

Ad Infinitum 831

Chapter 831: White Knights

The Old Task Force ultimately didn't take advantage of the hotel; they chose an ordinary suite that calculated the electricity bill separately. After all, Shang Jianyao clamored to save all of humanity. He definitely couldn't allow his team to do such a thing.

Sometimes, Jiang Baimian would sigh with emotion inwardly. This fellow was really the conscience of the Old Task Force.

After entering the suite, Shang Jianyao looked at the evening sky and eagerly said, "Does it mean we can head out to investigate once Old Ge is done recharging?"

"Let's not cause any trouble for the next few days." Jiang Baimian scoffed.

She had also dyed her hair flaxen. She didn't retain pure black like in First City because although the people were of the Red River ethnicity, the White Knights basically didn't have black hair.

As for contact lenses, she also didn't wear the pair from before. Instead, she had gotten the company's technical personnel to help her manufacture a pair using biological materials before heading out for the mission. Of course, it was still blue.

"Why?" Shang Jianyao felt like he had been struck in the head.

He wore green contact lenses.

Jiang Baimian quietly rolled her eyes. "Our first priority now is to charge all the batteries. Before that, we should try our best not to go out or investigate. This is to prevent us from being forced to leave Gesterbourg early due to any clues we find that might bring us trouble. When the time comes, it won't be easy to find a place to charge."

She had a sufficient understanding of her team's troublemaking abilities and often had lingering fears. She suspected that if they were unlucky, they would find something by tonight if they investigated the Eighth Research Institute or the team Shang Jianyao's father was part of. They would then escalate the conflict and have it snowball. Finally, they would be forced to escape Gesterbourg before dawn.

If that happened, how many high-performance batteries would they have charged?

What would they do next?

Considering the realistic possibility of such a development, Jiang Baimian decided to err on the side of caution. She planned on locking her team members in the hotel and waiting until all the backup batteries were charged up before doing the investigation.

Shang Jianyao understood Jiang Baimian's meaning and glanced at Long Yuehong. "She's talking about you!"

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Long Yuehong was peeved and amused. "You make it sound like you haven't discovered any clues before?"

He used another hair dye, and his hair was dyed brown. His contact lenses were yellow.

Bai Chen matched hers with his.

As the two of them argued, Genava walked to a corner of the suite's living room and charged himself. He then sat in the armchair beside him.

He looked comfortable, like a carbon-based human taking a hot bath after a busy day and lying in bed in extreme relaxation.

Bai Chen found another socket and charged another high-performance battery.

After looking around, Jiang Baimian took off her tactical backpack and walked to the window in the living room.

She was no stranger to the White Knights. Although she had never been here, she had read a lot of information and had come into contact with some members of the White Knights or humans who had once come to this large faction.

The White Knights were established in the early Chaotic Era after the Old World was destroyed. Back then, some people advocated the chivalry found in ancient times and had gathered the survivors of a few religious organizations in the Old World, attempting to lead people out of the chaos and restore order.

Back then, there was no talk of the Kalendarium. The deities advocated by the Old World's religions didn't appear, nor did they give humans any revelations. Therefore, the corresponding religions collapsed.

Under the counseling of their companions, the survivors filled their hearts with chivalry, producing the White Knights.

In the Chaotic Era, the Knights emphasized on and abided by the creed of simplicity, thriftiness, restraint, pity, humility, heroism, and fairness. They established settlements, gathered a large number of citizens, and worked together to tide through the difficulties.

The Salvation Army also admired the Knights' actions. Although they didn't approve of their excessive emphasis on hierarchy, submission, and lower statuses of females, they didn't provoke them.

Therefore, despite sharing a long border, the Salvation Army kept heading southwest, wanting to save the humans in First City while coexisting peacefully with the White Knights. Neither side interfered with each other.

In terms of faith, the White Knights didn't worship any deities on the surface. They extolled chivalry as the highest standard, but Jiang Baimian wasn't sure about the truth. They might be like the Salvation Army—who had never been affected by the Kalendarium—or they might be like First City, where several Kalendarium were behind them.

"I really want to visit the Grand Knight of Gesterbourg." Before Jiang Baimian could walk to the window, Shang Jianyao voiced his thoughts again.

As a relatively important border stronghold, mineral city, and industrial base of the White Knights, Gesterbourg was always guarded by a Grand Knight.

The ruling hierarchy of the White Knights was the Grand Knight Council, which was made up of Grand Knights. The supreme leader was the commander-in-chief, Goffrey. He was also known as the Chief Knight, the Supreme Master, and the Guardian.

According to the information the Old Task Force had obtained from Smith's Rootless team, the current Grand Knight in charge of Gesterbourg was named Havel.

Jiang Baimian turned around and looked at Shang Jianyao. "Why do you want to visit the Grand Knight here?"

"I want to discuss chivalry with him." Shang Jianyao spoke sincerely.

"I'm afraid you'll be disappointed." Bai Chen paused and said, "The current White Knights aren't the ones from decades ago."

She had heard many rumors at the borders of the White Knights and First City.

Jiang Baimian nodded. "Only the extreme environment back then could forge extreme purity. Decades that can be barely considered stable have made it unlikely that newborn knights are like the older generation. Even if there are exceptions, they will be in the minority. Most of the older generation have already passed away or changed their views out of pragmatism. The Salvation Army is an example."

Extreme despair in an environment would cause many things that corrupted human nature to happen. It would also create a large number of 'humanoid beasts.' However, it would also stimulate and induce a batch of relatively pure and tenacious idealists.

"Sigh..." Shang Jianyao sighed when he heard that. He then raised his right hand, pressed it to his left chest, and solemnly said, "For all of humanity!"

Jiang Baimian retracted her gaze and looked out the window.

The air was hazy, and the glass was stained. The windowsill outside was covered in dust, of which there was no lack of coal dust.

The pedestrians wore relatively simple clothes with relatively low-profile colors. This was the White Knights' style.

At this moment, a group of people came from the train station.

They were basically of Red River ethnicity. Most of their faces were pale, and their clothes were tattered. They trembled a little thanks to the cold weather in spring around Icefield, and a small number of them even had mutations like warts.

They were equivalent to half-Subhumans.

The leader—wrapped in a fur coat and holding a loudspeaker—said loudly, “Look around. I’m not lying to you, right? Here, you will have job opportunities. Work can be used to exchange for bread and meat, for clothes like mine, and for a warm residence! This place isn’t suitable for farming, and the conditions for herding aren’t good. However, countless salt, meat, and flour are transported here by train to exchange for coal, steel, and various metals before being transported away.

“Here, you can buy and obtain anything as long as you work hard! This is heaven, the New World in the real sense!”

The Red River people looked excited when they heard that. The people passing by were also a little infected, and their expressions were excited.

This settlement—which was considered a mine and industrial settlement—had always been lively.

As the coal dust fell, the group of people was led to the factory behind the ancient castle.

“Although the industrial pollution here is a little serious, people are filled with hope...” Long Yuehong also came to the window and sighed sincerely. “The White Knights seem to treat the workers well. At the very least, they don’t get discriminated against.”

Jiang Baimian tersely acknowledged it. “Pity and fairness are part of their creed. Even if things aren’t as they used to be, they still need to keep up the act on the surface.”

“The White Knights will occasionally send food to the poor.” Bai Chen spoke of the rumors she had heard in First City. Back then, she was rather envious.

“Not bad, not bad.” Shang Jianyao nodded in satisfaction like the White Knights’ commander-in-chief who had come to inspect.

After chatting for a while, they found their seats and relaxed after a few days of traveling.

Time quickly passed in the peaceful atmosphere.

Upon seeing that evening was approaching, Long Yuehong casually asked, “Team Leader, where should we investigate next?”

Jiang Baimian thought for a moment and said, “Let’s start with the Old Task Force from before. Although more than ten years have passed, very few Ashlandics come here. If they didn’t disguise themselves back then, it should’ve left a deep impression on many people. Yes, the premise is that they had really been here.”

After a pause, Jiang Baimian added, “Ask the Hunter’s Guild. If outsiders like them want to obtain information, the first choice is often the local Hunter’s Guild.”

“Alright!” Shang Jianyao replied with gusto.

Just as he said that, a bell suddenly sounded outside.

Clang! Clang! Clang!

Chapter 832: Local Customs

Shang Jianyao stood up and ran to the window, searching for the source of the bell. He looked excited with unconcealed curiosity.

This made Jiang Baimian feel like this fellow was only about ten years old.

She walked to the window. From the pedestrians’ reactions, she determined that the bell was something the residents here were accustomed to. It wasn’t worth fussing over or raising their vigilance.

However, she didn't turn her head because of this to instruct Long Yuehong and Bai Chen to turn on the lights to dispel the darkness brought about by the evening.

She remained standing there and traced the bell's source like Shang Jianyao. This was a habit built from her professionalism as a folklore scholar.

Jiang Baimian quickly confirmed that the bell came from Gesterbourg Castle. As the tallest building here, a large bell seemed to be installed on its top floor.

Not long after the bell stopped its ringing, bicycles tore out of the factory area and entered the streets and alleys of this settlement. They were like white pigeons that had escaped their cages, but their colors weren't uniform.

On these bicycles of different models, the workers were either overjoyed, filled with the desire to return home, or were excitedly conversing with their fellow cyclists.

Compared to their peers in First City, their skin was darker—the sun, rain, chimney smoke, and hot furnaces had taken a toll on them. They also couldn't hide their fatigue. Sweat dripped down their cheeks from time to time, but it was more 'vibrant.' They didn't have a numbed attitude to life.

After most of the bicycles were out, a crowd resembling a tide left the factory area on foot. Their clothes were grayish-white or blue. The cloth used was rather rough, and they were covered in stains and sweat marks. Their expressions were similar to those on bicycles, and not many of them looked depressed.

“So the bell signifies the end of a workday...” Shang Jianyao came to a realization.

At this point, he, Long Yuehong, and Jiang Baimian—who were born in Pangu Biology—were no strangers to this.

At the same time, some older residents and obviously disabled people rushed to the ancient castle's door. Soldiers in thick linen clothes carried out rye bread and other food, prepared to distribute them.

“There are fewer elderly than I imagined,” Jiang Baimian muttered to herself thoughtfully.

She originally felt that, with the White Knights' style of often helping the poor and their specialty in biological and medical research, the number of Gesterbourg elderly in their fifties and above would just be slightly lower than that of Pangu Biology.

But from the looks of it, it was about the same as First City.

"They probably have it hard in the factories." Long Yuehong had his own explanation.

The charging Geneva interrupted at the appropriate moment. "Before the Old World was destroyed, the area occupied by the White Knights wasn't suitable for farming and herding."

"When I was in First City, I also heard that the White Knights had relatively poor living conditions." Bai Chen nodded and added, "It's all thanks to the mineral resources and advanced biological technology that they could exchange for supplies that meet their basic needs."

