

Wow 261

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Lord, you have finally come! How could I live without you!

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After finishing the basic training for mecha operation and having lunch, Bai E rushed over.

He now stepped calmly in front of the three players, his smile unchanged despite the days apart.

"You've met the people I arranged, haven't you?"

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The elder didn't trust the city, and Bai E needed development—it was a perfect match.

A huge refugee camp could hardly be managed by just a dozen soldiers, not to mention counting them accurately.

How many exactly, wasn't it ultimately up to the elderly man managing the refugees?

And not just he himself, a few refugees hadn't actually entered the city...

The missing elder, on Bai E's instructions, was shown the way to the underground warehouse constructed by the players.

An elder with many years of life experience, even upon arriving at an unfamiliar place, wouldn't suffer due to a lack of life skills.

With directions from Bai E, the elder easily and inconspicuously found the players' secret base, and with his rich life experience, he would only need some time to get acquainted and should easily take up the role of "warehouse manager."

This was the responsibility and task Bai E had temporarily given him.

"Signboard... the old grandfather is really nice and quite capable," Dai Lian answered on behalf of the trio.

He wasn't just being polite; the grandfather was indeed very nice and quite capable.

As a signboard grandfather, he could even issue quests to the three: [Side Quest – Stock Food].

He could also impart abilities not offered for exchange in the Faction Shop: [Technology – Management, Knowledge – Conventional Vehicle Maintenance].

Whether they were used or not, this was his unique function.

As a signboard grandfather, what he could do had already far exceeded their expectations, they couldn't ask for more.

Bai E nodded with satisfaction, "That's good..."

Gilder managed to keep a group of over four hundred people together without disbanding, which naturally showed his strengths and advantages.

Keeping a few players in line shouldn't be a problem.

"Let's go down and have a look," Bai E gestured with a tilt of his chin.

Due to the affiliation of his power, the moment he saw the three players, Bai E could see from the floating text over their heads exactly how many faction tokens each owned.

[Gong Yan: 320 points of faction contribution, 1650 faction funds.]

[Dai Lian: 310 points of faction contribution, 1650 faction funds.]

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This meant that since Gilder's arrival, he had distributed 250 points of faction contribution to each of them, more than double the total of 110 points previously given by Bai E himself.

Before Gilder took office, Bai E had told him about his management policy for these... members, hoping that Gilder could take over some of his judgment and reduce some of his workload.

If he decided to develop a power, then it was inevitable he couldn't handle everything himself... Delegating authority was both an inevitable and necessary decision.

Gilder made a good impression on Bai E, who also trusted Gilder's judgment.

But the rewards he issued still had to be fulfilled by himself. Such a large number of rewards released at once always gave him some concerns.

What if... what if Gilder, being new, didn't "fully" understand the value of these tokens?

He needed to issue contribution points for the legitimate purpose of reaping players' experience, but at the same time, he needed the faction tokens he had set to hold enough "value" in the eyes of the players.

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The changes were quite significant.

Down in the cavern, spacious and regular.

The original passageway had been neatly cemented.

A patch of iron-gray ground was the first thing to catch the eye, its cemented surface exuding a sense of smoothness and grandeur.

Bai E's gaze widened, and it was apparent that the entire underground "cave" could no longer be called a "cave"; the semblance of a base was taking shape, and perhaps the construction of a power had truly begun on the right track from this moment...

A faint realization arose in Bai E's mind. Gilder, sitting behind a table, stood up to greet Bai E immediately, "Lord..."

In his aged eyes was a profound and sincere respect.

'The Lord is being far too modest...'

Before his arrival, Bai E emphasized repeatedly that his power was just getting started with scarce personnel, limited materials, and underdeveloped infrastructure, all requiring his attentive care.

He was prepared to develop from the ground up, with nothing at hand and even felt somewhat apologetic for his self-interest that had involved the Lord's desire to develop.

Had it not been for the intention to take care of himself and so many refugees, the Lord probably wouldn't have considered starting a major power on his own. It was due to his own defection that the Lord had embarked on this path, probably out of necessity.

And that meant the Lord would likely have to invest much more effort in the future.

However...

Although the base was just starting out, its foundation was complete and robust, the mountains of cement hidden in the unknown sewers displayed the depth of the adult's resources and thorough preparation.

There were only four personnel, but each was a pillar of talent, filled with trust for others yet not losing sight of personal judgment, possessing ample initiative and sufficient strength, easily and efficiently preparing the food that was requested, and most importantly, the internal unity, trust, and enthusiasm were abundant.

This was an excellent team.

The supplies were indeed not plentiful, but the base, with only five people including oneself, truly did not need too much for the time being.

Although the adult had not lied, in a sense, they had also "deceived" in terms of "attitude".

Such an outstanding team was merely described as "primitive conditions." The adult was truly too modest!

Of course, the more central aspect was the management guidelines and strategies set by the adult—

The internal contribution system and financial policies of the faction were simply strokes of genius!

Not only did the adult possess a leadership aura that could stir anyone to follow, but their means of leading the organization were also equally convincing.

With such a wise ruler, what more could one want?

[Lucky Strike energy +3.]

[It's just a clumsy imitation of those gaming dogs' planners...]

Listening to Gilder's embarrassingly flattering praises, especially his heartfelt "admiration," Bai E waved his hand, "Enough of this, I have important matters to deal with them."

"Yes! Sir!"

In the time it took for two sentences, the players had also climbed down.

"Sir..."

"Sir!"

The three stood tall and proud, looking at Bai E.

The vast semi-finished underground warehouse before them was the masterpiece of their ceaseless toil, and seeing the secret underground base they had crafted with their own hands take shape like this, they felt a great sense of accomplishment.

"You've done well, is there anything particularly you'd like?" Bai E asked the three with a smile.

Players, after all... a barrage of words can't outweigh some solid benefits.

The best way to win them over is to directly satisfy their desires.

'I wonder what's on the third level of the Faction Shop?'

Kuang Xin had already learned the advanced physical training from the second level of the Faction Shop, and unlocking the third level required at least two purchases from the second level, all while the Faction Shop refreshed individually for each person.

With these considerations, Kuang Xin, who had secretly discussed with the others beforehand, stepped forward, his eyes eagerly fixed on Bai E, "Sir, I want to learn the master-level Mecha combat specialization!"

The earlier one could master the special attributes as the specialization levels improved, the higher the ceiling for potential would become, this was a gaming trick they had already discovered.

And even without Bai E's command, Kuang Xin had recently been immersed in underground fighting rings, going there every night had become his routine.

In the thrilling close-quarters battles, his physical abilities, reflexes, and fighting skills were rapidly improving.

Of course... as his bouts increased and his "hidden rank" rose, he could distinctly feel the opponents arranged by the arena becoming more formidable.

His strength was barely keeping up with the level of his opponents, and he needed to improve urgently.

Directly leveling up with experience would compromise his future potential, so he was waiting for Bai E to return and learn from him.

"Good."

Bai E nodded, accommodating as ever.

After all, he would be the one to benefit.

Collecting 100 contribution points, Bai E began teaching the master-level... that is, the complete Mecha combat specialization.

He did so by demonstrating each move one by one.

He currently had ample time, no longer like before when he was under pressure.

Being part of the armored forces yet preserving the special forces unit meant he had in a sense become a completely free individual, and he even had proof to leave the camp at any time. Although he was still part of the military's structure, when there were no mandatory missions, he was essentially a free man outside the military.

He had not forcefully left the military, but he had begun to rid himself of the military's constraints.

[Teaching finished, from the feedback of the "teaching" you have altogether gained 130 combat experience points, 1580 general experience points.]

The massive expenditure of experience reserves had just been somewhat replenished through the players...

And it wasn't that Kuang Xin had learned all of Bai E's signature skills, only that was the extent of his experience.

Observing Kuang Xin's look of disappointment, Bai E patted him on the shoulder with a smile.

"Don't be disheartened, there will be other opportunities, and I won't charge you twice for contribution..."

"Yes! Sir!"

Kuang Xin's eyes lit up, his despondency had not been without worry about this very matter.

If he hadn't learned everything from the contribution-based teaching, would he have to pay the contribution again for another lesson? He had no prior knowledge on this matter, and those insidious

game developers had scammed people plenty of times on such issues, and the NPC operations in this game were quite disgusting too, like the recently encountered "mission bracelet".

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I surely followed the right person!

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[The third level of the Faction Shop has been unlocked...]

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Chapter 263 elite members

Recruit people?

The sudden question from Kuang Xin made Bai E's heart skip a beat.

Recruit! Definitely recruit!

He had a quota for issuing tasks every day, but recently he'd been entangled in miscellaneous matters and hadn't found the time to look for reliable player targets.

Bai E didn't plan to hit and run, changing targets after each shot. The limited task quota he had each day couldn't be given to unreliable players or distributed randomly; he definitely needed to focus on nurturing the same player consistently.

He would cultivate them with his authority, and use their feedback to improve himself. This was the choice that served his interests best.

