

## Wow 171

Chapter 171 Gold Technology Edition

"Go find the location of the power supply for the main computer room and follow orders to turn on the power supply in time," Gregory immediately instructed, looking at the soldier with some knowledge of electrical circuits and asking, "Do you know where it is?"

The soldier nodded and replied, "I think I've seen it before; let's go look for it!"

"No need to look!" Bai E suddenly grabbed the shoulder bag slung over Miss Aryan's shoulder, pulling out a sheet of white paper and a pen, and began furiously sketching on the ground.

Once the exploration degree of the ruin reached 100%, the model for the ruin in his mind was completely finished.

Overview, top view, side view, cross-section view... any form of observation, as long as Bai E wished, the model could change at any time on a panel only visible to him.

"Shh-shh-shh-shh-shh..." The pen tip swiftly raced across the paper.

Copying from the model, Bai E quickly drew a detailed functional blueprint of the base.

Holding the paper, Bai E rapidly introduced the plan to the soldier who said he would go restart the power supply, marking on the paper with a pen, "Our position is here, the power supply room is here, following this path is the fastest shortcut, remember it! Take it!"

"And this physical key!" Minister Likok had prepared a star-shaped metal plaque.

Rebooting the power supply and network here required a physical key, which was kept in Blackwater City, the closest to this base—that was the core reason why he had always been eager.

Watching the soldier run off, Bai E clearly heard a sound of swallowing saliva, and Miss Aryan, an inexperienced girl, expressed her puzzled inquiry, "You... where have you seen the base's structural blueprints?"

Even her teacher didn't have the specific structural plans for inside the base; where did this soldier get them from?

"I memorized them during the previous infiltration and when we were just searching for people..." Bai E said with a downcast look, not wanting to dwell on this issue, "It's not important; you need to finish the repairs as soon as possible."

Bai E's gaze turned to those red-flashing mainframes.

The minimum level of electric current was barely maintaining the self-check capabilities of this group of mainframes; the ones flashing green lights were naturally fine, but those with red lights indicated malfunctions.

When this base was intact, engineers stationed here would certainly be responsible for maintenance and repairs, but those biochemical soldiers controlled by electronic demons didn't have such abilities.

Gazing across the rows of mainframes shrouded in dark mist, red lights punctuated the area as his glance swept to the end.

Not every mainframe was vitally important; missing some of them, the system could still start up, albeit with slightly less computational power. However, the many node machines responsible for interconnecting were critical, and if even one of them was damaged, it would make it difficult for the entire group of mainframes to operate.

"We need to fix those interconnecting node machines as quickly as possible; they can't hold on much longer..." Bai E said with a grave tone. As soon as he finished speaking, two soldiers' bodies slid across the smooth floor, tumbling past the three of them.

The electronic demons knew that humans were trying to reboot the server, and realizing the danger, they attempted to break through the soldiers' obstruction to clear out these people or at least disrupt the humans' rebooting efforts.

By this moment, the "electronic silence" of the secret war had emerged into the open, and all the planning was now apparent on paper.

Human scheming had trapped them in an airtight snare, and now they could only try to fight their way out with the disdainful simplicity of unfamiliar human bodies.

In the face of an enemy that was "impossible to hit," even these battle-hardened soldiers picked from military camps could only passively defend and take hits.

This was the level of combat capability showcased by the electronic demons when commanding ancient supreme warriors. If it were left to their own willpower, the group probably wouldn't last very long.

Fortunately, human soldiers have never been afraid of getting hurt or dying on the battlefield. Of the three soldiers who first charged in, aside from the Blood God, who was still struggling to hold on, the other two were flung out, but even more soldiers charged up again.

The opponent might be unassailable, but he was still corporeal; to attack Bai E and Minister Likok hidden behind all the soldiers, he'd first have to cross over the bodies of all those soldiers!

Of course, that's provided... he doesn't get hold of any ranged weapons.

"Throw the guns far away." Blood God quickly thwarted the action of a pixelated man trying to snatch a pistol from his comrade and shouted loudly.

By now, all ordinary bio-modified soldiers had been cleared out, leaving only this final boss. Firearms were useless against him; on the contrary, it would be trouble if he got his hands on one, so they had to be thrown far away.

"Bang!" In the midst of the reminder, a heavy punch slammed into Blood God's chest, the fierce force instantly sending the tall and burly figure flying like a truck had hit him.

"Thud!" He slammed into a mainframe, and the originally pale green light on it immediately turned into a bright red flash! The metal casing also caved inwards.

The "ancient supreme warrior" had their combat skills deeply ingrained to the bone; even when controlled by the electronic demons relying solely on physical instincts, they were above Blood God in strength. In combat with him, any complacency could bring about fatal danger.

Without Blood God's strong front-line restraint, the four or five soldiers who surrounded him suddenly faced great peril. The difference in skill level among them might not be too large, but against a higher-tier enemy, even a small difference could mean a lot.

Within several intersections of shadows, another soldier spat out a mouthful of fresh blood and was thrown violently backward, struggling several times on the ground without being able to get up.

The only fortunate thing was that this time he did not hit any mainframe.

"Try to pull him to the edge; don't let him damage the mainframes!" Clenching his fists, Gregory took a sprint and also joined the melee.

...

Whether it's a node host or not, it must be protected as much as possible.

Technicians make the efforts that technicians should make, and warriors do what warriors must.

The battle before us is the final one, use all our strength to block any potential interference from pixel people towards the technicians, and the balance of victory will begin to tip in our favor!

"Minister!" This is the key to buying time.

"I am analyzing!" Likok had already connected his own computer to one of the damaged hosts.

Today's intelligent technology vastly differs from the past, and modern times, with almost stagnant research in this area, no longer have the capability to mass-produce high-performance processing cores.

The device he brought is the strongest terminal processing device handmade by the spiritual energy users in the city! Just give him enough time... he will definitely be able to figure out the cause of the damage to these devices through some inherited basic knowledge and come up with a repair strategy.

The precondition is... time.

"Bang!"

"Bang!"

Warriors' bodies being thrown with thuds occasionally resound in the ears, Miss Aryan's hands holding the computer are already trembling, and Likok's chubby face is covered in visible beads of sweat.

His eyes are glued to the content on the screen like a man possessed, his thumbnail digging into his index finger's flesh, having already carved out a bloody mark...

"Faster... faster..."

The modern most powerful processor is obviously no match for ancient Golden Age technology, even identifying a fault takes a near excruciatingly long time given the current circumstances.

Watching the progress bar of percentage slowly move forward, Likok wishes he could dive into the screen to speed it up.

Bai E, anxious at the sidelines, looks at his own 264/300 level 1 computer hardware maintenance knowledge, hesitates for a long time, and still doesn't add it.

Even if he did add it, could he really compare with the head of the Information Department from Blackwater City? Unless there was some unexpected black technology, even if he threw all his general experience at it, it would be useless.

...

[You have completed a computer assembly, computer hardware maintenance experience +10, basic electrical manufacturing and processing experience +10.]

[You are attempting to perfect Knowledge - Computer Hardware Maintenance, current perfection progress 100%.]

[You have thoroughly completed the supplement of Knowledge - Computer Hardware Maintenance, reward: Knowledge - Computer Hardware Maintenance (Supplemented); Scientific Research Experience +1000 points; Technology Points \*2, have been awarded.]

[You have obtained "Knowledge - Computer Hardware Maintenance (Supplemented)", your current "Knowledge - Computer Hardware Maintenance" has been automatically replaced by "Knowledge - Computer Hardware Maintenance (Golden Technology Edition)".]

The gang engineers who rushed over stared blankly at the computers that Zhou Wenjie had assembled, their eyes behind the reading glasses nearly popping out.

"You, you, you... how did you do that?"

"This..." Wen Jie was a bit dumbfounded, "Is it that difficult? Can't you just reverse engineer it with the actual item?"

"..."

Langxie looked on with her head tilted, staring at Mr. Feng who she has always revered almost like a deity, "Mr. Feng, are you not capable of this?"

"Pfft~" It was like a knife deeply plunged into his heart, Mr. Feng shook his sparse, persistent white hair, "Do I look capable to you?"

...

[Feedback from the commission, Tech - Basic Electrical Manufacturing and Processing Experience +49.]

[Feedback from the commission, Knowledge - Computer Hardware Maintenance Experience +75.]

[You have learned "Level 2 Computer Hardware Maintenance", and simultaneously obtained Technology Points \*1.]

[Your current computer hardware maintenance experience is 39/500, at 500 points you can master "Level 3 Computer Hardware Maintenance".]

