

Wow 201

Chapter 201 Hits

"Come, you strike first." Dan clenched his fist, his face excited.

Bai E looked at him seriously, reminding, "Please, instructor, don't hold back."

He had to control the variables, in case the instructor's mentoring attitude prevented the mode from triggering.

"Of course, I won't hold back." Dan smiled heartily, "Making you aware of the gap is my responsibility."

"Thank you, Instructor."

Bai E shook his wrists to ensure that certain key muscles remained agile and flexible.

Sometimes, being rigid wasn't necessarily a good thing.

Face to face, Dan was also curious to see how much this recruit, who dared to challenge him, had improved; letting Bai E strike first was to gauge his fundamentals.

With the most standard force-generating movement filled with maximum power, Bai E took the initiative and threw a punch.

"Bang."

Fist met palm, unmoving.

Dan, who caught Bai E's punch, slightly turned his face, looked past the fist to Bai E, more excited, "Not bad improvement, huh."

[Triggering the sparring mode...]

The hoped-for voice naturally rose in Bai E's mind, and he sighed silently—

The instructor was indeed strong, perhaps not as much as Blood God, but his strength was definitely not lacking.

His own force wasn't augmented with Overlimit Drive, but even relying on his native 14.7 physical prowess, it was considered the peak of an ordinary warrior. Plus, as his specialization level increased, those basic abilities mentioned earlier by Dan were invisibly enhanced. Yet the instructor who caught his punch showed no sign of weakness.

Clearly, he still had strength to spare.

That's exactly what he needed!

Only from an opponent stronger than himself but not capable of instantly knocking him out could he continuously learn.

"Let's go again," Dan took the initiative to invite him.

"Whoosh!"

Bai E threw another phantom punch.

Just like the initial probing during their first training session, one full-force blow, followed by a quick punch.

"Slap!"

Dan, having firmly caught Bai E's fist again, gently pushed and said with a robust enthusiasm, "Good, you've improved quite a bit."

Now confirmed that Bai E had a solid foundation, Dan clenched his fist, the exaggerated calluses on her joints displaying a fierce pressure.

"Be careful!" With a warning, Dan lunged at him.

Bai E's eyes flickered, and he instantly stepped forward half a step—intercepting!

Interrupting the opponent's attack before their force reached the ideal explosive peak meant that an action meant to release full power would ultimately only achieve 30 to 40 percent of its potential. This was a combat technique learned from the Wild Lion.

Dan's combat skills were rich, and sensing Bai E's intent, he changed his move instantly.

Everyone had their unique advantages. Apart from a resilient body, her strength was in her reflexes.

Her flexibility, typical of a female body, coupled with sensitive reactions, allowed her to switch from punch to elbow instantly, changing her force emission method in response to Bai E's intercept.

Bai E countered move for move. His reflex level of 12.7 might not yet match those instructors who had honed their physical qualities through countless battles and time.

But a versatile fighting style was his greatest advantage over Dan, learned from those underground fighters, focusing on varying and targeting the human body.

Without heritage, special training, or the experience of daily conniving with various schemers, Dan relied on real combat against other races and self-training to grow.

Defensive and offensive skills, flexible adaptation, those were her biggest trump cards.

Every part of the body is a weapon, ready to deliver maximum short-range driving force.

Fighting with Dan meant being cautious of her every move, as any seemingly insignificant motion could suddenly transform into a lethal assault.

Her style wasn't tricky; it was known for a tempestuous, overwhelming pressure.

If last night's tornado was known for its last-moment flurry of hitting, Dan's average output was nearly akin to that tornado's peak.

If it hadn't been for the massive surge in combat experience last night that urgently enhanced him, Bai E reckoned he would have been floored in a single exchange.

Even so, now he was mostly relying on his enhanced Guardian Place skills to double block and evasion capabilities, along with intercepting ability, to narrowly resist Dan's pressure.

But that's fine, his skills were rapidly improving.

[You are spending combat experience to observe and learn the opponent's fighting philosophy... (Cost: 20 points of experience/min)]

[You have spent 10 points of combat experience in learning, converting to 5 points of "Combat Mastery" experience. (Very small chance to awaken a special attribute.)]

...

"Such stable defense..." Dan, unleashing his power limitlessly, noticed the new recruit who was nearly watertight under his assault and his eyes couldn't help but flash with surprise.

During their first two trainings, he had judged this recruit's fighting talent as not impressive, skillwise rough despite strong physical power, but who would have thought that after just a few days on a mission, he'd come back, so formidable?

If Dan hadn't been the one to initiate him personally, he would have doubted if this was the same person.

No matter what, the serious instructor facing a challenge from a rookie who recently was a novice couldn't help but take on a bit of a mentoring attitude, despite his correct stance.

This momentary distraction was seized by Bai E as an opportunity.

Waiting for the chance!

Seizing the opportunity, going all in!

Striking vital points!

Controlling the flow of blood vessels, striking at the muscle fascia junctions to cause spasms, a method of hitting that stiffens the affected muscle area.

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...

Just like the triggering condition of a heavy strike, Bai E seized the opportunity amidst the prolonged entanglement and instantly deployed the special attribute he had just learned last night.

An explosive outbreak caught Dan off guard, as a bolt of lightning seemed to strike under his right arm, leaving his arm numb.

Dan swiftly leaned in with an Iron Mountain Lean to strike Bai E and regain a safe distance from being pursued. It was only then that she looked at Bai E with a truly grave expression.

This rookie... might really have the potential to defeat her.

Where did he learn these techniques!

Dan shook her right arm, the numb sensation slightly receding, before she took the initiative to attack once more.

Although the requirement for these recruits was to defeat her before graduation, as an instructor, the idea of being defeated by one of her own soldiers, especially a recruit who had hardly trained for a few days, was a blow to her pride.

An instructor... is always your instructor!

"Boom!"

Their fists met, and the air blast exploded.

Powered by a burst step, this kid was able to block a direct punch!

Dan looked at her own fist with deep skepticism.

The next moment...

"Hiss~"

Both retracted their fists, wincing in pain.

That punch almost shattered both their bones.

...

"I remember who he is now!" The contemplative instructor finally recalled where he had seen the new recruit currently exchanging blows with Dan.

It was not in the glory of the new recruits, but in the secret selection from two days ago!

Rose was defeated by this guy! But it was clearly Rose who held back!

It was this kid who disrupted Rose's Dao heart!

"If he couldn't handle Rose, how could he possibly defeat Dan..."

The astonished exclamations of other instructors filled his ears...

"There's actually a recruit capable of forcing an instructor to make a move?"

"This kid... might really have some skills!"

A group of instructors who had arranged training tasks for their own troops had gathered to watch the excitement, chattering away.

The sounds of the fight indicated that Dan was apparently not holding back.

Even so, she still couldn't take down this new recruit?

"That's too fierce."

"Can we transfer him to our troop..."

"Don't bother... you can't beat him!"

"Right, Guriba, what were you saying just now?" someone asked Rose's instructor.

Guriba blinked, "I was saying that Rose had asked me twice before to apply for the transfer of this kid to my troop..."

"And then?"

"I thought it would be too troublesome..."

"..."

"Lucky you didn't apply, otherwise you'd be the one getting beaten up right now..."

"But... he really shouldn't be able to outright defeat Dan, right?" one instructor wondered, stroking his chin and analyzing cautiously.

All being instructors, they occasionally sparred with each other. Dan's offensive and explosive powers were not the very best, but her tenacity and stamina were almost unimaginable.

Being able to achieve physical fitness close to that of a male in addition to a female's unique sensitivity, Dan's strength was certainly one of the top among the instructors.

"Probably... But to push Dan to this extent, it's already outrageous."

"Lucky Strike" charge +5.]

...

[You have spent 250 points of combat experience in learning, which were converted to 125 points of "Combat Mastery" experience. (Medium chance of awakening special attributes.)) (Stacked)

Perhaps due to having a solid foundation, or maybe because Dan's combat style was relatively easy to learn, the probability of awakening special attributes during learning skyrocketed.

Bai E wasn't just passively waiting for that final moment to come; the experience he was using came from system cheating, but he also had to put in his effort to transform the skills he had gained into real abilities he could control.

Using his current abilities to try to defeat his opponent by all possible means, that was the familiarity and integration of his own abilities.

Just like the "Overlimit Drive" specialty activated during the last advanced physical training, the specialty that might be activated in this sparring mission would most likely also require his own active exploration of the use of all special attributes and rely on self-integration to be successfully activated.

Joint lock, enhanced defense, and interception were the main combat strategies; acupoint targeting and combination strikes could only be used at rare opportune moments.

As for the whip...

His four fingers were as flexible as a whip, changing a punch to a palm while his arm— including his fist being blocked by Dan—continued its motion.

His fingers whipped out with the ceaseless momentum, creating a gust that blurred the vision, while the fingertips almost broke the sound barrier as they swept toward the vulnerable organs on the face.

Dan, who narrowly avoided it at the last moment, felt as if a sharp blade had brushed past her eyes and retreated rapidly, squinting with one eye.

With only one eye open, causing her eyelid to twitch uncontrollably, Dan watched Bai E with a shock she couldn't even detect in herself.

His moves... are strange.

But they are also effective, simple yet full of unexpected results.

Of course, the moves are secondary;

The main reason these unusual maneuvers worked was this kid's unexpected tenacity; he managed to stay undefeated under her fierce assault, making his fundamentals the capital of his ongoing endurance.

Even more importantly... after fighting for so long, despite being hit with solid punches from her, his combat state remained good.