The targets, of course, had to be chosen with care, and ideally, be as deeply tied to him as these three individuals before him.

Bonding them through joining the organization could also be considered the best choice.

With the corners of his mouth slightly raised, he asked softly, "Do you have any friends still?"

"Not exactly friends..." Kuang Xin scratched the back of his head, somewhat embarrassed, "just people we've met while... playing together."

When Bai E wasn't around, everyone occasionally did other quests and would encounter other players.

That's when the difference became apparent.

Armed with the various abilities taught by Bai E, they exhibited far greater prowess than those players who had no guidance, didn't even know relevant game information, and who only knew how to level up their specializations.

The gap between a Level 2 and Level 3 specialization ability might not be very big, but the difference with or without special attribute enhancements was like night and day.

Such is the world—some people get by with or without guidance, but relying solely on oneself, the piecemeal achievements are hard to form into a system. Among players in the same phase, the trio stood far ahead whether in uncovering game content or personal strength.

Naturally, impressive abilities would pique the curiosity of other players. Following the mysterious ethos of the adults, they certainly wouldn't disclose anything proactively. But when other players expressed an interest in joining, they didn't mind helping to ask.

Once the organization expanded, as founders they would feel a sense of accomplishment in nurturing newcomers and reap practical benefits too.

Bai E narrowed his eyes slightly and asked, "Are there many?"

If there were too many people, that wouldn't be a good thing; his task quota wouldn't suffice, and he couldn't treat everyone equally.

Moreover, with too many people around, the situation could get chaotic. Players were not exactly an easy species to control. If someone, acting under the ostensible power of his burgeoning organization, messed up, wouldn't he end up suffering the fallout?

When players don't act beyond the understanding of this world's natives, their actions will provoke the most authentic responses.

Kuang Xin hesitated but eventually replied truthfully, "Hmm... There are some. About, ten or so?"

They'd met many individual players, and almost everyone would casually inquire, but how many were truly earnest... that was uncertain.

They were players themselves and knew their own kind's ways best.

Seeing Kuang Xin's reaction, Bai E roughly guessed the ruse.

When there was a real conflict of interest, players could become ferocious; but without disputes, they would greet each other as brothers on sight.

That kind of relationship was likely superficial, not friends brought by real-world social networks.

Which meant... they were hard to control.

Bai E pretended to mull it over when in fact, he had already made a plan in his mind.

After a slight hesitation, Bai E's gaze met the other's, warm and sincere, "This depends on you. If they are truly trustworthy friends to you, and share our interests, I don't mind more people joining us. However, if you feel your understanding of them is not deep enough, then our organization is not fit to step into the limelight at the moment. You should weigh this matter yourselves.

I'm willing to trust your judgment. Of course... even if you trust them, new members need to walk the path you've trodden from the beginning."

In other words, they would have to start as temporary members.

And for temporary members to be promoted and gain access to core "secrets," ultimately, wouldn't it still require his approval?

Let players feel trusted, but always keep the final decision firmly in his own hands—Bai E thought this strategy shouldn't pose any problem.

Before Kuang Xin had the chance to speak, Bai E spoke again to add, preventing rigid terms, "... And if you also feel that the newcomers need further observation, then you can temporarily take them in under your own name as auxiliary members of the organization. I grant you this authority."

[Notice: Your status within the "Li Ming" organization has been promoted. Your current status is "Elite Member," entitling you to the following rights:

First, lead an auxiliary member action team comprising no more than five people.

Second, possess the authority to propose promotions for action team members. (1/1 per week)

Third, all your actions will be regarded as part of a whole, sharing rewards and punishments.

Fourth, to be determined...]

"..."

The three players, who abruptly received the prompt, shivered simultaneously and looked toward Bai E together.

Bai E, with a serene expression, silently gazed fixedly at his nose as if in deep concentration, not uttering a word.

It was just a spontaneous idea.

The player's words had reminded him that, to become great and reach new heights of glory again, recruiting troops was indispensable.

If he decided to expand his power, then growth was just a matter of time.

Just as a boat must paddle upstream to advance, or else it slips backward.

But his own ability to issue missions only grew at a limited pace, making it hard to attend to multiple players at once. Instead of making them feel equal and yet treating them differently, it was better to establish a hierarchy from the start.

The core players who he could directly assign tasks to would become the organization's elite members, holding the right to lead teams on behalf of the organization.

At the same time, the entire team would share honor and disgrace as one. For their own benefit, the elite members who recruited others would surely tighten control over their own team members.

Rather than exhausting himself, it was better to throw the responsibility onto the players.

Even to prepare for unforeseen situations that might arise as the organization grew larger in the future, he thought, "I'll have the final say on everything, and I can add whatever I think of later!"

Perfect!

The three players stared blankly at their boss for a long time before turning to look at each other in stupor.

Power...

Authority...

For the first time in the game, they held real power officially recognized by the system, which left them somewhat adrift.

They... had they really become the core backbone of a game world organization without realizing it?

So, their every action within the game truly had the power to affect the world's development in real time?

Did they truly possess the power to turn the world upside down within the game?

"Geez~" Kuang Xin simply uttered in amazement.

Dai Lian breathed rapidly, fresh developments and challenges awaited him.

Gong Yan's eyes shimmered silently, saying nothing.

"Alright, the organization's growth and strength cannot do without everyone's efforts," said Bai E with a smile, breaking the silence. He addressed the three players, "What plans do you have going forward? How is the rat infestation I asked you to deal with?"

Daily tasks still needed to be assigned, but before he did that, he could also ask if they had any plans of their own.

If so, letting them do something they wanted to do and earn double rewards for one task—wasn't that a method of winning them over?

After all, it was also very tiring for him to always have to think hard to find targets for them, right?

In any case, what he wanted from assigning them tasks was only the various attribute feedback from the task completions. What they actually did... didn't concern him much. He was just hitching a free ride.

Speaking of which, Dai Lian, as the brain of the team, took Kuang Xin's place and stepped forward, "My lord, we might need to make a long journey in the coming days."

"Oh?" Bai E, his face brimming with a smile, gazed at him intently, "Can you divulge where to?"

"Of course. Last time, you mentioned that our camp's attack on the Bug Race's hive ended in retreat, leaving behind some materials in Bug territory that had not been evacuated in time, and the camp has been trying to recover them. Recently, we've heard that some of these materials have been plundered by a roving band of orcs, who are trying to decipher human technology from them.

We thought maybe we could lend a helping hand and snatch back those materials that the orcs took! Even if we can't recover them, we can't let other races find a way to counteract us humans from this!"

Dai Lian spoke with conviction, rich in emotion.

Having been in the game for a substantial amount of time and knowing the lord for a while, thoroughly familiar with the lord's personality and the game's tactics, he controlled the emotional cadence of his speech perfectly, ensuring it was as genuine and sincere as possible.

This kind of realistic role-playing was quite enjoyable.

Even showing a hint of regret at the end.

"These next few days, we might not be able to carry out your commands..."

"That's perfect!" Bai E exclaimed excitedly, clapping his hands.

"Huh?"

Chapter 264 Development Plan

"Actually, I had the same idea."

Bai E's face showed satisfaction, "I didn't expect us to think alike, which is just perfect."

"Huh?" The three players gaped, completely dumbfounded.

Could there really be such a coincidence?

"You might not know this..." Bai E took a moment to explain, letting them realize that they were not bootlickers, "When I left a few days ago to carry out a secret mission, I encountered those orcs on my way back. This chaotic race roams everywhere, causing tremendous disturbance for both the city and the nearby residents.

Not everyone lives in the warmth of the city; many refugees wander aimlessly through the wilderness, and the consequences are unimaginable if they run into those orcs. The city has many difficulties to face and cannot control everything. Some things we must handle ourselves. Sending you to eliminate those roaming orcs was also a task I planned to assign upon my return."

[Task description auto-generating...]

[Side Quest — Clear the Orcs (Combat Commission): The orcs that wander the wilderness have always been a major threat to humanity. Now that your strength has grown to a certain extent and you have the ability to handle a crisis, the leader of Li Ming hopes you can take on this grave responsibility and alleviate human survival pressures to a certain degree.

Task requirement: Kill orcs 0/5~8 (adjustable).

Task reward: Universal experience 50~200 points (adjustable), item reward (undetermined).]

(Note: "Auto-complete" allowed; after confirming the commission, "authority" and "expenses" will be deducted and locked.)

[Do you want to issue the current commission?]

The difficulty remains at the maximum; each of you bring me back at least 8!

The experience reward is also maxed out.

As for the item reward... let's give them something fresh and exciting.

[Item Reward: Spore Colonies*2.]

Last time it dropped from an orc, and now it's being used in a quest targeting orcs, which makes sense.

In fact, Bai E had never really considered what use it might have.

[Spore Colonies: Biological nature removed, can grow rapidly, extremely adaptable.]

Simply put, it's inactivated orc tissue...

Anyway, it doesn't seem to be of much use, so might as well throw it to the players and let them do as they please with it.

If it's useful, use it; if not, at least it's a novelty that can fool them for a while.