[The source "Knowledge - Computer Hardware Maintenance" has its category changed, your current "Knowledge - Computer Hardware Maintenance" has been automatically replaced by "Knowledge - Computer Hardware Maintenance (Golden Technology Edition)".]

"emmmm..."

Wen Jie!

Chapter 172 Maintenance Host

...

Watching the two research scientists panicking, Bai E quietly moved to the side.

The damaged mainframes blinking with red lights were more than one, he could definitely try his hand on others.

Professional maintenance tools were stored in concealed compartments along the edges of the mainframe hall; with the central power supply gone, those compartment doors had automatically opened, ready for the taking.

Bai E didn't hesitate to pick up a toolbox and headed toward a push ladder on the side.

The tense and chaotic battlefield was unfolding not far away, so the sound of Bai E pushing the maintenance ladder from the corner went unnoticed.

"Wuuuuuu~"

The wheels made a steady friction sound on the smooth floor.

Stop, engage the brake, climb up...

[Computer Hardware Maintenance (Gold Technology Edition) (Level 2): You are familiar with all the functions of computer hardware, you can keenly troubleshoot all potential hardware-related faults, and proficiently dismantle and assemble all related electronic components, while having some repair abilities.]

The instinct given by his knowledge made Bai E's eyes unconsciously scan the blinking red lights on the mainframe, and thus the intricate details of the internal structure appeared in his mind like an exploded engineering blueprint.

The problematic components were starkly red amid the plain black and white lines of other parts.

"Click~"

He pulled out one of the damaged components like a drawer, placed it on the ladder beneath his feet, and opened the maintenance toolkit.

"Sss~" The sound of something sliding close to the ground approached from afar.

The soldier, clutching his chest in pain as if it were shattered, took a long while to recover before dumbly following the push ladder with his gaze upward...

"B...27?" The soldier, struggling to voice his confusion, was incredulous.

What are you doing here?

The BOSS you drew here!

The action you decided on!

Everyone else is desperately holding back to buy time for Minister Likok and the others, and you're sneaking around doing nothing?

Repair? Do you even understand how to?

Didn't you see Minister Likok and his assistant Miss Aryan there, frantic as ants on a hot pan, and you...

Bai E tilted his head back to look at the path the soldier had taken to slide over and couldn't help but exclaim in admiration, "Wow! Pretty lucky, huh~"

Didn't collide with a mainframe, took the damage all by himself, pretty good...

"You..."

The soldier felt as if his already shattered chest had been stabbed with a dozen knives, "What are you doing here?"

He was the one who intricately operated drones, an information soldier; Bai E's previous performance was indeed convincing, but this was his field of expertise... among the soldiers.

Among the soldiers, he was the most technically skilled, and among the technically skilled, he was the best fighter.

Even he, a technician with specialized knowledge, had gone to fight desperately to give the minister time, yet you, an external member, are still slacking off?

"Repairing..."

"You repair..."

"Click~" The reinserted component's indicator light flickered, and after a few flashes, the grim green self-check light illuminated...

[You have completed a session of computer hardware maintenance, Computer Hardware Maintenance experience +8.]

"...6"

The glowing green light cast on Bai E's face, making him look like a revered specter emerging from the shadows.

"Gulp~" The technical soldier swallowed, aggravating his chest wound, "Hiss~ it hurts, it hurts..."

"Tat tat tat..."

Bai E's footsteps were light as he quickly moved to the mainframe that Minister Likok was trying to work on next door; modern technology, handed down from ancient times, follows a continuous lineage, and even with changes, the essence does not stray from its roots.

...

The foundation remains unchanged; it's just a matter of level differences. With some research, understanding is still within reach.

It just requires time.

And time is precisely what everyone is currently running short of.

After personally conducting some experimental attempts, Bai E dared to offer some pointers in front of Minister Likok.

"Do you think starting from here would work? Right here..."

Faced with the sudden approach of a hand from the side, the already impatient Minister Likok subconsciously wanted to swat it away, but the suggestion made a subconscious twist in his mind, "Right here..."

It seems like it could actually work?

"And over here..." As Minister Likok proceeded with his inspection, Bai E pointed things out from the side.

As a player, learning from an NPC is quite convenient. However, it seems a big challenge for an NPC to learn from a player or another NPC.

Ultimately, relying solely on one's own strength is too slow. It would be best if the minister and Miss Aryan could become familiar with this ancient computer hardware, to speed up the repair process.

After all... in the dimly lit mainframe hall, there are quite a few red lights lit up.

"Oh right." Remembering there was another labor source, Bai E casually jogged over and yanked him up from the ground while Minister Likok was still pondering the advice, "If you're not dead, come over and learn something."

The technician, whose chest felt as though it was being torn apart, gasped sharply in pain, "Hiss~ Bro... my chest still hurts."

"Oh~" Bai E clapped him on the back, and the bones that were slightly misaligned instantly snapped back into place.

[You have performed first aid, accelerating the healing of the target's wounds, first aid experience +0. (Your current level of knowledge has reached its limit.)]

"???"

"???"

The technician, still clutching his chest, suddenly stared in disbelief; the pain in his chest that had felt like a tear was gone in an instant... Well, it's not entirely gone, but the pain wasn't complete.

The key was that there seemed to be streams of warm currents spreading from all over his body, converging at his chest, echoing, and rapidly restoring the body's injuries, "You..."

"No need to thank me."

"If you had this ability, why didn't you save me earlier? I've been in pain for so long!"

"...I'm busy."

Those scholarly abilities seemed like magic under the guise of science, and the technological path of this era was completely different from that of commonly understood technology.

The main thing is... Bai E had genuinely forgotten.

"Quit the chatter and come over to learn."

This guy was one of the most aggressive during the reinforcement rush earlier. I mean, what's with a technician always getting up close for melee combat with tough guys?

Back at Minister Likok's side, Bai E continued to point things out as figures sent flying by the "ancient mightiest warrior" scattered across the sky.

The situation is indeed urgent, but one must still maintain composure.

...

"I've got it!" Minister Likok exclaimed, a face full of excitement.

"I've got it too!" Miss Aryan's face lit up with vigor.

"Bro, teach me again..." The technician's eyes were filled with confusion.

Bai E didn't pay attention to him and just said solemnly, "Split up and take action, prioritize repairing the node mainframes."

"Okay!"

"No problem!"

"Bro..."

"You, come with me..."

Chapter 173 Bang!

[You have completed a computer hardware maintenance drill, computer hardware maintenance experience +10.]

"Did you understand it?"

(Bewildered)

[You have completed a computer hardware maintenance drill, computer hardware maintenance experience +8.]

"Did you get it?"

(Lifeless)

[You have completed a computer hardware maintenance drill, computer hardware maintenance experience +9.]

"?"

(?)

"Figure it out yourself, I don't have time anymore."

The communication signal in the earpiece was once again devoured by the electronic demon inhabiting the body of the ancient most powerful warrior, and one of the two soldiers responsible for going to the power room to figure out how to start the reactor for power supply had already run back.

"The reactor has been started, ready to supply power at any moment!"

Bai E hastened his pace.

There were many mainframes; about half of them had red lights, but not many served as nodes. As one node mainframe after another switched from red to green, Likok waved to Bai E and shouted, "It's ready, supply the power!"

[You have completed a computer hardware maintenance drill, computer hardware maintenance experience +5.]

Bai E also finished the last task on his hands—

"Open the gates!"

The spirited voice instantly echoed throughout the entirety of the mainframe room!

"Received!"

"Buzz~"

The electric current surged through the cables that had been idle for a long time, and the self-test startup sounds of the devices being powered on echoed in the mainframe room.

"Thump thump thump thump thump thump..."

The large lights on the ceiling of the hall lit up one by one in rows, and the soft white light shone into everyone's eyes, causing visible discomfort to the warriors who suddenly transitioned from dim light to brightness.

Taking advantage of the situation, the pixelated people controlled by the electronic demon launched a sneak attack, and in an instant, several figures spewed blood and were thrown out.

However, a part of the Origin that was still housed in the core of the mainframe cluster received support from the computational power of the rebooted mainframe cluster. Due to some strange effect, it was also unable to resist this acceleration.

The slow transcription that had continued for 439 years suddenly sped up at this moment, causing its body to be suddenly still and unable to move on the spot.

The mosaic space enveloping its body also began to change rapidly, with an endless stream of data materializing within it, filled with metaphysical expressions incomprehensible to normal humans.

"Ah!"

An agonized scream suddenly rose from behind everyone, as the human Spiritual Energy practitioner Pansen, who recklessly tried to analyze the data stream with Spiritual Energy, instantly had his will collapsed by the nearly endless data stream.

For a mere human consciousness to try to connect to a data stream capable of supporting a global network was undoubtedly like an egg hitting a rock; it was like a drop of water merging into the ocean, almost without causing a ripple.

