his catchphrase. “Some important military supplies were previously lost at a Salvation Army secret base. Intelligence now indicates that they have reached Ubei’s underground market. If these military supplies aren’t properly kept under lock and key, they will cause devastating damage to all humans in a large area.

“In order to prevent such a situation from happening, our Ubei Supplies Management Committee has announced the enactment of martial law. They will also transfer troops stationed outside the city to be in charge of this matter. They will strive to find the dangerous items as soon as possible and remove the alarm.”

After all, he had received ten kilograms of pork negotiables from the other party. The hotel manager told them everything he knew without holding anything back. He was rather sincere.

Long Yuehong secretly hissed. “This problem sounds a little serious! If something really went wrong with those military supplies and happened to be near this hotel, won’t we be implicated?”

Jiang Baimian nodded with a solemn expression. “This does require martial law. Hmm... Will this affect us?”

Upon seeing the hotel manager cast a vigilant gaze at her, Jiang Baimian smiled and said, “As you know, we brought some supplies and exchanged for some negotiables. If we encounter a search, we will inevitably suffer some losses.”

Actually, that wasn’t what was important. It was the three military exoskeletons and the two sets of bionic artificial intelligence armor.

When the time came, they might have to send Shang Jianyao to ‘communicate.’

“No, no.” The hotel manager heaved a sigh of relief. “We Salvation Army warriors won’t do such a lowly thing.”

Shang Jianyao revealed a relieved expression.

The hotel manager added, “As for officials, they have other channels, so they won’t think much of those few supplies of yours. Besides, the date on the pass indicates that you just entered the city

today. It definitely has nothing to do with the military supplies that were lost. They won't send anyone to search you."

"That's good, that's good." Jiang Baimian didn't hide the change in her emotions.

Shang Jianyao was the same, but his relief turned to disappointment.

At this moment, Jiang Baimian looked around and lowered her voice. "Do you know what those military supplies are?"

She wasn't just curious. If she could figure out what it was, she could understand the corresponding harm they could bring and take precautions in advance.

"There's no information on that." The hotel manager indicated that he also wanted to know.

This left them on edge.

He then pointed out the door. "I've to inform the other guests. Sigh, I'm requested to inform them face-to-face. I can't do it over the phone."

As an outward-facing facility, every room in the Ashlands Hotel had a telephone installed.

Jiang Baimian thought for a moment and asked, "Are there many people coming from outside your sphere of influence?"

"There is still quite the number," the hotel manager replied truthfully. "Some are merchants who do cross-border trade. Although our Salvation Army has rebuilt the industrial system, we still have many shortcomings due to problems with resources and technology. We need to import some, such as coal, mechanical arms, some electronic equipment, solar charger boards, and high-performance batteries. Others are Ruin Hunters. They want to officially settle down and become one of us."

"Oh, oh." Shang Jianyao nodded repeatedly.

The hotel manager casually said, "You can also submit an application. According to the law issued by the Supplies Management Committee, you are qualified to submit an application and undergo

the corresponding inspection as long as you can stay within the borders for three years. The admission rate is still quite high. However, it's impossible for you to be assigned a job in the next three years. You have to feed yourselves. Thus, most of these people choose to continue being Ruin Hunters."

"Isn't it said that all who can be saved will be saved to the best of your abilities?" Shang Jianyao was a little disappointed again.

"That's something from ages ago!" The hotel manager laughed. "There are limited resources."

Bai Chen—who had been listening quietly—asked, "Are the city ruins and various ruins in your Salvation Army open to foreigners?"

Isn't this too generous?

This was an outward-facing facility, so the hotel manager could be considered knowledgeable. He smiled and said, "A large portion of them are territories outside our control, and the corresponding resources aren't enough for us to send troops to watch them. You should've seen many similar situations when you came from First City."

This was the norm in the Ashlands.

Even an entity as strong as the Salvation Army could only control the settlements and some of the surrounding areas along the repaired roads.

Upon seeing October Xue and the others nod, the hotel manager continued, "Some are still within our control, but due to insufficient resources, there's no need to explore and search them on a large scale. It's better to leave them to Ruin Hunters to deal with. Heh heh, most of the things they find are still traded to us ordinary people. Our Salvation Army can only ensure that everyone has something to eat and a place to live. We also have blankets and clothes to wear in the winter.

"Many items can't be manufactured due to insufficient resources and the different emphasis on production, or we can only produce a small amount. Supply can't meet demand, and they have to make up for it through the Ruin Hunters' harvests. Our family now has three umbrellas, and all of them were exchanged from them.

“To them, officially becoming one of us means stability. They don’t have to worry about having food or shelter this winter, only to have none the next.”

It’s enough to have food, shelter, and clothes. This is the dream of many wilderness nomads...? Jiang Baimian didn’t ask anything else and watched the hotel manager leave the room. She then sighed at her team members. “I knew it. Most of the time, trouble comes knocking at us even if we don’t cause trouble in the Ashlands. If we were unlucky and happened to be near that batch of missing military supplies, we might die without knowing why!”

Therefore, they had to continue down the path of the long night in fear until dawn arrived.

Long Yuehong, Bai Chen, and the others agreed with this.

As the hotel manager had expected, the Old Task Force wasn’t searched. Daybreak steadily arrived overnight.

Not long after they had a simple meal of hotel-provided yellow cornbread, Ding Ling appeared again.

This group of people was relatively dangerous, and she was the one who brought them here. She had to finish what she started until they left Ubei.

Without waiting for her to speak, Shang Jianyao took the initiative to ask, “What’s that batch of military supplies? It actually resulted in martial law being enacted over the entire city?”

Ding Ling looked at the closed door, hesitated, and deliberated before saying, “It seems to be a nuclear warhead.”

“...” Jiang Baimian was momentarily at a loss for words.

Chapter 694: Interrogation

As an employee of Pangu Biology, Jiang Baimian was no stranger to nuclear warheads. She knew that several large factions had them and that they were relics from the Old World. They also seemed to have grasped the corresponding technology needed to maintain them.

But over the years, apart from the Chaotic Era's records of nuclear bombs being deployed, such weapons—which were manufactured by Old World humans—had never appeared again after the establishment of the New Calendar. They only existed for deterrence.

Pangu Biology's intelligence personnel had once suspected that the nuclear warheads left behind by the Old World would gradually lose their effects over time and couldn't be used again. Be it First City or the Salvation Army, they lacked the ability to create new ones.

Now that she had suddenly heard the term 'nuclear warhead' and that it had appeared in the city she was in, Jiang Baimian couldn't help but be a little dazed.

"A nuclear warhead?" Long Yuehong was also shocked. In his impression, these were weapons that could destroy the world. Many cities in the Old World had become ruins because of them.

In the various rumors of the Old World's destruction, this was the source of nightmares that were on par with the Heartless disease.

Once someone detonated the nuclear warhead, the entire Ubei might be implicated. The Old Task Force—which was in this city—was most likely unable to survive.

Bai Chen also blurted out, "How large is the yield?"

As far as she was accustomed to, talking about bombs without considering their yield was considered boorish—excluding those that were responsible for producing radiation or chemical pollution.

Shang Jianyao had a curious expression. "Was it made using uranium, plutonium, or—uh, hydrogen isotopes?"

He momentarily forgot how the word was written and what the pronunciation was.

Ding Ling shook her head. "I'm not sure about that; I only heard a rumor. I'm mainly telling you as a warning, lest you feel disgruntled from being confined to the hotel."

"I have no complaints now; I just want to escape," Shang Jianyao replied honestly.

That's right, that's right! Long Yuehong shouted crazily in his heart. He only wanted to leave Ubei and escape the nuclear warhead's detonation range.

Ding Ling consoled him. "Don't believe the rumors in the wilderness. A nuclear warhead's power isn't that great. A single one can't destroy a city. Furthermore, nuclear warheads that can be stolen have definitely been miniaturized. The yield is probably only a few percent of the original."

But Ubei now can't compare to the large cities of the Old World. It's a question if it's even one-tenth the size... Jiang Baimian muttered inwardly but didn't say anything.

Like First City, Ubei was rebuilt in a relatively well-preserved city ruin. However, the population here was quite different from that of First City. At present, it only used the area near the Yuelin River.

Upon seeing the Old Task Force members fall silent, Ding Ling added, "When you meet a commissioner of our Ubei Supplies Management Committee today, I can take you out of the city district in advance if you are willing to undergo relatively strict inspections. Don't worry. I've already reported the matter regarding the military exoskeletons and bionic artificial intelligence armor. There won't be any problems."

Long Yuehong was just about to say, "Sure, sure," when Shang Jianyao suddenly said righteously, "No! How can we flee in the face of battle? There are still hundreds of thousands of humans here!"

Ding Ling was immediately speechless. You spout both the good and the bad. What do you want?

