

Wow 1011

Chapter 1011: Tender Shoulders (2)

"Maybe he never intended to come back! The universe is so vast, resources so abundant, he left with the most elite forces, leaving us 'burdens' on this decaying planet to fend for ourselves!"

"What 'finding a fundamental solution'? It's just a pretty excuse to abandon us! He was long fed up with this planet full of bugs, demons, and beastmen!"

"Kiro Lan and Morphie? They're just a couple of kids still wet behind the ears! Sitting in high positions under Bai E's shadow, what right do they have to lead all of humanity? What ability do they have to deal with the monsters underground and the high-dimensional erosion? Following them, we're only on a path to death!"

These remarks, mixed with prevalent anxiety and pessimism, are highly inflammatory.

They precisely exploit people's fear of the future, apprehension after losing their leader, and the innate doubt about the capabilities of the young leaders Kiro Lan and Morphie.

Some who harbored dissent, or representatives of old forces whose interests were harmed during Bai E's integration of the federation, and the city's real power figures, have begun to stir up trouble, riding the tide.

In the northern industrial stronghold "Anvil City," far from the federation's core, its city lord—a descendant of an old warlord famous for iron-fist rule and conservativeness—almost publicly proclaimed at an internal meeting:

"Bai E? He might be a hero, but the age of heroes is over! Whether he's alive or dead, we don't know. Should we entrust the fate of the hundreds of thousands in 'Anvil City' to a green girl who rose to power through connections with the former leader and a brash young man who's only good at fighting?"

"Look at now! Those endless bugs are reappearing, Spiritual Ability Users are going mad at the drop of a hat, beastmen are causing trouble everywhere, what solutions do they have? Our 'Anvil City' has a complete industrial system and a strong city defense army. We can fully defend ourselves and even perhaps... become the leaders of a new era! I propose that 'Anvil City' suspend a portion of the key materials and tax submissions to the federal center immediately, with everything prioritizing local defense and reconstruction!"

This is almost a declaration of de facto independence.

In the eastern coastal trade hub "Ming Pearl Port," a group of emerging trade consortium leaders and former local council members proposed another plan.

"Bai E might return, but we can't put all our eggs in one basket. Miss Kiro Lan's governance... relies too heavily on Spiritual Ability Users and those 'direct line' from Blackwater City, neglecting the interests of us peripheral cities."

"The federation's system needs reform! We should reconvene the General Assembly of City Representatives and elect a new, more representative leadership core, instead of always letting the people from Blackwater City hold the highest power!"

Their goal is to promote "democratic elections," trying to weaken or even replace Kiro Lan's leadership through legal procedures.

And the goal of these people is undoubtedly the "Scientific Research Institute," which currently gathers the entire planet's scientific power representing the highest level of technology.

Although Helen and other core seniors firmly support Kiro Lan, among groups of top scientists and engineers who joined later from other cities, discordant voices gradually emerged.

Some secretly linked up, arguing that "cutting-edge technology shouldn't be monopolized by Blackwater City but 'shared' with all capable and contributive cities to collectively advance development."

Behind this is the covetousness of certain forces for the core legacies left by Bai E, such as "Starship Technology," "Storm Battle Armor Modification Technology," and "Advanced Spiritual Applications."

Moreover, a few ambitious individuals fantasize about acquiring these technologies to arm their forces, thereby achieving technological dominance to rule the globe, recreating Bai E's past glory.

These undercurrents gradually grew from private discussions and small-scale connections to public questioning, passive compliance with central orders, and even partial confrontations.

Kiro Lan received more than one report:

A certain city, under the pretext of "defending against underground threats," refused to dispatch the promised Spiritual Ability Users to support other regions more severely eroded by high dimensions.

A local city's border defense army deliberately "delayed" actions against beastman harassment, causing a neighboring city friendly to the center to suffer greater losses.

At the federal routine meetings, representatives from different cities began bickering over resource allocation, military command, and technology sharing, openly defying Kiro Lan's proposals for enhanced overall monitoring and integrative defense.

"What are they trying to do?!" Morphie angrily slammed the table during an internal meeting, "How long has it been since the leader left? The underground monsters haven't even emerged, and the high-dimensional demons are still whispering in our ears, yet they're already scrambling for power, each going their own way? Without the leader unifying global forces, can any of their cities face the Bug Race alone? Can they withstand high-dimensional erosion?"

Kiro Lan's complexion was paler than ever, not only due to the excessive consumption of spiritual energy but also because of this pressure from within, akin to betrayal.

She understood better than Morphie the complexity of politics and the fickleness of people's hearts.

Bai E was like blazing sunlight, dispelling all gloom, making villains afraid to show themselves.

But now, with the sun traveling afar, starlight, though bright, is insufficient to deter all the treacherous tricks lurking in the shadows.

"Because they are afraid, and... they have different thoughts now."

Kiro Lan's voice was somewhat weary but still maintained a cool analysis, "Afraid of losing the existing power and resources, afraid that under our leadership, instead of overcoming the crisis, they will perish. At the same time, they also see 'opportunity'—an opportunity to escape central control, or even replace it. The leader's extended absence gave them courage and an excuse."

She walked to the window, looking down at the city pieced together by Bai E, now surging with undertones.

"The professor and Helen over there can still stabilize the core scientific system, and there are many veterans loyal to the leader and the backbone of the Storm Battle Group in the army. But the local administration and some parts of the military... people's hearts have begun to scatter."

"So what do we do?" Morphie asked urgently, "Do we just watch them split the federation? It's something the leader painstakingly built!"

Kiro Lan turned around, a hint of resolve flashing in her eyes: "Of course not. But we can't, like the leader, simply rely on personal prestige and force to suppress everything. Doing so will only incite stronger backlash and even lead to internal collapse during times of crisis."

She recalled the political savvy Bai E once demonstrated when integrating various sides and some words said while teaching her.

"We need to take action, but it can't be simple suppression."

Kiro Lan began to devise strategies, "First, we must strengthen intelligence work, clarify who is simply wavering and self-preserving, and who are the true ambitious and separatists. For the former, we need to strengthen communication and reassurance, share some non-core monitoring data, letting them realize that the crisis is overarching, survival is impossible alone; simultaneously, we need to demonstrate that we still have the ability and determination to address the crisis, for instance... organizing a few directly-commanded, clean and decisive joint operations against beastman harassment."

"As for the latter..." Kiro Lan's eyes grew cold, "We need to gather evidence and conduct precise strikes or isolation before they cause substantial harm. We can leverage the forces of the Spiritual Power Managers Center and Arbitration Place, under pretenses such as 'investigating high-dimensional erosion' or 'cleaning up internal instabilities.' At the same time, we need to rally the centrists, especially those city leaders and military commanders who remain on the fence and have old sentiments for the leader. Perhaps... I need to personally visit some key regions."

"That's too dangerous!" Morphie immediately opposed, "It's so chaotic outside now, who knows what those people will do?"

"Some risks must be taken."

Kiro Lan shook her head, "We can't always stay in Blackwater City waiting. The leader entrusted this place to us, not just to guard the city but to uphold the ideal of 'human unity' he fought for. If the federation falls apart in our hands, when the leader returns... how could we face him?"

She looked at Morphie, her tone firm: "Morphie, you stay in the center, assist Helen and the professor in stabilizing the research and core military industry, while leading the rapid response team to maintain the ability to suppress emergent threats. Internal stability and diplomatic negotiations... that's on me."

After the leader left, Kiro Lan felt she should bear everything.

Only this way, when the leader returns, will he see a piece of clean and intact land...

Chapter 1012: Chaos

According to the established plan, Kiro Lan entrusted the routine affairs of the New Jing City center to a few reliable veteran executives for the time being and then embarked on her journey to the industrial town of Anvil City, located to the southwest.

This was the first step in her strategy to "win over the centrists and divide potential enemies."

