

## Wow 141

### Chapter 141: Depart at

In the dimly lit conference room, twenty silhouettes sat on either side of a long table, with the leading officer standing at the head, waiting in silence.

Bai E was the last to arrive. As he pushed the door and entered, the group said nothing and the atmosphere turned somewhat eerie.

"Eh? There's still one more?" someone broke the silence, their tone seemingly just simple curiosity.

No one replied.

There was a mocking look in everyone's eyes.

No one respected those who entered an elite secret operation team through the back door wanting to share in the glory.

Bai E kept a straight face and did not make a sound; he just glanced around briefly, and seeing an empty seat at the end of the table, he went over and sat down.

He knew he was not welcome in this team, and it's normal to be looked down upon for entering through the back door anywhere.

Not to mention that when everyone else was risking their lives on a mission, having someone who "drags their feet" would certainly cause resentment.

But Bai E didn't want to miss this rare opportunity to explore ancient ruins.

As for whether he would hold the team back during the mission... that would be a matter of doing his best.

The soldier sitting next to him, smiling at Bai E in a friendly manner as if trying to make his acquaintance, asked, "Brother, how did you get selected? Marksmanship? Assassination? You're not an information officer, are you?"

"..."

Gregory frowned slightly and stopped this mockery, "Alright, everyone's here, so I'll get right to the point."

The officer leading the team, with his hands pressed on the table, leaned forward slightly, his gaze sweeping over the teammates who would accompany him on the mission.

As he spoke, the projector behind him timely displayed an image—

A square building covered in vines occupied most of the screen, with only a small part visible on the surface, and the remaining depth of the main body buried underground unknown.

Amidst a soft "click" sound, the photo changed, showing several shots of the building from different angles.

The style was distinct from any architecture Bai E had seen since he arrived in this world, filled with a cold mechanical aesthetic.

The silver-gray building had stood for a thousand years, unyielding.

Bai E's gaze sharpened slightly as he noticed the date in the upper-left corner of the photo—August 3, 398 of the New Imperial Calendar, at 2:32 and 16 seconds in the afternoon.

That was over forty years ago.

"These are the most recent photos we have concerning the mission target, dating back over 40 years, as you can all see. The information from above says that a bunch of centuries-old antiques—biomechanical beings—are occupying the target location. Whether their vitality is enough to sustain them to this day is an unknown."

Clenching a copy of the combat plan in his hand, the officer slammed it onto the table with a loud "smack," "This is the combat strategy against biomechanical beings that I've received, but we may not

need it. In fact, we haven't had any understanding of the situation inside the target for hundreds of years, so..."

The leading officer's tone was grave, his eyes slowly sweeping over all the soldiers under his command, "No one knows what awaits us inside the target building. It could be those brainless orcs, it could be bugs... or maybe nothing at all. I have only one requirement for all of you—obey commands!

I know you've all been pulled from various teams in the military barracks, and you may not know me yet, but that's fine; we will get to know each other on the way. If anyone has any objections, they can raise them now. After we depart, those who defy orders will be executed on the spot. Understood?"

The atmosphere fell into a brief silence, then, almost as if by agreement, all the soldiers replied in unison, "Understood!"

First establishing his own authority and then moving on to the specifics, the unfamiliar soldiers needed to cooperate on the mission, and the last thing they wanted was a lack of unified command.

The officer, gratified by the collective response, continued.

"Good, let's now get familiar with this plan. Although we may not need it, you all need to memorize it! Our mission objective this time is to restart the root server of the internet located underground within the target construction..."

"... Now, let's discuss the operation plan. I know each of you excels in different areas, but I need all of you to do more than just your duties; you must also cooperate with your teammates on other combat assignments..."

"... Finally, let me mention the personnel we need to protect and assist on this mission—the Minister of Information Department Likok and his assistant, Miss Aryan. Remember, unless it's the final server restart phase, cooperate with them when they need help. Other than that, they are simply our protection targets...

targets that require our lives to protect, but don't let their instructions influence any of your decisions! Understood?"

"Understood!"

"Good. One last thing, I know that everyone present has some unique skills, so... if you need any special materials, you can ask me now, and I'll compile a request. I want to emphasize that this won't cost you any military merit; after so many years in the barracks, I still have that clout!"

The officer's tone grew slightly playful at the end, and in the conference room, which had been under a pressurized atmosphere, some more spirited soldiers cheered.

"Woo-hoo!"

"The officer is fucking awesome!"

Indeed, fucking awesome.

Bai E was forthright and unapologetic, not caring whether they liked him or not. In any case, he first wanted 500 arrows!

"That's too many..." The commanding officer's face darkened slightly as he looked at the expression Bai E submitted, manually adjusting, "200 arrows should be sufficient."

"Alright then," Bai E accepted.

Having some was better than none...

As for the rest of the gear—machine guns, pistols, military knives, daggers, chainswords, tridents, alloy shields, and the like—these were basic military supplies that didn't require special requests.

"Okay," said the commanding officer, Gregory, as he unconsciously raised an eyebrow looking at the list of items that needed approval, "That's the basic arrangements done. Everyone go back and prepare, get some early rest, tonight might be the most peaceful night you'll have for a while. We assemble and depart at six in the morning!"

"Yes, sir!"

After leaving the meeting room, Bai E wanted to find Yue Ying.

Although he hadn't gained much in physical attributes, the burst from the Overlimit Drive gave him a bit of a foundation and confidence to learn the skill "Steady Wind"... Unfortunately, he couldn't find her.

All he could do was honestly return to his tent in the residential area.

Carefully maintaining his firearms, bowstrings, and daggers, Bai E found a sense of peace in his heart while doing these tasks.

Despite the unknown awaiting him, it seemed there was nothing to fear.

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

[Feedback from the commission, Long Ranged Weapons Proficiency Experience +75.]

[Feedback from the commission, Light Weapons Proficiency Experience +32.]

[Feedback from the commission, Close Combat Proficiency Experience +5.]

...

[Feedback from the commission, your Reflex +0.1.]

[Feedback from the commission, Close Combat Proficiency Experience +18.]

...

[Feedback from the commission, Knowledge - Computer Hardware Maintenance Experience +52.]

As the first light of dawn crept through the cracks into the tent, Bai E dressed in his gear as quietly as possible so as not to disturb the others...

"Click!" The fastening clicked into place.

The black combat suit perfectly protected Bai E's body, a Desert Eagle pistol ready at his waist, the dull black-painted dagger in his calf sheath thirsty for blood, an arrow quiver on his back, a compound bow hanging at his waist, and five ammunition magazines filled with bullets slotted into the multi-functional pockets on his belt, with a heavy machine gun cradled in his arms.

He was armed to the teeth.

With his left arm cradling the issued combat helmet, Bai E took one last look at the four still-sleeping teammates inside the tent.

This operation was a secret mission. Even though there were slight whispers about the selection process in the camp, those who were actually participating obviously couldn't reveal any information.

The departure was silent and undisturbed.

The moment the canvas lifted, all four sleeping figures quietly opened their eyes.

Looking at the empty beds where someone once lay, none of them spoke a word.

They wished him a safe journey.

...

Early in the morning at six o'clock and five minutes, three specially modified off-road vehicles drove out of the south gate of the camp, kicking up a trail of dust.

Chapter 142: Prepare to meet the enemy!

"We do the dull and exhausting work, yet we're given the worst possible gear... Sigh!"

The vehicle wobbled along, the noise of the tires crushing gravel was quite loud, and an excessively good noise-cancellation feature could render everyone too insensitive to their surroundings, so even a bit of activity was easily heard clearly by everyone inside the not-so-large cabin.

There were a total of 20 elite soldiers selected, plus one leading officer, one Spiritual Energy user, Minister Likok and his assistant Miss Aryan, adding up to two, and then there was Bai E, who didn't replace anyone but was simply added to the team.

In all, there were 25 people, in three vehicles; two vehicles seated eight each, and one vehicle sat nine.

Minister Likok and Miss Aryan both rode in the other two vehicles. As each of them had the independent command ability to restart the Root Server, they were separated to ride in different vehicles in preparation for any sudden incidents, following the principle of not putting all eggs in one basket.

As for Bai E's vehicle, which wasn't carrying anyone of significant importance, it naturally took on the responsibility of leading the way and scouting ahead.

Without a doubt, this was a dangerous task, and a dangerous task naturally required more reliable teammates.

Some soldiers, who wouldn't say anything in front of their superior officers but couldn't control their tongues in private, felt somewhat unbalanced about having a "useless" person who had connections placed in their vehicle.

The harsh words of the irritable soldier didn't receive any agreement, but neither did they prompt any objections.

The atmosphere sank into a weird silence, paradoxically making the noise of the vehicle even more jarring.

It was as if everyone was waiting for Bai E's response.

Silence was the greatest contempt, and all the pressure bore down like a mountain on the so-called "dead weight."

Looking at everyone's somber expressions, the Asian soldier with a mature and honest face gave Bai E a comforting smile to break the silence, "Stop it, Brother B27 is quite capable, he just had bad luck and ran into the Blood God before."