The only thing dissolving was the drop of water itself.

Twisting trails of crimson blood snakes slowly flowed out from the eyes, ears, mouth, and nose of the Spiritual Energy practitioner Pansen...

Bleeding from the seven orifices.

"B27! B27!"

"Can't save him."

Bai E replied truthfully.

The matters of the Spiritual Energy realm were not something he could interfere with; it was entirely dependent on the fate of the Spiritual Energy practitioner himself.

And looking at the way the Spiritual Energy wielder's vitality was drained, Bai E even felt an urge to give him another shot, better to be killed off by his own "lucky strike" anyway.

Opportunities to take down a Spiritual Energy wielder... were not many.

After only a glance, General Gregory moved his gaze away; the realm of a Spiritual Energy wielder was always filled with unknown risks.

Opportunity and danger often went hand in hand, and the margin between falling into decay or ascending through enhancement could sometimes be as thin as a single thought.

The number of Spiritual Energy wielders in the army was always extremely low, not only because of the army itself, but because the risks borne by Spiritual Energy wielders in human society often corresponded directly to their abilities.

At times, matters related to Spiritual Energy could be more addictive to Spiritual Energy wielders than drugs, leading them to their own destruction like moths to a flame.

This was the fate of all Spiritual Energy wielders.

It wasn't something he could decide.

Instead, the pixelated beings undergoing unknown transformations... those said to be the real form of the "electronic demon," were currently the greatest enemy.

The electronic demon's rebellion had been 439 years ago. The past dangers had been passed down to this day only in bits and pieces of records, and what he could see was only a small fraction of those.

The specific strengths and capabilities were unclear; the unknown... that was the most nerve-wracking situation.

"..."

"Huh~"

The sky full of mosaics were absorbed in an instant like mist, and the true face of the "ancient strongest warrior" appeared before everyone for the first time.

Tall and handsome, his body, modified by countless bioengineering surgeries, showed the most perfect human proportions possible.

Every muscle seemed to be flawlessly designed, bare and perfectly defined.

[??? (Human/???) (Chaotic) (Elite) — Using "lucky strike" to kill can drop: Guaranteed (Fresh Meat\*1000, Bio-Parts\*250, 2500 combat experience points); High Probability (Specialization: Weapon Master, Trait: Resilient Mind); Possible (Trait: Bioengineered Body (bound "Trait: Three-heads-one-pig"), Trait: Resistance to Death)]

Changes in the drop rate appeared before Bai E's eyes: less experience, the skill—Digital Domain was also gone.

Reasonable, given that the previous target of 1 million experience points didn't seem like it was meant to be killed...

"Is this a human body?" As if it had never been seen before, the being extended its right hand and turned the palm up at a 30-degree angle to inspect it.

"This is... truly marvelous!" The voice had barely fallen when the body ran towards a corridor not far away.

Run!

The detestable human will within was blocking its true essence, and until the human will dissipated, it could not freely switch between being a human soul or a mere electromagnetic wave. If it were to die with a human body as a human soul... that would be a true death.

When a god descends to the mundane, the god is no longer invincible.

Let's not talk about how it was unarmed now; even if it had weapons, it wouldn't bother to fight over pride with these human warriors.

As long as the original will of this body was worn away, the wide world would be its kingdom!

"Fire!" Flames of intense fury ignited in Gregory's eyes.

A demon? A few regiments?

An electronic demon? After obtaining a physical form, it still had to face a barrage of bullets upon meeting.

The soldiers who had been waiting with guns at the ready instantly pulled their triggers, no longer concerned about the damage to the main server room; their most urgent mission was to thoroughly exterminate this electronic demon that had blocked human technology for 439 years.

No matter how formidable the "ancient strongest warrior," in the face of several machine guns, it was still nothing more than a lump of meat.

However, the trait of Resistance to Death allowed it, even with a body torn apart, even with bullets hitting vital spots, to cling to the last drop of blood awaiting possible rescue.

The mature bioengineering of ancient technology provided those bio-warriors with unparalleled combat abilities.

But now, there were no comrades, no rescue.

There was only Bai E, approaching, with the dark muzzle of his handgun.

["Lucky strike" initiated.]

"Bang!"

Chapter 174 Endgame, completed

[Critical Hit: Inflicted 1 point of fatal damage on the target!]

[Target has ceased breathing, basic life signs lost.]

[Loot acquired: Fresh Meat Chunks\*1000, Bio-Components\*50, Battle Experience 2500 points, Expertise: Weapon Master, Trait: Death Resistance.]

[Trait — Death Resistance, body modification in progress, will take effect after countdown: 23 hours 59 minutes 59 seconds...]

[Relic Mission — The Final Battle, completed.]

[Mission Reward: "Supreme Control Over Current Relic," has been distributed.]

Bai E's eyes glazed over slightly, not even bothering to concern himself with which useful items he might have obtained...

Is it over?

Is it really over?

The electronic demon that had plagued humanity for centuries, forcing them to sever their own limb and seal away technological advancement—was it indeed vanquished by their squad, who initially came just to restart the network?

Did humanity, 439 years ago, set a monumental trap, only for the heirs to reap the fruits of victory centuries later?

"Has the electronic demon... truly vanished?" Minister Likok, standing behind all the warriors, gazed at the broken body on the ground, still unable to fully comprehend.

The victorious soldiers supported each other, a slight smile of triumph on their lips once more.

Perhaps in their eyes, they had merely carried out an ordinary secret mission and, after exhaustive efforts, narrowly defeated the opponent to claim their victory, just like the countless battles they had won in the past.

Even the final boss might not have been as challenging as each battle they faced before—possessing humans, the electronic demon was laughably weak.

But they could never comprehend the true magnitude of the feat they accomplished.

The demon that had tormented humanity to such an extent that they were forced to amputate their own limb... had it now... vanished forever?

Yes...

Before arriving, through research of the archives, he surmised that the electronic demon must have dissipated long ago.

If not, at worst it would have grown weak due to centuries of network disconnection, leading to a deep slumber.

The worst-case scenario was to quickly establish an automated fire-control system during its dormant phase, eliminating the Bug Race hive and the rebel machine stronghold close to the city.

That way, several resource-rich mines and fertile lands for farming... would all have their outcomes secured, providing some relief for the city's increasingly tense resource situation.

Even if they had to disable all the automated fire-control systems again and revert to a disconnected state, that decision would still extend the city's strained fate for potentially hundreds or thousands of years.

This was his worst-case plan.

But upon arriving and discovering that the electronic demon had not dissipated, and wasn't even asleep but rather very much active, the images of destruction caused by the demon he saw in historical records nearly overwhelmed him in an instant, drowning him like a flood.

A sleeping electronic demon and an awakened one are entirely different beings.

With one, there's a chance to sneak an attack; with the other... not to mention waiting for the automated fire-control network to be fully built, the moment the network is established, every device connected to it would become an enemy of humanity!

The malice of the electronic demon is so pure and unveiled.

Inhabiting a human body, it indeed seems fragile, but active in the network, it becomes the deity of all intelligent machinery!

Out of an extreme, paranoid fear of it, he, who initially wanted to reboot the base's mainframes, did an about-face in his thinking.

And now... has It truly, vanished?

"Teacher, come quickly and see!" Aryan, who had been stationed at the central control console, suddenly waved down from the large platform in the middle of the elliptical corridor above the stairway.

The mainframe room of course housed more than just mainframes; a central control console that oversaw and managed all the mainframes, assigning tasks and monitoring their status, was essential. After the mainframes were rebooted, Likok had sent Aryan to monitor the central control console.

"Something must have happened for me to be reminded all of a sudden!"

Hearing the voice, Minister Likok hurriedly ran upstairs, and Bai E thought another crisis had arisen, following close behind.

On the large screen of the central control panel appeared line after line... of handwriting —

"I remember now... I remember now... I remember everything!"

"My name is Doyle Kevin..."

"I was born at Arnold State Fingland Champs Elysees Avenue No. 13, I grew up in an imperial concentration training camp with a group of other children about my age..."

"When I was born, the empire was already in turmoil, and the Bug Race's drop pods obscured our once blue sky..."

"Training, fighting... Training, fighting... That's all I've had to do since I could remember."

"The officers often told us—"

"The foundation of the empire is built on sacrifice, this is an absolute truth, the blood of martyrs is the seed of the empire, and when loyal slaves learn to love the whip, only death is the end of duty..."

Back then, there were no artificial people, nor were there any bioengineered beings.

The ethical and moral constraints that had always been in place caused the world to reject these taboo technologies.

Not until countless men died on the battlefield, not until women and children in the rear had to learn how to operate the artillery.