Jiang Baimian quickly cleared her throat. "The commissioner of your Ubei Supplies Management Committee wants to meet us?"

"Yes." Ding Ling heaved a sigh of relief when she saw that the topic had returned to normal. "He's in charge of military supplies statistics and allocation. He wants to know more about your experience in Wasteland Ruin 13."

Uh, why is he meeting us? It's not like we'll contribute military supplies to him...? Long Yuehong was a little surprised.

Jiang Baimian—who knew the Old World well—understood what was going on.

'Military' and 'statistics' might very well represent the intelligence services. Names were often just a designation.

"No problem," Shang Jianyao replied in Jiang Baimian's stead in a tone as though they were all family.

Jiang Baimian rolled her eyes at him and took a deep breath. "Are we to go over now?"

"Yes." Ding Ling nodded. "You can't bring your military exoskeletons or bionic artificial intelligence armor. Uh, it's best to leave two people here to watch the area. Although the Salvation Army has relatively good public order and there aren't many cases of theft, many of the people staying in this hotel are foreign Ruin Hunters. You should know their way of doing things."

Most Ruin Hunters were often part-time bandits in the wilderness. They would transform into thieves when they entered larger settlements.

Jiang Baimian thought for a moment and said to Bai Chen, Long Yuehong, and Genava, "Stay here and guard the supplies. Hey and I will follow Captain Ding to meet the commissioner."

She actually had the intention of leaving an Awakened on each side to prevent any accidents. However, she was worried that Shang Jianyao would have a brain spasm and head out to help find the missing nuclear warhead to save all the residents in Ubei. Nobody could stop him.

Bai Chen and the others immediately agreed.

...

Jiang Baimian and Shang Jianyao didn't drive their jeep. Instead, they got into Ding Ling's green mountain car. After making many turns, they saw the Ubei Administrative Committee building they had previously been to.

Ding Ling didn't stop. She instead chose to circle around and arrived at a quiet courtyard on the next street.

Deep in the courtyard stood a three-story building. The vertical sign hanging by the door had the words 'Ubei Supplies Management Committee.'

After being examined by the soldiers on duty at the gates and handing in their weapons, Ding Ling drove the green mountain car in and parked it in a corner of the courtyard. She then led Jiang Baimian and Shang Jianyao to the west wing of the building and conversed with a young man in the Salvation Army's black uniform.

The young man turned around and disappeared around the corridor's bend. He returned a few minutes later and said to Ding Ling, "Commissioner Huang is in the reception room. Follow me."

After passing three sentry posts along the way, Jiang Baimian and Shang Jianyao followed Ding Ling into the ajar reception room.

In the reception room, there was an elder sitting at the main seat. He also wore a black uniform representing the Salvation Army, but he didn't wear an epaulet.

Ding Ling respectfully pressed her right hand to her left chest and bowed. "For all of humanity!"

Shang Jianyao wanted to do the same, but his right arm was secretly gripped by Jiang Baimian's left hand, preventing him from moving it.

Ding Ling then said, "Commissioner Huang, October Xue and Zhang Qubing are here."

Commissioner Huang wasn't too tall—not more than 1.7 meters tall—but he had an imposing aura. When he didn't move, he was as deep as an abyss. When he looked around, it made people afraid to speak. It was obvious that he had been through mountains of corpses and rivers of blood.

His white hair was neatly combed. He stood up without any airs and replied to Ding Ling with the same etiquette before pointing at the sofa opposite him. "Have a seat."

After Ding Ling signaled for Jiang Baimian and Shang Jianyao to take their seats, she left the reception room and closed the door.

Commissioner Huang sat down again, and the sharpness in his eyes didn't decrease because of his age. He laughed and said, "Relax. Back then, all of us came from different places. How can we be considered locals or foreigners?"

He swept his gaze and said, "The older I am, the more impatient I become. I won't beat around the bush and will get straight to the point. How did you discover that the secret laboratory has a New World node? Not to mention normal people, even most Awakened can't sense it."

Jiang Baimian turned her head and looked at Shang Jianyao.

This was indeed one of the few flaws in her previous recount.

Shang Jianyao tacitly took off his tactical backpack and took out the ordinary-looking silver angel pendant.

"We have such an item," Jiang Baimian explained before he could.

This was the truth, but not the entire truth.

Commissioner Huang narrowed his eyes slightly as if he were sensing the aura in the Life Angel necklace.

"Do you need to hold it for the inspection?" Shang Jianyao asked kindly.

Commissioner Huang glanced at him and replied confidently, "Alright."

He wasn't at all worried that this was a trap.

Shang Jianyao propped himself up with his hands and jumped toward Commissioner Huang with one foot.

One foot.

Commissioner Huang had seen plenty throughout his life, so he didn't lose his composure. After some thought, he took the Life Angel necklace and nodded. "The price is the paralysis of one limb?"

Upon seeing that he had really taken away the Life Angel necklace for inspection, Jiang Baimian finally confirmed one thing: This commissioner was likely an Awakened. Otherwise, he wouldn't have been able to discover anything with the item other than suffer the price.

After a few seconds, Commissioner Huang returned the Life Angel necklace to Shang Jianyao, who was still standing on one foot in front of him.

He nodded in satisfaction. "You aren't lying. This item's aura is indeed relatively special; it can help you sense the New World's nodes."

He didn't ask where the other party had obtained this item. The Salvation Army still had the necessary bearing.

However, there was a mole in the Old Task Force. Shang Jianyao—who had his back facing Jiang Baimian—found an opportunity to confess. "We obtained this from a commissioner of the Eighth Research Institute."

Commissioner Huang's eyebrows twitched. "A commissioner from the Eighth Research Institute?"

He sounded a little surprised.

Chapter 695: Showing Goodwill

"That's right." Shang Jianyao nodded hard to express his affirmation.

Jiang Baimian—who was sitting on the sofa behind him—was already numb towards his antics and couldn't be bothered to stop him. After all, this wasn't too important.

Commissioner Huang thought for a moment and nodded slightly. "It's very normal for you to encounter the Eighth Research Institute's commissioner since what Oray left behind involves the reason for the Old World's destruction and certain secrets of the New World. The fact that you escaped their hindrance and even snatched an item means that you are indeed very strong."

"We were much weaker back then," Shang Jianyao said truthfully.

When they captured the Eighth Research Institute's commissioner and obtained the Life Angel necklace, Shang Jianyao had yet to enter the Mind Corridor. Jiang Baimian had yet to become an Awakened, and the Old Task Force had yet to obtain the two sets of bionic artificial intelligence armor.

Back then, they had actually had the help of the Mind Corridor-level Awakened, Kanna. But in Shang Jianyao's heart, she was battling the Virtual World owner who protected Avia. She didn't count.

Commissioner Huang couldn't help but size up Shang Jianyao a few times, and he was momentarily speechless.

"You can come back here and sit down." Jiang Baimian tried her best not to sound helpless.

After Shang Jianyao jumped up with one foot, he realized that his left arm—which wasn't holding the Life Angel necklace—was now paralyzed. He quickly switched back to normal walking.

Upon seeing this, Commissioner Huang sighed with emotion. "The price you paid is a little obvious."

He had plenty of experience.

After Shang Jianyao sat down again, he curiously asked, "What's your price? Is it obvious?"

Hey! Is that something you should be asking directly??Jiang Baimian felt that the price Shang Jianyao paid had worsened after clearing the cruise ship's trauma. His bouts of rudeness had increased!

However, she was also concerned over Commissioner Huang's price. She had been analyzing the other party's words and actions, and she preliminarily suspected that he was impatient.

Commissioner Huang laughed. "It's not that obvious."

He then recalled and said, "The least obvious price I've ever seen is constipation. Unfortunately, the negative effects worsened after that person entered the Mind Corridor. He suffered an infection while undergoing surgery to ease his constipation and unfortunately passed away. In that era, the sterility of surgeries was a problem."

The topic suddenly seemed odd. Out of politeness, Jiang Baimian simply replied, "The price isn't too concealed. It's very easy to come to a conclusion if one observes the target's lifestyle over extended periods."

In a tone of 'you guys are too young and naive,' Commissioner Huang said, "The reason I said it's least obvious is that the ability he obtained could effectively prevent himself from being observed for extended periods. He was in Eidolon Nun's domain."

Wariness-related??Jiang Baimian came to a realization.

The two parties then discussed the secret laboratory in Wasteland Ruin 13.

The Old Task Force naturally had no intention of keeping Future a secret. They had said everything that needed to be said, but they didn't mention Wu Meng's evaluation.

On the one hand, Commissioner Huang's horizons had been broadened. From time to time, he would say, "Although I don't know much about artificial intelligence, I find it shocking." On the other hand, his expression gradually turned solemn.

