

Ad Infinitum 501

Chapter 501: Freeze

Amidst the loud explosion, the passersby—who had already scattered—became increasingly alarmed and ran with all their might.

Many of them panicked and fell to the ground. In the houses on both sides of the street, the residents either fearfully hid in places they imagined were safe or picked up their weapons in an attempt to prevent the chaos outside. Some curiously stuck their heads out from behind the glass windows to figure out what had happened. Others reported to the Hand of Order through their home phones.

This was a street near the Golden Apple Zone in the Red Wolf Zone. Many residents had assets, so it wasn't a problem for them to install phones.

As Shang Jianyao assumed a running posture toward the attackers, he opened his mouth and shouted, "Xiaochong..."

He was only halfway done with his shout when a stream of air suddenly entered his mouth and went straight to his throat.

"Cough! Cough!" Shang Jianyao coughed violently from the choke. Not only did his shouting stop, but he also couldn't maintain the Bangle of Blindness any longer.

It was useless no matter which Shang Jianyao was at the wheel while facing physiological problems!

Just as Shang Jianyao was about to become the first human to choke to death from wind, Long Yuehong—who had failed to jump too far with Bai Chen—wanted to straighten his body and help his companions suppress the distant attackers. However, he suddenly felt his skin become abnormally sensitive.

The air around him seemed to turn into small hands that 'scratched' the areas that weren't covered by the military exoskeleton from different angles.

Normally speaking, such a level of influence might be closer to a gentle and refreshing breeze, preventing Long Yuehong from overreacting. But at this moment, Long Yuehong's skin was abnormally sensitive.

He immediately had the illusion of being scratched by countless people. His body twisted around, and his expression was a mix of crying and laughter.

It was simply torture.

Long Yuehong could no longer control the military exoskeleton.

Bai Chen sensed Long Yuehong's abnormality, but she didn't understand what he was suffering. Many thoughts flashed across her mind for a moment, hoping to help Long Yuehong escape his current predicament.

Finally, she decided to try to stimulate him with pain. This itself could wake people up from their sleep or hallucinations, but Bai Chen didn't know if it was the right or wrong thing to do.

Jiang Baimian also heard Shang Jianyao cough. From the corner of her eye, she saw Long Yuehong squirming in between tears and laughter. That Mind Corridor-level Awakened has managed to make creative strides when it comes to matter interference...

We can't continue like this. Even if that's all he has, just the current situation makes us unable to escape... Ignoring everything else, we might not be able to wake up in time under the effects of Forced Sleep every time. If we were a few seconds slower, we would become the distant attackers' target. We aren't mechanical monks, so we can't use our bodies to tank bullets, grenades, and rockets...

Damn it. There are bioelectric signals all around us, making it impossible to determine where he is. It's the same for Shang Jianyao's human consciousness perception... This isn't anything like locking onto distant attackers through ballistic trajectory calculations, observation, and the help of military exoskeletons...

Without finding the Mind Corridor-level Awakened, we can't counterattack even if we want to. We can only watch helplessly as we walk into a hopeless situation one step at a time... In this short gap, Jiang Baimian's thoughts raced. She could only give the order she was most unwilling to give: "Spread out and retreat!"

This way, at least they wouldn't be wiped out all at once.

The lesser of two evils!

On the third floor of an apartment building less than 100 meters away from the Old Task Force, one could barely see a man standing at the window facing the area where the Old Task Force was. He had a hand in his pocket and was leisurely looking at Jiang Baimian and the others.

He had golden-brown hair that wasn't short. His blue eyes, sharp nose, and handsome eyebrows indicated that he once had outstanding looks. But now, he had already grown fat thanks to age. His face was chubby, and there was a scruffy beard around his mouth.

As expected of a team that can steal the passcode despite First City's supervision. They actually forced me to enter the danger zone of 100 meters... The man wore a formal black suit in the Old World style with a white shirt inside that had its first button unbuttoned.

Despite the praise, the man named Khal was already preparing to evacuate after cleaning up the scene. From his point of view, regardless of whether the strange child named Xiaochong—who the other party was searching for—could appear in time to provide help, there was no way he could prevent him from completing the kill.

In the room behind him, a person was lying on the long sofa, deep asleep.

At this moment, a rather angry voice suddenly sounded in Khal's mind. "Cut it out, all of you!"

This voice sounded a little childlike as it echoed in Khal's mind.

Khal's entire body stiffened as if he had become a stone statue. He didn't laugh, nor did he move. He just stared blankly out the window in a strange silence.

Standing by the overturned sapphire-blue jeep, Shang Jianyao's coughing stopped. Long Yuehong was also liberated from his itch.

Jiang Baimian, Giuseppe, and Bai Chen saw a surprising change in their surroundings.

The passersby—who had scattered in all directions—stopped in a panic. Some even stood firmly, standing there dazedly. Some couldn't control themselves and fell to the ground, motionless.

The people who had tripped due to their panic were silent.

The residents in the houses on both sides of the street—who were hiding in safe spots—tried hard to control their trembling.

Those who held firearms transformed into statues. These were distributed along the road leading to their doors.

Those who were spying on the situation outside closed their eyes behind the windows and allowed their faces to be pressed against the glass.

Those who had connected with the Hand of Order by phone either held the receivers without lowering them or didn't say a word, allowing the other party to keep saying 'hello.'

The distant attackers were the same. They maintained a kneeling, standing, or crawling state as their eyes lost focus.

At this moment, it was as if someone had pressed the pause button, causing time to stop flowing within a certain range.

If it weren't for the fact that the frozen people's eyes weren't fierce, their eyes showing no signs of turbidity, nor did they show any obvious bestiality, Long Yuehong definitely would've thought that the block had encountered a Heartless outbreak. Apart from them, everyone else had instantly become Heartless.

This was a terrifying scene that had only happened when the Old World was destroyed.

As Jiang Baimian and the others looked around, Shang Jianyao exclaimed in surprise, "Xiaochong!"

This... Long Yuehong was a little shocked by Xiaochong's strength.

Jiang Baimian's heart palpitated as she shouted, "Head to Xiaochong's!"

They were to ignore the strange changes in the area.

Before all kinds of interference appeared again, Shang Jianyao carried Giuseppe, Long Yuehong carried Bai Chen, and Jiang Baimian followed closely behind. They ran crazily into the apartment where Xiaochong lived.

They didn't slow down. They jumped or ran to the fifth floor, pushed open the ajar door, and entered the apartment Xiaochong rented.

Xiaochong—who was wearing yellow clothes—was putting the game console and portable computer into his red school bag as he shouted in displeasure, "Those baddies. I'm exposed—I can't stay here any longer!"

This King of the Heartless acted like a child who had gone to an Internet café to game before the Old World was destroyed and was found by his parents.

"Alright, let's move quickly!" Shang Jianyao's deep friendship made him agree readily.

While Shang Jianyao and Long Yuehong helped Xiaochong clean up, Jiang Baimian's thoughts raced. She deliberated over her words and said, "Should we capture the baddie on the way? Otherwise, he will track us later and might expose your location again."

Xiaochong thought for a moment and said, "Alright! I want him to work and earn money for me!"

"..." While Long Yuehong and the others were speechless, Shang Jianyao and Xiaochong finished packing the bags.

After that, Shang Jianyao picked up 'Garibaldi' Giuseppe again and made Xiaochong sit on his shoulder.

Xiaochong was immediately a little happy and excited.

“Let’s set off!” He waved the hand that wasn’t required to stabilize his body.

The Old Task Force members didn’t delay. They didn’t even take the stairs.

Long Yuehong carried Bai Chen and helped Jiang Baimian jump down from the window. With the help of the building’s protruding parts, they easily landed on the street after two jumps.

Clang!

Shang Jianyao found his footing.

Suddenly, Xiaochong’s expression changed. He jumped off Shang Jianyao’s shoulder and went straight for an alley to the side.

“It’s too late; I’ll make a move first. Go and capture the baddie yourselves—there are still some residual effects on him...” A series of afterimages appeared as the child ran, making Long Yuehong think that he was hallucinating.

In just a second or two, the Old Task Force members lost sight of Xiaochong. Only his words echoed in their ears.

“Teacher Du Heng has arrived nearby?” Jiang Baimian made the most reasonable guess.

Chapter 502: Selfishness

In fact, Jiang Baimian could’ve stopped Xiaochong when he ran to the alley. After all, she temporarily didn’t have to worry about the others and was the first to react.

She could’ve shouted for Xiaochong to stop and say that she would bring him along. With the military exoskeleton and the modified jeep’s help, it would definitely be much faster for them to escape together than for a child like him to do it alone.

But at that moment, Jiang Baimian hesitated. She guessed from Xiaochong’s reaction that Du Heng had followed the trail and was already nearby.

If the Old Task Force kept bringing Xiaochong along and couldn't avoid the mysterious antiquarian, the Old Task Force would be in a dilemma when the two parties met. They wouldn't know which side to side with.

Either side was someone the Old Task Force couldn't face at the moment. Furthermore, they had a certain level of friendship with both parties and had been given considerable favors.

Upon thinking of such a scene, Jiang Baimian couldn't help but be thrown into a dilemma. Choosing either side and offending the other made it difficult to smooth things over in the future. She thought of Shang Jianyao—who might turn rash—so she decided to be selfish. She didn't say a word and watched Xiaochong disappear into the alley.

Sigh, humans tend to be greedy. Even now, I'm still hoping to live through the cracks... Perhaps it was because Xiaochong looked like a child, but the guilt in Jiang Baimian's heart didn't cease. The only thing she could comfort herself with was that Xiaochong was clearly inhuman.

The speed at which he ran at full speed was no less than a military exoskeleton operating at maximum speed. Therefore, it was the same with or without the Old Task Force.

"Teacher Du Heng..." Shang Jianyao quickly looked around. Although he didn't see the antiquarian, he still made a beautiful wish. "I hope Xiaochong escapes..."

He was clearly more biased toward his good friend—Xiaochong—than Teacher Du Heng on this matter.

But if Xiaochong really is the King of the Heartless, it will be extremely dangerous to his surroundings. It might be best if Du Heng watches over him... Long Yuehong looked around and was still deeply shocked by the posture everyone was maintaining as if time had frozen or there was a large-scale Heartless disease outbreak.

He suspected that if Xiaochong willed it, he could really bring about another Heartless outbreak.

From the perspective of saving all of humanity, they should indeed watch over Xiaochong. Of course, it was very necessary to make the monitoring more humane and humanitarian considering that Xiaochong had yet to do any destruction. After all, Xiaochong had very simple requirements—he just needed a room, electricity, water, games, and food. He didn't want to be disturbed, and he just needed his 'pets' to be taken care of.