Whether it be injuries or stamina... he doesn't get tired?

It seems that as long as she couldn't quickly take him down, problems might arise.

Moreover, he was even quickly becoming familiar with her attack patterns during the fight, to the point of countering and analyzing them. Dan smelled something familiar in the opponent's moves; he was trying to imitate her!

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At this moment, Dan's mind suddenly recalled the special attention that the scholar from the Scientific Research Institute had for this new recruit.

Back then, she still felt that the scholar wrongly believed this recruit was hiding his true capability... Now it seems, he really was?

She doesn't care about whether he has natural talent right now; all she wants is to protect the dignity of an instructor.

No matter what... she cannot truly be defeated by a recruit!

How can she take him down?

"Huff~" Dan took a deep breath, blinked, and finally no longer felt discomfort.

Could it be that she could only continue to be drawn into a prolonged fight?

...

[After using close-combat attacks to strike the target several times, hand-to-hand combat mastery experience +32.] (Cumulative)

Bai E wasn't having an easy time either.

His stamina stayed full thanks to the recovery provided by the Overlimit Drive, but the soreness in his body and the bruises from Dan hitting him several times were no joke, even with the aid of rapid healing. The occasional short-term physical strife had some effects.

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

[Injury repair progress 74%, Rapid Recovery (not unlocked) unlocking progress 39%.]

"..." Looking at the instructor before him, who showed not the slightest sign of faltering, Bai E couldn't think of how to defeat his opponent.

There was a mission on Dan that he hadn't forgotten about, a chance to draw an ability card from her.

Getting it before going on the mission would undoubtedly boost his confidence for the trip.

But she was too hard to beat.

He had landed hits on Dan's body too, but just like during their first encounter and the tests he had undergone, even if he punched her squarely, he couldn't break through her defenses.

He wasn't exactly losing, but he didn't have the slightest advantage either.

Or perhaps... he could only wait until he fully learned her style of fighting? Or maybe directly use experience to level up his hand-to-hand combat to level 4?

However, this standoff wasn't without benefits. Through practice during combat, he was slowly integrating the synergistic use of all his special attributes; the progress was slowly improving.

[You have paid 170 battle experience points in learning...] (Cumulative)

[Your hand-to-hand combat ability has developed a strong personal style, integrating everything you have learned; you will form a unique personal combat system. Current integration progress 37%...]

Bai E's eyes flickered, and he attacked again.

Using the pressure of a prolonged fight to enhance his use of various newly acquired special attributes was also the purpose of this battle.

As long as they engage, the process of engagement itself is sufficiently effective.

...

Outside the arena, an indescribable astonishment rose in Yue Ying's heart.

'Is he forming his own personal combat system?'

Watching the shadow that was becoming increasingly proficient in leveraging his strength, the small mouth under Yue Ying's hood opened slightly in astonishment.

With her keen eyesight, she could best understand the unusual aspects of what seemed like an ordinary fight—

But how could this be possible? How long had he been practicing hand-to-hand combat?

Or rather, how long had he "existed"? She had witnessed with her own eyes his birth as a newly created artificial human in this world!

Within such a short time, to achieve such prowess in close-quarters combat, such aptitude was perhaps no less remarkable than his talent for shooting.

In her experience, to form a personal combat system, what was first needed was sufficient accumulation... as well as strength in specialization.

Only with broad knowledge and familiarity can a wondrous flower bloom from the enriched soil above.

Yue Ying realized that she might be witnessing the rise of a human prodigy...

[Current mission reward: The clue to the Elf Breathing Skill (Quality: Gold)]

[The clue to the Elf Breathing Skill (Quality: Gold): You have gained the complete trust of Yue Ying of the Elf Race, displaying your astonishingly excellent qualities, which will enable you to obtain the secrets of the "Elf Breathing Skill" from her.]

"..."

There really is gold, huh?

Bai E glanced briefly at the visible dark figure on the side and quickly withdrew his gaze; at this moment, he couldn't afford to be distracted.

[You have paid 250 battle experience points in learning, converted into 125 "Hand-to-Hand Combat Mastery" experience. (High chance of awakening special attributes.)) (Cumulative)

[Long-term learning has allowed you to extract sufficient experience from your opponent's fighting style, your specialized ability—Hand-to-Hand Combat Specialization, received a new "special" attribute boost!]

[Hand-to-Hand Combat Specialization (Level 3): Strike power +6%, Dodge +3%, Block +3%... Hundred Strikes (Special) +1.]

[Your hand-to-hand combat ability has developed a strong personal style, integrating everything you have learned; you will form a unique personal combat system. Current integration progress 45%...]

Got it!

Chapter 204 victories

The moment he acquired "Bai Ji," Bai E's eyes instantly became clear.

Dan's offensive was like a storm, with an extremely high frequency and overwhelming pressure, but distinctively different from the continuous strikes of a tornado.

One was an overexerting burst; the other was about developing all parts of the body, any point of which could unleash a fatal attack.

Moreover, the primary focus was on rapidly mobilizing muscular strength to ensure that maximum output could be maintained even during short-range bursts of power.

If he could combine the two...

Bai E instantly initiated his move, pushing the Overlimit Drive to its peak.

"Bang Bang Bang Bang Bang!"

The savage assault completely submerged Dan's figure, fists, palms, feet, and knees all became weapons.

Facing Bai E's sudden outburst, even Dan, with a Combat Specialization Layer of 5, couldn't fully defend, and the sound of body impacts almost merged into one.

Not enough! Still not enough!

Bai E could feel the touch of his fists, Dan's physique was as robust as ever, like stones padded with cotton, his punches and palms felt only the rebounding force and not much of the impact damage to the opponent.

The current Combat Specialization Layer of 3 was still not sufficient!

Currently... Combat Mastery Experience (833/1000), Remaining: Combat Experience 2, Universal Experience 2655.

Add points directly! It's just 167 experience points; there's no more wool to be sheared from Dan, it would be most reasonable to try to defeat her for the rewards of her tasks.

[Payment: 2 Combat Experience points, 165 Universal Experience points.]

[You have acquired "Combat Specialization Layer 4," and you've also received 1 Potential Point.]

[Detected character currently has Combat Specialization (Layer 4), skill tree advancement unlocked: Graceful Release, Tactical Evasion, Absolute Defense.]

[Current unlocking requires: 1000 Universal/Combat Experience (double the cost for each additional skill unlocked of the same tier), 2 Potential Points (fixed).]

The moment the Specialization Layer increased, even the progress of the sparring task surged significantly.

[Your combat abilities have developed a strong personal style, integrating all you have learned into a unique personal combat system, current integration progress is 76%...]

Every time new special attributes are gained and the Specialization Layer is increased, it seems to rapidly advance the process of the personal system.

But there is still a considerable distance from it being complete, and it can't be relied upon for the time being.

Choosing one out of the newly unlocked skill trees needs careful consideration, the first 1000 experience points are not very expensive for him now, but unlocking additional same-tier skills requires doubling the experience, Bai E doesn't want to make a choice lightly unless it's crucial.

Defeating the instructor with the strength he already possesses is the optimal choice for now.

If that really won't work, he'll just unlock Graceful Release...

The three skills: Graceful Release for offense, Tactical Evasion for dodging, Absolute Defense for protection, clear and straightforward.

As the Specialization Layer increased, the addition to all attributes soared instantly, and the accompanying boost in effects was immediate.

In a flash, his strength surged.

Even with Dan's high resilience to being hit, she still found the combination of pressure points and joint locks amidst the powerful strikes troublesome, as these techniques could directly bypass physical defense to restrict the opponent's movement.

Dan only felt a numbness in her left arm before Bai E suddenly moved behind her, forcefully twisting her isolated right arm.

In the brief struggle, she ultimately couldn't match the brute strength of the new recruit.

"Crack!"

The muscle strain and bone dislocation caused Dan, the iron-willed woman, to feel a heart-piercing pain.

"Huff~ Huff~" Dan exhaled painfully, her face towards the ground.

It had been... how long since she felt this suffocating, tearing pain?

Since she left those frontal battlefields!

Constrained to form, powerless to resist.

Dan patted the hand clamped onto his shoulder like an eagle's claws, struggling to speak, "Alright, alright, I lost."

The damage fists and feet could inflict was ultimately limited for the two of them; even if he forced himself to break free at the cost of some pain, continuing to fight would simply lead to exhaustion until their last ounce of strength was depleted, to see who would falter first.

But it was just a spar in the military camp, there was no need to take it to that extreme.

[You've experienced an exhilarating battle, combat experience +20.]

[Your combat ability has developed a strong personal style, integrating all you have learned; you will gain a unique personal combat system, current fusion progress 80%...]

[Sub-quest—Challenge, complete!]

[Quest reward: Target character Ability Extraction Card*1, issued.]

[Target character Ability Extraction reward pool locked: Trait*Resilient Skin, Specialty*Enhanced Strength, Mastery*Combat Specialization Layer +1, not exceeding level 5. Start extraction?]

System prompts leaped out one after another.

"Phew~" Bai E finally sighed in relief, gently releasing the shoulder of Dan, who felt like a block of stone.

The muscular Dan, turning around, looked at Bai E with appreciation on his face and admiration from the heart, "Impressive!"

["Lucky Strike" recharge +1.]

"It's all because of the instructor..."

Dan interrupted, anticipating Bai E's response, "Don't say it was because I taught well! I at most taught you the basics of how to deliver power; I have no clue where you learned the rest of your skills..."

With that, Dan turned to look at the trainee troops riveted on their fight, announcing loudly, "I lost!"