[Confirm release!]

Directly X2!

There is also a resource-type task... might as well take the "unknown supplies" they're talking about!

[Task description auto-generating...]

[Side Quest — Recover Supplies (Resource Commission): Human creations must not be left to waste outside. Make every effort to recover the supplies and use them for the growth of the organization.

Task requirements: Surrender the supplies plundered by the orcs to the organization's warehouse 0/1.

Task rewards: Technology points*1, Spore Colonies*5.]

(Note: Physical submission of goods required, the current commission cannot be "auto-completed," and needs "inspection completion"; after confirming the commission, "authority" and "expenses" will be deducted and locked.)

But now I'm allowed to have two tasks published at the same time...

The supplies can only be submitted once; for the other task... let's submit talent.

[Task description auto-generating...]

[Side Quest — Talent Scouting (Resource Commission): The leader of Li Ming wants the organization to grow and believes in your judgment. This task is a joint mission and can be completed together.

Task requirement: Scout at least 0/1 potential target to become an official member of "Li Ming."

Task reward: Technology points*1, Spore Colonies*5.]

(Note: "Auto-complete" allowed; after confirming the commission, "authority" and "expenses" will be deducted and locked.)

All done!

Each time Bai E arranged tasks for players, it took quite a bit out of him.

But he was as satisfied as ever with his own arrangements this time.

One.

He only needed one.

After all, he currently only had the quota to issue four tasks every day, and there would be no use for more people.

The fresh tasks came pouring out all at once, the three players exchanged careful glances and didn't hesitate to accept them before that.

Look at our lord! Now look at other fighter group leaders!

That's what you call vision.

Everyone was going on prize pool tasks, each person staking their own 100 experience points in the gamble, yet only those three were guaranteed a return with two tasks at every action, drought or flood.

I love Li Ming! I love Li Ming!

"Right... What about the underground rat plague I asked you to clean up before? How is the progress?" Bai E hadn't forgotten what he had said before, once he decided to do something, he had to eliminate the threat completely, "If you haven't finished the cleanup and now need to go far away, I will need to consider sending someone else to deal with it."

"It's done! Lord!" Kuang Xin was the first to respond.

Dai Lian's tone was slightly cautious, "At least during the last mission when we covered the entire sewer network, we didn't see a single rat. Lord, you know, those creatures are mad and bloodthirsty, they would definitely attack if we passed by them."

"Hmm..." Bai E nodded, acknowledging Dai Lian's statement. He had personally dealt with those things and knew that these small creatures had been completely corrupted by demonic forces.

So that was... perhaps the last bit of the rats' vile influence in this world eradicated, for now.

"You are free..." Bai E approached the rat person, looking at him with a smile.

This rat person was somewhat timid; even if it was lively inside the underground base, he usually kept his distance and silently observed from afar.

The sins he had committed seemed unforgivable in his eyes, yet the lively nature of youth always struggled against his rational mind.

"Stay hidden, and... go out for a walk when you can. I will have the old man follow you. He is new to this place and needs to experience many things here. Remember, you must protect him!"

Wisdom is often just the sediment of experience. Gilder was new and always needed some contact with the locals before he could really do the job Bai E needed him to do well.

At the same time, the rat person himself was a qualified bodyguard.

Believers in demons do not only have different special abilities for worshipping each demon; the enhancement to their physique... or rather, the basic three-dimensional attributes is the most important and fundamental.

If the rat person didn't have a superior physique, he would have collapsed from exhaustion long ago due to all the digging.

Even if the rat person hadn't systematically learned combat skills, just with attributes far superior to ordinary people, he should be able to protect Gilder from harm in a conflict, or at the very least, help him escape the scene.

You could say it was making the best use of him.

"Yes! Lord!" the rat person's eyes shimmered with mist, touched.

He had seen all that the lord had done for him, as much as one's own parents ever could!

["Lucky Hit" charge +5.]

Bai E smiled slightly and stroked his head.

A faint odor kept entering his nose unwantedly, causing a bit of distress.

Believers in the "Eternal One" gained the ability to ignore pain and illness but lost the "impulse" to attend to their own hygiene.

They accumulated dirt on their bodies far faster than normal people, and the desire to clean themselves was subtly eroded away. Even with someone reminding them all the time, their desire to carry out such tasks was not strong.

Being a demon believer was ultimately trouble... always to be thoroughly resolved.

He wondered if there was a way to help him break free from demonic rules once and for all... When Bai E had saved the rat person, he hadn't refrained from experimenting on him to understand this world faster.

The rat person wasn't very dangerous, had a mild and controllable temperament, making him an ideal experimental subject.

As for now...

"Off you go."

It was time for him to return.

He had taught the players a lot of knowledge today, which took up a great deal of time, and now dusk was approaching.

The training time agreed upon with Yue Ying was almost upon them...

Chapter 265 Free Creation

In the familiar secluded corner, Yue Ying waited as promised.

To do something, one must persevere.

Teaching an artificial human created by man the Elf Breathing Skill was an unprecedented endeavor, so facing the current resistance was to be expected.

"Sit down," Yue Ying's voice was ethereal.

Merely hearing it felt like a spring bubbling up in one's heart, instantly refreshing the spirit.

"Yes," Bai E obediently crossed his legs and sat.

With her eyes closed, Yue Ying sensed Bai E's slightly chaotic breath from rushing over and calmly guided the process, "Calm your mind, stabilize your breathing. No need to respond."

"..."

Bai E evened out his breath.

Yue Ying's voice had a calming effect that easily gathered the scattered and chaotic thoughts.

The atmosphere became peaceful for a moment, and starlight gently cast a soft silver veil...

Gradually, his entire focus was concentrated on his flesh and spirit.

He could feel his breath, each inhalation like lively elves coursing through his body, trading out the impurities that were no longer useful to him.

He could feel his heartbeat, a strong and powerful heart pumping surges of warm currents; the blood flowed like majestic rivers within the wide and resilient "riverbeds".

A robust aura of life incessantly spilled out from within, his physical strength becoming ever more formidable, and the prior genetic enhancements along with many traits related to his physique had gradually taken his life towards an extraordinary realm.

Muscles, fascia, skin, nerves...

Countless structures formed a network as if woven from myriad stars, those bright nodes seemingly shimmering with light.

That light... was the sparkle of Spiritual Energy.

Spiritual Energy was everywhere, yet for some, it was like a draft passing through an open hall, leaving no trace.

For others, it was the nutrition that penetrated deep into the marrow, always ready to be commanded by their will and unleash unimaginable powers to the world.

Restraining thoughts, becoming aware of the presence of Spiritual Energy.

This was the prerequisite for starting the training in Spiritual Energy.

Sensing that the human warrior beside her had almost completely reined in his wandering thoughts, his soul focused entirely on the inward examination, Yue Ying finally spoke again—

"Let your thoughts drift, relax your body..."

"Exhale~"

"Inhale~"

[You are paying with combat experience to correct your breathing rhythm...]

[Current Following Completion: 91.3%]

[...98.5%.]

[...99.9%.]

"Cough cough cough cough!"

A sensation of tearing beyond what a human body could endure filled Bai E's chest; the body that had just been repaired yesterday was once again subjected to an unbearable load under a method of training completely unsuitable for humans.

[Node Record +1, collect more Breathing Skill secrets, you will be able to fully master this breathing rhythm.]

Yue Ying's bright eyes watched the figure beside her coughing and bending over, and under the intimate link formed through guidance, she could also feel the pain the warrior was experiencing.

It was precisely because she understood that she empathized even more.

The perseverance of this human warrior undoubtedly inspired admiration, irrespective of race or status.

["Lucky Strike" Charge +1.]

Bai E wiped the drool unwittingly escaping from the corner of his mouth and sat up straight again, "Let's go again!"

[Node Record +1...]

[Node Record +1...]

The familiar scene played out once more.

Once... once... and once again...

"Cough cough cough!" The harrowing cough, accompanied by heavy noise uncontrollably ringing out for a long time, was already making Yue Ying somewhat reluctant.

"Perhaps... we should call it a day?"

She knew human medical technology was quite advanced, but it wasn't meant to be used like this.

The physical pain would inevitably lead to a mental toll, and forcing oneself to continue training would only be counterproductive.

Training in the Breathing Skill was always going to be a long-term process, and she was prepared to treat guiding Bai E as a long-term goal to work towards.

After all, even she herself could only improve by summarizing her experiences from repeated attempts, little by little.

Using the most foolish method of exhaustive trial and error, what's left is to see Bai E's own willpower.

However...

Bai E had no intention of ending it like this.

For him, every day was important, every day was a race against time.

If he didn't work hard today, a command might come down tomorrow, and he could be sent to fight to the death again, always being in danger without sufficient strength at his side.

Although his own strength was growing ever more powerful, it was still nothing compared to the world.

With every bit of power he mastered, naturally, he gained a bit more confidence in his ability to survive in this world.

Moreover, as he acquired more skills that required the burning of Spiritual Energy, relying solely on the "physical energy reserve" was not a long-term solution, only by mastering Spiritual Energy... he must master Spiritual Energy!