"Heh~" The man who had spoken earlier sneered sarcastically, not even glancing at Bai E but just peering out the window, "I'm not naming anyone, just hoping no one holds us back in a fight."

"This..." The Asian soldier gave Bai E an apologetic look, feeling his own clumsy words had unwittingly put Bai E in the spotlight, and fearing to speak again.

The mood was rife with undercurrents, and once again, silence prevailed.

It felt as though all eyes were pointedly focused on him, making the atmosphere tense.

The unnamed ridicule and scoffing made it even harder for one to stay composed, but Bai E remained expressionless, his body leaning against the vehicle's wall as it swayed with the motion.

If a few sharp comments could easily breach his defenses, then he didn't deserve to live in this world.

The corruption of the high-dimensional demons was far more soul-piercing than these verbal snippets.

What he cared more about was observing his surroundings and utilizing the resources at hand. This was his first time embarking on an outdoor mission, and he needed to familiarize himself with the team's setup.

The space inside the off-road vehicle was quite large, so even with eight people, it didn't feel cramped.

In the front cab, one soldier was in charge of driving, while another assisted with observing the outdoor conditions and guiding the driving route. With rapid off-road driving, both people were constantly on edge, unable to spare any attention for what was happening in the rear cabin.

As for the rear half of the cabin, it was semi-enclosed and stored various survival and combat supplies needed by the group.

The middle part of the cabin was the space where the remaining six sat, with each person having welded, fixed storage compartments at their feet, housing the weapons and ammunition that might be needed at the first sign of combat.

The roof hatch could be opened at any time, and like a Multi-function Infantry Vehicle, it was equipped with a heavy machine gun and a flamethrower.

The sides of the vehicle also had firing ports that could be opened from the inside, providing sufficient firepower to keep the vehicle moving unrestrictedly, which was the greatest responsibility of the six people inside the cabin.

Bai E strove to memorize the layout inside the carriage, ensuring that he could react swiftly and accurately during the most chaotic skirmishes.

"Hey, kid, you know how to shoot?"

The veteran Caucasian warrior sitting closest to Bai E glanced at the battle blade machine gun hanging on Bai E's chest and suddenly asked him.

Bai E nodded in response. "I do."

"You passed the advanced shooting test?"

"Yes."

"Pfft," a dismissive sneer sounded from the front.

The Caucasian warrior smiled, glancing around at everyone. Having participated in the advanced shooting test and having seen Bai E before, he initiated the conversation to comfort the soldiers who still harbored misgivings about the arrangement.

With his rich experience in field missions, he understood that unity was the most crucial element in a team. Everyone selected was an elite, and pride was common, but for the sake of the mission's success rate, even the most elite warriors needed support and cooperation from their teammates.

Perhaps his calm demeanor and rich experience were the reasons why his superiors had assigned him to this specific vehicle.

"As long as you passed, that's good. Only four of us on this vehicle have passed the advanced firepower test. If we run into tough enemies, the old one and I will need to operate the weapons on top of the vehicle at critical moments. Inside the carriage, only you and AB can help us intercept any stragglers that get too close."

AB was a taciturn synthetic warrior, holding a machine gun in his embrace. Hearing the old soldier's plan, he didn't say a word, just silently leaned in the corner and nodded.

The team leader indeed had meticulous plans for encountering the enemy and also had the capability to command in real-time through radio headsets, but when it came to each of the three vehicles fighting on their own, accurate and timely decisions from the people inside the vehicle were still necessary.

There were a total of eight warriors on this vehicle, with the front two responsible for driving. The co-driver might also have some fighting capability, but he could not be relied upon as the main force.

Among the six in the back, two were masters in close-quarters combat. Although they could also shoot, their accuracy was significantly reduced, and there was no way to provide them with a stage for melee combat during the drive. If they encountered enemies on the road, they could almost only watch helplessly.

There might seem to be many warriors in the vehicle, but in actual combat, only four could effectively fight, making each one of them extremely precious.

Bai E nodded and agreed with the arrangement, "Okay."

As they spoke, Bai E began disassembling the battle blade from his machine gun.

After observing the inside of the vehicle and mentally rehearsing possible battle scenarios since boarding, he had fully planned for combat conditions.

Under normal circumstances, the two components of the battle blade machine gun are combined, but given the limited conditions for attack through the firing ports on the vehicle, there would be no use for the battle blade. The cumbersome blade would only hinder agility in combat. What was once a multifunctional attachment now just became cumbersome, so it was better to take it off.

"Prepare for alert!"

The soldier in the driver's cab leading the way suddenly issued a reminder.

"We will be passing by the edge of the Blood Raven Forest ahead, which could disturb them and lead to an attack. Be ready to defend against a sudden strike."

It would be safer to completely bypass the forest, but it would take at least an extra three hours.

Besides, there were no completely safe places in the wilderness in this era. Taking a longer route could increase the chances of encountering other dangers. A flock of Blood Ravens was not an especially dangerous enemy, so taking a certain risk and passing by their territory was the best planned route.

"Understood," the Caucasian warrior responded first, and then with a "click" sound, he unlocked the safety on his machine gun, the noise rising eagerly like boiling oil, "Ready for enemy contact!"

Chapter 143: Blood Raven's Assault!

"Thump~ Thump~"

With the unknown lying ahead, Bai E's heart began to pump blood faster.

The combat arrangements made yesterday afternoon were meticulous, clearly outlining information about all potential enemies along the route and their respective battle plans. Even if not everyone could

remember every detail, a general impression was enough to ensure they wouldn't be completely lost when an encounter occurred.

If his memory served him right, the so-called "Blood Crows" they were about to encounter were actually native species of the planet that had been contaminated by various biological spores released by the Bug Race.

These black birds, originally fond of carrion, cohabitated with a bloodthirsty plant in order to adapt to the drastically changing environment following the Bug Race's arrival. This plant took root inside their bodies and continuously drew nutrients from them, driving the birds to seek food frequently due to their insatiable hunger.

Without carrion... living creatures could also become corpses.

This made the originally timid birds become highly aggressive.

In some way, they were also like diligent bees with pollen on their feet, spreading bloodthirsty plant spores that latched onto any living being they attacked. Even if such a creature survived, it was highly likely to be contaminated with the spores shed during the birds' wing flaps.

Should these spores take root and sprout, the consequences were obvious.

They must not be allowed to get close to the vehicles.

Without a sound, Bai E unlocked the lock of the storage compartment at his feet. Rows of neatly arranged ammunition were ready for use.

...

"Caw!"

A hoarse and unpleasant cry sounded from the branches covered in a sooty black grease, and the misshapen tree trunks twisted into strange shapes. The black birds perched quietly, taking a brief rest.

They had been away from the camp for three hours.

If their goal had been the Bug Race nest, they would have already arrived.

However, they naturally chose a route that would not take them directly through the Bug Race nest, even though their destination lay broadly in the same southern direction.

These areas close to the Bug Race nest were also affected by the ecological contamination brought about by those insects.

"Everyone, be careful," the team leader's steady voice came through the earpiece.

Bai E glanced at the birds resting quietly on the branches, sweat beginning to form in the palm of his hand, his grip unconsciously tightening on the handle of the machine gun.

Passing beneath the watchful eyes of what could be the enemy, it felt like countless gazes were tightly fixed on him from the shadows. The pressing tension was like a heavy black cloud weighing on his heart, making it difficult to breathe.

Everyone watched nervously outside the vehicle, hoping against hope to pass by unnoticed... or else, to go to battle!

If a fight really broke out, it would at least alleviate the current anxiety.

"Rustle rustle rustle..."

The quiet wilderness was filled only with the sound of tires crunching over the sandy gravel.

"Caw!"

Occasionally, a bird would let out a pitiful cry as if from a dream.

The sleeping Blood Crows dreamed of succulent, rotting flesh, large and satisfying chunks to feast upon.

"Caw!"

They bit down only to find nothing!

Disappointment.

Before their groggy eyes, three large shadows appeared.

Living... things?

Blood-red eyes gleamed faintly as the incessant hunger flared up, consuming their entire consciousness.

"Flap Flap~"

With a flap of their wings, the shadows swooped down rapidly.

Intent on feeding before its siblings noticed, it was determined to be the first to feast!

"Bang!"

"Bang!"

"Bang!"

Gunshots erupted almost simultaneously from three vehicles, and several gliding shadows fell to the ground at the sound.

"Pat pat pat!"

As they hit the ground, they smashed into a heap of gore, with the bright red roots of plants wriggling like little snakes through the flesh, feasting one last time.

These damned creatures bore lethal spores, and it was impossible to let any get close.

The voice of the Caucasian middle-aged man inside the vehicle suddenly heated up, "Enemy contact!"

The thick valve opened, and the middle-aged man with his helmet, as well as another soldier, stepped on the platform inside the vehicle and leaned out. They skillfully hooked the combat suit's belt buckle onto the mount next to the skylight and steadied themselves with heavy machine guns and flamethrowers, awaiting the arrival of those damned creatures.

