

Wow 121

Chapter 121: apply for power leveling

"Good afternoon."

After the players had left, Bai E approached the boy.

The movement of the boy's feet was slight, indicating he was actually awake.

"Sir..." The boy who had woken up gazed at the tip of Bai E's foot under the dim light inside the cave, calling out with a touch of awe.

He had already learned of the "sir's" real identity from the three seemingly amiable people with whom he had built a home last night.

The leader of an organization.

What a significant figure was that?

When could Fernandi ever hope to meet such a high-ranking person?

It filled him with reverence.

"There's no need to be formal." Bai E smiled, squatting down and speaking as softly as possible, "I've come today because I have a few questions for you."

After returning last night, he had also inquired the more experienced ones like Tiger about the affairs of the demon believers and was surprised to find out that the believers of the eternal were the most mild-mannered among all demon believers, except for... the uncontrollable plague that they naturally emitted.

The plague was often what exposed their sins and caused disaster.

Apart from that, "the eternal" and its great demon seemed to have little interest in taking action; this faction of demons... seemed more like recluses indifferent to worldly matters.

"You... you may ask."

Bai E scrutinized the boy's eyes, coffee-colored, clear and translucent like amber, "Since you're associated with a demon, we must eliminate all potential threats, and you should understand this."

"Yes."

"Yesterday, the people from Arbitration Place said you can't perfectly control those rats, is that true?"

"Yes."

"Can you... give them up?"

Imperfect control meant harm to others as well as oneself.

It would harm normal people and also reveal the boy's whereabouts due to his unconscious actions. Probably, Arbitration Place, including Dai Lian, had tracked the boy using this method before.

On hearing Bai E's words, the boy hesitated slightly but then heaved a light sigh, "They were with me when I was most desperate..."

"..." Bai E remained silent; he never forced anyone to make any decision.

"...but I'm aware that it's just me anthropomorphizing them with affection. They have gone completely mad due to the plague from my body." The boy raised his head, looking earnestly into Bai E's eyes, "If possible, I hope you can eradicate them soon, so they won't trouble everyone anymore."

[Believers of the eternal are not afraid of illness but will spread the plague involuntarily...]

The nature of the plague varied from person to person, each case different.

Bai E nodded, "I will have them take care of it. Now for the second point, will you continue to infect new rats or say... other creatures? And will those already infected rats come seeking you out?"

The boy lowered his head again, his voice somewhat muffled, "It seems any creature with less reasoning can be influenced by me unconsciously, but humans won't. As for those already infected... I can only try to contract my presence to prevent being sensed by 'them'."

"Can you isolate the spread of this plague?"

"I can't control it, unless one stays away from me." The boy said, stretching out his hand to caress the earthen stones on the wall behind him, "If I hide here, there should be no more chances of coming into contact with other creatures..."

"Alright... one last thing." Bai E's tone became slightly more somber, "About you. What impact does the demon have on you? I believe you are currently led by your own will, but might there come a day when the demon uses your body to destroy this world?"

"I can feel it..." The boy looked down, his eyes distant, "But it's all hazy. Even if I tried to summon it to rid me of all fate, it seems difficult. The anomalies in the sewer were already my utmost effort. It's like it just generously bestowed a tiny bit of merciful blessing on me and then left like a loving father asking for nothing in return. I think it's unlikely that such a day will come."

With that, the boy suddenly looked up, his gaze earnestly meeting Bai E's, "Leader sir, please, you must promise me one thing."

"Go ahead."

"If such a day does come, if I truly become a threat to everyone, if I can no longer control myself... I hope, you will take action to kill me! Do not hesitate, do not show mercy. I am already content to have built a home for myself here with you, even if just for one day..."

"..." Bai E touched his head, smiling indulgently, "There won't be such a day, rest assured. Someone once told me willpower can penetrate the hardest stone. She's an expert on demons, and she also told me, behavior determines habits, habits determine thoughts, thoughts determine belief. And belief will decide the path of your life.

There's nothing wrong with being a chosen of the demon, what you do later is for you to decide."

The random blessing from the Evil God turns out to be a plague that doesn't directly affect others, which is rather lucky for the boy.

Standing up, Bai E called out to the outside, "Come down."

Since it had been confirmed that the boy would not suffer severe consequences, the plans for the next steps could be made—

[Side Quest—The True Culprit Behind The Scenes (Combat Assignment) has encountered an unexpected change, the quest progress has been altered, and the current quest requirements have been met.]

[Side Quest—The True Culprit Behind The Scenes, completed.]

[Quest Reward: General Experience +100, Precise Brass Bullets *130, distributed.]

The three players who just came down were bewildered upon receiving the notification.

The quest is settled?

Hooray!

The gleaming brass bullets in their perceptual quest inventory appeared as a settling screen raining down from the sky, clinking and clattering in a way that filled them with a pleasant sense of reward.

This quest... it had bogged them down for two or three days! They had finally completed it!

Long live the adult!

"Even though the previous stage of the quest is completed, you can't relax yet. The rats left by Fernandi still pose an unimaginable threat to the residents' lives. I just don't wish for people to continuously associate the rats with Fernandi, so next up, you are still tasked with eradicating those creatures that have lost all sense of reason."

Bai E spoke gravely, starting to arrange the assignment.

[Assigning Task Description in Progress...]

[Side Quest—Rat Plague Cleanup (Combat Assignment): Although the aimless swarm of rats needs to be cleared out, to prepare for potentially even greater crises in the future, your personal strength also needs to be honed.

Quest Requirements: Slay 0/(20~100) plague rats in the "Dark Environment."

Quest Reward: General Experience 50~200 points, Item Reward (to be determined).]

(Note: Physical submission is required for this task, and the current assignment cannot be "auto-completed" but must be "verified and completed"; after confirming dispatch of the assignment, "permissions" and "expenditures" will be deducted and locked.)

[Would you like to issue the current assignment?]

With additional authorization for general experience, Bai E decided to slightly reduce the physical rewards, reverting to the previous level given for wolf killings.

After all, watching the bullets being used so freely did hurt his feelings—they were his personal assets.

Therefore...

[Settings—Quest Requirements: Kill 100 plague rats; Quest Rewards: General Experience 200 points, Precise Brass Bullets 15+8.]

Job well done!

Dai Lian, who received the task, was clearly puzzled. One of the terms in the task caught his eye, "In the Dark Environment?"

"Yes..." Bai E kept a straight face without revealing any emotion, "Your actions are best carried out in the shadows to prevent tracing back Fernandi's presence here."

That was one of the reasons, but a more important one was obviously for his own benefit.

Given the choice to clear out the rat plague, Bai E would rather create a new assignment.

First, to give the players more experience so they would qualify to be harvested by himself, and second, to adjust the quest requirements a bit.

His own shortcoming, insight—the attribute Bai E kept firmly in mind.

What better than combat in a Dark Environment to hone this skill?

When else to have players grind on his behalf if not by finding opportunities to issue quests?

By relying solely on himself? Spare me.

"But..." Seeing his two teammates' thrilled expressions, Kuang Xin's eyes were filled with confusion. Why hadn't he received the quest?

"My lord, what about me?"

Chapter 122: Psychology

"You have other arrangements."

Bai E was acutely aware of his current shortcomings.

To improve his insight level, he relied on Dai Lian and Gong Yan to hunt rats in the sewers; for reflexes and combat skills, he depended on Kuang Xin, a naturally gifted melee fighter.

Based on Instructor Dan's requirements today, the selection criteria for the secret military operation were combat skills. Knowing that he was lacking in this area, Bai E truly wanted to enhance his skills.

Working hard on his own was too slow. Players, you need to put in the effort too!

[Quest description is being auto-generated...]

[Side Mission—Underground Boxing King (Combat Commission): The dark currents of Black Street surge, with the most attention-grabbing undoubtedly being the underground boxing matches that attract both eyes and money. The organization needs to understand the inner workings and has decided to send someone to investigate. The best way to do that, undoubtedly, is to blend in with them...]

Mission requirements: Complete at least 0/3 bouts in "Black Street Underground Boxing"; or secure at least 0/1 victory.

Mission reward: 200 general experience points, Item reward: Exquisite Brass Bullets* (25+12).]

(Note: As there is a physical submission stage, the current commission cannot be "automatically completed" and must be "verification completed"; after confirming the release of the commission, "permissions" and "expenditures" will be deducted and locked.)

[Do you want to release this commission?]

Confirm!

"200 experience points!" Kuang Xin trembled at the sight of the mission reward. No wonder Yanzi and Dai looked so excited just now—they had never enjoyed such treatment from other NPCs.

25 or 50 points were common, but previously a stable 100 general experience points from E had already made him feel like a big shot, but now... 200!

Skyrocket!

"I will not let you down!"