Despite having witnessed the bout, only when Dan announced it himself did the dreamlike reality descend, shattering the last bit of unconscious denial the others harbored.

"He really won?"

"Can we actually beat the instructor?"

"See that? My big brother!"

"Then, I think I could also try challenging..."

The instructors watching from a distance couldn't believe their eyes... Dan lost?!

Even among their group of instructors, there were almost none who dared say they could beat Dan with certainty.

Did this mean that the "New Recruit Glory" was now so formidable as to defeat most instructors in hand-to-hand combat?

How long had he been born?

"Turtle turtle~"

...

["Lucky Strike" recharge +44.]

emmmm... 50 when added together?

They're pretty strict.

Bai E chuckled secretly, then looked forward to the Ability Extraction Card in his Consciousness Space—

Resilient Skin was the core trait behind Dan's endurance; Enhanced Strength was akin to a youthful version of Overlimit Drive, but he wondered if it could be used in tandem with Overlimit Drive; as for Specialization, it was nothing out of the ordinary.

Compared to the luxurious reward pool from Yue Ying last time, this time there were only three abilities to choose from. The strength of a basic-level military camp instructor was, after all, no match for someone at Yue Ying's level, but even the weakest ability accumulated could result in an unimaginable enhancement.

Let's see what I can draw this time...

The pointer spun rapidly over sections of three different colors, eventually slowing to a stop—

Trait—Resilient Skin!

Chapter 205 Mission Goals

[Tough Skin: Your body can protect you from more from external harm, reducing impact damage by 30%, and puncture or slash damage of energy level 7 or below cannot cause substantial injury; physical defense performance +2.]

The introduction was simple and clear, but the effect was also quite formidable.

In Bai E's view, this was the most useful option among the three choices for him, and his luck with this draw wasn't bad either...

"Reporting to the instructor!" A powerful roar rang out in the training group.

It drew everyone's attention, including Bai E's. Dan asked with a composed face, "What is it?"

"I want to challenge you as well!" The warrior stood tall and proud, basking in the attention of the many eyes upon him...

And since someone had managed to defeat an instructor head-on, did that mean there was a chance for him too?

I too have the makings of a Great Emperor!

Dan nodded calmly, "Come on."

The warrior stood with hands behind his back, his confident gaze straight ahead, his voice resonant, "Instructor, don't you need to rest?"

"No need."

"Ah!"

The victor was determined two and a half seconds after the battle commenced.

There wasn't even a chance for onlookers to give pointers.

Dan clapped his hands, ignoring the soldier who was lying on the ground, wincing in pain with a dislocated arm, and just smiled at Bai E, "Alright, since you have this strength, you don't need to waste time here anymore. You can carry out the battle training on your own and don't need to report to me."

"Yes, sir!"

Bai E saluted sharply.

Dan was a powerful and responsible instructor and deserved respect.

"Go." Dan waved his hand and looked away, turning his gaze to the other soldiers, "Anyone who wants to challenge me is welcome at any time. Now, continue training!"

Good, with that, he was essentially free from basic training types.

As Bai E left, he was making calculations—

Physical fitness, shooting, combat... The various basic trainings most needed by recruits were essentially completed. What he needed to learn next was what really made one a member of a special forces team.

Machine guns, flamethrowers, infantry vehicles, chainswords, etc., as well as non-combat abilities such as scouting, gathering, and dissecting.

But that would all have to wait until he returned from his current mission.

After practicing some archery for a while with the time he had left, Bai E rushed to the outskirts right after a quick lunch.

He was going on a mission tomorrow, and there were some things he needed to bring... such as that bottle of "Exorcism Essential Oil."

Normally, you wouldn't need such a thing in a military camp, and it was easy to get discovered by teammates living together every day, so Bai E kept these items in a warehouse.

Since he was leaving early tomorrow morning, Bai E naturally had to bring along such potentially useful items just in case.

Refugee Slum?

Suffering is most fertile ground for faith; when human society cannot provide solace to an individual, those people can only seek all possible means to survive tenaciously.

Believers completely commanded by demons indeed mostly follow the guidance of demons to spread their faith in human society, but it's also possible to encounter newly born faith.

Bringing along this kind of item that specially targets demons is definitely the right move.

It's just a shame there is only 33ml...

"Sir, we also want to submit supplies!" Dai Lian looked at Bai E with sincere eyes, "We want to contribute to the organization too!"

Yesterday, Kuang Xin had set an example for them, and they managed to exchange for a good amount of money, so they urgently relied on their own channels to inquire about the value of Exorcism Essential Oil.

It turned out that it was CJB.

This thing had no effect on any living creatures other than demons, not even on demon believers walking among humans...

Only against those real demons from higher dimensions and those particular entities who have transcended from normal humans into demons can it exhibit its intended effect.

But with their current strength, if they really encountered a demon itself or those transcendental beings, it would undoubtedly be akin to offering themselves up on a platter.

This item would only be a threat to demons when in the hands of those who can hold their own against demons; it's an entry ticket to defeating demons, not something to increase power limits.

Matching up against demons?

Are they worthy? They are not.

And yet, yesterday the sir had especially reminded them that this item was in short supply for the organization; it's not worth this price under normal circumstances, so when else to submit it if not during a limited-time bounty period?

The thought that there were hidden dragons and crouching tigers in his organization, and that someone had actually been combating demons recently, filled Dai Lian with excitement—the future was bright!

"Good." Bai E nodded with satisfaction.

The funds were handed over painfully fast.

[Submitted Exorcism Essential Oil*33ml, received organizational funds*1650!]
X2

He glanced at the progress of the warehouse construction and recorded another 10 contribution points per person.

The other two remained motionless, having their own objectives but lacking in contribution points, they sensibly saved themselves; only Kuang Xin was somewhat excited.

80 points!

He could finally redeem the Advanced Physical Training 3.0 he had been longing for; his physical ability had reached 13.5, and it had been difficult to improve for a while. Without any training methods, he felt like he was about to die...

"Sir! I'd like to learn methods that can effectively train my physical abilities," Kuang Xin formally requested.

"No problem," Bai E agreed without hesitation, and 80 contribution points were instantly deducted.

["Teaching" concluded. Through the feedback from the "teaching," you've acquired 90 combat experience points and 510 general experience points.]

Only 600 points?

Bai E felt a pang of disappointment as he looked at the experience gained.

To roll out this damn 3.0 plan, he had spent quite a bit of experience himself; it was easy for the players to learn from the groundwork others laid.

But it was not a big problem. The more people learned, the more he earned, and looking forward, it was bound not to be a loss.

"I have to go out again tomorrow. I'm not sure when I'll be back. In the meantime, you guys will have to manage things yourselves."

Bai E took the initiative to remind everyone and reissued the quota for the mission.

"Yes, Sir!"

...

Returning to the military camp, Bai E ran into Dai Lian and others who were waiting for him.

"Let's go. We have a mission tomorrow. First, let's gather the members of our three squads to get acquainted, then familiarize ourselves with the mission target and designate each team's specific tasks."

They had been given a heads-up the night before, and Bai E nodded in agreement, "Okay."

There was no dedicated conference room, so they found a spot in the sun, where Bai E saw the other two squads besides his own.

At a glance, he didn't recognize anyone except for the Blood God...

"They are all pretty seasoned. We might have to follow their lead for this mission," Dai Lian whispered a reminder in Bai E's ear, and Bai E subtly nodded without making a sound.

"These are the only two photographs we have of the target."

One of the muscular men in a tight combat suit held up two photos and said, "Take a look and pass them around, so you can get a rough idea."

After Bai E received them, he scanned the first one—

A yellow background with an overall terrain shot: it looked like a honeycomb cake, the wind-eroded caves dotted across the vast land. The picture was still, yet Bai E could already hear the howling of the wind.

The second photo was predominantly black. Only after carefully looking could one discern the different shades of shadows outlining the terrain—it was the interior of a cave.

Based on the timestamps in the upper-left corner of each photo, they were taken no more than half an hour apart.

So... even under the daylight, the lighting conditions inside the cave were still not great.

"This is the target location for our mission," the man spoke up after everyone had looked at the photos. "Those refugees are hidden inside these numerous caves. There might be traps they've set up to ward off wild beasts inside, and everyone must be careful. The scouts we sent before most likely lost contact due to injuries inflicted by those traps."

"They are hiding deep inside the caves. We will split up into small teams to go in and scout. If you see someone, stay alert. If we are attacked, defense comes first. First, we state our intentions and try to persuade them, and we are not allowed to harm the refugees unless absolutely necessary."

"I have a question..." Bai E suddenly spoke up.

The man frowned slightly, gathering all eyes on Bai E. Maintaining his composure, Bai E continued, "Are we sure that the earlier missing scouts disappeared solely due to their own carelessness? I think it's best if we don't spread too thin before we understand the situation."

Chavez and Carlos's repeated cautions made Bai E extremely cautious, and he just wanted to raise his concerns to keep everyone extra vigilant.

The man who had been speaking, possibly a squad leader, furrowed his brows into a 'Jl', "How can those ordinary scouting groups compare with us?"

The special ops teams present were the elite of the elite, and the two teams had incredibly seasoned members who had participated in countless battles.

Moreover, regular scouting groups went out in pairs, whereas special teams operated in groups of five. Samuel felt his arrangements were overly cautious already.

"I just want to ensure the safety of everyone..."

Another man—who hadn't spoken up until then—gazed at Bai E with a sharp look, enunciating clearly, "Our duty is to scout dangers for the city. No one's life belongs to themselves. You're currency in the hands of the city lord, and you shouldn't have your own opinions."