Bai Chen retracted her gaze from the alley and quickly asked, “Are we still launching a counterattack on the Mind Corridor-level Awakened?”

She believed that they couldn’t stay here any longer, regardless of whether they counterattacked!

“Without Xiaochong, I don’t think there’s a need...” Long Yuehong immediately voiced his thoughts. He meant that it was too dangerous and that they didn’t have much confidence in succeeding.

Although the Old Task Force had previously finished off DiMarco—a Mind Corridor-level Awakened—and although Xiaochong said that the freezing effect on the other party would remain for a period of time and only grow weaker with time, times were different. With the strength the other party had shown, Long Yuehong didn’t believe that they could successfully counterattack and take down the other party.

The Old Task Force had zero defenses against Forced Sleep. As their urgency intensified over time, it might even break through their bottom lines as adults—peeing their pants without waking up just like when they were young.

Jiang Baimian interrupted Long Yuehong. “Let’s not talk about the necessity of the matter. We don’t even know where the target is!”

This was meant for Shang Jianyao—it was to prevent him from being persistent.

When he was packing his bag, Xiaochong had said that he didn’t know where the Mind Corridor-level Awakened was hiding. He had only exerted an indiscriminate and large-scale influence sans the Old Task Force members, thereby successfully stopping the other party’s subsequent attack.

If Xiaochong followed, he could sense the surrounding area and observe who was recovering from the ‘frozen’ state first—it would most likely be the target.

Without Xiaochong now, the target might very well be outside Shang Jianyao and Jiang Baimian’s perception range.

Shang Jianyao quickly replied to Jiang Baimian. “You can ask them.”

He pointed into the distance with his free hand—they were the ordinary attackers in charge of delivering suppressive fire.

Shang Jianyao then raised his left wrist. “I can still use this to sense him.”

Jiang Baimian’s thoughts raced as she quickly said, “No matter what, let’s drive the car over there first! If you can ask where the target is hiding, give it a try if you have the chance. We don’t want things to backfire. If not, make the best use of your time to move to the Green Olive Zone and leave the target’s range of control.”

As she spoke, she ran toward the sapphire-blue jeep that had flipped over by the side of the road.

Shang Jianyao and Long Yuehong used two jumps to overtake Jiang Baimian and landed beside the jeep. They put down Giuseppe and Bai Chen, relied on the military exoskeletons, and cooperated with Jiang Baimian to flip the armored jeep over.

Without any need for further words, the few of them got into the car one after another.

Bai Chen floored the accelerator, and the jeep darted between the ‘frozen’ people as it drove toward the distant attackers.

It was actually not suitable to drive in such a situation because there was a high chance that the path would be blocked. The drivers would also be ‘frozen,’ causing the cars to stop one after another.

Fortunately, the previous two explosions had successfully sent many cars fleeing the block. Therefore, the Old Task Force’s sapphire-blue jeep raced to the attackers’ side on an empty road.

Bai Chen didn’t dare to go too fast, afraid that she would suddenly fall asleep and encounter a serious accident.

At this moment, the attackers—who were carrying rocket launchers or using sniper rifles—were surrounding a silver-white multi-purpose car. They were either kneeling, standing, or prostrating.

All of them were still.

Shang Jianyao rolled down the window and asked loudly, “Where’s the mastermind?”

The attackers remained motionless, and nobody replied.

“Where’s the mastermind?” Shang Jianyao asked again.

Finally, one of the attackers moved his neck and turned his head slightly. His mouth opened slightly as he muttered in abnormal fear, “Cut it out.”

From the looks of it, they didn’t ‘freeze’ but received some order and are bent on executing it... Upon seeing this, Jiang Baimian knew that they couldn’t get anything out of these people for the time being.

Even if Shang Jianyao used Inference Clowning or Corny Person, he would fall short on the priority under that order.

Without hesitation, Jiang Baimian immediately said, “To the Green Olive Zone.”

Bai Chen turned the steering wheel and made the car turn into another street. During this process, she rolled down the window, pulled out the Ice Moss with one hand, and pulled the trigger at the attackers that were gradually exposed to her line of sight.

Bang! Bang! Bang!

Blood spewed out of the frozen attackers one after another as they quietly ‘walked’ toward death.

In this regard, Bai Chen was never soft-hearted as a woman. She believed that without these subordinates who could cause harm in the real world, the Mind Corridor-level Awakened could pull off fewer tricks and cause much less harm.

What Jiang Baimian was most worried about now was that the Mind Corridor-level Awakened would give up on the crowd control and create an opportunity to influence the Old Task Force members one by one so that they would die in the Real Dreamscape while lacking the effects of Inference Clowning.

Therefore, it was best to leave the other party's range of influence as soon as possible.

"Watch each other's backs, and don't let anyone fall asleep!" As Jiang Baimian observed her surroundings, she instructed her team members and Garibaldi.

...

In a town ruin in the North Shore Wastelands.

Genava, Han Wanghuo, and Zeng Duo thought for a long time but couldn't figure out how to ascertain Jiang Baimian and the others' situation and provide help from afar.

"I plan on returning to First City to investigate what happened." Finally, Genava made a decision. "You can stay here and continue misleading First City."

Han Wanghuo fell silent for a moment before saying, "I'll go with you."

With that said, he turned to look at Zeng Duo. "I'm sorry."

"I'll go too." Zeng Duo laughed self-deprecatingly. "Without their help, I can't save everyone in town."

Genava was a smart bot, so he naturally didn't pretend to be polite at a time like this. "Alright, let's do it together."

...

Red Wolf Zone, 19 Rosta Street, Hand of Order headquarters.

Wall and the others—who had been summoned due to the escalating situation—heard a distant explosion.

Don't tell me it has really begun? As they looked at each other, a public security officer entered the room and reported the situation.

"There was a gunfight near Sikhara Temple. Both parties used rocket launchers and grenade launchers... The witnesses at the scene heard a nursery rhyme. In a rush to pee, they didn't notice the subsequent developments..."

This... The description of a nursery rhyme and the urgency to pee reminded Wall of some details in a particular case. He straightened his body in surprise and anger and blurted out, "That team is back?"

How dare they?

Chapter 503: Strategic Retreat

The sapphire-blue jeep turned into another street.

The Bangle of Blindness on Shang Jianyao's left wrist kept emitting flames as it remained activated. Ever since he got into the car, he had been sensing the changes in human consciousnesses within a 100-meter radius.

Having been 'frozen,' they were in a relatively low activity state. Once someone showed signs of recovery—their thoughts becoming active—they would stand out.

They would be like fireflies in the night—bright and outstanding.

This could help the Old Task Force find the Mind Corridor-level Awakened in the Dawn domain. Of course, Jiang Baimian and the others couldn't lock onto the target if the other party could interfere with matter from 100 meters away.

Suddenly, Shang Jianyao discovered a tremble in the large number of human consciousnesses that resembled stars as if it were shaking off frost.

"Found it!" Shang Jianyao excitedly turned his body and pointed at the third floor of an apartment building dozens of meters away.

Jiang Baimian—who was beside him—looked over and saw a row of glass windows. With her understanding of Shang Jianyao, the suspected target he found should be behind one of those panes.

“The one closest,” Shang Jianyao added.

Uh... Jiang Baimian’s hand that was attempting to take the Orange rifle from Bai Chen froze.

From their current position and angle, they couldn’t see the situation behind the corresponding glass window. In other words, she couldn’t directly snipe the Mind Corridor-level Awakened.

Jiang Baimian subconsciously cast her gaze at the Death rocket launcher on her knees, wanting to use it to curve and bombard the room behind the glass window. However, her retracted left hand hesitated.

This was because according to normal logic, it was impossible for the Mind Corridor-level Awakened to be coincidentally living nearby. He had either rented a room in advance for the ambush or temporarily ‘appropriated’ a certain apartment.

Given the abilities displayed by the other party, Jiang Baimian was more inclined to the latter.

This wasn’t only because Forced Sleep could help a Mind Corridor-level Awakened enter and use whatever room they wanted. This method also provided better concealment—they wouldn’t encounter any accidents or expose their plans when renting an apartment.

From this inference, apart from the target, there was a high chance that the apartment’s original owner was also sleeping in the room.

Firing such a rocket might not kill a Mind Corridor-level Awakened who could interfere with matter without a lock, but it would definitely implicate the original owner. As long as he or they were unlucky enough, it was foreseeable that they would die on the spot.

In the face of such a situation, Jiang Baimian—who usually tried her best not to affect the innocent—was naturally rather hesitant.

Bai Chen also came to the same conclusion, and she calmly evaluated, “You’re too soft-hearted.”

“I think Big White did the right thing,” Shang Jianyao retorted.

Jiang Baimian said to Bai Chen in exasperation and amusement, “Why don’t you do it?”

Bai Chen fell silent and didn’t answer. It was unknown if it was a silent admission of being a little soft-hearted as well or if she felt that it might build a barrier between her and her Old Task Force companions if she really did that.

“We’ll circle back a distance, adjust the angle, and attempt to snipe.” Jiang Baimian had long thought of a backup plan.

At this moment, Shang Jianyao said regretfully, “The target has left the window in a strange way.”

As for how strange it was, he didn’t say.

There’s no way to carry out a long-range snipe... We have to rush to that apartment to face the target? It will take a lot of time to do that. The target will definitely have recovered significantly...

He should already know that Shang Jianyao has an ability similar to Inference Clowning and won’t talk to us about anything...

Hands Immobility will hardly affect him unless his abilities require his hands...

It’s still unknown how useful Corny Person is against a Mind Corridor-level Awakened. It’s very unwise to place our chips on this...

There’s no point in using the Bangle of Blindness to blind him. With the surrounding crowd gradually recovering from their ‘frozen’ states, our human consciousnesses will appear too special and eye-catching...

If we really go over, we can only bet that he hasn’t fully recovered. With the help of the military exoskeleton, we can make him panic and fail to put up an effective resistance...

This is too big a gamble, and the risk factor is too high... What a pity. He has been hiding in the distance, so we can’t observe his every move and can’t figure out the price he paid... As Jiang Baimian’s thoughts raced, she forced herself to retract her gaze.

She said to Bai Chen, “There’s no need to circle around. Continue on to the Green Olive Zone and distance ourselves from that apartment as soon as possible.”

Big White could occasionally be willful, but the Old Task Force’s team leader—Jiang Baimian—couldn’t.

