

Wow 331

Chapter 331 dilution

A drop of ink can easily contaminate a cup of pure water.

However, if you pour a pond's worth of water into it, the color tainted by the ink will fade significantly.

The demon's breath had been dispersed...

Not expelled, not purified... but merely diluted.

Franca could feel many things happening on the level of Spiritual Energy perception.

Of course, from a practical standpoint, regardless of the principle, what was ultimately demonstrated was...

The demon's power had been weakened!

Blondie felt his power rapidly diminishing, the strength bestowed by the true God washing away like by torrential waters, not even one in ten remained.

What had happened?

He did not know.

Everyone had already been taken into the domain of the true God, and their feeble minds had long lost the capacity for rebellion under the influence of long-term, high-dimensional murmurs.

With their first step toward betrayal, they would fall into the authority of the adults, never to escape.

They had already believed in the true God and were already envisioning their hopes for the future.

But why... why!

He did not know, and there was no need to know.

It must be the result of everything that was happening right now.

Mangy dog! This lowly mongrel!

Your broken dreams! Broken dreams! Broken dreams!

Who cares about your broken dreams!

Take your broken dreams and die!

A thick, purplish glow condensed in his pupils, but unexpectedly, an arrow zipped through his chest without warning.

His Spiritual Energy scattered, Blondie dumbly looked down at the large hole in his chest.

His Spiritual Energy had detected the object attacking him and even managed a brief resistance—

An arrow.

An arrow...

Just an arrow, how could it make such a big hole?

Huh? How could it make such a big hole?

I don't accept this!

I don't accept this!

"Fuck your mother!" Blood foam bubbled from the corners of his mouth as Blondie's gaze slackened and he fell.

"Fuck!" The first sound of a body hitting the ground erupted.

Feeling the suppression on his power disappear, Kuang Xin slapped his hands on the ground, flipping up from where he lay in an instant.

While still in mid-air, Kuang Xin twisted his body and kicked like a whip, knocking down the two nearby "traitors."

The slightly lean figure of Xu Ruoguang also seized the opportunity to break free; drawing his Longsword, his figure blurred past several traitors in an instant, leaving behind only faint traces of blood.

"Crack!"

Franca sheathed her Longsword, tracing back from the arrow that had pierced Blondie's chest, looking towards that dark direction.

Her gaze was complex.

Is this your answer to the erosion by high-dimensional demons?

Using the purest human yearning for goodness to smooth out the ripples in those high-dimensional spaces caused by extreme negative emotions.

Yes, ripples.

The birth of all demons is actually the ripples produced in high-dimensional spaces.

As a descendant of a deeply-rooted and prestigious family, Franca had all the various classics memorized by heart.

In the past, researchers of human Spiritual Energy practitioners admitted that high-dimensional space itself was not an absolutely evil place; it merely existed quietly there, as a natural attribute of the world.

Nevertheless, any extreme fluctuations of negative emotions would cause disturbances in that space, leading to changes.

And the core of those perturbations would materialize into demons themselves.

Killing demons could smooth out these ripples.

Smoothing out the ripples could also weaken the demons' influence.

Both affected each other, merely different manifestations of the same phenomena.

So in theory... just in theory, if the happiness, contentment, and joy from sentient beings could endure persistently and peacefully, then the high-dimensional space would ultimately be purified into an empty land of tranquility.

Besides a few native creatures of the high-dimensional space and the occasional space storms, there would be no more waves in the desolate land.

But... is it possible?

"..." Franca backed into a corner, standing with the wall at her back, her eyes reflecting the chaotic battle unfolding before her, while her mind pondered humanity's future.

The power of demons had already been significantly weakened; even without that lord or herself taking action, the guard squad composed of the children of demons would have been sufficient to deal with the fallen that had truly embraced the demons.

She was pondering something much more profound—

Has anyone ever done this?

Yes.

But all had remained at a naïve and simplistic stage.

In their early stages of growth, everyone believes they are the most special and powerful person in the world, capable of accomplishing what predecessors never did, confident in forging a golden age never before seen.

However, as soon as one encounters a more genuine and vast world, they would realize how impractical this idea is.

Humans are inherently chaotic creatures. Franca didn't deny some shimmering qualities that glow brilliantly, but the inevitable presence of scum and degenerates could not be avoided either.

Not to mention that the current world situation is plagued by internal strife and external threats. For humanity to simply survive and maintain its current scale might not be an easy task, let alone caring for the personal feelings of every individual within the system.

