

## Wow 181

### Chapter 181 Optimization fluid application

After their departure, the three players privately discussed their options.

"Agree to it?"

"Definitely can't agree for now," Dai Lian shook his head.

With their current strength, trying to contact that so-called wandering orc group would only bring them trouble.

But keeping the connection for potential future cooperation wasn't out of the question; after all, relying solely on Li Ming like today...

They hadn't done any missions all day!

And since it was already getting dark, they probably wouldn't be able to do anything today either.

Two whole days! Do you know how they got through these days?

Following the superior, their power had indeed improved much faster than other players, but they were still not strong enough to tackle more difficult events.

Ultimately, everything depended on the superior!

Superior, please come back soon!

...

[Why haven't I received any feedback from the players for such a long time?]

Driving past Blood Raven Forest, Bai E saw the ground covered with birds' bones, yet his mind was preoccupied with something else entirely.

Without my supervision, have they learned to slack off?

Well... no, it seems they no longer have missions.

Having a "+1 in Management" meant he could only assign one extra day's worth of missions, and four days had passed since leaving the players, resulting in two wasted days!

Grasping this, Bai E became anxious to return.

Unlike the outbound trip, the return trip involved driving through the day and arriving near Blood Raven Forest just as evening approached.

This place wasn't too far from the Bug Race's nest, and the blood ravens could launch an attack at any moment.

As dusk fell, it was unclear how many of the blood ravens that attacked them last time had been lost, but they would certainly not lack the courage to attack again.

And the closer one was to the military camp, the safer it was, even at night.

For the last leg of the journey, it was better to hasten back to camp rather than spend the night exposed in the wild.

Bai E floored the accelerator, and nobody was getting off!

The whole journey was fortunately smooth, and they successfully reached the military camp after midnight.

"All right, everyone go and rest, we'll take tomorrow off. I will go report the mission's outcomes to the officers. Minister Likok, thank you for your effort," Gregory quickly arranged for everyone before leaving with the Spiritual Energy practitioner who still hadn't woken up.

No matter how outstanding everyone's contributions were in this battle, they were still just soldiers in the military camp, and as soldiers, they should adhere to the soldiers' regular routine.

"Yes, officer!" The returning warriors responded in unison. After being out for several days, none of them had rested well. Although ensuring combat readiness despite poor sleep was a skill every soldier needed to master, they naturally needed plenty of rest once they could relax.

Bai E slept soundly until daybreak, completely exhausted from the effort of driving in the wilderness, especially since he was leading the way and spent more energy than anyone else.

Upon opening his eyes, he found the tent empty. However, seeing the light shining through the cracks, he could tell it was no longer early.

It was time to exchange military honors for a watch; he couldn't always rely on looking at the sky... thought Bai E.

In this era, everything was a precious resource. A mechanical watch that did not need batteries and could keep precise time was handcrafted and therefore a coveted item.

Almost immediately after he woke up, a familiar voice came from outside the tent.

It was Carlos, "Bai E, you awake?"

"Present!" Bai E called out as he dashed out wearing just shorts and a tank top, "Officer?"

"You did well," Carlos said, looking at Bai E with great satisfaction.

This morning, upon his return, Gregory had reported the full details of the secret military operation to a few high-ranking officers who were in the know.

The reports on Bai E's performance, coupled with testimonials from other soldiers, were consolidated and presented in full—both the minor disobedience of orders and the impressive actions throughout the journey.

The disobedience was mitigated by consideration for the mission, Likok's orders, and the unanimous agreement of his comrades, so it was not a major issue.

With his stunning performance throughout, these small issues were hardly significant, and the Hamilton faction officers had little ground to argue about.

The military honors were more than enough.

One novice trial, one Bug Race battlefield, one covert operation.

Just three military actions, and he had amassed enough honors to exchange for a Gene Optimization Solution, which was unprecedented in the camp's history.

However, the request for the Gene Optimization Solution had to be submitted personally by the soldier. Therefore, as soon as Carlos confirmed that the military honors were sufficient, he promptly came to notify Bai E.

...

"Is that enough?"

Bai E's eyes momentarily conveyed a sense of melancholy. After braving life and death three times, he had finally accumulated enough military merit.

The idea of players creating their own Gene Optimization Solution was just a future prospect; naturally, he wouldn't pass up the opportunity to obtain it right now.

"How do I apply?" Bai E asked.

"Simple, just fill out a form, and I'll take you there," Carlos said, brimming with excitement. Only those warriors who obtained the Gene Optimization Solution had the chance for further development in the

future; otherwise, as artificial humans, even with far greater military exploits than natural-born humans, they still had little chance of promotion.

The Gene Optimization Solution was a precious resource that was hard to come by. The more resources an individual consumed, the harder it was to replace that individual with another cog in the machine; it meant they were less likely to be treated as a disposable part.

Being a warrior was certainly not all there was to the life of 95B27. Any artificial human warrior with strength and potential should shine on their own stage, contributing even more to humanity.

Filling out the form was straightforward, and Bai E didn't need to worry about the subsequent haggling. With his solid record of battlefield achievements, even Hamilton and his people had to shut their mouths!

Carlos was very confident about this.

"Alright, you've got a day off. Go do as you please. I'll handle this for you, but it might take a while," Carlos said.

Each issuance of the Gene Optimization Solution required the most careful procedure: a representative from the military to sign off, the Scientific Research Institute to conduct a detailed physical examination to determine the genetic inclination and the appropriate dosage. Only after everything was confirmed without issue could it be injected for use.

"Got it," Bai E nodded his understanding. He'd waited long enough; another day or two wouldn't make a difference.

Gene Optimization Solution... he really had no idea what it was like.

After leaving Carlos, Bai E quickly grabbed some food from the cafeteria and headed straight out of the camp.

Having a day off and a chance to leave the camp earlier than usual, if those players were around, it would be a good opportunity to teach them some more.

In the four days of his absence, without other tasks at hand, they should have significantly expanded the underground base, and awarding contribution points for their faction was only logical.

With his plans for the future in mind, Bai E walked briskly.

...

As Weslin held the application for Gene Optimization Solution handed in by Carlos, he scrutinized the assembled officers who had the voting rights on this matter.

Shaking the application form slightly, Weslin spoke in a subdued voice, "A warrior has just accumulated enough military merit and has submitted an application for the Gene Optimization Solution injection. This is his record of achievements and service. Take a look and then decide on your vote."

He didn't name anyone; there was no need for special treatment in the military camp—it was his personal statement of neutrality.

As for the outcome, he did not interfere.

As the highest-ranking officer in the military, Weslin didn't need to take sides. No matter which of his subordinates received the Gene Optimization Solution, they were ultimately his soldiers.

Although he didn't mention a name, everyone knew who it was. That new recruit had caught their attention with his exceptionally eye-catching performance in recent military operations. When Gregory had just successfully returned from a covert operation that morning and reported back, they knew the application would come soon.

As Weslin finished speaking, the projection screen behind him displayed the new recruit's military achievements. Each individual item received meticulous evaluations from more than one officer to ensure a fair assessment of military merit.

Also displayed were the points he had spent on exchanges.

"The military merits are sufficient, and his performance in multiple missions far exceeds that of a common soldier. If such a promising warrior cannot meet the standard to receive the Gene Optimization Solution, I don't know whether we can maintain the trust of all soldiers with the rules we have set," Carlos was the first to speak up, his stance clear.

"I agree," Hamilton followed with his vote immediately.

"???"

All officers looked at Hamilton with his smile and an expression of surprise in their eyes.

Since when did you, a steadfast antagonist, defect as well?

After the core of the faction that rejected artificial humans also cast a vote in favor, those neutral officers who might have otherwise considered relationships cast their inconsequential votes in the face of hard facts.

Everyone wanted to apply for the Gene Optimization Solution for the soldiers under their command, but only the most elite warriors could acquire such scarce resources.

Not only strength but also the willingness to give back mattered!

An able but unwilling soldier was nothing but a cancer to the army; performance... was the sole criterion for applying for the Gene Optimization Solution.

And that new recruit with the number 95B27 had undoubtedly done it to perfection.

"Unanimously passed," Weslin tapped the table lightly, readily accepting the outcome. This was the first time he had chaired such a harmonious meeting; he felt slightly unaccustomed...

"Meeting adjourned!"

As the officers dispersed, some who were walking together pulled Hamilton aside, who was at the back of the group, their tones filled with surprise, "Change of heart today?"

"Why argue with him?" Hamilton's lips curved in a light smirk, "That 95B27's record is indeed impeccable; even if we argued with him all day, we'd still have to grant his wish. I didn't feel like wasting breath on them. Better to take a step back now and just wait and see what happens..."

"What are you planning to do?"

"What to do? Nothing," Hamilton took a bold step forward. "Since he's willing to put in effort for the camp, then he might as well do a bit more. Isn't there a Refugee Slum on the northwest side? Let him take a look!"