Phew, Team Leader is wise! Long Yuehong praised Jiang Baimian inwardly. Without Xiaochong following them, he had no intention of facing a Mind Corridor-level Awakened head-on.

Bai Chen also had no intention of taking the risk. She sank her foot, speeding up the car a little.

“What a pity...” Shang Jianyao maintained the Bangle of Blindness’s operation and constantly monitored the target until the straight-line distance between the jeep and the apartment building increased to 100 meters.

...

On the third floor of the apartment, the plump and middle-aged Khal tried to save himself when his thoughts recovered slightly.

He regretted underestimating the child named Xiaochong. He never expected the other party’s level and strength to reach such a terrifying level.

In their organization, such terrifying figures didn’t exceed five. Furthermore, they were in a predicament where they could only move about occasionally.

Khal’s body suddenly became ‘light.’ He seemed to be pushed by an invisible hand as he floated back and landed beside the long sofa.

After he was alleviated from the ‘Cut it Out’ status, he hurriedly walked to the apartment exit.

As for the sleeping person on the long sofa, he didn’t care. After all, the other party had never seen him.

Khal wasn't a soft-hearted person. He only felt that he would smell something unbearable when the two parties were so close—be it him using a gun, a hand, or Real Dreamscape to kill the other party.

Once he distanced himself, wasting time on a passerby that didn't need to be dealt with wasn't in line with his sense of beauty.

Raising a hand to his nose, Khal pulled open the door, entered the stairwell, and disappeared in the dim light. He temporarily had no intention of continuing to track October Xue, Zhang Qubing, and the others. He only wanted to leave this place as soon as possible.

On the one hand, the commotion would definitely attract First City's powerhouses. On the other hand, Xiaochong's strength had scared him.

After leaving the apartment building, Khal took out a pure-black mask and wore it. He then quickly walked to the spot where his vehicle was parked.

Suddenly, he saw a figure pass by the intersection ahead.

The figure wore a black robe and had long hair. His bearing exuded confidence, and he had an outstanding bearing.

He... Khal's pupils rapidly dilated.

The next second, this Mind Corridor-level Awakened retracted his body as if he were avoiding a ferocious beast.

...

After distancing themselves from the street Xiaochong lived in and turning into the Green Olive Zone, Bai Chen drove the sapphire-blue jeep into an empty, quiet, and dark back alley with her familiarity with the terrain.

Jiang Baimian looked around and confirmed that there were no cameras nearby and that there were many shields above. She then pushed open the door, alighted, and said, "Get to work!"

Shang Jianyao excitedly took out the tools and materials he had previously used to spray paint the jeep from the trunk and asked, “What color do you want this time?”

“Military green.” Jiang Baimian chose the most common jeep color.

If they didn’t immediately modify it, the Hand of Order might come looking for them at any moment.

At this moment, Long Yuehong tucked his legs and said, “Can I relieve myself first?”

He could barely hold it in.

Jiang Baimian tersely acknowledged his words. “Go. Everyone, take turns. Hey—you, Little Red, and Garibaldi will go first.”

Shang Jianyao put down his tools and materials. As he walked deeper into the alley, he mocked Long Yuehong. “Your bladder is quite lacking.”

“Don’t pee forever if you have what it takes.” Long Yuehong was physiologically irritable from holding his pee in.

Shang Jianyao gave a thumbs up. “You’re very brave today.”

They didn’t argue any further. They each found a mossy, humid spot and unzipped their pants.

Long Yuehong shivered and felt refreshed. After it was over, he recalled the scene and said in a strange tone, “Why did we end up in such a situation where we have to pee in public... The messiahs in the Old World’s entertainment were never like this...”

Shang Jianyao thought for a moment and said, “Just because it’s not shown doesn’t mean it’s not done.”

As Jiang Baimian and Bai Chen were still waiting, they didn’t delay any further. They quickly returned to the jeep and got busy, either spraying the jeep or doing some simple fixing of the indentations on the jeep.

After Jiang Baimian returned, she looked at ‘Garibaldi’ Giuseppe and smiled kindly. “Do you remember who we just visited?”

How can I not remember? How long has it been? ‘Garibaldi’ Giuseppe wanted to give this reply, but he inexplicably shivered.

Shang Jianyao leaned over.

Chapter 504: Temporary Peace

Soon, ‘Garibaldi’ Giuseppe and Shang Jianyao put their arms around each other’s shoulders and joined in the labor of changing the jeep’s appearance.

Jiang Baimian looked at their backs and silently heaved a sigh of relief. With Inference Clowning this time, no matter what happens when ‘Garibaldi’ Giuseppe returns to the company to report on his work, the matter regarding Xiaochong won’t leak as long as he doesn’t encounter a Last Mandomain Awakened that can read his memories. After all, the two prerequisites for the Inference were ‘their lives had been on the line together’ and that ‘they are all employees of the company.’ This forms the conclusion that ‘we belong to the same team and should keep each other’s secrets’ appear unassailable in a sense.

Of course, as long as it was a conclusion guided by Inference Clowning, there was no certainty that it wouldn’t be seen through. Jiang Baimian only felt that all the different conversations Garibaldi might hear from his surroundings after he returned to Pangu Biology weren’t enough to overturn Inference Clowning.

The emergency modification was completed before long, and the fashionable, sapphire-blue jeep blended into the surrounding cars again.

Bai Chen drove Jiang Baimian and the others to a safe house the Old Task Force had prepared in the Red Wolf Zone.

This didn’t provide them any help in escaping from Sikhara Temple and Zennaga’s control. Therefore, they had never thought of the additional safe houses they had prepared back then. Due to this, they didn’t have to worry that Zennaga had already grasped the corresponding location with his Mind Reading and could subsequently track them.

After parking the car and entering the house, Long Yuehong finally felt a little more at ease.

Jiang Baimian looked around and said, “Remember to touch up your disguises later. Also, we have to be out tomorrow morning. On the one hand, we have to observe what will happen to the Citizen Meet in Hope Square and determine the subsequent plans. On the other hand, we have to get another radio transceiver or assemble it ourselves with the corresponding electronic components. In short, we have to report tonight’s encounter to the company during working hours. We also have to inform Old Ge, Old Han, and the others at the agreed time and get them to pay attention to their surroundings. They can’t just be wary of First City’s personnel.”

Why didn’t they do it that very night? It was because they had missed their communication window.

Although Pangu Biology had a telegraph operator on night duty, Jiang Baimian felt that it was better to report it tomorrow.

This further highlighted how difficult it was for them to escape from the Mind Corridor-level Awakened, and it was also to hide Xiaochong’s existence. Furthermore, all kinds of things had happened tonight.

Jiang Baimian had also been affected by Awakened abilities many times, so she felt that her mind wasn’t as clear as it usually was. She wanted to get some sleep before combing through her memories carefully to determine what to report.

Her initial plan was: Replace Xiaochong’s whistling with Wu Meng’s whistling and push the critical moment of ‘freezing’ to the mysterious antiquarian, Du Heng. After all, the other party had rushed to the ‘frozen’ scene not long after.

“Alright.” Bai Chen had no objections to her team leader’s arrangement.

Long Yuehong was a little timid. “Team Leader, there’s actually no need for us to observe the Citizen Meet from a close distance. If anything bad happens, we might very well be embroiled in it. We just want to use the chaos. We can consider it when the chaos has expanded.”

Jiang Baimian nodded slightly and said, “I understand your concerns, but the observation I’m referring to isn’t close-range observation. Instead, it’s using the radio, television, and passersby’s reactions to gather some information and guess the possible developments while searching for a radio transceiver.”

Long Yuehong heaved a sigh of relief. “That’s good.”

At this point, he couldn’t help but sigh with emotion. “Only now do I know what it means that there’s always someone better out there. If it weren’t for the Mind Corridor-level Awakened being too careful in the early stages and us having certain trump cards, we wouldn’t have been able to survive. Xiaochong also seems to be countless times stronger than him. It’s no wonder Du Heng said that he could destroy a city.”

Bai Chen coldly replied to Long Yuehong, “As long as we continue investigating the reason for the Old World’s destruction and the origins of the Heartless disease, we will definitely encounter such powerful enemies in the future. They will only grow stronger and more terrifying.”

Upon hearing this, Long Yuehong deeply understood the loftiness and difficulty of investigating the cause of the Old World’s destruction and the Heartless disease’s origins. In contrast, the Old Task Force was tiny and weak.

It’s no wonder everyone finds Shang Jianyao’s proclamation of ‘saving all of humanity’ ridiculous and thinks he’s joking... Long Yuehong sighed inwardly.

Jiang Baimian fell silent for a moment, unable to speak.

Shang Jianyao nodded and said, “Therefore, we have to work hard to improve ourselves. I can’t wait to enter the Mind Corridor!”

He was still filled with confidence and motivation.

At this moment, Jiang Baimian recalled the past. Shang Jianyao once said: “Isn’t that great? When everyone is depressed, negative, and in despair, there’s still one person who keeps smiling. He’s full of passion...” He has indeed fulfilled his promise... However, you still have room and the possibility for improvement. As for us... Is there really no room or possibility to improve?

All kinds of thoughts surfaced in Jiang Baimian’s mind. She fell silent for a moment before saying, “No matter what, let’s hold out for now. Otherwise, we will die in First City. After we return to the company, we’ll evaluate our strength and the danger of the subsequent missions and make a rational decision.”

...

Golden Apple Zone, 18 Citizen Street, in the general's residence.

The old lion-like Phocas sat in the unlit study that didn't only rely on the moonlight to illuminate the dark room. He held a phone and constantly ordered, "In the past three days, all entrances and exits have been cordoned off. No matter which troops they are, regardless of the warrant they hold, they aren't to enter the city without the Senate's unanimous permission..."

"From tonight on, flying is prohibited city-wide. Even the Hand of Order's drones and helicopters have to abide by this restriction. There will only be one warning before they are struck down..."

"Maintain order for the Citizen Meet tomorrow morning..."

"Regardless of who it is, if they use any excuse to gather at places like the Senate, the Administrative Office, the commander's estate, and the Overwatch Council, arrest them directly. If they attempt to resist, use tear gas first before considering killing them..."

"Gather all the military exoskeletons and bionic artificial intelligence armor and centrally assign them..."

"Arrange the Awakened among them randomly to prevent any accidents..."

The orders were methodically issued to the city defense forces' different departments, making Phocas a little thirsty. Finally, he put down the phone and heaved a sigh of relief.

He had already done what needed to be done. If any large-scale unrest really happened, he could only take it one step at a time.

Knock! Knock! Knock!

Someone knocked on the study door.

"Come in." Phocas—who was wearing a military uniform—leaned back in his chair.

