

Full Time 291

Chapter 291 The Greatest Enemy is Hunger (2)

Together, they had fourteen packets. Without a word, Chen Gu tore them open and devoured them all in the blink of an eye.

When he finished and looked up, he saw everyone staring at him in astonishment.

Chen Gu hadn't actually had his fill, but he still forced an explanation. "It's a professional thing; I can eat a lot. Yeah, more than you'd think possible."

Gong Shuxu got the message. "So you're saying... you're still not full?"

Before Chen Gu could respond, his stomach growled. Lisa, who was beside him, burst out laughing. Chen Gu bashfully admitted, "Yep, still not full."

That little bit of food was hardly enough to tide him over.

Chen Gu changed the subject. "Where are we now, and how far are we from Base 11?"

Ma Shuwen had recovered considerably; she was the team leader, after all. She opened a holographic map. "We went in the opposite direction while escaping, so now we're even further from Base 11."

Chen Gu wasn't really paying attention to what she was saying. All he could think about was how to get more food and have a proper meal.

The group began discussing whether to continue to Base 11, head to a different base, or find the nearest human field troops.

Suddenly, Chen Gu pulled the holographic map towards him and pointed to a bright red marker. "Is this an insect nest?" he asked.

Ma Shuwen didn't pay it much mind. "That's Insect Nest One, the primary target of the three armies' offensive," she explained. "According to our war satellite scans, there are about one hundred and twenty Troop Nest Beetles inside. Some satellite imagery also suggests they might be using the terrain to conceal a gigantic egg. The staff in the Central Operations Room hypothesize it could be the Insect Race's ultimate ground warfare weapon: the Combat King Bug!"

Chen Gu's heart skipped a beat. An uncontrollable urge surged within him, making him want to head straight for Insect Nest One.

The Combat King Bug! Just the name sounds delicious!

According to the map, they were only a little over five hundred kilometers from Insect Nest One.

When they left the Roaring Mecha Regiment, they weren't too far from Insect Nest One. After returning to the temporary base, heading out again, and all the random running about, they had somehow, by a stroke of luck, ended up even closer to it.

The Roaring Mecha Regiment, being a large combat unit, had to consider the terrain's impact on their march, so they couldn't advance in a straight line. However, as Professionals, if they set out now, only five hundred kilometers would separate them from Insect Nest One.

After Ma Shuwen explained a few things to Chen Gu, she resumed discussing their next course of action with the others. Chen Gu firmly raised his hand. "If you ask me, we head for Insect Nest One!

"Didn't you say earlier that three armies are attacking Insect Nest One? If we get there first and take it out, then wait for the three great armies to come marching in, only to find—ta-da!—nothing's left, imagine the look on their faces?

"Otherwise, it wouldn't showcase the true capabilities of us Professionals!"

With his own little scheme in mind, Chen Gu gestured expansively, his tone rather grandiose.

But when he finished speaking, everyone, including Gong Shuxu, stared at him with the exact same expression.

Chen Gu was familiar with that look; it was the same one he gave Ossosa when he thought the guy was a complete idiot.

Uh... Chen, the Great Actor, now starved and delirious, still didn't see anything amiss with what he had just said. It was clearly a sincere and rousing pre-battle pep talk!

Gong Shuxu coughed, then said admiringly, "Even though I'm at the Sixth Energy Level, I wouldn't dare approach an insect nest, even at my peak."

Gong Shuxu's Energy Level allowed his skills to cover an entire nest. However, an insect nest teems with a vast number and variety of insects.

Amidst the Troop Nest Beetles, who knew what kinds of embryonic insects lay hidden?

It wasn't unheard of in history for powerful Professionals, finding themselves in an unfavorable battle, to venture alone into insect nests. They were then killed by Troop Nest Beetles that had hastily cultivated specialized insects to counteract their skills.

A being like Aviloya was, after all, exceedingly rare.

Otherwise, why would the battles between humans and the Alien Insect Race be so passive? If they could just pinpoint the nests' locations and air-drop a high-Energy-Level Professional, the problem would be solved.

The fact that Chen Gu had previously destroyed two nests was merely a stroke of luck. He simply hadn't encountered any insects perfectly suited to counter his abilities.

Moreover, since Chen Gu possessed more than one profession, it was almost impossible for the insects to completely counter him.

His pronouncements naturally left Ma Shuwen and the others utterly astonished. After Gong Shuxu spoke, everyone ignored Chen Gu and resumed discussing their next destination. They didn't even consider the suicidal option of "charging straight into the dragon's lair" to attack Insect Nest One.

When Gong Shuxu had said that, he was, subjectively, giving Chen Gu an out, trying not to be too blunt: You're crazy, kid!

And since Chen Gu had just saved everyone, the others also preserved Great Actor Chen's dignity.

But that was genuinely what Chen Gu was thinking. He even considered breaking away from the group to go to Insect Nest One by himself.

It could only be said that Chen Gu, at that moment, was driven mad by hunger...

Yet, if he really left the group, that old fox Gong Shuxu would probably become extremely vigilant, worrying, Is this potential Mutant planning to escape?

In the end, Gong Shuxu and Ma Shuwen decided: they would head to the more distant Base 9.

Seeking out the field army risked drawing the Mutant swarm behind them, which could cause significant losses to the troops. Their sense of responsibility wouldn't allow them to do that.

If they went to Base 11, they feared Boles might be there with the Mutant swarm, setting a trap.

Base 9 was over thirteen hundred kilometers from their current location and also had an aircraft. So, after weighing their options, they made this decision.

"Let's move out," Gong Shuxu declared. His wounds had healed considerably, and he began giving orders with the air of a Sixth Energy Level expert.

Chen Gu trailed behind the others, sullen and dispirited. After walking for a while, he started to stoop, his back hunched, looking as if hunger had completely drained his strength.

Ma Shuwen looked at Gong Shuxu helplessly. The old man, too, wondered, Why is this fellow so lazy? Still, they owed Chen Gu three times over, not to mention he had just saved all their lives. They couldn't just ignore him.

The old man coughed. "Do you have any other ideas for finding food? Let's be clear: going to Insect Nest One is definitely not an option."

Chen Gu perked up slightly. "If we could find some Energy Gathering Mechanical Species, that might alleviate the hunger a bit."

He was truly famished and blurted this out without thinking.

Ma Shuwen and the others were surprised. "How do you know this planet has Energy Gathering Mechanical Species?"

Chen Gu, dazed with hunger, mumbled, "Yeah, there are... but they're all underground..." He hadn't finished speaking when he saw Gong Shuxu and a few others suddenly exchange strange looks, their expressions shifting as if they'd remembered something.

Gong Shuxu took a step forward and asked gravely, "Was there a time when you were starving and ate some Energy Gathering Mechanical Species? Specifically... two of them?"

Chen Gu looked even more surprised than they did. "You actually found out?"

Chapter 292 Global Hunt (1)

The great battle between those two groups of Energy Gathering Mechanical Species hidden in the underground cave—how coincidental must it have been for the military to discover it?

Gong Shuxu and the reconnaissance squad entered that area of underground caves to investigate after the Gong Gong Mechanical Corps. Therefore, they knew Energy Gathering Mechanical Species existed on this planet. However, no one had ever mentioned this to Chen Gu.

Once this matter was brought to light, Gong Shuxu recalled the scene at the time. He then looked at Chen Gu's current state of recklessness whenever hunger struck. He felt he had guessed the truth. "You orchestrated a major battle between the two dominant populations of Energy Gathering Mechanical Species in the underground caves, just to eat their kings?"

The rest of the reconnaissance squad suddenly understood, vividly recalling the scene: parts of both the Energy Piranha King's and the Energy Serpent Spider's bodies were missing. Nearby, stone pots, stone basins, stone bowls, and a charred earthen stove lay scattered...

Was it all this guy's doing?

He did it all just for a bite to eat?!

A look of fond remembrance crossed Chen Gu's face. "Truly a worldly delicacy! For that, any amount of work is worthwhile."

"SLURP—" Chen Gu sucked his saliva back, looking at Gong Shuxu with a helpless expression. "You shouldn't have brought this up. My hunger is even more intense now."