The City Lord of Anvil City is the descendant of old warlords, with a tough and conservative style, and has a clear tendency to turn away from Blackwater City, but has not openly turned against it like some cities.

If she could gain his support, or at least stabilize him, it would be crucial to curb the Federation's trend of division.

With only a convoy, Kiro Lan traversed the wilderness.

The wilderness nowadays is far less dangerous than before. Even without a military escort, ordinary people have a good chance of traveling safely between cities.

Just before arriving, the drivers in the convoy hesitantly reported, "Miss Kiro Lan, we received air traffic control information from Anvil City. They... only approve us to disembark outside the city and demand that our escort team's weapons be stored, with their people 'accompanying' us into the city."

The escort captain's face changed: "Make us disembark outside the city?! This is clearly neglect and precaution! Weapon storage is impossible! Who knows what they're planning?"

Kiro Lan sat by the porthole, looking at the cold and solid city dominated by dark gray metal buildings and dotted with chimneys in the distance.

She could understand the other party's vigilance. In such sensitive times, a visit from the Central Federation's nominal highest leader would be akin to a weasel wishing chickens a happy New Year to a local real-power faction with ulterior motives.

"Do as they ask." Kiro Lan's voice was calm. "Weapons can be temporarily stored, kept by them. We are not here to demonstrate; we are here to communicate. Show sincerity."

"But your safety..." the escort captain said anxiously.

"If Anvil City's City Lord truly intends to harm me, whether we have weapons makes little difference." Kiro Lan shook her head. "The fact that he is still willing to let us into the city at least shows that the dialogue window isn't completely closed. Let's go."

The convoy parked in a designated area outside the city.

Indeed, a team of fully armed soldiers wearing Anvil City's distinctive dark red bordered uniforms had already been waiting. The middle-aged officer leading them sternly saluted before requesting the escort team to hand over all weapons and inviting Kiro Lan to board the armored vehicle with sealed windows they had prepared.

The atmosphere was tense and heavy, and all the accompanying personnel in the convoy were like facing a great enemy.

Only Kiro Lan looked as usual and was the first to board the vehicle.

She needed to see the current state of this city with her own eyes and feel its atmosphere.

The convoy entered Anvil City.

The streets were broad but sparsely populated, with people hurrying about, their faces showing a mix of apathy and vigilance.

The continuous roar of factories was heard, and the air was filled with the smell of metal and fuel.

Defense works were visible everywhere, reinforced significantly compared to Kiro Lan's last visit, according to her memory.

The entire city resembled a massive, tension-filled war fortress, full of distrust towards the outside world.

In the City Lord Mansion meeting room, shaped like a steel fortress in the center of the city, Kiro Lan finally met the City Lord of Anvil City—Otto Anvil.

A burly middle-aged man with thick beard and sharp eyes like an eagle.

He sat in the main seat, behind him stood several fierce-looking military officers and advisers, with only one seat reserved for Kiro Lan on the opposite side of the conference table.

"Great Commander Kiro Lan," Otto's voice was loud, carrying unapologetic distance and scrutiny.

"What wind blows you from the comfort of Blackwater City to our 'frontier town'? Things are not peaceful outside now; there are worms underground, and those beastmen are causing trouble everywhere. Such a distinguished person like you should stay in the safe center."

Kiro Lan ignored the sarcasm in his words and went straight to the point, "City Lord Otto, precisely because it's not peaceful, I must come. The underground threat is comprehensive, high-dimensional erosion is pervasive, and beastmen are creating chaos everywhere. Division and suspicion will only make

us all die faster. Bai E established the Federation initially to concentrate power to face threats that no single city can fight alone. We need unity and, more importantly, trust."

"Trust?" Otto sneered, "Of course we trust Bai E! He is a true hero and leader. But..."

Turning his speech, he stared intensely at Kiro Lan, "The lord has been gone for a long time, without a trace. And the life and death of hundreds of thousands of people in Anvil City cannot be entrusted to someone who may never return. Or... to two successors who, although exceptionally talented, are too young."

He leaned forward with an overwhelming presence, "Miss Kiro Lan, I'm not underestimating you. But running a city, a Federation, relies not only on Spiritual Talent and the shadow of a former leader. It's about food, ammunition, sturdy walls, and loyal troops! These we have in Anvil City! We improved city defenses according to the technical blueprints left by Bai E, increased production, and trained soldiers. We can fully protect ourselves! Why should we entrust our fate to directives from faraway Blackwater City, whose understanding of our specific situation is limited? And why send our hard-produced supplies and precious Spiritual Ability Users to support those 'brother cities' that perhaps haven't even managed themselves properly?"

Chapter 1013: Chaos (2)

"Because the Bug Race won't just attack one city! High-dimensional whispers won't just erode part of the people!"

Kiro Lan raised her voice. Despite the pressure, her gaze remained firm. "City Lord Otto, the monitoring data is clear, and I believe you have received it too. The entity underground is siphoning the planet's geolink energy! Its awakening will affect the entire globe! No single city, no matter how strong, can withstand an endless bug tide erupting from within the planet! High-dimensional erosion is weakening the mind of every Spiritual Ability User, shaking everyone's will. Without overarching spiritual stability measures and mutual support, once a critical node is breached, who can escape the chain collapse it triggers?"

She took out her tablet, pulling up some desensitized monitoring graphs: "These are the latest data from three monitoring points around 'Anvil City.' See, the intensity of the abnormal geolink fluctuations beneath the old mining area in the southwest of your city has risen by 17% in the past week! This is definitely not an isolated phenomenon! We..."

However, her words were suddenly interrupted by a piercing air raid siren echoing throughout the city!

"Woooo—!!!"

Immediately, an officer rushed into the meeting room, disregarding protocol, his face pale: "City Lord! It's an emergency! Around Shaft No. 3 in the southwest old mining area, the surface has suddenly collapsed on a large scale, and a massive number of Bug Race units have emerged! Initial estimates suggest Hydralisks, Zerglings, and what might be a new mutation! There's... a lot of them! They are quickly moving toward the city along the mining waste heaps and old pipelines! The first outer defense line has already engaged!"

Otto Anvil stood up abruptly, his face changing dramatically: "What?! The southwest mining area? Wasn't that purified long ago? How could..."

He looked sharply at Kiro Lan, his eyes full of suspicion, as if wondering if this was a maneuver by the central office to exert pressure, but he immediately dismissed the absurd notion that a Bug Race attack could be faked.

Kiro Lan's heart sank as well.

Once again, it's the old mining area, erupting from underground... it's just like the situation she dealt with previously near "New Jing City!"

The activities of the underground "Mother" are indeed intensifying, and it's erupting at multiple points simultaneously!

"City Lord Otto! Now is not the time for debate!" Kiro Lan also stood, her tone urgent and resolute.

"The Bug Race threat is right at our doorstep! Please, immediately order the entire city into combat state, evacuate the civilians in the southwest city area, and mobilize all defensive forces! My escort team, though few in number, consists of elite Spiritual Ability Users who can immediately join the fight and assist in defense! We need to share intelligence and coordinate deployments!"

Otto stared at Kiro Lan for two seconds, seeing only pure urgency and hatred for the Bug Race in her eyes, no hint of pretense.

He hesitated no longer, waving his hand decisively: "Send the order! The entire city to Level One battle readiness! Execute Defense Plan No. 3! Evacuate the southwest city area immediately! City Defense Army's First and Third Corps, push forward! Keep those filthy bugs contained in the waste mining area!"

He looked at Kiro Lan, "Miss Kiro Lan, your escort team, integrate into the Special Response Squad of the City Defense Army, follow the front-line commander's direction! You... follow me to the command tower!"

In a critical moment, internal friction was temporarily set aside.

Kiro Lan nodded, quickly issuing a strike order to her escort team via spiritual energy communication.