"How will such artificial intelligence affect humans in the future..." He muttered to himself as if he had the urge to nip this unknown risk in the bud.

After hearing Jiang Baimian and Shang Jianyao's recount, Commissioner Huang didn't comment any further and nodded. "Thank you for providing this very important information..."

"Don't you suspect that we fabricated it?" The honest Shang Jianyao interrupted the other party's subsequent words.

Commissioner Huang laughed. "I still have such acumen. If you hadn't really encountered the artificial intelligence, Future, you wouldn't have been able to fabricate such stories."

He then said, "What kind of payment do you want? Our Salvation Army has always been fair."

You said that yourself...? Jiang Baimian tried her best to make her smile genuine and innocent. "Can you share information regarding the Eighth Research Institute with us? I believe it's not the first or second time you've encountered the Eighth Research Institute's commissioners."

The Salvation Army was different from Pangu Biology. They didn't hide underground, and they had taken on the responsibility of saving all of humanity. There was a high chance that they would be interfered with, destroyed, and eliminated by the Eighth Research Institute.

The reason the Old Task Force chose to use a friendly method to pass through the Salvation Army's sphere of influence and pay a price to obtain a pass was that, on the one hand, it would be easier to obtain supplies this way. On the other hand, Jiang Baimian wanted to try to fleece the Salvation Army—no, exchange information.

Commissioner Huang fell silent for a few seconds before saying, "I have no problems in principle, but I need to request permission from the higher-ups. This will probably take one to two days."

As the commissioner in charge of intelligence in Ubei's Supplies Management Committee, his superior was naturally the entire Salvation Army's Supplies Management Committee.

"We can wait." Jiang Baimian didn't make her tone sound urgent. "Dealing with the Eighth Research Institute is our common goal."

After finishing this topic, Commissioner Huang flipped his wrist and looked at the mechanical watch on it.

The mechanical watch had many signs of wear and tear as if it had been excavated from a city ruin and had only been repaired.

After looking at his watch, Commissioner Huang hesitated for a moment and said, “Is it convenient to reveal your destination in Icefield? If it’s not convenient, forget it.”

“There’s no need to keep this a secret. We’re investigating the matter regarding the Five Great Holy Lands of Buddhism and plan on making a trip to Icefield’s Tai City. Oh right, we encountered your Public Security Council’s Commissioner Xu Datong in Iron Mountain City Ruin. We realized that the Salvation Army was also investigating such matters. We told him about the Five Great Holy Lands back then.” Jiang Baimian deliberately changed the focus of this matter from knowing Xu Datong to the Old Task Force’s constant friendly attitude toward the Salvation Army—they were always sharing information.

Commissioner Huang was surprised. “Your selflessness exceeds my imagination.”

Normal teams would charge a price for such information.

Shang Jianyao stood up suddenly, pressed his right hand to his left chest, and said loudly, “For all of humanity!”

Commissioner Huang looked at him in surprise for a while before coming to his senses. He stood up and pressed his right hand to his left chest with an abnormally serious expression. “For all of humanity!”

Perhaps she was seeing things, but Jiang Baimian felt that Commissioner Huang’s eyes seemed to be a little moist at that moment.

Commissioner Huang slowly exhaled and suddenly asked, “Your pass was signed by that old fellow, Hong Guangming, right?”

“Yes.” Shang Jianyao gave his affirmation without reservation.

Commissioner Huang waved his right hand. “He easily issued a pass to a team with a Mind Corridor-level Awakened, a smart bot, two sets of bionic artificial intelligence armor, and three military exoskeletons? That’s simply nonsense!”

Commissioner Huang didn't hide his anger at all. "Did he take your negotiables? Does he still have the cheek to meet his sacrificed comrades in the underworld?"

After venting his anger, Commissioner Huang composed himself. "If it weren't for the fact that you have shown a trustworthy character, I wouldn't have let this matter rest so easily. Tell Hong Guangming not to do it again! Phew, I know that he's doing this for his child, but he still has to pay attention to what's happening. He can't do anything that violates the rules."

"Yes, yes." Jiang Baimian and Shang Jianyao nodded like chickens pecking at rice.

At the same time, Jiang Baimian began to suspect that Commissioner Huang's price might be irascibility.

She thought for a moment and chose to change the topic. "Commissioner Huang, why is Ubei under martial law this time? Captain Ding has always been vague."

She deliberately asked about this so that she could absolve Ding Lin's responsibility of leaking information in the future.

Commissioner Huang sighed. "You've asked the right person. I'm also the Director of Ubei's Public Security Council, and I happen to be in charge of this matter. There's nothing we can't tell others. A skeleton in our closet has shown itself! This time, two traitors stole a miniaturized hydrogen bomb and brought it to Ubei before handing it over to a liaison. In order to prevent this dangerous item from getting out, we could only lock down Ubei and cut any loose ends."

Hydrogen bomb...?Jiang Baimian suddenly felt a headache.

Shang Jianyao sincerely asked, "Do you need our help?"

"Not for the time being." Commissioner Huang was rather confident. "Ubei can handle it."

He paused and said, "I'm giving you this much detail because I'm worried that the liaison will eventually send the nuclear warhead out through some foreigners. You guys live in the Ashlands Hotel, so please pay attention. Yes, if you really discover anything, don't force the other party into a

corner. This is to prevent them from acting in a desperate situation. If they really activate the detonator, everyone will be doomed.”

“No problem.” Shang Jianyao didn’t hesitate.

Jiang Baimian hesitated for a few seconds before assuming her role as team leader. “Can we leave Ubei as soon as possible?”

Commissioner Huang was stunned for a moment before he sighed. “You can leave after you obtain information on the Eighth Research Institute and undergo a detailed inspection.”

Shang Jianyao was just about to shake his head when Jiang Baimian glared at him again.

Jiang Baimian took the initiative to say, “Before that, we’ll pay attention to the Ashlands Hotel.”

Commissioner Huang nodded in relief. “You may return.”

After Jiang Baimian and Shang Jianyao bade farewell and walked to the door, Commissioner Huang suddenly stopped them. As he thought about it, he said, “I wonder if you are willing if we organize a team to join you in Tai City to explore the Buddhist Holy Land together?”

Chapter 696: Mind Control

Jiang Baimian and Shang Jianyao looked at each other and deliberated for a moment.

“We’d love to have some help. When the time comes, you can do your exploration while we do ours. We’ll share anything we find.”

She didn’t know what accidents they would encounter in Icefield’s Tai City, so it was indeed a good thing for the Salvation Army to send powerhouses to participate and share the risks. Furthermore, during the investigation of Buddhism’s Holy Lands, the Old Task Force hoped to obtain the truth, not some item. The relevant truth wasn’t a secret that had to be monopolized.

Without conflicting interests, cooperation was a good choice.

Commissioner Huang nodded. “I understand what you mean. We’ll need an internal discussion about our subsequent measures.”

As he spoke, he took out a box of wrinkled cigarettes from his pocket, retrieved one, stuffed it into his mouth, and lit it with a lighter as if to help him think.

Jiang Baimian and Shang Jianyao didn’t disturb him. They opened the door and walked out.

After retrieving their weapons and getting into the mountain car, Shang Jianyao enthusiastically said to Ding Ling, “Commissioner Huang has a message for us to pass to Director Hong. Let’s go to the Entry Office now.”

Why do I keep having the feeling that this fellow’s EQ is on par with Old Ge’s? Or rather, the more honest he is, the more annoying he is??Jiang Baimian muttered inwardly but didn’t say a word.

Ding Ling asked in puzzlement, “What message?”

“It’s simply nonsense that Director Hong issued us a pass! He’ll let it go this time, but there will not be a next time. In the future, even if he’s doing it for his child, he still needs to pay attention to what’s happening. He can’t do anything that violates the rules.” Shang Jianyao’s summarization abilities were rather good.

The only problem was that the reason for Hong Guangming’s reprimand was them—the Old Task Force—and Shang Jianyao acted as if he wasn’t a member of this team.

Ding Ling fell silent for a few seconds before saying, “There’s no need for you to relay this. I’ll find an opportunity to inform him.”

Using a more suitable method and tone...?Jiang Baimian added inwardly.

It was completely understandable that people didn’t want to be embarrassed.

As if afraid that Shang Jianyao—a foreigner with abnormal behavior—would object, Ding Ling looked ahead and sighed. “Several of Grandpa Hong’s children died in the expansion, construction,

and salvation during the early years of the New Calendar. The only child left is one he conceived when he was middle-aged. He's extremely precious to him.

"Maybe he's a little spoiled. His youngest son doesn't like to work and isn't willing to take on hard jobs. This isn't a big deal since Grandpa Hong can still help arrange a good job for him, but he ended up mixing with the children of a few commissioners at some point in time. He frequently has red wine produced by First City's manors, the latest electronic products imported from Orange Company, and the high-end cars from United Industries. How can his rank and position enjoy such things?"