"Besides, the things I ate made me even more powerful," Chen Gu emphasized deliberately.

Not only did he gain the body-enlargement ability from the 'crippled version' of Imagine Reality, but the speed of his Mind Remote Control also increased significantly.

But deep down, he knew very well: he just hadn't suffered a major screw-up yet.

Someday, he would end up like the Isabella Wu from his memories—hugging the toilet, vomiting and suffering from diarrhea, all because he ate something he shouldn't have...

This minor incident helped everyone realize that Chen Gu was indeed the "hero" who had saved the Gong Gong Mechanical Corps. Even so, their opinion of him didn't much change; they still wouldn't accompany him into the underground caves to search for Energy Gathering Mechanical Species.

No one was familiar with the underground conditions. Aside from the lurking Energy Gathering Mechanical Species, even if the pursuing Mutant Swarm chased them into the caves, the narrow environment would be extremely disadvantageous for Professionals.

Moreover, instead of their respect and admiration for this "hero" who saved the Gong Gong Mechanical Corps increasing, they found him inexplicably comical whenever they looked at him!

The team continued towards Base 9. Earlier on their journey, Gong Shuxu had used his portable device to contact the military. He reported the Boles mutation and the high probability of a Mutant Swarm appearing on the planet.

Such personal communication devices, even at increased power, couldn't transmit directly across Star Systems. They had only managed to contact nearby military forces, requesting them to relay the report.

Upon receiving the news, Bai Yunpeng no longer ignored Chen Gu's situation. Despite being short on troops, he managed to dispatch a Heavy Armor Mecha Company to rendezvous with them quickly.

Chen Gu specifically reminded them: bring plenty of food.

However, a few hours later, as they entered a dense stone forest, Gong Shuxu suddenly found that the electronic devices on his person were malfunctioning.

"Electromagnetic interference?" Gong Shuxu, ever experienced, cautiously scanned his surroundings. "Everyone, be careful. This might be a hunting ground for Energy Gathering Mechanical Species."

Ma Shuwen nodded. "Just like that pitted area, riddled with holes—the Energy Serpent Spider's hunting ground."

Chen Gu casually asked, "The Energy Serpent Spider's hunting ground is above ground?"

"Yes." Ma Shuwen explained further. Chen Gu found it strange. "Why do all the Energy Gathering Mechanical Species on this planet hide underground? Fine, let them hide underground. But their hunting grounds all seem to be on the surface. So, what exactly are they hunting?"

These words stunned Gong Shuxu and the others. Indeed, why was that?

"If this planet has some hidden secret," one of them mused, "we and the Insect Race have been here for over ten days. Logically, we should have discovered it by now."

Great Actor Chen was too hungry now to have much capacity for thought or analysis; he was merely speaking off the cuff.

Elton led the way. Already short, he now moved with heightened alertness, crouching low and tucking in his neck, looking even more like a... large ball of muscle rolling ahead.

Suddenly, he made a hand signal to those behind. The group quietly followed, and Elton pointed them towards something.

"Plants? Fruits?"

In the stone forest, red, willow-branch-like plants seemed to struggle out from cracks in the rocks, swaying gently. Their branches bore seven or eight pale green fruits, very similar in size and shape to peaches.

Everyone quickly turned, hands outstretched, ready to restrain Chen Gu. Based on the "craving" for food he had previously shown, they were afraid he would charge out recklessly.

Chen Gu, however, merely gazed listlessly at the plant, showing no intention of moving whatsoever.

Chen Gu made a reassuring gesture to the others and whispered, "That thing... it doesn't taste good."

The doll-like Lisa asked curiously, "How do you know?"

Chen Gu said, "I just know." He looked at it and felt not the slightest appetite; obviously, it wasn't tasty.

Ma Shuwen and Gong Shuxu conferred. "Should we go check it out, or go around it?"

Before the two could reach a conclusion, a strange sound suddenly echoed from the sky, growing louder as it neared!

"The Mutant Swarm! They're catching up!" Everyone tensed and quickly looked up. However, this time, what appeared wasn't the usual ferocious mutant flying insects, but rather meteors—streaking through the air, burning as they fell!

"Could it be debris from the great battle in the Star Sea, falling to the planet?"

Whether it was wreckage from destroyed starships or the corpses of dead insects, if they were too close to a planet, its gravity could capture them, leading to such a phenomenon.

No one could offer a definitive answer. As they looked up, they overlooked the strange plant before them. Silently and unnoticed, clusters of similar plants began to sprout around the original one!

The Professionals suddenly felt a palpitation in their chests. Lowering their gaze, they discovered in horror that these peculiar plants were now sprouting from every crevice in the rocks throughout the entire stone forest!

"Those are definitely not plants!"

The group drew closer together as those plants also began to emerge from smaller crevices underfoot, steadily advancing towards them.

Chen Gu leaped onto a massive nearby stone pillar and waved for the others to join him. After a moment's hesitation, they followed. Within seconds, the spot where they had just been standing was completely overrun by those plants.

Chapter 293 Global Hunt (2)

As everyone looked around, the entire stone forest had become lush and verdant. Red branches and green fruits were everywhere, swaying silently. An indescribably eerie and terrifying sensation permeated the air.

"What on earth is this thing?" Elton scratched his head and asked.

By then, the meteors in the sky had finally crashed to the ground. These numerous meteors caused continuous vibrations and loud rumbles, making the whole earth tremble.

The meteor shower landed not too far from them. Before they hit the ground, Chen Gu vaguely saw that within the intense flames, they didn't appear to be warship wreckage or insect corpses, but rather individual, irregular spheres.

However, faint dark blue stripes could be seen on their surfaces.

"But they don't seem like ordinary meteors either."

As the ground vibrated from the meteor shower's impact, the red branches shook even more violently. The earth's trembling gradually subsided, and the planet's surface seemed to return to calm, though the temperature felt even more scorching.

Ma Shuwen pricked up his ears. "What's that sound?"

Everyone listened intently. Faint, indistinct sounds could be heard, which then swiftly grew louder. From the direction of the meteor fall, a group of strange creatures suddenly appeared, blue flames burning on their bodies, roaring as they rushed towards them.

From a distance, these creatures somewhat resembled the Energy Gathering Mechanical Species. At first, only a few dozen were visible, but in an instant, a vast horde appeared behind them. They quickly surged forward, covering the land, their numbers in no way inferior to the largest insect swarms!

A chill ran down everyone's spine. Did the meteors bring these creatures? What exactly are they, and where did they come from?

Only Chen Gu pondered a different question: Why have they come?

This horde of terrifying monsters, swarming across the land, soon charged to the edge of the stone forest.

However, because their numbers were so vast, only a small portion passed through the stone forest; the majority of the creatures rushed over the mountain peaks and stone embankments flanking the forest.

They were agile and powerful, able to sprint rapidly over even the most rugged terrain.

As the creatures charged into the stone forest, the peculiar "plants" were the first to bear the brunt. The outermost plants instantly shattered under the onslaught, trampled into fragments by the stampeding monsters.

But as the creatures penetrated deeper, the plants suddenly stirred. The peach-shaped green fruits hanging from their branches burst open with a PUFF, shooting out countless tiny, needle-like objects.

These projectiles did little harm to the creatures' metallic bodies, striking them with a series of CLINKs before falling off. However, many needles managed to find their way into the crevices of the creatures' metal exteriors.

Chen Gu observed that as soon as those hair-like needles penetrated them, the rampaging creatures began to move unnaturally. They slowed, grew increasingly uncoordinated, and eventually collapsed to the ground.

The moment they fell, the branches would entangle them. The tendrils then inserted themselves into the crevices of their bodies, and with a single draining action, the blue flames on the metal creatures' bodies conspicuously flowed into the branches.

Even the red color of the branches slowly changed to a mix of red and blue.

When one of these extraterrestrial Energy Gathering Mechanical Species fell, it would often attract dozens, or even hundreds, of branches vying for it.