"Hmm..." Bai E's gaze finally swept around the underground cave one last time.

What started as an unpremeditated act now seemed to be on the rise.

In the end, he might actually be able to create a fully functional, safe, and stable underground base...

"I'm leaving now."

"Goodbye, E~"

"Oh, right..." Just as he reached the ladder, Bai E turned around and, pointing at the clothes he had neatly stacked in a dry corner, said with a smile, "I've tried the clothes. They fit perfectly. Thank you for the gesture."

Gong Yan, with her little face raised, just smiled and said, "It's nothing, E. It's just our small way of showing gratitude."

"..."

"I'm off."

As they watched E's figure disappear into the distance, Gong Yan remained smiling. It was only after a while that she softly said, "We've got bullets."

Just when needed, the pillow arrives.

They originally had 131 bullets; completing today's six tasks together, they received 114 from the cement task and 390 from the rat-plague task, totaling 635 bullets.

100 or so bullets, whether odd or even, might be hard to convince others, but with a full 600 bullets, Gong Yan was confident she could persuade those NPCs to work for her without charge again.

They still had value to her, and without them, it would indeed be troublesome to find cement on their own, so there was no rush to take them out of the equation yet.

When they were no longer of any use...

"I'm a little afraid of losing them..." Gong Yan, holding the hefty 600 bullets, appeared somewhat worried, "What if they still don't believe me?"

"No worries." Dai Lian comforted her gently, "We're here for you. If they still don't believe, we'll deal with them directly!"

As for the missions... they were bonus. Without these NPCs, they could find other methods. In Dai Lian's view, the game was full of possibilities.

"Alright." Gong Yan nodded, smiling brightly, "Then I'll give it a try."

...

"This is the confidence you wanted."

Gong Yan casually threw a cloth bag filled with bullets in front of Black Street ruffian, Jonathan, and it landed heavily on the ground.

The underling eagerly approached and opened it, the golden shine instantly blinding his dog eyes.

Jonathan excitedly grabbed a handful and examined each one closely in front of his eyes, "Real... real... all of them are real! They feel even better than the stuff they got!"

In his excitement, Jonathan suddenly paused and hurriedly put down the bullets, walking back respectfully towards Gong Yan, who leaned against the wall not far away with a slight smile and arms folded.

"My lord... is this all there is?"

"You wanted trust, and I've given it to you, but you haven't earned my trust yet. 600 not enough? I'll give you 10,000, 20,000, 100,000? Can you handle that?"

"..." Jonathan's face was plastered with a smile, "You're right, my lord, you're right... In that case, how does my lord wish to deal with this batch?"

"Money," Gong Yan declared firmly, "You can take five percent."

It was too suspicious for these people to exchange pristine bullets for poor quality ones; better to exchange for money. Whatever they needed, they could purchase on their own without suffering a loss.

He and Dai Lian were not Kuang Xin.

"If there's nothing else, I'll be leaving now. I don't want to be seen mingling with you lot."

"My lord, take care..." Jonathan bowed deeply, oozing sycophancy, "Oh, I almost forgot. We've prepared a gift to celebrate your triumphant return from the last military operation. Could you possibly deliver it for us?"

As Gong Yan turned away, her eyes flickered and she smirked coldly, "The operation was a failure, and the camp is on high alert these days, don't bring trouble upon yourself!"

"Yes! Yes..."

Only after Gong Yan's delicate figure had disappeared around the corner did the underling draw close to Jonathan, eyeing the bullets with greed, "Boss... what if we keep them all for ourselves?"

A rough knock on the underling's head answered him, "Shortsighted! This is just an appetizer; what's the rush!"

Watching as the figure disappeared at the end of the street, Jonathan stroked his golden mustache in a daze, "So certain about the failed operation, it must be true... But, they still don't trust our strength?"

Indeed, he didn't trust his own strength much either.

Well... let's test our skills with these 600 bullets first!

Nobles and generals, is there not a natural order!

With military support behind me, I could very well have the potential to be the king of Black Street!

[You have completed a perfect psychological operation, Psychology +2.]

[Psychology +2: Now you can more easily gain the trust of strange NPCs through your words. Charisma performance +2; also gaining a unique advantage in power management and certain technological research.]

...

[Feedback from a commission, your Technology—Psychology +1.]

[Psychology +1: Now you have won the trust of a larger population under your control, allowing you to pre-deploy more tasks. The same type of commission can be stacked one more time, consuming relative authority quota on the second natural day.]

"..."

Bai E had just returned to the camp when he received this message.

Is this... from Dai Lian? Or Gong Yan?

Seems I've been conning NPCs pretty well.

Worth encouraging, keep up the good work.

Grow bigger, create more glory!

"Bai E, Bai E! Come on!"

Just as Bai E set foot on the shooting range to practice his archery, he was quickly intercepted by an excited Carlos, "Here you are! That secret military operation selection I told you about—they're considering shooting skills now. Go try out!"

Chapter 123: Side Quest - Advanced Shooting

"I heard from Helen that your physical fitness has already exceeded 14 points, right?" Carlos asked hurriedly as he led the way.

"Hmm."

"Then you should go get a machine gun first."

Bai E had always used the beginner's Type 77 rifle; higher-grade machine guns are more powerful but also require more physical control. The minimum requirement to use the machine gun's burst mode is also a 14-point physical attribute.

Having only trained for three days, Bai E had not undergone a detailed physical examination. Even if he had, with a physical attribute of only 13.7 points at the time, he was still a bit short of the minimum requirement of 14 points. It's always better to stick with what's familiar, so he did not change his equipment when he went to the Bug Race battlefield.

Now that he knew, the first thing he certainly had to do was to change his equipment.

He could also switch to a more powerful Desert Eagle for his handgun.

The Blade machine gun that he had only personally fired during the new soldier talent test was finally in his hand, and the sensation of holding something much heavier than a rifle was reassuring.

"You go get familiar with the new equipment first, and then I'll take you to participate in the selection," Carlos said, clearly very concerned about Bai E, the synth.

"Alright."

"Pupu pupu."

The sound of the machine gun burst was more brisk and muffled, effortlessly leaving... a bullet hole on the distant 200 meter target.

Carlos gazed closely and saw that there was only one hole at the bullseye that allowed the light from behind the target to pass through.

Not bad in terms of precision.

"That's it, go try, go try!" Carlos was visibly more enthusiastic about sending Bai E on a covert military operation.

As Bai E approached the specialized test range, he could hear the roar of machine guns from a distance.

The moment he stepped through the gate, the muscles of countless burly men immediately stood out before him.

The number wasn't particularly high, probably less than a hundred, but...

All burly men!

Almost every figure that was carrying and firing a machine gun in the crowd lining up next to it was built; they all had the same uniform machine guns in their hands.

Those who weren't qualified to use the Blade machine gun in burst mode didn't even have the eligibility to participate in the selection.

Bai E deliberately summoned the "lucky hit" rate panel that belonged to him—

They were all at least third-level or even fourth or fifth-level Light Firearms Specialization, and almost all of them had the "Firepower Suppression" skill, just like Song Ying.

Clearly, as a member of a special forces team, Song Ying was not unique in this military camp; he was just the common face among countless machine gunners. Maybe in terms of all-around abilities, he had something special, but in shooting... everyone's abilities were almost the same.

Especially one muscular man dual-wielding machine guns appeared to be exceptionally showy.

The pressure was quite big.

Bai E felt his palms begin to sweat, and since it was not a critical moment, he did not suppress his body's natural emotions.

"Go on, it's okay. Although they are veterans, your abilities are not inferior to theirs," Carlos reassured Bai E, patting him on the back: "It's just a display of ability. The final selection still depends on the comprehensive score, and shooting ability is just a part of it."

"Alright~"

Bai E, carrying the machine gun, went to the end of the queuing line and waited quietly.

The capability test on the field was nothing more than burst firing at moving targets, except it was more continuous than the shooting training before, and not limited to the air, targets could appear from all directions.

It also did not require hitting all targets without wasting any bullets; as long as each target was hit the required number of times within its appearance time limit, it was considered a completion.

What Carlos said sounded easy, but to actually perform it, judging the order of the targets' appearance in rapid succession and determining instantly the different hit counts required for each target, as well as their paths of motion... it was still quite difficult.

To maintain continuous shooting while also retaining the ability to make reasoned decisions and a certain degree of precision, that's probably the capability this selection wanted to assess.

The only strange thing was... the duration of the test seemed quite long?

Bai E pondered quietly, feeling a bit puzzled.

"It's your turn," the officer in charge of maintaining Order reminded softly from not far away.

[Triggered side quest—Advanced Shooting.]