The sound of gunfire awakened the beasts that had been slumbering in the early morning, as countless pairs of crimson eyes, resembling blood agates, snapped open almost simultaneously.

Everywhere was teeming with them.

Their original camouflage, as dark as the tree trunks, made it impossible to discern their numbers. But as soon as their eyes opened, the countless pairs of blood-red eyes resembled the gaze of the Grim Reaper, and a sense of pressure as sharp as a blade's edge against the skin was instantly maxed out.

"Click."

Bai E opened the firing port, and the gun barrel protruded.

The shooting conditions were not optimal, and the angle couldn't cover the entire area.

But he was only responsible for patching up gaps. The main firepower came from the heavy machine guns and flamethrowers mounted on the roofs of the three vehicles.

In an instant, black wings unfurled, and hordes of blood crows blanketed the sky.

The convoy continued to move, everyone quietly waiting until they came within a sufficient shooting range, when the commanding officer's voice suddenly roared in everyone's earpiece, "Fire!"

"Da da da da da~"

The bullets from the heavy machine gun rapidly depleted, with casings bouncing and flying off in the path of the vehicles.

The vicious metal storm instantly tore a gap in the dense blood crow flock, revealing the sky through it.

"Pup pup pup~" Bullets pierced through flesh and feathers scattered. Like rainfall, the corpses cascaded down.

Three dense barrages of fire swept left and right, and for a time, the massive army of blood crows could not advance an inch.

In an instant, drawing on past experiences, the blood crows, not completely irrational, found the characteristics of the "heat weapons" created by these beings called "humans."

Just in an instant, their flight paths scattered, preferring to take a longer detour to maintain a certain distance from each other.

After spreading out, the pressure of their assault was noticeably greater than before. The three heavy gunners targeted the enemy's dense airspace as much as possible, but their efficiency greatly decreased.

After drawing closer, tongues of fire over twenty meters long burst forth.

The flamethrowers with closer lethal range, were even more effective against these small to mid-sized creatures.

Under the high-temperature blaze, all the blood crows in range immediately turned into roasted birds, plummeting down, and those deadly spores were also completely neutralized by the heat.

"Da da da! Da da da!"

Bai E's machine gun began firing in short three-round bursts.

The dense blood crow swarms would receive focused attention from the heavy machine guns and flamethrowers, while the machine gun inside the vehicle targeted those smaller groups of blood crows that were closer to the vehicles.

With their overwhelming numbers, it was impossible for the convoy to eradicate them all. Success meant escaping to a distance where the blood crows couldn't pursue due to exhaustion.

So what was needed at this moment was not a suppressive barrage of fire, but precise and lethal defense!

[Successfully hit several rapidly moving long-distance targets, light firearms proficiency experience +3.]

[Hit target, dealing 22 points of piercing damage!]

Chapter 144: The mainstay of the middle stream

The Blood Crows' defensive capabilities weren't formidable, and each bullet that hit its mark could achieve sufficient lethality. This was simply a standoff between firepower and numbers.

Would they be overwhelmed by the Blood Crows, or would they exhaust the creatures' stamina to the point where they couldn't maintain the chase... If everything went without a hitch, it should be the latter.

The tactical planning beforehand took these foreseeable dangers into account, and if nobody messed up, it was unlikely that problems would occur.

Dense black clouds enveloped the sky, and beneath the shadows, the three off-road vehicles raced wildly. The outdoor terrain was complicated, and even with a co-driver to navigate the path, the speed of the vehicles still couldn't increase significantly.

All four passengers within the vehicle commenced firing. The two close-combat experts weren't completely ignorant about firearms; military training ensured their soldiers didn't become too specialized. When strength reached a certain level, the differentiation between ranged and melee combatants wasn't that apparent.

In daylight, the flames from the gun's muzzles weren't blinding, but their roar was relentless.

"Ammo! Ammo!" a testy voice called out within the vehicle. The hotheaded hand-to-hand combat specialist reached for a magazine but found all of them empty.

Each soldier was only equipped with a maximum of five magazines, and after depleting them, they'd have to manually load each bullet into the magazines.

However, in the heat of battle, the soldier felt his absence would be detrimental, and his gaze involuntarily swept the interior of the vehicle, looking for any fully loaded magazines.

An abnormal rhythm of gunfire immediately caught his attention—

"Dada Dada! Dada Dada!"

The steady burst-fire rhythm was starkly distinct from the others. As he glared at the magazines attached to the other's waist, the irate soldier felt fury boiling within him.

Damn it! I knew I didn't like this kid from the start! Shooting like he's tiptoeing, like a damn woman! And he claimed to be a gunner who passed the advanced shooting test?

I burned through six magazines already, and he's not even through three. Even if my hit rate is only half of his, my contribution is definitely more substantial!

Useless!

"Give me the magazine!"

Bai E glanced at him, frowned slightly, but still drew a magazine from his waist and slapped it into his hand.

"Another one!"

...

Without a word, Bai E quickly handed over another and turned back to continue shooting and reaping.

A brand-new monster represented a prime opportunity to earn experience—wasting it was out of the question.

[Successfully hit multiple long-distance fast-moving targets, experience with light firearms mastery +53.]  
(stacked) (Extremely low chance to awaken special attributes.)

[Struck a critical hit on the target, inflicting 51 points of critical damage!]

[Struck the target's vital, causing 21 points of piercing damage!]

[Having completely defeated the target, you've gained 305 points of combat experience.] (stacked)

Indeed, battles were the quickest way to improve oneself; the experience gained from new monsters was fierce. Each one worth 5 points, the individual experience wasn't much, but the quantity was substantial, and after killing over 60, there was no sign of experience points diminishing... Maybe each type of monster had different requirements for experience reduction?

Bai E had no time to ponder further.

Amid continuous firing, his understanding of awakening special attributes under heavy firepower was deepening. The brief epiphany he had during the advanced shooting test resurfaced in his mind.

Minimizing the rate of ineffective shots was also a key element to maintaining firepower for extended durations.

Cold firearms equally needed gentle care.

During moments of lesser pressure, Bai E would even brace the machine gun with his chest, freeing both hands to quickly load bullets into an emptied magazine.

In fact, he had already depleted four magazines, which meant that one of the three magazines he had attached around his waist had been refilled during the battle.

He needed to scavenge as much as possible, get in on the kills and experience, while also maintaining his own condition to ensure he could be the last line of defense for the team in the event of any unexpected changes.

Moreover, the supplies carried on the three vehicles were limited; blind and arbitrary consumption could easily lead to a shortage of supplies later on, and he was not in a position to demand anything from others, only to control himself.

When not trusted by others, one must silently take on more.

The truth always makes it easier to silence doubters. The journey ahead is long, and Bai E did not want his teammates to always hold a grudge against him.

So do more... and then even more...

Following closely behind the temperamental warrior, who had just emptied his entire magazine, the stoic Asian warrior began to reload. From time to time, he looked over at his teammates to check on

everyone's status, but his gaze was inadvertently drawn to a certain direction, captivated by the fluid motions that resembled a butterfly skimming through flowers.

"So... fast..."

Such fast hands, such steady rhythm...

Loading and shooting at the same time, without delaying either task.

That soldier who was maligned for getting in through the back door... seemed very skilled.

"Click!"

He pressed the last row of bullets, reinserted the loaded magazine into the slot on his belt, and continued shooting steadily.

"Dada dada! Dada dada!"

The rhythm of the three-shot burst was steady and efficient.

With every burst, one or even two of the Blood Crows' bodies would fall.

"Good job up front," the squad commander, who was always coordinating the overall situation, quietly praised him through the earpiece. It was a long-drawn-out tug-of-war, and occasionally there was a need for some encouragement to lift everyone's spirits.

"Of course!" The short-tempered warrior slapped his heating gun without reservation and spoke up in the squad's channel.

"It's the good work of the 95B27," the battle-scarred Caucasian warrior managing the heavy machine gun on the roof suddenly spoke up to set the record straight.

From atop the vehicle, he had an even better view of the overall situation. The number of sporadic Blood Crows that had managed to launch assaults from the left and right sides, missed by him and the old one, were roughly the same. However, the right side where 95B27 was positioned was noticeably more stable—almost none of the Blood Crows could breach the danger zone near the vehicles.

Whose merit it was needed no discussion.

"Bullshit! I shot those down!" The temperamental warrior was not convinced; could that kid's shooting speed even compare with his own?

"Just don't bother him for bullets all the time," the usually taciturn AB suddenly added his voice.

Inside the vehicle compartment, there wasn't time to deal with everything, but they were not oblivious to what was happening.

If it weren't for the need for an extra magazine of bullets, nearly all the spot-checking and supplementing on the right side would have been handled by 95B27 alone.

Moreover, his shooting and reloading rhythms did not interfere with each other—he had almost no impact on the proper defensive rhythm, and overall, he seemed more skilled than himself.

Such a solid shooter, with such skills, why would he need to get in through the back door to join this military operation?

"...!"

"Enough!" the Caucasian warrior operating the heavy machine gun interrupted the still unconvinced, argumentative hot-headed warrior, "Morton, 95B27 is an expert in shooting. Not disturbing his aim is the only contribution you can make to this team."