Shang Jianyao nodded solemnly. "I think it's necessary for me to have a chat with these people. I'll teach them about 'no pain, no gain' and purify their thoughts."

Man, are you planning on using Thought Guidance??Jiang Baimian secretly clicked her tongue.

Ding Ling couldn't understand why Shang Jianyao had such a strong sense of responsibility and initiative. It had nothing to do with him.

"Uh." She pondered for a moment and said, "It's human nature to pursue a better life. They should improve when they grow older and have a sense of responsibility."

Ding Ling was just short of saying, "We'll handle our own matters, so you don't have to worry about us."

"Alright." Shang Jianyao had a look of disappointment.

...

In the Ashlands Hotel, Long Yuehong, Bai Chen, and Genava took turns guarding the window and monitoring their jeep that was parked in sight.

After Long Yuehong replaced Bai Chen, he muttered to himself, "I wonder when Team Leader and Shang Jianyao will return..."

It was summer, and the hotel didn't have industrial products that expended energy like an air conditioner. He felt more comfortable standing by the window to enjoy the breeze than staying deep in the room and being enveloped in the stuffy heat.

As he casually swept his gaze, Long Yuehong suddenly saw a strange person.

He wore a black Salvation Army uniform that had almost faded from washing. His body leaned forward slightly, and he wore a grayish-white, deep aluminum pot on his head, revealing only the area below his nose.

Those lunatics?? Long Yuehong quickly recalled these people and the evaluations Ding Ling had given them when he first entered the city. He was now wondering why such a lunatic had appeared in the Ashlands Hotel.

"L-Little White, Old Ge, something's up." Long Yuehong quickly turned around and summoned his companions. He was afraid that he would miss something by himself.

As Bai Chen and Genava walked to the window, Long Yuehong realized that the lunatic with the aluminum pot was moving rather slowly. This seemed to be because he could only see the area by his feet. This person's aluminum pot was bigger and deeper than the two people the Old Task Force had previously encountered.

As he walked forward, the person with the aluminum pot came to the Old Task Force's jeep.

Clang!

He bumped into it unprepared and sat on the ground in a daze.

Uh...? For some reason, a matter known as racketeering in the Old World entertainment suddenly surfaced in Long Yuehong's mind.

Upon seeing that the person in the aluminum pot didn't stand up for a while, Long Yuehong asked Bai Chen worriedly, "Do you want to take a look?"

Bai Chen thought for a few seconds and said, "Sure."

She then said to Genava, “Old Ge, stay here and help us monitor our surroundings.”

“Alright.” Genava was definitely a trustworthy companion in this regard.

After receiving an answer, Bai Chen lifted the window with both hands and flipped out the window. She relied on the pipes and protruding parts outside to land on the ground in a few swift moves.

Ever since she underwent the Firearms Talent genetic modification, her reaction, judgment, and coordination had improved significantly. She did well even when climbing buildings with her bare hands—which the modification didn’t focus on.

Furthermore, this was only the third floor.

Long Yuehong—who wasn’t wearing a military exoskeleton—followed Bai Chen in a slightly hesitant manner. He also ‘quickly’ descended to reach the first floor.

His actions were relatively stiff and unnatural.

Bai Chen turned around and nodded slightly when she saw this. “I was thinking of helping you.”

“It’s not like it’s anything too difficult.” Long Yuehong unconsciously puffed up his chest and sucked in his abdomen.

Bai Chen didn’t say anything else. She turned around and walked to her team’s jeep.

The person wearing the grayish-white aluminum pot remained sitting there without getting up. He gave off the feeling that he had a concussion from the collision.

Long Yuehong squatted down worriedly and asked, “How is it? Are you alright?”

The person didn’t answer him.

Long Yuehong looked up at Bai Chen and pointed at the aluminum pot. He asked using his body language if he was to take it off to check the target's condition.

Bai Chen nodded slightly, indicating that he could. She had a nagging feeling that the group of people Ding Ling called lunatics had secrets and that they weren't as ridiculous and comical as they seemed.

Although the Old Task Force had no intention of interfering with the Salvation Army's internal affairs, they had to be wary.

Long Yuehong no longer hesitated. He stretched out his hands, pressed down on the grayish-white aluminum pot, and lifted it.

The sunlight shone on the head that was originally covered by the aluminum pot.

He was an elder. His white hair was messy, and his face was like tree bark, wrinkly.

The elder—who was panting slightly and had slightly unfocused eyes—instantly came to his senses. He subconsciously raised his arm and shielded his face. “What do you want!? What do you want!? Are you guys sent by those degenerates? Quick, return the pot to me!”

The other party's anxious tone and intense reaction far exceeded Long Yuehong's expectations. He awkwardly covered the man's head with the aluminum pot again.

The elder—who had regained the aluminum pot's protection—gradually calmed down. He reached out to touch the ground and slowly stood up.

“Sorry, we were just worried that something had happened when we saw you fall,” Long Yuehong explained apologetically. “I don't know who those degenerates you're referring to are. We are foreign Ruin Hunters, and we plan on going through the Salvation Army to head to Icefield.”

The elder had a stiff back. Although he was old, he didn't appear hunched. “It's the foreigners that are more suspicious. This way, the group of degenerates won't be suspected after I lose my protection and am secretly mind-controlled by some instrument.”

He's indeed one of the people who are worried about mind control...? Long Yuehong was completely certain.

Bai Chen took the initiative to change the topic. "Why do you think that those people are degenerates and are secretly controlled by instruments?"

The elder snorted. "Isn't it obvious? Over the years, they have forgotten that they were going to save the humans who have yet to escape their hunger and cold in the Ashlands. They have forgotten that everyone is equal and that there is no difference in status. They have forgotten that everyone had made an oath not to use their power to eat more or sleep with other people's wives and daughters. They have forgotten to restrain their families, prevent them from profiting from reselling supplies, and interfering in all kinds of matters. This has caused so much discontent among the people!

"I cursed them in their faces, but they said that I'm old, stubborn, rigid, that I don't know how to be flexible or see the trend of the times, and that I'm destined to be abandoned by the times." The elder in the aluminum pot panted and raised his voice a little. "From the looks of it, they are the ones with problems.. They must be mind-controlled. That's why they degenerated and forgot their original ideals! Yes, they must be mind-controlled!"

Chapter 697: Racketeering

For some reason, Long Yuehong heard a hint of sorrow in the old man's raised voice. At the same time, he felt that he had some indescribable anticipation.

Bai Chen fell silent for a few seconds before asking, "Why do you think mind controlling exists?"

The elder in the aluminum pot couldn't catch his breath due to his agitation. He panted twice before saying, "Didn't I make myself clear? If not for the brainwave device and the secret control, how could those who have been through mountains of corpses and rivers of blood suddenly change? They even gave up on their ideals?"

"Also..." He paused, and his head under the aluminum pot seemed to rise a little. "As Ruin Hunters, you must've seen the so-called Awakened since you came all the way to Ubei. They influence a target via brain waves to achieve all kinds of bizarre effects. This is one of the signs of mind control!"

“However, such artificial interference is still too inefficient. The mastermind behind the Old World’s destruction created a brainwave device. This can cover several cities at once and affect hundreds of thousands of humans! Only people like us—who are prepared by wearing aluminum pots—can escape this secret control and maintain independent thinking. We still remember our ideals and don’t collude with them!” The elder became agitated again, and he stressed his last few words.

Long Yuehong blurted out, “You can prevent Awakened from exerting influence on you by wearing aluminum pots?”

Everything above the elder’s nose was blocked by the grayish-white aluminum pot, preventing others from seeing his expression change. “Yes, definitely! Let me tell you something. If not for the fact that I’ve been wearing an aluminum pot, I would’ve long become a Heartless. The mastermind won’t be soft-hearted toward people who discover the secret of brain control. They will either completely control you and prevent you from having autonomous thoughts or directly destroy your brain to make you a Heartless!

“Many of my comrades weren’t careful enough and didn’t employ anti-control measures by wearing aluminum pots all the time. This resulted in them suddenly being infected with the Heartless disease and being eliminated. Sigh...”

But Shang Jianyao previously said that he could sense the consciousness of the two passersby in the aluminum pots, and sensing consciousness means that he can exert influence...

?Long Yuehong muttered inwardly, but he didn’t say it out loud because he was afraid of agitating the elder’s sensitive and extreme nerves.

Furthermore, he remembered that Ding Ling had mentioned that this group of people—who promoted the idea of mind control and always wore aluminum pots—believed they could avoid the Heartless disease infection by doing so. However, they couldn’t.

Of course, these people seemed to have found a suitable reason to explain the cause.