As Kiro Lan followed Otto up to the rugged and towering command tower of "Anvil City," through the observation window, she could already see the rising smoke and faint sounds of explosions from the southwest direction.

The screeches of the Bug Race, even from such a distance, made one's scalp tingle.

On the city streets, soldiers and armored vehicles were being rapidly deployed, and panic-stricken citizens were rushing to the inner city shelters.

"The situation is dire." Otto glanced at the tactical screen, his face ashen. "The position of the Bug Race's appearance is too close, and they're breaking through very quickly! They seem... very familiar with the underground pipelines and abandoned mine tunnels! Our defense line is being infiltrated at multiple points!"

Kiro Lan concentrated her spiritual energy sensing, striving to extend it toward the battlefield.

Chaotic, brutal, and ravenous spiritual energy waves surged like a tide.

Besides, she also sensed several familiar human Spiritual Ability User waves fiercely battling, which were her escort team.

But among them, one wave... one particularly fierce, sharp, and unstoppable spiritual energy wave, like a torch in the night, was swiftly traversing the bug swarm, extinguishing segments of the Bug Race's spiritual reactions wherever it passed!

"Morphie?!" Kiro Lan instantly recognized.

This guy, as expected, secretly followed! And he's already engaged in battle!

At such a critical moment, she had no time to quibble over these matters, quickly saying to Otto: "City Lord Otto, the Bug Race excels at utilizing complex underground environments. We must immediately mobilize heavy engineering machinery or use high-power explosives to seal key underground passage entrances, forcing them back to the surface to engage! Simultaneously, concentrate firepower to target larger, stronger spiritual response units within the bug swarm, as those might be nodes or commanders! My... we have an outstanding battle Spiritual Ability User on the field already; he is attempting a decapitation tactic, requiring firepower cover to create opportunities for him!"

Otto gave Kiro Lan a somewhat surprised look, not expecting this young girl to be so calm and decisive in battlefield command.

He hesitated no longer, immediately translating Kiro Lan's suggestions into specific orders to be issued.

The battle lasted several hours.

Morphie's presence became the key variable in the battle.

He, like the sharpest blade, repeatedly forced his way into the densest regions of the bug swarm, accurately killing several suspected Bug Race "leaders" coordinating attacks and a few newly emerging, heavily armored, bone-spur-shooting mutated units, significantly disrupting the Bug Race's attack rhythm.

Kiro Lan, meanwhile, stayed in the command tower, using her keen spiritual energy sensing to consistently inform the defense forces of potential Bug Race infiltration paths and spiritual energy gathering points, helping adjust the defensive focus.

With their combined efforts, the wave of Bug Race assault was narrowly repelled.

The remaining Bug Race began retreating back into the collapsed pits and underground tunnels.

As the setting sun cast a dark red hue over "Anvil City's" metal structures, the intense gunfire and screeching sounds gradually subsided.

The battlefield was filled with the acrid scent of smoke and vaporized Bug Race bodily fluids.

Soldiers began wearily clearing the battlefield and tending to the wounded.

City Lord Otto let out a long breath, his gaze at Kiro Lan becoming much more complex, with less disdain and more scrutiny, and a faint, hard-to-notice admiration.

No matter what, this girl and her team indeed provided indispensable help at the critical juncture.

"Miss Kiro Lan, this time..." Otto just started to speak, trying to say something to ease the atmosphere and redefine their relationship, when another urgent footfall interrupted him.

This time, it was an attendant from the convoy, his face deathly pale and voice filled with panic.

"Great Commander! It's not good! During the height of the battle, four Spiritual Ability Users in the team, who were exerting spiritual energy to assist in stabilizing the defensive barrier... suddenly collectively lost control! They destroyed the stabilizing devices in the maintenance station, attacked each other, and have now stormed out of the maintenance station, causing destruction and casualties in nearby residential areas! They... their state is very abnormal, their spiritual energy is filled with twisted and frenzied auras! Others tried to contain them but suffered heavy losses!"

High-dimensional erosion!

Under the intense battle, immense pressure, and stimulus of the fear of death, it erupted again!

And this time it was a collective loss of control!

The atmosphere in the command tower instantly dropped to freezing again.

The trust that had slightly thawed due to fighting side by side showed cracks once more.

City Lord Otto's gaze turned sharp, looking at Kiro Lan, his tone filled with suppressed anger and questioning: "Miss Kiro Lan, what is going on now?!"

Chapter 1014: Dream

Bai E woke up from a dream and wiped the sweat that had faintly appeared on his forehead.

He didn't know how long it had been since he last had a dream, let alone a nightmare...

He couldn't quite remember what exactly happened in the dream, only vaguely recalling widespread war and alien creatures rampaging.

The most disheartening thing was himself... watching everything unfold before his eyes yet unable to intervene, only able to watch in silence.

This terror and helplessness jolted him awake, his eyes opening to a soft white light.

"Awake?" Within a soft embrace, the gentle voice of an Elf Race member sounded calmly.

Yue Ying held Bai E's head, eyes full of pity, "Had a nightmare?"

"It's okay..."

Bai E shook his head, looking up at the porthole outside.

Following his gaze, Yue Ying gently reminded, "We're nearing the Galaxy Center, soon you will be facing the universe's strongest of your kind."

Bai E's eyes flickered slightly, "I've waited a long time..."

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Anvil City.

After the Bug Race attack.

"Your center has continuously emphasized high-dimensional threats, demanding that all places strengthen the management of Spiritual Ability Users. Now, in my city, when my soldiers and people have just repelled the Bug Race and are in need of stability and recovery, your people have experienced a large-scale loss of control event among Spiritual Ability Users! Is this what you call a 'comprehensive response'? Can't even control your own people?!"

Faced with Otto's accusation, Kiro Lan felt a wave of dizziness and helplessness.

High-dimensional Demons!

While the Bug Race poses as a clear enemy of humanity, these high-dimensional demons have never given up on coveting the material world.

Previously, during Bai E's time, the brief peace in the high-dimensional space was completely gone, and recently the erosion of Spiritual Ability Users from high-dimensional space has become severe again.

While the Master was there, his vast, steadfast, and somewhat inherently intimidating spiritual energy towards high-dimensional beings acted as the strongest "stabilizing anchor" and "purifier," suppressing planetary wide high-dimensional fluctuations considerably. Though incidents of loss of control among Spiritual Ability Users occurred, their frequency and intensity were within controllable range.

However, with the Master gone, having ventured to the distant depths of the universe, his direct connection with the planet's Spiritual Energy Field grew exceedingly weak.

Without this strongest "ballast," the whispers, temptations, and erosion from high-dimensional space that had receded like a tide surged back like a frigid dark current.

Becoming clearer and more frequent, attacking the minds of every Spiritual Ability User.

While still in Blackwater City, reports from the Spiritual Power Managers Center flooded in like snowflakes, nearly overwhelming Kiro Lan.

Unexpectedly, in the first battle upon arriving at Anvil City, those demons from high-dimensional space immediately found a breakthrough.

This was her greatest concern—

External threats and internal erosion erupting simultaneously and catalyzing each other, nullifying any effort to mitigate the situation, even exacerbating conflicts.

She could understand Otto's current anger, the destructive power of Spiritual Ability Users losing control sometimes exceeded that of small Bug Race factions.

She forcibly steadied her mind, meeting Otto's questioning gaze. Her voice, although somewhat hoarse, remained clear.

"City Lord Otto, I understand your anger and concern. This is precisely what's terrifying about high-dimensional erosion—it exploits our inner weaknesses and stabs from the back at critical moments. The out-of-control Spiritual Ability Users are victims too. The primary task now is to control the situation to prevent greater destruction and panic. Please immediately dispatch your most elite troops equipped with spiritual suppression gear to join the professional purification personnel I brought to handle this. Ensure priority to control and non-lethal measures, unless absolutely necessary... My people have experience handling such events."