The clamor around her gradually subsided, and Franca let out a soft breath.

"...huh~"

No matter what, the fact that someone attempted to do it was a good thing.

What previous generations had not achieved, our generation can try.

That lord... was truly interesting, and self-confident.

With his power, he was certainly not an inexperienced greenhorn who had never encountered the world, and yet, he still naively believed that humanity could save itself.

The events of today, even without his arrow, this demon calamity would not have caused much loss.

The people of Black Street, relying on themselves... had defeated the demons!

"Heh~"

It has never changed... never changed.

Since the moment she first came into contact with those "Children of the Demon" who served under him, their organization has been such a purely idealistic existence.

And after many events, they remained the same.

Under such a brightly shining flag, there was a group of followers devotedly heeding the will of the flag. What a wonderful thing it was...

Franca's eyes swept over the guards of the children of demons, subduing every traitor.

With the diminishing demon strength, the traitors gradually awoke from their frenzied descent, realizing what they had done.

"Stop hitting, stop hitting, I surrender, I surrender!"

"Didn't I just kick you once? Kick me back ten times! Ten times!"

"Lord, I am innocent, Lord! We were just controlled by demons, it wasn't genuine, Lord!"

"Genuine or not, don't talk to me about it." Kuang Xin said sternly, pinning the "traitor" beneath him, "Everything will be judged by the lord!"

"Lord... Lord..."

Some saw the figure emerging from the shadows, their eyes filled with fear.

Chapter 332 stand up!

Bai E's gaze swept calmly over the figures on the long street.

Those who loudly proclaimed their dreams seemed as if they were waking from a dream, standing bewildered in their place.

And the betrayers who had committed acts of betrayal and enjoyed the blessings of demonic power looked at themselves with eyes full of fear, knowing well what they had done and that they were probably already branded as heretics.

Should they make a last stand, a desperate fight with their backs to the wall?

No!

That possibility did not exist!

Facing a person as powerful as a god, there was only pleading.

"My lord! My lord!" someone was on their knees, crawling over with their knees, kowtowing non-stop to Bai E, "My lord! My lord! I didn't mean to do it! I was just bewitched by demons! It won't happen again! It won't happen again!"

More people were infected, all crawling towards the feet of Bai E, "My lord! Please spare us! Please spare us! We won't do it again! Never again!"

They were accustomed to groveling; in the past, under the dominance of other gang leaders, they could only survive through such humility.

Sometimes it worked, sometimes it didn't.

But in the face of absolute power, they could only exchange their humility for a tiny possibility of mercy from those above them.

"Stand up!" Bai E spoke calmly, his eyes indifferent.

The moment the voice sounded, the place went silent.

At such a moment, no matter how loud the pleas for mercy, what everyone was most concerned about was the decision of their lord.

Stand up?

What did it mean?

Not accepting their pleas?

"..."

"My lord?"

Someone carefully lifted their head, looking up at the face of the great person before them, who seemed incredibly tall.

With a bit of firelight behind him, the lord's face was stern, his pupils shimmering with thoughts they couldn't understand.

"I told you to stand up," Bai E repeated.

Without waiting for everyone to speculate, he took the initiative to explain, "The world makes you kneel, I tell you to stand! You are people! You have your own thoughts, your own dignity! You shouldn't live so humbly, real strength comes from within. If you continue to act as you do today, then the future you speak of will never happen again, it will all be empty talk. Demons are everywhere, and you have seen that kind of thing twice... so you should know—you need to have your own thoughts! Your own personality! Your own steadfastness!"

"I tell you, stand up!" Bai E repeated.

His voice was light, yet carried a heavy weight.

And so the figures hesitantly got up, still feeling uncertain about their future.

They had committed acts of betrayal that would not be easily forgiven anywhere.

Even if the death penalty could be waived, the living punishment was hard to escape.

And the more gentle the treatment, based on their past experiences, meant... the death penalty!

Bai E's gaze was gentle but filled with helplessness, "You live in this world; you cannot expect a savior to rescue everything. Facing any crisis you encounter, only you can be the one to change your destiny. They

have just shown all this through their actions, you are not insignificant, nor do you need to be humble. Stand up, try to stand up. I am willing to give you a chance, but please, do not give up on yourselves first."

["Lucky Strike" +50.]

"Yes... my lord."

"I understand, my lord."