This was the true qualitative change!

Moreover, if even Bai E, with the experience-enhancement from Meng Meng aiding his cultivation, couldn't complete the cultivation of the Breathing Skill, then who else in this world could?

"I'm okay... cough cough cough!" Bai E forced out, utterly ignoring the blood at the corner of his mouth and the sensation of his chest being torn apart.

Suppressing and enduring the pain himself, the military's medical resources were his greatest confidence, and his full dedication to wound recovery would let his special talents sprint towards ultimate progress.

[Your body is rapidly healing injuries, injury recovery progress 33%, rapid recovery (unlocked) unlock progress 93%.]

Damn it, keep going!

[Node record +1...]

[Node record +1...]

"Cough cough cough!"

"You..." Yue Ying wanted to persuade.

With gritted teeth, Bai E said, "Wait for me to come back!"

Immediately after speaking, he got up and ran, his weakened chest in no way affecting his short-term activities.

After many attempts, Bai E felt the distinctive sense that Yue Ying was trying to modify the Breathing Skill's secrets to be more suitable for human physiology, although the effects were still minimal.

But for his own interface, the data collected seemed to be enough...

[Free Creation Mode: ...current success rate "medium". However, you can aid the creation by paying a certain price (combat/general experience), (cost: 20 points of experience/min).]

Medium... not particularly high, but definitely a huge improvement from "extremely low"!

He had to try!

Tonight, he would try!

If he didn't attempt it, he wouldn't be able to sleep peacefully!

Arriving at the infirmary, the familiar nurse Mashati was still dutifully on duty.

Bai E, well acquainted with the routine, said "Doctor."

"Go."

Seeing the familiar face, the salty egg doctor's fingers trembled slightly as he pointed at Bai, "Again?"

Bai E nodded expressionlessly, "Needle."

Salty Egg sighed helplessly, rubbing his shiny bald head, "Go get it."

"Yes!"

Bai E shouted at the retreating figure, "Increase the dosage!"

Mashati turned back to ask for instructions, "?"

Salty Egg waved his hand, "Get it."

One shot, and he was lively as a dragon.

Looking at that once again vigorous figure, Dr. Salty Egg had a look of pity, sighing, "Ah!"

"Medic medic medic..." another nurse came rushing in, frantic.

"Don't panic, take it slow," Salty Egg said nonchalantly, lifting the lid of his teacup for a sip.

The nurse stepped aside without a detailed explanation, revealing several figures behind her, covered in blood and looking weak.

Seeing the condition of the newcomers, Salty Egg's teacup trembled, spilling hot water, ignoring the burning sensation in his hand, he stood up suddenly, "Another battle?"

"No, no..." the leader with tiger-like energy, though weak, showed off a big white smile and waved his hand, "Training... just training."

...

...

Salty Egg's gaze drifted, glancing towards the direction where the other figure had disappeared some time ago, then back again, blinking blankly.

"Awesome!"

Is this the new trend of training among the soldiers in the military camp now?

Chapter 266 Spiritual Power Breathing Skill!

When Bai E briefly left, Yue Ying's clear eyes stared in the direction he'd departed, lost in thought. Though Yue Ying could indeed divide her attention between guiding the Breathing Skill and thinking, there was no doubt that her mind was clearer during her leisure time.

Even now, right after guiding had ended, inspiration struck even more so.

While guiding Bai E's body, she was even more aware of all the feedback coming from it than Bai E himself; at this moment, the myriad feedback from Bai E's body and the characteristics of the Breathing Skill sketched out like two anatomical drawings on separate layers in her mind, delineating clearly...

"I'm back."

Bai E greeted from afar.

Yue Ying blinked, her gaze swept over Bai E's body; his breath was still turbulent, but fortunately, there was no loss of spirit after being injured, so she nodded gently in response, "Hmm..."

"Let's continue."

Bai E was in high spirits. The chance of creation had increased by a large margin; at least, it wasn't such a waste of experience anymore.

"Alright."

As they spoke, Bai E sat down cross-legged. The turmoil of qi and blood from his rapid running calmed instantaneously under his self-restraint, the slight sweat cooling, and in a blink, he entered a state of emptiness.

"..." Yue Ying was about to open her mouth to help but then closed it again.

How many times had they trained? He was already capable of rapidly controlling his body and spirit so swiftly. Truly, befitting the human prodigy she had chosen!

["Lucky Strike" charged +1.]

"Exhale~"

"Inhale~"

[You are paying with combat experience to correct your breathing rhythm...]

[Current Follow-Through Completion Rate: 94.7%.]

'How should I change it?'

Yue Ying watched as Bai E swiftly entered the state again, feeling a slight vexation in her heart. For the first time, she was aware of her limited comprehension, struggling even with such minor difficulties.

If her sister were here...

[You are paying with combat experience to assist your creative attempts... (Consumption: 20 points of experience/min.)]

Bai E didn't hesitate to begin the free creation mode.

Two-pronged approach!

He had just harvested more than seven thousand points of experience from players, and this was the confidence behind his spendthrift ways.

Time trickled by beneath the night stars, and with the passage of time, the rhythm of his breathing became smoother and steadier.

"..." Yue Ying furrowed her brows slightly.

She felt it; Bai E was becoming more and more... disobedient?

Occasionally, his reactions to her guiding words sped up or slowed down by a beat or two, gradually losing control of the intensity.

The changes weren't obvious, but, in the practice of the Breathing Skill where there was little tolerance for errors, this should have been quite fatal.

It should either cause more harm to the body or be utterly useless.

Based on Bai E's previous performances, these low-level mistakes shouldn't have occurred.

Was it because he had practiced too long in a short time and lost control over his body? Or... had he come up with his own ideas?

Yet...

Because of the guidance of the qi mechanism, there was some sensory overlap between them.

She could also somewhat sense the current state of Bai E...

And it was getting better and better.

The light and soothing changes in his breathing never stopped but were as smooth and graceful as the instinct of natural breathing.

The rhythms he deliberately mismatched fostered an even more concentrated and robust breath.

Was this Bai E intuitively adapting the Elf Breathing Skill, feeling it unsuited for human physiology?

'So impressive...'

It was the first time she truly felt outperformed by Bai E in some aspect.

["Lucky Strike" charged +3.]

Yue Ying silently closed her mouth, choosing to trust Bai E's intuition.

"Don't stop," Bai E, still with his eyes closed, suddenly spoke up.

His creation wasn't fully mastered and still needed adjustments in the general direction based on Yue Ying's rhythmic guidance.

Regarding the state required for Elf Breathing Skill, which adjusted both flesh and spirit, he was still unfamiliar.

This seemed to be a dynamic approach that would be difficult to learn on one's own without someone to guide, even with the system's mighty power.

"Mhm~" Her voice softly replied, and Yue Ying's voice peacefully rose again, "Exhale~"

"Inhale~"

...

"Cough cough~"

She coughed lightly, the rhythm breaking for a moment.

[Current Follow-Through Completion Rate: 83.2%.]

...

Bai E wiped the corner of his mouth with the back of his hand, and both people tacitly remained silent, only to close their eyes again in the next moment and re-enter the state.

The transformation was not smooth sailing.

Constantly investing experience in learning and creation, the chance of successful creation gradually approached the ultimate goal——

[Free Creation Mode: ...Current success rate "quite high" ...]

Stars shone brilliantly, silently illuminating humanity.

[You are spending combat experience to assist your creation attempt... (Consumption: 20 points of experience/min)]

[Free Creation Mode: ...Current success rate "extremely high" ...]

The campfire extinguished, the warriors succumbed to weariness and drowsiness.

The voices fell silent, and the night slipped into slumber.

The night was deep, and the world was silent.

All that remained was that steady breathing gradually becoming the only sound in the world——

Half past one in the morning...

The starlight was magnificent.

Behind Bai E, the sprawling military camp facilities lay silently in the darkness; under the cool, pale moonlight, the shadows of sparse clouds cast upon the fabric of the tents.

Bai E's spirit seemed to leave his body, soaring beyond the tent, beyond the lighthouse, beyond the scope of the camp, drifting towards the unfathomable distance...

The granite city walls were half-hidden in darkness; he had never scrutinized that grand and majestic wall of life up close, but due to some inexplicable state, its color and contour presented themselves with clarity in the dark recesses of his mind.

Even deeper... Going even deeper...

Diving into the structure, exploring every molecule that comprised it.

The sensation was somewhat vague, yet incredibly certain.

The images that seemed to be witnessed firsthand burst forth from every gleaming crack, the brightest of which came from the dim streetlight behind the wall that lit up the night.

He could feel the paths the light rays dispersed through.

Bai E realized that his impressions of those rays had received the most fervent response from the light itself.

He could not only see the light but also follow its path far away.

He clearly saw the light, tirelessly journeying toward the ends of the world day and night, traveling countless light-years.

Not just the distant walls... atop the tower not more than 500 meters from him, whether it was the blazing light column or the silent and grim cannon, all carried their distinct origins and assailed his mind.