With so many branches and so little to go around, many failed to absorb the blue flames. They continued to burrow into the bodies of the extraterrestrial Energy Gathering Mechanical Species, swiftly extracting a deep blue liquid that also seemed to satisfy them.

As for the Energy Gathering Mechanical Species lying on the ground, they could still scream and struggle as the blue flames on their bodies were drained.

And when that blue liquid was completely depleted, they truly became inert, lying on the ground, unable to move.

Moreover, their originally lustrous metallic bodies rapidly began to rust and corrode.

Of such a massive horde of extraterrestrial Energy Gathering Mechanical Species charging through the stone forest, only seventy percent managed to break through. A full thirty percent were left behind, buried within the "mouths" of those bizarre branches!

From their vantage point atop the stone pillars, Gong Shuxu and his group could see that even outside the stone forest, in certain unique terrains, large-scale traps would occasionally appear.

Various unique indigenous creatures would bravely emerge from underground, ambushing these extraterrestrial Energy Gathering Mechanical Species.

As if summoned by something, the extraterrestrial Energy Gathering Mechanical Species kept running in a specific direction, utterly indifferent to the losses they suffered along the way. They crossed the vast wasteland and disappeared over the horizon, providing the native creatures of this planet with a veritable feast.

The Professionals were utterly baffled. "They came from beyond the stars, just to die?"

Gong Shuxu couldn't help but ask, "Chen Gu, what do you think?"

But he received no answer from Chen Gu. When the old man turned his head, he saw Chen Gu staring intently at the branches.

By now, all the branches in the stone forest had "eaten their fill."

Having absorbed so much blue flame and blue liquid, they had changed into a strange, deep blue color tinged with red. The sight involuntarily reminded onlookers of the recent slaughter, making them feel deeply uncomfortable.

The peach-like fruits they had grown were all used up in the recent massacre.

Even those weren't enough; many branches had hastily produced more fruit.

Now, they swayed lazily a couple of times, then drooped. However, they didn't immediately retract into the stone crevices; they had also swollen to several times their original thickness.

In each cluster of branches, one began to grow particularly thick and robust, as the other branches in its vicinity started transferring the blue "substance" to it.

This particular branch swelled until it was as thick as a bucket, then burst with a POP, transforming into a large, fluffy, strange ball!

The ball was filled with numerous seed-like entities. In total, ten such balls were produced throughout the stone forest. These balls bounced and tumbled out of the stone forest, rolling far into the distance.

Chen Gu was staring intently at these large balls, completely ignoring the inquiry from the distinguished Sixth Energy Level expert.

He swallowed hard with a loud GULP. A feast beyond compare!

Then, before Ma Shuwen could grab him, Chen Gu was already hopping along the tops of the stone pillars, chasing after the balls!

The branches in the stone forest, having produced these seed-filled balls, seemed to have completed the final step of their hunt. They slowly retracted back into the stone crevices. Before long, only the broken metallic carcasses would remain on the ground.

Gong Shuxu watched Chen Gu, speechless, while Ma Shuwen asked, "Should we... go with him?"

Chapter 294 - Global Hunt (3)

Gong Shuxu really wanted to say he'd stop bothering with that guy, but after all, he had saved everyone's lives. It was also evident lately that Chen Gu was close to becoming delirious with hunger.

He gritted his teeth and said, "Grab one for him so that he can fill his belly; that's the only way we'll make good progress on the road—otherwise, who knows what other trouble he'll stir up!"

"Sure." Actually, everyone was thinking the same thing.

To their surprise, those big spheres moved quite fast, and Chen Gu quickly caught up with them just outside the stone forest. He drew the Riverwash Sword and didn't hesitate to unleash the "Nuclear Frenzy Slash," propelling his speed to the limit. In an instant, he overtook a big sphere, crimson lightning flashed, and the sphere was sliced in two. Chen Gu didn't even pause for a moment before chasing after the other seed spheres.

The others who followed behind exchanged glances. Are you that greedy, wanting all ten spheres for yourself?

Gong Shuxu helplessly said, "Intercept the rest for him."

However, as everyone was about to dive in, Chen Gu heard Gong Shuxu's words. While chasing down the seed spheres, he yelled out, "Don't lay a hand on them!"

"These are top-notch ingredients! You won't handle them properly. I'll do it myself!"

What?! Gong Shuxu was frustrated and waved his hand to stop the others. "Never mind. He thinks we're meddling. Let him handle it himself."

True to form, the annoying Brain Domain Hacker! the Sixth Energy Level Psychological Spy master thought.

Chen Gu launched three consecutive "Nuclear Frenzy Slashes" and indeed managed to split all the seed spheres by himself.

Once the spheres were cut in half, of course, they couldn't roll anymore.

Ma Shuwen approached to inspect a seed sphere that Chen Gu had sliced in two: in the center of the huge, fluffy structure, there was a fist-sized, tender "meat chunk"!

Calling it a meat chunk was somewhat inaccurate, though; it was very tender, and it appeared somewhat like some kind of fungus.

This thing was overall pinkish-blue, with a semi-transparent membrane wrapped around it, dotted with fine red "blood threads"—something that looked disgusting at first sight.

Ma Shuwen also saw that Chen Gu's sword strike was very precise, neatly slicing the fluffy exterior of the seed sphere in half without damaging even a single layer of that membrane.

The others also gathered around. "Chen Gu clearly didn't want us to ruin these... 'meat chunks.' But is this really the top-notch ingredient he was talking about?"

"Can this stuff even be eaten?"

The doll-like Lisa hid behind Ma Shuwen. "I won't eat it! I won't eat it! Even if I starve, I won't eat that!"

Chen Gu dragged the other spheres back. He was full of enthusiasm, arranging the ten spheres together, radiating a sense of accomplishment.

Then, Great Actor Chen began preparing the cooking utensils, completely oblivious to the odd glances from his companions around him.

Seeing him put together an assortment of pots, pans, and utensils, the Professionals were fully convinced that he was indeed the one they found in the Energy Gathering Spider Den.

Then they watched Chen Gu start cooking with devout concentration. As the strange smell spread, they saw Chen Gu sniff the aroma, his face alight with rapture, making them even more bewildered by him.

Lisa quietly asked Ma Shuwen, "Captain, could Chen Gu's profession affect this area?" She pointed to her head.

Ma Shuwen felt awkward. I don't know either. Although, that's what I'm guessing too...

Chen Gu was about to finish cooking when Elton, with sneaky glances around, volunteered, "I... I'm feeling a bit ill. I need to find a place to relieve myself."

It was a clear attempt to get away.

Then, without waiting for everyone to respond, he dashed off in a flash. Suppose Chen Gu was extremely enthusiastic and wanted to share this oddity with everyone—would you eat it or not? Better to run away first.

Following Elton, the rest of the group also hurriedly found excuses to slip away.

But they had clearly overthought things. How could I possibly share such a worldly delicacy with them? Chen Gu mused. Seeing that everyone had left, he secretly breathed a sigh of relief. If you all had been around, it would've been very awkward not to invite you to eat too, but I just couldn't bear to part with it!

Once everything was set, Chen Gu sat down properly and began savoring the delicious meal.

However, just as he was politely taking a bite, out of the corner of his eye, he spotted Elton poking his head out in the distance. Chen Gu immediately tensed up and abandoned all ceremony meant to show respect to the food, gobbling down his meal like a whirlwind.

Elton retracted his head; he had actually just peeked out to see if Chen Gu had finished eating.

After about fifteen minutes, Chen Gu had polished off everything. This time he was finally full. He patted his belly contentedly and let out a burp tinged with blue light.

"Ah, satisfied—"

With his hunger and thirst quenched, Chen Gu regained his senses.

He called everyone back and started acting disingenuously. "Oh dear, it was so delicious. I really wanted you to join me, but since you were all busy, I started without you. And before I knew it, I couldn't stop myself and gobbled it all up.

"Next time, next time I cook, I will make sure everyone gets to taste the purest food from this planet!"

Everyone also repeatedly expressed understanding. "No worries, you were terribly hungry. It doesn't matter whether we eat or not, just don't starve yourself."

Comparatively speaking, it was clear that Great Actor Chen had the superior acting skills.