With that, he turned to Dai Lian, "I don't care how you usually assign your team's missions, but when we're on a joint mission, make sure to keep your team in line!"

Samuel too stared into Bai E's eyes, "This is an order, not a negotiation."

"..." Bai E could feel Dai Lian tug at his clothes from behind.

In truth, he had no intention of arguing further.

In this era, individual strength varied greatly, and the wilderness environment was complex and unpredictable; it's impossible to say what might cause someone to vanish.

Since these people were so confident, they likely had their own judgments.

Of course, the line between confidence and arrogance is often paper-thin.

Bai E could not control others, so he could only do what he was capable of...

He couldn't rely on them...

His gaze lingered on the dim environment in the second photo; Bai E remembered he still had an unfinished specialty...

Chapter 206 Expertise in Training

Evening, the Black Forest.

The moonlight was dim, the wilderness silent.

Bai E was no longer the same person who had first arrived in this world, neither in strength nor in mindset.

Facing the wilderness he had never dared to tread at night before, he now had the courage to come alone.

A military saber and two handguns were all the equipment he carried.

The saber was for killing enemies, the handguns for self-defense; there would be no problem using his Gun Fighting Skill to escape in a pinch.

As for his target...always letting Kuang Xin and the others kill wolves, wouldn't it be unacceptable if he didn't try it himself?

He had never killed this creature before, there was no experience decay, and it should be good for farming experience.

Bai E still remembered the unfinished "Blindfolded Combat" unlock method—

It required earning 100 points of combat experience by killing enemies in a Dark Environment, which was perfectly suited for the potential mission in the dark.

The night breeze in the Black Forest carried a moist, earthy stench.

Bai E deliberately made noise as he walked to attract any potential carnivores lurking in the dark.

"Crack~ Crunch~"

Twigs and leaves shattered beneath his feet as Bai E strode boldly deeper into the forest.

Until at some unknown moment, several ghostly green eyes floated in the darkness like will-o'-the-wisps.

"Swoosh~" Bai E drew his saber from its sheath, casually spinning it in a flourish.

The specially treated matte black blade was nearly unnoticeable at night; he didn't know if it would attract the wolves' attention, but they probably didn't care.

Wasn't it only proper to feast when a terrifying bipedal ape strayed alone into their territory, as if he was delivering meat right to their doorstep?

Encirclement, closing in.

The eyes of the beasts were fixed intently on the prey they surrounded, waiting for him to reveal a weakness.

One thing you never wanted in the wilderness was an injury, even if your target was as good as dead, you still had to be wary of its final struggle.

One two three four five, going into the forest to hunt wolves... There were six of them in total.

Standing still and letting them ravage... that would be an exaggeration, but given his current physical condition, six wolves shouldn't pose any danger.

Bai E pulled out a black cloth from his chest, opaque and impenetrable to light, and swiftly wrapped it around his eyes.

Then he secured it with a knot.

The requirement for activating the Combat Specialization Layer was a "Dark Environment," and he wasn't sure if the moonlight qualified as "dark." To avoid a wasted effort, adding another layer of surety seemed more sensible.

If it was to be blindfolded combat, he must first become blind.

The moment the black cloth covered his eyes, darkness completely descended upon Bai E's world.

All around was a pitch-black void, as if he had instantly lost connection to the world.

The moment the visuals vanished, everything around him felt far away.

This differed from the sensation of entering the depths of the sewer that day; one was an instantaneous cut-off, the other a gradual adaptation; one involved rats as foes, the other wolves.

Even though his current strength was unrivaled by ordinary people, the primal fear brought on by darkness still caused Bai E's heart to race.

Though it was quickly suppressed by "Self-Control."

After taking a deep breath, Bai E began to gradually adapt to the environment.

Using his ears, his breathing, his sense of touch...

The wind brushing his skin, the rancid odor in the wind, the rustling of grass as he moved...

[You are using your Senses to observe the environment...]

"Whoosh!"

He made noise almost simultaneously.

No matter how clever an animal was, it was still just an animal. Seeing that the terrifying bipedal ape had covered his primary means of observing the outside world, they thought this was the greatest opportunity.

A sigh echoed in Bai E's heart.

[Here they come!]

[The left!]

Bai E gripped the handle of his saber backward, estimating the speed, distance, and direction as he slashed to the left!

A solid sensation confirmed he hit his target. The feedback in his hand was slightly rigid, indicating a significant impact. The wailing of a wounded wolf also rose near his ear.

Without time to consider which part he had struck, Bai E spun around and delivered a sweeping kick in another direction.

Though the six wolves attacked at once, their actual assaults arrived in staggered successions, giving him some room to maneuver.

"Bang!"

A metallic thud came as his heel struck a skull, and the continued arc of his leg connected with the second oncoming wolf without losing momentum.

There was no chance for a follow-up or breather; Bai E turned again and struck towards his rear.

Unexpectedly, the empty hand he swung was suddenly entwined by a warm body. He felt sharp claws scraping the unknown fabric of his combat uniform and the gnashing teeth on his arm, eager to tear away a chunk of flesh.

Yet the toughness of his muscles and the fabric of his uniform frustrated the beast's intentions, leaving only a not-too-serious pain transmitted to Bai E's senses.

The mere act of biting and tearing wasn't much concern; what really constrained him was the weight of the wolf, nearly half the size of a human.

Flipping his blade around, Bai E chopped at the wolf which had ensnared his left arm with its forelimbs and fangs.

The sharp saber cut through the animal's tough fur but struggled to inflict significant damage; at least Bai E did not feel the blade penetrate deeply.

The blade wasn't dealing high damage? In a swift motion, Bai E turned his blade to stab downward, aiming for where he anticipated the wolf's belly and thrust harshly.

In pain, the wild wolf instantly released its fangs and leaped backward.

However, the coordination among the wolf pack during a hunt was unimaginably tacit, leaving Bai E no time to process his move before a wolf's jaws fiercely clamped on his right forearm, the one holding the knife.

They knew the danger of the knife Bai E held in his right hand, a terrifying weapon fashioned by humanoid apes, posing the greatest threat to them.

Once they controlled the knife-wielding limb, the humanoid ape's offensive capabilities would be greatly reduced.

Pressing down on the wolf's head, Bai E kicked its soft belly. With the activation of various special attributes from his Level 4 Combat Specialization, even without much space to wield force, he could still unleash an attack with a certain degree of strength using any part of his body.

The wolf, in agony, unconsciously released its bite with a pained howl.

In the complex fight, noises surrounded him on all sides, creating a situation far more challenging to discern complete information than the environment he encountered in the sewers that day.

The wild wolves weren't very strong, and six was not a large number, but for Bai E who couldn't rely on his eyes for information, it was a challenge neither too big nor too small.

Arms, thighs... the wolves attacked from all directions in their attempts to restrict Bai E's movements, but he resolved each assault in turn.

The sharp claws and fangs struggled against the protection of the combat suit, unable to cause substantial harm, and on the rare occasion that the tusks did genuinely pierce through the suit, Bai E's "Tough Skin" trait meant they still couldn't taste blood.

Pain was inevitable.

But like the pain felt in an underground fighting ring, it didn't cause Bai E to lose his reason. Instead, it brought him into a certain icy furor.

Seizing the fur of another wild wolf that lunged at him, Bai E heaved its body and smashed it towards another encroaching wolf.

The military knife had been returned to his waistband early on. It was of no use to him.

The somewhat heavy military knife, categorized as a light weapon, did not inherit the strength directly from the Combat Specialization Layer like when a dagger was used.

With only the feedback of 99/100 expertise points from the player and not even unlocking a Level 1 specialization layer, it was truly cumbersome to use for killing enemies, even less convenient than bare hands.

Bai E had no intention of significantly developing this specialization. Light weapons were typically suited for dealing with small creatures or fellow humans, but they proved to be of little use against the bugs or those machine intelligences and orcs he had yet to encounter.

Training to improve them was one thing, but he couldn't afford to invest experience points to boost that specialization.

For now, it was a better choice to cripple the wolf pack with his fists before using the military knife to finish them off.

Without the knife, Bai E's movements became even more agile. After grabbing one wolf and slamming it onto another, he loosened his grip and again pressed down on the charging wolf's head.

The wild wolf succumbed to his brute force, and as Bai E knelt down and gathered the strength in his fist, he smashed down on its spine.

"Crack!"

The wolf's body was slammed into the ground, and with one stab, the blade twisted into its flesh, spilling guts and blood all over.

[Successful close-range attack has rendered the target incapacitated, Combat Mastery experience +5. (Cumulative)]

[Successful critical hit on the target, Light Weapon Mastery experience +3.]

[Acquired "Level 1 Light Weapon Specialization", concurrently earning 1 Potential Point.]

[Light Weapon Specialization (Level 1): Attack speed +12%, Armor Penetration +1%.]

[Current Light Weapon Mastery experience 2/300. On reaching 300 points, "Level 2 Light Weapon Specialization" can be mastered.]

[Critical hit on target, dealing 27 piercing damage!]

He casually pulled out the blade and flung it away.

Having become accustomed to battling in "Dark Environments", the improvements in his abilities were not limited to information gathering, but more crucially, the confidence stemming from his comfort with the darkness.

"Awoo!"

The wolf that was struck squarely by the blade let out a painful howl.

Kill!

...

[Successful critical hit on the target, Light Weapon Mastery experience +12. (Cumulative)]

[Critical hit on target, dealing 33 fatal damage!]