The wooden door creaked open, and the yellowish light from the corridor's wall lamps surged into the dim study.

It was quiet outside. Most people in the manor seemed to be asleep.

...

On another street in the Golden Apple Zone, in the manor of Superintendent Alexander—one of First City's two giants.

The spotted, blond-haired, and muscular Elder in black civilian clothes cast his gaze at his daughter—who wasn't far away.

The blonde, blue-eyed, and beautiful Galoran was no longer wearing a grayish-blue Daoist robe. She had already changed into a wine-red dress.

The clothes were very exquisite, and the material used was extremely extravagant. It was obvious that it wasn't the kind mass-produced by machines.

"I thought you wouldn't wear these clothes again." Alexander nodded slightly. He didn't hide his relief, concern, and a little mockery.

Galoran had a calm and indifferent expression. "It's just a dress."

The state she showed was: This was no different from a Daoist robe. It was a prop used by humans to hide their naked bodies and maintain their body temperature.

At this moment, an explosion sounded from a distance. In the relatively quiet night, it sounded so obvious.

And it wasn't just one—some were loud, and some were soft.

Alexander walked to the floor-to-ceiling windows, looked in the direction of the explosion, and took the opportunity to educate his daughter. "What you want needs to be exchanged with iron and blood and a large number of lives. It doesn't mean that you can achieve it by pitying them and

making a scene at home. You've been traveling the Ashlands for several years, so you shouldn't be as childish as before, right?"

Galoran nodded. "I understand, so I hope that everyone will follow Master Zhuang's teachings and understand that fate cannot be defied. They are to focus their efforts on comprehending the Dao. Given time, they can completely escape their shackles if they can distinguish reality from illusion. There is hope to live forever."

Alexander was speechless. After a long while, he said, "Then, there will be no human society."

Galoran was just about to respond when someone suddenly knocked on the activity room's door.

Knock! Knock! Knock!

"Who is it?" Alexander raised his voice.

Outside the door was his butler. "Sir, Madam Cynthia has come to visit."

Chapter 505: The Dark Night's Opportunity for Murder

The person who entered the study was a butler that had served Phocas for many years. His name was Reiner, and he was almost 60 years old. He could be considered advanced in age in the Ashlands, sans the people in high society.

Reiner's hair was clearly mottled white. The wrinkles at the corners of his eyes, lips, and forehead were relatively obvious, but he had a strong body and a mind in good shape. His blue eyes only showed reliability forged through time—it wasn't ravaged by the vicissitudes of life.

"General, the bathwater is ready." Reiner bowed.

Phocas's yellow eyes swept across the butler's face, and he nodded. "Alright."

He slowly stood up and led the guards guarding the door to the second floor as he stroked the statues along the railings.

The guards remained at the bedroom door, and only two maids followed in to help Phocas remove his general uniform and enter the bathroom.

This general's habit was to sleep after taking a bath at night. Nobody was to disturb him until he naturally woke up.

As usual, Phocas took a comfortable bath with a glass of red wine. After the maids cleaned up the bathroom, he immediately got into a large bed and covered himself with a velvet blanket.

As an old man, the mattress on this bed had already been replaced with a relatively hard one, helping him relieve the pain in his waist.

Every time he felt the hard support of the mattress, Phocas would always miss the early years.

Back then, his bed was very soft, and he felt like he could sink into it.

Back then, his wife was still alive.

As the curtains were drawn and the bedside lamp switched off, the entire room was drowned by thick darkness.

Phocas's breathing gradually became drawn out.

After 15 minutes, the bedroom door quietly opened. It was unknown if the guards—who were supposed to stop anyone from disturbing the general's sleep—had disappeared or were ignoring the intruder.

The person who entered the bedroom was of average height and wore a formal black suit. He walked in the weakly illuminated environment and walked to Phocas's bed. Then, he took out a syringe from his pocket.

After pushing out a little liquid, the person hiding in the darkness bent down and aimed the needle at a certain vein in Phocas.

Tak!

The bedside lamp suddenly lit up. The originally warm, yellowish light was rather blinding for humans who were accustomed to the dark environment.

The person attempting to inject Phocas with poison couldn't help but close his eyes. He straightened his body in horror and retreated.

After adapting to the light, the intruder opened his eyes again and saw that Phocas had already sat up. The latter's yellow eyes stared at him coldly, and he looked imposing and abnormally dignified.

The person who had infiltrated the room held his breath subconsciously, just like every time he encountered such gazes over the years.

His hair was white, and his wrinkles were obvious. He was Phocas's most trusted butler, Reiner.

"Why?" Phocas asked in a deep voice. He didn't show any panic from the attempted attack.

Reiner overcame his fear and smiled strangely. "Because I'm Shepherd Bouillon."

"You?" Phocas scoffed, but he didn't say anything else. He calmly asked, "Why did you choose this moment, which isn't really an opportunity to attack me? Have you also lost your intelligence?"

Reiner laughed. "The fact that you raised such a question means that I wasn't wrong. In order to deal with a senior Mind Corridor-level Awakened like you and a general who can command the entire city defense force, being rash won't solve the problem. I have to patiently observe the details and carefully gather information to find your weakness. Then, I'll have to wait for an opportunity like tonight when the city defense forces are guarding the various areas but have lax defenses here.

"Fortunately, you can fool some of the people all of the time, and all of the people some of the time, but you can not fool all of the people all of the time[1]. I didn't say this sentence, but it's a famous saying from the Old World. It's perfect for you. I didn't sneak into your manor to find an opportunity to influence you. Instead, I flipped through the memories of the people around you bit by bit to find clues."

Phocas laughed instead of being angry. "What did you discover?"

Reiner shrugged. “I realized that you have a habit that hasn’t changed in years. Be it commanding the army outside or facing chaos in First City, you have to sleep before 10 p.m. You absolutely can’t go beyond that.

“Besides, nobody is to disturb you while you sleep. An emergency intelligence report was once reported to you through a phone, but you didn’t answer it. That was at 11 p.m, but you didn’t return the call until 2 a.m.

“In addition, I’ve tracked down many Awakened in the Dawn domain and found an opportunity to flip through their memories. I’ve concluded some common prices, one of which is that they will be in a deep coma for a period of time. After combining this information, I determine that you will be in a deep coma between 10:30 p.m. and 1:30 a.m.”

As a soldier who had risked his life many times, Phocas’s abilities had never been a big secret. It was very easy for people with ulterior motives to figure them out.

As far as Shepherd Bouillon knew, the two clearest points were: Coma Creation and Awakened Physical Potential.

As for the third one, it was relatively hidden. Not many people knew about it.

As a senior Mind Corridor-level Awakened, Shepherd Bouillon knew very well that the corresponding boundaries would definitely be widened after Phocas’s two abilities entered the Mind Corridor. They definitely couldn’t be treated through the usual way.

After advancing to the Mind Corridor, the number of times Phocas carried out attacks had clearly decreased. Most of the time, he only revealed the two means available to him—Coma Creation and Awakened Physical Potential.

Phocas didn’t say a word and continued staring coldly at Butler Reiner.

Reiner smiled. “Your question allowed me to confirm that the price you paid was a deep coma during a certain period. However, I made a certain misjudgment regarding the exact time. The reason I’m speaking so much is that I’m waiting for the moment when you are truly unconscious. I find it strange that you aren’t panicking at all. Are you willing to speak to me because you want to forcefully appear calm and scare me so as to stop any subsequent attacks?

“Don’t worry. Every 15 minutes, a group of people will come to your residence and attempt to kill you. Apart from your two children, I believe someone will chance upon a moment when you are in a coma. There’s no need to struggle. Even if you knock everyone in this house unconscious now, assassins will come from the surrounding area one after another. The only solution is to make a call immediately and request the Consul or the Senate’s help. When the time comes, my puppets might be among the people who are here to protect you.”

Phocas sighed after quietly listening. “You’re really patient. You’re different from most people in the Anti-intellectualism Church. I did mix up the time a little—the few times I didn’t answer the emergency calls were actually done on purpose. It’s just like how I have to sleep every night before 10 p.m. Together, they form a misdirection for a secret observer like you.

“As a general, I definitely know how to maintain some redundancies. In the Old World’s early years, there was already the concept of military reserves. How can I not make the corresponding arrangements now?” At this point, Phocas laughed. “My coma period isn’t from 10 p.m. to 2 a.m.

“Also, you might not have heard of this saying. This is something that the emperor once said: The Awakened have to protect the secret of the price they paid like they are protecting their eyes.” The smile on Phocas’s face became increasingly obvious. “In fact, the price I paid isn’t ‘a certain period of deep coma.’ Ever since I had a certain level of strength, I’ve been working hard to create an illusion. That illusion was that the price I paid was a certain period of deep coma to hide the price I really paid.

“There’s an Ashlandic saying that goes: ‘When using troops for battle, we can’t rule out deviating and deceptive strategies.’ This is also applicable in battles between Awakened. Otherwise, do you think I would talk to you so calmly?”

The expression on Reiner’s face gradually froze.

Phocas slowly got off the bed and casually said, “Did you notice that your insomnia has worsened recently?”

Reiner didn’t answer, but he frowned.

“Ever since October Xue and Zhang Qubing’s team left this place but were followed by the fake Father, I’ve been wondering if Shepherd Bouillon was already lurking nearby and plotting something against me.” Phocas stroked his nearly hairless head and smiled. “From that moment onward, I targeted everyone in this block indiscriminately, except for my two children.”

Reiner fell silent for a moment before saying, “Your third ability is to make people suffer from varying degrees of insomnia?”

“Yes.” Phocas smiled. “In addition to making you increasingly insomniac, I also awakened your physical potential so that you can maintain a good state while suffering from insomnia without affecting your daily life. Therefore, you can continue reading the memories of people on a large scale bit by bit. I’ve been slowly progressing on this matter, and I don’t think I made you sense anything. After all, you will definitely focus on the various details related to me when you flip through memories, not the daily lifestyle of the person whose memories you are perusing.”

Reiner fell silent again. After a while, he asked, “What’s the point?”

“Of course, there’s a point.” Phocas slowly paced around and glanced at him. “First City still has quite an adequate intelligence system. Some of the prices in your Last Man domain have long been grasped. I realized that many of them are physical and physiological prices, such as sleep disorders, hypertension, physical decline, and so on. I’m not sure if the price you paid is any of these—it’s just an attempt. In any case, there won’t be any losses if I fail. But if I succeed, heh...”

Phocas laughed. “After overstraining your body to resist insomnia for extended periods, what do you think will happen once nobody awakens your physical potential? It might range from a major illness to sudden death.”