At this moment, Shang Jianyao retracted his gaze and rubbed his stomach. "The White Knights are already handing out food. It's time for us to consider what to eat for dinner."

He used his body language to indicate that he was hungry.

Jiang Baimian thought for a moment before saying, "Old Ge, continue charging. Let's go downstairs and ask the front desk to see what food we can get in the hotel. Let's try not to go out."

This hotel named Fire & Iron didn't have a telephone installed in the room, or rather, most places in Gesterbourg didn't have the conditions for such an installation.

"Alright!" Shang Jianyao went out first.

He stomped from the third floor to the ground floor and asked the man at the front desk, "Can we order some food?"

"Order food?" The person didn't seem to understand why they were ordering food at the hotel. "Shouldn't you go to a restaurant?"

“You guys!” Shang Jianyao felt pained. “How can you guys expand with such poor service? In the Old World, in other places...”

He rambled on and finally made the receptionist understand what food-ordering services were.

The blond man shook his head and said, “None of our hotels here have such services.”

He showed no intention of upgrading themselves at all. Instead, he advised Shang Jianyao, “It’s boring and depressing to stay in the room all the time. It’s better to go to a restaurant or café. If it weren’t for the relatively cold weather, I wouldn’t be willing to do this job. Carrying a hunting rifle and hunting in Icefield while searching for ruins is what a knight’s descendant should do.”

Although that’s not the whole picture, this likely signifies a certain culture in the White Knights... Jiang Baimian nodded and asked before Shang Jianyao could, “Are there any restaurants nearby where we can place orders over the phone?”

“None have phones.” The receptionist shook his head again.

In Gesterbourg, there were only a few places where phones were installed.

The residential area wasn’t that big, but neither was it small. Twenty to thirty minutes was enough for healthy people to reach any destination.

“Then, we can only head out for food.” Jiang Baimian frowned. “Or we can move some canned food from the car and make do with our meals?”

Long Yuehong instinctively revealed a troubled expression at the thought of having canned food again.

Shang Jianyao said righteously, “There’s a problem with the latter plan.”

“What problem?” Jiang Baimian asked in amusement.

Shang Jianyao glanced at the receptionist and took a few steps toward the hotel entrance.

After Jiang Baimian, Long Yuehong, and Bai Chen followed him, he suppressed his voice and said, “There’s not much food left; we will definitely run out after a few more meals. When the time comes, we have to go out and purchase supplies. With Little Red’s destiny, this will also easily trigger an accident and cause a chain reaction. If this forces us to leave Gesterbourg, not only will we not have fully charged batteries, but we won’t have any food either. It will be even worse! Therefore, we have to ensure that our food reserves are above the safety line.”

“It’s clearly your destiny...” Long Yuehong muttered in retort. Apart from this, he actually felt that Shang Jianyao made sense.

Jiang Baimian was momentarily speechless by Shang Jianyao’s usage of her views to refute her.

Although the Old Task Force didn’t have as little food as Shang Jianyao made it out to be, there really wouldn’t be much after that many days.

After a while, Jiang Baimian slowly exhaled. “Hey, go upstairs and tell Old Ge to charge in peace. We’ll find food nearby.”

“Yay!” Shang Jianyao beamed.

Due to their caution and fear of triggering any accidents, the Old Task Force found a nearby restaurant on the street of the Fire & Iron Hotel. It was called ‘Old Henley.’

Only two lights were switched on in the shop, and the lighting was very dim.

Shang Jianyao and the others were just about to search for seats when they suddenly saw the waiter serve four dishes to a table of guests.

One of the guests with light blond hair and a hooked nose pointed at the strange meat in front of him and asked, “Is this beef steak?”

“Sir, it’s indeed beef steak, but you should know very well that most of the beef steak available in Gesterbourg comes from mutated species. The price also elucidates that,” the waiter replied calmly.

“Mutated species?” The hooked-nose guest was shocked. Can this thing be eaten?

The waiter immediately revealed a vigilant expression. “You aren’t local?”

The hooked-nose guest was confused for a few seconds before saying, “We come from a ranch in the south. We recently joined the White Knights and heard that Gesterbourg has many jobs and plenty of supplies to earn, so we came over.”

Like other large factions, the White Knights could only rule the towns along the transport roads. There were still humans or Subhuman settlements of various sizes in the mountains, wilderness, and deserts.

The waiter’s expression softened. “It’s no wonder you don’t know about the mutated species. Long ago, a type of cow mutated and adapted to the environment here. It was relatively easy to breed, so our White Knights used this as a blueprint and used genetic technology to nurture such cows. It produces plenty of meat and is cheap. It’s the prime choice for most people.”

“Why is it so cheap?” the hooked-nose customer asked.

The waiter smiled and said, “Eating too much makes one prone to mutations and various malignant diseases. Don’t worry. Nothing will go wrong if you only have it a few times. When you find a job, have enough money, and can buy genetic enhancement drugs, you won’t have to worry any further. The cheapest X-3 drug can give you the ability to resist such abnormalities...”

Not only did this make the guests exchange looks, but even Jiang Baimian, Shang Jianyao, Long Yuehong, and Bai Chen looked at each other with a magical feeling.

In biological technology, the White Knights seemed to have taken completely different directions from Pangu Biology due to the different environment.

The four of them hesitated for a moment before finding a table to sit at. Another waiter came to serve them.

Many people came from other places in the White Knights’ territory. The restaurant’s business was good, and they could hire about four people.

Jiang Baimian stopped Shang Jianyao's attempt to try the mutated species and ordered a pile of normal meat. It wasn't cheap.

After she was done, Shang Jianyao—who had finally found an opportunity—looked at the waiter. He suppressed his voice and asked mysteriously, “D-do you have that?”

The waiter's expression changed. He looked around, bent down, and asked in a very low voice, “Are you talking about that?”

Chapter 833: Short of Money

That??Jiang Baimian suddenly had a feeling that things were going south.?Could this be the beginning of an accident? Encountering a secret while having a meal?

From the fact that the hotel didn't provide food to the restaurants in Gesterbourg not having phones installed to the point of depleting rations and having to come out to search for food, she seemed to see her team walking deeper into a river step by step under the machinations of fate. However, they were helpless and unable to escape.

Bai Chen resisted the urge to glance at Long Yuehong.

Long Yuehong's heart palpitated as his mind was filled with:Can it not be so coincidental?

Shang Jianyao was delighted instead of being shocked. He looked around and suspiciously asked, “How many of that do you have? How much is it?”

The male waiter slowly took a deep breath and said, “It depends on which type you want. Cheap ones cost two Knight silver coins, while the good ones cost ten.”

“That expensive?” Although Shang Jianyao suppressed his voice professionally, he didn't hide his surprise.

They had only paid a fee of two Knight silver coins when they entered the city. The suite they lived in only cost a Knight silver coin a night.

They had just ordered plenty of unmutated meat, and it only cost them three Knight silver coins.

“It’s not expensive. You won’t be able to buy it without spending that much money.” The waiter seemed eager to facilitate the transaction.

Shang Jianyao stopped his riddles. “What is ‘that’ you are referring to?”

The waiter blurted out in surprise, “Alcohol! Otherwise, what do you think it is?”

Alcohol... Why does selling alcohol give off the feeling that it sells firearms and Paradise Island’s latest products...? Long Yuehong was a little stunned. He didn’t expect that after being on edge all this while, the other party was only selling alcohol!

Shang Jianyao was disappointed. “I want to ask if you have Coke—the kind with ice.”

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The brown-haired waiter—who was about the same age as Shang Jianyao and had clearly undergone genetic enhancement—fell silent.

Jiang Baimian could tell that he wanted to curse, but he held back.

In order to mediate the mood and lay the groundwork for the subsequent investigations, she took the initiative to ask, “We come from the south. Who else can we go to for information in Gesterbourg other than the Hunter’s Guild?”

The waiter exhaled and asked, “Are you Ruin Hunters?”

“Yes.” Jiang Baimian nodded slightly.

The brown-haired waiter revealed an understanding expression. He first said to Shang Jianyao, “There’s no Coke. If you really want to drink it, you can find it in the surrounding city ruins. However, I’m not sure how Coke tastes after decades. I can only tell you that I buy Coke cans and bottle caps—the metal kind. The price is determined by the number of cans. Don’t worry; it’s definitely fair. My dead grandfather was a knight.”

While Shang Jianyao nodded and made terse acknowledgments, the waiter turned to Jiang Baimian and said, “You’re early. In another month or two, you will be able to explore all kinds of city ruins in Icefield when it’s summer. Due to the weather, almost nobody dares to go there in other seasons. Very few city ruins have been excavated, and a large number of supplies remain. Furthermore, they can hunt Icefield creatures—their fur is very valuable.

“Whether locals like us lead a good life every year depends on how much we can harvest during the summer. It’s almost impossible for us to make a killing by working.”

He was rather tolerant and enthusiastic toward beautiful ladies.

“Why?” Shang Jianyao didn’t look at the other party’s expression at all and asked, “Why can’t you get rich by working hard?”

The brown-haired waiter smiled mockingly. “It’s very simple. My dead grandfather was a knight, but my father was only a squire. If I go to the factory, I can at most be promoted to workshop manager. If I go to the tribunal, I can only be a court assistant and can’t advance any further. I might as well be a waiter and be free. I can quit at any time and find a similar job when I return from my adventures.”

“Why can’t you become a high-ranking manager at the factory or be a judge at the tribunal?” Shang Jianyao asked.

The brown-haired waiter’s expression sank. “Because knights have sons.”

“...” Jiang Baimian, Long Yuehong, and the others deeply understood what it meant by the White Knights emphasizing hierarchy.

Under the White Knights’ commander-in-chief were more than 20 Grand Knights. Some of them held different positions in the headquarters—they either contributed strength, intelligence, or experience. Some were the commanders and the highest-ranking civil officers in a particular knight order. For example, as an important border stronghold, industrial base, and mineral city, Gesterbourg was always guarded by a knight order.

It was currently the Courage Knights. The commander was the Grand Knight, Havel, who was also Gesterbourg’s consul.

The Grand Knights formed the Grand Knight Council and decided the most important matters in the White Knights. Under them were the consul or feudal lords in the various non-strategic settlements or the Chevaliers who were Grand Knight aides. Under the Chevaliers were the Knights—they were divided into three ranks. The highest was the White Knight, the middle was the Purple Knight, and the lowest was the Red Knight.

Ranking below Knights were Squires, and they were also known as quasi-knights.

Beyond that were ordinary people.

The brown-haired waiter clearly didn't want to waste his time with Shang Jianyao. He looked at the menu and reminded Jiang Baimian, "But don't go to the northeastern city ruin. It's very dangerous there—yes, it's called Ceningmis."

Jiang Baimian's eyes flickered. "How dangerous?"

"Nobody who's been there returns," the brown-haired waiter said chattily. "If it weren't for the fact that I know many people and often go to Icefield to adventure, I might've even said the wrong name. I remember that merchants often came from Ceningmis when I was young. Who knew..."