[Target's breathing ceases, all basic life signs lost.]

[You have killed the target, combat has ended, 85 combat experience points acquired. (Cumulative)]

[You are attempting to familiarize yourself with combat in a "Dark Environment", and have successfully gained "100 combat experience points" through "combat", enabling you to train the Blind Fighting specialization. Current progress 98/100.]

As expected, his Blind Fighting progress had increased substantially.

Pity it's two points short... quite a rapid decay.

It felt as if the depreciation was even quicker than when killing rats. Sure, the initial 20 points of experience per wolf were not insignificant, but the rate of decay was too high. Was this due to... his own current strength?

Wiping away blood with his left hand, Bai E removed the black cloth covering his eyes. His gaze swept over the scattered corpses and closely examined the wounds on their bodies before realizing just how wildly off-target his attacks had been...

His skills were still lacking.

Continue!

...

[...Progress 107/100, you have successfully unlocked the Blind Fighting specialization.]

[Blind Fighting (Level 1): Perceptual performance (Auditory) in "Dark Environment" +1.]

[You are attempting to familiarize yourself with combat in a "Dark Environment", and have successfully gained "300 combat experience points" through "combat", eligible for upgrading the Blind Fighting specialization level. Current progress 7/300.]

A specialization with levels? This was his first encounter with one.

Bai E was brimming with joy, as the excitement in his eyes, hidden beneath the cloth, shone even brighter.

Wild wolves? I'm sorry!

Chapter 207 Delving Deep into the Cavern

[... Progress 85/300.]

...

[... Progress 143/300.]

In the dead of night, a figure reeking of blood roamed alone through the Black Forest. The thick scent of blood carried far on the wind, drawing wolf packs without the need for him to seek them out actively. Their numbers steadily increased.

[... Progress 229/300.]

[Successful close-quarters attack rendered the target incapable of moving, Combat Mastery Experience +21.] (Accumulated)

[Successfully struck vital points on the target, Light Weapon Mastery Experience +18.] (Accumulated)

But the experience points were diminishing.

"Hurrhurr~"

Perhaps the scent of their own kind's blood alerted the newly arrived wolves to danger, and this batch didn't attack directly.

With one leg stretched out and one bent at the knee, Bai E sat on a fallen dry log, the cloth that covered his eyes never once removed. At the approach of another wolf pack, he merely twitched his ears.

One... two... three...

The rustle of footsteps, the panting of the chase... every unnatural sound was a variation.

At least... twenty of them.

"Click~" Bai E gently undid the leather buckle at his waist.

He planned to make it quick.

The last wave, even if each one only provided an average of 4 points of experience, would be more than enough. After this fight, he would go back and rest.

It wasn't that Bai E was content with just reaching level 2 in Blind Fighting; it was simply that the wolves here were not enough to train his Blind Fighting skill to a higher level.

Not to mention whether he could easily find another wolf pack afterwards was debatable, there wasn't much time left this evening, and he had to set out early the next day...

The largest of the wolves, resembling a Wolf King, approached Bai E aggressively, its eyes filled with a lethal glint as they fixed on the figure bathed in the blood of their kin.

It had a scar slicing through its right eye, a wound left by a human, and it remembered forever.

"Bang!"

[Gun Fighting Skill, activated!]

Bai E fired the first shot.

[... Progress 342/300, you have successfully leveled up your specialty—Blind Fighting to level 2.]

[Blind Fighting (Level 2): "Dark Environment" Insight (Auditory) +2, Insight (Tactile) +1.]

The effects were straightforward. Bai E took off the bandage, his gaze sweeping over the chaotic scene before him.

Bullet-pierced branches and leaves scattered all around, mixed with splashes of torn flesh.

The hit rate set a new low for Gun Fighting Skill, as relying solely on his ears to gather information made accuracy terrifyingly low in a complex environment.

He particularly surveyed the body of the largest wolf... an elite monster—Wolf King.

The experience from the Wolf King was outrageously high, one exceeded a gang of others combined.

50 combat experience points! If it weren't for the Wolf King's sacrificial demise, he might have had to look for something else to kill.

But fortunately, it wasn't necessary.

Taking advantage of the moon's cover, Bai E slipped away lightly.

After a night of slaughtering wolves, the thick scent of blood was almost indelible.

Before going back to the tent, Bai E entered the communal washroom to clean himself thoroughly inside and out.

It took the slickest soap and the hardest wire ball to finally lessen the smell.

He tiptoed into the tent and lay down on the bed.

It seemed that You, who was in deep sleep, suddenly turned over, mumbling words like those in a dream.

"Get some sleep, we need to get up early tomorrow."

"... Mhmm."

...

[From the quest reward, your Insight +0.1.]

[From the quest reward, Ranged Weapon Mastery Experience +42.]

[From the quest reward, Light Weapon Mastery Experience +30.]

...

[From the quest reward, your Reflexes +0.1.]

[From the quest reward, Combat Mastery Experience +22.]

...

[From the quest reward, Tech - Basic Electrical Manufacturing and Processing Experience +152.]

Bai E stretched himself and put on his full equipment.

The two hundred arrows he requested for a covert mission last time were largely reusable after collection and patching; he didn't need to prepare anything else.

Sixteen people, two vehicles, Bai E's junior squad was sadly scattered.

Only junior squads can take in equally green recruits, a point that was considered during allocation, but sometimes this inexperience could be inconvenient.

Song Ying and You took Bai E in one vehicle while Tiger and Big Mountain turned to enter the other.

"Let's go!"

The road is long and obstructed.

...

The target location was about a ten-hour drive from the base, requiring passage through the city.

As they brushed past the edge of the city, Bai E could see the towering city walls and the occasional human settlements beyond them.

In the gloomy world, this black city stood miraculously, its longevity unknown.

The three team leaders were in another vehicle, seemingly discussing the details. Someone in Bai E's shaky carriage leaned in close and patted his shoulder, "Kid, a piece of advice, keep your mouth shut during missions. We're all battle-hardened, nobody's less thoughtful than you."

Another soldier sitting up front chuckled and looked over, "Even if you do have important suggestions, it's better to discuss them privately and let your team leader convey them. Blurting them out during planning is like slapping our team leaders in the face. It's not that our team leaders are petty; it's about maintaining the necessary authority for leading a team. You better be careful about that."

None of these men wore badges on their chests, indicating that they were all of natural human status.

Bai E's gaze swept across their faces, and he nodded in acknowledgment, "Understood."

"In any case, we follow our team leader's orders. Even if there's a failure, it's not on you, got it?" The soldier who had first reached out to Bai E patted his shoulder again, "Even if there's a slip-up, we've got your back, little brother."

"Thank you."

Naturals varied, some were hostile towards artificial humans, while others didn't care about that status—or rather, it was more about a sense of natural nobility and superiority.

Morals made them feel obliged to protect the weak.

Good and bad people always existed in equal measure within any group.

Bai E felt introspective but was still somewhat apprehensive about the unknowns of the mission ahead.

The carriage rattled on. Blood God sat diagonally opposite, staring absentmindedly at the floor of the carriage, silent.

...

The journey was unusually smooth.

It was five thirty-six in the afternoon.

The setting sun cast a sallow light, as misty as fog.

It slanted across the caves, casting bizarre, elongated shadows on the ground.

The boundless wilderness was swept by fierce winds that howled through the oddly shaped caves like wild beasts, and the sand carried by the wind felt slightly abrasive against the skin.

Desolation, silence.

That was the overwhelming sensation at the target location.

The photos had hinted at it, but being at the site made one even more aware of the primitive unease brought on by the environment.

"They live in a place like this?" A soldier getting out of the vehicle surveyed the surroundings, trying to find traces of human habitation.

"This area's far from those major threats; it really is a good hiding spot."

Using the city as a barrier and resting behind it did indeed seem like a good development area.

But the soil was too barren to support many people; it might be a paradise for a few settlers... relatively speaking, compared to other parts of this world.

The three team leaders seemed to have reached a decision on the strategy and their respective areas of responsibility and disembarked together from the side of the vehicle.

Experienced soldiers effortlessly took some equipment out of the rear storage compartment.

"Here, night vision goggles. You know how to use them, right?"

[No.]

But he could ask You and the others.

Bai E took them and nodded, "No problem."

"Kid, don't be scared. If you run into danger, just shout. We're here for you."

A soldier laughed heartily, apparently not taking the potential dangers of the mission too seriously.

What haven't these veterans seen? A bit of relaxation helped when it counted most.

Experienced soldiers quickly identified several cave entrances that seemed to be hideouts for the vagabonds through traces left in the environment.

"Make sure to keep communication open. Report any issue immediately!"

The three teams spread out to act. Tiger, taking the lead with a blast shield, stepped into a downward-sloping cave mouth.

The twilight glow watched over them as they gradually disappeared into the darkness and sank with it.

Within his own team, Bai E voiced his question, "Aren't we waiting for daylight to move?"

Tiger shook his head slightly, "We've discussed it; there's no need. You've seen the photos— even during the day, it's pitch-black inside. There's no difference with night vision. Move quickly, we can handle the vagabonds tonight and set off early tomorrow morning."

The return trip wouldn't be as quick as the journey here. Moving two hundred people would surely be slower, and even without considering their physical condition, it would likely take two to three days on the road.

Not encountering danger on the way didn't mean it was safe on the way back. In this era, there was never a guarantee of absolute safety outdoors, so the less time spent out there, the safer it was.

"Oh~"

Bai E responded somberly.

The world looked strange under night vision, everything enveloped in a layer of dim green light.