She paused, looking at Otto's uncertain expression, and added, "This incident precisely proves what we discussed before—no city can handle such a comprehensive crisis alone. The Bug Race attacks from underground, high-dimensional erosion comes from within. We need to share monitoring data, jointly research more effective methods to counter high-dimensional erosion, and establish cross-city Spiritual Ability Users emergency support and purification mechanisms. Anvil City's powerful industrial strength and army, when combined with the center's research strength, spiritual expertise, and... all our top-tier combat power, can truly protect every one of us."

Otto fell silent. He looked at the unsolved smoke outside the window and listened to the faint sound of new disturbances caused by the loss-of-control incident among Spiritual Ability Users in the distance.

Reality is grimly apparent.

Absolute independence and self-protection seem merely a beautiful dream. The Bug Race attacks from underground at unpredictable times, "our own people" losing control at uncertain times...

These threats are indeed not solvable by one city or one place alone.

After a long while, he sighed heavily, as if aged instantly, and ordered the officer by his side: "Do as Ms. Kiro Lan says. Deploy the 'Iron Guard' commando to cooperate with the experts from the center, handle the loss-of-control incident. Try... to capture them alive."

The last few words were spoken with difficulty.

Then, he turned to Kiro Lan, his gaze no longer aggressive but with a kind of weary pragmatism.

"Ms. Kiro Lan, regarding the specifics of the cooperation... we need detailed discussions. However, until I see concrete solutions capable of helping 'Anvil City' deal with these damned things, I won't make any definite commitments."

This was already a huge progress.

From resisting communication to being willing to sit down and negotiate terms.

Chapter 1015: Dream_2

"Of course." Kiro Lan solemnly nodded, "I will bring back the specific challenges and demands faced by 'Anvil City', as well as our joint battle experiences today, to Central Command in detail. We will definitely come up with a feasible plan."

Just then, the door of the command tower was pushed open, and Morphie entered with an aura of battle tension still lingering around him.

His armor was covered in Bug Race slime and scorch marks, with several cuts on his face, yet his gaze remained sharp.

He first glanced at Otto, then his gaze fell on Kiro Lan, nodded slightly as if to indicate that he was aware of the incident over there and had already sent people to assist.

Otto looked at this suddenly appearing, remarkably powerful young warrior, a deep and contemplative gaze in his eyes.

He vaguely guessed the identity of the other party, surprised that even after Bai E left, Central Command still had such powerful experts.

The crisis was temporarily resolved, but what was left was a mess and an increasingly complex, delicate situation.

As night fell, "Anvil City" was brightly lit, yet it was permeated with a sense of survival exhaustion and deep anxiety about the future.

Kiro Lan and Morphie stood on the terrace of the command tower, gazing at this scarred city.

"You're hurt." Kiro Lan looked at the wound on Morphie's face.

"A minor injury." Morphie nonchalantly wiped his face, "The bugs are more troublesome than expected; the underground environment is too advantageous for them. Has the City Lord's attitude changed?"

"Yes, he's willing to talk now. But it's not enough." Kiro Lan softly replied, "Morphie, we need to speed up. The underground entities... their awakening pace is accelerating. Today's attack on 'Anvil City' was of higher intensity than last time in 'New Jing City'. High-dimensional erosion is also worsening... I'm worried that the time left for us may be less than anticipated."

Morphie silently nodded, for the first time feeling the heavy pressure Bai E once faced when rectifying the world.

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Having resolved the Bug Race attack on 'Anvil City' and the Spiritual Ability User uncontrolled incident, and with City Lord Otto Anvil's attitude shifting from resistance to conditions for negotiation, Kiro Lan and Morphie did not linger.

Time was tight; they had to swiftly show more cities with hesitating or wavering attitudes the necessity and feasibility of cooperation.

"Next stop, Ming Pearl Port." Kiro Lan circled the eastern coastal trade hub on the map.

There, commercial groups and council forces gather, where calls for "democratic election" reform are loudest, and is a key point to win over the "Middle faction" and divide potential enemies.

Upon leaving "Anvil City", Otto personally escorted them to the outside of the city, his attitude much calmer than upon arrival.

"Miss Kiro Lan, Captain Morphie, some of the minerals and weapon test data you need, I will arrange for delivery to Blackwater City. I hope Central Command... can respond promptly."

"Certainly." Kiro Lan solemnly promised.

She knew this was a gesture of goodwill from 'Anvil City', and also a test.

They traveled in a modified convoy, more streamlined than the way there but equipped with advanced communication and defense systems.

Morphie insisted on personally driving the lead vehicle, while Kiro Lan sat in the passenger seat, utilizing travel time to sort through the data and intelligence gathered from 'Anvil City', contemplating negotiation strategies with the factions at 'Ming Pearl Port'.

The convoy slowly left "Anvil City"'s defense perimeter and entered the wilderness.

The wilderness was indeed relatively safer after Bai E unified the federation; major threats like Bug Race nests had been uprooted, and wandering intelligent machines were periodically cleared away, but that didn't mean it was completely safe.

"Stay alert." Morphie reminded the convoy via the communicator, "The orcs have been active lately, they don't care about any safe routes."

The convoy drove approximately two hours on a slightly bumpy but fairly smooth old highway.

Ahead lay a terrain with slight undulations and weathered rock columns, the edge area known as "Whispering Canyon".

The terrain here was complex, a traditionally high-attack or encounter battle zone.

"Slow down, increase vigilance." Morphie ordered again, his combat intuition picking up on an unusual vibe.

It's too quiet; even the common sounds of mutated bird beasts on the wilderness had vanished.

Just as the convoy prepared to cautiously pass through a column-dense area, sudden changes occurred!

"Waaaaaagh!!!"

Deafening, primitive excitement-filled roars erupted like thunder from all directions!

Immediately after, engine revs like beasts' roars filled the air; countless dilapidated motorcycles and tracked vehicles adorned with myriad colors and decorated with various spikes, metal sheets, and even unknown animal skulls, charged out fiercely from behind the columns, out of depressions, and from behind dunes!

They showed no formation, rushing in like a green tide, extremely fast, carrying a chaotic and violent momentum, instantly semi-encircling Kiro Lan's convoy!

It was the orcs!

And it was large-scale; seeing those densely packed green figures and the billowing dust, there were probably hundreds!

"Combat readiness! Form a circular defense formation! Do not get scattered!" Morphie yelled commands, braking hard, swinging the lead vehicle sideways.

Trained convoy members responded quickly; several off-road vehicles immediately adjusted direction, facing outward, forming a simple defense circle. Weapon operators on the vehicles opened the tops, operating onboard machine guns and light cannons.

The orc convoy roared closer, slowing down about two hundred meters from the human convoy, but didn't fully stop. Instead, like wolves encircling prey, they circled around, emitting various bizarre cries and mocking laughs.

They didn't launch an immediate attack, seemingly observing or waiting for something.

"Something's off..." Morphie closely watched those green figures, his brow furrowed.

These orcs, despite the chaos, seemed coordinated somehow; they didn't simply rush forward to die.

Just then, the largest, most flamboyant, loudest engine-roaring vehicle, made from unknown large chassis remnants, slowly emerged from the orc convoy.

On top of the war vehicle stood an exceptionally tall green figure.

He was a full head taller than the surrounding orc youths, with muscles knotted like granite, skin a darker olive green, covered in intersecting scars, the most notable being a diagonal, deep healed old wound across the left shoulder.

On his head was a "crown" of haphazardly assembled metal and bones, his body hung with various stolen trinkets, and in his hand he held a frighteningly large, jagged, spiked giant axe larger than his own stature.

Simply standing there exuded a wild, formidable, heart-shaking oppressive aura.

"War Boss..." Morphie spat the term softly, his expression heavy.

Having learned and fought alongside Bai E, he'd witnessed many strong figures, and had some knowledge of the beastman race.