From stone, from trees, from steel... from the ancient star fusion of eons past.

Bai E's eyes remained tightly shut, his body poised.

Letting his consciousness flow, he drifted with the scattering light.

As the light passed through everything, it revealed the true origins and structures to his mind, and Bai E quietly indulged his will in them...

Mountains stood through the ages, and light breezes over forests and lakes stirred ripples and inaudible choruses.

Seas changed to mulberry fields, and the affairs of the world transformed.

Bai E's consciousness traced its source upward, through the endless corridors of time and space, back to the very point where the world formed—

The silver-white nighttime land was vast and peaceful, with stars twinkling overhead.

Starlight from countless light-years away traversed time and space, filling the entire firmament.

From the plains that fell from the horizon to the other side under the arc of the earth's edge, they interwove into a magnificent tent of time and space.

Consciousness rose continuously, and even clouds could not obscure Bai E's "sight".

He saw the main star of Scorpio twinkling conspicuously with red light, forming a beautiful curve with a dozen other stars, its tail submerged in the Milky Way, merging into the embrace of the stars.

However, a corner of the stars was far less spectacular than the vast smoky Andromeda spiral galaxy, where countless ancient planets revolved slowly around the central massive black hole, their epochs echoing almost as long as the universe itself.

Bai E felt the starlight from thousands of galaxies rush into his eyes, the song of time sung by those star systems intertwining and overlapping in his mind.

Consciousness suddenly shifted, and Orion, suspended in the southern sky, burst into view.

The brightest star of Orion captured Bai E's attention immediately, and instinctively, he looked southeast of the three stars, finding Sirius, the brightest star in the night sky. To the east of the brightest star of Orion was another bright star, Procyon of Canis Minor. Between the brightest star of Orion, Sirius, and Procyon, the faint Milky Way cut across.

This seemingly endless cosmic river transformed into a current of time and space, extending beyond Bai E's vision, filling the earth and sky, encompassing the myriad things of the world.

The majestic river flowed forward serenely, never returning.

Its source was endless, its end unfathomable.

As the river of time flowed "by", its powerful allure effortlessly drew Bai E helplessly into its embrace.

Gentle waters cradled Bai E's "body", drifting in the boundless and majestic expanse.

In this moment... or perhaps for eternity...

Bai E connected with the "truth" of the universe.

Like a spark fleeting in darkness, like lightning ripping through the night sky, that flare of light... once briefly illuminated a dark corner of the universe.

[You are attempting to modify the skill—Elf Breathing Skill, current modification progress is 100%.]

[You have completely finished modifying the skill—Elf Breathing Skill and completed one full cycle of Breathing Skill training. Reward: Skill—Spiritual Power Breathing Skill, has been issued.]

[You have perfectly completed one cycle of Breathing Skill training, Spiritual Energy upper limit +1.]

Bai E opened his eyes...

Chapter 267 "Image

Bai E opened his eyes, and a faint glint of light flashed within them.

Even facing those bright eyes, Yue Ying still couldn't help but feel a shock to her soul.

For a moment, a vast, smoke-like aura pressed in from "behind" Bai E as though a tsunami, leaving one breathless.

Spiritual Energy!

Spiritual Energy!

The sea of Spiritual Energy, high-dimensional space!

Only that existence, which transcends time and space, encompasses everything, and seems both the true face of the universe and completely illusory, could give her such a terrifying sense of oppression.

Just now, in an indiscernible, indivisible instant, Bai E's will had successfully connected to that legendary ocean.

Awakener!

From a human-made man, initially repelled by Spiritual Energy, to an authentic wielder of Spiritual Energy... This human warrior had taken only two short nights.

An immeasurable shock arose quietly in Yue Ying's heart; even among her own Elf Race, those with no innate talent and even resistant to Spiritual Energy didn't awaken such power easily.

Let alone mastering the methods of the Elves with a human body.

One couldn't imagine how much he had changed to bring about this ultimate miracle!

The novel sensation brought by an unprecedented miracle surged like waves against her body, and her abnormally sensitive body climbed a layer of pale pink glow on this "heartbeat" moment.

A faint heat rose from every corner of her body, and even the maximized self-restraint unconsciously employed could hardly control the physical instincts activated by the sea of Spiritual Energy and the terrifying reality never faced before.

The overly sensitive body and mind gave the Elf Race their extraordinary talent for Spiritual Energy, but in a certain sense, it also made them always hover on the edge of being corrupted by extreme emotions emanating from high-dimensional space.

Yue Ying, somewhat beyond control, gently rubbed her thighs together, the granular friction of her clothing distinctly touching her fair skin.

The instincts, long suppressed, seemed particularly fervent now; the pleasing sensation from just the rubbing almost instantly spread through her whole body, shaking her sharply like lightning, and a soft moan nearly escaped uncontrollably from her throat.

"You... have Spiritual Energy now?" Unable to suppress herself, she had to try to divert her attention through speech.

However, Yue Ying didn't realize herself how much her trembling voice carried a sultry warmth.

Powerful Awakeners could easily infect others with their will, just as emotions from high-dimensional space could contaminate the thoughts of those nearby.

Bai E slightly lifted his head and glanced at Yue Ying concealed under the shadow of her hood, feeling that there was something odd about her tone of voice.

As if she were running...

"Yes," he replied calmly.

Not counting last night, just tonight alone he had spent 6300 points of experience; with such a massive expenditure of experience, not learning it would mean better to commit suicide.

The display on the panel clearly showed the ability that Bai E now possessed—

[Spiritual Energy]: 1/1

It was still a small amount, just starting out.

But going from nothing to something was undoubtedly a monumental leap for him.

As long as one has the method for training, every single minute and second meant growth, imperceptibly, continuously.

But for some reason, there was no "attribute" display.

Bai E, who had just stepped into the realm of Spiritual Energy, could only speculate based on his scant prior knowledge.

In a previously experienced panel concerning drop rates, both Yue Ying and Pansen, the Awakener who helped reclaim server relics, each had their own Spiritual Energy attribute.

Yue Ying's was "Sharp Cut," and Pansen's was "Heavenly Eye."

Although he didn't know what it meant, perhaps it was like a special attribute bonus related to specialized abilities?

Different "attributes" of Spiritual Energy have their own tendencies in ability.

Bai E spoke haltingly, wanting to inquire but unsure how to begin.

He couldn't explain how he knew that Spiritual Energy also had its own attributes.

"What... did you see in the moment of awakening?" Yue Ying's voice emerged with difficulty.

She knew something was amiss with her current state and needed to extricate herself quickly to calm her mind alone.

But an uncontrollable curiosity towards the newly awakened Bai E kept her from convincing herself to leave.

There is only one chance to witness one's awakening of Spiritual Energy in a lifetime.

That very moment is crucial!

The inspiration in that moment, the dim "visions" seen, will determine one's direction on the path of Spiritual Energy for life.

Humans may not place much importance on this, as they often select those naturally gifted with Spiritual Energy for training, who typically awaken in moments of routine childhood activities like eating, sleeping, daydreaming, playing... any inattentive instant might conclude this awakening-like event.

It is hard to trace back, and the vast number of humans means they don't concern themselves with individual development paths.

Only the Elves hold this moment with utmost regard.

The intense curiosity for the newly awakened Spiritual Energy made it impossible for Yue Ying to convince herself to leave just like that.

"What I saw..." Bai E murmured, his gaze vacant as if he were lost in memory, "I saw light... starlight..."

The origins of all things?

The river of time?

What has already happened.

What is happening.

What is about to be plotted.

In that moment, which seemed brief yet where time was incalculable, Bai E saw too much.

So many "images" and sensations, so dense that they couldn't be clearly expressed in words for a time.

As a means of exchanging information, language... is far too insufficient.

Due to an instinctual secrecy, he did not wish to disclose everything he saw.

"Stars?" Yue Ying gently repeated, her focused thinking to some extent suppressing the odd sensations in her body.

As for the imagery seen at the moment of an Awakener's awakening, there were Elves in the Elf Race who had specifically studied this.

The mysteries of Spiritual Energy are ever-changing and elusive, yet it is precisely within this field of difficult research that Elves immerse their minds.

Through generations of heritage, they had developed their own unique way of interpreting the "imagery" observed at the moment of awakening.

And the stars...

"How many... did you see? What were... the color and brightness like?" Yue Ying's breath was still somewhat heavy, her exhales seeming to carry a sweet, pink tinge.

In the Elves' "imagery interpretation," stars represent a higher potential.

Each star seen could represent a different path of development.

The color indicates tendency, brightness indicates strength, and number... represents choice.

The development of Spiritual Energy requires personal will to guide it to a certain extent.

"How many?" Bai E hesitated.

He intended to ask the experienced Elf lady about developing his Spiritual Energy, but what she described was so far removed from what he had seen.

This made him hesitant to speak the bare truth.

He hesitated slightly.

Yue Ying did not rush him.

Not every Awakener could clearly remember and articulate the "imagery" they saw upon awakening.