With that issue swept aside, Chen Gu went on, "I think we shouldn't proceed with the original plan."

Gong Shuxu was cautious. "You don't want to go back?"

"I do," Chen Gu said, "but I think we should figure out what secrets this planet is hiding.

"From what we've seen, this planet's native creatures are far more numerous than we thought. Yet, why are they always hiding underground?

"Where did those celestial Energy Gathering Mechanical Species come from, and why did they come to this planet? They rush blindly onward, but where are they heading? And why do they want to go there?"

Chen Gu posed a series of questions, but he had deeper reasons of his own. He thought of that terrifying mechanical lung.

From the countless scripts he had read in his previous life, Chen Gu deduced a pattern: seemingly unrelated clues often hide deep connections.

Just like the mechanical lung and those celestial Energy Gathering Mechanical Species.

Everyone turned to look at Gong Shuxu, who, at the Sixth Energy Level, weighed the matter seriously and reluctantly agreed with Chen Gu's suggestion. "You make a valid point. Both the numerous celestial Energy Gathering Mechanical Species and the equally numerous native creatures hidden away pose a huge potential threat to our forces.

"Chen Gu's matter is important, and this is just as important.

"Moreover, in terms of priority, it is clear that the matters on this planet are more urgent. Let's follow those celestial Energy Gathering Mechanical Species and see where they are heading."

Everyone naturally followed orders. The celestial Energy Gathering Mechanical Species had already gone far, and not daring to delay any longer, they sprinted in pursuit.

Along the way, they came across vast swaths of the celestial Energy Gathering Mechanical Species' corpses.

Just like in the stone forest, they had all been drained of their blue flames and blue liquid, their bodies slowly rotting away.

Chapter 295: Flipped Over

The indigenous creatures of this planet outdid themselves in setting up ambushes for these off-worlders, deploying all kinds of unimaginable traps.

And after these indigenous creatures ambushed the off-worlders, they were in a well-fed and satisfied, Sage-like state, turning a blind eye to Chen Gu and his companions intruding into their territory. This allowed them to run wildly for hundreds of miles, and they were now far enough to see the tail end of the off-worlder group ahead.

Everyone was about to press on to catch up, but Chen Gu suddenly stopped, breaking into a cold sweat as he yelled, "Wait a minute!"

The rest were baffled. Only Chen Gu himself howled inwardly, It's over, I've screwed up!

He crouched down, hugging a large rock beside him, just as Isabella Wu had hugged the toilet in days gone by.

"It hurts so much!"

An intense abdominal pain struck, and Chen Gu was in unspeakable torment, all the while complaining inwardly, Not now...

Gong Shuxu was the first to realize what was happening and felt a wave of relief. Is the annoying Brain Domain Hacker finally getting his comeuppance?

He said with a grin, "Young man, you really shouldn't eat just anything."

Chen Gu was past speaking. The others showed dawning understanding as Chen Gu struggled to move further away. "I... I need to go over there. Don't come near..."

After moving two steps, he could barely walk anymore.

Gong Shuxu "considerately" asked, "Do you need us to step away for a bit? You seem to be somewhat inconvenienced?"

The situation was incredibly embarrassing, but all Chen Gu could do was nod vigorously.

Gong Shuxu chuckled, leading the others away smoothly.

The doll-like Lisa was still confused. "Why do we need to leave? Chen Gu is in pain. As teammates, shouldn't we stay and take care of him?"

Ma Shuwen whispered a few words in her ear. Lisa's expression turned to shock, then her pale face blushed beet-red. She secretly scoffed in Chen Gu's direction and followed Ma Shuwen, fleeing as if on the run.

After relieving himself mightily, Chen Gu felt much better. He then buried his "achievements" and rose to rejoin his team when, unexpectedly, as soon as he stood up, that terrible abdominal pain returned.

He yelled "OUCH!" and crouched back down.

...

Gong Shuxu and a few others found a concealed spot to wait, watching helplessly as the off-worlder group vanished from sight, inevitably letting out quiet sighs.

Elton checked the time. It had been over an hour. Chao Wanghou, growing impatient, complained, "How can it take so long? With a professional's constitution, even if you have a bad stomach, you should be able to recover quickly."

Gong Shuxu said coolly, "That wasn't an ordinary thing he ate. Nobody knows what exactly it was."

Chao Wanghou shook his head repeatedly. "Too undisciplined. We're all professionals, but our military would never be like this. One person dragging down the whole squad..."

Gong Shuxu shot him an annoyed look. Chao Wanghou realized he had included this Sixth Energy Level great master in his rebuke and fell sullenly silent.

"He saved your life," Gong Shuxu reminded him.

Chao Wanghou, now reluctant, insisted on clarifying with Gong Shuxu, "Sir, this is a battlefield. We are all soldiers. Once the battle starts, today you save me, tomorrow it might be me saving you."

"We don't go around talking about who saved whom all day, because once we start a mission, everyone's fate is bound together—we live and die as one.

"Don't think I'm ungrateful. The reality is that in many units, warriors can no longer keep track of how many times they have saved each other."

Gong Shuxu found himself unable to refute. Out of respect for his own status, he didn't want to use his Energy Level to forcefully suppress the other party into submission, so he remained silent with a cold face for the moment.

But everyone had to wait another hour or more before they saw Chen Gu staggering over.

However, unlike others who would be completely drained after a bout of vomiting and diarrhea, Chen Gu actually looked bright-eyed and bushy-tailed, appearing much more capable than before.

"Let's go," Ma Shuwen quickly said.

The group started sprinting again, trying to catch up with the off-world species. Along the way, the situation was similar to before, with indigenous creatures setting traps at every turn. Although there was a large number of the off-world Energy Gathering Mechanical Species, it was uncertain how many would actually make it through to their destination.

The tragic scenes along the way made Ma Shuwen and the others even more curious about what could make the off-world species so desperately reckless.

In the meantime, Chen Gu was observing. Apart from the majority of Energy Gathering Mechanical Species, this planet's native beings included the special "plant-like" vine branches they had seen earlier, as well as a small number of steam-powered mechanical species.

Near a cliff over a hundred kilometers back, he had discovered some huge stones blackened by smoke expelled by the steam-powered mechanical species, and huge claw marks left on the ground. From this, he deduced that the Energy Gathering Mechanical Species there could very well be thirty to forty meters tall!

Suddenly, a strange clicking sound came from up ahead. The group stopped in their tracks, facing a cliff.

They approached quietly and saw a vast open area beyond the cliff, which led down to a sand sea, a rarity on this planet.

At that moment, the sand sea was filled with countless off-world mechanical species trapped within it.

They were inexplicably immobilized, slowly being dragged into the sands. The off-world species had just left the area, and from their vantage point on the cliff, Chen Gu and the others could still see the tail end of the fleeing group in the distance.

"What is that?" Lisa asked in horror. The sand sea below was too eerie. If it were quicksand, so many Energy Gathering Mechanical Species wouldn't just remain motionless, waiting to sink.

Without replying, Chen Gu stopped observing and quietly walked to one side. Ma Shuwen asked, "Where are you going?"

"Going around this sand sea," Chen Gu replied. "Whatever is under this sand sea, I have no desire to find out. Taking a detour and not provoking it is the wisest move right now."

Everyone nodded in agreement, deeming it a prudent move.

The group of professionals didn't want their curiosity to lead to their demise, so they all followed Chen Gu, preparing to take a detour.

The area covered by this sand sea was vast, requiring them to take a long detour, but safety was paramount. They circled around the cliff to one side. However, not far into their detour, they heard a crunching sound. While it seemed to be at a distance, no one dared to take it lightly, and they proceeded with caution. On this side of the cliff, a slope led down to several peaks, creating a valley with complex terrain.

The crunching sounds were emanating from those valleys.

Chen Gu peeked over and quickly drew back, telling everyone, "This road is blocked. We need to find another way."

Everyone took turns peeking. Then, their expressions unchanged, they nodded in agreement with Chen Gu. "We'll go down the other side," they decided.