"..."

In an instant, he felt as if he had become the isolated one in the team. The agitated desire to prove himself and earn distinctions was abruptly quenched by a bucket of cold water. Realizing he may have been too rash, the warrior fell silent, continuing to shoot while quietly observing...

Chapter 145: Facing the Enemy Alone

Indeed... very fast.

When Morton set aside his prejudice and impatience about this soldier getting in through the back door and focused on observing his performance, only then did he see the truth.

Just as they'd said, in terms of shooting ability, this kid was indeed better than himself.

Juggling reloading and shooting, both killing efficiency and accuracy were out of his league, and even though he had now slowed down his shooting speed, the right side of the vehicle remained as stable as Mount Tai.

Well... the performance is acceptable.

["Lucky Shot" energy +1.]

But what of it, if he wasn't chosen by the senior officers, then it surely meant his overall ability was lacking.

The officers have their judgment, and they must be infallible.

Not having won in the selection and needing to rely on connections to join this elite team definitely meant he lagged behind in some aspect!

"You focus on shooting, I'll load for you, help them out more."

"..." Bai E glanced sideways at the other, somewhat surprised.

He had thought this one would be a tough character.

[But you loading for me isn't even faster than me doing it myself...]

With lips barely moving, Bai E reined in his urge to retort and simply said, "Thank you."

...

Within the rear vehicle, the commanding officer furrowed his brow deeply, "These blood crows still have the stamina to keep up..."

Based on previous experience, these blood crows should not be a significant threat by now; their physiology plus the burden of carrying the "vampires" meant they didn't have the ability to maintain flight for long, and their stamina would limit their range of activity.

But now... was it because the data from the few prior cases were insufficient, leading to miscalculations in the predictions?

"This is troubling..."

If the blood crows' stamina could hold, then the machine guns and flamethrowers firing continuously might be the first to fail.

Overheated barrels would protest first, and forced use would only lead to complete equipment failure.

Allowing the blood crows to crash into the vehicle with their fleshy bodies, necessitating a forced breakout, was certainly the last and most passive option; the consequences of flipping the vehicle were unimaginable.

Right now, could they only rely on the soldiers' individual strength to extend the lifespan of their weapons as much as possible?

The purpose of the prior high-level shooting tests was this, hoping... these elites could withstand the pressure.

...

"Give me my machine gun!" The voice of a Caucasian soldier who was operating a heavy machine gun suddenly rang out over the team's comms, at the same time his large hand reached down.

Recognizing his role to take care of the odds and ends due to his own abilities, Morton immediately passed the other's machine gun to his palm, while loudly asking, "What do you want the machine gun for?"

"The heavy machine gun is overheated, needs a break... Damn! These blood crows are still chasing! The pressure might get a bit heavier now, look out for yourselves!"

As he spoke, he disengaged the safety and opened fire with force.

"Da-da-da-da!"

Elder Yi also extended a hand downwards, "Give me my machine gun too."

The flamethrower's continuous operational time was even shorter than that of the heavy machine gun, and even though he hadn't been using it constantly, it had reached its limit as well.

From now on, it would be a tough fight.

With both the heavy machine gun and flamethrower ceasing fire, the onslaught of the blood crows surged violently.

These cunning beasts also possessed not insignificant combat intelligence.

Even though the heavy artillery had ceased, the creatures still did not alter their previous attack strategy out of fear of human firearms; their flight paths were unpredictable and diverse, simply firing blindly after increasing the distance between themselves would not yield superb combat results.

The soldiers needed to maintain a certain degree of accuracy amidst uninterrupted firing, fortunately, the main shooters were selected from the best through high-level shooting tests, and for the moment they were able to barely maintain the defense line.

"Car 1 slow down, cover for Cars 2 and 3 to go ahead." The officer's command was suddenly issued.

Vehicle 1, that's the one Bai E was in.

Minister Likok and his assistant were separately in Vehicle 2 and Vehicle 3, and abandoning their vehicle to save an important figure was a fairly rational decision during critical times. The situation hadn't reached that point yet, but to be safe, it was still more prudent to have the two vehicles go ahead first.

Orders were to be obeyed without question, and at the moment the drivers heard the command, they took their foot off the gas pedal.

He didn't slam on the brakes for two reasons: one was that once the vehicle came to a complete stop it wouldn't be easy to pick up speed again; the second was that slamming on the brakes would cause the soldiers inside to be thrown about, losing their ability to resist.

However, merely not accelerating was enough for the other two vehicles to overtake. The two off-road vehicles instantly passed by on either side, leaving behind only trails of swirling dust.

The dark canopy trailing from behind covered vehicle 1 in an instant, the thick cloud composed of blood crows pressing down so heavily it was hard to breathe.

The situation grew even more dire!

"Ah!"

The painful cry of Veteran 1 was especially piercing over the team's voice comms.

A scream indicated an injury, and a high probability of losing combat capability.

With only four main combatants to begin with, losing even one could cause the already precarious defense line to collapse instantly.

The two hand-to-hand combat experts, who were only along for the ride, hurried to assist, while Bai E quickly glanced aside with a slight frown.

The wound was deep, with blood streaming down, revealing white bone.

The claws of the blood crows had gashed Veteran 1's right hand, the one he used to shoot, tearing away a large chunk of flesh and rendering his hand incapable of firing a gun.

"AB! Cover for him!" the veteran commanded calmly.

The firing angles from inside the vehicle were limited, certainly not as wide-ranging as those from the top hatch.

Hunkering down inside the vehicle and using the armor for cover might save one's life, but these creatures were not to be taken lightly.

Humans could find their weak spots through experience, and they could remember the vehicle's weak spots the same way.

Blocking the windows to obscure vision, using their bodies to interfere with the wheel rotation...

If the vehicle flipped, none would escape.

"Yes!" AB was taciturn and simply acknowledged the command when he received it.

Bai E focused intently, hesitated for just a moment, and then abruptly stood up, "Let me do it."

Without giving anyone a chance to object, he grabbed the machine gun from one of the hand-to-hand fighters, slung it over himself, then grasped the edge of the roof hatch with one hand and nimbly flipped out.

"AB..." Not being able to hear the change of personnel from outside, the veteran instinctively wanted to give an order but realized the figure beside him was behaving oddly. As he turned his head, all he could see was a pair of metal combat boots in front of his eyes.

"AB?" While voicing his confusion, he instinctively looked up along the legs until he saw a rugged face with no expression, which made him start, "B27?"

What was he doing up here?

Even a veteran like Veteran 1 had a hard time against these blood crows, what good would a new recruit be, one who had needed "connections" to join?

Of course, he was aware that this young brother had passed the advanced shooting test, but both Veteran 1's and AB's scores were better than his.

He might have good marksmanship with minimal shooting, but this was not the time for jokes!

He had to take responsibility for everyone's lives.

"Get down!" the composed veteran's face darkened, as if it could drip water.

This was the first time he had shown Bai E such a serious expression, "Let AB take over!"

"Click!"

Bai E hooked the locking mechanism of the hatch onto his belt to prevent himself from being thrown out and then responded expressionlessly to the other, "Just let me try."

He removed the machine gun strap from around his neck and grasped a machine gun in one hand.

The heavy feeling of the machine gun was reassuring, and Bai E recited in his mind—

"Gun Fighting Skill, activate."

Chapter 146: Double Guns

"What's Car 1 doing?"

"Who is that warrior? Has he gone mad?"

"Seems like, it's that guy who 'got in through the back door'!"

The two vehicles in the lead were equally concerned about the situation of Car 1 lagging behind, their occupants dumbstruck as they watched the scene unfold through the rear window.

"Is he looking to die?"

"Irrational newcomers always think they can play the hero."

"Just hope he doesn't get everyone in his vehicle killed!"

The figure standing atop the vehicle roof became extraordinarily conspicuous against the shadow-draped skies, like a lightning rod during a thunderstorm, instantly drawing the gaze of not only his human comrades.

It wasn't common for someone to come out of their armored shell and court death.

With one less point of firepower for a brief moment, the Blood Crows had already pressed close to the vehicle, and with the proximity of flesh, they became frenzied with hunger.

The stench of decay, ever-present with rotting flesh, assailed the nostrils.

Surrounded by foes on all sides!

Grey mists invisible to others spread across the gun in his hands, as Bai E's eyes flickered with a cold gleam and his hands fiercely pulled the triggers.

To avoid getting entangled by the linking rope, Bai E twisted his body sideways and, like a pair of compasses, he drew a large circle on top of the vehicle.

"Da-da-da-da-da..." With his body spinning, bullets sprayed in all directions from both guns.

Below the blackened skies, a lone waltz unfolded, blazing and solemn.

Both guns danced, smoke wafting through the air.

The rhythm of ejecting shell casings, together with the falling bodies of Blood Crows, descended slowly before everyone's eyes, bringing down the curtain on this solo dance.

The sudden outburst cleared the immediate vicinity of the vehicle in an instant, and both the attacking and the defending sides temporarily stalled their advances at that moment.