His companion was slightly shocked, "That Refugee Slum..."

It seemed that quite a few scouts had gone missing there.

Chapter 182 essential oils? Bring it on!

Kuang Xin, who just emerged from the cave carrying a basket of dug-up earth and stones, saw a figure quickly approaching in the distance and immediately turned his head, shouting excitedly to the person below him, "The Lord has returned!"

As if sprouting from the ground, three players jumped out one after another.

"My Lord!"

The three of them looked at Bai E with ardent eyes, as if they wanted to devour him.

In the two days that Bai E had been away, they had tried to find other NPCs to see if they could get some quests, but obviously... those meager rewards were no match for what the Lord gave out.

And it seemed that as their reputation spread, many NPCs who knew them were reluctant to interact with them, let alone issue quests.

It was like when your reputation in one faction increases, it decreases with the opposing faction, stopping them from developing ties with both.

Being seasoned gamers... they were quite used to this.

So they were even more eager for the Lord's return.

"Did Your Lordship's endeavor succeed?" Gong Yan, who had twice intimidated NPCs with feigned authority, almost subconsciously gathered such information.

Bai E was in a good mood and felt no strong barriers towards the players, so with a smile, he nodded and said, "Pretty successful."

He walked straight towards the entrance of the underground base, knowing that the size of the completed construction would determine how many contribution points he would distribute.

"Whoa!"

Descending the ladder and scanning the area with a glance, Bai E was inwardly impressed.

The target for the requested task was at least  $20*20*3m^3$ . Though it was hard to tell the exact size at a glance, the scale had at least doubled since last time—if not more.

"You have worked hard these past few days," Bai E casually threw out some gratuitous words.

Dai Lian, who had made adequate preparations, displayed his professionalism, "We've measured it, and we are close to having enough space. However, we still need to do damp-proofing, pest control, and other treatments before we can complete it."

Just digging a hole in the ground wasn't enough for a complete warehouse. With cement making its way into the picture, they were about to transform into construction workers plastering walls—no surprise it was him and Kuang Xin once again... perhaps with an addition of a rat-person?

When did he ever realize he was so all-around? In the future, even if he couldn't game, he would still be quite the jack-of-all-trades in the real world...

"No worries, as long as you're working on it."

[Side Quest – Build a Warehouse (Construction Commission), progress updated.]

[Quest Reward (Stage):Faction Contribution Points (Li Ming) +60, issued.]X3

Contribution points were issued once more, and Bai E continued to carefully control their numbers.

After the players had exchanged items at the first level of the Faction Shop, the second level had long been open—

[Trait – Well-Trained, price – Basic Instruction: 60 Faction Contribution points.]

[Knowledge – Conventional Vehicle Driving, price – Basic Instruction: 25 Faction Contribution points.]

[Knowledge – Computer Hardware Maintenance, price – Basic Instruction: 25 Faction Contribution points; Professional Instruction: 40 Faction Contribution points; Expert Instruction: 60 Faction Contribution points; Gold Science Edition: 100 Faction Contribution points.]

[Knowledge – Advanced Physical Training 3.0, price – Basic Instruction: 80 Faction Contribution points.]

[Expertise – Self-Restraint, price – Basic Instruction: 100 Faction Contribution points.]

[Unlock any "two items" from the current exchange level before unlocking the choice of items from the next level, stay tuned...]

Many of his abilities seemed to be able to make it in, but traits like the inherent dullness to thoughts due to the artificial person template, battle instincts, as well as the bloodlust trait and hive will activated by the Bug Race template, plus his personal talent expertise—rapid recovery, were all impossible to teach to others.

Some knowledge skills required professional understanding, which is why there were tiered instructions; for practical skills like driving that didn't require much professional knowledge, Bai E had only set up basic entry-level instruction, trying to maintain a bit of conscience and rationality when it came to reaping benefits.

At the same time, Bai E didn't want to make overpowered things like "Overlimit Drive," "Resist Death," or "Weapon Master" available to players too quickly.

The second layer of the shop had already put out good items, so what about the third layer?

But just these were already enough to satisfy the players' ambitions and curiosity for the time being.

The three players who had just received another round of Faction Contribution points were caught in a dilemma as they looked at the exchange list.

"It seems different from the last time I checked it."

Without any available exchange, constantly monitoring the list was one of the most torturous punishments in life.

Having experienced the system prompt suddenly ringing last time, they also opted to turn off notifications of changes to the Faction Shop exchange list... a nuisance.

Looking at it now, they noticed differences—

The Gold Science Edition of Computer Hardware Maintenance was definitely not there before.

But that was not a problem; they weren't interested in it.

Dai Lian and Kuang Xin's gaze rested on "Knowledge – Advanced Physical Training 3.0," while Gong Yan's interest was undoubtedly on "Expertise – Self-Restraint."

One to improve physical attributes more quickly, the other to enhance Spiritual Energy control—both were undeniably fitting for their professions, and they had been coveting them for a long time.

Too bad they didn't have enough...

Gong Yan had spent the last distribution of Faction Contribution points without a trace left, now having only the newly issued 60 points. To exchange for "Expertise – Self-Restraint," which required 100 points, she had no choice but to save up, as the others didn't catch her interest as much.

Chapter 183 Essential Oils? Bring them on!\_2

Dai Lian and Kuang Xin both had 10 points left over from last time, and with the 60 points just issued, they had a total of 70 points, which was undoubtedly insufficient to exchange for the "Knowledge – Advanced Physical Training 3.0."

For Dai Lian, however, the "Trait – Well-Trained" and the unfinished "Remote Weapons Master Guidance" from last time, as well as the newly introduced "Light Firearms Master Guidance," were also full of temptation.

Kuang Xin, on the other hand, was single-minded about enhancing his physical abilities. His thinking was simple; just 10 points short, he wasn't into flashy tricks—save it!

While the three players were engrossed in how to plan the use of their faction contribution points, Bai E was also pondering over more ways to make use of the players' knock on the door.

His gaze swept around and felt that this so-called "Dawn Warehouse" seemed a bit empty.

A warehouse is a structure that serves the function of storing materials.

An empty warehouse, how can it be called a warehouse?

These players moved around in the outside world, and one couldn't rule out that they might obtain some items that were difficult for him to come by.

Resources, well, they should flow between one another to create the greatest value. What they temporarily didn't need might be just what he was looking for, right?

And as for setting the prices, wasn't it all in his own thoughts?

Um...

[Prompt: The current functional building—Warehouse, has reached a certain stage of construction, and the Faction Warehouse function is now activated.]

[Current warehouse inventory: Exquisite Brass Bullets, Bug Tribe Essence Extract, and Biochemical Components.]

[Prompt: Extracting warehouse materials requires payment of corresponding prices.]

[Exquisite Brass Bullets\*10, price: Faction Contribution\*5, Faction Funds\*10. (A maximum of 5 sets can be exchanged per natural day, and a maximum of 20 sets per week.)]

[Bug Tribe Essence Extract\*1, price: Faction Contribution\*100, Faction Funds\*200. (A maximum of 1 set can be exchanged per natural day, and a maximum of 3 sets per week.)]

[Biochemical Components\*1, price: Faction Contribution\*500, Faction Funds\*1000. (A maximum of 1 set can be exchanged per natural day, and a maximum of 3 sets per week.)]

Damn! A genius! Not becoming a game designer would be a great loss to the gaming industry.

Looking at the rules he had set, Bai E was quite satisfied.

To prevent players from losing their drive to strive after eventually obtaining too many faction contribution points, it was essential to offer them something with sustainable development for exchange, to constantly maintain their resource scarcity.

And just like the reward he had given Wen Jie for the task—the Bug Tribe Essence Extract—by establishing a price for it beforehand, he could let them know the preciousness of the task rewards and thus make them more diligent. It was indeed killing multiple birds with one stone.

The players, suddenly receiving the unexpected prompt, were a bit stunned as they looked at the newly appeared "Faction Warehouse" feature.

What's this, how did a new feature suddenly appear?

Let's see what's in there...

"Damn!"

"Damn!"

Bug Tribe Essence Extract? Isn't that Wen Jie's reward? The thing that can make Gene Optimization Solution!

Although they hadn't reached the level to come into contact with Gene Optimization Solution yet, the fact that they now had a channel to obtain it undoubtedly created the illusion that the Gene Optimization Solution was just within their reach.

Awesome!

And this thing... Biochemical Components?

Don't know what it is, but judging by its value, it's actually five times more expensive than the Bug Tribe Essence Extract?

Awesome!

But...

"How do we get faction funds?" Dai Lian murmured to himself.

Ah! Good question!

[Prompt: Faction funds can be acquired by contributing "resources" to the Warehouse Manager.]

The flow of resources, that was the principal reason Bai E activated the warehouse function, not just to harvest the players' experience, but also to see if they had any resources that they couldn't use at the moment but he could.