[Advanced Shooting: The most challenging shooting test of the training camp is right before your eyes. To qualify for covert military operations, you must perfectly complete this test. Task requirements: a failure rate below 10%, an ineffective shooting rate below 30%. Reward for completion: Light Firearm Specialty Special Attribute Awakening Card *1. Countdown: 10 minutes.]

Bai E was slightly startled, then nodded and responded with a smile, "Hmm."

"Hu~" Standing in front of the target position, Bai E took a deep breath, turned off the safety, and set the firing mode to burst fire.

"Ready!" The officer beside him shouted loudly, "Begin!"

The moment the order was given, the moving targets that appeared in front of him traced erratic paths, one in the air and ten on the ground.

20S, 30Hit

18S, 20Hit

5S, 9Hit

30S, 50Hit

8S, 3Hit*7

The number of hits required and the time limit for each of the moving targets, crafted from an unknown metal of various sizes and marked with paint, loomed before him. The changing movement patterns of the eleven targets were also instantly outlined in a pitch-black sea of thoughts.

The rate of fire for the War Blade machine gun was 8 rounds/s, using the longest firing duration of 30 seconds as a baseline, the number of hits that could be made was 240, while the total number of required hits for all the moving targets combined was only 130.

The provided shooting time seemed to be quite ample, the only factor that could possibly affect efficiency was the time needed to reload mid-way, considering the War Blade machine gun's total magazine capacity was only 100 rounds, requiring a magazine change after no more than 13 seconds of continuous fire.

Fortunately, magazines loaded with bullets had already been prepared by the military. The speed of changing magazines determined one's results significantly. Those veterans were exceptionally smooth in this respect, and that was Bai E's observation from watching on the sidelines.

He might be slightly at a disadvantage here...

"DadaDada!"

In less than a breath's time, numerous thoughts flashed through Bai E's mind, then the machine gun roared into action.

[Side quest—Advanced Shooting, current failure rate 0%, ineffective shooting rate 1%...]

...

[Side quest—Advanced Shooting, current failure rate 0%, ineffective shooting rate 1%...]

After opening fire, notifications on the panel flickered like a flowing stream, updating in real-time. Bai E, who had spent days getting used to controlling the intensity of the notifications with his mind, wasn't disturbed by this.

"DadaDada!"

At a certain moment when the gunfire fell silent, Bai E's left hand, which steadied the gun, instantly flicked away the magazine.

"Click!"

The mechanism engaged as bullets were chambered again.

"DadaDada!"

The ejected brass casings soon piled up into a shallow carpet of golden yellow at Bai E's feet.

[No wonder they don't make Advanced Shooting a routine training exercise for the soldiers, it's too wasteful of bullets...]

The task was easy, and Bai E still had the energy to think about various things...

"Kakakaka~"

There were three targets left in the first round, and several more targets subsequently appeared from all around.

Continuous judgment and execution of shooting, that's the key point of assessment in this advanced shooting test.

Bai E's gaze intensified, he quickly focused his concentration.

Watching from the sidelines didn't provide much of an actual feeling, only by starting the test could he truly feel that pressing tension when one target after another emerged, giving no chance to catch a breath.

The time limit marked on each target was like a countdown from the grim reaper, not allowing any mistakes.

Chapter 124: Training Special Attributes

Or rather... one has to choose to make mistakes on purpose.

As time went by, Bai E realized that maintaining a zero-error rate was somewhat difficult.

What seemed like a not-too-time-consuming task of changing magazines was continuously adding pressure on Bai E's shooting time after each accumulation of seconds.

Under the continuous pressure of an unending stream of moving targets, the burden of time stacked up heavily. If he still wanted to perfectly hit every target, it could result in total collapse at a certain point.

He could only choose to give up selectively.

Fortunately, no matter the size of the target, the duration, or the number of hits required, they all counted as one unit in the mission's tally.

The targets to choose to give up on, of course, were those that needed a higher number of hits and had a shorter duration.

The countdown was at 6 minutes and 38 seconds.

The first target that he had to give up on appeared!

[Side mission—Advanced Shooting, current error rate 1%, invalid shooting rate 5%...]

"Not bad," Carlos, who had been watching closely from the sidelines, nodded.

It was very rare for someone to achieve a zero-error rate throughout advanced shooting training. Even he had to surrender to the time it took to change magazines and choose to give up.

This test was designed to maximize pressure. The only difference was the amount of error rate.

Some people wanted to hit all the targets and ended up too tense, resulting in a complete breakdown. Others couldn't let go of a target that they almost completed and lost balance in their mentality, leading to collapse as well.

Learning to let go, or rather, learning to assess the tactical situation on the battlefield, was what a good shooter should achieve.

After all, on a real battlefield, there would be teammates to back you up, or you could reposition to evade; there are always more solutions than difficulties.

That's the goal this advanced shooting test tried to teach the soldiers.

In this respect, the newly developed 95B27 was doing quite well.

"But... the real trouble is still to come."

The countdown was at 6 minutes and 37 seconds.

The countdown was at 6 minutes and 27 seconds.

The countdown was at 6 minutes and 37 seconds.

...

The countdown was at 3 minutes and 58 seconds.

Another unexpected event occurred.

[Side mission—Advanced Shooting, current error rate 3%, invalid shooting rate 13%...]

[Warning: Excessive shooting has caused the gun's barrel to overheat. Please cool it down; otherwise, the mechanical performance will drop sharply!]

[Warblade Machine Gun—Quality: White (Light Firearms/Military Weapon)]

[Basic Parameters: ... Durability 19/20]

[Trait: Brand new and undergoing its first intense test, its overheated barrel from continuous firing reduces shooting accuracy by 5%, and durability is rapidly falling...]

[I can't be expected to perform maintenance on you right now!]

No wonder I felt something was off just now. A pure test of a warrior's shooting capabilities wouldn't need ten minutes, right?

Was it also taking the soldier's performance in a prolonged combat situation into account?

But when I watched those burly men shoot earlier, I didn't notice any significant deterioration in the latter half of their performance.

Perhaps some had a slight decline in form, but the drop seemed to come... later?

Is it because of... suppressive fire?

Bai E had no time to think further; the "enemy" wouldn't slow their assault just because his firearm was deteriorating.

The reduction in the hit window was their "attack"!

"Da da da!"

Bai E, with his knowledge of firearm maintenance, was able to detect the substantial change from the abnormal sounds during gunfire.

The hit rate began to plummet significantly.

Countdown 3 minutes and 38 seconds.

[Warning: Shooting accuracy -1%, current firearm shooting accuracy correction -6%...]

[Side mission—Advanced Shooting, current error rate 4%, ineffective shooting rate 14%...]

...

Countdown 3 minutes and 20 seconds.

[Warning: Shooting accuracy -1%, current firearm shooting accuracy correction -7%...]

[Side mission—Advanced Shooting, current error rate 4%, ineffective shooting rate 15%...]

...

Countdown 3 minutes and 4 seconds.

[Warning: Shooting accuracy -1%, current firearm shooting accuracy correction -8%...]

[Side mission—Advanced Shooting, current error rate 5%, ineffective shooting rate 16%...]

Three pieces of bad news came one after the other, and although Bai E would not be affected by their prompts and perform immediately, they still sounded like the final ultimatum from the swinging pendulum of the Grim Reaper.

The mission's requirements were likely also the military's minimum requirements for selection.

But...

Images of the other soldiers' shooting tests flashed through Bai E's mind—

Some of the soldiers who only had a level 3 expertise in suppressing fire skills didn't seem to experience such a rapid decline in performance.

"..."

Which came first, the chicken or the egg?

If all special attributes come from emulating a great master, then where did the first specialized special attribute come from? Was it automatically unlocked at level 4? Bai E was not sure whether real NPCs would have such a mechanism.

He was more inclined toward the underlying logic of improving everything in this world—training!

Indeed, some of the warriors who came here for testing lacked skill trees unlocked after reaching level 4 specialization... However, they might possess their own specialized special attributes, developed through long-term practical training!

His own randomly unlocked level 4 attribute—Arc Shot, was essentially only applicable to pistols.

Was this actually compensation for a high-level specialization that was directly upgraded without training? Real NPCs all have specialized special attributes they trained themselves!

For instance... Cooling? Overload mode? Quick reloading and so on? These are the contents displayed on the "Light Firearms Specialty Special Attribute Awakening Card" that came as a mission reward.

Those who mainly used machine guns as their primary weapon, of course, couldn't develop fanciful techniques like Arc Shot, which were specific to pistols. This was also why his Arc Shot was so special in the military camp!

A few doubts were suddenly clarified, and Bai E realized his own problem.

In this test, those soldiers who had worked their way up through their own efforts had their own trained specialized special attributes helping them, while his own Arc Shot was clearly of no use here.

Gun Fighting Skill was not able to cope with this scenario either.

"Huh~"

Bai E took a deep breath, his self-restraint allowing him to maintain a calm combat state at all times.