The two machine guns worked in perfect harmony, wasting not a single bullet nor missing a single Blood Crow. Operating at a 50% bonus rate of fire thanks to the effects of his skills and enhanced further by heightened insight and reflex, he executed an incomprehensible instant-kill moment.

The incessant onslaught of the Blood Crows stalled at that point, their limited brains unable to comprehend what had just occurred.

The occupants of the leading vehicles, now far ahead, witnessed this astonishing scene through the rear window, and silence hung in the cabin for a long time, as they replayed those brief four or five seconds in their minds, a period that seemed to stretch out as if it had been four or five minutes in the real world...

The Blood Crows, constantly driven by their hunger, did not cease their assault permanently. Under the spur of their insatiable hunger, they launched their attacks once more.

"Da-da-da-da..."

Even with both guns firing at once, he managed to send the bullets precisely into each Blood Crow, and faced with Bai E who had activated his Gun Fighting Skill, no amount of Blood Crows could breach the boundary he had drawn.

For that minute, this was a hundred percent safe territory!

The seasoned soldier standing just below Bai E, clutching his machine gun, went to fire several times only to find the targets either too far away or already shot down by Bai E.

"..."

It seemed, suddenly, there was nothing for him to do?

Just moments ago it was a peak crisis, a matter of life and death—yet in the blink of an eye, all was as calm as a mountain, as if time stood still in peace...

Remembering his own rebuke from earlier, his face flushed slightly.

With Bai E's explosive ability as seen in 95B27, how could the authorities have been so blind not to select him?

But then again...

"How is he going to reload?" Miss Aryan, having seen this from the rear window of a vehicle far ahead, suddenly had this ludicrous yet realistic thought cross her mind.

Humans didn't have the black tech for unlimited bullets; the sight of the warrior erupting violently with a gun in each hand was stirring indeed, but if he were to lay the guns on the ground to reload them one by one, that would be embarrassingly low-tech...

"Ah?" The naturally bright red lips, void of lipstick, open in surprise at that moment.

The solitary warrior atop the vehicle casually tossed one of the machine guns into the air, rapidly reloaded the other with a ghost-like swap of cartridges, and then tossed that one as well...

The two machine guns, likely unaware they had ever been flung so mercilessly, were already having their spent magazines thrown back through the open roof hatch of the vehicle.

"..."

Even the rhythm of the shooting didn't seem to break.

[ "Lucky Hit" charge +4. ]

The terrifying upright creature quelled the last bit of hunger in the flat-haired beasts.

Was it will that decided the body, or physical ability that decided the will?

The flock of Blood Crows beneath could hardly ponder this issue. Yet, facing the black figure with guns in his hands, standing atop the armored vehicle, they felt an inexplicable terror.

No matter how insane their hunger, it couldn't break through the barrier of despair, and with the courage spurred by hunger now fading, so too did the strength that drove their hunt.

The wings seemed to grow heavy.

"Whew~" Watching the black flock of birds finally retreat into the distance, the delicate-faced Miss Aryan let out a long sigh of relief, her little heart finally settling back into place.

The outside world was too frightening.

A pair of amber eyes flickered spiritedly before finally resting on the solitary figure standing on the roof of the vehicle, single-handedly stopping the birds... The wind howled fiercely, and the guns were brandished.

Beneath the dim sky from which the crow flock had receded, stood one, gazing into the distance alone.

[What is his name?]

"Who did it?" The voice of the commanding officer, Gregory, sounded in everyone's earpieces in vehicle number 1. Even though some recognized the action of the newcomer who had gotten in through the back door, he still wanted to confirm.

For a moment, no one responded.

That was because Bai E was slowly climbing down from the roof.

"Gulp~" Morton could hear the sound of his own swallowing.

Even amidst the noise of travel, it was jarringly loud.

With this kid's skills... how exactly did he fail to be selected?

Gregory's voice, filled with doubt, rose again amid the silence, "Hello? Can anyone hear me?"

It was then that the steady old soldier finally turned on the open channel of the microphone and responded softly, "It's 95B27."

It was truly that soldier who had joined through backdoor channels?!

An eerie atmosphere spread as silence filled all three vehicles.

Miss Aryan blinked, her curiosity piqued about the owner of this number...

["Lucky Strike" energy charge +7.]

The moment Bai E landed, his knees buckled, but fortunately, he braced himself against the spot where he had been sitting, preventing a fall.

AB, quick to respond, stretched out his hand to help, but it was hardly effective.

"What's wrong?" The seasoned soldier asked with concern.

With just this one battle, the newcomer who had "gotten in through the back door" had already established his position within the team.

Even if there wasn't much opportunity for him to shine in subsequent operations, no one would question his strength anymore.

Bai E leaned against the wall for a long while without a word, just closing his eyes as if to steady himself.

He was pretending...

A necessary disguise was always needed; otherwise, doing such a conspicuous act without any repercussions would give them unrealistic expectations, and if they all pinned their hopes on him, he'd be done for.

A certain level of performance was required, but Bai E couldn't bear the weight of expectations that were too heavy.

After all, with his current lack of Spiritual Energy, the duration of Gun Fighting Skills wasn't anything over a minute. This was because even relying on No. 3 Chew could only push his action reserve to just under 150 points at most.

After using No. 3 Chews multiple times, Bai E had gradually become familiar with its characteristics. The reserve of action points had an upper limit, which would decay rapidly after surpassing 100 points, and using No. 3 Chews in quick succession wouldn't restore a large number of action points as the first one did.

If a minute-plus burst wasn't enough to settle a fight, then he'd be the one getting settled.

He couldn't afford to give them the illusion that he could burst freely at will.

After 'recovering' for a while, Bai E slowly opened his eyes, giving everyone a weak smile as if the "world spinning" before his eyes had calmed, "Feeling a bit dizzy, but I'm fine now."

"Good to hear..." The steady soldier finally felt relieved.

No one doubted Bai E's words.

If someone performed such an extravagant feat without any side effects, they'd start to question their understanding of the world.

So, was it this 95B27's innate ability? Or had he developed some special skill on his own?

"Can we gather with the lead vehicle..." Old One, who had been sitting quietly in a corner not saying a word, finally spoke up with difficulty.

When Bai E looked over, he saw Old One's face was pale, large beads of sweat incessantly dropping from his forehead, while the hastily applied gauze wrap on his injured right hand was already soaked with fresh blood.

"I'm in so much pain..."

The seasoned soldier then realized, "Right away! Right away!"

"No need." Bai E, bracing himself against the vehicle, stood up "with difficulty" and moved over, meanwhile reaching out his hand to his side, "No need to delay the journey, hand me the medical kit."

"..."

You know medical treatment too?!

The commendation sent out to the whole camp had only mentioned the kid driving back with over four hundred immobilized teammates; it didn't mention anything about medical skills.

Chapter 147: Mystery of the Orcs

"Huh?"

The veteran looked at his right hand that had been bandaged, the snow-white gauze was tied into a neat knot, which didn't restrict his gripping and other activities, and also perfectly protected the wound.

What was even more miraculous was that there seemed to be a warm current flowing around the wound. Apart from a slight itchiness, he couldn't feel any of the expected pain. Could those head nurses even compare with this?

Seeing the veteran's stunned expression, the composed old soldier asked curiously, "Is it alright?"

To outsiders, it might only look nice, but who knew if it was actually effective?

"Alrig... Alright! Quite alright!" the veteran snapped out of it and vigorously nodded his head.

That was more than alright!

"You also know medical techniques?" The composed old soldier suddenly looked at Bai E with a surprised joy. For a fighter like them, having a doctor or a nurse following them in battle was like having an extra life.

This sense of security couldn't be matched even by a more powerful warrior.

Bai E smiled modestly, "Learned a little."

"How much is 'learned a little'?" The comrades all wanted to have a clear understanding of each other's capabilities.

After pondering for a moment, Bai E carefully answered, "As long as the body isn't severed, I should be able to save them... of course, due to the limitations of medical equipment, there's not much I can do for cases of severe bleeding or extensive limb damage."

"Awesome!" The composed old soldier's face was full of joy.

Wasn't this a get-out-of-death-free card?

There were indeed soldiers in the team with medical expertise, but now having this unexpected boon in his own vehicle was undeniably more exhilarating.

["Lucky Strike" charge +3.]

Bai E's lips curved up as he laughed softly, as if shy from the praise, and then his head spun again as he reached for his temples, his hand instinctively searching for something to support his body.

"You should rest, young man... don't overexert yourself."

Leaning back against the vehicle, Bai E closed his eyes with one hand on his forehead, as he tallied the total gains from the brief battle that had just occurred—

Light firearms mastery experience 133 points.

Combat experience 1352 points.

The combat experience he had scraped together from the previous drawn-out battle was nothing compared to what he had gained in the last explosive minute. If he hadn't started to experience diminishing returns from killing too many, he could have gained a few hundred more points.

The only regret was that the full-load shooting for not too long of a time didn't bring enough of an experience, other soldiers were battle-hardened, and he himself had only truly done full-load shooting twice, so unlocking special attribute bonuses was still out of reach.