Bai E maintained a calm expression and softly explained to the three players, "The warehouse is a place to store the common resources of the organization. Everyone can contribute or take from it. In principle, all the items are meant to be used by everyone in the organization.

But considering that not everyone puts in the same effort, we can't let people use the resources indiscriminately without limits, so there are some conditions when exchanging for them."

God damn it! as deep as the Ganges!

What resources don't cost money?

As for the boss's explanation, the three players didn't even bother to listen; they just needed to know how to obtain it, and that was enough.

"Can anything be turned into funds?" Kuang Xin asked eagerly.

"I'll decide based on its value, the same for everyone."

The three players looked at each other and reached a consensus, "Let's test the waters first."

"1000 Blackwater Coins!" Kuang Xin, who never did things by halves, handed over most of the money he won from the last match along with his original capital in one go.

[You have handed over 1000 Blackwater Coins and received 200 Faction Funds.]

"1000 for 200," Kuang Xin whispered to his two teammates after receiving the notification.

Dai Lian nodded in understanding.

Not bad, it was within expectations.

By judging the price of the bullets, they had a rough idea of the value of Faction Funds, but it was always better to have a concrete confirmation.

They had a substantial amount of Blackwater Coins on them. The last time they took out 600 bullets and sold them to Jonathan and his group, they reeled in 3420 Blackwater Coins. From a rate perspective, selling bullets directly in the outside world was more profitable, with a price of 6 Blackwater Coins per bullet.

If they could exchange goods from the Faction Warehouse and sell them for money, and then come back and convert it into funds, couldn't they infinitely exploit the system to multiply their wealth?

Crafty strategies began to brew in the players' minds, but unfortunately, exchanging warehouse materials required not only Faction Funds but Faction Contribution Points as well, and even then, there were daily and weekly limits on the amount that could be exchanged... No luck there.

Even if they handed over everything, they would only have just over 600 Faction Funds, and they couldn't possibly give it all away since they still had many uses for Blackwater Coins.

The three of them scoured their possessions, looking to see if they had any resources they could hand over.

They had nothing... Their guns and ammunition had been bought with Blackwater Coins, and after being exploited by those Black Street merchants, the real value would definitely be less than that of the Blackwater Coins themselves.

Only the items not purchased with Blackwater Coins were worth handing over, like...

Kuang Xin took out a small glass bottle from his body; inside was a bit of caramel-colored, semi-transparent liquid.

The young miss from the Heretical Arbitration House had given them each 33ml of the so-called Exorcism Essential Oil, the only item whose value they did not know.

"We don't need this thing for now, right?" A bold light sparkled in Kuang Xin's eyes.

The demons of higher dimensions were of high caliber, and just the powers of the human Believers who worshiped them were unbelievable—like with the Ratmen, if they truly launched a full-scale attack against them, the three players would be nothing but easy prey.

Although there would definitely be varying levels of strength among the high-dimensional demons, even the lowest-tier demons were probably stronger than the Ratmen.

In such a situation, what good would it do them to have weapons that could harm high-dimensional demons?

Could a child with a knife defeat a fully-armed soldier?

"But isn't it always good to keep it..." Dai Lian hesitated; after all, the other two items in the warehouse aside from bullets were currently not exchangeable, as the required contribution points were far from sufficient.

"Hey, it's fine. I'll give it a try; you guys keep yours." Kuang Xin was nonchalant. Both the Bug Tribe Essence Extract and the bio-components were limited to a set number of exchanges per week. The earlier they were exchanged, the more one could accumulate. Who knew if they would be very useful in the future?

And how could combat consumables like Exorcism Essential Oil compare to core growth materials?

Let's submit one and see. If it works out, we'll hurry up and accumulate contribution points and take down all the exchangeable warehouse goods from the most to the least expensive!

With a clear goal in mind, Kuang Xin was filled with enthusiasm and didn't hesitate to try it out.

[You have handed over 33ml of Exorcism Essential Oil...]

"emmmm"

Looking at the item Kuang Xin handed over with both hands, Bai E slightly spaced out.

He had heard about this item, a key material used by the Heretical Arbitration House to fight against demons, rare and hard to come by.

Without it, even the professional executors of the Heretical Arbitration House would struggle to truly damage the essence of high-dimensional demons.

Bai E's eyes swept over the three players with a hint of astonishment... Players sure had wide connections.

If it were up to him alone, it would be tough to get his hands on this.

An item specifically for fighting demons?

Bai E glanced at the conscientious Ratman who was staying away from everyone in the corner... The demonic issue with him hadn't completely ended; who knows when he might face a direct threat from a demon.

Having a weapon that could truly threaten demons would always be more reassuring...

Such a good item didn't come by often; encouragement was in order!

[You have handed over 33ml of Exorcism Essential Oil and received 1650 Faction Funds!]

Chapter 184 Continuing Mission — Acknowledgment from Yue Ying

...

"Fuck!" Kuang Xin's mouth dropped open in shock.

Blackwater coins were exchanged at a 5 to 1 ratio, so organizational funds must be something very precious.

So he originally thought that the so-called biocomponents priced at 1000 would be quite a distant future thing, but who could have anticipated getting nearly two of them all at once?

He was fired up!

His fighting spirit was ablaze!

He was going to earn contributions for the organization! He'd work like an ox, labor for the cause! The organization was his home, and he'd build that home!

Bai E saw the obvious change in his attitude and decided to add a bit more incentive.

"Due to different situations the organization faces at different times, the scarcity of various materials can vary quite a bit. So, at critical times, the valuation of 'specific' materials can fluctuate..."

This meant that pricing was ultimately at their own whim, right?

Plus, it could create a sense of urgency for them, with limited time increases in the purchase prices for specific materials. If you missed it, you missed it; if you have it, don't wait!

Perfect! Bai E was becoming more and more accustomed to exploiting player strength; if he ever could return to his own world one day, he'd definitely make a fine game designer...

But the other two players seemed unmoved; they were not impulsive.

Seeing that there seemed to be no further discussion about contributing materials to the organization, Bai E brought up the mission.

"Additionally, have you cleaned up the sewer rat infestation you were tasked with?"

"...No." Dai Lian couldn't quite meet Bai E's eyes, responding meekly.

Seriously, who would go grind without an actual quest?

Those little buggers were tough to kill. Without a quest, willingly going into the sewers after them at night was sheer torture, and not cost-effective.

Bai E chuckled, "No worries, I know you all certainly have more important things to do. Everyone must have worked hard these past few days. I regret I was out and couldn't offer my assistance... With me here, you can feel a bit more at ease."

Relying on the three of them to wipe out a small Black Street force must have been tough; it was a pity he hadn't been able to join the fight... Maybe there was a way to scavenge some benefits.

"..." Dai Lian suddenly looked up.

His eyes shone as he gazed at the superior figure slightly taller than him, his emotions a complex mix.

Sorry?

The superior said he was sorry?

It was their own failure to do the task he assigned because they had no quests, and yet the superior sincerely thought their own matters were more important and even felt guilty for not being able to help!

Even knowing it was a game, even though he knew the character before him was nothing but data, this genuine attitude was enough to melt even the hardest of hearts.

For the first time, Dai Lian felt a pang of guilt...

"Since I am back now, if you have any troubles you can tell me. I won't stand idly by if I can help you. But since those rat swarms are still there, I'll have to ask you to continue the cleanup."

Dai Lian looked down again and, gritting his teeth, responded, "Yes! Superior!"

"Mmm..." Bai E paused slightly in his speech, his gaze slowly sweeping over the three of them, "So, do you have anything else? I just got back last night and have many matters to attend to back at the camp."

[You've thought about it long enough, right? You should have made your decision about what to exchange your organizational contributions for.]

Kuang Xin and Gong Yan remained silent; they both planned to save up. But it was Dai Lian who spoke up, "Superior, I would like to continue learning the bow shooting skills."

There were still plenty of plague rats in the sewers, and archery skills still had much room for use. Besides, the young miss from the Heretical Arbitration House had proven a point to everyone — in this magical world, cold weapons have a great potential for development. When personal strength can rival machinery, the effectiveness of cold weaponry in combat isn't inferior to firearms.

...

"All right," Bai E nodded and promptly agreed.

Having one study is better than none. He couldn't directly control the players' decisions but could only guide them as much as possible.

The most important thing was that he currently lacked neither combat/general experience. After the recent covert operation, he had amassed a total of 7347 points of combat/general experience reserves.

Slowing down the harvesting pace to let them develop a bit seemed like a good idea...

Since he had paid 30 points of guild contribution for professional guidance, now to move up a level, he only needed to pay the difference of 20 points of guild contribution between a master and professional.

Bai E, although wanting to "harvest" the players' "leeks," also knew restraint.

...

["Teaching" ended, through the feedback of "Teaching," you have acquired a total of 220 combat experience points and 180 general experience points.]

It's done!