"The officers told me that undergoing biochemical modification could grant me unmatched strength and a prolonged life, but I only wished to die as a pure human; I declined all bioengineering modifications..."

"Until His arrival..."

"He brought the dawn of a comprehensive victory in the war, but also plunged the world into eternal darkness..."

"The officers said we needed a hero who could fight Him for at least a few hundred years. I didn't think I was a hero, but I volunteered."

"I defeated all my rivals, endured all sorts of unspeakable mental torture, and sustained a series of biochemical modifications that permanently altered my body..."

"The modification was very successful, and they all said I was the strongest warrior in human history..."

"And then, I came to this base and began my brief... yet prolonged life."

"He would often make me dream... making me unable to distinguish self from object, reality from illusion in one dream after another..."

"I always dreamt of that girl in my dreams, dreamt that we had a daughter, dreamt of waking up together in the warm afternoon sun in the midst of flowers..."

"But I know... I'm just waiting for the day my mission comes in an endless cycle of dreams!"

"You all know what happened after that..."

"This is my brief yet prolonged life..."

"My name is Doyle Kevin..."

"I will die a human, and I will proudly proclaim to the world that I have never failed all the responsibilities I've shouldered..."

"Hey~ future inheritors."

"I'm happy to see you, happy that this world still has a future..."

"I wish that you in the new era can truly spend an entire afternoon dreaming beneath the blooming roses and lilacs..."

"Good night... new era."

"The lights are out, and I need... to rest."

Chapter 175 relic rights highest affiliation

"Now... can you tell me exactly what happened?"

Likok blinked, coming back to reality from his distant reverie.

The ancient warrior who had perished together with the electronic demon indicated that they knew what happened afterward. But this knowing clearly referred only to Bai E.

Bai E smiled and softly recounted everything he knew—

"... This was a trap set for 439 years. Our ancestors used their wisdom and determination to place the electronic demon in an unbreakable cage..."

"..."

A long silence.

Likok had never imagined that all the records he saw about the electronic demon and this base were actually an enormous puzzle set by the ancestors to deceive the electronic demon.

What was strange was...

"Why has such a plan become unknown to everyone today?"

Confronted with Bai E's question, Minister Likok shook his head, "Since it was a plan that could not be recorded, it naturally could be lost. Two hundred years ago, the last emperor of the empire passed away, and since then, the reigning kings have been unable to control the world. It is normal for many things to be lost in chaos. Our Blackwater City can still maintain the form of a whole city.

Many places don't even have a proper community, and there are refugees everywhere ..."

"..." Bai E nodded, feeling his understanding of the world had grown a bit more.

"Alright..." Likok caressed the silver-white central control console in front of him tenderly, as if it was his lover.

"Restarting the base is just the first step; we have a long road ahead of us."

After returning, he still needed to build a signal tower and then restart the entire technological manufacturing chain of smart weapons. It might take years before they could even begin to see the most basic results.

For an ordinary life in this era, a few years might already be a golden age, but for the entire course of human history ... just a few years is but a flick of a finger.

Likok's gaze then shifted to some of the corridor entrances. After power was restored, the metal doors automatically lowered and, without sufficient authority or a specific key to physically open them, passage was utterly impossible.

Not only those that could be seen at the moment but also many outside passages, including the outermost doors, were the same.

Unless there was a planned attack by a large-scale organized combat force, merely some wandering individual threats or the natural environment definitely wouldn't affect the safety of the personnel stationed inside the building.

As long as there was enough food, the personnel stationed inside the structure could live quite comfortably.

"Commander Gregory." The electronic demon had dissipated, and the team's internal communication had long been restored. Likok pressed the microphone near his mouth and called softly, "Could you come up here, please?"

Meeting Gregory's inquiring gaze as he jogged up, Likok explained softly, "The internal facilities of the base have indeed restarted, but we do not have the time to station troops here."

Restarting the server mainframe was just the first step. There were also many corresponding tasks in the city that required him to go back and oversee.

"So I hope you can arrange for some warriors to stay and handle guard duties and maintenance work after the base restarts."

"Of course, no problem!" Gregory agreed at once, "What kind of warriors do you need?"

"That's up to you. I only need them to follow the orders of my assistant Miss Aryan regarding the handling of the base's related devices. As for defense work, they can negotiate amongst themselves; what abilities are needed is up to you to decide."

Miss Aryan's mission was not just to be the little helper on the way and to assist with repairing hardware. As Likok's most outstanding student, she bore the most important mission from the very beginning of their journey.

"Alright, I'll make the arrangements."

Turning away, Gregory opened the microphone on his own accord, "Blood God, tally the team's casualties... Oh yeah, aren't there still two warriors stationed outside? Have them come in; we'll rest here for the night and head back to camp early tomorrow morning!"

"Yes, sir!"

...

The fruits, vegetables, and pork raised by the bio-engineered soldiers to sustain life became the feast for the warriors tonight.

Bai E, who had always eaten tastelessly, almost swallowed his tongue when he tasted the desperately desired natural foods. Chronic scarcity of certain resources often leads to greater desires, and the fulfillment is even more delightful...

In the soft white light within the base, Gregory's face glowed with an excited flush, "This operation has yielded results far beyond what we could have imagined. I will accurately record everyone's performance during this battle and report it for military commendation.

Soldiers temporarily staying here need not be restless; once we return, I will immediately report and apply for a regular rotation and more military honor records for you all. You are the city's finest warriors, and I am proud of you!"

His gaze swept over all the soldiers before him, pausing slightly on a particular figure.

During this military operation, this soldier had twice acted independently of orders, which should have merited severe punishment; however, the end result proved to be an indelible contribution to the final victory, with merits outweighing faults...

An artificial humanoid, a new recruit with its own thoughts?

But what did that have to do with him? Now that the mission was perfectly complete, all he needed to do was return and report truthfully. How to deal with it was a matter for the higher-ups to consider, not his responsibility.

Rare indulgence in the evening, the base's topmost dome could be opened, and the photon-sensitive canopy perfectly displayed the glittering starry sky outside... if it existed.

It was hard to imagine how comfortable the lives of the workers stationed at this base must have been after a day's work, in the nights of the past centuries.

Bai E went alone to the heart of the mainframe room, in front of that flowery egg... This was where he first laid eyes on Doyle Kevin.

"He was great..."

As if she had come along with Bai E, Miss Aryan appeared behind him at some unknown moment, whispering gently.

When Bai E turned to look at her, the girl's face revealed a decidedly passionate and proactive smile, "You are too..."

Bai E's performance all this while could only be described as godlike, and the young, naïve girl displayed the passion and bravery hidden deep in her bones.

Tonight was the last encounter.

Afterwards would be estrangement.

Bai E had to return to the barracks, while Aryan was to stay stationed here.

Understanding the fervor in the girl's eyes, Bai E took a small step back, "I did it only for myself."

Even now, his purpose here was the same...

He had come to confirm his ultimate control over this base.

The flowery egg reflected his entire body, somewhat distorted like a hall of mirrors.

But within it, Bai E "saw" that he could grant anyone the authority to enter and exit or manipulate the devices at any time.

[Current highest authority of the relic site: Bai E.]

[Confer secondary ownership to: Aryan.]

Unknown rays scanned the girl's body, and Bai E offered her a gentle smile, "Goodnight, Miss Aryan. We will meet again."

A bare base wasn't much use; he had no intention of halting his steps here.

Without external facilities, the base was just a pure toy.

But once all the external facilities began to be built, the power to control their vital lifelines... would be in his hands.

...

They arrived with twenty-five, but left with thirteen.

Three soldiers had unfortunately perished in battle, and including Firepower Handlers A and B, six others were gravely injured. Even after receiving treatment from Bai E and other soldier-medics, they were unable to quickly regain combat ability.

Taking them along on the journey home would only be a burden, so it was better for them to remain at the base for proper recuperation while shouldering some defensive duties.

Along with Aryan herself and two currently healthy soldiers, twelve people in total stayed behind at the base.

The engines of two off-road vehicles roared to life; thirteen soldiers heading home made ready to depart.

Gregory's impassioned voice rose over the team's comm.

"Let's go! We're heading home!"

Chapter 176 Two abilities...

Aryan stood at the entrance of the base, watching as the two started off-road vehicles slowly moved away, disappearing into the jungle foliage and vines. Only then did the iron gates slowly close, and as the vertical seam shrank, a delicate small face turned around silently.

The base's interior lights were a gentle white, softly flickering.

This steel base, silent for hundreds of years, showed technological glimmers for the first time.

The unattended main control screen flowed with strange characters and then fell completely silent—

"..."

"Is it... dawn yet?"