But no matter what, he had gotten through this hurdle.

Following the route plan set before departure—Blood Raven Forest, Blackrock Plains, Beast Transformation Forest... one hurdle after another to be crossed!

Every encounter with danger was also an opportunity for promotion and improvement. Gradually, Bai E had become accustomed to this kind of life, fighting on the edge and shedding blood...

Only after confirming that they had completely escaped the threat of the blood ravens did the commanding officer's voice, Gregory, clearly transmit from everyone's earpieces, "Check the resource consumption and health status of each vehicle."

"Vehicle 1 resource consumption... personnel status—old one's right hand was injured by a blood raven, but it has been treated and is now recovering, no other abnormalities for the rest."

"Vehicle 2..."

"Vehicle 3..."

After collecting all the information, Gregory's eyes narrowed slightly.

Vehicle 1 wasn't equipped with a medical-trained fighter...

Although the soldiers selected for this operation were almost all multifaceted, they each had their particular strengths, and it was rare to find someone both proficient in combat and exceptional in medical skills.

There were many who knew both in the military, but the number of those proficient in both wasn't that high. For this mission, we could only pick out three, two of whom were assigned to 2nd vehicle to protect Minister Likok, and one in the 3rd vehicle to protect Miss Aryan.

As the commanding officer of the team, he knew and remembered the information of all other official members, except for the data of that youngster who was inserted into the squad at the last minute. Because of the rush right before departure, he hadn't had time to look for it, so... could it also have been his doing?

95B27, the most shining one among the latest batch of recruits.

He had heard of this warrior's reputation, and now it seemed... his strength wasn't bad either?

A firepower expert with explosive capabilities who also possessed some medical skills, after all, didn't seem like such a useless addition as initially thought.

Gregory nodded to himself.

[Not bad...]

...

After passing the Blood Raven Forest, there was basically no trouble along the way. This was a carefully planned route, chosen because it was deemed the lowest risk.

If even this path required overcoming numerous difficulties, then it would be impossible to go anywhere in this world.

After leaving the Blood Raven Forest and the bug nest far behind, even the scenery along the way gradually shed the contamination of the Bug Race and reverted to the look of native species of the planet.

To survive on this disaster-ridden planet, even plants had evolved unimaginable vitality, which allowed them to thrive even in the approaching winter.

White and fluffy like dandelions, the grass swayed gently in the breeze. The seeds, resembling miniature balloons, were scattered by the gale generated by the speeding off-road vehicle, carrying new hope and spreading to the distant future.

The soft green grasslands stretched endlessly. Undisturbed, they grew wildly, with waves of grass billowing in the wind, a lush sight to dazzle the eyes.

The Blackrock Plains were fertile, and if not for their proximity to the bug nest, which interrupted them, they would've been Blackwater City's breadbasket—this was the military's greatest motivation for wanting to completely eradicate the Bug Race.

However, there are no what-ifs in the world. The bug nest is there, and it's an insurmountable chasm.

The wide wheels of the off-road vehicle crushed the grass, leaving six deeply pressed tire tracks in the wild, contrasting starkly with the occasional black and yellow rocky ground—a path they tried to follow as much as possible.

This was one of the rare stretches of the planned route where one could take rest. Blackrock Plains were special—

Humans were not the only opponents of the bugs; the beastmen who roamed about like war-crazed lunatics also gave the Bug Race a headache.

In face of the murderous and rapacious bugs, normal people would either flee or resist and try to destroy them completely.

Beastmen were different...

This race, lacking in intellect, saw it purely as entertainment. Their wild battle lust frightened the bugs, who, although they lacked individual intelligence, felt fear.

What's more critical was... their numbers were no less than the bugs'.

The bugs could convert all biomass into their fighting force, but the beastmen... they cultivated the soil.

Yes, they reproduced not through sexual means, but like plants, growing directly from the ground.

When Bai E learned these facts from the military records, a fact not published on the official game website, he was completely dumbstruck.

Just like planting potatoes or carrots... one pit, one beastman, sprouting from the ground.

And they kept coming, one crop after another, growing even faster than damn leeks.

How many they wanted to grow, it all depended on the race's own will—it was just outrageous!

The largest beastman planting territory closest to Blackwater City was at the other end of the Blackrock Plains, so the plains, naturally, became a buffer zone between the two sides—a safe area under a fragile balance of power.

Unless one had the misfortune of encountering a wandering beastman directly, this part of the journey should be safe.

Chapter 148: sudden change!

...

"Mind if I drive for a bit?"

Considering that the roads ahead might not be as easy to navigate, and more challenging sections would naturally require drivers with more experience, it only made sense to let the most skilled veteran driver take a break and cover a stretch for him.

The straight-line distance from the military camp to the target base was a whopping 613 kilometers. The actual distance would depend on the route taken, and without satellite navigation, no one knew what the wilderness ahead was like. But the estimate was that it would take between 14 to 24 hours to arrive.

No one had the energy to remain in peak condition for such a long period to face all potential emergencies, so adequate rest was vitally important.

Good steel should be used on the blade's edge, and this detail was meticulously planned for beforehand.

The arrangement made sense, and the veteran driver who had led everyone through the Blood Raven Forest nodded and gently pressed on the brake.

The drivers of the three off-road vehicles switched at the same time.

A skilled close-combat Asian soldier took the seat.

In vehicle No. 1, out of the eight people, four knew how to drive, including the driver and co-driver as well as the two close-combat experts.

Considering that those skilled in hand-to-hand combat wouldn't be of much use while driving, the military factored these conditions into their selection process from the start.

Bai E, whose driving abilities shown during battlefield rescues were limited and mainly chosen for his shooting skills, did not enjoy any bonus points for his driving ability during the final scoring phase.

And even though four people in the vehicle could drive, apart from the main driver, the others were just making up numbers. Knowing how to drive and being proficient were two different things, as had been evident during the critical moments in the Blood Raven Forest, where any other driver would likely have resulted in an overturn.

It was different now on the plains with flat terrain, where the Asian got his hands on the steering wheel and began to show the more unrestrained part of his personality.

Listening to his lively humming, the atmosphere in the vehicle was relaxed. The elegant and pristine natural environment without any hidden dangers was undeniably refreshing—

The stone-faced AB, holding a machine gun by the window, looked out at the scenery rushing by and a smile played on his lips.

Lao Yi relaxed on the spot, the composed veteran joined Morton in tidying up the somewhat messy supplies in the vehicle due to the prior chaos.

Bai E pretended to rest for a while, then began to check and maintain his weapon. Regular maintenance is essential for a firearm to remain in pristine condition.

[You have completed maintenance on the target, restoring 2 points of durability.]

[You have completed maintenance, "Firearm Maintenance" experience +3.]

[Current "Firearm Maintenance" experience 98/300, at 300 points you will master "Level 2 Firearm Maintenance".]

It's been a while since I've gone back to my old trade, my enchanting plan!

Bai E calmly reached out to Morton walking by, "Your gun."

"What do you need my gun for?"

Though puzzled, Morton still handed over his machine gun to Bai E.

When it came to shooting, he admitted the kid had something.

Of course, that's where it ended... In terms of overall ability, the kid was surely lacking, and the superior's decision not to choose him was proof. He was firm in that belief!

Bai E took the machine gun and casually explained, "It felt a bit off when I used it earlier. I'll check it for you."

Experience +3

"Brother up front, I'll check your gun too,"

The jovial Asian driver replied, "Sure, go ahead."

Experience +3

"And yours?"

When asked, AB tightened his grip on his machine gun, "Mine doesn't need it."

He knew how to do it himself.

As their service time increased, many soldiers would take the initiative to learn things they were interested in during their downtime. The standard craft of maintaining firearms wasn't unique to Bai E.

...

Some people are willing to help others, while some only look out for themselves, or simply have no energy for social interactions.

"Oh~"

Bai E didn't really care either way since he had netted 6 points of experience, definitely not a loss.

His heart buoyant, he suddenly froze, a familiar sensation creating turmoil within.

What was happening?

With a suspicious glance, Bai E unconsciously looked out the window, wanting to pinpoint the source of the feeling that seemed to make his heart skip a beat.

After barely two seconds of frowning scrutiny, Bai E's gaze sharply dropped to the ground below—

Plants?

No! Lower!

Underground!

Getting closer...

Getting closer...

"Swoosh swoosh swoosh~"

In a few moments of blurred consciousness, the imagery of dark brown earth and stones rapidly swept by his vision.

Bai E pressed a hand to his throbbing temple, trying to pinpoint the precise origin of the target.

In the next moment, Bai E was startled and leapt towards the front, towards the direction of the cockpit.

"Move aside!"

Almost simultaneously, the co-pilot responsible for navigation gazed at a slight bulge in the grass about ten meters in front of the vehicle, a fleeting thought crossed his mind: "What is that?"

All of this happened in the blink of an eye—

Watching the AB who was staring blankly out of the window suddenly become fierce, Morton, perplexed, watched as Bai E threw himself forward, and the main driver, who was lying asleep, had drool at the corner of his mouth...