Bai E put away his bow and arrow and waved his hand without dawdling, "Pay attention on your own, and notify me promptly if anything arises."

Upon returning to the camp, Bai E didn't idle. Before departure, he had wanted to learn the "Steady Wind" skill that Yue Ying had taught previously. Whether or not the learning was crucial didn't matter; the mission line possibly leading to the "Elf Breathing Skill" that Yue Ying carried was what mattered.

He had to surprise her thoroughly to make her impart her treasured skills!

He hadn't seen her the afternoon of that day, but on this afternoon... Bai E spotted a cloaked figure quietly observing the soldiers' training not far from a combat squad in actual training.

This Elf Race lady seemed particularly interested in the training process of the human soldiers, though being alone in human territory, she probably didn't have much else to do...

"Miss Yueying..."

Standing beside her was an officer assigned by the military. Bai E kept a respectful distance and called out as he stopped.

The officer looked toward Bai E on cue, glancing over Bai E's shoulder and chest, noting the lack of stars or stripes, just a synthetic being... somewhat familiar looking, but not important.

His brow furrowed instantly, "Which unit's soldier are you? What are you doing here instead of training?"

"Reporting to the officer! I finished a mission yesterday, and I'm resting today," Bai E snapped to attention and replied stiffly and formally.

"Resting?" The officer's brows rose slightly, and he reprimanded with a cold voice, "If you're resting, then rest properly, don't loiter around the training ground."

"Mr. Dunpus..." The cold voice finally spoke up. Being in a human military camp, Yue Ying wasn't clear on the intricate rules among humans. It was only after realizing that not much was against the rules did she speak up, "He's here to see me."

"Yue Ying?" The officer was mildly surprised. In this military camp, he had never heard of any officer or soldier who received special treatment from this elf ally.

His gaze flitted briefly, as the officer scanned Bai E standing respectfully in front of him, wondering internally—

What's this kid's background?

"If Mr. Dunpus has other duties, please attend to them," Yue Ying said, involving private affairs. The element of authority in her cool tone, unequivocal, inspired awe.

Considering that all the seniors in the military district held this foreign ally in high esteem, Dunpus dared not object and simply nodded his departure, "If Miss Yueying is busy, I shall take my leave. If you need anything, feel free to seek me out. Officer Veslin has instructed— to accommodate all of your requests within the military camp."

The detached hood gave a slight nod, "Understood."

After waiting for the officer to walk away, Yue Ying turned towards Bai E. Her tone was noticeably lighter, hinting at reminiscence, "I heard you went on a mission the other day."

"Yes."

Yue Ying narrowed her eyes, feeling a bit excited, "So... is it that you feel you've honed sufficient skills during the operation?"

"Yes..."

Chapter 185 Set the wind!

"Squeak~" As the sound of the bowstring being tensioned arose, Yue Ying's cool voice also emerged, "Near my hometown, there is a canyon where strong winds blow all year round..."

Having reconnected with Yue Ying after some time, it was clear she was not as silent as during the last lesson; however, the words spoken seemed to bear no relation to the technique's key points...

"Wild fruits that are very sweet grow on the cliffs in the canyon."

Pressing the switch, the set aerial targets were almost thrown out in a straight line at a uniform speed. The skill to be taught this time was not some flamboyant ability; it only required...

Moments before the ten moving targets perfectly aligned in a straight line, Yue Ying suddenly released her grip.

"Whoosh!"

The arrow tore through the air!

"Bang bang bang bang bang..." The sound of the moving targets bursting open was a continuous chain, an unending sequence of noise.

Bai E's gradually enhanced Insight attribute allowed his dynamic vision to strengthen over time, and with dedicated observation under mental focus, he could glimpse the general process of each moving target bursting apart.

These moving targets had been specifically manufactured by the military. They lacked any significant technological content but were filled with some... air.

The compressed air inside created great internal pressure so that upon impact with a collision of a certain energy level, they would burst apart violently, intended to provide a more visually impactful demonstration to the shooter as to whether their shots had hit.

However, the violent bursting process of the compressed air certainly had a significant influence on the trajectory of any bullets or arrows passing through it.

During Yue Ying's last teaching session, Bai E had tried it out; his arrows could indeed easily hit the first moving target, but after hitting the first one, they would be deflected by the explosive air current, making a hit on the second target a matter of luck, while hitting the third was entirely out of the question.

To shoot through ten at once like Yue Ying did...

That was a tall tale!

Yet, it happened right before his eyes.

As Yue Ying bent her bow and nocked another arrow, she continued her unrelated story, "The cliffs are steep. If we wanted to eat the wild fruits, we had to shoot them down with arrows."

Again, ten moving targets rose up, and Yue Ying fired another arrow.

"Bang bang bang bang bang..." The noise erupted in unison.

It seemed as if Yue Ying had performed a casual, effortless trivial task as she lightly retracted her bow and looked towards Bai E, "How to withstand the influence of the strong winds and shoot down those fruits was the favorite challenge of our childhood. One of my elder sisters invented this technique, naming it—'Ding Feng'."

One arrow loosed, the wind stilled.

Focus on one point; no matter what obstructions lay on the path, nothing could halt the might of this single arrow.

Bai E pressed the switch for the moving targets, took a deep breath, and raised his bow and arrow as the Overlimit Drive supplied him with additional strength converted into actual physical force.

Facing a series of aerial targets thrown out in a straight line, Bai E abruptly loosened his fingers from the fully-drawn bowstring.

The arrow spiraled forth, its wake stirring the air.

"Whoosh!"

[You have spent 10 points of combat experience in learning, converted into 5 points of "Ranged Weapon Specialization" experience. (Very small chance to awaken a special attribute.)]

[Prompt: Please maintain "Overlimit Drive" output status; otherwise, the difficulty of learning will increase significantly.]

"Bang! Bang!"

The crisp sound of breaking was heard. Of the line of moving targets, only two shattered, the rest were left to descend powerlessly after reaching their apex, offering no further chance for Bai E to make amends.

But that was alright.

Bai E looked at the panel's message and felt certain about this time.

It's not the small chance that's scary, it's the absence of any chance at all.

Since there's an opportunity to learn "Ding Feng" while under the state of "Overlimit Drive," he definitely couldn't let it go before he exhausted himself!

Again!

[You have spent 630 points of combat experience in learning, converted into 315 points of "Ranged Weapon Specialization" experience. (Very small chance to awaken a special attribute.)]

...

[You have spent 550 points of combat experience in learning, converted into 275 points of "Ranged Weapon Specialization" experience. (Small chance to awaken a special attribute.)]

As the experience for the Ranged Weapon Specialization approached level 4, Bai E's previously calm demeanor began to shift.

"Whoosh!"

"Bang!"

This was the first time during the current learning session that only one moving target had been pierced.

Noticing something amiss, Yue Ying looked over, her long, narrow eyes under her hood slightly squinted, observing Bai E's reaction.

If this was his mindset... then there was no need to continue learning.

"Huff~" Bai E's fingers stroked the arrow, and on the next draw, he forcefully steadied his emotions through "self-restraint."

It was merely a chance for an upgrade that came with a specialization level increase; there was no need to obsess over it.

As long as it can be obtained, it's never too late...

"Whoosh!"

"Bang bang bang bang bang!" Five of them!

[You have spent 10 points of combat experience in learning, which has been converted into 5 points of "Ranged Weapon Mastery" experience. (Medium chance to awaken special attributes.)]

Yue Ying retracted her gaze, feeling satisfied.

This is how it should be; this is the human warrior she had taken an interest in!

At any time, impatience is always the swiftest punishment away from success.

[You have spent 60 points of combat experience in learning, which has been converted into 30 points of "Ranged Weapon Mastery" experience. (Medium chance to awaken special attributes.)]

[With prolonged learning, you have gleaned sufficient experience from the master's performance, your specialization ability—Ranged Weapon Specialization, has gained a new "special" attribute bonus!]

[Ranged Weapon Specialization (Level 3): Shooting accuracy +11%, shooting speed +7%, shooting range +300 meters, arcing shot (special) +6%, scatter level (special) +2, stabilizing wind level (special) +1.]

[Stabilizing Wind +1: Your attacks can always precisely hit targets, ignoring any hindrances. After charging for at least 0.5~1 second, your attack gradually reaches its peak: attack kinetic energy +2, attack power (piercing) +3, projectile speed +15%, and ignoring any "feather-weight" environmental factors.]

[Current Ranged Weapon Mastery experience at 990/1000, reaching 1000 points will master "Level 4 Ranged Weapon Specialization."]

Success!

Bai E's spirit shook, he nocked an arrow to the bow, and after a slight charge, he released an arrow that broke through the air.

In a vacuum, the arrow whistled through the air like lightning.

"Bang bang bang..." The moving targets burst open in quick succession, the arrow's course unwavering.