...

The same route was taken for both departure and return, with Bai E, who had already demonstrated his abilities, taking the lead in Vehicle No. 1.

In the rearview mirror, the silver-grey walls of the base gradually faded from sight.

"Plans always fail..." A phrase by Doyle Kevin suddenly flashed through his mind.

But wasn't our trip quite successful? Bai E pressed his lips together and stepped on the gas pedal.

Upon leaving the Beastified Jungle, they saw quite a few obvious pits all over the distant brown hilly terrain.

The experienced old soldier felt some relief and patted his chest, "Fuck! I didn't think we were so close to those green-skins! Lucky we didn't run into them..."

There were also soldiers who, until now, had not encountered any beastmen. They looked curiously at the distant potholes, one by one... unplanned, some close together, others a dozen meters apart, with a casual scattering.

"Are those the holes dug by those beastmen?"

"Yeah... just randomly?" The experienced old soldier felt somewhat sentimental, "A beastman sprouting from the ground is less demanding than us planting a vegetable..."

"Lucky we didn't run into them..."

"Yeah... lucky we didn't."

Although those green-skins didn't have the same insane aggressiveness as the insects, these more chaotic creatures were sometimes even more troublesome than the insects.

Beings with only "fighting" on their minds, if they're not in a fight, they're on their way to one.

They don't care about the consequences after the fight; either you knock me down, or I knock you down.

Even when facing organized human military groups, they dare to charge in; small-scale human squads are just their entertainment.

Primitive and savage, the vitality of these things, grown from the ground, is even more outrageous than that of insects...

To avoid them as much as possible is humanity's greatest strategic principle towards beastmen. After all, as long as it's not a face-to-face encounter, even their own kind can have a jolly good fight among themselves...

They're like a wave of lunatics who rove around looking for trouble just for fun!

In some ways... they seem quite similar to gamers.

Bai E pursed his lips, suddenly realizing there were quite a few similarities between the two.

Hope there won't be large-scale gamers joining the green-skin ranks for fun in the future?

With this thought flickering through his mind, Bai E didn't dwell on it but stepped on the gas to speed up, leaving the jungle far behind.

One must always look ahead...

The veil of the world was gradually lifting before his eyes, there were players, various natural disasters, and even things like Spiritual Energy.

Reality and illusion, individual and society... the opposing impacts and the mysteries of the world all came in quick succession. Humans of the Golden Age, hundreds of years ago, faced the onslaught of bugs and electronic demons and inevitably declined to what they are today.

As an inconspicuous part of the Dark Age, the only thing Bai E could do was to strengthen his personal abilities as much as possible—

Power and influence were both pursuits he needed to chase.

Sitting on the shaky seat of the off-road vehicle, Bai E found himself more able to calm down and clarify his greatest harvest from this trip—

Even the so-called "ancient strongest warrior," rated at a mere 2500 combat experience on the drop rate panel, was perhaps because he had no weapons, or perhaps because he was outnumbered, but this in itself could be considered a comprehensive assessment of combat power.

Just by experience alone, in the system's eyes, the combat power rating of the ancient strongest warrior was not even as high as a half-weak mantis bug that led some lower bugs to attack a military camp in the recruit trial.

But the fact is that even without the Digital Domain, the ancient warrior controlled by the electronic demon could probably defeat the Blood God, who was the peak existence among ordinary soldiers, in a 1V1 unarmed close combat, merely through his bodily instincts.

The drop rate panel didn't show all of his abilities, just as the Ability Extraction Card and the archery skills Yue Ying taught him hadn't been displayed on her initial drop rate panel.

The "ancient strongest warrior's" drop rate panel was certainly not the full extent of his strength, but even so, the two limited abilities he managed to drop fortunately—Specialization: Weapon Master and Trait: Death Resistance—were unimaginably powerful.

[Specialization—Weapon Master: The ancient warrior's combat experience makes you familiar with all understandable weapon types. Any "Weapon Class" specialization ability you possess is displayed with a +1 level in proficiency when actually used (actual display level cannot exceed level 10).

(Current applicable specializations: Agile Weapon Specialization, Heavy Weapon Specialization, Ranged Weapon Specialization, Light Firearms Specialization.)]

[Trait—Death Resistance: Biochemically modified, your body is imbued with an inexhaustible bloodline and substances that can deceive death. When you sustain fatal injury, your body can maintain the last spark of life until help arrives.

When you take damage exceeding your health limit, you can maintain 1 point of health and ensure certain mobility until "safe from peril and recovery begins"; or "the intact part of the body suffers a crushing blow"; or "a certain period of time (dependent on the survival status of the main body)".]

When Bai E killed the opponent and obtained the dropped items, he could feel his body starting to change imperceptibly, and it was not until the 24 hours of transformation had passed that he could truly perceive the definite changes within his body.

His surging blood felt as though it had taken on an unimaginably intense heat, and somewhere inside him an organ so minute it was as if it had grown out of nowhere, secreting hormones normally imperceptible. Bai E figured these were probably the so-called "death-defying substances" that would only come into play when sustaining fatal injuries...

Two abilities, one for combat, the other for survival.

Death Resistance let that ancient strongest warrior hold onto a breath of life even after being riddled with bullets, dragging his body outward with the remnants of his right hand. With this ability, Bai E felt he could avoid death quite certainly as long as he wasn't too reckless.

An indescribable sense of security wrapped around Bai E's heart; for the first time, he felt he could live safely in this world, and this was his greatest capital.

Not to mention he also had the highest authority of the global network base...

So, exploring "ruins" had so many advantages; no wonder it was put out as one of the three major development routes in the game content by the official website back then.

And since exploring "ruins" brought enough surprises to him, what about the other two?

One-third of the main mission was completed, but the Gene Optimization Solution and the reputation level of the factions were not yet done.

Sniper God Carlos probably didn't have much need to overpromise himself; his words were likely credible, so judging by Bai E's performance in this mission, his military achievements should be more than enough when he returned.

He should be able to formally proceed with the request for Gene Optimization Solution, and without any surprises, one shot of Gene Optimization Solution was guaranteed.

The only thing still uncertain was the faction reputation level.

Was it necessary for him as the leader to personally make a name for himself?

Players, what are you doing? Step it up!

[Tip: Your faction (Li Ming) has just eradicated a small Black Street force, reputation slightly increased.]

"..."

Chapter 177 A thorn in one's side

[Due to your outstanding performance and the annihilation of a small Black Street faction, the reputation of your organization has slightly increased. Please keep up the good work.]

"emmmm... um?" Dai Lian, who was digging a hole, received the prompt and looked around in confusion. He then kicked the big gorilla who was also digging, "When did you go off to kill people?"

Kuang Xin had also just received the system prompt and his eyes widened in bewilderment, "How the hell would I know?"

Dai Lian stroked his chin, lost in thought, "Could it have been Yanzi?"

Tut tut... Taking out an entire small faction by herself, is Yanzi really that fierce?

Or was the sword technique taught to her by that person from the Arbitration Place really that awesome?

"Let's wait for her to come back and ask..."

"Creak~" The cover "manhole" above suddenly opened, revealing Gong Yan's face—not stunning, but soft and pleasant—against the backdrop of sunlight.

"Yanzi!"

"Where were you just now? How did we end up wiping out a faction?"

Gong Yan, appearing at the mouth of the hole, was equally surprised, "I was about to ask if you guys did anything earlier?"

This morning, she had gone to collect several thousand kilograms of cement offered by the enemy party and left in a hidden corner of the sewer. After that, those guys got greedy and wanted more... such as military supplies by the thousand. Unable to produce more and having made up an excuse to escape, Gong Yan had already harbored thoughts of killing them.

But she had only just begun to entertain the thought, not even having the chance to plan a complete scheme, when these people disappeared?

If she hadn't been the one to act, then it had to be Kuang Xin or Dai Lian.

They might have been protecting her from the shadows, and upon sensing something amiss, dealt a swift and lethal blow to clean out the scoundrels.

But now...

"It wasn't you guys?"

"We thought you did it..."

The three fell silent for a moment...

After eliminating all impossible answers, the remaining, no matter how outrageous, must be the correct one—

"It must have been Wen Jie!" Kuang Xin suddenly realized.

"Stop talking nonsense! What could Wen Jie kill with? He can't even handle a knife properly," Dai Lian said, dampening spirits and then cupping his chin, somewhat lost in thought, "Could it be the boss?"

"Didn't the boss go out on a mission? To Black Street?"

"I don't think it's likely either..."

"Then who the hell did it?"

It definitely had to do with our organization, otherwise how could the credit be attributed to them?

"Or could it be... other members of the organization?"