Bai Chen quietly listened and suddenly asked, “Why are you telling us so much?”

She had originally prepared to lead the other party into discussing this matter, but she didn’t expect everything to go so smoothly. It went so smoothly that she felt like they were spectators being at the right place and at the right time.

The elder in the aluminum pot waved his right hand. “I’m sharing these matters with you because you guys have just entered Ubei and most likely haven’t encountered mind control. Sigh, every one saved is an additional comrade.”

At this moment, Long Yuehong felt that if Shang Jianyao were here, he would most likely take a step forward, press his right hand to his left chest, and enthusiastically shout the slogan ‘for all of humanity.’

Bai Chen was stunned for a moment and didn’t know how to respond. She simply squeezed out two words: “Thank you.”

The elder in the aluminum pot was just about to say something when he suddenly turned around and faced the hotel’s back door not far away.

“The degenerated’s goons are here; I hear their footsteps. I’m leaving.” The elder waved his hand and lowered his head. He looked at the road under his feet and walked to the exit by the side of the parking lot.

Long Yuehong and Bai Chen looked at where the elder had previously turned to and saw the back door of a building. They saw the slightly bald, middle-aged hotel manager standing there with an embarrassed and ugly expression.

At this moment, the elder—who was slowly walking out—shouted, “Remember to get an aluminum pot to wear!”

The hotel manager finally snapped to his senses and quickly walked in front of Bai Chen and Long Yuehong. He anxiously said, “Don’t listen to him. His brain is...”

As he spoke, the hotel manager pointed at his temple. “Problematic!”

Bai Chen remained calm and deliberately revealed a confused expression. “Who is he? Why does he give off such odd vibes?”

Eh, Little White has learned well from Team Leader... Or was she like that before joining the company?

?Long Yuehong's focus wasn't right.

The hotel manager looked around and lowered his voice. "He was an old warrior who joined our Salvation Army during its founding and has lived to this day. As you know, people who have experienced large-scale wars and casualties definitely have some kind of post-traumatic stress syndrome. Nobody paid attention to this during the Chaotic Era or the early years of the New Calendar; it's already good enough that they survived. After all those battles, he slowly became irritable, irascible, and wasn't able to focus.

"He's like that, and so are many of his comrades. Some even began to drink excessively. A considerable portion of our Salvation Army's resources is focused on them.

"It's fine if that's the case, but after he and his comrades—who are also suffering from some post-traumatic stress syndrome—left the front line, the problem worsened. They began to become overly suspicious, and they kept having the feeling that someone was out to harm them. They kept having the feeling that the commissioners and directors—who were still at the front line—had degenerated and forgotten their ideals. Don't they know what era this is? Don't they know that the current problems aren't the same? It has gone from survival to motivating everyone for better developments.

"Later, they organized an anti-secret control organization as if they were mentally ill. They clamored for everyone to wear aluminum pots to escape the mastermind's mind control. Isn't... Isn't this a sign of being sick?"

Long Yuehong didn't correct him that it was a disorder, not a syndrome. For a middle-aged hotel manager, it was already pretty good to know such a term.

It was obvious that the Salvation Army had been conducting universal education for a long time.

Why can a hotel manager say that the current problems are already different? It went from survival to motivating everyone...? This question flashed through Bai Chen's mind, but what she said was completely unrelated. "Manager, why did he come to the hotel parking lot?"

The hotel manager sighed and said, "He and his old comrade live in a nearby sanatorium. How would we dare stop veterans like them from entering the hotel with force? He used to enjoy stopping young people on the road to talk about mind control and degeneration. When he realized nobody was enjoying his spiel, he targeted the foreigners at our hotel.

“He often comes over and pretends to accidentally bump into something and fall to the ground, waiting for someone to help him up. Then, he can take the opportunity to tell the person helping him about mind control.”

Ah...?Long Yuehong was dumbfounded. He finally confirmed that he and Little White had really been a victim of ‘racketeering.’

It turned out that the elder had deliberately bumped into their jeep and was waiting for them to help him up. The reason he had been sitting there without suffering any injuries was that it would be useless if he stood up too quickly.

It’s no wonder he answers whatever Little White asks. Furthermore, he took the initiative to elaborate...?The more Long Yuehong thought about it, the more he felt that he had been too stupid and naive.

Bai Chen was also stunned for a few seconds before she frowned and said, “Will the merchants and Ruin Hunters that come to trade in these borders really help him?”

With her years of experience as a wilderness nomad, she didn’t believe that these two groups of people had any good intentions. There were too few people like Wu Shoushi.

The hotel manager laughed. “Many people are always happy to show their kindness in order to become a member of our Salvation Army. Heh heh, good deeds might really help them shorten their residency requirement. This is encouraged by the Supplies Management Committee.”

I see...?Long Yuehong felt that this policy was pretty good.

At this point, there was nothing else to say. He and Bai Chen bade farewell to the hotel manager named Shen Kang and returned to the room on the third floor through the normal stairwell.

...

After Jiang Baimian and Shang Jianyao returned, Bai Chen took the initiative to talk about the old man in the aluminum pot.

Shang Jianyao's eyes lit up. He turned his head and said to Long Yuehong, "Why don't you try wearing an aluminum pot? I'll see if I can control you."

"There's no need." Long Yuehong shook his head without hesitation.

This was obvious!

Genava denied it from a scientific perspective. "This won't do unless the aluminum pot covers the entire body and is grounded. Only then can it produce an electromagnetic shield."

"Maybe we can give it a try..." Jiang Baimian fell into thought. She also wanted to see if Awakened abilities used electromagnetic waves as carriers.

Long Yuehong suddenly felt a little nervous.

Bai Chen then talked about the hotel manager's lofty words.

Jiang Baimian smiled. "That's understandable. Since the elder comes to the hotel from time to time to 'complain,' he must've told him about mind control and degeneration. He's someone who will betray the Salvation Army's interests upon being bribed; he must be very guilty. When he has nothing to do, he probably often thinks about how he should explain himself if he's the one facing such accusations.

"In such a situation, listening to the radio more, reading more of the documents from the higher-ups, and chatting more with the people around him will naturally form a self-consistent explanation."

As it was getting late, Jiang Baimian was just about to lead her team members to the hotel restaurant for lunch when the speakers in the rooms, corridors, and streets outside suddenly sounded.

They sounded at the same time.

Someone—who had clearly used a voice changer to sound male—said loudly, "Everyone, I'm a gaming enthusiast."

“I want to play a game: I’ve hidden a nuclear warhead somewhere in Ubei. If you don’t find it in three days, it will explode with a bang. Work hard, everyone. I don’t think you want Ubei reduced to ruins amidst spectacular fireworks.”

That was all the male voice had to say.. All that was left was the sizzling sound of static.

Chapter 698: Painstaking Investigation

After hearing the announcement, Long Yuehong—who was sitting by the bed—stood up immediately.

This development exceeded his expectations.

The person who obtained the nuclear warhead planned to blow up Ubei, sending hundreds of thousands of people to hell! Furthermore, he had also hijacked the radio and widely publicized the matter as if he wanted to savor the ensuing panic and despair the Ubei residents experienced.

This was lunacy!

It was really a disaster to have a miniature hydrogen bomb land in the hands of such a person.

“Team Leader, what should we do now?” Long Yuehong looked at Jiang Baimian. He didn’t become overly nervous or panic, nor did he lose the ability to think. After undergoing so much training, he could still maintain a basic level of composure when facing such situations.

The reason he asked Jiang Baimian was that he remembered his team leader mentioning that Commissioner Huang from the Ubei Supplies Management Committee would allow the Old Task Force to undergo a detailed inspection and leave Ubei after receiving feedback tomorrow or the day after.

At this moment, they had to consider this problem unless they intended to fall out with the Salvation Army and rely on their own abilities to storm their way out of Ubei.

Jiang Baimian didn't answer immediately. Instead, she frowned and thoughtfully said, "There's no rush. This matter happened too suddenly, and I find it a little strange..."

"That's right, that's right," Shang Jianyao echoed.

Bai Chen tried to glean some of Jiang Baimian's thoughts. "The 'game' began at a strange time, neither too early nor too late. If he's waiting for the army to enter the city while Ubei is under martial law, preventing anyone from leaving, he could've announced the start of the 'game' last night. Isn't the chance of failure higher the longer this drags on?"

The honest Shang Jianyao gave his answer. "Maybe he only found an opportunity a few minutes ago to temporarily control the entire Ubei radio system. He couldn't announce it earlier even if he wanted to."

It was too easy to expose oneself by distributing pamphlets on the streets. Only the Anti-intellectualism Church liked to do so.

Jiang Baimian nodded. "I just feel that what he did was rather unnecessary. If he really wants to blow up Ubei and satisfy a certain desire, he definitely has to enter the city secretly and not resort to force. Only then will there be a higher chance of success."