[Triggered Stabilizing Wind! Successfully shot through seven feather-weight obstacles with one arrow, Ranged Weapon Mastery experience +5.]

"It's... It's really learned!"

A look of surprise flashed in Yue Ying's slender eyes. This was the first skill she thought posed some difficulty, so she had more patience to wait.

Moreover, this warrior's physical capabilities clearly wouldn't exceed the limits of humans, even under such circumstances... he still learned it?

The most crucial aspect was the speed, even comparable to her own learning pace from back in the day...

[Current task reward: Clue to the Elf Breathing Skill (Quality: Purple)]

[Clue to the Elf Breathing Skill (Quality: Purple): You have secured the sincere trust of the Elf Race's Yue Ying. By demonstrating many of your outstanding talents, there's a good chance to obtain the "Elf Breathing Skill" from her.]

"With your current abilities, the fact that you've learned this skill is beyond my expectations. The subsequent skills, with your current strength, are not even remotely learnable for now. Let's stop here for the moment," she said.

While speaking, Yue Ying looked at the emotionless warrior in front of her, her eyes brimming with satisfaction. For a human to have mastered these skills before reaching a certain level of proficiency in archery was an incredible display of innate talent. All of these skills would grow more profound as his archery improved over time.

That alone ensured he would certainly make a mark in archery.

Very good!

[Current task—Yue Ying's Recognition, the progress is temporarily stagnant. Until you demonstrate abilities beyond learning shooting skills, the task's progress will remain unchanged...]

"..."

"Then... goodbye." The elf lady bid him a gentle farewell and swiftly turned to leave.

Not enough...

Watching her retreating figure, Bai E sighed inwardly.

This elf lady was quite cautious.

After all, just learning wasn't enough to be more than an excellent warrior, far from qualifying to learn the "Elf Breathing Skill."

So, won't it be necessary to complete two more events to acquire a clue of gold quality before ultimately achieving the goal?

Just the thought of it was tormenting...

But no matter, progressing steadily towards improvement, as long as there's progress, there's no problem.

Looking at the Ranged Weapon Specialization skill that needed just 5 more experience points to advance to level 4, Bai E, who was slightly obsessive-compulsive, couldn't stand it.

I'm just going to shoot!

[Triggered Stabilizing Wind! Successfully shot through six feather-weight obstacles with one arrow, Ranged Weapon Mastery experience +4.]

[...+3.]

[Ranged Weapon Specialization (Level 4): Shooting accuracy +14%, shooting speed +9%, shooting range +400 meters, arcing shot (special) +8%, scatter level (special) +3, stabilizing wind level (special) +2.]

[Scatter (Level 3): Dual shot success rate +80%, triple shot success rate +25%, quadruple shot success rate +5%, quintuple shot success rate +0.1%.]

[Stabilizing Wind (Level 2): Your attacks can always precisely hit targets, ignoring any hindrances. After charging for at least 0.45~0.95 seconds, your attacks gradually reach their peak: attack kinetic energy +3, attack power (piercing) +4, projectile speed +25%, and ignoring any "feather-weight" environmental factors.]

[Detecting character now possesses Ranged Weapon Specialization (Level 4), the skill tree for advanced study is unlocked: Concussive Shot, Power Shot, Vector Shuttle.]

Chapter 186 participates in a boxing match

Having gained another specialization ability that reached level 4, Bai E's bold conjecture had been confirmed—

Directly upgrading a specialization ability to level 4 only meant to compensate for the lack of special attributes provided before reaching that level.

A warrior who relied on actual training to attain a level 4 specialization ability wouldn't be without special attribute bonuses.

Indeed, he had lost out when he had previously upgraded his light firearms skill using his own points.

But that had been a necessary evil due to lack of experience. How could he have had a later stage without an early one?

Should there ever be an opportunity to respect, Bai E was determined to train for a perfect build!

As for the present, it was time to see what uses the three skills unlocked after reaching level 4 Ranged Weapon Specialization possessed—

Concussive Shot, hmm... a control skill.

Power Shot, hmm... a damage-dealing skill.

Vector Shuttle, hmm... a movement skill.

Clear and simple!

Gun Fighting Skill had given Bai E many surprises, and naturally, he held high hopes for the newly unlocked skill tree.

Yet with each skill having its merits, Bai E was reluctant to make a choice before encountering a practical application scenario.

Although he had quite a store of experience by now, it hadn't come easily. Spending 1000 points of experience in an instant still required careful consideration.

He checked the sky, noting it was still early, probably just past three o'clock.

The main purpose of his return to the camp was to learn Yue Ying's archery skills and to advance the progress of the "Yue Ying's Approval" mission. Now that he had achieved his goal, it seemed like he suddenly had nothing to do within the camp again.

So... Chavez, the fitness instructor, had mentioned underground boxing, which the other players had all tried. He hadn't experienced it yet.

In his pocket was the betting money given by Chavez, not much... just 500.

Let's check it out!

Considering appearing there directly might be too conspicuous since his last visit to Black Street Tavern had drawn a lot of attention, Bai E decided to opt for a disguise.

The whole set of clothes and even a mask given by other players last time would do just fine, so he took them.

With no players around, the secret base was empty except for the rat-like individuals.

"Where did they all go?" Bai E asked as he picked up the clothes to change, addressing the seemingly well-behaved boy in the corner.

"They said they were out of wood... and needed to chop some more."

Bai E glanced around, noting the warehouse propped up by wood looked somewhat ragged and disorganized.

[Relying on wood all the time isn't a solution...]

When they gained a bit more capability, he could consider having them build a pure metal base like the server ruins. Hmm... that seemed unrealistic. However, constructing one out of concrete and reinforced steel might work.

Mulling over these ideas, Bai E asked the rat-like individual, "Have you felt anything unusual recently?"

Since the rat-like beings were always related to demons, he had to stay vigilant about their mental and physical health.

The connection between humans and demons couldn't easily be discerned from the outside; problems always began in the mind first.

"No... no, nothing."

"Do you find it boring to stay here?"

"Yes... just a little bit."

The adolescent yearned for the outside world, no matter how much suffering he had endured, he always longed for the beauty and fascinating aspects of the world; it wasn't right to treat him as a mere tool, keeping him confined here forever, when saving someone, one must also take on the responsibility for their future well-being and any potential troubles they might bring."

Bai E nodded in understanding, acknowledging that speaking truthfully to him was a good sign, "It's okay, once I'm sure there's nothing wrong, I'll let them take you out for a stroll occasionally. But for now... please try to suppress these thoughts."

"I understand, Sir!" the Mouse Person responded quite sensibly.

"...Work hard."

Bai E picked up the mask and climbed up the ladder.

The clothes prepared by the players were pretty nice, albeit a bit sexy...

The black leather jacket was skimpy on fabric, leaving the stomach and part of the chest exposed, showcasing clear lines of sturdy muscles.

He wondered what state of mind they were in when they chose these clothes for him... but unexpectedly, it suited the style of Black Street quite well.

Those living there either wrapped themselves up completely like the Mouse Person, not daring to expose their inner softness, or dressed in bizarre and personal styles to the extreme.

This ostentatious outfit was, to some extent, also a disguise for his usual persona, and it wasn't entirely unacceptable.

As Chavez said, Bai E found the man known as "Black Goat" in Black Street.

He was a black, slim man with sharp eyes, looking to be in his thirties.

When he heard Bai E was referred by Chavez, the black man immediately became all smiles, leading Bai E in the direction away from the hub of Black Street.

"Bro, is this your first time here?" Walking in front, Black Goat asked enthusiastically, looking back as he spoke.

"Yeah..." Bai E posed confidently with his arms stretched out, his brazen gaze sweeping around; this was his first time visiting Black Street during the day.

And perhaps because of the clothes he was wearing, his behavior naturally exuded an air of brashness, striking a contrast.

"Got any money on you? The first time you participate in a fight, you need to pay a deposit of 500 Black Water coins, which is essentially betting on your own match."

"500?" Bai E's voice paused, as Chavez had given him exactly 500.

Normally, as a man-made being, he would likely have no funds of his own, so... was this actually his startup capital?

Also mentioned was betting on Blood God...

"Of course, I have it!"

Filled with a surge of emotion, Bai E strode ahead boldly, his tone hearty.

"Hurry up, my fists are itching for action!"

...

Following Black Goat, they reached the so-called "Underground Boxing Arena," a solitary grey concrete building stood forlornly upon the barren land, with the surrounding sand swirling, stinging the eyes of onlookers.

Bai E shielded his eyes with one hand, tilting his head to examine the concrete behemoth before him.

"This was supposed to be an apartment building for folks outside the city... The big shots from the inner city were once ambitious, vowing to extend urbanization to every place where human footsteps had trod. Unfortunately, everything that wasn't too heavy to move was cleared out of the building overnight, and they abandoned the idea..."

"..." Bai E was at a loss for words.

Badass!