What others can do, I can do too!

With external aid, naturally, I can do better than others. Without the aid... am I worse than others?

Having a solid foundation in shooting, any training on top of basic abilities would be doubly effective.

His eyes, fixed on the target, became sharp again, and Bai E focused his spirit.

[After observing the shooting targets for a long time and perfectly executing combat thoughts, your abilities have been adequately trained, Insight +0.1, Reflex +0.1.]

[Successive successful precision strikes on numerous moving targets, Light Firearms Mastery experience +34.] (A very small chance to awaken a special attribute.)

Chapter 125: Light Firearm Specialty Special Attribute Awakening Card

"Da-da-da~"

The roaring of the machine gun gradually subsided, and the bouncing metal casings piled into a small mountain at his feet.

Bai E's hand, clasping the slightly warm gun handle, trembled unconsciously. Fourteen points in physical endurance was merely the entry requirement for using the Warblade machine gun's burst mode; the prolonged burst firing caused his arms to endure a tremendous amount of recoil.

Countdown: 0 seconds.

[Side Mission—Advanced Shooting, current error rate 9%, ineffective shooting rate 28%...]

Fortunately, even without external help, Bai E narrowly completed the test.

[Side Mission—Advanced Shooting, completed.]

[Mission Reward: Light Firearm Specialty Special Attribute Awakening Card*1, has been issued.]

In the Consciousness Space, a deep blue card with a golden pentagonal star in the center surrounded by twinkling lights quietly rotated around its vertical axis.

[Light Firearm Specialty Special Attribute Awakening Card: Upon use, adds one of the following special attributes to the character's "Light Firearms Specialization" at random—Cooling, Overload Mode, Quick Reload.]

Bai E glanced at the message on the panel—

[Successfully executed precise strikes on numerous moving targets consecutively, Light Firearms Mastery experience +24.] (Extremely low chance of awakening special attributes.)

Still, the final popup message did not show any special attribute bonuses unlocked through his own training. The test seemed long, but when compared to the cumulative actual combat time of veteran soldiers, it was still somewhat insufficient.

Unlocking on the first training attempt, that's not the way even for geniuses.

Relying on freebies was unrealistic at the moment, better to check out the current luck...

[Confirm use: Light Firearm Specialty Special Attribute Awakening Card?]

Confirm!

Just as with the previous Ability Extraction Card from the mission for Yue Ying, this time the choices were fewer. A pointer spun rapidly within the three-sectioned circular pattern. Finally, it stopped at—

Quick Reload?

Emmmm... Bai E wasn't sure if it was good or bad, but having it was certainly better than not.

[Light Firearms Specialization (Level 4): Shooting accuracy +12%, critical hit +2%, special trajectory (special) +1%, Quick Reload +1.]

[Quick Reload +1: Speed of changing bullets or magazines increased by 10%.]

"Not bad,"

Carlos was the first to greet Bai E as he slowly descended, looking at the contemplation in the eyes of this artificial human soldier and offered comforting words with a smile.

He had no time to remember the scores of all the testing soldiers in the field, but he definitely noted that Bai E had passed the threshold.

As long as one crossed the line, there was a chance.

At the beginning when Carlos leaked the inside tips to Bai E, the internal assessment targets hadn't been set. He had merely tried his best to help Bai E seize every possible opportunity.

As for the firearms assessment, he too only learned that it was an advanced shooting test.

Originally, he was worried that Bai E, a newly born recruit with insufficient basic abilities, would fall behind in this kind of test that emphasized heavy firepower coverage. Unexpectedly, Bai E was able to pass the threshold.

Passing the threshold was good, since it provided an opportunity.

...

[Faction Shop Update: Light Firearms Specialization Teaching, Price—Expert Instruction: 50 Points of Faction Contribution.]

Hmm... huh?

Gong Yan and the other two who were carving arrows out of wood were stunned by the notification.

Changed?

Was the system updating all the relevant game content in real-time based on the changes within the game itself?

"Wow~" Kuang Xin exclaimed in amazement, then paused, "Does this mean we can monitor the changes in our organization members' strengths too?"

"What's the use..." Dai Lian glanced at him disdainfully and continued to whittle the piece of wood in his hand, "Do you think that's all there is to the NPC's strength? Hard work is what really counts. Tonight, the arrows for the sewers are all depending on you."

Arrows were low-tech; unless considering bonus properties from arrow quality, you could just carve a wooden rod and it would work. There was no need to waste money on it with able hands and ample supplies.

Moreover, there were experience points to be gained...

[Successfully crafted a large batch of small props, skill * Handcrafting experience +20]

[Sharpened Wooden Shaft—Quality: Gray]

[Basic Parameters: Attack modifier -2, 50% of damage converted to blunt damage.]

[Usage Requirement: Compatible with bow and crossbow types.]

[Trait: If used as an arrow, shooting accuracy -5%.]

...

[Feedback from the commission, handcraft experience +29.](Cumulative) Experience tales at mVL

[Skill learned—"Level 1 Handcraft".]

[Handcraft (Level 1): Your hands have become more dexterous, granting you a +1 in reflex performance when engaging in nimble handiwork.]

[Current handcraft experience 3/300, reach 300 points to master "Level 2 Handcraft".]

[Detected that the character currently possesses a special attribute in "Light Firearms Specialization"—"Quick Reload +1"; the skill "Handcraft" grants an additional 50% effect.]

[Quick Reload +1: Speed of changing bullets/magazines increased by 10 (+5)%.]

"..."

Is this the synergy between abilities?

This was the first time Bai E witnessed it.

What an unexpected surprise!

"Carry on with your training if nothing else," Carlos sighed with relief as it seemed Bai E had likely passed the shooting assessment.

Combined with the previous physical fitness assessment outcomes... he should be able to secure a spot for the mission, right?

"Yes, sir!"

The advanced shooting training range was large, accommodating ten people for testing at once. With around a hundred participants, it took less than two hours to complete, leaving plenty of time for the second half of the afternoon's advanced physical training.

Following Helen's instructions to wear a full set of sensors before each physical training session, Bai E headed straight for the training grounds.

He already achieved 115% completion in the morning, only a step away from the 125% overlimit boundary with a 30kg load.

Plus, according to Helen, the overlimit burn at a 30kg load was fully sufficient for training needs below 15 points in physical fitness. Higher burn efficiency would actually be damaging to the body, and it's quite doubtful that unlocking the specialty—Overlimit Drive—would require a higher degree.

So...

Unroll!

Chavez, who had "prematurely" arrived at the training area to wait for the soldiers to assemble, twitched his eyelid.

Why was there someone sweating profusely on the training obstacle course before the assembly time?

114%... 118%...

"Huff~"

Bai E, breathing heavily after completing the obstacle course, grabbed the "complimentary electrolyte water" that hadn't been rented out and guzzled it down his throat.

Just a little more...

Glancing at Bai E resting on the side, Chavez glared at the soldiers who were still waiting for his command to assemble and suddenly bellowed, "What are you waiting for? Get moving and train!"

"Yes, sir!"

The soldiers passed by that solitary figure with mixed emotions in their eyes, lamenting that the time spent rolled up with the drill was always blissful. (Tears)

["Lucky Strike" charge +5.]

Bai E paused briefly, then shook his head and chuckled.

His body was rapidly regaining energy during the short rest, and the yet-unlocked specialty was already beginning to demonstrate its power.

125%...

120%... 124%...

12...5%!

The prompt didn't sound instantly, and Bai E remained calm and composed.

The long-term training had refined not just his body but also his natural state of mind, which had gradually become steady and tranquil.

125%... 125%...

After maintaining the overlimit completion rate for more than one obstacle course, the prompt finally arrived—

[Teaching mission—High-Level Physical Training, completed.]

[Mission Reward: Specialty—Overlimit Drive, activated.]

The unexpected prompt did not interrupt Bai E's movements; he sincerely finished a training session that completely exhausted his strength, and then, he turned to look at the effects after unlocking the specialty...

Chapter 126: All-around Overlimit Drive

[Overlimit Drive: Through honing and familiarizing yourself with your body, you've mastered the method of exerting power beyond its limits.

From now on, you can maximize your body's output power, using up to 30% more stamina to cause up to 150% actual effect in all physical-related judgments; you also recover your physical condition faster, using 50% more "action reserve" to convert to stamina and doubling the recovery speed, possessing the ability to actively maintain your condition, with conversion and recovery rates equal; and you're more efficient when training any ability requiring bodily coordination, such as: improving "Close Combat Specialization", efficiency increases by 20%, improving "Agile Weapon Specialization", efficiency increases by 20%...]

...an all-around skill that's hard to imagine!

Battle, recovery, growth...

An all-around enhancement of abilities, truly deserving of the massive experience invested back and forth.