In the valley, the hills were covered with mechanical ants, each about the size of a small pig. Dozens of them were working together to drag a prey, an off-world mechanical species, towards a cave at the base of the mountain.

The crunching sounds were made while they dragged their catch.

Chapter 296: A Gathering of Beasts

Everywhere they looked was completely overrun by these mechanical ants; their numbers were impossible to ascertain. Moreover, these creatures were extremely aggressive: if two groups of mechanical ants dragging their prey collided, they would immediately fight without a word, the victors then proceeding first.

The Professionals were all very strong, and possessing such power, most tended to have short fuses.

Yet, at this moment... everyone was being very restrained.

The group attempted to return via their original route along the cliff but then tried to find a detour from another side, feeling increasingly apprehensive. If this new path was also blocked, they would have no choice but to backtrack and take an even larger detour to pursue the alien species.

Fortunately, luck was on their side this time. They discovered some huge caves, but at the entrances lay remnants of the alien mechanical species. Clearly, the "owner" of this territory had already "finished eating" and gone back to "digest."

Chen Gu and the others detoured, advancing along the edge of the sand sea. Occasionally, from higher ground, they could still observe the situation within it. The alien mechanical species there remained motionless; only a few of the taller ones still had their heads exposed, while the vast majority had been silently pulled down into the sand!

Lisa suddenly let out a small cry of surprise and pointed in a direction, "Look, something is growing out of the sand again."

Chen Gu and the others followed her gaze. On that patch of sand, all the alien mechanical species had vanished beneath the surface, and then, slowly, black "threads" began to grow out of the sand.

They were far away, but with the superior eyesight of Professionals, they could see that the black threads were indeed very fine, yet numerous.

"What is that?"

Among them, Elton's current position allowed him to see past some boulders toward the valley where the mechanical ants were. He suddenly noticed some metallic ants rushing out of the valley at high speed.

Elton blinked in surprise. "Have those ants gone mad?"

Then he smacked his head abruptly. "No, they didn't come out on their own! Quick, look! It's those weird black threads. They've wrapped around the ants and are forcibly dragging them out..."

In that valley, hundreds of ants were already stumbling over the rocks as they were pulled into the sand sea. Then, just like the alien mechanical species, they were held fast in the sand, motionless!

And more black threads were rapidly "growing" out of the sand sea, spreading in swathes towards that valley.

This time, Chen Gu saw clearly: Elton was mistaken. The strange black threads weren't wrapping around the mechanical ants; they were directly burrowing into their bodies through gaps in their armor, possibly jamming some critical components and rendering them immobile.

"No wonder those alien mechanical species didn't move and couldn't resist being slowly pulled into the sand sea." Chen Gu hadn't finished speaking when a chill ran down his spine. He clearly saw, right in front of them in the sand sea, a patch of ominous black threads rapidly grow and head straight for them!

"Run!"

At this point, they couldn't care less about other dangers; the group fled wildly.

The black threads behind them pursued relentlessly. It was uncertain what these things were, but they were incredibly long. Even after the group had fled for over ten kilometers, the black threads were still extending, chasing them with unyielding persistence!

Gong Shuxu said, "Let me try!"

He had been seriously injured before, and his strength had not fully recovered, but continuing to flee like this was not a sustainable solution.

The Psychological Spy's ability activated. The black threads halted in confusion, as if they had suddenly lost their target.

Then they swayed a few times before slowly retracting into the sand.

Still not daring to stop, the group continued to race ahead for several tens of kilometers. Only when the black threads were long out of sight did they finally slow down.

"What in the world was that?" Lisa asked, still shaken.

Gong Shuxu wore a peculiar expression. "The moment I activated my ability," he said, "I sensed countless targets..."

Sweat drenched Gong Shuxu's temples, the old man appearing extremely fatigued.

For a Psychological Spy, while an ability could strike multiple targets, its energy consumption naturally increased with the number of enemies.

Elton couldn't help but ask, "But there were only a few dozen black threads chasing us earlier!"

Gong Shuxu shook his head. "I have a feeling... that those few dozen black threads might actually be composed of countless tiny life forms."

The group was dumbstruck. Chen Gu was inclined to trust the judgment of a Sixth Energy Level Professional, but this revelation made the black threads seem even more mysterious and unsettling.

"Everyone, be extra careful," Chen Gu voiced his own assessment. "The arrival of the alien mechanical species has likely drawn all the planet's subterranean native creatures to the surface. This world is now countless times more dangerous than before!"

In places Chen Gu and his group could not see, events were unfolding that corroborated his deduction.

The "Gonggong Mechanical Corps" was locked in a bitter struggle, besieged by a swarm of Steam Mechanical Species resembling pangolins. Their numbers rivaled the Insect Race, and they were ferocious and powerful. Having suddenly emerged from surrounding subterranean caves, they had caught the "Gonggong Mechanical Corps" completely off guard.

「...」

Around Base 9, a vast swarm of Energy Gathering Mechanical Species, resembling grasshoppers, launched a ferocious assault. The unmanned base's automated defense system activated, cannons firing in all directions. However, it didn't hold for long before being breached, and the base was quickly and thoroughly destroyed.

「...」

Clad in pitch black, Boles perched atop the head of a towering Troop Nest Beetle. He had not pursued Chen Gu and his companions. After contaminating the entire Insect Race, he had led the Mutant swarm back to their nest. He had just finished utterly tainting the entire nest and hadn't yet had the chance to "unveil his grand ambitions" when a massive horde of alien mechanical species thundered past. This was immediately followed by an assault from various local creatures emerging from the surroundings—Energy Gathering Mechanical Pythons, Steam Mechanical Terror Pigs, Energy Gathering Bat Birds, and more—trapping him in a fierce battle that raged to this moment.

Fortunately, the Mutant Insect Race was also exceptionally strong, and they were slowly gaining the upper hand.

「...」

「Several hours later」

After a laborious detour, during which they dealt with several powerful Energy Gathering Mechanical Species, Chen Gu and his team finally caught up with the alien mechanical species horde once more.

This time, however, the alien horde had stopped.

They were congregated around a colossal meteorite crater, facing an equally massive group of native mechanical species.

The crater was immense. By his estimation, it rivaled the largest city on Empire River Star!

Mechanical species packed densely around the crater's exterior, yet not a single one dared to charge into it.

Conflicts continually erupted at the boundary where the two types of mechanical species met.

The alien mechanical species were all wreathed in a uniform blue fire, while the native mechanical species were a motley assortment, a mix of Energy Gathering Mechanical Species and Steam Mechanical Species.

Once they were no longer in a hurry to "travel," the formidable power of the alien mechanical species became apparent.

Exceptionally large individuals were not common among them, yet at two points of conflict, the native mechanical species were suffering a one-sided rout.

Chapter 297: The Puppet Master

Whether in strength, speed, or physical resilience, the extraterrestrial mechanical species completely outclassed their native counterparts. With their more compact and formidable bodies and greater speed, a single surprise assault could kill an opponent several times their own size.

This scene greatly infuriated the native mechanical species. The extraterrestrial mechanical species, having been ambushed repeatedly en route, were also seething with immense anger.

Yet, both sides exercised incredible restraint, avoiding a truly large-scale conflict, as if awaiting something.

From Chen Gu's position, he couldn't see the bottom of the meteorite crater. What on earth is down there that seems to make both sides so fearful?

At this moment, the countless mechanical species nearby suddenly fell uniformly silent. Then, those at the very front began to prostrate themselves, pressing their heads deeply into the ground.

Those behind followed suit, kneeling in waves like falling wheat. Soon, all the mechanical species were prostrate on the ground, seemingly to respectfully welcome the appearance of something.

Then Chen Gu heard a familiar HUFF, HUFF sound. His expression changed. Could it really be so?

This sound was unmistakably coming from that mechanical lung!

Within the immense meteorite crater, a red light bloomed.

A military satellite swept overhead, transmitting the image back to the distant Central Operations Room. Amidst numerous screens, a tactical staff officer keenly spotted this.

He exclaimed, "Marshal Bai, quickly, look at this!"

The image was quickly enlarged and projected throughout the entire room.