"Whoosh!"

A colossal creature burst out from underground, its ferocious iron claws stretching out in the sunlight.

The startled driver, an Asian warrior, jerked the steering wheel hard in an attempt to dodge the body that was shooting up from the earth.

The sharp turn of the vehicle, combined with the disruption of soil and stones caused by the worm breaking the surface, caused the off-road vehicle skimming past the creature's body to tip sharply, almost tilting at an angle of around 30 degrees.

Everything inside the vehicle that wasn't secured instantly flew around, and the main driver lying in the back was thrown into mid-air.

However, the first worm that emerged from the soil was merely an appetizer. Ahead on the plains, many more worms seemed to have an agreement to stretch their limbs at the same time, breaking through the ground like bamboo shoots after rain.

Bai E, who had already lunged towards the cockpit, glanced at them. Their bodies were flat, resembling scorpions or centipedes, with blades like knife edges on either side of their bodies. Their heads were equipped with drilling apparatus resembling the mouthparts of worms, convenient for burrowing.

The part of the creatures that protruded above ground was at least twice the height of the vehicle, with a length of six to seven meters definitely possible, and with sections of their bodies still underground, a conservative estimate of their size would be over ten meters.

Were they native species of this planet that he had yet to learn about?

Or rather, wurms!

None of the information he had received mentioned the existence of these creatures, but Bai E felt that the things that had suddenly appeared before his eyes must be wurms!

He roughly knew what the vague "hint" he had received beforehand was... it came from the "Wurm Nest Will" that had lain dormant within him!

A slight resonance made Bai E suddenly become aware of their existence, but were they here for him, or simply stretching their bodies?

Nobody knew.

Chapter 149: Insect Sea Navigation

"Bang!"

The wheels hit the ground heavily, and everything inside the vehicle tossed about.

"Ah!"

"Damn!"

"Hiss~"

The sudden mishap greeted no one, except Bai E, who had sensed it beforehand and braced himself against the back of the cockpit with his hands.

The Asian warrior driving was sweating profusely from his back, his large hands whitening from the grip on the steering wheel. When the vehicle had lurched, he felt as if his soul had lurched with it.

If the vehicle had flipped, the consequences would have been unimaginable.

What was more critical were... those gigantic worms churning right in front of his eyes, which could burst from the ground beneath the vehicle at any moment. The large clumps of soil and rock they brought up with them from below the surface were lethally altering the once relatively flat road.

They were like fish swimming in the sea, occasionally leaping out to stretch their bodies in the air before diving back into the ocean.

The underground was their sea!

Take a detour? There was no time!

They were right in front of him!

The fact that they hadn't attacked the vehicle yet was the greatest mercy they could show, but it seemed they had no intention of deliberately avoiding the vehicle's path.

It was vital to leave this area they had thought was safe as quickly as possible, while also being careful not to collide with the creatures and to pay attention to the changing terrain, planning route alterations on the fly...

The pressure was immense... even more suffocating than in Blood Raven Forest.

Cold sweat seeped finely from the forehead of the Asian warrior, who, without looking back, yelled to the back, "Bai, are you awake yet!"

"Hiss~" The driver who was called out could only clasp his right arm, hurting too much to speak.

In the recent chaos inside the vehicle, he had been unlucky enough to be flung from his seat and had hit the blade of a dismantled battle machine gun, cutting a gash about ten centimeters long at the upper part of his right arm, from which blood was uncontrollably flowing.

"His arm is injured!" a calm warrior, having recovered his wits, answered for him.

"But I can't hold on..." The Asian warrior knew his limits; facing such chaotic scenes, he felt he could flip the vehicle at any moment.

"Morton!"

"I'm no good either..." Morton said with difficulty, swallowing hard as he watched those ghastly things periodically burst through the ground in front of the vehicle.

The veteran who had experienced E's skills before suggested, "B27, hurry and bandage Bai up so he can take over again!"

E glanced at the severity of the injury and shook his head, "Not so fast."

It wasn't about the speed of his treatment; the wound was too large and too deep for a rapid recovery, even if they bandaged it, it wouldn't be quick enough to return to use.

In such critical moments, where every second was contested, how could they rely solely on Bai's personal will?

When the nest is overturned, how can there be any intact eggs?

"I'll do it." E, who was leaning against the back of the cockpit, said solemnly.

The co-driver looked back at E with a puzzled look, "You'll do it?"

"Unbuckle the seatbelt!" E had no time for explanations and nearly ordered the Asian warrior in the driver's seat.

[Confirm payment of 300 generic experience points to upgrade "Knowledge—Standard Vehicle Driving" skill level?]

["Level 2 Standard Vehicle Driving" acquired, simultaneously gaining 1 Technology Point.]

[Standard Vehicle Driving (Level 2): You have mastered the driving methods for most standard vehicles by heart and can adeptly handle generally complex terrains, slightly improving the riding experience for passengers, and increasing control over the speed limit by 15%.]

Level 1 driving skills were definitely not enough to keep things under control in this situation; the Asian warriors and Morton were probably all at this level.

So, it had to be upgraded.

"Oh oh~" In such a critical moment, facing commands issued by anyone, the Asian warriors, who lacked a lot of personal judgment, followed almost completely without question.

Bai E leaned forward, his hand lightly resting on the steering wheel without exerting much force, and only when he spotted a slightly safer gap did he firmly issue the instruction, "Don't panic, get up and move!"

In these circumstances, there was no way to slow down and change drivers regularly; not leaving this area quickly, nobody knew what might happen.

The occasional pebble flung against the window by a giant insect felt as if it were directly striking everyone's hearts, causing terror.

"Okay! Okay!"

The two exchanged places, with Bai E taking the driver's seat.

"I'll do my best to help you plan the route," the co-driver said to Bai E. His mind was quite sharp, but asking him to operate and plan at the same time was indeed a tough request.

"No need."

With a "click," Bai E fastened the seatbelt with one hand, and the chaotic scenery ahead came into view, with numerous potential routes weaving through traffic rapidly taking shape in his mind.

[Not enough.]

[Confirm payment of 500 generic experience points to upgrade "Knowledge—Standard Vehicle Driving" skill level?]

["Level 3 Standard Vehicle Driving" acquired, simultaneously gaining 1 Technology Point.]

[Standard Vehicle Driving (Level 3) (Max Level): The driving methods of any standard vehicle hold no secrets for you. Where a person can go, a vehicle can go. You've significantly improved the riding experience for passengers, and your control over the speed limit is increased by 30%.

(Your driving skill has reached the peak, but the peak driving ability of standard vehicles is just the foundation for unlocking driving capabilities for more types of vehicles. Now, you've met the prerequisites to master the ability to drive "specialized vehicles" through learning/training.)]

Directly to max level!

The state of the entire vehicle, communicated through omnipresent vibrations and feedback from the steering wheel in his hands, entered Bai E's mind—its acceleration/braking performance, vehicle weight changes, suspension damping ratio, tire grip capability, and all other performances were instantaneously comprehended.

It was as if a transparent model of the entire vehicle was slowly rotating in his mind, with all capabilities presented as data on a sheet of paper.

At his command!

The precise information needed about the road surface, combined with the vehicle's capabilities, meant the best driving solution appeared before his eyes without the need for meticulous planning.

"Hum~"

Bai E gently pressed the accelerator, as the engine began to provide maximum horsepower within the optimal running range, its light tremors akin to a prehistoric giant beast ready to pounce.

"Have the vehicle behind follow my route."

His voice was somewhat unfamiliar to the vehicles behind, and if the composed warrior spoke, it would be easier to gain trust and prompt action in the first instance.

With peak driving skills, and the occasional flashes of insight resonating with the insect nest's will, Bai E felt it shouldn't be too difficult to lead everyone out of this "sea" rampaged by giant insects.

Bai E's voice was too calm, his strong confidence infecting the whole vehicle; the composed warrior chose to trust his teammate unconditionally.

"This is Car 1! This is Car 1! The vehicles behind, pay attention and follow! We will lead the way up front, guiding you out of the danger zone as quickly as possible."

Leading the way and clearing danger—that was the greatest purpose of Car 1 on this journey!

Chapter 150: Approaching

"What are those...?"

The glass of the car window reflected the gradually weakening sunlight of the late afternoon, and Miss Aryan's delicate, petite face, pasted against the glass, stared blankly at the giant insect figures receding into the distance.

Under the lead of Vehicle 1, everyone escaped safely.

However, an unknown confusion weighed on their hearts; nobody knew what exactly the monsters that had burrowed out of the ground were.

"Did the Bug Race undergo some kind of mutation?" Gregory's brows were tightly furrowed, his mood heavy.

Humanity had survived on this planet for thousands of years; there were almost no native creatures left completely unseen. Moreover, near the Bug Race's hives, whenever something entirely new appeared, it was almost certain to be related to the Bug Race; even if not the Bug Race itself, their genetic pollution undoubtedly had an influence.

This ability for survival mutations of an extraterrestrial species was something human biotechnology's imagination couldn't keep up with.