"No, no, no." Shang Jianyao wagged his finger. "Maybe he's a pure lunatic and wants to appreciate the ugliness of human nature and the way humans break down before the explosion?"

Jiang Baimian wanted to reply, "Such lunatics often can't control their actions. Very few can complete the corresponding plan." However, she recalled that Awakened existed in the Ashlands.

Awakened who sacrificed mental health had both the ability and drive. For example, the dark version of Shang Jianyao could definitely do such a thing.

Jiang Baimian paused and looked around. "I mean that with such a broadcast and the announcement of such a 'game,' there's a high chance that the Ubei Supplies Management Committee will mobilize and evacuate the residents and supplies out of Ubei in batches due to the panic. Three days is enough to turn this place into an empty city. When the time comes, will that person be satisfied with just blowing up buildings?"

Upon hearing his team leader's analysis, Long Yuehong gradually realized that something was amiss.

The honest Shang Jianyao argued, "Maybe the lunatic never thought of blowing up everyone. He just wanted to create chaos and savor everyone's panic."

As a mental patient, his words rendered Jiang Baimian, Geneva, and the others present unable to retort. He was a professional in this regard.

Soon, another professional—the timid but ruthless Shang Jianyao—scoffed at himself. "If it were me, I would definitely add, "In three days, only entries into Ubei are allowed; no exits. If anyone escapes without permission, I'll detonate the nuclear warhead in advance. This way, be it the goal of destroying Ubei, killing most of the people here, or savoring humanity's exaggerated performance in the face of danger, the effects will be maximized!"

Good heavens.?Long Yuehong cursed inwardly.

The ruthless Shang Jianyao perfectly explained what an extremely dangerous and intelligent lunatic was.

With such an 'expert' around, the latent problems with the radio broadcast immediately became obvious.

Jiang Baimian connected various scattered thoughts. She smiled and said, "From our observations and the broadcast, we can deduce two possibilities: First, although the terrorist is crazy, he's not that intelligent. He forgot to add the last sentence during the broadcast: 'Only entries, not exits into Ubei are permitted during the game.' The possibility of such a situation isn't too high. A stupid fellow would've long exposed his tracks, and even if there are various reasons that prevented him from being exposed, he won't be able to be out and about for long after the radio broadcast. There's a high chance that he won't be able to detonate the nuclear warhead.

"Second, he deliberately didn't add 'only entries—not exits—into Ubei during the game' to create flaws in the rules..." At this point, Jiang Baimian looked around again. "His real goal might be to force the Ubei Supplies Management Committee to evacuate everyone in the city. Only during such an emergency evacuation can he have a chance to fish in troubled waters!"

This...?Long Yuehong's heart palpitated.

Bai Chen also came to a realization.

Genava spoke before anyone could. He moved his metal neck up and down and said, “That person wants to use a large-scale evacuation to deliver the nuclear warhead out of the city? Otherwise, with the Salvation Army’s mobilization and organizational abilities, it won’t take long for them to find that person under martial law and retrieve the nuclear warhead with the large number of Awakened they have.”

Clap! Clap! Clap!?

Shang Jianyao’s applause was never absent.

At this moment, a commotion came from the hotel’s first floor. It seemed to have become relatively chaotic.

After looking at each other, Jiang Baimian pointed at the floor. “Let’s go down and take a look as well.”

As they discussed, they heard many residents leave their rooms and head down the corridor to the ground floor.

After the Old Task Force arrived at the first floor, they realized that the cross-border merchants and foreign Ruin Hunters had surrounded the hotel manager named Shen Kang and some of the employees. They shouted at the same time, “Let us leave!”

“It’s too dangerous here.”

“I’m here to do business; I’m not a dangerous criminal. Quick, give me the papers so that I can leave the city!”

“Someone has already planted a nuclear bomb in Ubei. Why aren’t you evacuating everyone?”

...

As the residents expressed their thoughts one after another, the phone at the hotel's front desk rang.

"I-I'll take the call. It might be the latest instructions." The hotel manager, Shen Kang, wiped the cold sweat from his forehead and took the opportunity to squeeze out of the crowd and answer the call.

After a series of terse replies, Shen Kang's expression relaxed significantly. He turned around and said to the hotel guests, "Everyone, don't panic. Our Ubei Supplies Management Committee is considering an emergency evacuation plan. Don't worry. We can evacuate from Ubei as early as this afternoon or tomorrow morning at the latest. There's still a long time before the nuclear bomb detonates!"

Upon hearing this, Long Yuehong, Bai Chen, and the others cast their gazes at Jiang Baimian. Their team leader's guess was very likely right.

Jiang Baimian wasn't pleased with herself. She felt that only a fool would believe that the Ubei Supplies Management Committee didn't have someone smart enough to realize this problem.

This was an open plot. With the nuclear threat exposed, it was impossible for the Salvation Army—which still followed their original creed—not to evacuate the citizens!

Jiang Baimian then gestured for her team members to leave with her.

After returning to the third-floor room, she looked at Geneva—who was closing the wooden door—and said to Shang Jianyao, "With your current strength, can you hijack the Ubei radio system and make that kind of proclamation? Yes, the premise is that it's within your abilities."

Shang Jianyao thought for a moment and shook his head regretfully. "Not yet. I can only make the radio host's voice distort in a way that can't be heard clearly—unless I can implant the corresponding thoughts into the radio host in advance."

"The voice isn't right." Long Yuehong had listened to Ubei's radio yesterday and knew that the voice didn't belong to any broadcaster.

Jiang Baimian made a terse grunt. "From the looks of it, that terrorist's strength exceeds Hey's. Even if he hasn't entered the New World yet, he's probably about to find the door."

“Not necessarily. I can’t hijack it, but Old Ge can.” Shang Jianyao laughed and pointed at Genava. “There’s not only one way to hijack a radio broadcast. Powerful Awakened can do it, and so can smart bots.”

“That’s true.” Jiang Baimian accepted this explanation and put it into consideration. She then revealed a thoughtful expression again. “There’s another problem—a timeline problem.”

“What is it?” Long Yuehong asked nervously.

Jiang Baimian continued, “We heard that military supplies were stolen on the 15th. In the afternoon, the two traitors were discovered and killed. At the same time, according to the items they left behind, they had been to Ubei and handed over the missing military supplies to someone. It takes at least eight hours to go from that settlement to Ubei. In other words, the two traitors left Ubei on the morning of the 15th at the latest. Of course, they might also have taken a plane, but that would be too arrogant and ostentatious.

“We arrived in Ubei on the afternoon of the 16th. We obtained a pass at the Entry Office just before martial law was enacted.” Jiang Baimian paused and concluded, “From the morning of the 15th to the evening of the 16th, the person who obtained the nuclear warhead had sufficient time and plenty of opportunities to send it out of the city. There was no need to worry about the subsequent martial law. But from the looks of it, the nuclear warhead is still in Ubei City. Why is that?”

“He has a procrastination problem!” Shang Jianyao replied without hesitation.

He then retorted himself, “Maybe the terrorist’s goal is to blow up Ubei and kill most of the people here. However, he wants to give everyone hope. During the evacuation, he would suddenly say, ‘I lied.’ Then, he would detonate the nuclear bomb.”

Jiang Baimian carried on from that.. “There’s another possibility: The person who obtained the nuclear bomb encountered an accident back then, causing him to suffer a two-day delay. He ended up trapped in the city because of martial law!”

Chapter 699: Counterproductive

With the investigation coming this far, Long Yuehong and the others gradually had an idea of the ins and outs.

Two people in the Salvation Army's secret base—who had access to the nuclear warhead—had been instigated to defect for some reason. They seized the opportunity to bring the corresponding items to Ubei. They then completed the transaction with their contact and handed over the nuclear warhead, obtaining a large amount of supplies and a route out of the Salvation Army.

After separating from their contact, the two defectors headed west. In the end, they were discovered near a settlement closest to Cloud Mountain before being killed. The person who obtained the nuclear bomb handed the weapon of mass destruction to a relatively strong person, or he himself was strong.

This person originally planned on leaving Ubei as soon as possible and delivering the nuclear warhead out. Unexpectedly, something happened, and he was trapped in the city until the army entered the city and enacted martial law.

Having a clear understanding of the Salvation Army's efficiency and situation, he panicked slightly. After some time, he thought that perhaps he could use his Awakened abilities or hacking abilities like Genova's to hijack the radio system and plan a 'game' to feign a diversion.

Of course, this was only the most likely scenario. They couldn't rule out the possibility that the person who obtained the nuclear warhead was a lunatic and a swindler who wanted to pull off something big.

"What accident did the target encounter?" Long Yuehong began to think about this question.