Utter surprise.

With the specialization now a part of him, Bai E could feel the explosive power stirring within, eager to burst forth.

With the same attributes as before, his maximum strength had risen directly by 50% after receiving the specialization boost!

This was a multiplicative calculation at the end, formidable beyond imagination.

His stats... had improved again.

Bai E, who had just acquired a new specialization, showed no signs of being conceited. Overlimit Drive wasn't the end; the purpose of Advanced Physical Training was to enhance physical attributes and push them to their limits.

The acquisition of the specialization was just an incidental outcome of the process.

Continue training!

Task completed, and without the completion notification on the panel, Bai E could only rely on the feeling in his body to maintain the sensation.

Training is tedious, requiring focus and dedication every day, every minute, every second.

If you're perfunctory with it, it will be perfunctory with you.

[In intense exercise, you've pushed beyond your limits, Physical +0.1, Reflex +0.1.]

...

"Finished training?" Helen's demeanor had calmed quite a bit when she saw the entering Bai E.

When she no longer cared so much, her state of mind also stopped fluctuating so easily.

Letting go of the obsession, the world felt wide and vast.

"Mm..." Bai E nodded in response.

Continuous good news brought about an inner joy that was hard to contain; a bright light shone from his face.

"?" Helen, who was in the middle of putting down her equipment, paused slightly, her gaze turning back to the stoic warrior.

Perhaps it was just an illusion, but she always felt that he seemed... particularly confident today.

This confidence was like sweet nectar flowing effortlessly from within.

Yet, a close scrutiny made the impact seem fleeting, like a flash.

An illusion?

Helen somewhat absentmindedly removed the various sensors from Bai E, while subconsciously greeting him, "Today might be my last day staying in the military camp. There are quite a few things waiting for me to deal with back in the inner city."

"Mm," was the only response Bai E gave, seemingly indifferent.

Noticing the somewhat stiff atmosphere, Helen ran her fingers through the curls by her ears and smiled gently, "Train well, your superiors all think highly of you. Tonight, you will have a pleasant evening."

"Understood."

"Hold on a moment." After collecting the sensors, Helen turned gracefully to go back to her workbench, her voice following from behind, "I'll tell you the final analysis, hoping it might help with your training..."

After two days of familiarity, Helen had become quite adept at analyzing such data.

The sounds of Helen typing at her keyboard occasionally echoed in the white laboratory, as time passed in a silent wait.

"You're much more stable now, it seems that your body is gradually getting accustomed to this excessive exertion beyond the norm..."

[You are participating in the creation of Knowledge - Advanced Physical Training Version 3.0, current progress 60%...]

"In these two days, I've carefully analyzed the differences between your training method and the standard one, and I've found that maintaining a perfect harmony between the rhythm of your body's motion and your breathing is extremely difficult; it's a unique training method belonging to you, and it would be very difficult to generalize..."

[You are participating in the creation of Knowledge - Advanced Physical Training Version 3.0, current progress 75%...]

"Therefore, even though you're now familiar with this training method, still pay attention not to get distracted during your training. Compared to the regular training method conducted by the other soldiers, yours requires more focus, every action of your body needs to be controlled..."

[You are participating in the creation of Knowledge - Advanced Physical Training Version 3.0, current progress 90%...]

"Even if your body has memorized that feeling, it remains the same. It is counter to human instinct and requires continuous control through willpower. A moment's relaxation, and it will surely backlash!"

[You are participating in the creation of Knowledge - Advanced Physical Training Version 3.0, current progress 100%!]

[You have fully participated in the development of Knowledge - Advanced Physical Training Version 3.0, reward: Knowledge - Advanced Physical Training Version 3.0, Scientific Experience +1000 points, Science Points *2, already distributed.]

Gazing at the artificial warrior in front of her, eyes out of focus and face filled with confusion, Helen seemed unperturbed, aware that knowledge has its thresholds.

The mission of them, as researchers, lay precisely there: to turn those abstruse and difficult understandings into practical guidelines for others to follow; that was their responsibility.

Everyone in this world bears responsibilities from birth...

With her long legs crossed, Helen stood up gracefully, concluding her host duties at last.

"I will report to your superiors about your full cooperation in perfecting the advanced physical training program, hence... you may make any request of them that is not too excessive, and I believe they will agree. It was a pleasure working with you during this time..."

Her back to the soft white light, the rays penetrating her translucent skin and reaching into Bai E's eyes, "Soldier Bai E, goodbye."

Bai E saluted respectfully, "Goodbye, Scholar Helen."

...

The military camp was abuzz with activity at night, adorned with lights and a burning bonfire.

Everyone was adept at forgetting.

One must always look forward, concerned only with the impact on the bigger picture should life be lost; in this era, everyone was accustomed to sacrifice.

What kept mankind going was not the bonds of affection with loved ones, but the mere fact of "being alive".

And since "being alive" was so tough, people occasionally needed some encouragement from others to get their spirits up once again.

Before all the warriors, Carlos's voice thundered with perennial vigor.

"...Now, let us pay our highest respects to this hero!"

Drinks were spilled into the sky, reflecting the wavering light of the fire.

Standing straight on the stage, Bai E basked in the warmest gazes of everyone present.

["Lucky Strike" charge +50.]

["Lucky Strike" charge has reached 148/100, currently available for use!]

Rose brought strong alcohol, Mashati grilled kebabs, and Stone clumsily tried to assist...

Song Ying sat with arms crossed in a corner away from the bonfire, You's face flushed as he was cajoled into drinking by the big man, and Tiger watched everything with a contented smile.

That night, he got drunk... the stars fell into his eyes.

Amidst the haziness, it seemed only a distant voice echoed ethereally—

[Feedback from the commission, your Insight +0.2.]

[Feedback from the commission, Long-Range Weapon Mastery Experience +108.]

[Feedback from the commission, Finesse Weapon Mastery Experience +14.]

[Feedback from the commission, Close Combat Mastery Experience +32.]

...

[Feedback from the commission, Close Combat Mastery Experience +16.]

...

[Feedback from the commission, Knowledge - Computer Hardware Maintenance Experience +37.]

[You have acquired "Level 1 Computer Hardware Maintenance," earning an additional Science Point *1.]

[Computer Hardware Maintenance (Level 1): You are familiar with the specific functions of all computer hardware. You can accurately troubleshoot all potential hardware-related issues and proficiently disassemble and reassemble all related electronic components.]

[Current Computer Hardware Maintenance Experience 17/300, at 300 points "Level 2 Computer Hardware Maintenance" will be mastered.]

...

"Hic~"

Chapter 127: Hunting Rats

"Shh—lighter..."

Lighter...

"Even lighter..."

In the pitch-black sewer, Dai Lian shushed Gong Yan, who was following behind him.

He needed a very quiet environment to be able to hear the movements of the evil creatures with his own ears.

This world wasn't quite reasonable. Normally, the game would directly determine the interaction between one's attributes and the environment, possibly with a fluctuating value influencing the outcome, and if the determination passed, it would directly present the target within a white circle or outlined shape on the screen.

But here... there was no system assistance, no display on screen.

[It's like I've traveled to another dimension...]

Dai Lian muttered internally, his ears receiving every slight noise like sonar.

The twanging sound of steel rebar expanding and contracting with heat... The dripping sound of cold condensation beads falling...

Natural and chaotic noises needed to be filtered out first, leaving behind the purposeful and rhythmic movements of the Anti-Entropy!

[You are using sensory powers to explore the environment...]

Gong Yan followed closely behind, trying to step as lightly as possible.

Cold objects emitted no ripples of thought; only living things released waves that rippled from their aggregated neural tissue.

Coldness, hunger...

In her world, all emotional fluctuations seemed to act like an unaffected background color, casting themselves around all living things.

However, receiving this information was still slightly difficult for her right now; this instinct was not yet skilled, only with extreme concentration might she faintly perceive something...

"Whoosh~"

The two moved in unison, almost simultaneously raising their weapons.

Dai Lian had switched to a short bow, while Gong Yan, lacking the basics, undoubtedly found it easier to start with a hand crossbow.

"Swoosh!"

"Swoosh!"

Two arrows were shot one after the other; one missed... the other missed as well.

Combat information appeared with an unpredictable delay. Players usually found it difficult to judge the effectiveness of their actions in real-time through it, but the sound of arrows hitting the ground was obviously different from that of a hit.

The battle-focused Dai Lian was still able to make this distinction.

Even with Level 1 Ranged Weapon Specialization, Dai Lian couldn't achieve perfect accuracy in the Dark Environment, let alone when the target was a living creature.

Fortunately, these dim-witted creatures had lost their awe of larger lifeforms, as well as their perception of fear. Sensing the direction of the attack, they actually initiated a charge.