"..." Bai E turned his head away, not speaking further.

Change doesn't happen overnight, nor is it reversed by mere words.

Everything requires time to ferment, and for now...

A group of old soldiers fitted with prosthetic limbs was slowly coming from the far end of the street, and several old soldiers without prosthetics were stumbling behind them, leaning on walking sticks.

Tiger was also among them, looking at the unmasked Bai E with complex eyes.

This was his first time seeing the great person spoken of by the people of Black Street.

Unexpectedly... it turned out to be Bai E.

Ha ha ha ha ha... It should be Bai E!

So that military medal he took with him was used in such a place.

No wonder they could never find him...

Their gazes intersected, understanding unspoken.

The leading old soldier, followed by a group in neat rows of those with prosthetics, came forward; even those disabled soldiers could still manage strict discipline, forming an orderly line.

"Attention!"

"Salute!"

The military uniform on Bai E's body was all too familiar to them; normally, Bai E would appear before them in disguise... and only on this day of urgent matter did they see Bai E's true identity.

Of course, this wasn't important.

Simply sharing the identity of soldiers wasn't enough to unconditionally gain their trust, what really made them willing to step forward was what Bai E had said...

From the words of this comrade, they heard what they wanted most—fairness, personality, dignity.

If he could treat these soulless commoners from Black Street that way, then... what about artificial humans?

...

I don't know, but we can try to make contact first.

Bai E stood still, his face devoid of any expression as he accepted the salutes of these veterans.

He didn't speak, quietly waiting for them to express their purpose on their own.

The leading veteran stood straight as a javelin and said with a stern face, word by word, "Starting today, we are the sword in the hands of the adult! The order of Black Street, from now on, will be our responsibility!"

"..." Bai E was noncommittal, waiting for them to state their demands.

"Under the leadership of the adult, may humanity shine again!"

"..." Eyes slightly downcast, Bai E knew they would not reveal their true intentions at such a moment.

But nevertheless, it could be considered a preliminary subjugation of these veterans, an unexpected pleasure.

"Arrange the follow-up, don't delay everyone's work tomorrow."

Bai E ordered softly and turned away.

With the chief culprit of the rebellion now dealt with, the rest seemed to have concluded.

But everyone knew the impact of this rebellion was far from over.

Personality, dignity...

Every person can be someone who lives openly and honorably... a person?

The Ratfolk huddled in a dark corner, their deep black eyes gazing at the light outside.

The adult's words echoed and wound around in the depths of their heart, eventually fading into another soft and indistinct murmur.

That voice was warm and calming, with the same power to soothe the heart—

'Don't lose heart~ Even the smallest germ can destroy an empire. You're important too.'

...

As soon as Bai E returned to the camp, he saw You standing by the tent entrance with someone beside him.

"Captain, he's looking for you." After the major changes and handling all kinds of odds and ends in recent days, You, still with that cold youthful complexion, had undergone a complete transformation in temperament.

"Hmm~" Bai E looked at the visitor... one of Minister Likok's subordinates, whom he had seen a few times.

Since he had decided to take the warlord path, Bai E naturally would not miss any opportunity to make contact with the city's major powers.

Last time, he didn't agree when Minister Likok invited him to join the information department of the Scientific Research Institute, but neither had he completely severed the connection.

In these idle days, he often accompanied the department led by Likok in the name of wanting to learn, participating in research.

Getting his face known and understanding the city's highest level of technology at the moment were both extremely meaningful activities.

And now...

"Our recent research is basically complete. The minister has invited you to participate in the final summary and analysis," the other said with a smile, his tone warm.

In the few interactions they had, the people from the information department had discovered that this boy Likok wanted to recruit was indeed exceptional.

Despite his unorthodox background, he was no less adept at the research and understanding of the revived communication technology than any of their professional researchers, often even surpassing them, which was simply inconceivable.

Bai E nodded and answered immediately, "Alright."

The first step was to dissect and analyze the simple communicator he had made, then propose different hypotheses and dispatch various military squads to verify them within the "Bug Nest Domain"—that's what the information department had been doing these past few days.

Of course, the concept of the "Bug Nest Domain" did not exist before.

Now... that boundary where electronic signals were replaced became what everyone referred to as the "Bug Nest Domain," an area covered by the Bug Race's will.

It might be that the "Bug Nest Will" is just as sensitive to electronic signals as humans are, or there could be some other reason why human electronic signals would be intercepted and replaced the moment they entered the "Domain."