Bai Yunpeng and Nan Zhendong were already at their wits' end. The sudden "Mechanical Beast Tide" on that planet had inflicted heavy losses on their various units. He had already deployed all available reserve forces, yet the situation inevitably continued to worsen.

Bai Yunpeng felt the army had been dragged into an inexplicable quagmire of war.

As the image zoomed in, Bai Yunpeng and Nan Zhendong were dumbstruck. Around the colossal meteorite crater, countless mechanical species lay prostrate. Deep within the crater, something suddenly ruptured, and a gigantic red corolla unfurled.

The material of this red corolla, which emitted a disorienting crimson light, was unknown.

Then, an immense mechanical lifeform drilled out from the meteorite crater.

It was incredibly majestic, somewhat resembling a hybrid of the Phoenix and the Kylin from the ancient myths of the Confederation.

Its entire body was ablaze with red and blue flames, its limbs robust, and behind it trailed thousands of tentacle-like tails.

The fiery red "corolla" atop its head constantly rippled and swayed. Its head was shaped like an eagle's, and on each cheek grew a large carapace plate, naturally inscribed with countless mystical patterns.

Upon its appearance, the mechanical species prostrating around the meteorite crater trembled violently, not daring even to look at it.

Bai Yunpeng and Nan Zhendong were stunned for a long moment before exclaiming in unison, "A super lifeform!"

Chen Gu and the others, being present, could more directly perceive the immensity of this super lifeform. A body tens of thousands of meters tall, it simply shouldn't exist on a planet.

It should be soaring through the Star Sea, where a single casual movement could destroy an entire planet!

As it continued to breathe, producing that HUFF, HUFF sound, Chen Gu and the others felt their limbs grow icy, their minds blank before such a powerful entity.

In the Central Operations Room, without waiting for Marshal Bai's orders, the tactical staff officers had already temporarily redirected dozens of military satellites. They swiftly focused them above the meteorite crater, transmitting images from every angle.

Bai Yunpeng stared at the images and suddenly spotted something in a corner. He pointed to the location. "Zoom in."

The image was magnified repeatedly. Bai Yunpeng suddenly burst out laughing. "Chen Gu! That kid is there!"

Everyone else also saw Chen Gu and Gong Shuxu. They were lying in a shallow depression, fully engrossed in observing this super lifeform.

Bai Yunpeng now possessed an inexplicable confidence in Chen Gu. "Since that kid has appeared there, this matter shouldn't adversely affect our overall battle situation."

The others in the Central Operations Room couldn't help but glance at Marshal Bai. Why would you think that? Master Chen Gu is indeed miraculous, but he is, after all, only Second Energy Level, and he's facing a super lifeform!

Nan Zhendong coughed and said in a low voice, "Shouldn't we withdraw all troops first?"

Bai Yunpeng understood his meaning. With a super lifeform appearing on the planet, a single action from it could annihilate all troops on the surface.

He looked at Chen Gu on the screen. The Master remained steadfast, appearing calm and composed.

[He actually didn't know that this group of professionals was already scared stiff...]

Thus, Marshal Bai suddenly regained his confidence. After some deliberation, he said, "For now, there's no need. We don't yet know if this super lifeform is hostile or friendly towards us."

"Besides, even if we were to order a retreat, we couldn't pull them back now."

The sudden Mechanical Beast Tide had not only caused heavy losses to the ground forces but their bases had also been attacked. Nearly ninety percent of the unmanned bases were breached. The three newly constructed permanent military bases were also under siege, suffering grievous losses. There simply weren't enough aircraft to evacuate the troops to space.

Nan Zhendong urged again, "We can't be blindly optimistic. We should still prepare for evacuation as soon as possible."

Bai Yunpeng reconsidered. "Alright." He issued a series of commands, once again mobilizing the fleet to provide reinforcements.

These orders had just been issued, and the reinforcing fleet had not yet fully assembled, when an operations staff member suddenly exclaimed, "Marshal Bai, the Alien Insect Race is on the move!"

This time, the image came from a Star Sea Fleet observation post. The Swarm had once again dispatched a large contingent of landing-type Insect Race, which were rapidly heading towards the planet!

"The Insect Race has also discovered this super lifeform," Nan Zhendong mused. "What are they planning?"

Super lifeforms were exceptionally powerful adversaries for both humanity and the Alien Insect Race. For humans, hunting a super lifeform could easily result in the entire force being annihilated, a total loss.

The same was true for the Insect Race.

"Does the Insect Race also require super-materials?" a staff officer ventured.

But Bai Yunpeng and Nan Zhendong both shook their heads. "Ordinary Insect Race couldn't possibly defeat a super lifeform."

On the planet's surface, Chen Gu and his group finally snapped out of their shock.

Chen Gu's first thought was: Were these extraterrestrial mechanical species summoned by the super lifeform?

Are the native mechanical species gathering here also because of this super lifeform?

However, Chen Gu's greatest uncertainty remained: he had previously seen that mechanical lung—or rather, a part of it.

Considering this super lifeform's size, its mechanical lung must also be immense. He suspected that what he had seen was not its entirety.

Why would a super lifeform submerge its mechanical lung in that red liquid?

Chen Gu speculated internally: Is it injured? Hiding on this planet to recuperate?

Chapter 298: The Purpose of the Insect Race

Chen Gu looked again at the Super Life-form. It stood imposingly, its presence dominating the entire planet, showing no hint of injury or a lurking stance.

Outside the meteorite crater, countless mechanical species were prostrating themselves on the ground, daring not to move. The Super Life-form rotated its massive head, surveying its surroundings. Then, two mechanical creatures, one from each faction, rose into the air: one from the off-world mechanical species and one from the indigenous mechanical species.

In front of the Super Life-form, a transparent platform constructed purely of energy materialized. The two mechanical creatures landed on it and immediately began to roar and clash. After probing each other a few times, they engaged in a ferocious battle.

The Super Life-form's 'gaze' was sharp and penetrating; these two mechanical creatures were top contenders within their respective groups and quite evenly matched. The battle lasted for over half an hour, and ultimately, the indigenous mechanical creature lost; it was torn into several pieces and thrown down from the energy platform.

The off-world mechanical species roared in unison, while the victor, battered and limping, made its way to the front of the Super Life-form and bowed its head. The Super Life-form nodded slightly. From the coronet on its head, a beam of light shot out, enveloping the off-world mechanical creature.

Chen Gu was astonished to see this off-world mechanical creature begin to undergo significant transformations, showing signs of developing toward the form of the Super Life-form itself! The light lasted for only about ten seconds, yet the off-world mechanical creature had unmistakably transformed into a miniature version of the Super Life-form!

Afterward, this mechanical creature was sent back, and the Super Life-form selected another pair to come up and fight. The victor, once again, received a reward from the Super Life-form.

There were five such combat rounds in total. The off-world mechanical species won three times, and the indigenous mechanical species won twice. After everything concluded, the Super Life-form let out a long howl to the heavens, and its massive body slowly sank back into the meteorite crater. As the last glimmer of red light from its coronet faded into the ground, it was as if a war cry had sounded for total war, prompting both factions to begin a violent onslaught.

The five mechanical creatures that had received the Super Life-form's boon undoubtedly became the "peerless warriors" in the ensuing war. Mechanical creatures fell constantly, only for more from the rear to surge forward and join the fray. The five special mechanical creatures first slaughtered a great number of their adversaries' rank-and-file soldiers, then finally encountered each other on the battlefield.

Three against two—the outcome was predictable. When the two special indigenous mechanical creatures beat a hasty retreat, the indigenous faction completely crumbled, and the off-world mechanical species began a massive pursuit.

Chen Gu and the others watched the entire battle in shock. Of course, with Great Actor Chen present, they had followed his suggestion and left their original spot for a much safer "audience seat" on a tall, distant mountain. This way, should one side suffer a rout, they would not find themselves caught amidst a "crumbling army."

However, this time, the indigenous mechanical species retreated in the opposite direction from them. They watched from the mountain. About half an hour later, the mechanical species, having left behind a field of corpses, pursued their fleeing enemies towards the north, much like human armies in full pursuit.