To possess such a physique and aura, it must be the War Boss level of existence among the orcs, the absolute "boss" and strongest force in an Orc Tribe.

The War Boss' yellow-green eyes scanned the human convoy, finally landing on Morphie, who appeared as the leader or the most powerful present.

He grinned wide, revealing crooked yellow fangs, letting out an "aw-kaka" strange laugh, sounding like a broken gong.

"Humans! Little sprouts! How dare you yourselves in the territory of Blade-face Liao?"

He patted his solid chest, making his jingling trinkets sway, "Know me? I'm called Blade-face Liao!"

Blade-face Liao?

Morphie and Kiro Lan exchanged a glance, this name... seemed familiar?

Indeed, Bai E had occasionally mentioned encountering an interesting, skillful orc leader in the wilderness, apparently named this way?

Could it be him?

"Blade-face Liao, we know you." Kiro Lan's voice calmly transmitted via the convoy's loudspeaker, attempting negotiations.

Chapter 1016: Humiliation

"We come from the Human Federation Central, heading to 'Ming Pearl Port' on official duty, not intending to intrude on your territory. We mean no harm, would you allow us passage?"

She knew that reasoning with a Beastman was mostly futile, but she had to try to avoid unnecessary conflict. Their time was precious and couldn't afford delays, nor did they want to lose manpower here.

"Federation? Central? Official duty?" Knife-faced Kan seemed to have heard something amusing and laughed heartily, rocking back and forth. The Beastman lads beside him joined in the uproarious laughter, "Wahaha! I don't care about your official business! All I know is that your human vehicle looks sturdy and could probably yield plenty of good parts! And moreover..."

His yellow eyes roamed over Kiro Lan and Morphie, lingering on Morphie, as if sensing the surging Spiritual Energy and unusual aura from him, and his battle intent began to ignite.

"You look... tougher than those ordinary human sprouts, don't you? Especially you, the kid with the sword!"

He pointed his enormous axe at Morphie, challenging boorishly, "Come! Fight me! Let me see if there are any good opponents like 'that previous human' among humans now!"

"That previous human'?" Morphie's eyes narrowed.

"Yes! A human who used a bow, then a sword, and even fists to waaaaagh beat me up!" Knife-faced Kan's voice seemed to carry a hint of admiration and... respect?

"He was strong! Very waaaagh! The most waaaagh human I've ever encountered! You..."

He scrutinized Morphie, shook his head, and spoke with obvious disappointment and disdain, "You look... far inferior. But among those I've met recently, you're the strongest. Come, fight!"

This undisguised evaluation ignited a fire in Morphie's heart, but he forced himself to remain calm.

He knew the other was referring to Bai E.

He was indeed far inferior to Bai E, that was the truth.

But being so underestimated by a Beastman, especially in front of Kiro Lan and many subordinates he had to protect, still made him feel humiliated.

Most importantly... will he never be able to surpass Bai E?

"Fight or not? If not, get out of the way, leave the vehicle and goods, and if I'm in a good mood, maybe I'll let you sprouts go!" Knife-faced Kan impatiently waved his huge axe.

Morphie hung his head, his shoulders trembling slightly.

"Morphie..." Kiro Lan whispered through Spiritual Energy, "Don't be impulsive. We have a mission; it's not wise to get into a fight. Find a way to break through or... try negotiating some terms."

She knew Morphie's competitive nature but now was not the time to be reckless.

Facing those eyes filled with provocation and disdain, listening to the jeering and bizarre shouts of surrounding Beastmen lads that grew louder and louder, a rush of hot blood surged to his head.

He was not only the protector of this team but also destined to replace Bai E as the strongest human!

If he backed down here, how could he ever catch up to or surpass that savior seen by all of humanity?

"I accept your challenge, Knife-faced Kan." Morphie's voice came through the loudspeaker, cold and resolute, "One-on-one. If I win, you let us pass; if I lose..."

He paused, "I'll let you deal with me as you wish, but let my companions go."

"Morphie!" Kiro Lan was anxious.

"Hahaha! Interesting!" Knife-faced Kan roared excitedly, "I like sprouts with a bit of guts like you! Fine! One-on-one! Let me see if there's anyone who can fight besides that monster among humans now!"

Negotiations broke down, and a fight was inevitable.

Kiro Lan knew she could no longer dissuade, so she gritted her teeth and ordered, "Everyone, stay alert, prepare to support Captain Morphie!"

Morphie took a deep breath, leaped down from the car roof, wielding a battle sword glimmering with subtle Spiritual Energy, moving toward the space between the convoy and the Beastmen.

Knife-faced Kan also jumped off his extravagant battle vehicle, wielding his enormous axe, striding heavily, making the ground seem to tremble slightly.

The two stood 20 meters apart. Without wasting words, the battle erupted almost the moment their eyes met!

"Waaaaaagh!" Knife-faced Kan launched the first attack, his massive body bursting out with astonishing speed not matching his size, charging like a cannonball towards Morphie, swinging his enormous axe down with a fierce, whistling wind!

Simple, crude, but terrifying in power!

Morphie dared not directly block it; Spiritual Energy empowered his legs as his figure slid like a ghost to the rear side, simultaneously slashing his battle sword in a cunning arc towards Knife-faced Kan's side.

He knew his strength was far inferior to the opponent's and must rely on speed, agility, and the enhancement of Spiritual Energy.

"Clang!" Knife-faced Kan seemed to anticipate his move, inconceivably redirecting the giant axe mid-swing to parry Morphie's strike.

Amid the loud clash of metal, Morphie felt his arm go numb, causing alarm in his heart:

This Beastman's reaction speed and combat instinct are indeed terrifying!

Yet, such enormous strength had once been defeated by his own hands?

The ensuing battle went on to overwhelmingly suppress him.

Knife-faced Kan wielded his enormous axe like an untiring war machine, his overwhelming and formidable attacks forced Morphie into continuous dodging and blocking, facing constant peril.

Morphie's Spiritual Energy Sword Technique was exquisite and sometimes could seize openings to leave shallow wounds on Knife-faced Kan. However, for the thick-skinned and robust-recovering Beastman war boss, these damages were almost negligible.

In contrast, even a glancing blow from Knife-faced Kan's attack was enough to make Morphe's energy and blood surge convulsively.

"Too slow! Too soft!" Knife-faced Kan continued to lash out while roaring discontentedly, "Is that all you've got? You're way worse than 'that previous human'! He was able to cut at me with a sword and punch me flying!"

Chapter 1017: Humiliation (2)

Every time he heard such evaluations, Morphe's anxiety and resistance would increase even more.

He exerted all his strength, unleashing his Spiritual Energy to the fullest, even using some of his most guarded secret skills. The blade became swifter and more fierce, occasionally forcing Dao Mian Liao to retreat half a step.

But this was his limit.

"That's enough, it's no fun." Dao Mian Liao seemed to have grown tired, and in a head-on collision, his giant axe suddenly exploded with more power.

Morphie's saber was knocked high, leaving his center wide open!

"Bang!" Dao Mian Liao kicked Morphie in the chest, sending him flying like a broken kite and crashing heavily into the side of an off-road vehicle, creating a dull thud.

"Morphie!" Kiro Lan exclaimed, ready to rush over.

"Don't move!" Morphie struggled to stand up, a trickle of blood at the corner of his mouth. The severe pain in his chest almost made it hard to breathe, but he still used his saber to support himself, standing firmly in front of the convoy, eyes staring intently at Dao Mian Liao.

Dao Mian Liao walked over slowly with his giant axe, looking down at the battered Morphie, shaking his head: "You are no good. You're much worse than 'that human before.' When he hit me, I had no temper. When you hit me, it's like a tickle."

He extended his thick green finger and pointed at Morphie, "But you do have some guts, not peeing your pants right away. I'm in a good mood today and don't want to kill a little thing like you. Go back and practice more. Next time we meet, I won't spare you."