"It became a ruin a few years ago?" Shang Jianyao blurted out in surprise, acting very professionally.

The brown-haired waiter nodded. "They were destroyed because they followed the Devil."

"Devil?" Long Yuehong didn't hide his confusion.

"I heard it from someone." The brown-haired waiter shrugged. "Before I came of age, my elders liked to scare me with the idea of sending me to Ceningmis to feed the Devil."

"Was that before or after Ceningmis was destroyed?" Jiang Baimian tried to get confirmation.

"After." The brown-haired waiter was very certain.

Long Yuehong and the others were a little disappointed. They thought that there were rumors that Ceningmis had followed the Devil before the incident.

At this moment, the brown-haired waiter added, "When my grandfather was still alive, he instructed me not to approach Ceningmis as much as possible. Heh heh, he might've been afraid that I would be abducted."

There's something wrong with Ceningmis in the hearts of the older generation of knights??Jiang Baimian didn't continue the topic. ""She could tell that the other party was clearly not sure of the real reason behind his grandfather's exhortations.

After chatting for a while, the brown-haired waiter finally recalled what the Old Task Force had asked. He bent down and suppressed his voice. "What do you want to know?"

"Various things," Jiang Baimian replied vaguely.

The brown-haired waiter pointed at the Knight silver coin on the order menu. "I do know a well-informed person, but it won't come cheap. Do you need me to contact him later to see if he can meet you tonight?"

"Not for the time being." Jiang Baimian forced a smile. "We'll visit the Hunter's Guild tomorrow before deciding if we should acquire his services."

Having proven that things had been a false alarm, she didn't want to take the initiative to provoke another 'accident.' She only wanted to charge up the high-performance batteries and replenish her food before carrying out the investigation.

The brown-haired waiter was very understanding. "I understand."

After he sent in the order, Shang Jianyao looked at the table of guests eating the mutated beef in fear and curiously muttered, "Why don't the people here suspect that they are spies and simply believe that they are from a newly absorbed ranch in the south?"

Bai Chen said, "How can a real spy infiltrate the White Knights' sphere of influence without knowing common knowledge like mutated beef?"

“Yes, this is basic homework.” Jiang Baimian nodded slightly.

Bai Chen then said, “However, they should also be foreigners. Like us, they came to Gesterbourg for other reasons.”

“Why do you say that?” Long Yuehong was very supportive.

Bai Chen calmly replied, “I just recalled something I’ve heard in the past. The area ruled by the White Knights suffered considerable pollution when the Old World was destroyed. The creatures underwent nasty mutations, and only a few places and some rivers remained relatively normal. They became the current settlements that produced clean flour and meat.

“Old Ge previously said that this area isn’t suitable for farming and herding in the Old World. In the early years, the White Knights used supplies and trade to exchange for food and meat. On the other hand, they had to hunt mutated creatures to maintain the survival of so many people.

“If not for the need to resist the pollution and mutation, the humans here wouldn’t have accepted the genetic enhancement drugs so easily.”

In the Ashlands, many people believed that genetic enhancement violated nature and had serious consequences.

“There’s insufficient food production here and they rely on imports, so there’s a ban on alcohol?” Jiang Baimian immediately understood why the waiter sold alcohol like he was selling firearms and Paradise Island’s latest products.

Bai Chen pursed her lips and said, “This should also be related to the White Knights advocating simplicity.”

As they conversed, dishes were served one after another.

Gesterbourg was close to Icefield. The climate was cold, but there was no lack of fuel. Food was mainly roasted and boiled, and sweet vegetable roots were widely used.

It was unique.

Considering the possibility of an ‘accident’ bumping into them and the fact that they had eaten canned food, energy bars, and compressed biscuits for too long, the Old Task Force finished their meal quickly. They only wanted to fill their stomachs and return to the hotel as soon as possible.

They soon had their fill, left their tables, and walked to the restaurant entrance.

Jiang Baimian touched her pocket and frowned. “We don’t seem to have any money left...”

Their supplies were limited, and they didn’t exchange much money with Smith’s Rootless team. The remaining items in the jeep weren’t suitable for trading.

Shang Jianyao excitedly said, “Shall we take on some missions at the Hunter’s Guild tomorrow?”

As they spoke, they passed by the previous table of guests.

The sharp Bai Chen suddenly captured a word: Subhuti.

Chapter 834: Different Directions

Subhuti??Bai Chen resisted the urge to listen carefully.

On the one hand, she still remembered her team leader’s exhortations. The trauma of encountering ‘accidents’ made her afraid to delve deeper. On the other hand, the people at the table temporarily shut their mouths and didn’t talk when they saw them pass by.

After leaving the restaurant, Bai Chen deliberately didn’t look at Long Yuehong beside her. She suppressed her voice and said to Jiang Baimian, “Team Leader, the people at the table just now seem to be talking about Subhuti.”

“Ah, fellow parishioners.” Zen Master Redemption Shang Jianyao was rather happy. He pressed his palms together and said, “Namo Annutara-Samyak-Subhuti.”

Jiang Baimian chuckled. “The ones discussing Subhuti might not be Buddhists. It might also be historians like us.”

The Old Task Force was essentially studying history and restoring the truth.

Without giving Shang Jianyao a chance to answer, she pointed ahead and said, “Ignore that. Let’s return to the hotel and focus on charging.”

Life was filled with forked roads. She didn’t want to lose her bearings on the real path and make a wrong choice on the path of fate.

This wasn’t because she really believed that there was anything wrong with Long Yuehong or Shang Jianyao’s destiny. It was because she was overly suspicious of everything due to the group of Kalendarium backing them.

“Alright.” Shang Jianyao was rather disappointed.

After having their fill, the four of them walked to the Fire & Iron Hotel amidst the relatively bad air and the street lamps that lit up on both sides of the road.

Long Yuehong walked the short distance of a few dozen meters on the edge.

Fortunately, nothing happened along the way, and they successfully entered the hotel.

Phew...

?Long Yuehong secretly exhaled.

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Shang Jianyao glanced at him regretfully and didn’t say anything. He only shook his head.

Long Yuehong—who was prepared to argue with him—felt stifled. He really wanted to ask this fellow what he meant.

At this moment, Jiang Baimian saw the blond, blue-eyed receptionist packing up.

He held a canvas backpack, pulled open the drawer, and placed a United 202 pistol, two boxes of bullets, and a few grenades inside.

“Getting off work?” Shang Jianyao asked enthusiastically.

“That’s right,” the receptionist replied with a bright smile. “I’m waiting for my colleague to take over the job before heading to the Hunter’s Guild to see if there are any suitable missions.”

As he spoke, he put on his backpack and picked up a double-barrel hunting rifle.

This armed appearance made Long Yuehong feel that he was actually trying to break out of prison instead of being a hotel’s receptionist.

Is this the White Knights??he muttered inwardly.

The receptionist looked at the door and didn’t see his colleague. He impatiently returned to his original spot.

Jiang Baimian swept her gaze and realized that there was a thin booklet in front of him. On it was a drawing with words written on it. They were separated as if they were listing something.

“What’s this?” Shang Jianyao never disappointed Jiang Baimian when it came to curiosity.

The receptionist looked down at the booklet and smiled. “I obtained a list of genetic enhancement drugs from the castle. I’m almost done saving up, so I want to choose which enhancement I’ll do next in advance.”

“Oh, oh.” Shang Jianyao approached and asked without any reservations, “What’s available? Can you show us?”

“Sure.” The receptionist didn’t mind at all. “You can also get it from the castle. To them, this might be a business lead. Heh heh, you might not have some genetic enhancement drugs we have here.”

As he spoke, Shang Jianyao had already stretched out his hand to pick up the book. Jiang Baimian and the others leaned over and read it together.

Long Yuehong was shocked by what he saw. He had never imagined that the White Knights had dozens to over a hundred types of genetic enhancement drugs!

Over the years, Pangu Biology had only accumulated three types: the oldest and less effective Type 1, the experimental Type 2, and Type 3 with outstanding effects and almost no negative effects.

It was only when they reached Type 3 that Pangu Biology promoted and universalized genetic enhancement internally. Therefore, when Pangu Biology's employees talked about genetic enhancement drugs, they didn't deliberately mention which type it was. They tacitly meant Type 3.

As far as Jiang Baimian knew, the company's research focus after Type 3 was on targeting the employees who received poor enhancement effects. They wanted to find the exact reason and develop a more targeted subtype. There might be more than ten of them, or perhaps only two or three.

Considering the receptionist's existence, Long Yuehong didn't share his surprise or dumbfoundedness with Bai Chen. He seriously read the introduction on the list.

After Shang Jianyao flipped through three pages, he roughly understood what was going on.

Pangu Biology's genetic enhancement serum and the corresponding drugs could allow a person to obtain a comprehensive improvement: from height, brain, looks, immunity, and environment adaptation—almost everything.

Of course, the exact effects were different depending on one's physique.

The White Knights' genetic enhancement drugs were a 'unilateral' improvement. For example, the X series was an optimization for human immunity. The X-3 series was the basic model and also a mature model that was the cheapest. It could allow the recipients to resist pollution very well.

There were also a few which had better effects.

The A series was an optimization of looks that involved facial features and height. The B series enhanced one's reaction speed, etc.

Overall, the White Knights needed to combine many types of genetic enhancement drugs to result in a person obtaining a comprehensive improvement. But if it was only in terms of individual effects, Pangu Biology's genetic enhancement was inferior to that of the White Knights.

Jiang Baimian was previously aware of this. Her understanding was: The White Knights took a different approach and achieved a certain extreme in 'unilateral optimization.' Pangu Biology was more balanced and comprehensive.

Most of the time, it's a considerable burden on the body to only carry out 'unilateral optimization...' There might be a reason for so few elders in the White Knights who are past 50...? As Jiang Baimian's thoughts raced, she heard Shang Jianyao ask the receptionist, "Which drug do you plan on buying this time?"

The receptionist revealed a hesitant expression. "I plan on choosing between the C series and the K series."

The C series gave enhanced balance and coordination abilities, and the K series enhanced memories and learning abilities.

Without waiting for Shang Jianyao's response, the receptionist continued, "As you know, apart from the basic X series, a person can only undergo three genetic enhancements in their life. I've already taken the E series and the A series once. There's only one last chance left; I have to consider it seriously."

The E series was a genetic enhancement drug that enhanced muscles.

Shang Jianyao asked in confusion, "Since you know that there are only three chances, why did you choose the A series?"

From his point of view, looks were the least important.

The receptionist sighed. "To obtain height. If a person has height, they can have relatively good combat strength by increasing their weight and training hard."

He was nearly 1.8 meters tall and similar to Jiang Baimian. Although he looked alright, he wasn't especially outstanding.