"But what does that have to do with me?" Bai E's figure surpassed Black Goat's frail body, striding into the building, "You talk too much! I'm here to compete, not to sightsee!"

Watching that grand silhouette enter the building from behind, Black Goat swallowed reflexively, only one thought echoing in his mind—

The fighter Chavez introduced this time... sure has a fiery personality.

Chapter 187 White Ghost

Even in the afternoon, the atmosphere inside the building was still frenzied.

Men and women addicted to the violent secretion of hormones had no concept of time, though their silhouettes weren't as densely packed as in the evening.

The low-quality speakers blasted explosive waves of sound, and Bai E's body swayed gently with the rhythm.

When in Rome, do as the Romans do, after all, one has to blend in with the crowd.

Seeing that a familiar person had brought him, and considering the warrior before him was fit and imposing, the staff registering fighters instantly changed from slouching idly to sitting up straight and proper.

He had seen many such figures, and even if they might unfortunately die in some deathmatch later on, they were definitely the ones who could climb the ranks fastest here!

Thus, his gaze toward Bai E carried a noticeable reverence, "How may I address you?"

"White Ghost."

Bai E blurted out.

For some reason, this name surfaced in his mind first, like a shackle.

Without waiting for a response, Bai E directly pulled out ten notes of currency that looked like glassine paper and slapped them on the table, "A thousand, on myself."

Perhaps the average cyborg warrior had no money, but he was not average; there was no need to touch the 500 hard-earned dollars of Chavez, as the players had just handed him a thousand dollars.

Self-sufficient.

"Fine," said the staff member curtly, carefully taking the ten black paper bills worth 100 each, "Please go over there and rest for a bit. After this ongoing match and another one, it will be your turn."

"..."

Glancing at the figure heading toward the rest area with an imposing air, the staff member discreetly gestured to the waiting Black Goat, only asking in a hushed voice when he leaned closer, "What's the background of this guy? Never seen him before?"

"Over there..." Black Goat said with an air of mystery, tilting his chin in a certain direction.

The registrar instantly understood, "Turtle, turtle!"

One phrase instantly came to mind—Blood God!

He's from the same place as the Blood God!

Although there were quite a few who came to this arena from that place just for fun, this newcomer was entirely different from those taciturn and reserved soldiers; a single glance was all it took to see the stature of the Blood God.

They would have to arrange a sufficiently worthy opponent for him...

Sitting at the edge of the arena, Bai E spread his arms wide, majestically draping them over the backrests of the vacant seats on either side, his gaze fixed intently on the ongoing battle.

The fights in this place were about anything goes; there were no reservations about any dirty tricks one could think of—eye gouging, throat locking, groin kicking...

Do whatever you want, in any way that you can win.

Even if it wasn't a fight to the death, it was full of brutality meant to maim.

Victory was the only standard here.

Bai E's eyes sparkled, radiant with vitality.

He liked this feeling of being unrestrained, having suppressed himself for too long, it was always necessary to find an opportunity to vent.

Always cowering, always walking on eggshells in the barracks, it gets stifling after a while.

An opportunity to beat someone up without consequences, who wouldn't grasp it fiercely?

As for getting beaten to a pulp himself? First, the rules didn't allow killing, and someone would intervene in a dangerous moment; second, with the "resistance to death" trait, he wasn't afraid at all. As long as he could get back to the barracks, no injury was a concern.

Perhaps because of the constant wars with alien species in this era, medical technology was surprisingly advanced.

With the right equipment, even his level 2 first aid skills could snatch people back from the clutches of death, not to mention the professional medical department in the barracks.

He had almost been shattered by the Blood God before, and Rose had been battered by a mantis bug during the rookie trials, yet wasn't she bouncing around again within a day?

Watching the defeated contestant being dragged away bloody like a dead dog, and the winner raising his arms to embrace the audience's cheers.

Bai E felt...

Hardened!

His fists hardened!

The two matches didn't take long to finish, with staff members specially coming on stage to clean the bloodstains from the ring.

It was a perfunctory job, but it showed an attitude, often indicating that the next contestant to appear was rather extraordinary.

"Next match, by the all-destroying 'Tornado'..."

The host paused to let the audience's emotion ferment.

Only after the cheers erupted did he slowly read out the opponent's name.

"Facing off against our newcomer—Bai E!"

In an instant, confusion spread among the audience seats, "A newcomer?"

"A newcomer?"

"Tornado against a newcomer?"

"What's the deal with Bai E? Has the organizer lost their mind?"

Tornado himself was somewhat famous in this gladiatorial arena, his battles characterized by a storm-like barrage of combos that would devastate his opponents spectacularly, always highly praised by the audience.

Logically, such a well-known fighter should be matched with another high-level expert.

Yet unexpectedly, the opponent was merely a newcomer. Newcomers should have their own pool... so why appear in a match against Tornado?

The fact that the organizers had taken special care to clean the stage before the fight somewhat indicated the importance they placed on this match, a reverence reserved only for bouts featuring star fighters.

It was also a signal to the audience—prepare for the revelry!

The gladiator, wearing nothing but shorts, bounded into the vast arena from the tunnel, the unrestrained nature of the fight allowing ample room for tactical maneuvers.

He raised both hands, ready to receive the adoration and cheers of the fans, only to find the arena unusually silent, the sporadic mewling of a few kittens making it seem even quieter.

What had happened?

From the dimly lit corridor opposite, a figure gradually emerged from the shadows of the concrete floor, its outline becoming slowly clearer amidst the interplay of light and shadow.

Blood-red leather pants with jagged, wide-edged cuts, and two metallic chains hanging as ornaments on the legs, the black leather jacket was slightly tight, revealing a large expanse of muscle with the lithe grace of a leopard. Even the parts covered by the jacket outlined an indescribable power in the bulging muscles.

The mask on his face reflected a metallic sheen, planting a seed of mystery in the hearts of all the viewers.

"Ah~"

"So cool..."

A woman, craving madness, crossed her legs tightly, her eyes a haze of infatuation.

The men were nearly obsessed with that dream of a perfect body, not the exaggerated bulging muscles nor the frailness of a bamboo stalk that seemed like it could be blown over by a gust of wind.

Since when could Black Street produce such perfect forms? The unattainable is always the most desirable.

"Is it really worth giving him such fanfare?" the person in charge of the afternoon session, stroking his stubbled chin, asked, somewhat puzzled as he watched the figure emerge from the corridor on the monitor screen.

Every promotional effort had to whip up a sufficient frenzy of excitement; otherwise, it could be a blow to the reputation of the organizers.

The scruffy registrar cowered to one side, his tone feverish, "Boss, does this guy look like a rookie to you?"

His entrance was full of presence, impressively imposing.

This couldn't be anything but an expert's facade... it just couldn't be.

"Let's hope..."

The speaking manager glanced at another scene on the monitor screen... There sat a large figure quietly in a chair, eyes closed in wait.

When a star player steps onto the field, there needs to be matching hype.

Using a trivial preliminary to build up the atmosphere was a good choice.

The main event was still to come; this appetizer before it... hopefully would also reach a certain level.

...

Hearing those heavy breaths thick with desire, Bai E's eyes narrowed slightly.

The spectators' eyes were indeed keen; the clothes prepared for him totally matched their tastes...

But whether it was the players' own perverse aesthetic preferences or to cater to the tastes of Black Street's commoners was anybody's guess.

However, none of that mattered.

He was there to fight.

The muscular man opposite already had a visible fervor of murderous intent in his eyes.

Tornado could tolerate defeat, but not the theft of his glory by someone else.

Even in failure, he must be the most dazzling one!

Bai E's lips lightly curled, and he brought his index and middle finger together, tauntingly gesturing towards the other side—

"Come on."

Chapter 188 Practice Mode

...

"Thud," the door locked tight.

Within the coarse iron mesh, only two beasts remained, sizing each other up.

Both moved cautiously toward the center of the ring, the arena was large, but strategies like running around to exhaust stamina didn't come into play until after testing hands and ascertaining the opponent's true strength.

Tornado had made a significant name for himself in such an arena, naturally, he had his tricks.

No matter how angry one must remain rational, that's the first principle of underground boxing.

Boos from the crowd, the mockery of the opponent... if one can't block out these distractions, they won't even make it out of the rookie pool.

Facing that stranger with a face that screamed trouble, one had to be careful, then more careful.

When facing an unfamiliar opponent, the first thought shouldn't be how to take them down instantly, but rather... to observe.

Observe their habits, their weaknesses, by... probing.

Bai E's breathing was calm, his gaze fixed on the other, his body seemingly relaxed yet ready to mobilize every muscle in response to any incoming attacks.

These outsiders would likely have a hard time getting their hands on something boundary-breaking like Gene Optimization Solution, so their physical limit was probably around 15, with his own 14.5 physical strength plus the burst from Overlimit Drive, he was sure to outmatch his opponent.