He needed to adapt.

Thinking Bai E was nervous because it was his first time with them on such a mission, Big Mountain cheerfully comforted him, "Don't worry; You is here. She'll spot any traps the vagabonds have set up."

You, leading the way in risk assessment, was as vigilant as a little cat.

The delicate touch unique to female artificial humans showed in various aspects and complemented male templates.

The group moved deeper into the cave, the path became winding and descended underground. The light from the outside world could not penetrate the bends, leaving vision beyond the night goggles in utter darkness.

The complete darkness dampened the mood for conversation.

Amidst the silent sound of footsteps, the howls of the wild winds above the wasteland seemed especially eerie.

"No traps..."

You took the lead, her clear, cold voice echoing with confusion.

Chapter 208 Exploration and Doubts

"Traces of humanoid creatures..."

"No feces or scent left by large wild beasts..."

"No traps..."

Based on the discoveries made so far, which were not too deep into the area, You made her current judgment.

"Perhaps traps are laid a bit deeper inside?"

"Or perhaps this isn't their primary living space?"

The cavernous terrain covered a vast area, and the scouts who had explored previously had only speculated about the rough living range of those migrants through scattered clues.

If the scouts had made a mistake or if their presence had alarmed the migrants, causing them to move, it couldn't be certain.

You frowned, having her judgment, "Even without signs of traps being set, if it were to guard against wild beasts from the wilderness, there would already be traces. Placing them too close to their dwelling would also risk accidental injuries. Maybe... we are going in the wrong direction."

Those migrants didn't dwell in the areas that their current exploration pathway could reach, so naturally, there was no need to lay traps along this passageway.

As for the sparse humanoid traces she had found... they couldn't be taken as solid evidence.

The network of caves and tunnels here was extensive; it was quite possible for some passages to be less frequently traversed by people.

Song Ying looked towards Tiger and asked softly, "Captain?"

After pondering for a moment, Tiger made a decision, "Continue exploring a bit further."

The distance they had entered wasn't far; the discoveries at this time couldn't serve as definitive evidence for a judgment.

If they reported this, the members of the other two squads wouldn't accept it; instead, it would make the already somewhat awkward situation even more embarrassing.

Since there were signs of human activity, it meant the intelligence on the migrants in this area was generally correct.

Even if they had changed their residence due to the disturbance from the previous scouts, it was necessary to locate and confirm their original dwelling place.

The clues in the tunnels could only prove limited things, but the actual living site could yield more useful information, including the number of people, living standards, and so on.

In this era, firstly the technological level was limited, and secondly, human life was cheap; information explored through human efforts often relied on bravery and physical endurance.

"Okay."

You nodded gently and continued to clear the way ahead.

The team proceeded as quietly as possible, not making any unnecessary noise.

Silence ensured that everyone was able to acutely perceive everything in their environment.

To listen to the wind that sounded like wailing ghosts and howling wolves, to listen to the rustling footsteps constrained by the limited vision, to listen to one's own heartbeat that felt like the only thing left in the world, to listen to... the fear that comes from the primal darkness.

'Why do I feel a bit creeped out...?' Big Mountain rubbed his hands together and looked over his teammates.

For some reason, even though everyone was moving together and the physical distance hadn't changed, he always felt his teammates were drifting further away from him.

Further and further away... Further and further away...

So far that his breathing became slow and drawn out, so far that each blink of his eyes felt extremely heavy, so far that voices stretched into several syllables to the point of distortion, so far that his heart seemed to forget how to beat.

He felt like an unfortunate swimmer who had drowned, watching his companions who were still afloat on the surface, silently sinking down to the seabed...

"..." He opened his mouth, wanting to say something to break the panic-inducing sensation.

But he couldn't make a sound.

It was unclear whether it was reason preventing him from making noise, fearing that his own noise might disturb or mask potential information or dangers in the darkness;

Or whether it was emotion suppressing his body's instincts, stopping him from using his mouth and vocal cords.

He could only watch as he drifted further and further away from his teammates, slowly being submerged into the darkness...

"Beep beep beep~"

A series of signals suddenly came through the earpiece.

Even when there was no need to share essential information, everyone would press a button at regular intervals to signal to their teammates that they were alright.

The sudden noise made Big Mountain's body tremble violently, and the feelings he had just experienced retreated like a tide.

Regaining his senses, Big Mountain felt his back drenched in sweat, not realizing when his cotton undershirt had been soaked through.

Raising his hand to press a button on the side of his earpiece, Big Mountain also signaled that he hadn't encountered any abnormalities.

Turning to look at his teammates, everyone seemed to be fine.

Did he not sleep well last night?

Big Mountain shook his head as if to shake off the sinking sensation he had felt, as if to cast it off along with the motion.

"Look over there..."

You, who was leading the way, whispered, made room by stepping aside, and stopped in her tracks.

As everyone caught up and peeked, an underground cavern that suddenly broadened in their field of vision appeared before them, evident through their green-tinted night vision devices.

Tiny spots of an even more luminescent green dotted the entire inner wall of the underground cavern, making the sight in their vision as splendid as a starry sky.

"Is this... some kind of fungus?"

"Cultivated by humans, it's either food or a weapon..."

They were either exploiting the natural toxins in these materials as traps or weapons or the fungi were edible...

The migrants living in such a place, without normal conditions for cultivating crops or synthesized food production lines that could utilize proteins, starches, and the like, only had the option to grow such things as a source of sustenance.

...

Everyone tended to agree with the latter.

Wearing gloves, You carefully picked a mushroom and examined it closely.

After a moment, she matched the target species with the "Encyclopedia Atlas" recorded in her mind, "Flavor-heart Mushroom, edible between 23 and 60 days of growth, containing mild hallucinogenic toxins, mild addictiveness if consumed over a long period. The toxicity gradually increases and it starts to lignify after 60 days of growth..."

After crouching down and observing for a while, You confirmed, "These Flavor-heart Mushrooms are basically about thirty days old, they probably haven't come to harvest them yet."

Zhou, with his arms crossed, had completely recovered from the "illusion" he had just experienced, "But this patch of Flavor-heart Mushrooms wouldn't be enough to sustain those two hundred people mentioned in the intelligence reports..."

"There must be more than one plantation..." You looked around and said, "The growing conditions for Flavor-heart Mushrooms are very low, they must have planted a lot. If we keep moving forward, we should see more."

"Let's go, keep moving forward."

With a somewhat exhilarated tone, Tiger expressed that finding human-cultivated food also meant that at least part of their prior intelligence was correct.

As expected, several nearly adjacent caves were found to contain large swathes of Flavor-heart Mushrooms, brilliant as the stars.

"They're here!" You stated confidently.

In the absence of any guards

In the absence of any guards, such a plantation could easily be ravaged and eaten by various wild animals.

The cultivated area couldn't possibly be too far from the real dwelling place of the refugees, or even if they were moving, they wouldn't leave so many Flavor-heart Mushrooms unharvested.

"They haven't left."

"Good!" Tiger nodded in agreement, fully trusting his team member's judgment, and then speaking into the microphone said, "This is Team A97, we have discovered their plantation, repeat, we have found their plantation."

As Tiger reported their findings to the other two teams, You was still looking in the direction they had come from, continuing to doubt to herself, "But why are there no traps?"

Surviving in the wilderness, using traps for warnings and defense is a basic requirement, the refugees couldn't possibly be unaware of this.

This wasn't something that could be easily explained by whether the city dwellers had hostile intentions or not.

Unless... they're not afraid?

Come to think of it, since arriving at this underground nest, they really hadn't encountered any small wild animals.

It seemed that the entire cave system was unnaturally quiet.

Bai E, closest to You, heard her muttering to herself.

"Did you find a problem?"

"There shouldn't be an absence of traps..." You said softly, expressing the doubt circling in her mind.

"Zzzzt—"

After some static, the familiar voice of another team leader came through, "How large is the scale, approximately how much can it supply for daily consumption?"

Inwardly calculating, Song Ying quietly reminded Tiger at his side, "Probably just over a hundred people."

Tiger nodded and responded, "Based on what we've found so far, it's enough to support the daily consumption of about a hundred people."

"Understood..."

"Zzzzt—"

Another voice joined the conversation, "We've found some too, and it's not small... wait, we think we've seen someone. He's running! Chase!"

Suddenly, the voice became chaotic, hurried breathing momentarily dominated the conversation.

While two teams continued their exploration, they awaited the outcome on the other side.

Only until the commotion coming through the open mic subsided did the waiting team leader calmly ask, "Did you catch him?"

"He got away..." After regaining some composure, the voice responded steadily, "There are too many branching paths here, we're not familiar with the environment, and he lost us after a few turns."

Team Leader 1 fell silent for a moment, seemingly contemplating the next move, before finally saying, "Continue moving forward to explore. Since we've found the plantations, the target group can't be far. Our side... has found them too."

It might be a scale larger than two hundred people.

Everyone understood the implications of that statement.

"Received."

"Received."

Tiger and Team Leader 2 responded softly and then muted their mics.

"Continue the exploration." Tiger looked at his teammates and waved them forward.

Walking on the rugged terrain, the group once again fell silent as they moved forward.

Since a squad had seen a figure, it meant they were heading in the right direction. Besides being wary of possible attacks from the refugees, they also had to be careful not to startle them.

If only they had been a bit quieter and closer, could they have caught him?

Capturing one would likely lead to finding the main body of the refugees effortlessly, provided communication was possible.

But...

"There are so many forks in the path."

"We have the same situation here." Tiger reported seriously, pressing his earpiece.