Reiner’s expression darkened. He looked around and said, “There are definitely many people in poor physical condition in the surrounding area. Aren’t you afraid of affecting them?”

“There’s an Ashlandic saying: A soft-hearted person isn’t suitable to be a general.” Phocas raised his chin, revealing his dignified posture. “I didn’t investigate the surrounding area and search for suspicious people because I didn’t want to scare you away. I wanted to have a chance to punish you.”

At this point, Phocas glanced at Reiner and laughed self-deprecatingly. “Why am I telling you so much? You’re just a puppet...”

Just as he said that, Reiner collapsed and fell to the carpet.

The guards outside and the others in the manor had also fallen unconscious.

Phocas changed into casual clothes and came to his two adult children. He carried one in each hand and rushed to the garage before getting into a bulletproof SUV. He then drove the car north toward the Green Olive Zone.

During this process, he didn't call the Senate or the Administrative Office, nor did he contact his subordinates in the city defense forces.

Chapter 506: Mathematics Is Very Important

Phocas drove the bulletproof SUV and brought his two children out of the Golden Apple Zone, passing through the Red Wolf Zone and arriving at a very ordinary five-story apartment in the Green Olive Zone.

Not far from this apartment stood Ugo Hotel.

Phocas parked the car in a nearby alley and carried his two children into the apartment calmly. He didn't head up but went straight for the basement entrance.

Two men in ordinary clothes stood guard in the shadows. Upon seeing Phocas, they immediately clenched their fists and gently punched their heads without stopping him.

Phocas nodded and pushed open the ajar door with his elbow.

After passing through a narrow corridor, Phocas came to a hall.

At the end of the hall stood a stone statue. In front of the statue were rows and rows of simple futons.

At this moment, many people were lying on these futons. Their eyes were tightly shut as if they were sleeping.

Phocas walked to the stone statue. On the way, he placed his two children on an empty futon.

It was actually very difficult to be called a futon. They were only considered stacked white bedsheets on the hall's stone tiles. It was no different from lying on the ground—it was very hard and uncomfortable.

Sleeping on it was almost a form of torture.

Finally, Phocas came in front of the stone statue.

This statue was different. Its face wasn't carved with facial features, but an ordinary mirror was embedded in it.

When Phocas looked up at the statue's head, he naturally saw himself. He clenched his fists and gently rapped his head before saying in a deep voice, "The true self lives forever."

After bowing, Phocas turned around and returned to his two children's side. He then found a simple futon and lay down.

The hard touch tortured his waist, reminding him of the past.

Ever since his wife contracted the Heartless disease and he—a noble, general, and a Mind Corridor-level Awakened—was powerless to stop her and could only watch helplessly, he joined the True Self Church, which worshiped Dawn, and became a Dreambreaker.

After nearly 15 minutes, Phocas closed his eyes, and his breathing became rapid.

He fainted.

...

Golden Apple Zone, in the inspector's residence.

Alexander's butler led the visiting Cynthia into one of the activity rooms.

Cynthia looked to be in her late twenties. She was tall and had lustrous, flaxen hair and a pair of eyes that seemed to speak.

Today, she wore a black dress that exposed her shoulders. She also wore a diamond necklace, a bracelet, and a brooch. She looked noble and elegant, but there was nothing special about her.

“Your Excellency.” Cynthia looked at Alexander and bowed respectfully. She then swept her gaze across the activity room and checked how many people there were.

“One...” This referred to Superintendent Alexander.

“One...” Cynthia’s gaze slid past Galoran’s face.

“Two...” Cynthia glanced at the butler beside her.

“Three, four...” Cynthia saw the two guards in charge of protecting Alexander.

A total of four people... She nodded inwardly.

Alexander cleared his throat and asked, “Ma’am, why are you here so late?”

Cynthia looked around and hesitantly said, “Do you mind if they wait outside?”

She often came to the Superintendent’s residence as a guest to have private interactions with Alexander. Such a suggestion wasn’t excessive.

As one of First City’s two giants, Alexander had the ability to protect himself.

Alexander frowned indiscernibly and hesitated for a moment. “Go stand guard outside.”

He was clearly instructing the butler and guards, but his gaze was on his daughter, Galoran.

Galoran stood there calmly as if she didn’t sense her father’s gaze.

At the same time, the butler and the two guards silently and gently walked out of the activity room. The former closed the door very carefully and guarded the outside with the two guards, preventing anyone from approaching.

Upon seeing this, Cynthia took two steps forward and said in panic and fear, “Your Excellency, the culprit behind the Citizen Meet explosion captured by the Hand of Order has identified Elder Varro as the mastermind. General Gaius took the opportunity to gather all the citizens in the city for a meet tomorrow morning.

“Th-this reminds me of some nasty rumors. Your Excellency, First City will be in chaos if you don’t stop it!” As she spoke, Cynthia approached Alexander and tried to reach out to hold the elder’s arm to comfort her terrified heart.

Alexander turned his head to glance at his daughter—Galoran—and retracted his arm awkwardly. “Ma’am, don’t do this.”

Before Cynthia could respond, Alexander pointed at the coffee table in the activity room. “Ma’am, calm down. How about a cup of tea first?”

There were two cups of tea there. One belonged to Alexander, and the other had been drunk by Galoran.

Cynthia traced Alexander’s finger and instinctively counted the few cups of tea. One cup, three cups... Yes, there are a total of three cups of tea. Which two people did the Superintendent chat with here previously?

As these thoughts raced through her mind, Cynthia pursed her lips and said, “O-okay.”

Her lips were pink and seemed to glow, making her look very alluring.

Alexander forced himself to look away and subconsciously gulped. He quickly summoned the butler and got him to deliver another cup of tea.

At this moment, Galoran had already found a seat and sat down. She showed no intention of leaving, presenting her stance of adapting to her circumstances.

The butler quickly delivered a cup of black tea and gently left the room.

Cynthia picked up the cup and tried to take a sip, but her hands were trembling uncontrollably due to her lingering fear and horror. She accidentally overturned the teacup.

“Oh...” She quickly stood up, and her clothes were already wet.

Alexander was a gentleman and wanted to step forward to provide his assistance. However, he looked at her moistened spot and glanced at his daughter beside him before stopping.

Cynthia flustered around for a while. Upon seeing that there was no response, she could only sadly take out a tissue and wipe herself.

“Your Excellency, look...” As she wiped the clothes around her chest, she wanted to say that she might have to go to the bathroom to deal with it.

With the words ‘look,’ Alexander looked at Cynthia’s chest and felt that the arcs were beautiful and indescribably moving.

He suddenly felt like he was on fire. Something was rapidly brewing in his heart, about to boil.

But... Alexander turned his head to look at his youngest daughter, Galoran, sitting beside him and couldn’t help but grumble about Cynthia in his heart. Can’t you take note of the situation? Why are you acting like nobody is here?

Alexander straightened his face and said in a deep voice, “Ma’am, I already know what you want to express. I’ll maintain First City’s stability. Alright, you may return. It’s easy to catch a cold when your clothes are wet.”

Cynthia was stunned. Her expression didn’t recover until the butler received the instructions and came in to invite her to leave.

She had never seen Superintendent Alexander acting like this before!

After Cynthia's figure disappeared from the door, Alexander turned around and looked at his youngest daughter, Galoran. He frowned and said, "Is this one of your abilities?"

Galoran replied very calmly, "That's right."

Alexander fell silent for a while before letting out a long sigh. "You're completely different from before."

Galoran smiled. "You probably don't know the price I paid."

"Oh?" Alexander asked. How can the price you paid be casually mentioned? Unless it isn't too easy to target.

At this moment, Galoran suddenly muttered, "Celestial Worthy of Immeasurable Blessings."

She then casually said, "Personality."

The price she paid was her personality.

...

In the Red Wolf Zone safe house prepared by the Old Task Force.

Long Yuehong looked at the sky that was gradually lighting up and heaved a sigh of relief. "I thought there would be chaos last night."

After all, with a terrifying existence like Xiaochong taking action, it was very easy to trigger an overreaction. In addition, the explosions caused by the Old Task Force also pulled at the sensitive nerves of everyone in the city.

"From the looks of it, First City's strength and stability are greater than we imagined. Those big shots should've been very busy last night." Jiang Baimian nodded in agreement. "It's very difficult to create chaos in such an edifice unless there are problems with the internal structure."

Shang Jianyao thought about it seriously and said to Long Yuehong, “Say a few more words. For example, ‘I’m only 1.75 meters tall after genetic enhancement,’ ‘my grades are only average,’ ‘there shouldn’t be any unrest for us to exploit.’”

“Hey...” Long Yuehong was bemused with anger.

Jiang Baimian glared at Shang Jianyao and exhaled before saying seriously, “We should head out and obtain a radio transceiver.”

They also had to pay attention to the development of this Citizen Meet.

Chapter 507: Meeting

In order not to be embroiled in any of First City’s possible unrest before getting a radio transceiver, the Old Task Force left early in the morning and missed the scheduled Citizen Meet by an hour.

In the Red Wolf Zone in the morning, there weren’t many pedestrians. It was the same for the cars coming and going.

Most of the residents here were still enjoying breakfast at home and waiting to participate in the gathering that Gaius had convened. They didn’t have to work in the morning thanks to this reason.

The remaining people either chose food from the bakeries that had opened early or entered the alfresco cafés. They found a seat and sat down, waiting for the waiter to deliver breakfast.

All of this was so serene and peaceful. If the air quality was better, Long Yuehong would definitely feel refreshed and happy.

Life was beautiful.

After turning into the Green Olive Zone, the sky became a tiny line thanks to the looming buildings on both sides. The environment also turned darker.

There weren’t many pedestrians here either. Most of them had already gone to the Factory Zone and had begun a busy day.

In front of the shops that sold expired bread was a long line, making the already cramped road narrower.

The Old Task Force's jeep drove northwest at a moderate speed along the road strewn with all kinds of trash. Their destination was Antanna Street.

First City's largest and most famous black market was the place they could most easily obtain a radio transceiver. But when the Old Task Force arrived at Antanna Street, they saw that the shops on both sides of the street were tightly shuttered. There were almost no pedestrians, and it appeared very quiet.

"They went bust?" Shang Jianyao clenched his right fist and punched his left palm.

Jiang Baimian kept wondering if he would say the following sentence next: "Antanna Street—Antanna Street has gone bust. B*stard—the b*stard boss owes a huge debt and has run off with his little aunt..."

Long Yuehong also had a similar premonition and quickly voiced his guess. "This place was raided by the Hand of Order after the previous conflict?"