Long Yuehong determined that the genetic enhancement drugs this person could buy were relatively cheap basic models that didn't have amazing effects. Furthermore, he had clearly drunk the other two potions later in life. They weren't improvements he had undergone when he was a fetus or a baby, so it had some influence on the effects.

Shang Jianyao tersely acknowledged his words and suggested as he pointed at his head, "No matter when, a good mind is important."

"I'll consider it again..." The blond, blue-eyed receptionist was once again torn.

Upon seeing this, Jiang Baimian and the others returned the completed genetic enhancement drug list and quietly entered the stairwell to their suite.

On the way, Shang Jianyao eagerly asked, "How many times can people like us drink the White Knights' genetic enhancement drugs?"

"Countless times. You can drink it if you want, but it's useless." Jiang Baimian doused Shang Jianyao's enthusiasm.

She had a certain level of understanding in this regard.

Shang Jianyao immediately said, "I'm asking on Little Red's behalf to see if he can adjust his height."

"Thanks?a lot!" Although Long Yuehong was unwilling to admit it, he was indeed a little disappointed.

As they spoke, they returned to their room. Geneva was still in his previous spot, guarding the high-performance batteries that were charging.

A safe return without any accidents...?Jiang Baimian secretly heaved a sigh of relief after passing through the door.

At this moment, the red light in Genava's eyes flickered as he said in a slightly synthetic voice, "You guys are finally back. I was monitoring the Ruin Hunters passing by downstairs and heard them discussing Subhuti."

Don't say it! Jiang Baimian, Long Yuehong, and Bai Chen shouted inwardly at the same time.

They had never expected Old Ge to play the role of 'troublemaker,' nor did they expect them to fall just a little short of the finish line.

Jiang Baimian exhaled and stopped sweeping things under the rug. She directly asked, "What is it?"

She felt that it was better to figure it out at this point in time so as to formulate a corresponding plan in advance.

Genava replied, "They were talking about how the Hunter's Guild issued a mission some time ago to search for a Subhuti figurine that a certain monk had lost in Gesterbourg. The bounty is 50 Grand Knight gold coins."

"That much?" Shang Jianyao didn't hide his surprise.

His focus had clear deviations as it concentrated on the bounty.

Chapter 835: Figurine

Fifty Grand Knight gold coins were enough for the Old Task Force to live in Gesterbourg for extended periods. They could pay the corresponding electricity bill, have good meals every day, and replenish the supplies they needed with plenty to spare.

One Grand Knight gold coin could be exchanged for 100 Knight silver coins, and one Knight silver coin could be exchanged for 100 Squire coins. An ordinary worker in Gesterbourg had no hope of saving up 50 Grand Knight gold coins, even if they survived to their fifties.

Jiang Baimian—who had just been wistful about the lack of money and supplies—couldn't help but be a little tempted. Therefore, she closed one eye when she saw Shang Jianyao ignore the Subhuti figurine and only cared about the bounty.

“That’s right.” Genova moved his metal neck up and down. “Besides, this mission isn’t only available in Gesterbourg—it’s available in many of the important White Knights settlements. The Ruin Hunters who were conversing on the streets came from elsewhere in pursuit of the handsome bounty.”

Jiang Baimian nodded in thought. “The table of people that mentioned Subhuti in the restaurant should also be here for the bounty. However, they seem more like outsiders.”

Bai Chen confirmed her team leader’s guess. “It’s very normal for missions that don’t involve the various large factions to appear in places like First City.”

Shang Jianyao eagerly asked, “Then, should we take it? By pulling it off, we don’t have to save up money to buy supplies. Furthermore, we can also deal with the Hunter’s Guild and gather information openly.”

Pulling it off... You make it sound like you’re carrying out a heist...?Long Yuehong muttered.

Jiang Baimian nodded slightly. “Sure.”

The next second, she smiled. “But we have to wait until all the high-performance batteries are charged.”

The electric load that the hotel room could undertake was undoubtedly limited. Once it was overloaded, it would trigger the circuit breaker. It was impossible for the Old Task Force to charge all the high-performance batteries in one go—they could only do at most three a time.

It took hours to charge one up.

“That will take another two days.” Shang Jianyao had a look that said: I’m worried sick for the team. “When the time comes, the Subhuti figurine might’ve already been found by others. This opportunity can’t be missed!”

The honest Genova quickly explained, “This mission has been released for almost two months. Nobody has found any useful clues so far.”

Jiang Baimian then said to Shang Jianyao, “See? It’s been a month or two, so it doesn’t matter if we spend another two to three days recharging.”

Upon seeing Shang Jianyao’s disappointment, she slowly exhaled and said, “However, we can visit the Hunter’s Guild tomorrow. We can first accept the mission and obtain the corresponding information. When we return, we can make good use of the two to three days to read through it and set a direction.”

“Team Leader...” Long Yuehong wasn’t agreeable. What happened to staying in the hotel peacefully and only going out at regular times for our meals? What happened to not causing trouble or accidents?

The Hunter’s Guild had always been a place of trouble and accidents!

Jiang Baimian smiled and said, “Gesterbourg has already become so lively, and the matter clearly involves Buddhism and Subhuti. It might be pointless for us to avoid matters in search of stability. It might instead cause more trouble in a more alarming manner. When the time comes, we won’t even have time to devise a plan.

“Yes, it’s not like we have to take the initiative to jump into the vortex now. We haven’t stocked up on electricity and supplies. I mean, under the premise that stability is most important, we should understand this matter appropriately and obtain the corresponding information to lay the foundation for our subsequent plans.”

“That’s true.” Bai Chen nodded slightly.

Long Yuehong no longer objected.

Shang Jianyao had long become excited and asked, “Shall we go now or tomorrow morning?”

The Hunter’s Guild didn’t close that early.

“Let’s do it tomorrow morning.” Jiang Baimian looked at the night sky and the lights outside. “We’ve been traveling for days. Get some rest tonight.”

There were many power plants in Gesterbourg, and most of the factories had already knocked off. Therefore, the entire settlement had plenty of electricity, and the price was relatively low. An ordinary family could also turn on an electric lamp to dispel the darkness and bring light.

This made the night scene in Gesterbourg not inferior to First City's Red Wolf Street and other places. At a glance, the lights were dazzling and dreamy like the galaxy flowing over the ground.

In a sense, Jiang Baimian felt that this might be a symbol of civilization. The only bad thing was that there was plenty of dust dancing in the area illuminated by the lights.

"Okay." Shang Jianyao indicated that he understood. He then asked, "Then, can I explore the rooms in the Mind Corridor tonight?"

"Get some rest," Jiang Baimian repeated.

Slightly disappointed, Shang Jianyao didn't object.

They then chatted for a while and watched some Old World entertainment. Following that, they entered their corresponding rooms, washed up, and slept, leaving Geneva alone in the living room.

The night passed uneventfully and peacefully. However, the sound of some factories operating in the distance intermittently sounded.

The next morning, Shang Jianyao woke up early, woke Jiang Baimian up, and knocked on Long Yuehong and Bai Chen's door, waking them up.

"Breakfast time! Breakfast time! We'll head to the Hunter's Guild after that," he urged.

"You have to give us time to wash our faces and brush our teeth!" Jiang Baimian replied angrily.

Just as she said that, the bell in the castle rang again.

Clang! Clang! Clang!

Gesterbourg instantly woke up from the foggy and gray weather. Different families switched on their lights, and the streets quickly became noisy.

After the Old Task Force washed up and prepared to leave, a large number of humans began to head to the factory area.

To Long Yuehong and the other Pangu Biology employees, such a scene exuded an indescribable sense of familiarity and intimacy.

In the underground building, the street lamps lit up at 6:30 every day, informing the employees that it was time to get up and go to work.

“What should I eat...” As Shang Jianyao muttered, the four Old Task Force members—excluding Geneva—went down to the hotel lobby.

The receptionist on duty was a woman. Her honey-colored hair was casually tied up, revealing her long neck. Her head bobbed up and down, making one worry that it would smash onto the table’s surface the next second.

If it weren’t for the fact that she was sitting, she would’ve already fallen because she couldn’t stand firmly.

Knock! Knock! Knock!

Shang Jianyao ran over before Jiang Baimian could stop him. He bent his finger and rapped the table’s surface.

The woman sat up straight and looked at the fellow in front of her with drowsy eyes.

“How many rooms do you want?” she blurted out a question.

This woman was in her twenties. At first glance, she looked rather beautiful. But on careful inspection, her skin was rough, and her facial features were relatively stiff.

Jiang Baimian suspected that she might not have drunk an A series genetic enhancement agent. It was all natural.

“I’m here to greet you. Good morning!” Shang Jianyao replied with a beaming smile. “Besides, more and more people are appearing on the streets. There will be guests coming to the hotel at any moment.”

The female receptionist’s lips quivered a few times, but she ultimately didn’t open them.

Shang Jianyao asked without realizing her reaction, “Did you not rest at night? You should be able to sleep on night duty.”

For the hotels he had stayed in, the receptionist could sleep in the corresponding duty room when there were no guests checking in at night. However, they had to be prepared to be woken up at all times and resolve matters like resetting the circuit breakers or fixing their flushing system.

“How?” the female receptionist replied weakly. “Three batches of guests came last night.”

“There were people checking in so late?” Shang Jianyao chatted.

The female receptionist sized him up. “Not everyone is as rich as you guys who don’t care about the difference in the cost of day and night train tickets.”

“Oh, oh.” Shang Jianyao had an ‘I completely understand’ expression.

At this moment, the male receptionist from yesterday entered the lobby and waved at his colleague. “Gitis, I’ll swap with you after using the bathroom.”

The female receptionist, Gitis, was a little surprised. “Spant, you’re actually so punctual today.”

Spant chuckled. “I’m not like you, who’s always late.”

The Old Task Force didn’t participate in their conversation. They left the lobby and found a café nearby for breakfast.

Perhaps it was because it was too far north, and the White Knights' exchange with the outside world was mainly to obtain food, firearms, and other supplies, but there was no coffee in the café. The reason it was still called a café was a habit left behind from the Old Era.

After breakfast made of oatmeal, toast, and other food, the Old Task Force came to the Hunter's Guild near the ancient castle. It was located in a grayish-black building that resembled a large bunker.

As soon as Jiang Baimian and the others entered, they noticed a message displayed on the large screen.

It was the mission to find the Subhuti figurine.

According to the introduction, the Subhuti figurine was lost three years ago. Back then, an ascetic monk brought it to Gesterbourg. In the end, he was found dead sitting beside a steel furnace in the factory area, and the Subhuti figurine was missing.

Long Yuehong suppressed his voice and muttered, "They only issued a search mission after losing it for three years?"

Isn't this too much of a delay?

Jiang Baimian nodded. "In the Ashlands, communication between two nearby settlements is often difficult, much less those very far away. Maybe the faction that the ascetic monk belongs to only recently figured out his whereabouts and learned that he died in Gesterbourg."

As she spoke, Jiang Baimian read the item's description.