Perhaps in that fleeting moment, an Awakener might have caught a hasty, blurry glance at some warm, dandelion-like orbs of light and thought them to be stars.

Or perhaps, they saw points of light twisted like pentagrams...

"Imagery" is diverse and ever-changing; what Awakeners see is not necessarily clear, what is clear is not necessarily accurate, what is accurate may not be remembered, and what is remembered might not be expressible.

Of course... what's most important is belief.

Even if one only saw a flicker like that of fireflies, if one firmly believes them to be stars, they might gain the power blessed by a host of stars.

In the realm of Spiritual Energy, belief itself is power.

After a moment of hesitation, Bai E decided to ask, "Normally, how many would one see?"

"That's uncertain... one, two, three..." Yue Ying enunciated each word with some difficulty, "...all are possible."

As she spoke, she needed her rationality to struggle to restrain her body in order to suppress the fleeting urge for a more intense sensation.

"What about more?"

Using the norm to aid in recollection was not uncommon among Elven Awakeners, and Yue Ying tried to help Bai E, "It's rare... No one has that many choices."

"..."

Bai E pursed his lips, "It seems like, two... one red, one white. The brightness, perhaps similar to tonight's moon."

In fact, they were brighter...

Of course, what Bai E actually saw was not just one star.

He believed he even saw the actual Milky Way.

...and the even more illusory river of time and space.

'As bright as the moon?'

Tonight's moon is quite bright.

This level of imagery felt like a surge of heat rising from below, crashing through Yue Ying's mind, instantly making her body feel unbearably hot.

As a result, her breathing grew even more chaotic, her exhales coming in bursts, "Very good... you are doing very well."

White often means salvation, red... might mean love or it could mean slaughter, or something else entirely.

The specific nuances would depend on the shades.

He himself might find it difficult to recall or describe those subtle characteristics.

"You must persist in your training and always... always scrutinize your heart."

The first step in awakening Spiritual Energy often means taking a step closer to the abyss.

From now on, the vast psychic sea of higher-dimensional space will constantly affect this newly entered soul.

"I should leave now... We can talk more about it when we meet tomorrow!"

The moment she received an answer, Yue Ying felt a great sense of satisfaction and fulfillment.

Curiosity is the most difficult desire for intelligent beings to overcome.

Fortunately... this desire rarely arises.

Watching Yue Ying hastily retreat, Bai E felt something was odd.

Ever since his awakening, the Elf lady had been behaving very strangely.

Her words were sticky and slurred, syllables blending into one another as if bound by some unidentified mucus.

Yet occasionally, her words seemed to be ejected with difficulty, one by one, in stark contrast to her usual cool and decisive demeanor.

Of course, what's more important is what he saw...

Even in the knowledge of someone like Yue Ying, there seemed to be no precedent for the sights he had witnessed...

Is it good, or bad?

Chapter 268 off we go!

Awakening to Spiritual Energy, one feels clearheaded and refreshed.

In the early hours before dawn, Bai E snuck back into the dormitory tent with light and stealthy steps.

His teammates' breathing was calm and gentle, deep in sleep.

Yet the same sleep seemed, to Bai E's newly sensitive senses, to carry a slightly unusual touch—

They... were exhausted.

Perhaps it was a conclusion forged from information gathered subconsciously that even his rational mind had not detected; perhaps it was from a synesthesia of collected stray thoughts.

Bai E instinctually felt that his teammates, sleeping like logs, were worn out from body to soul.

And in this state of slumber, both body and mind were relaxing and recovering swiftly under some intricate, hardly perceptible mechanism, so that the aura of life gradually grew stronger.

Those precise sensations were as vivid as distinct strings before him, as if he could reach out and touch them.

However, when Bai E actually tried to do so, he found his hand seeming to pass directly through the air; those "strings" that seemed visible were ethereal to an extreme, utterly intangible.

Bai E lowered his somewhat excited hand.

Spiritual Energy was certainly powerful, but it wasn't like one could reach the heavens in a single step.

At just 1 point of Spiritual Energy, he was still a mere apprentice at the threshold, with many unknowns in this realm yet to be explored.

After casually washing up on the public platform outside and cleaning himself, Bai E, lying in bed, found himself unable to fall asleep on either side.

His freshly awakened Spiritual Energy left him feeling energized, every injury suffered physically and mentally while practicing Spiritual Energy having been cleansed in an instant during the awakening, thoroughly healed.

He was in excellent condition.

He simply couldn't sleep.

Bai E sat up, closed his eyes, and began to practice the Breathing Skill suitable for the human constitution in the peaceful night.

New to the practice of the Breathing Skill, Bai E couldn't yet maintain it constantly like Yue Ying, nor exercise Spiritual Energy through breathing at all times.

He even had to assume specific postures during practice to help him quickly enter a meditative state and find that feeling of cultivating both spirit and flesh.

Breathe in~

Breathe out~

The plain breath flowed smoothly and lightly with each exhalation, time passing serenely like water.

...

Uncovering the small car hidden beneath clumps of grass and branches, Dai Lian took the driver's seat and inserted the key.

"Vroom~ vroom~ vroom~ clatter clatter clatter~"

After struggling to start it, the engine beneath the hood finally roared to life like a tractor.

The trembling engine transferred vibrations through the car's rigid connections, shaking the backsides of the three people sitting inside.

So much so that Kuang Xin's voice trembled as he spoke, "Are we setting off right now?"

Without a word, Dai Lian stroked the "steering wheel" in front of him, round like a ball, and looked back.

Gong Yan, who carried many bags in the car, struggled to reach out for the door, prompting Dai Lian, somewhat annoyed, to hammer Kuang Xin's shoulder, "Don't you know to help Yanzi close the door?"

"..."

Just as Kuang Xin was about to act, he heard Gong Yan's voice, "It's fine, just having the stuff brought up is enough for me."

Dai Lian's gaze swept over the large and small bags of items and he asked softly, "Do we have everything we need?"

"All here," Gong Yan patted the canvas bag beside her, which contained the food supplies they would need for the next several days.

Of course, there were several other packages, each filled with medical supplies, weapons and ammunition, and other materials they might need.

It was their first time undertaking a mission in this game world far from the city, and their in-game lives were quite precious. Plus, with their current accumulation far exceeding that of ordinary players, the three of them preferred not to be negligent and aimed to be well-prepared for every conceivable aspect.

Dai Lian nodded with satisfaction, "That's right, we trust your work. Then let's... set off!"

The internal rental agreement for the car within the organization was settled by the natural day, so to avoid wasting time, they had rented the car and departed as soon as midnight passed.

Departing at midnight allowed them to have more time to act during daylight.

"You know where we're going?" Dai Lian asked, glancing sidelong at Kuang Xin, who had unfolded a map on the passenger seat.

"Of course..."

Let's not talk about other tactical minds for now, it's just map navigation, and as a seasoned game veteran, Kuang Xin is quite familiar with it.

Kuang Xin's eyes wandered over the hand-drawn map, and he quickly located both their position and the approximate roaming area of the orcs that the mission publisher had defined.

Orcs always like to run around erratically, and their traces may not be found within the designated area of activity, a fact that those who assign the missions would clarify to prevent strange "Bounty Hunters" from becoming enraged due to not finding their target.

"Here..." Kuang Xin pointed at the target location and then traced a winding line from their current position to the target with his finger, "We'll take this route."

The map's target is not only to pinpoint the target location but also to mark all potential dangers one may encounter on the way there—these are the crystallizations of the efforts of those who like to deal in shortcuts, painted in blood.

"Alright, you lead the way," Dai Lian nodded, his role as the co-driver was to assist the driver with various tasks on the road.

The not-so-bright headlights pierced through the night's thin fog, and the humid air floating in the atmosphere scattered the direction of the once straight beam of light.

Wilderness driving conditions were harsh with the ground littered with stones, and the clattering makeshift car was bumping all along, jarring the passengers to the point of physical discomfort akin to having their brains thoroughly shaken.

Fortunately, none of the three got carsick...

"After we get back, I've got to learn some repair skills to fix this car up properly," Dai Lian said as he gripped the steering wheel with both hands, trying his best at 50 kilometers per hour to keep it steady, with his bright eyes straining to distinguish passable roads, all the while gritting his teeth with determination.

[You are using the "Insight" ability to observe the complex environment...]

"It's all on you then..." The cold nighttime wind poured into the car through a window that couldn't be fully closed, the air as sharp as a knife against the face, but for Kuang Xin, it was just an unexpected pleasure.

The thought of soon encountering the orc girl he was after made Kuang Xin's heart itch with anticipation!

It's been so long! I've been in the game for such a long time!

I'm finally going to see my kin woohoo!

...

"waaaaaagh!"

"waaaaagh!"

A bloody, rusted axe blade was pulled out with a "splat" from a green chest, and the sticky green fluid it carried was carelessly flung aside by the axe-wielding arm.

Several relatively lanky machete lads looked on in horror at the formidable and brutal figure before them.

Just now, this member of the Fu Yue Clan had personally chopped off the head of their former boss.