In front of them, several dark tunnel mouths resembled the gullets of beasts, waiting for them to step inside voluntarily.

"Let's split up to explore, two people per group." Team Leader 1 was somewhat aggressive.

He believed in the individual combat abilities of his team members, "As for you... do as you see fit."

Chapter 209 has fallen!

"Captain?"

Tiger fell silent for a moment, looking towards You, "Any clues?"

"There are traces of human activity."

After a brief silence, everyone was waiting for Tiger's decision.

For some reason, Dashan felt his palms beginning to sweat, as if he were waiting for a judgment.

He hoped everyone would stay together, but he couldn't bring himself to voice his fears, worried it might influence Tiger's judgment.

After a long silence, recalling the advice he had secretly received from his instructor and Sniper God Carlos, Tiger still decided to err on the side of caution, "We'll stick together."

Efficiency could be sacrificed; ensuring the safety of the team and the success of the mission was the primary concern.

"Phew," Dashan let out a breath, feeling much more relaxed.

Just now, that hallucination-like "imagination" always made his heart feel as if it were being held by an invisible hand, unable to settle, nor to break free.

A sense of faint unease echoed in his chest, only dispersible by the warm strength of his teammates when they were by his side.

"Let's go."

The team once again plunged into as quiet an exploration as possible.

The finely ground special sand falling from the sand-timer-like device clipped to the waist of Dashan at the rear left a clear trail in the night vision goggles, so everyone knew the path they had taken to avoid getting lost.

Everyone still tried to minimize any noise they made, their stealth skills coming into play once more.

Bai E's footsteps were so light they were almost imperceptible, with You and Song Ying not far behind.

Only Tiger's footsteps were slightly heavier, but they too could not provide a sense of reassuring power.

It's coming...

It's here again...

That feeling... it's back again...

Dashan felt his breathing becoming difficult, his teammates ahead increasing their pace, while his own legs felt as heavy as if they were filled with lead.

He desperately wanted to pick up the pace and catch up, but he couldn't move quickly.

He reached out, yet he couldn't touch the back of his teammate.

Wishing to shout, something seemed to block his mouth and vocal cords, resulting in only a silent gaping.

"Thump~"

"Thump~"

The spiritual world was dark and ethereal, the sound of his own heartbeat magnified infinitely in his mind.

Faster and faster...

Faster and faster...

The howling winds above swept across the land, stirring up ghostly wails.

The world before him expanded away, while he felt like an insignificant grain of sand in the endless darkness, losing his color, his character, his will, losing... everything.

He was about to merge eternally into this expanse... of darkness.

"Szzzz~"

Static suddenly erupted in the comms, Dashan waiting with bated breath for salvation, only to hear a long scream.

"Ahhh~~~~"

"Save... *click~"

In a consciousness stream that seemed to flow slower, allowing him to hear every nuance of each byte, the screams of other team members played out slowly in his mind.

This cry from his teammate completely shattered his last line of defense.

The moment the scream sounded, he felt every nerve in his brain being plucked one by one.

His crown felt as if it had been blown off, sending chills directly through him. A tremor that reached deep into his soul invaded his entire body, leaving him feeling electrocuted.

He stretched out his hand desperately, seeking salvation from his teammates.

In his field of vision...

His teammates... all stood still.

...

"Woo~"

The wind over the wilderness never ceased.

In the cramped passageway, it was as quiet as one's own breathing, every light rustling of footsteps felt as if they were directly on one's heart, causing it to tremble ceaselessly.

If the noise from any step became slightly louder, it felt as if some taboo commandment had been violated, instilling unease.

Bai E, slightly distracted as he walked, blinked his eyes as if he had a premonition of the scream that was about to come through the headset.

"Ah!"

"Save... *click~"

Something's gone wrong!

Bai E jolted alert from a semi-lucid state.

It was from another squad; he instinctively turned to look at his teammates.

But he found that everyone maintained a strange "in-progress action": Tiger's body rigidly extended forward in a half-step, his foot lingering in mid-air as if frozen into a statue.

Song Ying was holding his machine gun as if ready for battle, but likewise, he was stuck in place.

Lagging behind, Dashan reached out like a drowning victim in a weird semi-floating posture, desperately trying to touch what was in front, his longest middle finger stopping just three centimeters shy of Song Ying's back.

And You, just half a step in front...

Suddenly, a gloved small hand was thrust into Bai E's own, a pained and soft voice intermittently piercing into Bai E's ear.

"Quick... run..."

"You?"

Bai E shook the hand that had been placed in his, and along with it, You's entire arm also moved slightly.

However, his stiff body was likewise frozen in eternity.

Teammates... were all immobile.

The voice comms, too, fell silent.

No one questioned the comrade who had just screamed.

Everyone was engulfed in a deathly silence.

They... were all motionless.

They had fallen...

In just an instant, a piercing cold swept up from Bai E's heels, climbing up his entire back.

All the pores on his body contracted, his hairs standing on end.

"Woo~"

The only sound was the howling of the wind above.

It was like the death cry of a beast—or the sob of humans in despair.

What's happened! What's happened!

Bai E clenched his teeth tightly to ensure he wouldn't tremble from the fear in his body.

His mind was blanketed in darkness, Bai E having no time to analyze the situation or make decisions.

This can't go on!

Self-control... where is my self-control?

Realizing he had not yet fallen like the others, Bai E struggled to remember his trump card.

Fear's agents chaotically surged within, self-restraint like soldiers arresting bandits throughout the city, but the fear only multiplied... more and more...

It was as if it poured into the crown of his head from the air, the boundless darkness flooding his body along with the fear, seeking to completely bury him.

"Slap! Slap!"

Bai E fiercely slapped himself twice, the pain bringing a momentary lucidity to his senses.

He couldn't stay here!

Get out!

Carlos was right, as long as you don't die, collecting intelligence and returning is also a way of completing the mission.

There's something wrong with this Refugee Slum!

Something wrong!

It's problematic!

He scooped up You's light yet rigid body around his waist, his left hand trying to lift the close-by body of Ying.

However, the muscles, acidified from fear, suddenly gave out, and the two bodies he managed to lift fell to the ground in an instant.

He couldn't carry them...

Just run...

Leave this place...

Get out of this cave!

The disappearance of several previous recon soldiers was not a careless accident, this place... harbored perils beyond common imagination!

Bring back the intel! Bring back the intel!

Short, recurrent thoughts looped in Bai E's temporarily stalled mind.

Run!

The path he followed showed a clear guide under the night vision goggles.

He couldn't care about hiding, couldn't care about the noise, the only consideration was to leave the cave as fast as possible.

The mask of the night vision goggles trapped his heavy breathing, the hot vapor covering his face.

Running away...

Was also an escape.

The darkness grew ever denser, Bai E's consciousness filled with the pounding heartbeat and heavy breathing.

"Thump! Thump!"

It was as if an unknown primeval beast stalked him from behind, the closer Bai E got to the cave entrance, the smaller he felt in comparison to the entire world.

Massive stones and the very earth seemed like bindings pressing down on him, leaving him gasping for air.

"Hiss~"

Bai E's foot slipped on stepping out of the Wind Erosion Cave tunnel, almost causing him to fall.

Staggering to his feet, he sprinted to the vehicle parked not far away.

Opened the car door... turned on the ignition...

Bai E, performing all these actions, could only feel his hands shaking continuously, the unspeakable fear eroding his heart at all times.

At some point, the hand steadying the steering wheel suddenly paused.

Bai E slowly raised his head, staring blankly into the dimly lit night sky—

In the boundless wilderness, the rocks of bizarre shapes outlined monstrous and distorted figures under the black shadows.

Natural wind caves played a primitive roar for the ordinarily silent gale.

His thoughts, as if his soul had left his body, soared quickly from in front of him into the boundless sky.

The earth seemed to grow more and more distant before his eyes, his small body like a drop in the ocean.

"Thump~"

"Thump~"

In the quiet, Bai E heard his heartbeat slowly calming down.

A seed of fear had taken root deep within his heart without him knowing when.

Escape?

Go ahead and flee.

You can escape from the present, but not from within.

Once the seed is sown, all acts of escapism become the best nourishment for fear.

Perhaps on the road...

Or maybe back at camp...

In the future... perhaps tomorrow... maybe when waking up the next morning...

He would regret why he abandoned everything because of the unknown fear.

Escaping?

[Under your firm will, you have successfully passed a "mental check".]

[You have successfully passed a check in the field of occultism, Occult +0.1.]

Only when his self-consciousness awakened from the endless fear did the success notification quietly pop up on the panel.

This passive confrontation could happen at any moment, and the notifications on the panel could not be taken as a preventative source of information.

Bai E lifted his head, his gaze empty as he looked ahead.

In the silent darkness, it seemed as if a pair of malicious eyes had formed, quietly watching him with amusement...

Fear was not entirely his own.

In that brief instant just now, Bai E sensed the fear imposed on him by other wills—

A group of ragged refugees, with dry and hardened sticks in hand, struggled to climb to the top of one of the Wind Erosion Caves.

The desolate gray wilderness stretched to the horizon like a backdrop in front of them.

The city's glow couldn't shine into the wilds...

It was as if the glow deliberately drove these gray figures out of their borders.

With such a vast world, there was nowhere for them to go.

What about the future?

What about life?

Every child who fell asleep in the dark caves with the whisper of the wind had swallowed bewilderment and fear along with the cold and hunger.

The demon that germinated from fear had already shown its fangs, reaching its roots into the hearts of every living being that came here.