However, reflexes were his weak point, and these people, accustomed to close-quarters combat, might very well surpass him in that regard. Then there was the application of technique.

These were the goals he had set for himself when he came to this place; facing opponents likely superior in skill and reflexes, he could only opt to counter stillness with stillness.

"Whoosh!"

The distance was still enough, the other side threw a testing punch straight at his face.

Bai E, ever attentive to his opponent's movements, simply tilted his head and dodged with ease.

Neck movements in a dodge always covered less distance than a punch, making such prepared evasions extremely easy.

And just as his opponent threw that punch, Bai E's eyes gleamed with a sharper intent—by his ear, he heard an unexpectedly familiar voice:

[Triggered sparring quest—Underground Boxing.]

[Underground Boxing: You have entered a 'fatal' underground fighting match filled with lethal intent. You must be exceedingly cautious under the watchful eyes of your opponent. Each adversary possesses their unique fighting style. Adapt to their rhythm of attack and learn from their combat experience to secure victory in every fight. The brave may not always win, but the observer never truly loses!]

Quest requirement: Learn the combat philosophy of your opponents in the sparring matches and achieve victory 0/? Reward for completion: After each fight, you may unlock a proficiency—???

[Sparring Mode: Observing that your opponent's technique exceeds yours, you resolve to pay a certain price (combat experience/general experience) in order to learn their fighting style.]

You can initiate a learning process by spending: 20 experience points/min, with a chance to learn the opponent's unique fighting style, and expend 2 combat/general experience points to receive 1 point of corresponding specialized experience (to enhance your own specialty level abilities). Both transactions must happen simultaneously; otherwise, the current mode cannot be activated.]

...

Yet another mode he had never encountered before.

Sparring? The final combat competition in the military camp counted as sparring, right? Or was it that the sparring there wasn't lethal enough? No matter how realistic the military competitions were, they still lacked the desperate, no-holds-barred hysteria of fighting in the mire of the outside world.

The emphasis on "fatality" in the description of the sparring quest—Underground Boxing might explain why it was triggered.

Bai E clenched his fists, his gaze at the gladiator before him becoming even more fervent.

Acquiring combat ability through triggered tutorials was difficult; after all, real combat hinged on rapid, life-or-death reactions. Bai E couldn't imagine what a tutorial needed for learning advanced combat techniques would look like.

Previous learning in shooting, including archery, allowed space for continuous teaching, whereas the combat tutorial once triggered from Dan was merely a fleeting glimpse and at best could only provide basic teaching in simple force application, movement, and such. His proficiency, already over level 1, could not be developed through such low-quality teaching.

Now... real combat was the best teacher!

This sudden prompt didn't distract Bai E, instead, making him more focused once realizing what was happening.

Learning an opponent's fighting style? First, the opponent had to show his style.

Each specialty had its unique features, with combat having its natural limitations. It seemed only logical that learning and training would require spending more experience.

Bai E's lips curled beneath his mask, and he threw back a punch in the same manner towards his opponent.

[You are paying combat experience to observe and learn your opponent's combat philosophy... (Cost: 20 experience points/min)]

[You have spent 10 combat experience points in your learning process, converted into 5 points of "Combat Master" experience. (A very small chance to awaken a special attribute.)]

[Current Combat Master experience 124/300, reach 300 points to master "Level 2 Combat Specialization."]

Burn it! After all, he had plenty of experience reserved, and training reflexes from real combat needed to be at its peak.

Bai E's gaze was fiery, his movements large and uninhibited.

Let go of design, let go of thought.

Dodge attacks with reflexes, seek opportunities by instinct.

Use the body to record every attack, feel each impact with the flesh.

Every blow taken would be a heavy punch returned to the opponent.

...

...

A blank sheet of paper.

Tornado could feel the combat style of his opponent.

It was like a blank sheet with no sketches, devoid of any attacking patterns or schemes except for the responsive evasive maneuvers.

An opponent who was best to deal with! On the surface, that flamboyant strength seemed to be just laughable gold foil, easily pierced and broken.

The audience outside also erupted in jeers, "Tsk!"

"That's it? Looked like a pro, but ends up just getting hit all the time."

"I could do the same if I were up there."

"Tornado, go for it! Use your best Storm Combo and finish him off!"

"Are the organizers idiots? This newbie is no match for Tornado?"

...

[You have spent 90 points of combat experience in learning, which is converted into 45 points of "Fighting Mastery" experience. (Small chance of awakening special attributes.)] (Accumulated)

...

A bit troublesome.

This seemingly unimpressive opponent unexpectedly had a resilience that was somewhat prickly to deal with.

Tornado was slightly out of breath, swaying as he tried to find an opening to launch an attack.

There seemed to be openings everywhere, inviting attack, but... no decisive blow could be landed.

The opponent highly valued the protection of his vital areas, as if a complete defense could win the match.

But... that's not how you fight in an arena!

...

[You have spent 80 points of combat experience in learning, which is converted into 40 points of "Fighting Mastery" experience. (Moderate chance of awakening special attributes.)] (Accumulated)

[In the fight, you discerned the opponent's attacking intent and quickly reacted, Insight +0.1, Reflex +0.1.]

...

"Huff~ Huff~" Tornado was gasping for air; offense was far more draining than defense, especially when his attack style required constant changes in positioning.

Although he maintained the offensive rhythm, he always felt like he was the one being suppressed, a frustration that was driving him mad inside.

He had realized it!

His opponent was not weak... He, he was just observing his line of attack, making occasional counterattacks within a mostly defensive fight, attacks that tasted all too familiar to him.

The opponent was learning the combat strategy he had honed through countless real battles!

And moreover, learning quickly!

This was no rookie! Absolutely not!

Arrogant! Too arrogant!

Tornado could hear the waves of jeering from the crowd, as if they were blaming him for not yet having disposed of this only defensive and evasive person.

That was trust, that was support, that was the deep admiration the audience had for him!

But at this moment, he just wanted those sounds that would usually cheer him to shut up!

All he wanted was to shout out loud for everyone to hear—

"Shut up! You! No one knows what kind of monster this is!"

He was learning, he was imitating!

His abilities were far beyond mine, yet he was trying to use the fighting style I had developed to defeat me, his master!

How arrogant is that? How presumptuous!

Even if your strength surpasses mine, such arrogant presumption is the only reason for your failure!

Arrogance always comes with a price!

I... am not to be trifled with either!

Chapter 189 combo-hit

The tornado's eyes flashed, finally catching the perfect moment when his opponent seemed to be out of breath.

In just an instant, his body lunged forward, like a ravenous wolf longing for flesh and blood, eagerly unfolding his own gluttonous feast.

Surrounding the target who had almost lost the ability to counterattack, Tornado's figure shifted rapidly, leaning into every possible vulnerable spot to unleash his full offensive output in an instant.

It was like a hurricane swirling around Bai E, a combat scene so fast that the figures were nearly indistinct—this was the origin of his moniker "Tornado"!

This wasn't a name he gave himself, but an honorific bestowed by the spectators!

Until this moment, all the frustration and rage that Tornado had felt in this fight seemed to be vented in an instant, as his fists, filled with fury, pummeled down on that frightful and disgusting body from all directions like raindrops.

"Bang bang bang bang bang!"

Each powerful punch landed hard, and the sounds of fists striking muscle were incessant.

Deathblow combo—that was his proud finishing move in this underground boxing ring!

Every opponent who had the misfortune to be caught in this combo had, without exception, fallen!

No one...

"Bang!"

The quickly delivered right punch was caught in a grip by a palm that wasn't particularly large, and as Tornado's gaze traveled from the palm to the wrist, forearm, and upper arm, he didn't even notice the fear that had crept into his own eyes.

[You have spent 80 points of combat experience in learning, converted into 40 points of "Combat Mastery" experience. (High probability of awakening special attributes.)) (Stacked)

[Long-term learning has allowed you to draw enough experience from your opponent's fighting style, and your specialized ability—Combat Expertise, has received a new "special" attribute boost!]

[Combat Expertise (Level 1): Strike Power +2%, Evasion +1%, Block +1%, Combo (Special) +1.]

[Combo (Level 1): Exerts as much muscle strength as possible in the shortest force exertion time, increasing attack speed by 50%, with strike power gradually increasing to the peak at 110% of Overlimit performance.]

[Current Combat Mastery experience 249/300, at 300 points you can master "Level 2 Combat Expertise".]

As the aggressor who had been on the offensive, Tornado subconsciously realized that his attacks hadn't completely broken through the opponent's defenses.

An attack that dragged on...

Bai E's lips curled slightly, his smile blooming recklessly, "My turn..."

As Tornado's stamina was depleted, Bai E's counterattack was launched in an instant.

The roles of attack and defense were reversed.

"Bang bang bang bang bang!" Endless fists landed heavily, one after another, on Tornado's muscular body.