"Shoot closer."

There weren't many targets, roughly a dozen based on the disordered noises.

Without the control of their "king," they no longer moved in unison, providing chances for targeted strikes.

"Mhm~" Gong Yan quietly responded.

She wasn't particularly fond of fighting, but in this world, having fun without any personal skill was clearly impossible.

Given the chance, she wouldn't mind honing her skills as long as it didn't cost her anything.

Quickly loading her hand crossbow, Gong Yan remained calm.

[Closer, even closer.]

Gong Yan silently recited, steadying the trajectory of the hand crossbow as much as possible with both hands.

3...

2...

1...

Shoot!

"Swoosh!"

"Swoosh!"

Dai Lian felt some delight at shooting the arrows almost simultaneously once more, even without communication. The tacit cooperation in battle was still exhilarating.

Not like Kuang Xin, that brute!

But having that brute in front seemed pretty reassuring...

[Successfully hit a small moving target, Light Firearms Mastery experience +2.]

[Hit confirmed, 3 points of piercing damage dealt to the target!]

The tension of the bowstring wasn't enough, the pulling strength insufficient, the arrows not sharp enough...

Their weapons, naturally, were not as reliable as Bai E's military-grade ones.

But it didn't matter, the hefty bundle of "arrows" they each carried on their backs served as their ample ammunition supply!

Once they closed in enough, Gong Yan and Dai Lian maintained a steady rhythm of shooting and retreating.

Without the close-combat prowess of that lady from Arbitration Place, they dared not allow these little creatures to close in with their numbers—once the creatures got close, they would crazily climb up from gaps around the ankles and pant legs.

Within a few breaths, they could latch onto an entire body, and with their sharp teeth and claws, whether they tore through the skin or hung onto the torn clothes, it was difficult to shake them off by struggling.

The individual attacking power of these small creatures was indeed not high, but their attack frequency was extremely fast, swarming by the dozens. Dai Lian and Gong Yan definitely did not want to nourish these hungry creatures with their flesh.

Kiting was the only option.

"Whoosh!"

"Whoosh!"

Their steps while retreating were swift, their hands never stopping. The knowledge imparted during pistol shooting lessons was also guiding their combat, only that real combat was necessary to convert it into experience.

There were over a dozen targets, but they couldn't be greedy. As long as they aimed as best as they could at one locked target, plentiful shots would eventually hit.

It was foolish to simply shoot into the mass and rely on luck to fight just because there were many targets.

Dai Lian had Level 1 Ranged Weapon Specialization, his hit rate was at least double that of Gong Yan's.

Gong Yan was skilled and dexterous, grasping more than a dozen homemade arrows in her small palm, her movements swift and dazzling. Her small hand crossbow managed to achieve a firing rate not inferior to that of a pistol.

[Successfully hit several small moving targets, Light Firearms Mastery experience +8.]

[Successfully hit several small moving targets, Light Firearms Mastery experience +14.]

The sound of slicing through the air traveled through the pipes, mixing with the wind to carry far...

"You said you wanted to track down the protectors' whereabouts, why are you still being so stubborn?"
The burly man's voice was heavy with dissatisfaction.

"Don't talk~" Franca raised her index finger to her plump, bright lips, "Listen..."

"Whoosh~"

"Whoosh~"

"Whoosh~"

The faint howling that vibrated in the air reached them from afar, and the burly man's eyes narrowed in surprise. "When did you notice them?"

Franca had a cheery smile on her face, unconcerned. "You're too impatient now, hence you've lost your acuteness to the environment."

She intentionally deepened her voice, adopting a seasoned tone, "I am training your patience... And these rats are related to our mission, you know. Didn't you mention before that leaving a good impression on ordinary people was important? Isn't it natural for us to do some good deeds for them?"

Who knows, maybe seeing us in action, those mutants and demon believers hiding in the shadows will come out and surrender?"

The burly man snorted, "Naive!"

"Naive is a compliment for me~" Franca's eyes twinkled as she looked eagerly toward the direction of the sound, "How about it? Shall we take a look? It might be related to the direction of our investigation?"

"..." The burly man was silent, then hastily set off.

"Tsundere~" Franca hummed a melodious tune, hands clasped behind her as she lightly caught up.

...

[Used close combat to hit the target, Melee Combat Mastery experience +18.]

[Combat concluded, 15 battle experience points gained.]

[You killed a Plague Rat, "Sub-quest — Rat Clearing" progress 10/100.]

"Finally killed it..." Dai Lian wiped the sweat from his forehead; he wasn't Kuang Xin, that handsome muscle-bound gorilla. Out of breath from strenuous physical labor, he clutched his arm and felt a kind of abused exhilaration, "And lost 3 points of health, damn it..."

Bows and arrows were only a means to diminish the Plague Rats' state; to ultimately end the fight, they had to rely on... their feet.

After losing their ability to move and swarm attack due to being kited by arrows from a distance, stomping with their feet became their final coup de grâce.

After all, Zhou just required them to kill rats in the "Dark Environment"; he never specified that they had to rely solely on bows and arrows for the kill.

Stomping on the last one also had a bit of the fun of a game of Whack-a-Mole.

Gong Yan wielded a small shovel...

"I really don't know why Zhou insists on us dealing with these little things at night..." After taking a short break, Dai Lian frowned and said in puzzlement. There was no one in the sewers during the day either, and at least during the day there would be some scattered light, making their vision not so limited.

Gong Yan just pursed her lips and smiled softly, bandaging his arm while listening to him talk.

[Curiosity, irritation...]

Glancing in a certain direction in the dark, her smile remained gentle, "Maybe Zhou just wants to do some good deeds in secret... What we do doesn't need to be known by others."

Chapter 128: Franca's teaching

[You have completed a bandaging task, accelerating the healing of the target's wound. Bandaging experience +0.]

[Your "Scholarship - Bandaging" level has reached its maximum. To continue improving, you need to acquire advanced knowledge.]

"Still no increase in bandaging experience..." Gong Yan sighed softly.

Because of the two from Arbitration Place causing that fire rat disaster on Black Street last time, she had only learned the level 1 bandaging knowledge from the adults. The level 2 first aid was advanced knowledge, and without professional understanding, it was impossible to improve the experience, which had been holding her back for a long time.

In the Faction Shop that she unlocked, bandaging instruction from a master could be exchanged for 40 points of faction contribution. She was very envious and determined to have the adult teach her the moment she earned enough contribution points!

While she was sighing, deliberately made noises arose in the distance.

"Cough, cough~"

The girl's clear voice echoed melodically in the dark sewer, "Good evening."

Accompanying her voice, Franca, with her boots and longsword, gradually approached.

Familiar with the dark, the photoreceptor cells also clearly made out the other party in the extremely dim light environment.

Mutually...

Was it one of the two informants from before?

Was the previous guess wrong, and they weren't a single entity?

Or had that little ax-wielding dolt gone to carry out some other task for their 'adult' as they referred to them?

But none of that was important.

With her hands behind her back and a smile on her face, Franca came closer, "How did you guys end up here?"

"Ma... Master?" Gong Yan turned around to face the other, with an appropriate mix of surprise and hesitation on her face, "You... how are you here?"

Franca, with a mischievous smile, said, "Strictly speaking, I might not be as 'old' as you, so no need to be that formal. Just now I heard you saying... you are carrying out an 'adult's' order? What kind of order?"

"Franca!" the brawny man called out sternly.

There were as many factions in and out of the inner city as there were hairs on an ox; as long as they were not directly connected to heretics, they couldn't afford to investigate each one individually.

Since the other party had no relation to the demon believer who had escaped, there was no need to waste further time here. In fact, he felt there was no need to show up at all.

"Don't be in such a hurry~" Franca did as she pleased, completely unconcerned with the brawny man's face, which was as black as coal, though invisible in the darkness, "Don't you think we need a couple of helpers? It's too troublesome to chase after those rats in this labyrinthine sewer, one more person means more strength~"

"That's why we shouldn't continue doing senseless things here."

"That's why we should look for help."

Facing the stubborn Franca, the brawny man, who seemed to have more the role of a nanny in this mission, clearly had no way of persuading her.

He crossed his arms and stepped aside to sulk by himself...

"I've observed your combat method just now." Franca glanced significantly at the small shovel Gong Yan had put aside, "Your 'adult' doesn't seem to have taught you close combat techniques. Ranged attacks sometimes leave no room for manoeuvre and aren't suitable for survival on human territory~"

"..." Gong Yan couldn't figure out the reasoning of the young lady and could only ask with a puzzled face, "Master?"

"Let me teach you a few techniques~" Franca said with a beaming smile, and as she spoke, she spread the fingers of her right hand.

Within the dark space, a nebulous mist, like starlight, abruptly appeared about five centimeters in front of her palm.