He turned around, waved at his surrounding Beastman boys: "Boys! I'm not interested in these humans' junk cars and trash! Let's go find bigger fun!"

The Beastman boys, though puzzled as to why the boss wasn't taking anything, followed orders, and quickly responded with a messy cheer, jumping onto their vehicles.

Dao Mian Liao jumped back onto his war vehicle, giving a last glance at the barely-standing Morphie and the anxious Kiro Lan, grinning: "Tell 'that human from before' that I, Dao Mian Liao, have become stronger! When he returns, I'll challenge him again! This time, I will surely win!"

"Waaaaaagh!"

Accompanied by a deafening battle cry and the roar of engines, the green Beastman convoy, as they had arrived, rolled up a cloud of dust and sped away into the distance.

Soon, they disappeared behind the stone pillars of the wasteland, leaving only a mess of tire tracks and the lingering smell of fuel mixed with the unique stench of the Beastmen in the air.

The wilderness returned to silence, leaving only the sound of the human convoy's survivors' heavy breathing and repressed silence.

Kiro Lan immediately rushed to Morphie's side, supporting his shaky body: "How are you? Are your injuries severe?"

Her Spiritual Energy quickly probed into Morphie's body to check his injuries.

At least two ribs were broken, his internal organs had been shaken, and his Spiritual Energy was somewhat disturbed, but fortunately, there were no fatal injuries.

"I... I'm fine." Morphie coughed up bloody saliva, his face pale, but his eyes filled with reluctance and deep frustration.

He had been defeated, and so utterly, being judged as far inferior to Bai E. The opponent didn't even bother to use lethal force, as if they merely dismissed an unworthy challenger.

This humiliation was harder to bear than the injuries.

"First, let's treat you." Kiro Lan instructed the approaching team medics, then looked at Morphie with a complex tone, "You shouldn't have been impulsive. Our mission is to win the support of other cities, not to bid for bravado here against the Beastmen."

Morphie lowered his head, his fists tightly clenched: "I know... but..."

"I understand." Kiro Lan sighed, looking towards where the Beastmen had gone, "That Beastman... his attitude towards the Master is somewhat strange."

Could it be respect for the strong? Or an obsession with victory and defeat?

He said he'd challenge the Master again when he returns.

It seems the Master left a very deep impression on him back then.

Could this be considered good news?

At least this powerful Beastman warlord seems to recognize only Master Bai E as a worthy opponent and is uninterested in other humans, including themselves, and is even lazy to kill them...

"We need to hurry up now." Kiro Lan withdrew her gaze, her expression more determined, "Morphie, take good care of your injuries. This incident also reminds us that external threats come not only from below ground and higher dimensions; these Beastmen... if used by some ill-intentioned people, or if they go mad themselves, are also huge hidden dangers. We must consolidate our strength quickly. Once your condition stabilizes, we'll immediately set out for 'Ming Pearl Port.'

Morphie nodded without speaking, only looking into the distance, his gaze filled with more than just defeat, but a blazing fire.

Grow stronger! I must become stronger!

Not just to protect but also to... make those who have humiliated me pay the price one day!

After tending to Morphie's injuries, the convoy, after a brief rest, once again headed towards "Ming Pearl Port."

On the journey, Morphie spent most of his time in the back seat of the off-road vehicle with his eyes closed, meditatively regulating his breath.

Kiro Lan used this relatively peaceful time to organize the main points of potential confrontations with various forces in "Ming Pearl Port."

She knew that dealing with the Trade Union Council was far more complex than dealing with a military strongman like Otto Anvil and required more patience, wisdom, and... bargaining chips.

Days later, the convoy arrived at "Ming Pearl Port."

Unlike Anvil City's cold, industrial style, this city was filled with the bustle and vitality of a harbor.

Boats large and small docked at the port, flags of trade caravans from different cities fluttered, the streets were lined with shops, bustling with people, and the air mixed with the smells of the sea, spices, and machine oil.

Beneath the prosperity, there was also a hint of restlessness and detachment from central authority.

The arrival of Kiro Lan's party did not stir much open commotion, but the attention behind the scenes was undoubtedly significant.

They were arranged in a receiving manor designated by the council, decently located but by no means at the core.

Their reception was handled by an experienced councilor named "Ethan," who was courteous, with smooth and meticulous speech, but constantly maintained a professional distance.

"It is an honor for Great Commander Kiro Lan to visit Ming Pearl Port." Councilor Ethan smiled and said, "The council takes this very seriously. However, as you know, the decision-making process in Ming Pearl Port is quite... democratic. We need time to convene all councilors and major trade representatives to fully discuss the terms of cooperation you've proposed. In the meantime, you may rest here and enjoy the views of our port."

Kiro Lan understood this was their usual delaying tactic, using so-called procedures to waste her time and patience while observing the situation and biding their time.

She knew she couldn't be hasty and nodded: "I understand. We also hope for deep, honest exchanges with our friends in Ming Pearl Port. However, Councilor Ethan, time is extremely valuable to all of us. The threats from underground will not wait for our meeting to end, nor have the whispers from higher dimensions ceased. I hope the council can arrange everything promptly."

"Of course, of course," Councilor Ethan's smile remained unchanged, "We will hurry."

In the following two days, Kiro Lan and Morphie moved within limited range, trying to connect with some relatively neutral organizations or individuals friendly to the federation center, to understand more about the real voices within Ming Pearl Port.

They discovered that this place was indeed rife with factions. There were pragmatists wishing to leverage central power to stabilize trade routes and acquire advanced technologies, conservatives fearing central interference would harm their autonomy and business interests, and radicals ambitiously attempting to seize greater power amid the chaos, even seeking independence.

Rumors spread particularly quickly here, with talks of "Bai E is dead" and "the center can't even take care of itself" being quite prevalent...

Chapter 1018: Despair

By the third morning, Councilor Ethan finally informed that Parliament would hold an unofficial internal briefing in the afternoon, inviting Kiro Lan to attend and elucidate the central stance and cooperation suggestions.

This was a progression, but far from formal negotiations.

However, just as Kiro Lan prepared to head to the Parliament building, a rapid series of alarms, akin to a plague, instantly swept across Ming Pearl Port!

The first alerts came from the port district!

"Urgent report! Unidentified giant creatures rapidly approaching underwater beneath wharves three and seven of the port! The number...the number is numerous! They are colliding with dock bases and anchored ships!" The port management office's communications were almost tearful.

Simultaneously, a disaster report came from the northwest old town: "Report! A massive collapse occurred in the underground drainage system of the Rusted District with...with Bug Race units pouring out! They are Zerglings and Hydralisks! They are spreading to the surface!"

These two messages were already horrifying enough, but adding insult to injury was the nearly synchronized appearance of Bug Race, a heart-stopping psychic howl and chaotic energy waves erupted from the Spiritual Ability Guild tower near the city center square—

Another Spiritual Ability User lost control under high-dimensional whispers and sudden crisis pressure!

As if things weren't chaotic enough, the border defense outside of the city also sent a urgent communication: "A massive Beastman War Gang appeared on the eastern coastline! They...they haven't attacked the city directly but are using some crude catapults to hurl incendiary and explosive objects into the city! They are howling chaotically along the coastline, tying up a large part of our defensive forces!"

Bug Race attack, high-dimensional erosion, Beastman harassment...

Triple threats exploded in different forms across Ming Pearl Port at almost the same time!

This is absolutely no coincidence!

Kiro Lan and Morphie exchanged a glance, seeing horror in each other's eyes.

This is more serious than what they encountered in Anvil City, with more attack points and better coordination, as if an invisible hand was simultaneously plucking these deadly strings!

Councilor Ethan's face turned ashen, his previous composure vanished without a trace, voice trembling: "Wh...what's happening?! How are Bug Races coming from underwater?! And Beastmen...they've never dared approach the coastline so closely before!"