The Subhuti figurine was 50 centimeters tall and made of pure wood. It was brown in color, and it had benevolent eyebrows and a bitter expression.

Chapter 836: Intelligence Peddler?

Long Yuehong read the mission description several times and whispered, "This mission seems difficult. Can we really get funds through it?"

The item had been lost three years ago, and not many people traveled in and out of Gesterbourg. The possibility that the clues were gone remained very real, and the probability wasn't low.

Ignoring that, it had been two months since the mission was issued. Ruin Hunters had yet to find any useful clues. They had only conducted a preliminary investigation and provided the Hunter's Guild with statements from corresponding personnels and some results from their field exploration.

Therefore, although the 50 Grand Knight gold coins were tempting, it was just a fantasy in itself. It could be seen but never touched.

The idea of using this opportunity to earn a sum was closer to having a life plan that involved making a killing by winning the lottery in Old World entertainment shows.

Jiang Baimian raised her eyebrows. "To others, this is indeed hopeless. But for us, we might just find ourselves bumping into clues when we head out later."

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

"Uh..." Long Yuehong didn't know if his team leader was teasing him.

Jiang Baimian relaxed her cheeks and smiled. "Alright, I'm joking."

Although she claimed to be joking, she actually couldn't rule out the possibility. After all, certain existences behind them occasionally showed themselves. If the matter regarding the Subhuti figurine was relatively important and involved the battle in the New World, it wasn't a bad development for the clues to take the initiative to throw themselves into the Old Task Force's arms.

Jiang Baimian then said to Long Yuehong, "As you can see, there's no need to really find the Subhuti figurine. You can also obtain a certain bounty by providing useful clues that are different from what's known. Besides, it's not like the guild only has one mission. Since we're here, let's search seriously and see if there's a high-bounty commission that's suitable for us."

"Yes, if it really doesn't work out, send a telegram to the company to ask if any outfield intelligence personnel are in Gesterbourg and if they can provide us with some funds for our activities."

On this trip, the Old Task Force still had to investigate the Kalendarium's rearing of humans. Unless necessary, they didn't want to contact the company.

"Yes, yes." Long Yuehong agreed and focused on the mission information displayed on the large screen.

These commissions involved temporary employment in the factories, the search for bodyguards, the acquisition of certain Icefield creatures' hide, the hiring of people to search for technical information on certain types of special steel in the surrounding city ruins, the need for large goods to be transported, and the recruiting of volunteers for biological experiments...

In addition to the local missions, the Hunter's Guild in Gesterbourg also had a specific commission from other large human settlements. This was mainly to pursue certain targets. For example, the Hunter's Guild's bounty for a Dark Hunter or the bounty from First City's Hand of Order for October Xue, Zhang Qubing, Gu Zhiyong, and Qian Bai.

Shang Jianyao said with emotion, "If it weren't for the fact that this place is very far from First City and that the bounty won't arrive for a long time, I really would've gone to First City to turn myself in. This way, we won't have any financial crises!"

Long Yuehong was shocked. He quickly looked around and realized that nobody was paying attention.

Of course, this was mainly because Shang Jianyao had lowered his voice.

Bai Chen retracted her gaze and changed the topic. "There aren't any missions we can take on for the time being. The ones that are suitable for us need us to begin today, and we have to wait until all the high-performance batteries are charged."

Jiang Baimian tersely acknowledged it. "Then, apply for information on the mission regarding the Subhuti figurine. We'll study it when we return."

The corresponding information included two parts. The first was the information provided by the mission client, and the second was the various statements and survey results obtained by the Ruin Hunters.

“That’s all we can do.” Long Yuehong expressed his opinion before Shang Jianyao could. He didn’t want to stay in the Hunter’s Guild for long.

Although Shang Jianyao was a little disappointed, the minority had to follow the majority.

After receiving the paper information and paying the printing fee, the four Old Task Force members left the Gesterbourg Hunter’s Guild and returned to the Fire & Iron Hotel by the same route.

There weren’t many pedestrians as it was during working hours. Ruin Hunters were the majority, and from time to time, a team of White Knights soldiers with alloy armor and bulletproof helmets, submachine guns, and assault rifles patrolled the area.

These soldiers were also divided into ranks. The most eye-catching team was all riding tall horses, making them stand out.

Shang Jianyao’s eyes were filled with envy.

Nothing happened along the way. Long Yuehong walked into the hotel lobby first.

The man at the front desk named Spant looked up at them and casually said, “You’re back so soon?”

Shang Jianyao took a stride forward and asked in ‘surprise,’ “You know where we went?”

The blond, blue-eyed Spant shrugged. “Isn’t it the Hunter’s Guild?”

“You tailed us?” Shang Jianyao showed a plethora of emotions—‘anxious’ and ‘angry.’

Spant curled the corners of his mouth and explained, “There’s no need to tail you guys. Isn’t it obvious? You guys have a robot, so it’s obvious that you aren’t weak. You clearly aren’t here as workers. It’s not summer yet, so it’s not suitable for you to go to Icefield. Apart from going to the Hunter’s Guild to find something to do, people like you can only head south to explore the city ruins. Heh heh, you’ve only been here for a day. You probably don’t know the surrounding area well.”

In other words, there was only one possibility left—going to the Hunter’s Guild.

Clap! Clap! Clap!?

Shang Jianyao applauded Spant. He didn’t retort and praised with a smile, “Your logic is pretty good.”

“That’s why I’m still hesitating about strengthening my brain.” Spant revealed a troubled expression again. “It’s above standard to begin with. The improvement gained from basic drugs is limited.”

Shang Jianyao skipped the topic and asked, “Didn’t you say that you were going to the Hunter’s Guild to take on a mission last night? Did you find one?”

Spant hesitated for a moment and nodded. “Yes.”

He paused and said, “You didn’t find a mission, so you returned so quickly?”

“There are no suitable missions,” Shang Jianyao emphasized.

Spant nodded and didn’t ask any further. He began busying himself with his work.

Upon seeing that he had no intention of discussing missions any further, Jiang Baimian smiled and changed the topic. “Who else can I find here other than the Hunter’s Guild if I want to obtain information?”

Although the waiter at Old Henley had already mentioned one, the Old Task Force definitely didn’t want to rely on only one source.

Spant was stunned for a moment before he laughed.

“Haha!” Shang Jianyao laughed as well.

“W-why are you laughing?” Spant was confused.

Shang Jianyao explained seriously, “You’re already laughing. If I don’t laugh, won’t I appear rude?”

Spant clearly choked. After a few seconds, he said, “I’m laughing because the person you’re looking for is my colleague, Gitis.”

“Gitis?” The honey-colored hair, grayish-blue eyes, and dozing female receptionist surfaced in Long Yuehong’s mind.

Apart from her relatively stiff facial features, it was impossible to tell that she was an intelligence peddler.

Spant muttered, “Actually, I don’t believe it either, but I’ve already bought several pieces of valuable information from her. Although she’s usually distracted, likes to be late, unfocused, and likes to be in a daze as if she lives in her own world, she seems to have many secret intelligence channels and knows many things that nobody knows.”

“Unbelievable!” Shang Jianyao exaggeratedly expressed his feelings.

“I couldn’t tell.” Jiang Baimian was also a little surprised.

In particular, Spant had added a bunch of adjectives describing her as being in a daze and unfocused often.

Spant shrugged. “But the truth is before us. I can only tell myself that she likes to be late because she’s busy gathering intelligence. She likes to be in a daze and unfocused because she needs to think and analyze.”

Long Yuehong couldn’t help but ask, “Then, why is she working here as a part-time receptionist?”

Spant said, “I’ve asked, but she didn’t answer.”

Jiang Baimian nodded. “We’ll find her when we need her.”

After bidding Spant farewell and returning to the room, the four carbon-based Old Task Force members and Genava studied the information regarding the Subhuti figurine mission.

Just as Jiang Baimian had previously said, there wasn't much valuable information. First, it had been three years. Countless people had left Gesterbourg and taken away useful clues. Second, the monk who had passed away was an ascetic monk. He didn't live in a hotel or enter a restaurant when he came to Gesterbourg. He didn't have much contact with the residents here. If it weren't for the fact that he had to make alms for a living, nobody might have an impression of such a monk.

The only valuable information was that the monk died from an illness.

Knock! Knock! Knock!

As the Old Task Force flipped through the information, someone knocked on their door.

Jiang Baimian and Shang Jianyao had sensed it in advance, but they didn't expect the person to be coming for them.

Genava stood up and opened the door, only to see Spant outside.

"What's the matter?" Jiang Baimian walked over and was slightly surprised.

Spant glanced at Genava and smiled. "Here's the thing: I took on a mission that pays well last night, and it's impossible to complete it alone. I originally had companions, but something happened to them, so they can't help me.

"I think you guys are pretty strong. Do you want to join forces? Don't worry; you can register at the guild and request them to supervise the allocation of the bounty. Oh, you have Official Hunter badges, right? You guys need to verify them when the time comes."

Chapter 837: Invitation

Upon hearing Spant ask if they had Official Hunter badges, Shang Jianyao—who had also come to the door—revealed a troubled expression. "We do, but..."

Spant didn't sense the meaning behind his words and immediately interrupted, "That would do."

Jiang Baimian thought for a moment and signaled for Genava to make way. She then said to Spant, "Let's talk inside."

Spant looked around and saw that there wasn't any commotion from the residents on the same floor. With a quick step, he entered the Old Task Force's suite.

He smiled and praised, "You guys are indeed experienced and careful."

"Those who haven't died after being Ruin Hunters for several years have such vigilance." Jiang Baimian casually patronized him. "What kind of mission is it, and how much is the payment? There's no need to go into detail; we just need you to give us a general summary. We can't agree to your proposal without knowing anything, right? Can you be at ease if we really agreed that easily?"

Those who didn't have a certain level of understanding of the mission and chose to participate were either out of their minds and couldn't care less or weren't concerned about the mission but the client and the other Ruin Hunters.

Spant nodded. "I understand. This mission is actually relatively simple, but there are certain risks. We need to go somewhere in the nearby mountains and cooperate with the client's subordinates to escort a batch of supplies back. On the way, we might encounter bandits or people hired by their competitors. We can't rule out the possibility of a battle.

"As for the payment, it's a total of three Grand Knight gold coins. Although I'm alone and you have four people, this is my next mission. I also have to be in charge of contacting the client and dealing with his subordinates. Therefore, it won't be a problem for me to take one and you guys to take two, right?"

Three Grand Knight gold coins for five people? They also have subordinates? The batch of supplies that needed to be escorted isn't cheap... Yes, there's a high chance of contraband items if they aren't using the White Knights' official channels despite being worried that their competitors will get people to rob them in the wilderness.

"A very reasonable plan.

"Heh heh, the payment is indeed quite generous. But if this mission takes days, it won't be that attractive."