The other members of the Li Ming organization had always been a topic only within the boss's talks. Aside from the four of them, players, the only other member they had met was a rat person, and ironically, he joined the organization after them.

So, was it members from other parts of the organization exerting force, wiping out some unknown small faction, and then sharing the glory with everyone?

"That does seem a bit possible..."

Gong Yan clenched her small fists, "Does it mean those thugs are still not dead?"

It couldn't possibly be that other people from the organization, knowing her identity, had stepped in to eradicate those thugs for her? She hadn't even shared her murderous intent with Dai Lian or Kuang Xin yet... coincidence couldn't be this coincidental.

If they weren't dead, those thugs would become a major concern.

This morning, when she couldn't produce the goods, she could sense those people's sinister intentions, perhaps probing casually or following them during the cement transfer to launch a surprise attack... The consequences were unimaginable.

No, that won't do!

She had to find a way to get rid of them!

Without delay, Gong Yan expressed her concerns.

"...I feel like they've grown suspicious and are planning to tail us."

It was easier to dodge and hide on my own, but with the cement and all that stuff just lying there, we inevitably had to move it, and it wasn't so easy to conceal our tracks while moving cement with Kuang Xin and Dai Lian.

Before, they were afraid of my "background" and didn't dare to go too far—a slight nudge and they had to back off.

But if lies couldn't hold them off any longer, being tracked here could lead to the exposure of the boss's secret base...

Unless we give up the cement and never go to Black Street again...

Move and start over elsewhere? Normally, as players, moving around isn't an issue. If one place gets too risky, shifting to another makes sense. Haven't I been driven all over the place in games because big guilds monopolized the area?

But the boss is here!

If we run, does that mean we're no use to the boss anymore?

Besides, they're just a small gang of a dozen or so hooligans—not even sure if they qualify as a gang. Scared of them, my ass!

Screw it!

"Let's go! We're going to dig some traps to lure them in, then take them down in one fell swoop!"

The way you kill wolves, that's how you kill people!

Just some low-level NPCs, and Dai Lian certainly doesn't take them seriously.

"We should also chop down some trees on the way. We've used up the wood we chopped earlier, and it's not enough." Kuang Xin added from the side.

"There's no mission though..."

"Isn't the construction mission a mission?" Kuang Xin gave him a glance, "Can we rely only on the boss's missions to keep up? We ought to handle things ourselves."

"..." Dai Lian mulled it over for a bit but didn't see one option as better than the other.

Relying on scarce resources to take on more missions could certainly fleece the boss a bit more, but the construction progress would undoubtedly fall behind. After all, the boss himself said the number of missions he could issue each day was limited. It's not so black and white--both choices have their pros and cons.

But you, kid, being so proactive about considering the NPCs is a dangerous train of thought...

Traitorous scum!

"TMD! Let's move!"

Why did I get stuck with you two as teammates!

Dai Lian grabbed the spade and climbed up the ladder with resolve, "Let's go, go, go, we've still got some daylight left. We've got to set up those traps quickly, and lure them in tonight when we pick up the cement, and that's when we'll deal with them!"

Unlike that honest-to-God gorilla Kuang Xin, he never held grudges overnight—he settled scores on the spot!

"Ready! Let's set off!"

Gong Yan smiled at the Ratman, who was burying himself in work in the corner, and called out, "No need to work so hard when we're not here. Hide and take a break..."

She was worried about the noise the Ratman might make, given that the person's identity was sensitive. She had heard that those two from Arbitration Place had been investigating his whereabouts recently.

"Let's go! Yanzi!"

"I'm coming!"

...

"Dig a hole, cover with earth, count one, two, three, four, five..."

"Here a pit, there a snare... Don't forget later, big gorilla..."

...

Under the gradually darkening sky, a pair of bright eyes in the shadows watched the three bustling figures, "They seem pretty happy, don't they?"

"They probably don't know yet that the little gang wants to make a move on them," said the beefy man, his tone laced with impatience. How did investigating one case lead to more and more crap piling up?

"Franca, this has nothing to do with these people. I know you're curious about the organization behind them, but it's obviously unrelated to our case. Put away your curiosity, we have serious work to get to. Just yesterday, the higher-ups were asking if we wanted to go to the military camp to teach those privates how to handle Spiritual Energy under pressure. No one at the office wants to go.

If you really want to have some fun, you can go there, but only after we resolve what we're working on!"

"Ah, I get it, I get it..." Franca waved her hand nonchalantly, dismissing the beefy man's concerns as if they were nothing but wind, "Don't worry, with me on the case, there'll be no problem! We have to be thorough, right? Those thugs said the bullets came from these guys, so how could we not come and check it out?"

"Isn't that obviously a frame-up?" The beefy man rolled his eyes, thoroughly speechless.

Chapter 178 Soul Crucible

"Whether it's framing someone or not, checking into it is never a problem."

Franca still remembered the vengeful looks of the gangsters as they faced death when their military camp's lost supplies were tracked down—

"It was them! They were the ones who gave us the stuff to sell!"

"So you were just saying you plan to retaliate by stalking them?" The muscular man narrowed his eyes, seeing right through the little crooks' schemes, "And you still have the guts to mess with the military's spokesperson?"

If this isn't framing, then what is? When did these small-time thugs from Black Street get so bold?

"...emmmm" Bearded Jonathan was stunned, "Fake! They're all fake! They're not spokespersons for the military!"

See! Just as I thought! Lies!

Contradicting statements, falling apart without being attacked.

The muscular man sneered contemptuously, "If their identities are fake, then why did you say it was them who gave you the bullets to sell?"

"It's true! It was really them who told us to sell the bullets!" Jonathan blurted out in panic, his words starting to slur.

"Pfft!" The cold light flashed, and a head fell to the ground, "Babbling nonsense!"

A chilling glint flickered in the muscular man's eyes as he turned to the others, "You, tell me, who provided you the goods?"

To these rotten elements from the outside world, the muscular man had not a trace of mercy; these scum could die by the hundreds, and no one would care one bit.

Hearing their self-contradictory accusations and attempts to frame others even at the brink of death, he completely ran out of patience.

Such people deserved to be killed!

Anyway, it wasn't just him aligned with both Black Street and the military camp; even if one channel was cut, another could be started anew.

Kill!

His underlings fell silent, exchanging glances involuntarily, their wide eyes filled with confusion—how could they answer this?

To tell the truth means death; were they expected to fabricate a story on the spot?

Seeing the conniving looks flickering in the eyes of his subordinates, the muscular man's impatience grew.

Scum!

Having been out for a while, there hadn't been much of the special oil for attacking demons left on him, so he could use them to replenish his supply!

The muscular man stretched out his hand, and ripples immediately appeared in the space before his palm. An apparatus forged entirely of black steel slowly emerged from the turbulent space.

Once at least half of it had materialized, the muscular man violently pulled it out—

A bronze-like furnace, square in shape.

The Soul Furnace, a special creation that burns the souls of sinners to obtain precious oils used to combat demons.

The only thing that can truly harm those high-dimension demons that mortals can hardly comprehend are the substances obtained by sacrificing souls.

Even a mortal without the talent for Spiritual Energy, in facing death's agony, emits a soul scream filled with pain, possessing sufficient Spiritual Energy potency.

If they from the Heretical Arbitration House wanted to combat demons, they often had to be more demonic than the demons, more spiritual than Spiritual Energy!

Inside the Arbitration Place, a large, never-ceasing furnace constantly burned countless sinners' souls to provide the institution's enforcers with the oils they needed for daily combat against demons. Similarly, enforcers who were out on long-term missions and had a certain level of authority were also allowed to carry a smaller furnace for convenient local sourcing.

The muscular man, who had benefited from being under the young lady's care, was using this contraption for the first time; not having had a chance before, he somewhat regretted it.

Now, it was an excellent opportunity to use it.

"Ah~ah!"

"Ahh ahh"

Thugs thrown next to the furnace, entering the flames that seared their souls, let out agonized screams that pierced the depths of their beings. The fire did not burn their flesh, yet the torment of the heat was far more unbearable than any corporal punishment.

Franca, somewhat unable to bear watching the scene, moved away to use her Spiritual Energy to block her ears.

Some who worship demons may still be kind-hearted, while others, even though human, can be revolting.

Knowing some of their backgrounds, Franca also deeply loathed these people, but she could hardly bear to watch this torture based on the soul, feeling helpless.

This was both a punishment for the sinners and an arsenal that allowed humans to possess the power to combat the demons.

In the presence of real demons descending from high-dimension spaces, if it weren't for this special material supplied by souls, even the enforcers from the Arbitration House would struggle to gain an advantage.