He was referring to the matter of the Old Task Force forcefully snatching Han Wanghuo and Zeng Duo from Antanna Street.

"We'll know by asking." Bai Chen parked the jeep by the roadside, put on a baseball cap, and pushed open the door to get out of the car.

Just because there were almost no pedestrians didn't mean that there weren't any.

After putting on a disguise, Bai Chen pushed open the ajar door of a shop and said to the boss, who was hiding inside and peeping out from the cracks, "Getting some time off today?"

She deliberately used a mocking tone.

The Red Coaster laughed dryly. "Well, there's the Citizen Meet today, ain't it? The situation has been a little tense recently. Everyone unanimously believes that it's better to rest for a few days and

observe the situation to prevent ourselves from being treated as target practice. Sigh, those with money and resources have all brought their goods to the manors outside the city.”

Upon hearing the boss’s explanation, an Old World ancient poem surfaced in Jiang Baimian’s mind: “The duck knows first when the river turns warm...”

Antanna Street—which dealt in gray or even illegal businesses—had an acute grasp of the changes in the situation. Of course, this was also because there was information among the illegal things sold on Antanna Street.

Bai Chen nodded slightly in understanding. She then went straight to the point. “Which shop has excess numbers of radio transceivers?”

The Red Coaster shook his head. “The people in this business have either led people and their wares to the southern manors or have hidden in the nearest North Shore city ruins. They aren’t on the street anymore. If you really want one, go to the Hunter’s Guild and assign a mission. Many Hunter teams are relatively well off in this regard.”

Bai Chen calmly listened and maintained her mocking tone. “This is the first time I’m seeing people from Antanna Street push their business to the Hunter’s Guild.”

“Safety first, safety first.” The Red Coaster smiled and closed the shop door.

Bai Chen returned to the driver’s seat and turned her head to ask, “Where are we going to search next?”

She didn’t consider the boss’s suggestion at all because to the Old Task Force, issuing missions and waiting on others to complete it relied on luck. It didn’t meet their pressing need for one.

“How about my good brother, Terrence?” Shang Jianyao suggested. With that said, he gulped as if he missed the taste of iced Coke.

As the Blackshirts’ second boss, there was a high chance that Terrence had a radio transceiver.

It’s rare for Hey to come up with such a reasonable, serious, and feasible solution... Long Yuehong suddenly felt like echoing Shang Jianyao.

Of course, the solutions Shang Jianyao came up with were still feasible most of the time. However, they weren't serious or reasonable.

Jiang Baimian fell silent for a moment. "Keep that as a last choice."

Upon seeing that her team members were a little confused, she sighed and said, "Terrence is related to the pitiful ones at Wolf's Den. We should try not to use him if possible, lest it implicates the innocent."

She then smiled and said, "In any case, we still have many options, such as Boss Ugo."

This boss had a secret organization backing him. Furthermore, he was a friend of General Phocas.

Clap! Clap! Clap!

Shang Jianyao applauded.

"Alright." Bai Chen and Long Yuehong had no objections.

As for 'Garibaldi' Giuseppe, he couldn't provide any effective suggestions because his previous intelligence channels had been exposed.

...

Red Wolf Zone, 19 Rosta Street, Hand of Order headquarters.

Wall came to rendezvous with his colleagues that had investigated the several explosions last night. He came too early, and most of the people had yet to arrive, so he could only sit there by himself, pick up the information placed in front of everyone's seats, and seriously flip through it.

"In the armed conflict near Sikhara Temple, the people in the area heard a nursery rhyme and almost wanted to pee at the same time. This basically matches the situation at the colosseum..."

It's really them... They really sneaked back to First City! Are their whereabouts in the North Anheford area a sham or a trap? Wall thought angrily. This is belittling and insulting the Hand of Order!

Wall continued reading. The subsequent parts were regarding another armed conflict in which he had participated in the investigation.

"Similar to the armed conflict near Sikhara Temple, witnesses saw a sapphire-blue jeep. We can preliminarily determine that it's the same group..."

"These people drove at an extremely slow speed near Sikhara Temple, but they still hit a utility pole by the roadside. Over here, they were attacked by rockets several times, and their vehicle was overturned..."

"They are suspected of having two military exoskeletons..."

"From this, we can determine that they should've been attacked by powerful Awakened and their subordinates. This resulted in them displaying all kinds of illogical traits..."

Apart from us, who else would attack them? Wall went to the scene last night and tried to track them. He wasn't surprised by this conclusion at all, but he wondered who it was.

At the same time, he was more concerned about something else.

Although everything looked normal and matched all the characteristics of an armed conflict when he arrived at the scene last night, the situation of the crowd around him kept giving him an indescribable sense of strangeness. He felt that these people were still sleeping and were slowly shaking off their drowsiness.

As Wall flipped through the information, Red Wolf Zone's Orderly, Trevis, walked in.

As he sat down, Trevis said to Wall, "Focus on tracking the jeep. Don't come into contact with any more witnesses at the second scene."

"Why?" Wall was very surprised.

Trevis spread his palm. “Instructions from above. It might involve some highly confidential matters.”

Highly confidential matters... Wall shut his mouth.

Trevis casually added, “If you really want to know, you can ask General Gaius. Oh, he’s participating in the Citizen Meet this morning. Do you want to bring some people over to help maintain order?”

...

Green Olive Zone, Ugo Hotel.

Shang Jianyao and the others entered the lobby and went straight to the front desk.

The boss had already finished breakfast and was organizing his things.

“You guys actually came back?” Ugo looked up, taking a few seconds to see through their disguises.

Jiang Baimian smiled. “Because you still owe a large sum of money, we’re afraid that you will renege on your debt after some time.”

Ugo calmed down. “What do you want?”

“One radio transceiver.” Jiang Baimian directly stated her request.

“One?” Ugo was a little surprised.

It was too simple and cheap.

“That’s just the interest.” Jiang Baimian smiled. “The real ‘payment’ will have to wait until we meet General Phocas.”

“You want to meet him now?” Ugo fell silent for a moment.

Uh... Jiang Baimian’s heart palpitated. “Yes.”

General Phocas owed them a favor, so it was definitely a good thing for them to contact him as soon as possible.

“As it happens, he’s nearby.” Ugo pointed to the other side of the hotel lobby. “Wait for me outside that door.”

Before long, the Old Task Force members followed Ugo through an alley and entered an apartment before arriving at the innermost room on the first floor.

Knock! Knock! Knock!

Ugo knocked on the door.

“Come in.” General Phocas’s voice was slightly exhausted and hoarse.

After Ugo pushed open the door, Jiang Baimian and the others were a little dumbfounded.

The old lion-like Phocas stood there half-naked as he constantly lashed himself with a whip. Every lash had a bloody mark left behind—they looked rather hideous...

Chapter 508: True Self

In the awkward atmosphere, Shang Jianyao curiously asked, “Doesn’t it hurt?”

“It does.” Phocas didn’t stop lashing himself, and his voice trembled as he spoke. “But the more pain I feel, the more it makes me forget the externalities and past. It makes me see my true self.”

This saying... It feels strange... Which religious organization has this philosophy? First City sure is a lost cause. Many Elders have certain connections with different religions... It’s no wonder that internal conflicts are becoming more and more pronounced... Jiang Baimian deliberated for a moment and purposely asked, “You advocate the true self, not some Kalendaria?”

Piak!

Phocas lashed himself again. “No, Dawn is the true self. The true self is Dawn.”

Another religion that worships February’s Kalendaria, Dawn... Jiang Baimian didn’t equate the organization that General Phocas, Boss Ugo, and the others belonged to with Dawn’s Morning Star. This was because she could tell that there were considerable differences between the two parties from what she had heard so far.

At the very least, in the information provided by Pangu Biology, Morning Star had never mentioned the words ‘true self.’

The Old Task Force members weren’t surprised that General Phocas and Ugo believed in the Kalendaria, Dawn. This was because Ugo had previously shown the ability to influence dreams.

Now, Jiang Baimian and the others finally understood what was going on with the equipment in Ugo’s room. Their philosophy was to torture themselves and find the true self amidst pain.

“I thought you guys valued dreams more.” Shang Jianyao said this.

Long Yuehong thought so too. After all, the Kalendaria—Dawn—was most famous for its ‘dreamscape.’

Phocas ended his lashing and panted. “That’s a common misunderstanding and the wrong path taken by heretics and cultists.”

He threw the whip to the side, picked up a wet towel, and wiped the blood from his body. “Our consciousness will indeed be swallowed by nightmares, and we will become Heartless in reality. But we aren’t just talking about dreamscapes. In our religion, dreams are a wider concept. It refers to the various problems that conceal the true self.”

That’s where the differences lie... That’s how Dawn’s believers explain the Heartless disease... Jiang Baimian didn’t blindly mock the other party’s theory. When she was still worlds away from a conclusion, she couldn’t underestimate any so-called ‘truth.’

Sometimes, the most profound and cruel truth might lie behind absurdity and comical answers.

A rock from another mountain could polish jade—one could improve oneself by accepting external criticism!

Phocas wiped his body and wore his clothes, concealing the many whip marks on his body. “The Mirror Church and the Lost Dream Church believe that the world itself is a dream. In a sense, this isn’t wrong. Otherwise, nightmares wouldn’t have the terrifying ability to devour consciousnesses.”

When mentioning the other Kalendaria believers, this First City general casually mentioned two secret organizations.

“There’s also the Clam Dragon Church.” Shang Jianyao tried fighting for a status for Abbess Zhou and the others.

Phocas glanced at him and continued, “But if they want to use the Kalendaria’s power to wake up from their dreams and enter the New World, they can only be described as stupid. The Kalendaria have long given us the solution and power, but we were blinded by the dream and didn’t realize it. Everyone has the true self in them—the true self is Dawn. As long as you can find your true self inside, you can escape the dream and enter the New World.”

At this point, the lion-like general raised his right hand, clenched it into a fist, and gently rapped the side of his head. “The true self lives forever!”

“Oooh.” Shang Jianyao watched very attentively as if he wanted to memorize General Phocas’s every move.

After Phocas was dressed, Jiang Baimian smiled and asked, “Creating physical pain is your way of finding the true self?”

“Yes.” Phocas nodded slightly. “At every Mass, we talk about how to torture ourselves better. Some prefer dripping wax, some prefer to be pricked by needles, and some constantly summarize the various techniques needed to tie, hang, and whip themselves. Some hope to be tortured by external forces, not by themselves.”