The Old Task Force's initial plan was to stay in Gesterbourg for two weeks to investigate the Eighth Research Institute and Shang Jianyao's father's team. Once they exceeded two weeks and didn't

gain anything, it was impossible for them to continue indefinitely. They would choose to leave and head to Ceningmis to carry out a new round of exploration.

When the time came, they might be able to discover some clues in Ceningmis, resulting in the expediting of the investigation in Gesterbourg.

At present, the Old Task Force needed to eat, drink, and pay for their accommodation and electricity every day. If they were frugal, it would cost them ten Knight silver coins. The payment from such a mission was enough for them to stay on for two weeks with some change to spare.

After discovering some clues regarding the mission regarding the Subhuti figurine and obtaining a certain bounty, Jiang Baimian and the others didn't have to worry about not having enough money to stock up on supplies.

The only problem was that if this mission required them to leave Gesterbourg for a few days, it would mess up their plans, and the cost-benefit ratio would be lowered.

"It will only take four to five hours to go back and forth." Spant didn't mention that cars were needed. As the hotel's receptionist, he knew that the four guests had driven a jeep to Gesterbourg instead of taking the train.

Besides, he could rent a car if he really didn't have one.

"If we hurry, we might even make it back in time for lunch." Shang Jianyao expressed his relief.

He then criticized himself. "That's not right. Doesn't this mean that it saves the client our meal allowance? Lunch is included, right?"

"Yes." Spant had seen many calculative Ruin Hunters, so he wasn't surprised. He added smugly, "I helped everyone get it! We can only fight after we have our fill to deal with any accidents."

Jiang Baimian nodded slightly. "This mission does sound good."

"There's a robot in your team, so this mission won't be difficult at all," Spant interrupted, attempting to secure the participation of these Ruin Hunters.

Jiang Baimian smiled at him and changed the topic. “But we still have other matters to attend to. We might have to wait until the day after tomorrow. Does that work out?”

Spant clearly heaved a sigh of relief when he heard that. “No problem. The employer’s request is to recruit enough manpower in three days. Shall we register at the guild now?”

“You’re still at work,” Shang Jianyao reminded sincerely.

Spant blinked. “In the evening then.”

Jiang Baimian agreed and sent the Ruin Hunter—who was also a part-time hotel receptionist—away.

Long Yuehong looked at the tightly shut door and said, “Our Hunter Badges have our records. Isn’t it inappropriate to have them registered?”

A record with a high bounty.

When the time came, the Hunter’s Guild staff and Spant might be terrified.

A team with a bounty of tens of thousands of Oray could easily make others tremble even if they didn’t say or do anything.”Search our n?wno?el.?rg” It was easy for words like ‘extremely fierce, murderous, and capricious’ to automatically surface in their minds.

Shang Jianyao replied righteously, “What does it matter? This is the White Knights, not First City.”

“I’m worried that our identities will be exposed and attract the attention of the White Knights and the lurking Eighth Research Institute.” Long Yuehong didn’t mention that perhaps many Ruin Hunters, driven by greed, would attack them.

This was because the Old Task Force was most likely a windfall for them.

Clap! Clap! Clap!Shang Jianyao clapped—

He praised Long Yuehong, “You’ve considered everything very thoroughly this time.”

He spoke as if he were the team leader.

Jiang Baimian thought for a moment before saying, “Register a new Hunter identity with our current looks. Then, get Old Ge to hack into the local guild’s system, modify our clearance, and upgrade us to Official Hunters so that we can take on subsequent missions.”

“No problem.” Genava mimicked Shang Jianyao and thumped his chest.

After settling this matter, the Old Task Force members sat down again and looked at the mission information regarding the Subhuti figurine.

After the exchange was over, Bai Chen pursed her lips and said, “There are no valuable clues.”

“There’s still something.” Jiang Baimian smiled. “For example, the people who came into contact with the ascetic monk say that he didn’t look too well and that his physical condition was poor. This matches the outcome of him dying while sitting.”

“Hmm…” Jiang Baimian pondered for a moment and said, “Everyone, let’s just do an open discussion and see if we can trigger some inspiration.”

Shang Jianyao was the first to speak. He said with a serious expression, “Dying from the illness might be real, but it can also be disguised.”

Long Yuehong cited the information. “The corpse has already been cremated. The Gesterbourg sheriff’s assistant and the coroner—who were in charge of this matter—were found by many Ruin Hunters. They have always indicated that the deceased didn’t have any external injuries, was poisoned, or have any traces of him being murdered.”

Bai Chen tersely acknowledged it. “Although there might be one or two Awakened among so many Ruin Hunters and the corresponding words should be true, we still need to verify them personally.”

“I mean...” Shang Jianyao quickly corrected himself. “The ascetic monk did die from a disease, but this disease was caused by an Awakened’s ability that leaves no traces.”

At this moment, a word surfaced in Long Yuehong’s mind: Cardiac Arrest.

Jiang Baimian nodded slightly. “Regardless of the situation, from the information, the ascetic monk was sick for a while. Could he sense that he wasn’t far from death?”

“It’s hard to say,” Shang Jianyao retorted. “Why would a person not far from death go to the factory in the middle of the night?”

The information indicated that the investigation found no signs of dragging at the scene or any other footprints.

Long Yuehong tried to guess. “Maybe he made an appointment there, and that person didn’t show up?”

“That’s a possibility, but nobody knows why the deceased went there or who he was meeting. Three years have passed, and there are no clues in the information.” As Shang Jianyao spoke, he chanted a Buddhist proclamation. “Namo Annutara-Samyak-Subhuti. Another possibility is that the monk—who knew that he was about to die—took the initiative to pay respects to the steel-refining furnace in the factory area. Before he passed away, he passed on in front of a symbol of Tathagata.”

“Very reasonable.” Geneva felt that he had been convinced.

Jiang Baimian thought for a moment before saying, “Let’s first assume that this possibility is true. How will a monk—who is about to die of illness—deal with the Buddhist treasure on him?”

As a folklore scholar, she called the Subhuti figurine a Buddhist treasure to show its importance.

“If it were me,” Long Yuehong enthusiastically said, “Without any companions, I would hide the Subhuti figurine somewhere in advance and send a telegram to headquarters to inform them of this matter so that they can retrieve it in time. Yes, it was still lost eventually.”

Genava moved his metal neck from side to side. “If that’s the case, the information provided by the employer definitely would’ve included that hidden location. This is a very important clue that can be used to carry out a more effective and targeted investigation.”

There was nothing about that in the information.

“Then, I don’t understand...” Long Yuehong muttered.

At this moment, Shang Jianyao smiled sinisterly. “Maybe the client isn’t the monk’s peers.”

Jiang Baimian nodded slightly. “Also, why did the ascetic monk come to Gesterbourg, which has a harsh climate, near Icefield when he’s in poor health and has a Buddhist treasure? Did he want to expedite his death and lose the Subhuti figurine as quickly as possible?”

Chapter 838: Clues

Bai Chen glanced at Genava and didn’t give him a chance to run an exhaustive search. She tried speculating. “Maybe the headquarters of the ascetic monk’s faction is somewhere in Icefield. It’s closest and safest to return via Gesterbourg. Who knew that his condition would worsen after his arrival, leaving him stranded?”

Jiang Baimian’s eyes flickered slightly. “There are two problems. The first is that the ascetic monk arrived in Gesterbourg in March and died in April. It’s easy for ordinary people to freeze to death in Icefield during that season, much less him—who wasn’t in good health. If their headquarters really are in Icefield, I believe he wouldn’t be stingy in sending a telegram to headquarters. To protect the Subhuti figurine in his possession, the higher-ups will then send a convoy to pick him up after arriving at Gesterbourg. However, such a thing didn’t happen after nearly a month.”

“Maybe the person he met at the steel-refining furnace in the factory area was sent by his headquarters, but...” Shang Jianyao muttered softly.

In the end, it was a vile attempt at his life that detonated his condition from afar.

The honest Genava disagreed with Shang Jianyao this time. “There shouldn’t be a need to go to a factory in the middle of the night to meet a companion. The ascetic monk didn’t hide his solicitations in Gesterbourg.”

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

Jiang Baimian didn’t harp on this and continued, “The second problem can be inferred from the information. Although the ascetic monk didn’t seem to be in good health when he first came to Gesterbourg, it didn’t make one associate him with death. In other words, his condition hadn’t deteriorated early on, and he still had the ability to travel far. Then, what was he waiting for by staying in Gesterbourg?”

“Waiting for someone from headquarters to pick him up!” Shang Jianyao replied very bluntly.

“It’s also possible that he’s waiting for summer,” Bai Chen said thoughtfully.

“Yes!” Long Yuehong came to a realization. “He was waiting for summer. Icefield’s climate will become mild, and he will then go somewhere in Icefield.”

Why didn’t he use Gesterbourg as a conduit to head to the settlements of other factions? Could it be because there was a better route here, that he didn’t have to undergo the test of the harsh weather, and that there was more than one route?

It was most likely the cold and terrible air in Gesterbourg’s spring that worsened the ascetic monk’s condition.

Jiang Baimian nodded indiscernibly. “The closest thing to Gesterbourg worth paying attention to is Ceningmis.”

Although this was only a bold guess, Long Yuehong and the others still felt their hearts palpitate.

In that case, Ceningmis might be the source of many problems and matters.

“Also, there are Eighth Research Institute personnel hiding in Gesterbourg to”Search our n?wn0? el.?rg” gather supplies. The Eighth Research Institute’s headquarters is confirmed to be somewhere in Icefield.” Jiang Baimian added, raising another possibility.

The red light in Genava’s eyes flickered. “There’s another possibility. The ascetic monk originally arranged to meet someone in Gesterbourg. That’s why he came to this place despite the harsh climate and stayed here for a period of time until his condition worsened.”

Shang Jianyao immediately smiled. “Then, why did that person or faction make an appointment at Gesterbourg?”

Nobody answered him, but a term flashed across everyone’s minds—including the main module: Eighth Research Institute.

Shang Jianyao ignored the brief silence and excitedly fabricated a story. “Maybe the faction that the ascetic monk belongs to was destroyed by someone because of the Subhuti figurine. He brought the Buddhist treasure and dragged his sick body all the way to Gesterbourg to seek the protection of someone or a certain faction, but he failed.

“It’s also possible that he betrayed his faction, stole the Subhuti figurine, and tried to head somewhere to complete a certain matter. In the end, he was stopped by the weather in Gesterbourg. His condition worsened day by day, and he ultimately couldn’t hold out...

“This can explain why the person who issued the mission only knew after three years that he died in Gesterbourg and that the Subhuti figurine was lost.”

Clap! Clap! Clap! Without waiting for a response, Shang Jianyao clapped and cheered for himself.

Clang! Clang! Clang! Genava was very polite.

Jiang Baimian slowly exhaled. “Have you watched too much Old World entertainment... What you said is more reasonable and less out there in a wuxia or xianxia world.”

But I think Hey is right. There’s a certain possibility... Long Yuehong only muttered inwardly but didn’t say it out loud.