Kiro Lan forced herself to calm down, knowing that any panic and blame would be futile at this moment.

"Councilor Ethan, now is not the time to investigate the reasons! Immediately initiate the city's highest-level emergency plan! Evacuate the port and old town residents, mobilize all defensive forces to intercept separately! Send people to control the situation at the Spiritual Ability Guild to prevent further damage from those who have lost control! The city defense force must allocate some power to suppress the Beastmen on the coastline, they shouldn't interfere with city defenses!"

Her speech was rapid, with clear thinking: "The underwater threat at the port might be a new Bug Race variant, requiring heavy deep-water bombs or underwater defense nets! The Bug Race in the old town emerging from underground means immediately blasting and sealing main sewer exits to trap them below or force them into designated extermination zones! Handling Spiritual Ability User loss of control needs professional purification teams! Beastman harassment needs long-range firepower to disperse them and prevent their approach!"

Councilor Ethan was already somewhat at a loss, instinctively asked: "Th...then what should we do? We don't have enough manpower to handle so many simultaneously..."

Kiro Lan took a deep breath, eyes sharp: "My guard team and accompanying personnel can immediately join the battle, assisting in defense. Morphie, take your people to the old town to assist in purging the Bug Race emerging underground and focus on blocking passageways! I will bring some to the Spiritual Ability Guild to attempt controlling the loss-control incident! The underwater threat at the port and Beastmen on the coast need your local navy and main city defense forces to handle! We must immediately establish joint command, share intelligence, and coordinate actions! Otherwise, the entire city will be defeated one by one!"

In the critical moment, the decisiveness and clear response shown by Kiro Lan, like a lifeline.

Councilor Ethan no longer hesitated, repeatedly nodded: "Good! Good! I will immediately notify the Speaker and the city defense commander! Have your people act immediately!"

The whole Ming Pearl was instantly plunged into chaos.

The blaring alarms, the citizens' frightful cries, the rumbling of army mobilization, sounds of explosions and firefights already starting in the distance, intertwined together.

Morphie led his most elite "Dawn's Blade" team members, hastily heading to the old town's Rusted District.

The area was already in chaos, with Bug Races swarming out from multiple collapsed sewer openings and earth fissures, engaging in a chaotic battle with the hastily assembled city defense army and security forces.

Morphie immediately commanded his team to join the battle while requesting city defense to gather engineering vehicles and explosives, bombing several key sewer main entrances as per Kiro Lan's strategy, limiting the Bug Race emergence points to smaller areas, then concentrating firepower for extermination.

Kiro Lan meanwhile rushed with a few spiritual purification experts and guards to the Spiritual Ability Guild tower in the city center.

Even from afar, they could see the tower's high-rise windows flickering with abnormal, twisted pink-purple spiritual energy lights, occasionally spilling uncontrolled spiritual shockwaves, causing nearby buildings' glass to shatter.

At the tower entrance, some of the guild's low-level Spiritual Ability Users and guards were attempting to seal the entry but appeared at a loss.

"What's the situation inside?" Kiro Lan asked while swiftly approaching.

Chapter 1019: Despair (2)

"I... I don't know!" A guild guard's face was deathly pale. "Several high-ranking Spiritual Ability Users have lost control at the same time. They are attacking each other inside the tower, and the Spiritual Energy Field is completely chaotic! Our people can't get in and don't dare to go in easily, fearing they'll be affected or... eroded!"

Kiro Lan frowned deeply. She could feel the wild, chaotic, malicious waves of Spiritual Energy inside the tower clashing and intensifying.

The high-dimensional demons had found a perfect breach here.

"Follow me!" she ordered her purification specialist squad, simultaneously channeling her own Spiritual Energy. A faint, stable Spiritual Energy aura enveloped her, attempting to resist the erosion of the chaotic energy outside, as she took the lead towards the tower entrance.

"Set up a temporary purification barrier, try to stabilize the internal Spiritual Energy Field, prioritize isolating those out of control, look for opportunities for mental intervention or... forced stasis!"

The port area was where the fighting was fiercest.

New aquatic Bug Race units continuously surged from underwater, crashing into the docks, even trying to climb onto the ships.

The port's artillery and stationed warships fired frantically, exploding columns of water into the sky, but the Bug Race numbers seemed endless.

More troubling was that along the coastline, the Beastman War Gang's crude trebuchets threw flaming barrels and explosives into the port area and the city near the coast, sparking multiple fires and further causing chaos, binding some firefighting and defense forces.

Inside the council building, the temporarily established joint command center was in chaos.

Reports came flying in like snowflakes, almost all bad news.

The Bug Race's advance in the old city was faster than expected, Morphie's blockade operations were meeting with tenacious resistance; inside the Spiritual Ability Guild tower, the loss of control was escalating, and contact was lost with Kiro Lan after she led her team in; the port area was under immense pressure, the aquatic Bug Race seemed somewhat resistant to conventional artillery; while coastal Beastmen hadn't landed yet, their continuous harassment and arson kept the city defense forces running ragged.

"Hold the line! We must hold the line!" The chairman shouted hoarsely, but his eyes were already filled with despair.

He never imagined Ming Pearl Port would face such multifaceted, ferocious attacks.

The prosperity and so-called "democratic autonomy" of the past seemed so fragile in the face of a real survival crisis.

As time passed, the crisis did not alleviate but rather intensified and grew worse.

Some areas of the old city fell, the Bug Race started spreading into neighboring districts; more violent Spiritual Energy explosions occasionally erupted from the Spiritual Ability Guild tower, with even uncontrolled Spiritual Energy flames spurting from the windows; under the continuous assault of the Bug Race, part of the port's docks finally collapsed, capsizing several merchant ships; the Beastmen by the coast, as if finding it not entertaining enough, began attempting to approach the edge of the port with small gangs on makeshift rafts...

Just as the entire city seemed about to be swallowed by despair and chaos, mutiny arose again!

On the southeast sea surface of Ming Pearl Port, the previously clear sky suddenly darkened without warning, a thick, tar-like darkness rapidly spreading, accompanied by deep, blasphemous whispers piercing the soul.

Within that darkness, the vague outlines of something gigantic and twisted were coalescing and manifesting—it was neither Bug nor Beastman, it was... the breath of a high-dimensional Demon!

And its scale was far larger and more terrifying than the loss of control among the Spiritual Ability Users!

It seemed as if the city's chaos, terror, and despair were attracting deeper, more terrifying existences to traverse dimensions and arrive!

"What... what is that?!" Inside the command center, someone pointed at the darkness devouring the light on the surveillance screen, their voice trembling uncontrollably.

Even Morphie, who had been fighting on the front line, felt his heart sink heavily upon sensing that overwhelming, malicious Spiritual Energy pressure.

Spiritual Ability Users losing control, Bug Race attacks, Beastman harassment... and now, even a real high-dimensional Demon might descend?

What on earth was happening?!

And within the Spiritual Ability Guild tower, Kiro Lan, who was painstakingly leading her purification team to maneuver around several out-of-control high-ranking Spiritual Ability Users and attempting to set up a purification barrier, suddenly looked up, gazing through the tower's shattered windows towards the monstrous darkness forming on the southeast sea.

Her face instantly became deathly pale.

Underground Bug Race, high-dimensional erosion, Beastman disturbances... now even the abyssal gaze had become a tangible threat, imminent.

Ming Pearl Port, this bustling port city, was standing on the brink of complete destruction.

Could she, Morphie, and the defenders of this city turn the tide?

Or would the ultimate resolution to this disaster have to wait for that figure beyond the Star River to return for it to be quelled?

"No!"

Kiro Lan gritted her teeth, forcibly suppressing the metallic taste rising in her throat.

No, she couldn't give up!

At least until the Master returned, she had to fight to the very last moment!