Jiang Baimian pondered for a moment and replied, "Maybe his public identity prevents him from leaving Ubei without permission as he might be suspected. It's also possible that someone around him has been infected with the Heartless disease. The Ubei Public Security Council would employ caution by quarantining him at home for observation. It's also possible that he's really a powerful Awakened, and of all days, his weakness was 'hit' that very day. This forced him into spending two to three days to recover..."

"We can rule out the possibility that someone around him got infected with the Heartless disease," Bai Chen said as she thought about it. "We're currently in a state of martial law, so if that person has a way to hijack the radio system, it's unlikely the stay-home quarantine—which is low on the wariness priority—can trap him."

Shang Jianyao suddenly smiled. "Is there a possibility that he's actually the one infected with the Heartless disease?"

Long Yuehong was stunned, and the corners of his mouth twitched. One can't think of such a situation without suffering from years of mental illness!

Just as this thought flashed through Long Yuehong's mind, Shang Jianyao smiled as if he had succeeded in his prank. He then changed the topic. "I mean that the original contact contracted the Heartless disease, causing a problem with the nuclear warhead's handover. The person who hijacked the radio spent a great deal of effort and time reconnecting with him to retrieve the nuclear warhead. However, Ubei entered martial law before he could leave the city."

Clang! Clang! Clang!

Genava clapped for Shang Jianyao.

Jiang Baimian also nodded slightly. "It might not be the Heartless disease. It might also be a heart attack, brain hemorrhage, or a car accident..."

At this moment, Jiang Baimian and Shang Jianyao cast their gazes at the door at the same time.

Soon, someone knocked on the door.

"Who is it?" Shang Jianyao asked enthusiastically.

"Me." Ding Ling's voice sounded.

Jiang Baimian walked over and opened the door with a smile. "Why are you here again?"

How long has it been since we separated?

Ding Ling didn't look good as she sighed. "I never expected things to turn out this way; the nuclear warhead actually landed in the hands of a lunatic. After I heard the broadcast, I quickly reported it to Commissioner Huang's secretary for your future arrangements. Don't worry. Commissioner Huang told me to inform you that you will be examined in detail tomorrow morning and will be evacuated from Ubei. When this matter is resolved, we'll invite you back to wait for the Supplies Management Committee to approve the sharing of the corresponding information."

That's good, that's good...?Long Yuehong was delighted and even wanted to clap.

“No!” Shang Jianyao replied before Jiang Baimian could.

Ding Ling was just about to say that she would work harder and strive to evacuate them in the evening when Shang Jianyao added righteously, “Evacuate the ordinary people first!”

“...” Ding Ling's expression froze as if she hadn't seen such a noble human in a long time.

Fortunately, Jiang Baimian didn't embarrass her. She glared at Shang Jianyao and said, “With Ubei's manpower and how the army is already in the city, we definitely aren't the first batch to be evacuated.”

Ding Ling forced a smile and nodded.

Jiang Baimian changed the topic and carefully recounted their analysis of the radio broadcast and their guesses on the entire matter. Finally, she said, “This is our humble opinion. Your Salvation Army might've already thought of it, but advice from others may help one overcome their shortcomings. I hope it can give you the corresponding inspiration.”

Ding Ling became more and more shocked as she listened. In the end, she unconsciously revealed an expression of admiration. “Regardless of whether others have thought of it or not, this is the first time I've discovered that one can figure out so much important information through such inconspicuous details.”

The honest Shang Jianyao was just about to say, ‘you just need to rely on the brain’ when Jiang Baimian smiled and replied, “We've undergone professional training.”

Ding Ling nodded. “I'll submit your analysis. I'll lead you to be examined tomorrow morning.”

“Alright.” Jiang Baimian didn't give Shang Jianyao a chance.

After sending Ding Ling off, the Old Task Force went to the hotel restaurant for a simple lunch. They then returned to their rooms and didn't go out again.

When the sun began to set, they suddenly heard an argument in the parking lot outside.

“Mr. Zhang, why are you here again? You are putting me in a tough spot!” said the hotel manager, Shen Kang, sounding frustrated.

Shang Jianyao leaned against the glass window and saw a person wearing a dark-gray aluminum pot and a black uniform that had faded from washing standing there with his back straight.

The person spoke quickly with an aged voice. “Why are you in a tough spot? What’s wrong with me coming over for a walk? I’m not doing anything else!”

At least not yet.

“Mr. Zhang, we are under martial law.” Shen Kang spoke sincerely, not daring to be rude to him.

Shang Jianyao turned his head and asked Long Yuehong and Bai Chen, “The one you encountered this morning?”

Although the other party was wearing an aluminum pot and only revealed the area below his nose, making it impossible for Long Yuehong to identify him from his appearance, he could tell from the voice. “Yes, that’s right.”

Jiang Baimian also walked over. She looked at the elder in the grayish aluminum pot below and muttered to herself, “That’s right. Why didn’t I notice that he managed to come to the hotel’s parking lot despite the city being under martial law...”

At this moment, Elder Zhang—who was wearing an aluminum pot—snorted and pointed at Shen Kang. “Back when they sent us to the sanatorium, the Supplies Management Committee said: ‘If you are sick of staying in the sanatorium, you can walk around. This area is equivalent to your courtyard.’

“I figure that even if martial law is up, it won’t affect anyone if I stroll in my courtyard! You don’t care about what needs to be cared for, and you worry about what you shouldn’t care about. You even play dirty, are lazy, and love to take advantage of others...”

Shen Kang's face turned pale from the scolding, but he didn't dare to retort.

At this moment, a voice sounded beside Elder Zhang. "That's right, that's right!"

At some point in time, Shang Jianyao had already jumped out of the window and landed on the first floor.

This stunned Shen Kang.

"You are..." Elder Zhang moved his body and turned to Shang Jianyao as if he were trying to determine if he had met the latter before by sizing up his large shoe.

Before Shang Jianyao could respond, Shen Kang stammered, "Mr. Zhang, I'm just worried that something will go wrong. Sir, please take your time strolling. I still have something on!"

He quickly left and returned to the hotel.

At this moment, Jiang Baimian also jumped to Shang Jianyao's side in just two clean moves.

Shang Jianyao took a step forward and enthusiastically stretched out his hands, attempting to hold the old man in the aluminum pot. "Mr. Zhang, I'm very interested in what you proclaim. Can you tell me in detail about mind control and degeneration?"

Elder Zhang was stunned for a moment. It was only when Shang Jianyao gripped his hand that he suddenly shook him off and took two steps back warily. "Who are you? What do you want?"

Excessive enthusiasm results in the opposite effect...? Jiang Baimian facepalmed with her right hand. She even felt like laughing.

Under normal circumstances, Elder Zhang would come to the hotel to 'racketeer' and talk to any kind helpers about mind control and degeneration. However, he ended up encountering Shang Jianyao—who was too proactive. Instead, he suspected that the other party was a spy sent by the degenerates who wanted to infiltrate the anti-secret control organization.

Shang Jianyao quickly explained, "My name is Shang Jianyao. Many years ago, I felt that I should be a member of the Salvation Army."

Hey, don't say that in front of the team leader of Pangu Biology's Investigation Unit for the Cause of the Old World's Destruction! Jiang Baimian yelled weakly in her heart.

Elder Zhang snorted. "Don't even think of lying to an old man like me. From your voice, how old can you be?"

He turned around and slowly walked in the other direction.

Shang Jianyao wore a disappointed and confused expression.

"Mr. Zhang," Jiang Baimian shouted, "I want to ask something. Do you know that a nuclear warhead is installed in Ubei?"

Elder Zhang paused and raised his voice. "So what if I know? It's not like I can do anything about it!"

"We want to ask if you and your comrades still stroll the area during the martial law lockdown. Did you encounter anyone suspicious?"

Elder Zhang asked loudly, "Why are you two foreigners concerned about this? Hurry up and find an opportunity to evacuate Ubei!"

Shang Jianyao took two steps forward and said in a deep voice, "How can we abandon the ordinary citizens and evacuate first!?"

Elder Zhang was stunned, and words seemed to fail him. He instinctively raised his right hand as if he wanted to touch his forehead, but he ended up touching the cold aluminum pot.

Suddenly, he laughed. "The families and relatives of those above have probably already left Ubei by this time!"

Phew. Elder Zhang took a deep breath and said seriously, “Kid, let me ask you: Why can’t we abandon the ordinary citizens?”

Shang Jianyao stood up straight, stretched out his right hand, and pressed it to his left chest. “For all of humanity!”

The pot-wearing Elder Zhang stood there stunned and silent.

Chapter 700: Feedback

Jiang Baimian and Shang Jianyao had no idea what expression Elder Zhang had under the grayish-white aluminum pot. They could only watch as he raised his right hand with a tremble and tried to press it to his left chest.