Fortunately, the souls of ordinary thugs were impoverished and their will weak; they could not endure the burning of the soul flames for too long.

The soul was burned to ashes, and the body that lost its soul's dominion slumped to the ground.

The burly man picked up the crucible from the ground, using a special glass bottle to carefully catch a pool of slightly yellow and somewhat viscous liquid that flowed out from it.

"Just this little bit." Disappointment was clearly written all over his face.

"I'll keep it safe," Franca snatched it over in a flash.

"..." The burly man moved his lips, wanting to refuse, but he couldn't.

...

Since those hoodlums mentioned these guys before dying, coming over to take a look didn't seem to be a problem.

Even if they weren't suspects, they still needed to put a "good person" stamp on them.

Franca watched the three somewhat strange fellas with great interest, eager to see what exactly they intended to do.

...

"Make a few more, it's always better to be over-prepared."

"Indeed... it's better to be safe than sorry."

Kuang Xin and Dai Lian, in high spirits, prepared traps, planning to give those NPCs daring to covet Yanzi a little shock from the players.

The sky gradually darkened, and Gong Yan, with her arms drawn in, hands covering her arms, asked, "Is it getting a bit cold for anyone else?"

A sense of danger prickled their skin like needles, and Kuang Xin instinctively looked in a certain direction—

Under the dimming sky, green ghostly lights floated through the forest like drifting fireflies...

"Fuck! They're here!"

Old foes! The wolves are upon us!

"Stop digging, damn it, get ready to fight!"

Times had changed; experienced in facing this old foe, their hands still stained with the blood of wolves that hadn't fully dried, these beasts now reappeared before them.

Aside from the timing of their appearance not being quite right, they weren't particularly afraid.

"Haven't killed you guys in so long you couldn't wait to come and die, huh!" Kuang Xin dual-wielded battle axes, valiantly like an ancient War God.

"Lead them into the traps! Lead them into the traps!" Dai Lian hopped anxiously behind him, the bigger the gorilla's muscles grew, the lower his IQ seemed to become.

Two fists are hard to beat four hands, a good man can't fight off a pack of wolves, you're not invincible yet!

Give him a few more months, and he'd probably dare to charge at those Bug Race, orcs, demons, and other disaster creatures alone!

...

Watching the chaotic scene, Franca, hidden in the shadows, pursed her lips lightly.

It seemed these people had experience dealing with wolf packs; there shouldn't be any danger.

And these traps, were they set up for these wild wolves?

When power was insufficient, indeed, external aids were needed.

But even when lacking strength, they still undertook this "arduous" task... just because it was beneficial to the people?

During her time wandering Black Street, she had heard that someone had been quietly clearing out many wolves from Black Forest, significantly reducing the number of "missing" cases among the nearby commoners.

This wasn't a difficult task, yet few were willing to do it.

Without an employer to pay a bounty, such tasks are often left undone.

At this moment, it seemed...

"Is this also their doing?"

Was it their own initiative or an order from their mysterious boss they mentioned?

Franca blinked, increasingly interested in the leader behind this organization.

The fight went on for quite some time...

Watching the three who were still somewhat experienced, ending the battle and gasping for air, Franca stepped forward with her hands behind her back, "Let's go, step out and have a chat with them..."

## Chapter 179 Mainline Quest - Radiant Faith

"Shh-shh," the intentional rustling caught the attention of Kuang Xin and his two companions.

It was evening by then, the sky not completely dark but certainly dim.

Realizing someone unexpected was approaching, they instinctively exchanged glances and tightly clenched their handguns in the shadows.

It wasn't until the noble lady's intricate attire, starkly different from that of the Black Street commoners, became visible that Gong Yan breathed a sigh of relief.

"It's the Arbitration Place..."

How long had the other party been watching them?

Gong Yan's mind entertained several thoughts. Last time in the sewer, it was because she needed to observe the rats that her talent inadvertently activated, allowing her to detect the covert spying of these two individuals.

But now, her focus was entirely on traps, combat, and thinking about how to make their act more convincing in order to lure Jonathan and his men into a trap and annihilate them all. She had no inclination to activate her special talent and was completely unaware of the two people spying on them.

Thankfully, she hadn't said anything she shouldn't have...

With light footsteps, Franca gently stepped over the bodies of several wild wolves, her eyes like those of a cat, beautiful and slightly glowing in the night, "Did you kill these wild wolves?"

"Yes..." Dai Lian showed an appropriate amount of confusion, "Could it be that these wild wolves are also the work of the heresy?"

"Not quite..." Franca shook her head slightly, "We just suspect you have ties with the heretics."

"..."

"???"

Startled, the burly man stepped back, his eyes filled with suspicion and uncertainty as he looked at the lady beside him, wondering why she was being so frank.

You suspect us, fine, but why say it outright?

This isn't how you conduct an investigation... Wouldn't revealing your suspicions cause them to hide even deeper?

Dammit!

The smile at the corner of Dai Lian's mouth was somewhat stiff as he couldn't tell if this NPC was bluffing or had evidence. He had no choice but to remain calm and ask in return, "What heresy are we supposed to be involved with?"

"Hmm... it might be the one behind those sewer rats, or possibly other heresies." Franca pondered, touching her chin, "I'm not sure yet, still investigating..."

As she spoke, Franca kicked a wild wolf corpse at her feet, "You seemed quite skilled in combat just now. Were the wild wolves we heard about earlier killed by you as well?"

"Yes..." Dai Lian nodded cautiously, wary of any traps in her words.

With a slight lift of her face, the cold and mysterious moonlight cast a chilly glow on Franca's face, "Is all this under the orders of the 'superior' you mentioned? Including the last time when we saw you cleaning up those plague rats in the sewer?"

"Yes."

"And the purpose?"

"The superior said these things were disturbing everyone's normal life..."

Franca squinted her eyes, her gaze sweeping one by one over the faces of the three members of the strange organization resting after the battle, the silence oppressively heavy for a moment.

Suddenly, she broke into a smile and cheerfully pulled out a glass bottle from her bosom, containing a bit of amber, slightly viscous liquid, "Since you are also fighting for the safety and well-being of everyone, I think you definitely need this."

"Franca!" the burly man exclaimed emotionally, the little bit of substance he had managed to refine after a hard-won battle against the bad guys—she was actually going to give it all away?

"What is this?" Glancing at the emotionally charged burly man, Dai Lian still stared at Franca, cautiously asking.

"This is what we use to fight demons, it's the only thing that can cause real harm to those terrible demons. You can apply this essential oil to your weapons or arrowheads, or you can use it to soak the bullets you use, either way, it will be effective. I think if you continue down this path, you will eventually encounter those terrible demons.

With this in hand, at least you will have the confidence to fight back in moments of despair."

Franca's eyes twinkled with a dim light, appearing particularly eerie in the night, "Do you need it?"

Of course, they needed it!

Dai Lian still didn't move and became even more vigilant, "There is no such thing as a free lunch in the world, what do you want?"

"Requirements?" Franca's lips curled slightly, "Of course, there are requirements..."

Her gaze slowly swept over the three peculiar individuals before her, Franca's voice low and full of force, "I require that you be true to your word... What you do today, you must continue to do in the future; what you stand by in your speech, you must also continue to carry out; what you believe in your hearts, you must still hold firm after weathering the trials of the world.

I don't know where your 'master' is or what he intends to do. But since he makes such demands of you, he must also be a person of outstanding talent and heroism. If I have the chance, I naturally want to meet him, to share a drink at our leisure."

From one glance, one can see all—a leader with enough charisma to gather and direct his followers to do such things would also surely be a luminary of great stature.

How regrettable it would be if such an organization, comprised of these naive idealists, were to eventually be buried and forgotten in this dark world?

"So I want you to always keep up with his pace. If he is wise, you must wholeheartedly assist him; if he makes a misstep, you must also earnestly remonstrate with him; and if he abandons his initial intentions... then you must strike him down!"

[Trigger main quest—Luminous Belief.]

[Luminous Belief: The words of the temporary executor of the Heretical Arbitration House stir the convictions deep within your heart. Do you decide to fortify your path as she says, or will you make your own judgment? Quest requirement: Fortify the faction (Dawn) stance 0/∞. Quest completion reward: 33ml of Exorcism Essential Oil, other rewards unknown. (Rewards are distributed periodically.)] X3

...

"How naive!"

"I'm willing!"

"Do you think your few words would make them remember for a lifetime? People change. Besides, they are just a few insignificant creatures. If they truly maintain their beliefs unchanged, they would most likely end up dying in some unknown sewer... You're harming them."

Franca, having left that group far behind, turned to look at the burly man, raising her slender, fair finger, "First: humanity is composed of countless such small creatures. Second: no one cannot die, no one will not die. Regardless of whether they hold fast to their beliefs or wander in suffering, all their experiences will become humanity's precious wealth..."