And now...

"Crunch!"

"Crunch!"

The grating sound of chewing echoed through the quiet night, accompanied by the cool breeze pouring into everyone's ears.

The former boss's head was still alive, but firmly grasped by a large hand, which tore and chewed off pieces of flesh bite by bite.

That clear sound reverberated in the ears of every orc spectating.

Is this a fellow Fu Yue Clansman?

How are they even more brutal than our Spike Hammer Clan?

"Ptooney!" The new boss had no intention of fully consuming a head, after a few bites, he casually tossed it aside.

Several drooling dog-like creatures immediately pounced on it, and the round former boss turned into a kicked ball, rolling around on the ground amidst their scramble.

An orc's head being chopped off didn't necessarily mean death, and thankfully, such a thing felt no pain.

The half-mouthed former boss retaliated against the dogs fighting over him with bites of his own, creating a lively and noisy scene.

The new boss from the Fu Yue Clan spat out another irresistible hard bone, with his thick lips puckering and moving in a sound that seemed both simple-minded and brutal, ringing in the ears of all the orcs present.

"Me reckon... it's me who calls the shots now, right?"

"You call the shots!"

"It's all your call!"

The remaining youths of the Spike Hammer Clan shouted with fervor, their voices becoming particularly zealous amidst the chaotic ruckus.

Standing in the center of all the orcs' attention, the new boss felt an infinite power surge within him.

The vigorous force that bumped and pushed inside him was like a ball of hot air trapped within his body, unable to break free, urging his body to rapidly swell.

The already bulky green muscles became even more fearsome and terrifying as they quickly expanded, and under the moonlight, his shadow grew a more imposing silhouette on the ground...

Chapter 269 'Combined

"What are we going to do now?"

"This is a mess..."

"Damn it, is this game targeting me specifically!"

The purchase plan had just been agreed upon yesterday! Yet today, they learned that the boss they had negotiated with had been ganked.

It had happened last night, on a night when the moon wasn't dark, and the wind wasn't fierce. A sudden fight erupted on the turf where the Orc Tribe had set up camp.

The foreign orcs had no sense of martial ethics, and they defeated the local orc leader in a one-on-one duel.

Now look what happened...

"Boss... my teeth... my teeth..."

"I've lost my teeth too, boss..."

The new boss obviously had no plans to deal with humans; the underlings who were sent to talk to him were violently knocked out and had all their teeth removed before being sent back.

It was because of this that they found out the Orc Tribe's boss had been replaced.

Two underlings with whistling speech squeezed in front of Ren Fengxing, hopping up and down, their gums with single-digit teeth opening and closing comically.

Without teeth in the real world might be a big problem, a good set of teeth is a basic guarantee of physical health, making eating a pleasure and sleep sound, and dentures are never as convenient.

However, in the game world, such minor injuries were nothing; even the in-game food was quite perfunctory.

For combat players, a mouth full of broken teeth was a medal of honor for the guild.

Far from being ashamed, they proudly boasted about it everywhere.

"Get lost!" Ren Fengxing kicked the two away.

"Boss, boss! The cart we assembled has fallen apart!" Another underling crowded over from the side.

The cart had been put together for transporting the artificial metal object.

During the negotiations yesterday, they had already seen the so-called human-made object — a large piece of metal whose texture was unidentifiable.

It was segmented.

The cut was incredibly smooth, as if it was meant to be that way.

But clearly it wasn't; from its structure, the object was obviously a small part severed from a much bigger machine. It was hard to imagine what kind of attack could have inflicted such damage.

After all, for them, not even swords or firearms could leave the slightest mark on it.

It was the same for the orcs.

Being indestructible meant it was also unusable.

An almost unusable metal structure; the Orc Tribe's continued interest waned, which was the core reason why they agreed to sell it.

But now...

"Stop fucking worrying about that damn cart!"

The negotiations had collapsed.

The other party had turned hostile.

Wouldn't you grab your weapons, ready to blast them to smithereens?

Pushing the underling's face away, Ren Fengxing continued to stride toward the distance.

The executive president of another guild had also personally led a team for this task. When obstacles arose from the game world itself, they were natural allies.

A woman in a flowing red dress was slowly approaching.

Her figure was graceful and radiantly beautiful, and although her face did not appear young, it had a sense of age's patina.

As she walked, the small pistol strapped to her leg with a black belt flashed in and out of view beneath the slit of her skirt, contrasting greatly with the swinging single-edged sword at her waist.

A sister with an imperial aura.

"Gu Lan, how about joining forces?" Ren Fengxing greeted her first.

If stealth was ineffective, the only option left was brute force.

The orcs were opponents the players had never faced before, and the hearsay about them was filled with lies and exaggeration. No one knew their true strength.

This game was not like the others they used to play; it lacked visible levels or data on attributes and gear for reference. Here, life was incredibly precious, and players could no longer recklessly use corpse-running tactics to forcibly clear instances or bosses.

Exactly how to fight against the orcs needed careful planning.

The mature Gu Lan agreed readily, "How many do you have?"

Cooperation was essential, players' competition was an internal affair, let each rely on their methods.

But the first priority was to snatch back the item from the Orc Tribe.

Ren Fengxing glanced back and, in a spot hidden from Gu Lan, his eyes flickered slightly, "Thirteen."

Then looking at Gu Lan again, he shot back the question, "And you?"

"Me?" Gu Lan laughed lightly, her lips curling up enchantingly, "However many you have, I have just as many."

"...Haha!"

Ren Fengxing laughed, aware that both were keeping their cards close to the chest.

His gaze scanned the surroundings. There were many lone wolves and solo players, either by themselves or in small groups, wandering in the distance.

The scale of the Orc Tribe is quite large, and most importantly, each one looks like a tough contender, with broad shoulders and thick waists, making them seem hard to deal with.

Those solo players, being neither able to form large groups nor confident enough to sneak attacks on their own, can only hang around not far away, like a pack of hyenas waiting for a fierce beast to show a flaw, ready to leap and bite into the flesh at any moment.

The opportunity they are waiting for is, needless to say, the leading charge of our two big guilds.

"What do you think of them?" Ren Fengxing lifted his chin slightly.

Do those solo players think they can be opportunistic?

In what world does it work that easily?

Have the tough ones have their share, only for them to wait to rip a chunk off one's own body?

No way!

Either join the fight together, or go die first.

Thinking about sneaking a win? You'll have to see if I agree first.

Gu Lan raised an eyebrow, "Aren't you afraid of being cursed?"

The notoriety of the big guilds for clearing out zones and monopolizing them has already been widely spread in other games.

And because of the unique nature of this game, organizations from the outside world find it difficult to utilize their numerical advantages in its world, just like this mission, where the two big guilds that dominate the real world could each muster only...a secret number of players.

So if these solo players really start to hold a grudge, their path in Blackwater City may not be so smooth in the future.

Ren Fengxing looked provocatively at Gu Lan, "Are you scared?"

"Aren't you?"

"I'm not," Ren Fengxing snorted disdainfully, "With just them?"

The means of raiding by the big guilds don't rely just on sending out their original members.

Since the birth location of players who join the game cannot be chosen, recruiting players who have already created characters in the game is just as viable.

Most of these solo players have already been filtered once.

Since they are unwilling to submit to management, they are also utterly unable to band together and work towards the same goal.

Hatred? Is that more important than freedom?

The resentment of a lone wolf isn't worth mentioning.

"Shall we go ahead then?"

Ren Fengxing nodded, "Let's do it."

Clear the zone.

The standard operating style of the big guilds.

Either join, don't watch, or...die.

Don't talk to me about tyranny or tyranny.

To play a game is to play with a smile!

Someone's got to smile, so why not me?

...

"Seems like they've noticed us, huh?"

"Could it be that Gu Lan woman took a fancy to me?"

"..."

The buddy beside gave him a look as if to say, "Your brain must be seriously sick."

"Why are they waving at us?"

"Why are they looking at us?"

"Why are they coming over here?"

A series of questions involuntarily rose in the hearts of the solo brothers.

The members of two well-known local guilds gathered together, a large group of people with various styles, brandishing weapons and looking menacing as they walked over, an image that was unsettling.

"Are we in their way?"

"Should we step aside?"

Then let's step aside.

The two brothers who deliberately stepped back a few paces found that the others adjusted their course to follow suit.

"It really seems like they're coming for us..."

"We didn't provoke them, did we?"

Closer and closer...the pressure became immense.

Looking at the leader of the group, a man with an aggressively smiling face, the two soloists couldn't help but shout from a distance, "Fengxing..."

"I know you haven't provoked us," Ren Fengxing cut them off directly, stepping forward briskly, "Not yet, but just staring at us here is pissing me off."

He held up two fingers, his face slightly lifted, "You have two choices, we either take on those son of a bitch Orcs together, or we give you a beating first."

Following that, Ren Fengxing revealed a row of shiny white teeth, "What's it gonna be?"

Chapter 270 I was thinking...

...