Jiang Baimian changed the topic. “However, these two situations are nothing but hypotheses. There might be some traces that can be verified.”

“How?” Bai Chen asked in surprise.

Jiang Baimian smiled. “Since the client knows how to issue a mission in the Hunter’s Guild and drive Ruin Hunters to Gesterbourg to search for the Subhuti figurine, will he or they issue a mission to find traces of the ascetic monk through the Hunter’s Guild? Two to three years passed, and they finally confirmed that the target had died in Gesterbourg.”

Bai Chen nodded slightly. “Go to the Hunter’s Guild to flip through the mission records for the past three years? These are all confidential information...”

She didn’t continue because she recalled that her team had already planned on sending Genova to hack into the local guild’s system and modify their new identities’ Hunter levels. In that case, it only required consuming a little more electricity to check the past mission records.

Furthermore, with Genova’s search abilities, he could crush the four carbon-based Old Task Force members combined. He only needed a few seconds to complete the filtering or scanning—perhaps even less than a few seconds.

After another round of discussion, the Old Task Force had a preliminary plan for investigating the Subhuti figurine. The first was to visit a key witness and examine the corresponding evidence to determine if the ascetic monk had really died from a disease due to an Awakened’s ability.

The second was to ‘check’ the Hunter’s Guild’s past mission records. Since they could determine that the ascetic monk had died in Gesterbourg, the corresponding search warrant should’ve been available at the local guild. Furthermore, it had been issued not long ago, perhaps less than half a year ago. Otherwise, the person who issued the Subhuti figurine mission would’ve long locked onto the ascetic monk’s whereabouts.

The third was to learn about any abnormalities in the past three years through the intelligence peddlers and the random selection of numerous Gesterbourg residents. The Old Task Force believed that the Subhuti figurine was likely a little magical considering how important it was. If it fell into the hands of people who didn’t know it well, it might bring about a disaster or a strange phenomenon.

The fourth was to visit everyone who had come into contact with the ascetic monk according to the intelligence. The focus was to figure out if the monk had asked about Ceningmis or any place in Icefield. This would take a lot of time, and Jiang Baimian planned on doing it last.

After the Old Task Force was done with this matter, the sun had already reached the middle of the sky. However, it appeared listless under the yellowish air.

Under Shang Jianyao's urging, Jiang Baimian and the others left the hotel to search for food.

Considering that they were bringing Old Ge to the Hunter's Guild later and how the Old Task Force was familiar with the area nearby, they chose Old Henley again to prevent any accidents from happening while randomly heading to unfamiliar places.

Upon seeing them, the brown-haired waiter from yesterday evening took the initiative to entertain them and led them to a remote spot to sit down.

After taking down their order, he suppressed his voice and said, "You should've been to the Hunter's Guild. Do you still want to ask the friend I know for information?"

"That's our wish." Jiang Baimian nodded.

After confirming that some of the high-performance batteries had been charged, she gained some confidence. Of course, she planned on meeting the intelligence peddler tomorrow or the day after tomorrow.

That would be safer.

"Where's your friend? What's his name?" Shang Jianyao took the initiative to ask.

The brown-haired waiter didn't say a word and only smiled at them.

Bai Chen took out a Knight silver coin she had on her and handed it to him.

The brown-haired waiter reached out to take it, and his smile turned warm. "Her name is Gitis. She works at the Fire & Iron Hotel."

Shang Jianyao immediately revealed a pained expression.

The Knight silver coin was wasted! This was an intelligence peddler they knew!

“She’s on break today. She should come over for lunch later,” said the brown-haired waiter further. “I’ll introduce you to her.”

Gitis is really well-informed and has the reputation matching it... I really couldn’t tell...?As Jiang Baimian sighed inwardly, the female receptionist appeared at Old Henley’s entrance.

She wore a linen shirt, pants of the same color, and dark black boots. She also wore a dark leather coat. Her honey-colored hair was still casually tied up, and her grayish-blue eyes were large and listless.

As soon as she entered, she acted as if she were sleepwalking. She almost bumped into tables and chairs several times.

She looks terrible... The price of being an Awakened??Jiang Baimian’s first thought when she encountered such matters was the price of being an Awakened.

The more abnormal it was, the more likely it was to involve Awakened!

“Gitis, someone’s looking for you.” The brown-haired waiter smiled and greeted her.

Gitis looked up and glanced over before slowly walking over.

“What do you want to know?” she asked warily.

Shang Jianyao blurted out in surprise, “You don’t recognize us anymore?”

He looked aggrieved and disappointed.

Gitis thought for a moment and finally recalled. “Are you guests at the hotel?”

She didn’t seem to have much of an impression of what had happened this morning.

“Yes.” Jiang Baimian said to the brown-haired waiter, “Bring a chair over for Madam Gitis.”

After Gitis sat down and the waiter left, Shang Jianyao took out his father's photo and handed it to the intelligence peddler. "Do you know this person? He might've been to Gesterbourg 12 years ago."

Shang Jianyao's actions were as swift as lightning as if he had rehearsed it many times. Jiang Baimian couldn't stop him at all.

As Gitis took the photo, she muttered, "Twelve years ago, I was only 14..."

Suddenly, she paused, and her tone changed. "This Ashlandic..."

Chapter 839: Feedback

"You've seen him?" Shang Jianyao became excited.

Jiang Baimian, Long Yuehong, and Bai Chen were also delighted.

Gitis glanced at them and said, "We rarely see Ashlandics here. Occasionally, a small team of three to four people will come, and they will be in several cars with more than ten people. Therefore, although I was relatively young back then, it left a deep impression on me."

"Yes, yes, yes. Their team is quite large!" Shang Jianyao quickly replied.

Jiang Baimian frowned and deliberated over her words. "In the eyes of us Red River people, don't Ashlandics all look the same? Why do you remember the person in the photo?"

Gitis opened her mouth and replied after a few seconds, "This might be my talent. Otherwise, I wouldn't be an intelligence peddler. Even if it's someone I chanced upon on the street, I can still recall their looks."

The honest Shang Jianyao immediately pointed out, "You almost didn't recognize us just now. We even chatted this morning!"

Gitis's tone turned cold. "Didn't I recognize you when I tried recalling?"

This person does give off a strange feeling...? Jiang Baimian muttered inwardly.

Before Shang Jianyao could speak, she asked Gitis, “Do you know why the person in the photo and his team came to Gesterbourg?”

Gitis fell silent for a moment. “I’m not sure, but I can help you ask around. I know who to find.”

“Alright!” Shang Jianyao agreed without asking.

“This might take a lot of time to do the visits. I don’t want my efforts to be in vain.” Gitis’s expression dazed for a moment before she slowly emphasized.

“A deposit?” Bai Chen was familiar with this.

Gitis nodded. “Five Knight silver coins. If I don’t get the corresponding information, I’ll return four to you and throw in some additional information.”

“Very fair.” Jiang Baimian smiled and said, “But we still want to know two more things.”

Gitis didn’t say a word and only signaled with her eyes for her to continue. Her grayish-blue eyes weren’t that listless when communicating.

“You know Smith’s Rootless team, right?” Jiang Baimian asked.

“Yes. They just came to me last week, hoping that I could help them gather information on something.” Gitis’s voice suddenly sounded a little deep.

This formed a certain disparity from her words.

Jiang Baimian tersely acknowledged it. “We want to know who provided the goods that Smith’s Rootless team previously transported. Uh, about ten days ago.”

“Alright.” Gitis accepted the commission.

Jiang Baimian continued, “We also hope to know all kinds of information regarding the mission on the Subhuti figurine. Yes, this includes rumors—as long as the Hunter’s Guild isn’t aware of them.”

“There have been too many Ruin Hunters asking about this recently, allowing me to earn quite a lot from the intelligence.” Gitis revealed a rare smile.

She looked better smiling.

“Three things—that will be all,” Jiang Baimian concluded.

Gitis nodded slightly. “The deposit is still five Knight silver coins. I’ll be working at the hotel in the morning and afternoon tomorrow. When the time comes, come to me. I’ll give you some preliminary feedback to let you know that your money isn’t wasted.”

“Why not go through the Hunter’s Guild?” Bai Chen interrupted and asked.

There was a Hunter’s Guild to review missions and provide guarantees to determine if the corresponding information was valuable and could effectively promote the trust between both parties.

Gitis appeared to fall into a trance again as she said solemnly, “I don’t want the intelligence I provide to be grasped by the Hunter’s Guild.”

Her appearance and bearing instantly became serious, completely different from usual.

“No problem.” Jiang Baimian glanced at the anxious Shang Jianyao and smiled as she took out five Knight silver coins and handed them to Gitis. “Please reading on NEWN0V?L.0?G””You’re a local, so we aren’t worried that you will renege on your debt.”

Her smile was filled with the meaning: you can run, but you can’t hide.

As for whether Gitis understood the underlying meaning, she didn’t know.

After accepting the five Knight silver coins, her eyes lost their luster again. Gitis nodded and said, “If there’s nothing else, I’ll be leaving.”

“Alright.” Jiang Baimian didn’t give Shang Jianyao a chance to appear forthright and generous.

After paying the deposit, the Old Task Force had to be frugal to last until the mission the day after tomorrow.

After Gitis found a seat in a corner and sat down, she familiarly ordered a set meal.

The brown-haired waiter from before came to the Old Task Force’s table with the bread.

“Is she really a local?” Jiang Baimian asked in confirmation.

As the brown-haired waiter put down the small basket containing the bread, he nodded and said, “Yes, she and I used to live on the same street. She used to be a very energetic, ambitious, and loving lady who wanted to become a knight. But as you know, women are greatly discriminated against in this matter. Her parents were only ordinary workers. A few years ago, one fell sick, and the other got injured. Unable to work, they could only rest at home.

“This is also one of the reasons why Gitis became an intelligence peddler. Furthermore, she also works as a hotel receptionist. From then on, she never mentioned her dream of becoming a knight. She changed completely and often zones out. She became careless and likes to daydream.”

Long Yuehong wanted to say something, but he could only sigh. “Sigh...”

At this moment, the honest Shang Jianyao looked at the brown-haired waiter and asked, “Do you like her?”

The brown-haired waiter immediately panicked. “No, no.”

As he spoke, he moved away the additional chair.

After lunch, the Old Task Force got Geneva to come out and meet at the hotel’s entrance. They then headed to the Hunter’s Guild near the castle.

After Jiang Baimian and the others registered as Hunters with their current Red River looks and newly fabricated aliases, Geneva—who had finished observing the environment—asked Shang Jianyao for help and occupied a machine in the lobby meant for Ruin Hunters to check and accept commissions.

With Shang Jianyao's body as cover, he tried to hack into the local Hunter's Guild's system.

Although the Gesterbourg Hunter's Guild's system structure, programming, and machine purchases didn't directly come from Mechanical Paradise like in Weed City, they more or less shared the same blueprint. Therefore, Geneva's hacking made him feel like he was back home.