Elton shifted, about to stand, but hands from either side pressed him down. One hand was Gong Shuxu's, the other Chen Gu's. However, since Gong Shuxu only had his left arm remaining, it was somewhat awkward for him to reach over and hold Elton down.

Elton looked puzzled. Chen Gu pointed towards the sky, where specks of light were already faintly visible.

"The Alien Insect Race!"

"What does the Alien Insect Race want?" the others wondered, puzzled. "They're certainly no match for the Super Life-form."

Chen Gu frowned, remaining silent. With his experience from the scripts in his past life and his personal experiences at the Bureau of Mystic Security in this one, this war seemed increasingly bizarre. There were too many strange and illogical aspects.

Both the off-world mechanical species and the indigenous mechanical species are here for the rewards offered by the Super Life-form. For the off-world mechanical species, it was, of course, a race to be first, worried that arriving late would mean missing the competition and this opportunity. As for the indigenous mechanical species, they were obviously weaker than their off-world counterparts; hence, they ambushed them en route, hoping to weaken their rivals. Perhaps there was some unspoken, unfathomable understanding among the indigenous mechanical species: one contingent lay in ambush along the way to attack the off-world mechanical species—these off-world mechanical species themselves were the prize for the ambushers, as consuming them presumably provided some sort of enhancement. The cost was that they would be too late to participate in the Super Life-form's 'imperial examination.' Another contingent waited around the Super Life-form's meteorite crater to battle the off-world mechanical species.

After analyzing for a while, Chen Gu was still puzzled. What exactly is the reward from the Super Life-form? Does it transform these victorious mechanical creatures to resemble itself?

Gong Shuxu said slowly, "This reward... is extremely generous. It's most likely a genetic strand from the Super Life-form. These victors gain the potential to evolve into Super Life-forms themselves!"

Chen Gu had an epiphany. "That's it!" He looked at the descending Alien Insect Race. "So it seems these bugs aren't here for the Super Life-form itself, but for its genetic strand."

"The bugs wouldn't dare challenge the Super Life-form directly," Gong Shuxu also figured it out. "But if they capture one of the victors, they can obtain this genetic strand. And the Alien Insect Race's evolutionary adaptation and modification capabilities are terrifying; they could use this genetic strand to birth even more powerful offspring."

Ma Shuwen and the others were only scouts. When it came to analysis, dissection, and peeling away the fog to see the truth, they were naturally far behind a former veteran operative like Gong Shuxu. What secretly surprised them, however, was that Chen Gu, despite his youth, could hold his own against a veteran operative like Gong Shuxu in analytical reasoning. They could only remain silent and listen intently.

Chen Gu continued, "Given the Alien Insect Race's greed, their target is probably not just one victor; they likely want to capture all the victors in one fell swoop!"

Gong Shuxu laughed too. It had been a long time since he had such a passionate and open-minded discussion about a perplexing issue. Moreover, both could follow each other's train of thought, making the entire discussion smooth and natural. It reminded Gong Shuxu of his early days at the Bureau of Mystic Security, working through the night to crack cases with his fellow rookies. It was a potent wave of youthful nostalgia.

Then Gong Shuxu suddenly remembered this kid was an irritating Brain Domain Hacker! His demeanor instantly turned cold and awkward. "So," he asked indifferently, "what should we do next?"

"Of course, we're going to ruin the Alien Insect Race's plan!" Chen Gu gestured decisively. "Think about it—why did we follow these off-world mechanical species all this way? It was to uncover this planet's hidden secrets. Now that we have, and those secrets involve the Alien Insect Race, we certainly can't let them succeed!"

Chapter 299: The Duck That Got Away (1)

Ma Shuwen and the others watched as the Alien Insect Race began to descend, tremendous vibrations and roaring sounds coming their way. Each Troop Nest Beetle was enormous and terrifying, and there was no telling how many powerful members of the Insect Race were hidden within.

Elton was counting, "One hundred thirty-four, one hundred thirty-five..."

This time, the Alien Insect Race had gone all in; the number of Troop Nest Beetles had reached two hundred!

The scouts felt chills running down their scalps. Ma Shuwen saw Chen Gu's piercing gaze fixed on her, and she smiled resignedly, "There's no need to look at me; I'm well aware that this is a suicide mission. But we're all active military personnel, and we're very clear about the serious consequences if the Insect Race obtains these gene chains. So, come on, let's start this suicide mission together!"

Chen Gu smiled faintly and said, "With a Sixth Energy Level expert to back us up, it may not necessarily be a suicide mission."

When Gong Shuxu heard the annoying Brain Domain Hacker, he thought, He's actually trying to shift the burden onto an old man like me? He immediately said with restraint, "On your way here, you've destroyed two insect nests, and the total number of Troop Nest Beetles you've annihilated has already exceeded two hundred. This batch of insects, for you, is just a little more trouble."

Ma Shuwen and the others nodded in agreement. In their eyes, the old and the young were "heroes recognize heroes, with mutual admiration."

Chen Gu and Gong Shuxu exchanged glances, both feeling something was off. How does it seem like the two of us aren't trading sarcastic barbs and shifting blame, but are instead... engaging in mutual flattery?

Gong Shuxu said, "Let's head out and take a look at the insect nest."

As everyone was about to move, Gong Shuxu's communication device suddenly started making a SIZZLING noise.

The old man was puzzled. Personal communication devices have a limited range, and there was no base or army nearby. Consequently, throughout the various emergencies they had encountered, Gong Shuxu had no way to report the situation to the military. That's why Bai Yunpeng's later deployment of an armored unit to support them never managed to find them.

He curiously opened the communication device, and a voice came through, "This is Bai Yunpeng. There is a war satellite above you, and I'm using it to contact you. The connection is very unstable due to the magnetic field interference from the planet you're on."

Contacting them through the war satellite required some technical adjustments, which caused some delays.

Gong Shuxu immediately said, "We have figured out the Insect Race's aim."

After sharing his and Chen Gu's speculation, Bai Yunpeng quickly responded, "Follow Master Chen Gu's plan, and I will try my best to provide you with support."

The communication was filled with CRACKLING sounds. Indeed, the connection was very unstable.

Bai Yunpeng concluded, "This war satellite will follow you continuously, and we'll stay in touch."

Ma Shuwen and the others noticeably breathed a sigh of relief. What they had thought would be a suicide mission now seemed to carry a glimmer of hope. It always feels good to have the military backing you up.

The location where the Alien Insect Race descended was about a hundred miles from the crater of the super lifeform—they clearly dreaded the super lifeform and dared not come too close.

The professionals moved swiftly. When they arrived at the landing site of the Insect Race, they were taken aback. The ground was shattered, covered with signs resembling meteorite falls.

But those two hundred enormous Troop Nest Beetles were all dead! Their bodies were all dried up, exhausted of the last bit of nutrients and energy. And the ground around them was covered with the traces of insect feet.

Chen Gu shook his head again. "The Insect Race this time directly brought most of the already hatched insect soldiers. Inside the Troop Nest Beetles, there were only a handful of embryonic seeds. After landing, they immediately used the energy of the Troop Nest Beetles themselves to hatch, quickly forming a large insect army, and then chased after those victors."

Gong Shuxu gritted his teeth with some regret. "Chase!"

Chen Gu felt a heavy weight in his heart, knowing that a tough battle was inevitable. The previous two insect nests he had wiped out had involved some luck, but what was key was his need to control powerful members of the Insect Race, like the Skyrocketing Insect. However, those fully hatched

Skyrocketing Insects were very difficult to control with "Mind Remote Control." If I really have to kill the members of the Insect Race one by one... then we'll truly have to rely on Gong Shuxu.

The traces of the swarm were easy to follow. They pursued the trail, and after several hundred kilometers, they arrived at another gruesome battlefield. But the corpses on the ground were all of the mechanical species; the defeated local mechanical species and the pursuing extraterrestrial mechanical species had erupted into a second major battle here.

"The Insect Race has split their forces," everyone concluded after a thorough search.

The defeated local mechanical species must have scattered here too, with the extraterrestrial mechanical species hunting them down everywhere. The Insect Race also split their forces to chase them. But since Chen Gu and his team were few in number, they could only pursue one group.