"Hold the nodes! The purification ritual cannot stop!" she shouted sharply at her squad members nearby, pouring her own Spiritual Energy without reservation into the precarious purification barrier, her gaze resolutely fixed outside the tower on that ultimate gathering darkness.

...

Watching the scene of despair they created with their own hands, the eyes from the high-dimensions were filled with the pleasure of their conspiracy's success.

"Even if you are invincible in this world, you can't protect your own backyard."

The Human Emperor's ambition could swallow the world, but he also had high standards for himself.

If he knew the world of his current reincarnation had been completely destroyed under his guard, even the Human Emperor might have a broken mindset.

Their long-planned endgame battle was finally set into motion!

All three parties have made their move, let's see how this backyard, without the Human Emperor, can remain as the anchor point for the Human Emperor in this world?!

...

Time seemed to have congealed into sticky amber in Ming Pearl Port, each moment filled with the gnawing sounds of despair.

In the old city, the defense line of the "Rusted District" finally ripped open a rift under the endless, unexpected corner assaults of the Bug Race from underground.

The bone needles of the hydras plowed deadly furrows into the streets, the wailing of decaying insects mixed with the screams of civilians and the sounds of buildings collapsing.

Morphie and the members of his "Blade of Dawn" team, together with the local city defense troops, found themselves divided and surrounded in several shrinking defensive circles, everyone's faces stained with gunpowder, blood, and an unmistakable weariness.

Morphie's war knife was already dulled after extended combat, his Spiritual Energy nearing exhaustion. He leaned against a half-collapsed wall, looking at the swarming Bug shadows in front of him, and for the first time, he felt truly powerless—

Individual bravery was as insignificant as dust against such overwhelming hordes.

He thought of Kiro Lan, the girl still facing more terrifying threats alone in the Spiritual Ability Guild tower, and a slab of heavy stone seemed to press down on his heart.

Inside the Spiritual Ability Guild tower, it had already turned into a hell of Spiritual Energy.

Several high-level Spiritual Ability Users, completely eroded by high-dimensional whispers, were unrecognizable.

Their Spiritual Bodies twisted into grotesque postures, emitting nauseating pink, purple, and inky mixed Spiritual Energy glows, attacking each other and anything living.

The purification team led by Kiro Lan had already lost more than half of its members. The few remaining, together with herself, were trapped inside an area barely ten square meters, sustained by purification runes and their remaining Spiritual Energy.

Outside the shield was a ferocious torrent of Spiritual Energy and the hysterical shouting and laughter of those out of control.

Kiro Lan knelt half on the ground, her hands tightly pressed on the core runes maintaining the barrier, her face pale as paper, blood constantly trickling from the corners of her mouth—

Such was the backlash from severe expenditure of Spiritual Energy, even burning her life source.

She could feel her hastily constructed "stabilization field" collapsing at an alarming rate, and what made her soul shiver even more was the ominous presence of something crossing the dimensional barrier from outside the tower, from the southeast sea, as if the abyss was descending.

This was a true high-dimensional Demon crossing the dimensional barriers, about to descend!

Chapter 1020: The Painting?

Despair, like a cold venomous snake, coiled around her heart, tightening more and more.

The port area was already in chaos. Several docks had completely collapsed, and burning shipwrecks floated on the sea, with thick smoke obscuring the sky.

The new aquatic Bug Race seemed endless, even beginning to attempt climbing the port area's defensive walls.

On the coast, the orcs' clamor reached its peak, as if they found the "great entertainment" before them utterly thrilling. No longer satisfied with long-range projection, more green skins began boarding ragged landers, attempting to forcibly storm the beach and join the feast of destruction.

The city defense army and navy were exhausted and scattered, with their firepower seriously divided, and the defense line was about to crumble.

The temporary command center in the parliament building had fallen into dead silence.

All communication channels brought bad news or were completely interrupted with busy tones.

On the big screen, red representing the Bug Race-occupied area, purple signifying the Spiritual Energy pollution zone, green indicating the orc activity area, and the ever-expanding black mass on the southeastern sea, representing a high-dimensional threat, were rapidly devouring the blue area representing city control.

The Speaker sat slumped in his chair, his eyes vacant.

Senator Ethan and other officials looked ashen, with some starting to sob softly or mutter prayers.

They once believed that prosperity and democracy could withstand anything, yet now, faced with an all-encompassing disaster beyond comprehension, they saw their own and the Order they had built as painfully fragile.

Just as it seemed the entire city was about to be torn apart, swallowed, and corrupted in the next second, and everyone's will was being pushed to the abyss of collapse—

In the Spiritual Ability Guild tower, Kiro Lan, half-kneeling and with consciousness starting to blur from exhaustion, felt the scene before him suddenly flicker and overlap in an eerie way.

The violent Spiritual Energy turbulence, the twisted figures of those who lost control, the growing darkness from the demons' distant arrival reflected outside the window...

These broken and despairing images, for some reason, began to slowly merge with a similarly dark and oppressive yet strangely familiar fragment of a memory deep within.

The thick smoke sketched with dark ink, the dim sky devoid of sunlight, countless distant shadows, the ruins on the land, and... a human figure stepping out from behind the ruins.

This scene... she had seen it!

Not in this purgatory-like reality, but long ago...

Where?

A somewhat hollow-headed Kiro Lan thought in confusion.

For a moment, a flash of insight.

The bedroom!

Bai E's bedroom!

After the Master left, Kiro Lan often went to clean his bedroom.

Whenever she felt troubled, she would hide there alone, inhaling the faint scent left behind by the Master, as if all her worries would gradually dissolve.

She remembered a painting lying open on a desk by the window in the Master's simple bedroom.

The style was realistic and heavy. She had seen it but couldn't understand it.

It felt oppressive, yet the lone human silhouette in the painting inexplicably brought her a sense of solace and curiosity.

Never did she expect that now... in this apocalyptic desperation, the floodgates of memory, burst open by despair, would bring back every detail of that painting with unparalleled clarity.

Moreover, it perfectly matched everything she was currently experiencing!

Ink-like smoke... dim sky... distant shadows... human ruins...

And... the silhouette stepping out from behind the ruins!

Kiro Lan's pupils suddenly contracted, her heart nearly stopping.

Could it be... could it be that the painting hanging in the Master's bedroom wasn't about abstract meaning or a distant future, but... this moment?!

Is it Ming Pearl Port today?!

This thought exploded in her mind like a thunderbolt, bringing an even deeper chill—

If the painting foresaw this disaster, does it mean all this is unavoidable? Is it a predetermined fate?

Are all of them destined to die here?

And if she, Morphie, and an entire city were destroyed today, would the three great crises of the Bug Race, Demons, and Beastmen spread uncontrollably, rolling back the world to its original point?

Even leading to the complete extinction of humanity?

However, just as this cold, despairing thought arose, a mutation occurred!

It didn't come from a new attack by the external Bug Race, Demons, or Beastmen, but from her own Spiritual Energy perception, or rather, a kind of mysterious "resonance" beyond conventional perception.

The painting existing in her memory, as if breaking free from the constraints of time and space, was no longer just an image in her mind, but transformed into an illusory yet remarkably clear "light stream," "flying" out from the depths of her consciousness!

This light stream wasn't material but carried a bizarre sense of presence. It ignored the violent Spiritual Energy turbulence in the tower and the barrier of physical walls, unraveling from Kiro Lan's center, expanding towards the edge of the entire threatened Ming Pearl Port!

All those still fighting, fleeing, or trapped in despair—

Morphie and the soldiers in the old city's bloody battle, the military and civilians fighting the Bug Race and Beastmen in the port area, the ashen-faced officials in the command center, even those on the edge of madness, the out-of-control Spiritual Ability Users, and the howling Beastmen outside the city, the Bug Race surging from the sea bed, and that dark mass gathering with malice on the sea surface...