He then said, “Of course, the focus is on torture, not pain. The former involves the latter. Apart from pain, humiliation, and mental torture, the simplest example is that some people attempt to draw

strength from the pain of their partners betraying them. Therefore, they take the initiative to create an opportunity to test the other party.”

Your religion is rather indecent... Even with Long Yuehong's experience, he found it strange.

At this moment, only one sentence flashed across Jiang Baimian's mind: Everyone has their own ambitions...

Bai Chen wanted to ask, “Can you really accept this? Will you really be satisfied with this?” However, she recalled that Phocas had repeatedly emphasized ‘pain’ and ‘torture.’

This made her feel that there were no holes in the other party's defense.

“Isn't the most painful thing the deaths of family, companions, and friends?” Shang Jianyao asked with a serious expression.

Phocas's expression changed a few times. “Yes.”

His tone was very deep.

Shang Jianyao went further by asking, “Then, would someone deliberately let their family, companions, and friends die to experience such pain?”

Phocas couldn't help but size up the fellow as if he were looking at a pervert. He then said in a deep voice, “How can people who can deliberately cause their family, companions, and friends to die feel pain from their deaths?”

“That's right!” Shang Jianyao clenched his right fist and punched his left palm excitedly. He seemed to have resolved some of his worries because of Phocas's answer.

Phocas didn't understand a thing, but he didn't want to say anything else. He looked at Jiang Baimian and asked, “What kind of assistance do you want from me?”

Having formulated a plan, she smiled. “If there’s chaos in the city, the responsibility of protecting Avia will be handed over to the city defense forces, or there might be a void. General, I hope that you can provide some convenience in our contact with Avia.”

“What if there’s no chaos?” Phocas asked instead of responding.

Jiang Baimian smiled and answered, “Then, we won’t trouble you. We’ll get your help another time.”

Phocas didn’t comment and said, “If you are willing to share your gains from your contact with Avia, I can agree.”

Phew... Jiang Baimian heaved a sigh of relief and joked, “Actually, with your philosophy, why do you want to obtain the secrets Oray left behind? Can’t you just focus on finding the true self?”

Phocas looked around and said, “Before we find the true self, we have to resist the terrifying nightmares to prevent our consciousness from being swallowed. The secrets Oray left behind might very well reveal the nightmare’s truth to a certain extent.”

Jiang Baimian stopped asking and smiled. “Looking forward to working with you.”

Phocas turned to look at the curtain-covered window and casually said, “It’s time for me to return. Gaius will be speaking at the Citizen Meet later.”

...

After receiving the radio transceiver from Ugo, the Old Task Force directly did some tuning in the car and sent a telegram to Pangu Biology.

The telegram’s content was about the same as Jiang Baimian’s draft from yesterday. She only added the matter regarding today’s Citizen Meet and provided her speculation that there might be chaos, expressing her intention of taking advantage of the chaos to make contact with Avia.

Jiang Baimian hoped to obtain the company’s help. She felt that as a large faction, it was impossible for the company to have only one intelligence network and a single Old Task Force in First City.

After sending the telegram, Jiang Baimian cast her gaze at Giuseppe. “Are there Mind Corridor-level Awakened in the company here?”

Giuseppe slowly shook his head. “I’m not too sure. I’m only in charge of providing the corresponding intelligence and not establishing deep ties with the person I’m meeting. Before this, I didn’t know you were this strong.”

He meant that there were indeed many people sent by Pangu Biology to First City for missions. He had indeed met a large number of them and had given them the designated intelligence, but he didn’t know if there were any Mind Corridor-level Awakened among them.

At this point, Giuseppe added, “But the company has quite a number of teams and individuals carrying out missions here. The chances of them being powerhouses are very high.”

“Individuals?” Jiang Baimian’s eyes lit up.

Just as lone Hunters were often relatively strong, those who carried out company missions as individuals and not teams were definitely not weak.

“Three.” Giuseppe gave an affirmative answer. “But I’ve already been exposed, so they definitely won’t contact me again.”

Jiang Baimian nodded thoughtfully and said to Bai Chen, “Drive the car to the intersection of the Red Wolf Zone and the Green Olive Zone.”

They could hear First City’s official radio broadcast there, making it easier for the Old Task Force to grasp the Citizen Meet’s developing trends. Once chaos broke out, they could retreat into the Green Olive Zone in time. As a place where lower-class citizens and foreign nomads lived, this place lacked strategic importance. It wouldn’t become the focus of the fight, and it would only produce a certain level of disorder. This didn’t threaten the Old Task Force.

“Alright.” Bai Chen accelerated the jeep slightly.

Chapter 509: Approaching

When the jeep drove to the intersection of the Red Wolf Zone and the Green Olive Zone, a group of lower-class citizens in old, washed-out clothes happened to be holding wooden placards and banners toward them.

“We want land!”

“We want work!”

“We want to live!” The group shouted in unison, and their voices went far.

Unlike the few times the Old Task Force had encountered them, this group of demonstrators was rather excited as if they had seen hope. At the same time, they had another slogan: “Severely punish the traitors; take a stand against evil!”

Jiang Baimian leaned her right arm against the window and muttered, “The Salvation Army had at least worked hard to save the world. Your First City has never had such thoughts since it was established...”

She knew that this slogan was directed at the Salvation Army, the Anti-intellectualism Church, and Elder Varro—who was rumored to have colluded with the Salvation Army and the Anti-intellectualism Church.

In the early stages of the Salvation Army’s establishment, they had a strong sense of mission and were filled with aggression. They fought their way to First City, horrifying the latter.

In order to resist this powerful enemy that wanted to save their slaves, First City had been demonizing the Salvation Army for years. It was said that they were extremists—extreme and fanatical. Everyone was like an incontrovertible lunatic. It was said that the Salvation Army would strip away everyone’s fields and property in the name of a collective once they arrived. It was said that the Salvation Army would publicly claim to distribute uniformly according to one’s needs, but they were actually exploiting ordinary people to enrich the rulers. It was said that they controlled very evil forces and would unconsciously change a target’s views, thoughts, and understanding. They would make First City’s citizens their puppets and do all kinds of things that were completely different from their own wishes.

From day after day of demonization, First City’s citizens hated and feared the Salvation Army. They believed that the Salvation Army was First City’s number one enemy.

Among the nobles, whoever was exposed to be in cahoots with the Salvation Army would basically spell political death.

“That’s right, that’s right.” Shang Jianyao agreed with Jiang Baimian in Long Yuehong’s tone.

After Bai Chen parked the car in an inconspicuous spot, Jiang Baimian thought for a moment and said, “It’s better not to contact Old Ge, Old Han, and the others at the agreed time tonight. First City’s situation is fluid, and there’s a high chance that it will affect Early Spring Town’s situation. We have to inform them as soon as possible. Yes, I hope Old Ge’s communication module stays open. Otherwise, we’ll have to wait until nighttime.”

She meant that they could directly contact Geneva without having to wait for Han Wanghuo and Zeng Duo to turn on the radio transceiver they obtained.

The Old Task Force kept the radio transceiver switched on at all times so as to receive the company’s reply—they had already mentioned this in the report.

Just as Jiang Baimian was about to contact Geneva, Pangu Biology replied with a telegram.

The telegram wasn’t long. When translated, it was: “Try your best to reach 15 Emperor Street in the Golden Apple Zone before the chaos erupts and meet someone. The countersign is: Angelica Sinensis.”

15 Emperor Street in the Golden Apple Zone? Jiang Baimian was no stranger to this address. The First City Elder—Meyers, whom her father had mentioned and was on good terms with the company’s Chief Scientist, Elder Huang—lived here.

It was his home.

On this street lived First City’s consul and commander-in-chief, Beulis.

When she heard ‘Emperor Street of the Golden Apple Zone,’ Bai Chen’s expression suddenly changed. She only calmed down when the word ‘15’ entered her ears.

“The company’s Mind Corridor-level Awakened has become a noble in First City?” Shang Jianyao stroked his chin and used his imagination.

“It’s also possible that he’s hiding in the house of a noble who has secretly cooperated with us.” The person who made this guess wasn’t Long Yuehong but ‘Giuseppe’ Garibaldi. As an intelligence agent, he could be considered knowledgeable in this regard.

“Perhaps.” Jiang Baimian looked at the protest march heading to Hope Square and made a decision. “We’ll head that way now.”

“But First City’s current situation probably means that the Golden Apple Zone is filled with sentries. How can we sneak in?” Long Yuehong objected.

Jiang Baimian nodded. “Therefore, we will temporarily stay at the intersection of the Red Wolf Zone and the Golden Apple Zone and wait for an opportunity. Actually, the area with the most attention should be Hope Square. The Golden Apple Zone might not be that heavily guarded.”

At this point, she smiled. “Besides, we can report to the company if we can’t do it. We’ve completed 80% of the journey, and the remaining 20% will be left to that person.”

She meant for that person to come over and meet up, not that they had to meet at 15 Emperor Street in the Golden Apple Zone.

“Yes.” Long Yuehong felt that his team leader had considered everything very thoroughly.

At this moment, Bai Chen frowned. “It’s impossible for the company not to guess the current situation in the Golden Apple Zone. Why didn’t they directly specify a place in the Red Wolf Zone and instead gave a meeting place like 15 Emperor Street, which isn’t easy to reach?”

Jiang Baimian made a terse grunt. “There are roughly two reasons. The first is that the person has a special identity and that it’s not convenient for them to leave Emperor Street at this moment. The second is that it will be much easier for us to find an opportunity to make contact with Avia if we can enter the Golden Apple Zone before the chaos erupts. Alright, let’s report our difficulties to the company first. Then, send a telegram to Old Ge, Old Han, and company.”

Jiang Baimian was suddenly stunned. After a few seconds, she yelped.

“What’s wrong?” Long Yuehong felt his liver tremble, believing that something bad had happened.

Jiang Baimian smiled bitterly. “We didn’t manage to get Old Han and Zeng Duo’s medical reports that Master Zennaga obtained... Do you think he will ignore us at Sikhara Temple when First City’s unrest subsides?”

“He might beat us up.” Shang Jianyao’s answer was very pertinent.

...

In the North Shore wastelands.

Han Wanghuo, Zeng Duo, and Genava—who were constantly traveling—were about to reach the Red River’s edge.

Genava suddenly said in surprise, “Hey, Big White and the others just sent a telegram!”

In order to maintain communication, he wasn’t stingy with his batteries.

At this moment, a strange thought flashed through Zeng Duo’s mind: Genava’s surprise didn’t feel metallic or plastic...

“What happened to them?” Han Wanghuo asked directly.

“They were attacked...” Genava went straight to the point. “They also reminded us to pay attention to our dreams.”