Just like the main forces of the Bug Race... The insects that landed on the planet centuries ago were entirely different from today's insects. Back then, the insects primarily consisted of aerial forces, with air creatures named "Gargoyles" and "Winged Serpents" rampaging through the skies.

The "Drop Pods" descending from outer space brought countless "Servants," "Horn Beasts," "Soldier Insects," and other castes in a mad invasion against human defenses, a fierce battle.

Today's Worker Insects, Bee Insects, and Mantis Insects had already mutated or adapted.

To humanity's complete unfamiliarity, the Master—a core insect—had shown itself not long ago and taught humanity a harsh lesson. And now... a new type of insect had appeared.

What had caused this new wave of mutations in the species?

"Commander, should we turn back and report to the military district?" a soldier asked beside him.

The prohibition engraved in his genes made him constantly concerned about the safety of all humanity. If humans weren't prepared for an underground attack, the Bug Race's sudden strike from below could cause heavy losses for humanity, even crippling injuries.

Gregory frowned in thought for a moment before shaking his head, "No need; we continue forward."

They had their mission, and the military base wouldn't be completely blind.

The Master, that kind of core insect, was a special case—there was only one, hidden deep within the hive, never revealing itself, refusing to initiate an attack unless humans reached its main lair.

But the number of insects they had just seen was not small; it would be difficult for them to move unnoticed on ordinary days.

The military base sent out patrols every day for reconnaissance, and if these insects showed any signs of movement within a certain range of the city, they would hardly escape the keen eyes of those elite scouts.

Protect your comrades, but also trust them.

Patrol and reconnaissance were the scouts' duty, executing this military operation was the mission they themselves had to accomplish!

The only odd thing was... why didn't those insects launch a targeted attack on the three off-road vehicles?

Were their sensory organs incapable of detecting the human flesh and blood beneath the cold steel, or did this type of insect not bear the burden of assault?

This information could actually be gathered and reported back to the Scientific Research Institute for analysis.

Withdrawing his gaze, Gregory remembered how Vehicle 1 had led everyone out of the chaotic upheaval of the ground insects and deftly avoided all danger, feeling a sincere sense of relief.

This internal selection mechanism had indeed been rigorous, equipping him with quite a few excellent soldiers—Vehicle 1's driver had performed unbelievably well during this unforeseen event.

In the midst of unknown chaos, daring to shoulder everything, this kind of composure and decisiveness in the face of danger, and courage to forge ahead, shone brighter than his skills.

"Was it 166A11 that led everyone to safety just now? Well done."

There was a brief silence in the channel, before the calm voice of an experienced soldier slowly came through—

"...It was 95B27."

"..."

That number again...

["Lucky Strike" energy charge +7.]

The notification sounded unobtrusively as Bai E casually glanced through the rearview mirror at the giant insect figures growing distant.

Insects...

Another completely unknown new type of insect...

From the frequency of occurrences, they resembled the Elite Insect Race like the Mantis Insects, only without the capacity as a "Hive Mind" node.

Their bodies were almost entirely covered in a thick layer of black Chitin Bone Armor. In the sunlight, the bone blades, row upon row like knives, reflected blindingly cold light.

In the wars to come, one would have to be wary not just of what's in front and far away, but also of what's underneath...

"Let me drive from here; they didn't bandage the back properly," said the yellow-skinned soldier, full of admiration, from behind Bai E after they had left the danger zone.

With just two interventions, this honest and straightforward soldier was completely convinced.

Bai E gently pressed on the brake and smoothly carried out the exchange.

"It's not serious; it'll heal after some rest, but for now, it's best not to exert any force," Bai E advised the soldier known as 'Big White Bear,' the chief driver, after examining and bandaging the wound.

"But as for driving..."

"Just rest, leave the driving to me."

Moreover, a long stretch of road ahead had even terrain, and the yellow-skinned soldier was capable enough to handle it on his own.

After two medium crises, the journey had become stable again.

All the jostling had fatigued everyone inside the vehicle.

Until the red sun sank into the ground, and the twilight filled the treetops, the distorted silhouettes of the jungle showed their fangs and claws far off against the twilight horizon.

From dawn... to dusk.

The last stop, the Beastified Jungle...

It was getting dark...

The journey grew increasingly rough, the terrain in the hilly area was rugged. Even when they tried to find the smoothest paths possible, the bumps were inevitable, and their speed slowed down considerably.

The Asian soldier twisted uncomfortably and asked the man behind him, "Brother B27, maybe you should take over driving..."

The heavy responsibility panicked him, but evading it only filled him with self-reproach.

Bai E patted his shoulder and smiled away his worries, "You're tired too, let me take over."

The target base was located deep within the Beastified Jungle ahead in the distance.

Built hundreds of years ago with deliberate avoidance of populated cities, the once suburban hills now wore a mantle of marshland after centuries of abandonment.

The jungle, influenced by extraterrestrial factors, exhibited astonishing vitality and aggressiveness.

Lacking any conscious will, driven only by the instinctual triggers of lying in wait.

For those beastmen, this was the perfect playground, but for human convoys trying to penetrate its depths, it was undoubtedly a significant barrier.

According to the plan, they were to reach the edge of the jungle before darkness fell completely; whether to proceed would be decided based on the conditions observed and the actual time of arrival.

After all, the target base was a considerable distance from the jungle's outskirts, and advancing further today would enable an earlier arrival at the base tomorrow to initiate reconnaissance and attack.

The three vehicles slowed down, and someone inquired over the voice channel, "Commander?"

"Slow down, but keep moving forward," Gregory scanned the horizon with his eyes.

There was still time, at least two hours left before night would fall completely—they couldn't afford to waste it.

The status of the target base was unknown, and it was always better to carry out reconnaissance by day than to engage in combat at night.

According to the data received, bioengineered soldiers' nighttime abilities far surpassed those of normal humans.

"Yes!"

On an operation, the commander's order was an absolute ironclad rule, executed to perfection.

In the quiet, unpopulated wilderness, the three vehicles drove a snaking S-curve, with their headlights piercing the increasingly dense twilight, as if willingly diving into the mouth of a demon, slowly entering the twisted, sparse jungle.

Almost every tree that met the eye was a centuries-old behemoth, unimaginably thick, not necessarily very tall, but requiring at least three to four people to encircle, standing apart in stark relief.

"Creak, creak~"

Dry vines and branches snapped crisply under the wheels, the vehicle body jolted lightly over the exposed, hefty roots, as if the disturbed green branches swiftly recoiled, wrapping into bundles alongside a giant tree like clutching human hands.

Occasionally, small creatures that formed a symbiotic relationship with the jungle flitted through the network of vines and branches, their green sheen obscured whatever native species they might be.

With humanity having lost dominion over the planet for hundreds of years, subject to various external influences, the planet itself had undergone drastic changes, native species evolving little by little to adapt and mutate for survival—nothing could be more normal.

The rustlings of those small creatures made the place seem even more serene.

All the soldiers inside the vehicles quietly gripped their machine guns.

They didn't fear a fiery, head-on battle, but the uncanny and unknown always accelerated the heartbeat.

Fortunately, they truly hadn't encountered any danger along the way.

Bai E carefully controlled the speed and path, avoiding "offending" those "beastified giant trees" where danger lurked, unless it was impossible to evade.

The meandering path before and behind them sent the beams of six headlights straight into the depths of the hills, some blocked by small mounds.

Only when it became too dark to see one's hand in front of them did Gregory's voice sound in everyone's earpieces, "Stop the engines; everyone rest inside the vehicles! Assign shifts for duty, and preserve your energy."

"Yes, Commander!"

"Yes, Commander!"

Bai pressed the brake but didn't leave the driver's seat.

Even while resting, he had to do so at the driving position to ensure he could get everyone out of danger at the first sign of trouble.

The vehicle's dim light came on as everyone made final preparations before resting.

"Come, eat something."

Steaming ration packs were passed forward by a composed soldier, "Here are blankets too; cover yourself to avoid catching a cold at night."

"Thanks, got it."

"Eat up, you sleep first. I'll wake you for the second half of the night."

"All right."

After briefly addressing personal needs, the lights were turned off, and the vehicle fell silent.

Soft snores began to rise from all around.

Reflecting on the day's journey in the darkness, gazing at the resting figure on the left side of the cockpit, the seasoned soldier inexplicably felt a wave of reassurance.

It felt as if with him on a mission, nothing was too difficult.

This sense of stability was something he couldn't feel when occasionally teaming up with genetically optimized soldiers or Spiritual Energy users—it might be due to... his seemingly unflappable character? His decisive actions even amidst unforeseen changes?

Or perhaps it stemmed from the man's reputation—single-handedly saving more than four hundred lives on a battlefield against the Bug Race!

He wasn't a direct participant, but having a soldier who had accomplished such a feat as a teammate made him feel backed up.

Without demonstrating sufficient personal capabilities, unity and noble qualities were but gentle traps; with ability, all nobility of the soul gained its foundation.

In any case, it was like a bright moonrise in his heart, bathing his spirit in cold light on this moonless night...

"Creak~"

"Creak~"

The branches moved slowly...