Chen Gu wondered, "How does the Insect Race know where those victors have fled to?"

Regardless, everyone decided to follow the Insect Race.

...

In a narrow valley, a nimble mechanical species was creeping along in hiding. It was very alert, its massive metallic body moving across the rocks without making a single sound. There were no other mechanical species following it.

The intellect of the Energy Gathering Mechanical Species was naturally higher than that of the steam mechanical species. After receiving the blessing of the super lifeform, the intellect of this victor was accordingly enhanced. After fleeing with its clan, it understood after the second battle that sticking with the large group was a sure path to death.

So it had driven away its followers and escaped alone. Unquestionably, this strategy was very successful. It had smoothly arrived at this valley; just beyond it was the entrance to an underground cave. By entering it, it would reach the world it was familiar with, and those extraterrestrial visitors would never be able to catch up to it.

Any mechanical species knew that once it gained the favor of the "Ancestor," its future potential was boundless. With their intelligence, of course, they could not be fully aware of what this "future" entailed, driven only by instinct to desperately strive for it. And once successful, the five of them suddenly understood that they were in the most direct competition with each other, much like wild beasts fight for their right to survive, to mate, and so on. That is why the subsequent relentless battles between the two species were also fueled by these five.

This one quickly understood that two couldn't beat three, so it decided on a "strategic retreat."

Peeking out from among the sheltering rocks, the blazing sunlight poured down from above the narrow canyon, shining on its metallic body, which reflected a prismatic glow. The body proportions of this victor, which had received the genetic chain of the super lifeform, had become even more perfect, making anyone who saw it marvel at the wonder of creation.

But just as the mouth of the valley was within reach, suddenly some strange creatures emerged along the sides of the valley walls, RUSTLING about in great numbers with large bodies, instantly filling the narrow mouth of the valley.

Chapter 300: The Duck That Got Away (2)

The victor was infuriated, lowering its body and letting out deep growls, ready to charge through in one go. However, atop the cliff above the canyon, one giant bug after another appeared, including Giant Ghast Claws, Blazing Mammoth Bugs, and colossal armored insects...

It suddenly turned its head; in the canyon behind it, a large expanse of black insects surged out.

The victor was filled with despair, but the ferocious nature within it was also ignited. Without any hesitation, it let out a roar and sprinted with all its might, scaling the slanting cliffside. In the blink of an eye, it reached the mountain peak on the side of the canyon where a Giant Ghast Claw was roaring and raising its huge claw. But the victor, reaching there first, sprang up into the air and with swift strokes of its claws, the Giant Ghast Claw screamed as it tumbled down.

This was the victor. Although it had not possessed the gene chain of a super lifeform for long, it had already made an essential leap for itself.

The Insect Race had no concept of fear, especially after the Empress had adjusted and evolved the insect soldiers. It had removed such emotions as much as possible.

The insects swarmed over the hills and fields, unhesitatingly pouncing toward the victor.

On a gentle slope on the other side of the canyon, there was a moving "Troop Nest Beetle." If Chen Gu were here, he would be surprised, for this one, only a few dozen meters tall, resembled the one he had burnt to death outside the "Roaring Mecha Regiment" battlefield.

However, the tentacles beneath this one were not for delving underground to absorb nutrients and energy, but for movement.

This Troop Nest Beetle, with multiple compound eyes growing around its body, transmitted every movement on the battlefield in real-time to the giant bubble flyers in the Star Sea. The giant bubble flyers acted merely as relays, sending information back to the Empress.

Humans were vastly different in their vision from the Insect Race. Such imagery, if seen by humans, would cause nausea, vomiting, and dizziness within a few seconds.

But as the Insect Queen observed the entire battle, commands were issued and sent to the moving "Troop Nest Beetle." The direction of the battle became much more convenient than before.

This had been an aspect of battlefield command that the Alien Insect Race had always wanted to improve. After the last battle with the "Roaring Mecha Regiment," they had finally settled on this improvement plan.

Upon receiving the Empress's order, the insects surrounded the victor at all costs. The victor roared and fought fiercely. The insect carapace that could withstand human energy weapons shattered like toasted bread crusts under its assault...

But even a fierce tiger is no match for a pack of wolves; the Insect Race outnumbered the victor too greatly. After several dozen minutes of combat, the victor had caused substantial losses to the Insect Race. However, it had also accumulated more and more wounds, and its movement began to slow.

Far behind the lines, the Alien Insect Queen excitedly witnessed this scene from within its lair. It let out excited shrieks, urging its warriors to push harder, determined to kill the victor and bring it back.

To the Alien Insect Queen, every strong gene chain was the most precious "jewel" in the Star Sea.

What it enjoyed most was using these jewels to adorn its future "children."

This was an instinctive behavior that even the Alien Insect Queen could not suppress.

Another several dozen minutes passed, and the victor was struggling to hold on. A group of slender, large insects stealthily appeared on one side of the mountaintop. Their shape somewhat resembled spitting bugs but were dozens of times larger; they belonged to a rarely seen category of the Insect Race: the Armor-Piercing Arrow Bug.

They could shoot giant insect spikes, each 8-10 meters in length, with both piercing and explosive power.

This had been the battle tactic the Empress had personally set before the combat began: to allow the ordinary insect soldiers to wear down the victor first, then deliver a fatal blow with the Armor-Piercing Arrow Bug.

Because as long as the victor wasn't wounded, its speed made it almost impossible for the Armor-Piercing Arrow Bug to hit it.

Now, the moment had come.

THWIP THWIP THWIP—

Giant arrow-shaped insect spikes pierced through the air. The victor, sensing danger through its primal instincts, did not bother with the Giant Ghast Claws swarming it and leaped violently to one side. Its body was left with three deep gashes from the claws of the Giant Ghast Claws, but it managed to dodge the Armor-Piercing Arrow Bug's spray this time.

However, there were too many Armor-Piercing Arrow Bugs, and hundreds sprayed their spikes simultaneously. The victor rolled awkwardly on the ground to evade most of the arrow spikes. Even so, two still struck its body.

They penetrated its metallic body and exploded violently.

The victor was blasted half a meter off the ground by the explosion and then fell back to the ground in agony, unable to move for a moment.

Back in the great nest, the Empress let out an involuntary, excited shriek: It was about to get hold of that gene chain!

After planning for so long, success was finally at hand. Once this battle was over, its children's evolutionary level would be far ahead of all the other empresses'!

It kept issuing orders urgently: "Kill it, kill it for me, my children, bring its corpse back to me!"

Before the order had made it through, the Armor-Piercing Arrow Bugs had already launched the third salvo of spikes.

The victor struggled to its feet, its intense will to survive driving it to try and drag its battered body away from this deadly attack. But it was too grievously wounded. It only swayed a few times and managed to move just over a meter—nowhere near enough to escape the fatal assault.

The Insect Queen had already started fantasizing about how it would expand its power after obtaining that gene chain and how it would lead its powerful offspring to roam the entire Star Sea.

But just at this moment, next to the victor, a patch of inconspicuous pale blue energy ripples appeared. Suddenly, a person materialized from within; that person placed a hand on the victor, and then the ripples of energy quickly became clear and intense.

With an inward surge, in a whoosh, both the person and the colossal victor disappeared.

THUD THUD THUD...

Almost, but not quite, the arrow spikes shot through empty space, hitting the ground in a series of explosions, leaving craters everywhere.

In the nest, the Empress had been ready to cheer and even thought about how to celebrate, but everything had shockingly come to a halt.

It was as if... a novel was reaching its climax, and the author suddenly, in a fit of malice, cut the story short!

The Empress was stunned for a good while before it let out an angry scream that shook the entire nest. The Insect Race cowering within trembled, keeping their distance for fear of becoming the target of the Empress's wrath.

And the warriors on the battlefield were confused: What happened? Where was our prey?

They were about to win the Empress's reward; how could the prey disappear at the final moment?!

The furious command of the Empress came: "Find it! You must find my prey for me! No matter who interferes, kill them, kill them all!"