The independent players' eyes flickered, stepping back lightly, their faces sporting an awkward smile, "Can we choose not to? My buddies and I are just here to watch the fun, we have no interest in the mission."

"Click click click!"

The sound of firearms being taken off safety almost melded into one, and in the next moment, the independent players found several long rifles and short guns aimed straight at their faces.

A group of gun-toting youngsters bore threatening expressions, their intent to coerce clear as day.

Ren Fengxing, slightly displeased, pushed the rifle resting on his shoulder and adjusted his leather jacket as he stepped forward, his face still wearing that threatening smile, "So, how about it? Want to think it over?"

"No need to think!" Independent Player Number One declared with righteous indignation, "Clearing all heretics for humanity is the innate mission of our existence!"

Independent Player Number Two picked up his handgun, his face filled with rage as he looked towards the distant Orc Tribe, "For the Alliance! Charge!"

"Very good," Ren Fengxing nodded with satisfaction, "In the Yan Kingdom, we have an old saying, 'He who laughs, a martial artist, will be a hero!' You guys, you've got potential!"

The independent players nodded and bowed repeatedly, "Definitely! Definitely!"

"Next!" Ren Fengxing waved his hand dismissively.

Independent Player Number One hurried to the front, "Fengxing, this way please. I know a few of those lads over there, let me introduce them to you... for Big Brother Fengxing!"

"Not bad, kid!"

"Of course! Of course!"

...

"Hey! You there, boy, Fengxing asked me to bring you a message. He says in our Yan Kingdom there's an old saying, called..."

"No need, boss! Count me in!"

...

"Can you let me finish my damn sentence!"

...

"Our dear Fengxing..."

"Fengxing, right! I know him, the chief executive of the Black Hole Guild! Any particular things to take care of?"

"He says, heh heh..."

"Heh heh~"

"Heh heh?"

"Heh heh your mother's head! I'll stuff a round up your damn Yanzi ass!"

With a "click," a bullet was chambered.

"Bam bam bam bam!"

Gunfire rattled indiscriminately!

Independent Player Number One blew the gunsmoke from the barrel.

He stepped forward to pick up the shotgun from the dead body of a rebellious player.

"We all use pistols, and you've got a shotgun. Who else but you was going to die?"

...

Sitting atop a broken-down cart, Ren Fengxing gazed at the team that was recruiting all independent players, its size growing ever more formidable.

"Still plenty of smart ones around~"

The elegant Gu Lan, resting a hand on her sword hilt, her long legs protruding from the slit of her skirt, set foot on the edge of the cart.

Looking towards the ongoing recruiting, she smiled in admiration, "You've really made enemies of them now."

"So what if I've made enemies? What are they gonna do, bite me?" Ren Fengxing scoffed.

You know what Black Hole means?

The meaning of Black Hole is that I'm here, and everyone has to be drawn in.

They're all mine. They all listen to me!

Gu Lan shifted her gaze back from the scene, looking beside her at Ren Fengxing, who was playing with a blade of foxtail in his mouth, "What's your battle plan?"

Ren Fengxing did not answer directly, instead waving over one of his underlings, "Come on, show our beautiful lady here what Black Hole Guild is made of."

"On it!"

"Huff and puff~"

Four people, two pairs of underlings carried a cumbersome wooden crate half a person's height between them, struggling mightily as they brought it over from afar.

"Clunk!"

"Clunk!"

The heavy wooden crates were let go just five centimeters from the ground, crashing and shattering with the sound.

Inside was something metallic...

"You damn well be careful!" Ren Fengxing couldn't help but kick out in response to that sound.

The player who tumbled all over didn't get angry but clambered up chuckling, "Boss, it's just too heavy... we've lugged it all the way from the city..."

"Go get your pay yourself! An extra 80 for a kick."

That player immediately perked up, presenting his rear, "Come on, kick a few more times, more kicks..."

"Scram!"

Gu Lan raised an eyebrow, her piercing eyes fixed on Ren Fengxing, who was jesting and cursing in front of her, waiting for him to reveal the answer himself.

"Open it," commanded Ren Fengxing with a glance, and the remaining two lackeys quickly stepped forward.

"Click!"

"Click!"

At the crisp sound of unlocking, the wooden crates opened on cue.

Inside were... black, disc-like objects that resembled flying saucers?

...

Gu Lan squinted his eyes, "This is..."

"Mine!" Ren Fengxing stepped forward, slapping the steel creation that still glistened with oil, "remote-controlled."

"..."

Gu Lan's gaze at Ren Fengxing flickered with a hint of admiration.

This thing was not easy to deal with.

And judging by the quality, it didn't seem like the product of some shoddy, makeshift workshop.

Ren Fengxing lifted his rust-colored leather jacket, revealing a black box at his waist resembling a brick phone, "The remote controller. I press it, and it goes boom!"

These were the most advanced strategic weapons currently in the possession of the Black Hole Guild; those hulking Orcs might look big and strong, but as long as they were still made of flesh and blood, they too had to bow down before the might of firearms.

In front of the Minefield Array, all creatures are equal!

"Let's go! Find a spot to see how many of those green-skins there are," Ren Fengxing quickly shut the wooden crate.

"You're going?"

"Both of us."

"I won't be looking out for you if we start running."

"Don't worry, I'll cover your back."

...

Orc Tribe.

In a clearing surrounded by a crude fence made of mud, rows of simple wooden targets were stuck into the ground.

Flying axes occasionally whooshed past, some occasionally hitting the targets, their ferocious power easily smashing the wooden targets to smithereens, while many more... simply whizzed through the gaps.

"Waaaaagh!" the leader of the Fu Yue Clan roared out in frustration, having thrown numerous hand axes without achieving the desired effect.

The oblivious young ones watching beside him cried out in imitation, not knowing why but feeling inexplicably excited, "Waaaagh!"

As he weighed a hand axe, the leader of the Fu Yue Clan narrowed his eyes at the targets, scanned the heads of the watching lads, and then turned to look at the football chucked around and chased by a pack of dogs on the ground...

The former chieftain still clung to life stubbornly, mouth wide open trying to bite the dogs.

Suddenly, inspiration struck the current chief, and with a sweep of his large hand, he ordered the nearest cleaver boy, "Throw that head up for me!"

"Right! No problem, Boss!" The called Orc scurried away, large feet stomping into the fray of dogs, kicking a dog that refused to let go of an ear, and then grabbing the former chieftain's head and turned back to his boss, "Here it comes, Boss!"

"Whoosh!"

With all his might, he threw the head into the sky.

Far... Far away...

The current chief squinted, craning his neck to watch, and only after a long while did he see a black spot lazily falling down.

The hand axe twirled effortlessly in his hand, and without aiming, the chief tossed it into the sky.

"Thwack!"

The two trajectories intersected in the air; the head struck by the hand axe split instantly, its juice splashed in all directions, like a burst watermelon...

Seeing the accurate hit, the ecstatic Orc chief raised his fist and shouted, "Waaaaaagh!"

All the subordinates echoed loudly, "Waaaaaagh!"

"I knew I could hit it! What's the point of wooden targets?" The chief, grinning from ear to ear with excitement, turned to look at some puny kids in the corner.

Useless weaklings that never grow strong!

"Chop their heads off for me!"

Suddenly, a swarm of his followers rushed over, repeating the chief's words, "Chop their heads off for me!"

"Chop their heads off for me!"

"Chop their heads off for me!"

"Waaaaaagh!"

Numerous heads soared into the sky, each accurately struck by the howling hand axes.

"Tsk tsk!" Ren Fengxing, secretly observing, recoiled behind the bushes, "So brutal..."

They kill their own at the drop of a hat.

How did these Orcs become such scourges and enemies of mankind?

Is it just because they're physically strong?

A mere underling can throw a head that high...

"What kind of crazy thing is this that we're tasked to fight?" Ren Fengxing cursed under his breath and began to walk back, "Bad luck!"

Back in their own territory, Gu Lan remained silent, simply recalling everything she had observed, and then asked Ren Fengxing softly, "Did you notice? That leader is injured."

"Injured?"

Gu Lan nodded, "That leader, there's a penetrating scar on his shoulder in the back, he's been wounded there!"

She didn't believe for a second that the big boss of this mission could be easily killed by a mine; in the end, it might come down to a bayonet fight.

Knowing the enemy's weakness provided an opportunity to launch targeted attacks.

"Now that you mention it... there does seem to be one," Ren Fengxing squinted as he recalled, "It looks like a through-and-through wound, light passes through it. Geez, who's so fierce as to wound that big guy?"

"This might just be the opportunity left for us."

In games, there's always a way to complete a mission.

Such deliberately given information might be the shortcut or even the only choice to complete a mission; it depended on whether the player could grasp it.

Gu Lan had plenty of experience with this kind of setup in past games.

"We'll give it a try when the time comes."

Speaking of which, Ren Fengxing, annoyed, shouted towards the distance, "Damn it, can this be any slower, recruiting people takes forever!"

"Boss..." one of the followers gulped with wide-eyed shock, staring at a black dot slowly emerging on the horizon, "Looks like a tough nut is coming..."