Before long, he added a few simple and ordinary missions to Jiang Baimian and the others, allowing them to obtain the corresponding credit points and become Official Hunters. Geneva then wrote the additional missions into the database and took the opportunity to filter and check through the missions that had been issued in the past two years.

It only took the time for Shang Jianyao to yawn and browse through the machine's interface before Geneva retracted his palm and straightened his finger.

After leaving the Hunter's Guild and arriving at an empty spot nearby, the red glow in Geneva's eyes flickered a few times. "There's indeed the search mission we deduced—its content is to find the whereabouts of a monk. From the description, this is identical to the ascetic monk in the Subhuti figurine mission.

"This mission reached Gesterbourg's Hunter's Guild half a year ago, but it had been issued for nearly three years. The timing matches."

Clap! Clap! Clap!

Shang Jianyao applauded himself. "It's as I guessed!"

Although he had guessed two situations, it was essentially the idea that the ascetic monk was being pursued. His goal in coming here might be to bring the Subhuti figurine somewhere in Icefield at the end of his life or to make contact with some faction in Gesterbourg to seek protection.

“We can’t be completely sure yet. We have to eliminate the possibility of him being murdered,” Jiang Baimian reminded calmly. “If the ascetic didn’t expect himself to die so quickly, it’s normal for him not to have the time to send a telegram to headquarters and inform them of the situation.”

She continued, “This is the next step of the investigation.”

In the evening, the Old Task Force and Spant—who had finished a day’s work—came to the Hunter’s Guild and registered to take on the corresponding commission.

“You guys are only Official Hunters?” Spant was a little surprised. “I thought you would be highly experienced.”

They looked experienced and had decent strength.

“The point isn’t experience but strength.” Jiang Baimian smiled and pointed at Geneva.

This matter came to an end. The Old Task Force would meet up with Spant the day after tomorrow to complete the supply escort mission.

...

The next morning, Jiang Baimian glanced at Shang Jianyao and didn’t say a word.

This fellow tossed and turned the entire night and didn’t sleep well. He woke up early in the morning.

Jiang Baimian—who knew the reason—didn’t bring it up. She only led the team down to the first floor after Gitis completed the handover and began work.

“Any results?” Shang Jianyao asked eagerly.

Her image and mental state were the same as yesterday.

She spent some time recalling and nodded. “Some progress. I roughly got to know what the Ashlandic team asked around 12 years ago.”

Chapter 840: Five People

“What is it?” Shang Jianyao asked impatiently.

A smile gradually bloomed on Gitis’s face, and her eyes lit up. She then said unhurriedly, “About Ceningmis—this will count under the remaining deposit. There’s no need to pay additional fees.”

Although she tried to show her generosity, Long Yuehong and Bai Chen still felt like they had suffered a ‘loss.’

They had previously known that the Old Task Force—which Shang Jianyao’s father was a part of—had indeed been to Gesterbourg, so there was a high chance that it had been to inquire about Ceningmis. Now, they had only obtained confirmation.

Of course, it was always a good thing to get confirmation.

“What aspects were involved?” Shang Jianyao asked.

Jiang Baimian couldn’t ask before he did.

Gitis picked up a piece of paper on the table and a fountain pen beside her. She then said seriously, “I asked many people, and most of them have the same knowledge about Ceningmis as me. Any local over the age of 30 on these streets can provide the same information. The Ashlandic team back then didn’t obtain much from them either. I don’t think you will be interested in this.”

“No.” Jiang Baimian shook her head slightly. “I still want to know what questions the Ashlandic team inquired.”

This allowed them to infer certain matters.

Gitis nodded. “They mainly asked them what they knew about Ceningmis. Their focus was whether residents from there who came to Gesterbourg had mentioned anything abnormal. Clearly, the Ashlandic team didn’t receive a satisfactory answer.

“This will count under the remaining deposit. There’s no need to pay additional fees.”

That’s more like it... Long Yuehong finally felt that the deposit was worth it.

Gitis smiled mysteriously again. “However, there were five people. I think they should know more about Ceningmis. All kinds of signs prove this, but they only gave me standard answers. The answers weren’t much different from the others I inquired.”

“Which five?” Shang Jianyao asked again.

“This requires additional payment.” Gitis maintained her expression. “Two Knight silver coins for one name, and ten coins for five.”

Ten? Jiang Baimian felt a headache coming on.

The Old Task Force only had six Knight silver coins in total. They could barely afford their meals today, and their accommodation and electricity bills were paid once every few days as long as it didn’t exceed the deposit.

“We only have a mission tomorrow, one that we can receive a bounty,” Shang Jianyao suggested enthusiastically. “Do you accept mortgages?”

“You need to make a mortgage for ten Knight silver coins?” It seemed like it had been a long time since Gitis met such a person. “What do you plan on mortgaging?”

In a flash, Jiang Baimian suspected that Shang Jianyao would answer ‘nuclear bomb.’ She quickly replied, “One United 202.”

She then removed the United 202 from her belt.

Apart from these relatively ordinary firearms, the Old Task Force really couldn’t find an item that was suitable for mortgaging without scaring others.

If they were really pushed into a corner, they could only use Old Ge as collateral.

Gitis took the pistol and checked it. “On the black market, a good United 202 can be sold for 25 to 30 Knight silver coins. There’s no problem using it as collateral.”

The White Knights had a sizable firearms shortage, and the price of weapons was higher than in places like United Industries.

When the Old Task Force walked along the streets of Gesterbourg, the most common weapons seen on ordinary people were shotguns and modified hunting rifles.

“Deal!” Shang Jianyao smiled.

Gitis wrote words on a piece of scrap paper with a fountain pen and handed it to Jiang Baimian.

Although Shang Jianyao was mainly the one negotiating the matter, the intelligence peddler seemed to acutely sense who was in charge.

Shang Jianyao moved his head close to Jiang Baimian’s shoulder and looked at the drying ink on the piece of paper.

“1. Vice-Commander of the local knight order, assistant of Grand Knight Havel, Chevalier Eman.

“2. The local Hunter’s Guild’s president, Frances.

“3. Director Aester of the local United Mining Association.

“4. The other intelligence peddler, Mor.

“5. Farstriders’ caravan leader, Smith.”

As the Old Task Force examined the piece of paper, Gitis said in a tone like she was reciting from a book, “Eman’s father was the former feudal lord of Gesterbourg, a Grand Knight. He died seven years ago. It’s confirmed that the Ashlandic team had visited Eman’s father, and he was also

present. As the son of Gesterbourg's former ruler and one of Ceningmis's trade leaders, I believe he knows a lot.

"Frances has been the president of the local Hunter's Guild for almost 30 years. As the current Chief Hunter, he definitely knows a lot. There is reason to believe that the Ashlandic team visited him back then.

"Before Ceningmis was destroyed by the disaster, it had rather close trading ties with Gesterbourg. Aester even established a branch company over there and spent half a year there every year. Fortunately, the disaster happened during the other half of the time.

"Mor is my competitor; he's already old and barely earns some pension with his original connections. But 12 years ago, he was still an energetic middle-aged man who knew many things he shouldn't have known.

"Smith is the leader of the Rootless team you know. His caravan is called Farstriders, and he's the main broker in all our transactions with Ceningmis. He has been to Ceningmis more often than anyone in the area."

"We actually didn't ask Smith about this back then!" Shang Jianyao sighed with regret.

That was his brother. Whether that relationship was maintained or not depended on the situation.

The reason the Old Task Force didn't ask back then was that they had yet to associate Shang Jianyao's father's Old Task Force with Gesterbourg.

Gitis fell into a daze for a few seconds before saying, "You can visit these five people and ask them about the corresponding matters or get my help. However, I have to find sufficient chips to pry open their mouths. Therefore, the price won't be low. Each person will cost one Grand Knight gold coin."

Just one Grand Knight gold coin? Jiang Baimian felt that Gitis's price was surprisingly low.

It wasn't that Grand Knight gold coins were worthless—just the bounty of 50 Grand Knight gold coins for the Subhuti figurine mission had attracted a large number of Ruin Hunters. Many people even felt that they wouldn't have to worry too much about the rest of their lives if they could obtain the full bounty.

This was because money could produce more money. Sometimes it was faster than a gun, and sometimes it was slower than a gun.

Of course, it sometimes ran to other people's homes.

Jiang Baimian found it cheap because it felt impossible to pry open the mouths of people at Eman and Aster's level with a Grand Knight gold coin.

Would they be short of one Grand Knight gold coin? Just some spare change of theirs was more than that!

Gitis has unconventional solutions?

As Jiang Baimian thought, she smiled at Gitis. "We'll give it a go first. If it doesn't work out, we'll look for you."

"Alright." Gitis wasn't surprised by this answer. Normal people would mostly make such a choice.

"What about the other two matters?" Jiang Baimian asked.

Gitis thought for a moment and said, "There's no extra news regarding the Subhuti figurine that the Hunter's Guild isn't aware of.

"Some of the goods that Smith's caravan previously transported came from Aester. I'm not sure what it is, but this information is worth ten Knight silver coins. I'll count it as part of the collateral."

Aester... Jiang Baimian and the others silently repeated the name.

"Is there anything else?" Gitis asked.

After receiving a negative answer, she fell into her usual daze.

Shang Jianyao left the hotel and suggested anxiously, "Let's find Smith first. It's easiest to negotiate with him."

Jiang Baimian smiled reassuringly. “There’s no rush; we haven’t had breakfast. Yes, nothing will happen to Smith. We can ask him later. We can consider the other four after we complete the mission tomorrow.”

“Alright.” Shang Jianyao had no objections.

However, an unexpected development still happened after they had a quick meal and began searching for the Farstriders caravan.

Smith had led his Rootless team to transport a batch of goods to a settlement in the southeast. They had already set off for several days, and it would take about five days for them to return.

Shang Jianyao was very disappointed about this. He could only return to the hotel and wait patiently.

Another day passed. The Old Task Force—which had charged high-performance batteries—was filled with confidence.

Knock! Knock! Knock!

In the morning, Spant knocked on their door.

“Shall we set off now?” He looked at the tall, muscular, and metallic Geneva and felt that the mission would be very simple.

Any possible enemy wouldn’t ignore the existence of such a dangerous item if they had eyes! In comparison, the four humans were only a bonus.

They sure are lucky. When can I have a smart bot of my own... In that case, I can save up another sum of money and buy the latest serum with the best effects. The range of choices will also be greater... Spant’s gaze swept across Jiang Baimian and the others as he felt a little jealous and envious.

Shang Jianyao rubbed his stomach and asked in all seriousness, “Is breakfast provided?”

Spant wasn't surprised by this question at all. He laughed and said, "Yes! I haven't had breakfast either."

As Ruin Hunters, they were accustomed to freeloading whenever possible.

Shang Jianyao nodded in satisfaction and called out to Jiang Baimian and the others. "Let's go!"