However, this action wasn’t completed. Just as Elder Zhang’s palm touched the clothes, he paused for two seconds before sliding it down.

His voice seemed to be a little hoarse as he spoke a little faster than usual. “To put it simply, the mastermind behind the Old World’s destruction wants humans to maintain their current state and never be able to rebuild true civilization. Therefore, he secretly controls a large number of people—that includes the various large factions’ upper echelons—with a brainwave device. He made them lose their motivation and forget their former ideals. They stopped working hard for the recovery of all of humanity and became degenerates.

“The brainwave devices were the culprits that brought the Heartless disease into this world back then. To this day, they still play a role in many aspects, contributing to the mastermind’s elimination of the humans who discovered this secret.”

“However, many Heartless patients we encountered were ordinary humans. It’s impossible for them to discover the secret of mind control.” Even in the face of the former Salvation Army warrior, the honest Shang Jianyao still retorted whenever he needed to.

Elder Zhang and the others had clearly considered this problem and had long come up with a reason. He replied without stuttering, “You guys are too young. This is called mixing things up! If they only eliminate people who know the secrets of mind control, it’s very easy for people to discover that something is amiss. They have to turn some ordinary people into Heartless in passing

to mix things up and make things less obvious. In the Old World, there's an old saying: The best way to hide a needle is to throw it into a haystack."

"It also makes it very difficult to find it," the honest Shang Jianyao commented.

Elder Zhang took a deep breath and said with a hushed voice, "In short, quickly find two aluminum pots and put them on before you are mind-controlled. Even if you don't have an aluminum pot, using iron pots, copper pots, and stainless steel pots can help. Only then can you maintain the independence of your thoughts and the purity of your ideals. You won't be corrupted by the tiny benefits they have to offer.

"These are all lessons from the past! Countless Salvation Army warriors risked their lives to save all of humanity back then and were fearless, but when the situation improved, things changed. They are mind-controlled!" Elder Zhang felt increasingly pained as he spoke.

"Yes, yes, yes!" Shang Jianyao seemed to have found a confidant. "It has to be the case. Otherwise, it wouldn't be so easy for them to abandon their former ideals and forget the oath they made."

They had been forged in the crucible of blood and fire without fading.

Jiang Baimian tried to interrupt their conversation several times, but she couldn't join in the conversation.

Elder Zhang nodded heavily, causing the aluminum pot on his head to shake. "From the looks of it, although you've only been here for a few days, you've also seen some of their ugly phenomena. Right, the one who issued you a pass is still Hong Guangming, isn't it?"

"Yes." Shang Jianyao didn't hide the truth.

Elder Zhang waved his hands and became agitated. "I scold that old bastard Hong Guangming every time I see him. I do it pointing right at his nose! Back when he was still under me, he was such an honest and enthusiastic lad. When he saw that a wilderness nomad's child didn't have enough to eat, he secretly shared half of his food.

"Once, we were surrounded by a group of people who only knew how to burn, kill, and pillage. In order to cover the bulk of the troops' retreat, he took the initiative to step forward to help cover the retreat. He almost died there. Was he afraid because of that? Not at all! He still led the charge again

and again. As you can see, he lost an arm and a leg one after another. Fortunately, we found and seized many mechanical prosthetics back then. People who were good at such surgery joined the team, allowing him to live to this day.

“Everyone might not be able to eat their fill now, but at least nobody will starve to death under normal circumstances. Even if the clothes are shabby, at least nobody will freeze to death. How did he become like this? After I discovered this, the reason escaped me for an entire year until I learned of the secret of mind control and wore this aluminum pot. It was then that I knew. Sigh...”

“Sigh.” Shang Jianyao sighed as well.

It was rare to encounter a confidant, so Elder Zhang finally wasn't that vigilant. He thought for a moment and said, “Didn't you want to ask if we encountered anyone suspicious when we walked around during the enactment of martial law? Follow me to the sanatorium, and you can ask them one by one.”

Although he was still worried that Shang Jianyao and the others were spies who were trying to infiltrate their anti-secret control organization, he felt that there was nothing wrong with bringing them along to ask about things related to martial law and not involving anything else.

Jiang Baimian was delighted. Just as she was about to agree, Shang Jianyao firmly said, “No?”

“Why?” The grayish-white aluminum pot concealed Elder Zhang's confused and surprised expression.

Shang Jianyao replied righteously, “Martial law is still enacted. We can't leave the hotel without permission. You and your old comrades have the right to go out for walks, but we don't. We can't ignore the rules just because you're in front of us. If we do that, what's the difference between them and degenerates who abuse their power for personal gain?”

At this moment, two phrases surfaced in Jiang Baimian's mind: An indomitable spirit, only to be left with nothing.

The last phrase didn't match the situation, but it matched the first phrase.

Elder Zhang was stunned for a few seconds before saying, “Good for you! It would be nice if all the new generation of Salvation Army members were like you.”

It might not be good for everyone to be mentally ill...?Jiang Baimian felt that Elder Zhang's words were filled with problems.

After a pause, Elder Zhang took the initiative to say, "Then, I'll help you ask back in the sanatorium. I'll write down the answers and bring them to the hotel."

"Thank you," Jiang Baimian quickly said. She thought for a moment and then added, "By the way, ask your old comrades what they've encountered in the past three days that is worth paying attention to. Hmm, even for those that don't seem worth paying attention to. Record everything that doesn't usually happen."

"How meticulous." Elder Zhang was knowledgeable, so he praised her. He then said, "I'll go back now and try to send back the information I obtained there before 10 p.m."

Shang Jianyao waved his hand enthusiastically. "Have a safe journey!"

After watching Elder Zhang disappear at the other exit of the hotel parking lot, Jiang Baimian led Shang Jianyao back to the building via the normal route.

The hotel manager, Shen Kang, stood by the door and paced around. Upon seeing the two of them enter, he quickly asked, "Elder Zhang has left?"

"He's gone," Shang Jianyao replied enthusiastically.

Shen Kang heaved a sigh of relief and said, "Elder Zhang is muddle-headed and suffers from PTSD. He can no longer distinguish reality from illusion. Many of their generation have bad habits. Some even suffer from alcoholism, and their views are conservative. It's as if they lived decades ago and don't believe anything we say. Think about it. How normal can someone who believes in mind control and wears an aluminum pot on their head every day be?"

He was implying that Elder Zhang had mental problems.

"Indeed." Shang Jianyao nodded in agreement.

Jiang Baimian glanced at him in surprise and didn't say a word.

"You guys are still very clear-headed." Shen Kang was very gratified.

Shang Jianyao then pointed at himself. "I have mental problems too. Why do you believe me?"

"..." Shen Kang was tricked.

...

At night, the radio announced that the evacuation of the masses started tomorrow.

Long Yuehong was filled with anticipation about leaving Ubei tomorrow morning as he said worriedly, "I wonder what will happen if that nuclear warhead is taken away and sent to a certain faction..."

The honest Geneva replied, "It shouldn't be any different from staying in the Salvation Army's hands."

They lacked the ability to be mass-produced, so they were most likely only used for deterrence.

Shang Jianyao was just about to join in the discussion when he suddenly heard someone shout from outside the window.

"The lad and girl from this afternoon, I've gathered what you wanted!"

Jiang Baimian and Shang Jianyao looked at each other and opened the window. As expected, they found Elder Zhang wearing his faded, black Salvation Army uniform with a grayish-white, deep aluminum pot over his head. He stood in the parking lot, holding a stack of paper as he constantly shouted.

In a few moves, the two of them 'quickly' landed beside Elder Zhang.

“I asked them one by one and recorded them on paper. Don’t worry; I didn’t miss anything, including my own.”

Shang Jianyao and Jiang Baimian quickly thanked him sincerely.

“Scan through and see if there are any problems.” Elder Zhang handed over the stack of paper.

Jiang Baimian received the stack from him, removed the flashlight from her belt, and scanned through the documents on the spot.

The information recorded on the paper was ordered in the order of the person interviewed. Everyone had two parts to them. The first was if they had encountered any suspicious people during the martial law enforcement, and the second was if they had encountered anything abnormal or rare in the past three to four days.

Shang Jianyao came to Jiang Baimian’s side and read them one by one with her.

“There’s nothing useful...” When they were almost done, Shang Jianyao sighed in disappointment.

Jiang Baimian didn’t say anything else and cast her gaze at the last page.

This page only recorded one person’s feedback—Elder Zhang himself.

“Zhang: 1. I only encountered warriors in charge of enforcing martial law on my walks. 2. The antihypertensive drugs from a hotel customer were stolen two afternoons ago. Unable to take the medicine in time, their hypertension rapidly acted up. The situation was very serious, and they were sent to the hospital for two days.”

Hypertension acted up and was sent to the hospital for two days...?Jiang Baimian’s heart palpitated as she slowly looked up.