The muscles, taut as stone, gradually softened under the relentless combo, and the core elements of force exertion that Dan had mentioned were circulating in Bai E's mind. Even under the storm-like offensive, Bai E still tried to rapidly marshal his muscular strength in the attack to exert an even more formidable striking power.

"Bang!" A punch hit the chest.

Bai E had carefully avoided striking any fatal points after breaking through the defenses, yet Tornado, already defeated in spirit, had lost the willpower to resist both physically and mentally.

Without the need for Bai E to throw another punch, the heavy body flopped limply backward and crashed to the ground.

The only thought lingering in Tornado's muddled consciousness was—

How did it seem like he wasn't hurt at all after so many blows?

...

[Your body is rapidly healing from injuries, don't worry! Warrior!]

[Injury repair progress 80%, Rapid Recovery (unlocked) unlocking progress 37%.]

[Using "Combo" to knock down the target, Combat Mastery experience +5.]

"Boom!"

His body collapsed with a thunderous fall, heavily smashing onto the steel platform.

The counterattack came too quickly for the audience to even change their tune, resulting in an immediate silence.

"Congratulations on witnessing a splendid battle! Our winner is, the White Phantom!"

The host's voice was filled with fervor, "What did we just see! Tornado fell to his most formidable Storm Strike! It seems our newcomer is also a player who likes quick attacks!"

As the voice faded into the background, Bai E, stepping down from the arena, found a staff member, "Arrange the next match for me, the sooner the better."

There was no time to wait, he couldn't wait a moment longer!

"You... don't you need to rest?" the staff member asked, astonished by the newcomer's impressive physique.

Shaking his head, Bai E kept his breathing even, "No, that was just a warm-up."

In the few breaths after stepping down from the arena, Overlimit Drive had already converted the abundant reserves of kinetic energy into actual physical strength. In maintaining his condition, Bai E had a huge natural advantage.

The first battle lasted... 7 minutes.

...

In the surveillance room, the person in charge squinted at the monitor, observing the figure still standing.

"Can you see it?"

A muscular man with a formidable presence behind him responded in a deep, echoing voice, "Another expert here to hone their skills."

Such people were not rare in the Underground Colosseum; they were not here solely for the release it provided, nor were they particularly driven by bets or money.

The only reason these individuals participated in the combats was to refine their battle skills.

They had their developed philosophies of combat but suppressed their full potential to learn from observing their opponents' tactics and adaptively countering them.

Even the initial Blood God did the same...

While many shared this mindset, very few actually succeeded.

Learning an opponent's strengths during short battles and defeating them using their own tactics is undoubtedly a formidable challenge.

Many self-proclaimed experts have fallen embarrassingly due to such attitudes.

In this place, keeping a continuous presence on the stage meant none were to be taken lightly.

Of course, it could also be for those battle gangs...

The person in charge's gaze swept over some of the quieter corners of the entire colosseum—this venue was also seen as a cradle of talent, with many gangs from the city sending scouts to find suitable fighters.

A contestant could freely choose to seek wealth and status, and the gangs could select talents they desired for private contacts... or through the organiser, provided they pay a certain fee after succeeding.

"Boss..." a voice came through the headset hanging from his ear, "White Phantom says he wants to keep fighting, and the sooner the better."

"..." The person in charge paused for a moment, then responded, "Who was scheduled for the next match?"

"Viper versus Fang."

After thinking it over, the person in charge made a decision, "Let White Phantom replace Fang, give him continuous combat."

Continuous combat was undoubtedly a huge draw. Few contestants dared to take such a risk, but since the contestant himself requested it and his displayed strength didn't seem delusional, the organisers would not pass up such an obviously exciting match-up.

And besides... Viper was a special opponent.

...

"News received, the freshly victorious White Phantom has requested consecutive battles!"

"Next up, White Phantom will face Viper!"

Chapter 190 Kiss of the Viper

"Viper..."

"That's one sly old fox!"

Whispers of intrigue momentarily rose among the audience, only to be buried beneath even more boisterous voices.

"Viper is just looking for some fun, but the True God is all about the White Ghost."

"The White Ghost is truly fierce, Viper is nothing in comparison."

"With fists faster than a tornado, Viper would be on the ground in no time."

...

"I'm betting on Viper, 500!"

"All in on Viper! 97!"

"You need to bet at least 100 to place a wager."

"Bro, lend me 3 coins..."

This was a unique opponent, whose fights at first glance appeared to be the most ordinary and dull, but it was only at the most critical, perilous moments that the deadly intent hidden within that split second would be revealed.

The way of the assassin is to court death in order to live.

Seizing the opportunity for a daring move meant either crippling the opponent or falling heavily wounded oneself.

If both fighters' styles involved careful observation for vulnerabilities in the other's attacks, then the early stage of the match might be quite uneventful.

Considering the fighting style the White Ghost had just displayed, that was very likely.

Addressing the concerns raised by the muscular man behind him, the person in charge shook his head with a smile, his eyes filled with trust as he watched the black and red figure step into the arena once more on the monitor, "Such a person aims to learn from the unique combat style of the opponent in order to perfect their own fighting theory.

Just one exchange, and upon detecting Viper's purpose, he'll take the initiative to draw out Viper's best."

Victory was not his objective, self-improvement was.

Such confident fighters were actually the favorites in the arena, they always forced their opponents to exert their full strength.

But as for whether the fighter was being arrogant or confident, that was hard to say.

...

Bai E saw his opponent before him.

Stooped in stature, he appeared quite despicable and base, lowering his eyes as he looked at people, as if subconsciously flattering them.

Even knowing that such characters would not appear in this setting, one still couldn't help but feel contempt for him.

Whether he was being underestimated or not, Bai E didn't care.

His fists itched for a fight, eager to brawl.

Flexing his fists, Bai E glanced towards the edge of the ring.

The door seemed to sense his intent and closed with a "bang."

It also signified that the battle had officially started!

The opponent kept on smirking in that vile manner, inspiring disgust at a glance.

Bai E charged forward with swift steps, his punch charged with full force aiming straight for the face.

If the opponent didn't want to strike first, let him stew in it.

Combination attack!

From the moment he launched his attack, Bai E laid his cards on the table.

Wasting energy? Exposing weaknesses?

He didn't care! He was all about wild aggression.

With his fast recovery and Overlimit Drive at his disposal, he wouldn't feel the weakness that typically came after delivering combinations—as long as he desired, there would be no such feebleness.

He was eager to see what this opponent had up his sleeve.

Sure enough, upon trading blows, Bai E could feel how tricky his opponent was.

His adversary hopped around like a monkey, agilely dodging and even when struck by a punch, it seemed to lack force and never hit solidly.

Yet the impression his opponent gave was somehow like a boat in a fury storm, as if he might capsize at any moment by an inconspicuous wave, tottering on the edge.

Despite his powerful punches and the roaring winds they broke through, they failed to pose a decisive threat to the target.

If a tornado was the harmony of footwork and attack, then this opponent represented the perfect defense within footwork.

The adversary was like the most patient hunter, waiting for his prey to expose a fatal vulnerability on its own.

Moving, observing, biding his time.

And inescapable.

Once the battle commenced, there was a feeling akin to being watched by Viper, an almost tangible cold air circulating, pressuring the aggressor with an anxious desire to defeat the opponent and put an end to this unsettling sensation.

This subconscious impulse arose from a blend of rational and instinctive self-judgment, rather than any special influence from another, and didn't even fall within the realms controlled by hormonal secretions of the body, with "self-restraint" having no effect on it at all.

It forced him, as the adversary, into a growing madness, akin to the delirium and convulsions that followed a snake bite.

But Bai E didn't care!

[You have spent 100 points of combat experience learning, which is converted into 50 points of "Combat Mastery" experience. (A very small chance to awaken a special attribute.)] (Accumulated)

[Current Combat Mastery experience 4/500, "Level 2 Combat Specialist" learned, synchronously gaining 1 potential point.]

[Combat Specialist (Level 2): Strike Power +4%, Evasion +2%, Blocking +2%, Combo (Special) +2.]

[Combo (Level 2): Within the shortest time of exerting force, deploy as much muscle power as possible, increasing attack speed by 55%, and gradually elevating strike power to a peak 120% with Overlimit performance.]

For a moment, Bai E's punches became more formidable, his fists alternating in a nearly impenetrable flurry.

Onlookers outside the ring recognized the familiar scene whenever Viper was in combat, lively and intense, but all the more dubious for it.

"It's that familiar feeling again..."

"It looks impressive, but what use is it if it doesn't kill?"

"He just used this tactic to exhaust Tornado, now why does he look dumb against a different opponent?"

Feeling his opponent's growing eagerness to take him down, Viper's mouth corners subtly curled up in the unseen shadows, "That's more like it."

There were no fools among the fighters who ran rampant in this arena, and one's own fighting style was no secret in this combat ring either. However, each of his opponents found themselves trapped in a difficult situation as they fought.