The farther you flee on land, the more the seed blossoms.

Physical escape was meaningless if one could not face it head-on, as no matter where one went, one would ultimately succumb.

"Huff~"

Bai E exhaled gently, as if expelling all fear from within with that breath.

Turned off the engine, got out of the car, closed the door.

Bai E slowly completed these actions, taking steps towards what lay ahead...

The unknown cave awaited quietly in the darkness.

To be a fool who challenges the windmill.

Rashness, closer to courage than caution...

Chapter 210 Facing Fear

"This is 95B27, this is 95B27. If you hear me, please respond. If you hear me, please respond."

Bai E pressed his earpiece, his voice echoing in lonely resonance.

In his own ears, and possibly in every corner of the passages.

No response.

Everyone was silent, sinking into silence, or waiting for possible rescue.

Bai E closed the channel and sighed softly.

The dark dungeon remained fearsome—every unwatched corner seemed like a writhing shadow, brewing malice in the dark.

Courage couldn't always inspire Bai E's body; the bewildered fear of the caverns invaded his body at all times.

But Bai E, not immediately overwhelmed by fear, was trying to fight against this feeling.

Once he bravely took the first step in resistance, mere emotions could no longer depress his will.

Mere drifters were not the enemy; the true threat loomed over them.

Who exactly?

He didn't know.

But going deeper might reveal the answer.

The same journey, but without his teammates by his side.

Those who had said they could be relied on in an emergency had long since fallen silent.

However, precisely because of the solitude... because there were no teammates to depend on, he had become stronger.

This time it wasn't about redemption for anyone else, but solely about his own redemption.

The target was his own heart.

Seedlings accompanied his heartbeat and spread throughout his body with his blood; Bai E could feel those evil tendrils taking root and sprouting within him.

They wanted to feed on fear, to completely corrupt him into becoming their servant.

Let's see then...

Let's see whether you make me kneel, or whether I will overthrow your reign.

Bai E moved swiftly, even more familiar with the route he had already traversed, the characteristic sand on the ground forming a clear path under night vision.

"Bang! Bang! Bang!"

Suddenly, at a fork with many cave mouths, Bai E heard echoes coming from one of the tunnels.

Gunshots!

Teammates who had lost their ability to communicate?

Or those drifters?

"Bang!"

Another short gunshot echoed, then fell silent.

A simple emotional outburst, or a clash between two forces?

Bai E's eyes flickered, and he opened the pathfinder hourglass also at his waist. Then he cautiously stepped into the passage from which the gunshots had come.

There was no need to deal with the safety of his teammates for the moment; what the other side needed was the emotion of fear itself, and only living creatures could provide fear.

Even if he took their bodies away, it wouldn't help; their hearts... had already been linked to some strange existence.

Only by facing fear could he save himself.

And only by defeating fear could he resolve it all.

Before discovering the truth, every unexpected finding could be a small part of the truth.

The passage was pitch-black, but the night vision goggles provided a certain degree of visible field.

However, the view was filled with winding, twisting underground passages, with endless obstacles blocking the view, one couldn't even see things beyond three meters.

Only the sound could...

As Bai E stepped into the passage, sounds that were not as obvious as the gunshots but just as discernible in the quiet began to grow clearer.

"Bang!"

"Bang!"

Irregular thuds and vibrations like a hammer smashing a wall resounded, accompanied by... screams.

"Ahh!"

"Help..."

"He's gone mad..."

"Bang!"

As Bai E rounded a corner, two bodies appeared in the night vision.

The soldier pinned to the wall was dripping a thick mixture of saliva and blood from his mouth, his body hung on the irregular protrusions of the wall like a piece of rotten meat, his entire form mashed flat against the rugged surface.

Only his head seemed to retain its complete structure, issuing a final warning with a whisper-thin voice.

"He... has gone mad..."

He...

It was the Blood God.

The massive Blood God turned his head to look over, his blood-red eyes especially sinister through the night vision goggles—the terrifying glow piercing through the slightly distorted view and keenly perceived by Bai E.

His muscles swelled, the violent, bloody aura almost filling the cramped space.

"What are you doing!"

Bai E held his gun with both hands, questioning coldly.

The bloodthirsty Blood God pointed to the mangled body on the wall, a smile flickering across his face, "He no longer deserves to be a soldier of the empire, offering his strength to demons; only death can redeem him!"

"Demons?" Bai E squinted his eyes.

"Can't you smell it? The scent of demons in the air?" said the Blood God, pausing suddenly in mid-speech, as if waking from his intoxicated expression to look at Bai E, "Oh right... you can't smell it. You're not like them; you haven't become a part of the demon."

He extended a bloody hand, "Join me, and together we'll cut through this den of sin."

"And what about you?" Bai E stepped back unobtrusively.

Atop the Blood God's head, his identity now shone brightly—

[95A09/Blood God (Human) (Chaotic) (Elite)——Using "Lucky Strike" to kill may drop: Guaranteed (Fresh Meat*2400, Battle Experience 3500 points, Gaze: Blood's Stare); High Probability (Trait: Regenerative Blood, Mastery: Combat Specialization Layer +1, not to exceed level 6, Mastery: Agility Weapon Specialization Layer +1, not to exceed level 6); Possible (Skill: Extreme Pain Suppression, Feat: Fury's Surge).]

Even without the display of drop rates, Bai E could tell from his performance that his current state was far from normal.

He had been on a mission with the Blood God before; the towering figure only fought in silence, dutifully carrying out his superior's orders, showing not the slightest hint of the... madness, the arrogance he was displaying now.

When did the change begin?

A covert mission?

The return journey?

Or was it right now?

Fear had plunged his teammates into a dark tremor, yet this most formidable warrior used arrogance to mask his fear?

A demon?

"They haven't become part of a demon..."

They had only been temporarily invaded by a demon. Bai E raised his guns, the dark muzzles aiming at the head of the Blood God.

"The real demon incarnate... is yourself!"

"Bang! Bang! Bang!"

Machine guns are ill-suited for confined tunnels; the sound of the pistol's gunfire bounced futilely within the underground channel.

At the first sign of Bai E's attack, the Blood God's colossal body easily retreated, exploiting the terrain to dodge the bullets.

Within seven steps, a gun is quicker.

But in the cave's environment... there were no clear paths of seven steps.

Darkness, silence.

Taking advantage of the complex passages to retreat easily, Bai E lost sight of the Blood God after advancing just two steps.

The soldier's faint groans reached his ears, and Bai E, unable to bear the sight, turned his gun toward the soldier's head instead.

"Bang! Bang!"

After two shots rang out, Bai E tightened his grip on the gun handle and chased through the tunnel from which the Blood God had fled.

A demon? Let it be a demon!

It was just as he had anticipated before his departure.

Suffering is the perfect breeding ground for demonic beliefs; it's a reluctant choice for wilderness refugees with nowhere to turn.

It's just that he didn't know... the background of this demon.

The four major demons You had introduced were simply the foremost among higher-dimensional demons; even the clueless commoners might have heard of their notoriety.

But below the four Demon Gods, countless greater demons and lesser demons exist.

All extreme emotions of all sentient beings are capable of coalescing in higher-dimensional space, potentially giving rise to specific demons.

So could this demon be the one that rules over fear?

Having such a multitude of people's mental "worship," Bai E did not know whether the demon could incarnate in true form, nor was he overly familiar with the field of demonology.

What was clear was that the Blood God had already caught a demon's attention, becoming Its chosen one.

Striking down the chosen one is also a way to weaken the demon's power.

Perhaps by killing the Blood God, the chosen disciple of the demon, he could diminish the power of the current demon, thereby lessening Its control over You and the others.

It was both a rescue for his teammates and a redemption for himself.

The battle that didn't happen in the arena that night could be settled right now.

The only oddity was... why would the Blood God, the chosen disciple, invite him to slay his way through this nest?

Is it some kind of way to elevate oneself?

Or is it inherent to the demon's nature?

Or perhaps, is it just a lie to lower one's guard?

But none of that matters.

Many things in this world are chaotic and unknown, but battle never deceives.

While many things are shrouded in mystery, in the end, they still lead to an inevitable fight.

Gun in right hand, left holding a dagger pressed under the gun handle, Bai E remained on high alert while he ventured into the dark corridor.

Each winding turn in the tunnel might be an opportunity for the Blood God to launch a sudden attack.

Even though the enemy had temporarily retreated, he clearly wouldn't give up on finding him.

In this dark and complex labyrinth of tunnels, hunter and prey hunt each other, with roles possibly reversing at any moment.

"Click~"

Bai E, whose vision was limited due to night-vision goggles, kicked something squishy without noticing it right away until he looked down to inspect.

Night-vision goggles?

They lay quietly on the ground, looking somewhat distorted at the lenses.

Did they belong to the soldier who had just died?

After the sudden assault, losing this device may have been what caused him to be completely outmatched by the Blood God.

However... why haven't the soldier attacked by the Blood God turned into an immobile "stone sculpture" like You and the others?

Perhaps that was exactly why he had attracted the Blood God's attention and was specifically targeted.

But why didn't he respond to Bai E over the voice comms?

Bai E narrowed his eyes, burying these suspect thoughts deep in his heart, awaiting the final revelation.

Shifting his gaze, Bai E continued to move carefully forward.

As he walked, Bai E could feel his limbs trembling slightly.

With self-control imposed, forcibly-induced fear no longer caused Bai E's will to falter, but the omnipresent spirit of fear still stirred the seed of fear within.

It circumvented his will and deceived his own body.

Trembling, weakening...

It was inevitable.