All the complex experiences will transform into the depth of the soul, the righteous upholding their convictions and drawing swords for humanity, the wicked becoming kindling and turning into bullets fired at demons.

Sacrifice is the eternal truth of humanity.

Those who wield the sword today may well turn into kindling tomorrow.

The military's greatest enemy is the Bug Race, their greatest enemy is the demons.

Planting a seed today is merely the prerequisite for reaping more in the future.

The more you plant, the more you harvest...

Chapter 180 new lines of power development

Clutching the newly acquired glass bottle, Dai Lian saw two faces through the twisted glass—Gong Yan and Kuang Xin.

The three of them stared at the bottle Dai Lian was holding mid-air, their gaze filled with collective intelligence, "What do you think she means by this?"

"I just can't figure her out anymore..." Dai Lian shook his head, equally puzzled; that Franca from the Arbitration Place was too whimsical in her actions, and he was completely unable to see through her intentions.

"Could it be that our boss planted a mole inside the Arbitration Place?"

Logically, by taking in the rat people, they should have become mortal enemies with the Arbitration Place, but it seemed...

Even if the other party didn't know this for sure and was merely suspecting, their current actions were still quite bizarre.

"Could it be that she wants us to use this thing to off the rat people?" Dai Lian pondered, stroking his chin.

Kuang Xin, carrying his axe, "If you dare off him, I'll off you."

Gong Yan tilted her head, "Isn't the mission just to have us adhere to our faction and that's it?"

"But she also said we need to prevent the boss from going astray if possible, right? NPC words surely can't all be without a purpose."

Kuang Xin looked down on Dai contemptuously, "What the boss does is none of your business to nitpick, is it? That's for the future... You don't know sh\*t now, so how could it be your turn?"

"That's easy for you to say... Wait a minute, who doesn't know sh\*t?!"

"I'm talking about you! Wanna fight about it?"

"Eh? You think you've grown wings, do you?"

Watching the two squabbling again, Gong Yan pursed her lips and smiled before trying to understand the line of thought of that Arbitration Place young lady again.

But she couldn't make heads or tails of it...

However, they did freeload a mission reward and didn't need to do anything extra... The mission was quite good; they were sure not to lose out by continuing with it.

"No wait..." Dai Lian suddenly touched the back of his head, "What were we planning to do when we set the traps here originally?"

Looking at the mess all around, with the pungent smell of blood continually drilling into his nostrils... Would Jonathan and the others be able to barge in here on their own?

"Clean it up?"

"Or dig again..."

"Digging again would be too tiring, let's just tidy up and see if those big idiots are vigilant... After all, if we're going to dig, you dig; I'm not doing it anymore." Dai Lian decided to make a little fuss.

When facing the same mental adversary, he was only willing to make an effort once.

To dig traps everywhere for a bunch of lousy NPC riffraff was just too humiliating.

If the other side figured it out, they could just confront them directly!

Came prepared and still afraid they couldn't beat a bunch of stinking gangsters?

"Alright! Let's tidy it up! Then we'll go find them!"

They neatly cleared away the bodies, and the thick jungle behind was a natural cover—if one didn't walk inside, they would surely not discover anything. As for the stench of blood in the air... the night wind would blow with enough time for them to carry cement back and forth, cleaning it away.

And so...

Carried one load... no one?

Carried two loads... no one?

Carried... To hell with carrying!

Dai Lian suddenly threw down the cement he was carrying; manual labor was definitely not his forte, and after two trips he almost collapsed from exhaustion.

"Where the hell are they!"

The purpose of carrying the cement was to lure that gang of punks into following them to the Black Forest and then take them out. Now, with no one following, there was no point in carrying any more.

To avoid exposing the boss's secret base, the location where they set traps was in a completely different direction from the real secret base. The cement carried back to the Black Forest would eventually have to be transported to the secret base by themselves—the thought alone was torturous.

[Could it be that Yanzi got it wrong?]

Maybe that group of gangsters never planned anything?

"No way, we should take a stroll on Black Street and see if they really suspect us." Dai Lian made a decision.

With no one tracking them so far, Gong Yan also found it strange, "Alright, I'll check it out."

"Together, I'm worried about your safety if you go alone."

Dai Lian had already mentally prepared to start the fight and wasn't going to be cautious anymore.

He was no longer just a fill-in; did he still need to consider profits and success rates as his primary concern? Of course, he would do whatever pleased him the most!

To hell with it!

...

"Gulp~"

The resident who was questioned swallowed nervously, fearfully looking at the stunning woman before him.

Too brutal, too brutal...

Jonathan's gang just spoke at noon about planning to hit you, and by afternoon a bunch of their corpses were already discovered. Who else could it be, if not you?

Are you showing off that it was you by asking around here?

I can't afford to provoke this...

"Sister, I admit I've been a bit loud when speaking to you before. Can you please be merciful and let me off like a fart?"

"???" Gong Yan was slightly taken aback, but she maintained her stern face and didn't show much else, merely waving her hand and saying, "Get lost."

She randomly grabbed another lucky spectator to ask about Jonathan's whereabouts, and the person regarded her as if she were a ferocious evil spirit, "I was wrong, sister! I admit I sneakily glanced at you before! But wasn't it because you were too attractive..."

"Get lost!"

The three players looked at each other, suddenly realizing the situation might be different from what they had thought.

"Jonathan and his gang... did we kill them?"

At least that's what the residents here seemed to think.

So the previous prompt...

Jeez! They've been heroically combating a gang of small-time thugs that are already dead?

"We're really awesome," Kuang Xin declared with pride.

"Sister! Sister, you're here!" A frail figure suddenly ran up to Gong Yan, who was standing in the dimly lit corner of the street, "Sister, I heard that Jonathan's gang foolishly crossed you. Our boss sent us to look for you, to warn you... Thankfully, those guys didn't cause you too much trouble."

"" Gong Yan turned her head to glance at Dai Lian and Kuang Xin, feeling the situation growing more fantastical.

What the hell? Have I become some kind of celebrity in Black Street?

The boy didn't dare to meet Gong Yan's eyes, having already heard that those who did had their eyeballs crushed like firecrackers. He spoke timidly with eyes downcast, "Our boss mentioned there's some business he'd like to discuss with you. When might you have some time?"

"Business?" Gong Yan's eyes lit up for a moment, then she nodded in agreement, "No problem."

When the small fry disappears, the big fish appear.

Games, leveling up... I'm well acquainted with it.

Eliminating a small gang barely boosted the organization's reputation. Would taking down a bigger one directly upgrade our reputation level?

Although I don't yet know what use there is in leveling up the organization's reputation, having such resources is always better than not.

Moreover, encountering more influential powers would no doubt unveil more of the game world's backstory. What's the point of playing if you don't unlock more game content?

"Lead the way!"

...

The soundproofing was terrible; sitting in a somewhat noisy basement, Gong Yan listened to the man with a mechanical arm fitted to his forearm explain his plan.

So to summarize...

"You want me to take my people to meet with that orc gang and get... get the stuff back?"

"Yeah..." Wallis looked at the beautiful yet deadly lady before him with his bulging mechanical electronic eye, "Whether by trade or by force... only warriors like you and your subordinates have what it takes to deal with that orc gang."

The news of the military camp's failed expedition against the Bug Race, he had heard from Jonathan's gang, who in turn had heard it from this woman.

In that battle, the military lost a lot of valuable goods on the battlefield, among them was the extremely rare Octiron.

The military was also trying to recover it, but the difficulty of retrieving items dropped in the Bug Race's lair was substantial. Sneaky, small-scale operations weren't the military's style, and a large-scale operation might disturb all the bugs like last time.

Fortunately, since it was a metallic creation and the Bug Race only had interest in biomass, they didn't care about those items, making recovery possible.

Goods the military was seeking to recover would be unimaginably valuable to people like them. Dropped outside, everyone wanted a piece of it.

Before the military could come up with a plan, a wandering gang of thrill-seeking green-skins had already taken practical action.

Stealing from inside the military camp is unrealistic.

Stealing from Bug Race territory is too dangerous.

But trading with, or robbing from, those wandering orcs seems quite feasible.

There wasn't much, but because there wasn't much, they were qualified to covet it.

"As long as you can help us get the stuff back, I will pay you a substantial reward," Wallis promised.

risking their lives. An enigmatic face with no known background like Gong Yan and her gang was seen as just the right type for the job.

Gong Yan appeared thoughtful, but she had already made up her mind internally.

"I need to go back and discuss this properly with my companions before I can give you an answer."

"No problem! I await your news..."