With time, the misty light gradually expanded, resembling the pommel of a sword, slowly emerging forth.

"..." Staring at this fantastical scene, Dai Lian and Gong Yan were completely stunned.

This, this, this...

What kind of power was this?

Was it a technological spatial storage device, or a miracle achieved by individual Spiritual Energy?

Franca offered no explanation, grasping the now fully visible hilt and drawing forth a longsword with a deep blue scabbard into the presence of all.

Without a care, Franca tossed it towards Gong Yan, "It's my spare longsword, I'll lend it to you for now."

Catching it somewhat frantically, Gong Yan held the scabbard in her left hand and the hilt in her right, still looking bewildered, "I..."

"There's no 'I' or 'mine'... come on, let's go hunting for those rats!" Franca, the natural socialite, easily arranged everyone's next move.

[You are observing a master's sword technique demonstration. If you gain some insight...]

[Teaching: Feeling the other person's professional expertise, you decide to pay a certain price (combat experience/general experience) to learn the corresponding ability. (Exchange ratio: every 2 points of combat/general experience can be exchanged for 1 point of corresponding specialty experience.)]

?

Gong Yan had not anticipated the situation unfolding in this way; she, who always felt that everything was under control, felt as clueless as she did with her own master when faced with Franca, the young lady from Arbitration Place.

To learn?

Or not to learn?

"We're short on time~" Franca, darting into the rat pack with the flash of her blade, didn't forget to pressure Gong Yan. To give Gong Yan as much learning time as possible, she was using the side of the longsword to swat away the oncoming plague rats.

[Triggered side quest—Blade of Agility.]

[Blade of Agility: Learn as much combat technique as possible in the Dark Environment, which will significantly enhance your Spiritual Energy. Quest Requirement: Acquire at least 0/1 level of proficiency with light weapons before clearing the current rat infestation. Quest Completion Reward: Mystery +0.3. Countdown: ???]

"..."

Gong Yan gritted her teeth.

Learn!

[Tip: The current environment is unique, and teaching conditions are limited. Please concentrate as much as possible on perceiving the opponent's movements, otherwise teaching cannot proceed.]

Willpower... Light of the sword...

Entity... Spectrum of colors...

Pipeline... vanished.

Sound of wind... vanished.

Swarm of rats... vanished.

Countless pieces of information in front of Gong Yan wove together, gradually sketching out the precise image of Franca's swordplay in a world of darkness...

[You spent 10 points of combat experience to learn, converted into 5 points of "Light Weapon Mastery" experience.]

...

[Precisely hitting small moving targets, Light Weapon Mastery experience +23.] (Stacked)

[You spent 10 points of combat experience to learn, converted into 5 points of "Light Weapon Mastery" experience.]

[Acquired "Level 1 Light Weapon Proficiency," and concurrently received talent points *1.]

[Light Weapon Proficiency (Level 1): Attack speed +3%, Armor penetration +1%.]

[Current Heavy Weapon Mastery experience 4/300, achieving 300 points will grant mastery of "Level 2 Light Weapon Proficiency".]

"Shua, shua, shua~"

Under the cold light of the sword, the rats were beheaded in one fell swoop!

[Killing three small targets simultaneously with one move, Light Weapon Mastery experience +6.]

[Combat ended, gained 20 points of combat experience.]

[You killed a plague rat, "Side Quest—Rat Eradication" progress 20/100.]

[Exceptional technique observed, continue learning and you might achieve unexpected gains.]

"Not bad~"

Franca whistles and holds nothing back.

Sword light falls like snowflakes, corpses scatter as they fall.

Gong Yan wasn't given more chances to learn...

Sheathing her longsword, Franca turned and walked towards the far end of the dark pipeline.

"Bye-bye, missy~"

Her arrival was sudden, her departure resolute.

...

Once far from those two strange people, the burly man asked in a steady voice, "You suspect them?"

"Do you think it's possible?"

"I think you're wasting your time..." the burly man replied with a grimace.

"But they use bows and arrows~"

"Isn't using crossbows in sewers like this a perfectly normal choice?" he sighed deeply. "If it really was them, what they need now is to hide and clear their tracks, not jump out in front of us."

"But according to that mysterious person's responsibilities... shouldn't clearing the plague rats be their duty?"

The burly man snorted with scorn, "You think there are such noble people? Miss, I know these filthy gutters outside better than you... You, don't understand human nature."

"Oh~" Franca acted as if his words were hardly worth noticing, simply holding her chin and staring blankly, "but I think it's possible."

"Even if it's possible, you didn't have to teach her swordplay... "

"Wasn't it you who said last time that she had a talent for Spiritual Energy? What's wrong with testing her aptitude?"

"I'm starting to doubt your sanity..."

"Huh?" Franca was taken aback, and actually used her Spiritual Energy to carefully feel her own body, "I think I'm perfectly fine? Doing very well!"

Chapter 129: Guys Must Fight

Only after confirming that the footsteps of the other party had indeed walked away did Gong Yan glance at Dai Lian, who seemed lost in thought, and murmur ambiguously, "Why did she teach me?"

"To create discord!" Dai Lian's eyes sparkled with certainty, "To scare the snake by beating the grass! She might be suspecting us!"

Feeling guilty as a thief, Dai Lian was a bit panicked when he saw the two people, but he felt he had masked it perfectly, so there shouldn't be any big problem.

It was just that he didn't know if Yanzi had given anything away. Under the overly dim lighting conditions, he couldn't ascertain how Yanzi had behaved.

But Yanzi was smart; presumably, she would have caught on with just a hint.

Dai Lian pinched his chin and analyzed rationally, "The NPCs of this world have no concept of our player identities. In her eyes, we are just members of a small force in Black Street... although that's indeed the case.

Under normal circumstances, our force has chosen to oppose Arbitration Place, and she teaches you these skills without asking for anything in return, which will undoubtedly lead to suspicion within the organization. Eventually, some kind of conflict might arise that would give her some clues from you. But..."

"Don't worry about Yanzi."

It's just that these NPCs understand human nature, but they don't understand players.

Whether it's a hook or bait, take it all!

As for the adult... Not to mention the adult wouldn't notice, but even if the adult did, so what?

With Wen Jie's precedent, it's clear that the adult doesn't care if the people in the organization seek skills from other forces.

Any skill learned is an asset.

Previously, Dai Lian had some doubts about why the adult had such strong confidence in the members of his organization, as if they would never defect no matter how long they spent in other organizations, an ideal that seemed almost naïve.

It was after the ratman incident that he realized it wasn't about the adult having confidence in the organization's members, but in himself.

["You don't need to take the initiative in a self-sacrificing way, I can bear the consequences of all your choices."]

That silhouette was so magnificent it was unbelievable.

This suffocating aura of majesty was the source of his confidence.

"Let's go, continue, as if they don't exist," Dai Lian said, tidying up the aftermath and filling in what was missing.

Some rats wounded by Franca were still struggling a little; if left alone, they might bleed to death, but the heads were not his own to claim, so it would be wasteful.

[By hitting the target with a melee attack, you gain +4 experience in Close Combat Mastery.]

[The battle ends, you gain 3 points of combat experience.]

[You killed a plague rat, "Side Quest—Rat Extermination" progress 15/100.]

Just picking up a few knives~ Heehee.

Yanzi had been on a killing spree with the other party just now, probably far ahead in progress, so it was imperative to catch up.

Gong Yan also seemed to have recovered from her bewildered state due to the sudden event, "Right, let's forget about her and continue..."

"Exactly, let's finish the quest quickly, I still want to go see Kuang Xin boxing..."

The underground fighting arena didn't sound like a place to mess with at first hearing. He was worried that Kuang Xin would get sold out and end up counting money for others...

...

"Squeak squeak squeak~" In the depths of the dim sewer, a cluster of plague rats huddled together, writhing in a sight that could terrify some faint-hearted children.

The "king" has disappeared...

The "king" has abandoned them!

They needed a new "king"!

A plague rat with shiny black hard fur slowly stood up, quietly rising from the chaotic swarm of rats, like an unshakable rock amid the tides...

...

In the hazy night mist, the woman made her final plea, "Hans, you must understand that people don't become stronger or more agile as they get older... You're of age now, so don't be like those impetuous, brawling young fellows."

"I know, I know... I'm just going to have a look." Hans was somewhat impatient, "I've got a bit of money on me... I'm going to see if I can try my luck."

"Whatever you want... Anyway, it's all ill-gotten, better spent than hoarded."

"What's this about ill-gotten? Don't talk so nastily, you know what it's about. Alright, I'm off. You go to sleep first, don't wait up for me."

"Fine..." The woman grumbled and muttered to herself, hugging her arms and casting suspicious glances into the dark as she closed the front door, "The weather's getting colder..."