As a smart bot, he naturally completed the translation when he received the telegram.

“There’s indeed something wrong with that dream.” Han Wanghuo heaved a sigh of relief.

Genava moved his metal neck. “I’ll tell them what happened here and give them the theory that the target is afraid of the smell of blood. Also, Big White said that chaos might erupt in First City at any

moment. She wants us to pay close attention to the First City army in the North Shore wastelands and determine the situation in Early Spring Town.”

Zeng Duo was thrilled when she heard the last sentence, and she pointed at the Red River not far away. “The powerhouses and troops that will be recalled from the North Shore wastelands to First City will definitely have to pass by the bridge over the Red River. We can obtain first-hand information by using binoculars from afar!”

“Alright.” Genava’s eyes flickered with a red glow.

...

First City, Golden Apple Zone, 9 Emperor Street.

This was the residence of one of First City’s two giants—the consul and commander-in-chief, Beulis.

Asus was half-naked as he stretched his arms in the blue swimming pool. He had just taken a steam bath at home and came out to cool down.

Whoosh!

The handsome young noble with black hair and blue eyes climbed out of the swimming pool. His body was tall and straight, and his muscles were well-defined. At this moment, they were dotted with water droplets, making him appear very stylish.

“Gaius’s Citizen Meet is about to begin, right?” Asus asked the attendant holding a large towel.

“Yes, it’s in another 15 minutes.” The attendant couldn’t help but ask, “Aren’t you worried?”

As Asus with deep, charming eyes wiped his body, he smiled. “What’s there to worry about? As long as Gaius isn’t stupid, he should know that there’s no chance of winning by relying on those citizens.”

Asus was this confident because his father—the consul and commander-in-chief, Beulis—was one of the strongest people in First City.

This elder had already found the door to the New World in the Mind Corridor. He only restrained himself and didn't push it open. He wanted to wait to complete this step only when he was old and when his life was coming to an end.

Apart from this, as far as Asus knew, most people in First City—who could be called powerhouses—supported his father. Even the ones who often slept were the same.

For example, Cass.

Yes, Cass—one of the giants who founded First City, Oray's good comrade, and a denomination of the city's currency—was still alive. He was already more than 90 years old and slept in that chamber most of the time. But as long as he was willing, he could return from the New World temporarily at any time.

As far as Asus was concerned, the citizens that Gaius had gathered were only means of production. This was a term he had learned when reading certain books in the Old World.

In city street fights, Awakened were much more useful than troops unless Gaius wanted an internecine outcome by blowing up First City with as many explosives as possible.

...

A large number of citizens had already gathered in Hope Square.

Wall rushed over with 20 to 30 public security officers. At a glance were a dense crowd of heads.

I hope nothing happens... This sheriff was also more inclined to stability.

Chapter 510: Speech

The Old Task Force quickly received a reply from Pangu Biology.

The telegram told them that the meeting location couldn't be changed and that they had to think of a way to enter the Golden Apple Zone.

Jiang Baimian slowly sighed and said, "From the looks of it, it's indeed inconvenient for that person to leave Emperor Street..."

"What should we do then?" Long Yuehong looked at the Golden Apple Zone, which was only one street away. The city defense forces had already set up temporary checkpoints there.

Although he didn't see the hidden guards, he believed that they were there.

Jiang Baimian pondered for a moment and said, "We can only contact General Phocas and get him to get a temporary pass. This is considered part of that help."

Phocas had already returned to the general's residence and had given the Old Task Force the number to his study's phone.

"That's all we can do..." Bai Chen indicated that she had no other choice.

Shang Jianyao looked at the temporary checkpoint established by the city defense forces and said, "It should be possible to use the method of 'making friends,' but I wonder how many more friends I'll end up with."

"I'm afraid the city defense forces will become the Shang Jianyao Brotherhood's First City branch," Jiang Baimian joked.

This was indeed a joke because there were many Awakened in the city defense system. They were sufficiently vigilant and had the ability to counterattack on such matters. Perhaps Shang Jianyao's outcome of 'making friends' would be an enlightenment to which he would surrender himself to the Hand of Order.

Bai Chen started the jeep again and searched the surrounding area for a place to make a call.

Shang Jianyao leaned back in his chair and massaged his temples.

...

In the Sea of Origins, on the island with the golden elevator.

Shang Jianyao landed ashore and split into nine. They once again surrounded the Shang Jianyao that was wearing a gray camouflage uniform and blocking the golden elevator's door.

"We've finally found a flaw in your logic," said one of the Shang Jianyaos with a smile.

Another Shang Jianyao stroked his chin and added, "By killing our companions, letting them live in our memories, and then splitting into different personalities to act as them, there won't be the fear of losing companions, nor will we feel much pain. This matter is completely unnecessary."

The Shang Jianyao sitting at the golden elevator's door quietly 'listened.' It was only when the nine Shang Jianyaos finished speaking that they picked up a portable recording device beside them and played the previous content.

When the nine Shang Jianyaos spoke, this Shang Jianyao completely blocked his hearing to prevent himself from being unknowingly affected by Inference Clowning. At Shang Jianyao's current level, he couldn't turn Inference Clowning's power into an electromagnetic signal like Wu Meng. Once he did a transcription, the corresponding effects would disappear.

Therefore, both parties 'prepared' a portable recording device in order to facilitate communication.

After hearing the nine Shang Jianyaos' statements, the Shang Jianyao blocking the golden elevator door laughed.

"This is a white lie that has helped all of you make up your mind. The focus of my suggestion is actually to kill our companions, not how we should let them live in our memories or split out personalities to act as them. When you put the killing of your companions into action, you would've already overcome your fear of losing them. The source of the fear of 'loss' is that you mind. Our goal is to make ourselves indifferent, even coldblooded."

After the villain—Shang Jianyao—finished speaking, the nine Shang Jianyaos also used the portable recording device to replay his words.

One of the Shang Jianyaos scoffed. “After becoming coldblooded, how can you persist in your dream of saving all of humanity? What has their survival got to do with us?”

“I get it.” Another Shang Jianyao clenched his right fist and punched his left palm. “He’s essentially the coward in our hearts. He crazily wants to escape our responsibilities, ideals, and everything that makes him suffer.”

Shang Jianyao—who was holding a small speaker—shook his head. “Your mockery is useless against him. He won’t mind at all.”

The Shang Jianyao that had just spoken sighed. “From the looks of it, we have to have the resolve to perish together to accommodate him.”

“Don’t!”

“No!”

“Calm down!” The other Shang Jianyaos shouted to stop their companion with dangerous inclinations.

Once again, Shang Jianyao’s earnest meeting ended in failure.

...

A large number of cars and people passed by the Red River Bridge every day in the North Shore Wastelands.

Han Wanghuo, Zeng Duo, and Genava hid on the top of a collapsed building relatively far away. They used binoculars or only their eyes to monitor the target area’s activity.

Before long, they saw an army armed to the teeth reach the bridge, but they were intercepted by the city defense forces guarding the bridge.

After the two parties argued for a while, the troops—which numbered in the hundreds—chose a ruin by the shore that had long been emptied to set up base.

Subsequently, teams arrived in droves, but they weren't allowed to cross the bridge.

This was the case for First City's officials, as well as Ruin Hunters. Everyone received the same treatment.

"Is the entire city under martial law? Is it forbidden to enter or leave?" Han Wanghuo guessed.

Genava analyzed the verbal data he had gathered from the city defense officers and replicated their words. "Wait for orders from above, or three in the afternoon."

"First City's higher-ups are sufficiently vigilant about the unrest..." Han Wanghuo sighed with emotion.

"Will there be any unrest?" Zeng Duo was a little worried.

Genava gave his opinion. "If no other accidents happen, there's a 91.2% chance that unrest won't happen. As for any other accidents, we currently lack sufficient information to speculate."

The data that Genava provided wasn't casually fabricated like Shang Jianyao's. It had been calculated from a built model.

Zeng Duo fell silent for a moment before saying, "Early Spring Town's defense forces should be reduced now."

"But if there's no chaos and the powerhouses and troops don't have their hands tied, they can reinforce Early Spring Town at any moment." Genava doused Zeng Duo's enthusiasm.

Han Wanghuo turned his head to glance at Zeng Duo and consoled her. "Opportunities require waiting."

...

First City, Golden Apple Zone, 9 Emperor Street, in the consul's residence.

Asus, who had put on his clothes, returned to the grand hall and saw that his father—the consul and commander-in-chief, Beulis—had already changed into a green and brown military uniform.

This powerhouse was slightly older than Phocas, but he didn't relegate himself to secondary importance like the latter because he didn't have to be at the front line or actually command the army. He only maintained his seat as an Elder and a portion of First City's city defense forces' command.

He still stood at the peak of First City's authority.

"Father." Upon seeing Beulis, the playboy-like Asus became serious.

Beulis combed his black hair that was mixed with a few silver strands and nodded. "I'm going out. Stay at home today—you can't go anywhere."

"Where are you going?" Asus was a little surprised. His father seemed to value Gaius's Citizen Meet more than he imagined.

The chubby-faced Beulis with deep-blue eyes looked around at the guards. "I'll visit His Excellency Cass first before heading to the Senate."

...

Hope Square.

A large number of citizens had already gathered here. Those who couldn't come over were also paying attention to the meet's content through First City's official broadcast.

Time quickly passed, and 9 a.m. arrived.

Gaius—who had a hooked nose and slightly sunken cheeks—wore his green-brown general uniform today and walked to the podium in the middle of Hope Square with a serious expression.

Back then, Oray had announced the establishment of First City here.

Gaius didn't deliberately show his uniqueness. He held the microphone and said to the crowd, "My fellow citizens, I believe there's no need for introductions. I'm the commander of the Eastern Army Corps—Gaius, who became an Elder last year. Like you, my father and mother are citizens of First City. Therefore, I was born a citizen of First City. I wasn't a noble in the past, so I could see how much the surrounding citizens had paid to develop and strengthen First City for its survivability. I was one of them, so nobody knows the weight of the word 'citizen' better than me."

What Gaius said was the truth. As an ordinary citizen, he—who relied on his military achievements to become an Elder—naturally obtained the favor of the citizens present.

After the citizens nodded or applauded, Gaius continued, "It's precisely because of your predecessors and your efforts over the years that First City has become the largest faction in the Ashlands. Only then can it have a large number of fields, occupy many mines, and build factories of various sizes. This allowed everyone to escape their hunger and lead a more stable life. But..."

Gaius's tone suddenly became heavier. "All of this is being slowly corroded and destroyed!"