Lying in bed and hesitating for a moment, the woman still got up and lit a grease lamp on the table.

The flickering yellow flame shone on the woman's shadow on the wall, with wisps of smoke drifting above the silhouette.

"I'll leave a lamp on for him..." The woman drifted off to sleep.

...

The underground fighting wasn't actually underground but took place inside a solid concrete structure.

As the city developed and transformed over the years, some ambitiously built structures on the outskirts were abandoned before being used, like human ambitions, gradually retreating back into the city.

Heavy metal music, grating to the ears, forcibly stimulated the secretion of hormones in the body, with the explosive sound waves threatening to burst one's eardrums.

The most primitive collisions evoked the most basic arousal; life's tedium and mundanity had people craving small shocks to jolt their long-dead hearts awake.

They lacked the courage to step onto the battlefield and could only find a semblance of proof of living amidst the noisy, crowded clamor.

With an elderly gait, Hans stepped onto the dusty cement floor, his decaying heart pounding fiercely along with the heavy bass.

Clutching a hundred Blackwater coins tightly in his embrace, this seemed like a godsend for his lifelong poverty.

It allowed him, in his old age and declining health, to rediscover the adrenal rush of his youth.

Money is a man's courage.

For some reason, the moment he took that money from the lad, his body also seemed to awaken.

He felt like a warrior at his most courageous, with unbounded energy surging through him, yearning for the glory of blood and battle.

Be a fool challenging the windmills! Recklessness is closer to courage than cowardice!

A man has to fight!

He squeezed into the bustling crowd, with excitement and sweat filling the air, inhaling the mixed scents of perspiration, body odor, and alcohol, Hans's eyes excitedly bloodshot.

Finding a spot where he could catch a glimpse, his cloudy eyes peered through a large hole in the wire mesh to watch the duel underway.

Two muscular men battered each other, noses bloodied and faces swollen, with blood streaming down their visages.

The sight of fresh red liquid stirred the nerves, and savage desires could only be vented through younger bodies.

A man has to make bets!

"The match has started! No more betting."

"Tsk!" Hans spat in the direction of the other person's back, clutching the 100 Blackwater coins in his arms.

"Huh... Huh?" As he walked away, disillusioned, his eyes wandered randomly until they spotted a familiar figure in front of the relatively quiet registration desk.

Was that... the big fool?

Chapter 130: Side Quest - Black Fist

"You're entering the competition?"

"Hmm..."

"Why do you bring a..." The man in charge of registration, donning a metallic hip-hop style, sized up the odd man before him from top to bottom, before managing to barely string his words together, "bring such a strange... head cover?"

"The Bull Warrior never removes his mask." It wasn't that Kuang Xin wanted to be such a nuisance, but it was only now that he truly realized the troubles his initial good looks had caused.

He had always been wandering in the wilderness, with most interactions with NPCs handled by Gong Yan and Dai Lian, effectively leaving him in a wild man's state.

Now back in a human congregation, the aftermath of his charm +10 was that wherever he went, he was stared at with unusual eyes—if it weren't for the public setting, he would've believed he could be knocked out with a cudgel any minute and dragged into a corner for unspeakable acts...

Only after sneaking out, taking a stroll, and finding a sack to put over his head, did the feeling of being scrutinized alleviate somewhat.

Although he still attracted attention, covetous glances had turned into stares that seemed to say, "look at that fool," which, all in all, was more acceptable.

Hearing Kuang Xin's response, the registrar tapped the desk with his pen, curious, "Your name is Bull Warrior?"

"Hmm."

"Such a silly name, but whatever... I'll ask you one last time, are you sure you want to compete?"

Peering through the hole poked in the sack, Kuang Xin looked at him with firm eyes, "I'm sure!"

The registrar glanced behind Kuang Xin, seemingly puzzled, "Then where is your guarantor?"

"Guarantor..." After a moment of surprise, Kuang Xin spoke in a deep voice, "I am my own guarantor."

The registrar burst out laughing in annoyance, "Don't eff around if you've got nothing better to do..."

Not even knowing the rules here, yet wanting to compete?

Probably just some kid, blood running hot, seeking excitement.

These types are the most troublesome—if they get injured during a match, their family making a fuss is the last thing anyone wants.

Although the underground fights are callous and unrestrained, such a youngster without heat or controversy clearly couldn't bring in much profit; no profit and all hassle, nobody would willingly let them fight.

It's precisely to avoid such trouble that the rule was established requiring newcomers to be accompanied by a guarantor.

Although it wasn't foolproof, it was still better than someone insisting on fighting just because they said so.

"Yes! Yes!" A hoarse voice excitedly called out from a distance, as Hans made his way through the crowd, rushing to meet him, "He has a guarantor, it's me."

As he spoke, Hans looked at Kuang Xin, his eyes conveying a familial reproach, "Why did you run off so fast without waiting for me?"

Finally seeing him again!

Ever since the last time he threw him the remaining chunks of meat, this fool had vanished so completely from his world as if he'd disappeared.

The sensation of his strength welling up like a spring and the awakening of skills in his body was fleeting, like a night-blooming cereus.

Hans, slow to realize, desperately pursued that wonderful sensation but could never seem to find it again anywhere.

He had a hunch... the problem lay with this big fool.

If only he could meet him again...

Hans tried to suppress the heartbeats almost leaping from his chest.

His own youth, his own vitality, it was all brought to him by this fool in front of him.

This time, he must hold on tightly!

Observing the newcomer, Kuang Xin's gaze sharpened.

It's you again, old man. The mission is already done. Believe it or not, I'll kill you, grr~

However, considering you've helped me out just now, I'll let you off easy this time...

"..." Looking at the two before him, who seemed as if they were father and son, the registrar didn't think much of it and just outstretched a hand, "Pay up."

"How much?" Kuang Xin asked casually.

After Yanzi had taken out the bullets and returned with a lot of money, he now carried the substantial sum of exactly 500 Blackwater coins!

"500."

"..." As if he could see the savings I had on me.

Kuang Xin inwardly complained but willingly took out the money.

The registrar seemed to have some standards, and as he took the money and registered them, he explained, "Normally, contestants don't have to pay, but since it's your first time here, this is considered a security fee. Plus, rest assured, this money isn't for us; it's for your own bet. If you win, you'll get the principal and profits back based on the odds; if you lose, naturally, it's gone.

Understood?"

Such a hassle...

Kuang Xin just wanted to skip, "Understood, understood."

"There's one more thing to explain; since it's your first competition and you're a newcomer, you're not qualified for a death match. So, the upcoming fight won't be to the death for you, and you can't deal fatal blows to others, got it?"

"s... Understood, understood!"

"Good to hear." The registrar nodded in satisfaction. Death wouldn't occur, but things like concussions, paralysis, broken hands, or legs were all possibilities.

After all, for the sake of the spectacle, some realism had to be sought.

"Here, sign this. If there are no questions, you can sit over there and wait. When your name is called, you go into the ring."

"Alright." Kuang Xin took the pen and was about to sign when Hans snatched it from him, "Let me have a look."

This silly kid wasn't bright; how could he trust what someone else said? What if their 500 Blackwater coins were mysteriously given away? It was necessary to check for him.

The registrar wasn't in a hurry; such people were rare. He watched the bloody fights in the ring while letting them dawdle.

"No problem... go ahead and sign."

Kuang Xin snorted in disdain, "Like I need you to tell me."

Facing Hans, who had conned him before, Kuang Xin had no patience.

After signing, Kuang Xin walked off, and Hans, who wanted to follow, was stopped by the registrar, "That area is for contestants. What are you doing there? Wait outside."

"Oh~" Hans smiled obsequiously at the man, then turned around and yelled at Kuang Xin's retreating figure, "Hey! Kid, give it your all! I believe you can win!"

[Side Quest Triggered — Underground Boxing.]

[Physical Training: Your body carries Hans' sincerest hopes. Win this fight. Quest objective: Defeat your opponent in the upcoming match 0/1. Quest completion reward: Universal Experience +25, item reward unknown.]

"..."

Damn it! Still as stingy as ever!

But that doesn't affect the normal quest progression. Why not take the free reward?

Accepted!

"Got it, you old thing!" Kuang Xin waved his hand and entered the contestant area without any reluctance.

Watching Kuang Xin walk away, Hans smiled contentedly.

His dreams seemed to be fulfilled through him... how wonderful.

"I still have 100 Blackwater coins; please bet on his opponent for me..." As he spoke and was about to take out the money, Hans' expression changed abruptly, and for some reason, he changed his mind, "Nevermind, let's bet on this kid instead. Put this 100 on him too, let's raise the stakes!"

The registrar glanced at the old man missing a tooth, indifferently accepted the money, and handed him a betting slip for 600 Blackwater coins, "Here, go wait on the side."