These days they had been researching the core reasons, as well as looking for countermeasures.

So now is the time when the fruits of their labor are truly revealed?

Bai E, following behind the researcher into a car heading straight for the city's information department, felt a sense of anticipation.

...

The vast room contained rows of consoles and several huge screens.

Likok saw Bai E enter through the door, nodded and smiled at him, but did not engage in much action.

Clapping his hands, Minister Likok sternly spoke to everyone in the room, "Everyone is here, we will now officially start the fourth summary of the countermeasures to the Bug Race's signal-jamming technology and the subsequent operational plans..."

"The known facts are as follows:"

"One, any remotely transmitted signal will be cut off the moment it enters the 'Bug Nest Domain';"

"Two, signals re-established within the 'Bug Nest Domain' can be normally transmitted;"

"Three, changing channels or receiving bands have been proven ineffective;"

"Four, whether the 'Bug Nest Domain' exists only near the Blackrock District Hive or not is currently unknown."

"Based on these reasons, it has been decided to restart the signal relay stations around the world. The first step is to begin with station B13 inside the 'Bug Nest Domain.' If successful, we will contact other cities to restore all global internet signal stations."

The constructs of the Golden Age were sturdy and reliable, and even after hundreds of years, unless deliberately destroyed, the main structures remained largely undamaged.

Perhaps slight repairs were needed, but overall they were definitely capable of being put back into service.

Reactivating old facilities is always more cost-effective than rebuilding from scratch.

Minister Likok, continuing his address, turned to Bai E with a grave tone, "Captain Bai, I would like you to lead the mission this time, if you are willing?"

Chapter 333 Overcome others by force

...

Bai E had already demonstrated his technical abilities in several operations, and although he would also deploy professional technicians to follow the operation, having a backup option was always more secure.

Furthermore, even if we set aside the technical aspects, the combat power Bai E displayed was at the top of his recognition. With such a person in charge, the success of this first attempt could be ensured.

"No problem."

Bai E accepted the offer without hesitation.

Going on a mission? Of course, that was no problem.

And he could even curry favor with the information department in the process, killing two birds with one stone.

"Just submit the application to the Military Department on your end, and I will accept proactively."

After becoming captain, Bai E had also dealt with a variety of miscellaneous tasks.

A captain had many privileges. In addition to randomly assigned tasks, they could occasionally apply proactively for some yet-to-be-assigned missions. And a captain with the highest level of synergy like Bai E had even greater authority in this realm, allowing for considerable flexibility in action.

His team had been sidelined for a while because of the reorganization, which was time the military gave them to learn to coordinate and adapt internally.

Now, it was about time for them to embark on a mission.

Seeing Bai E agree, Minister Likok's face visibly brightened with pleasure, "Good, I will apply to the Military Department right away."

"I'll go prepare."

There was no need for pleasantries; they were all practical people who got straight to the point.

Within the "Bug Nest Domain" there was a ruin of a signal base station, a certain distance from the Bug Nest in Black Rock District.

Those signal base stations, even in the Golden Age, were considered precious creations. Their main structures were deeply buried underground and isolated with steel. As long as there was no deliberate damage, the main structures should be well preserved.

But since they had not been usable before, the military wouldn't constantly monitor the target base station.

"We depart tomorrow morning. Our mission target is an ancient ruin near the Bug Nest. The enemies may include, but are not limited to, bugs, beastmen, and mutated creatures... Everyone should prepare individually."

In the once familiar tent, Bai E calmly commanded the gathered squad members.

"Yes, Captain!"

The atmosphere relaxed slightly as Rose approached with a smile on her face, "This time, you just stand back and let me see how much those bugs and beastmen are worth."

Rose's development trajectory had been much safer compared to Bai E. Before joining the special squad, she had always trained in the military camp, and even missed the previous major battle with the Bug Race because of severe injuries she suffered the day before.

Having heard so many stories of Bai E's encounters with alien races, she was itching for a fight.

Moreover, since they were in the same special squad and even trained in the same armored camp, Rose had plenty of time to interact with and even spar privately with Bai E. She believed no one else in the camp knew how strong Bai E was at this moment, except for her.

If Bai E took action, what fun would there be in this mission?

Bai E shook his head with an amused smile, "As you wish..."

Unless he encountered the same Overlord as before, ordinary opponents now hardly caught Bai E's eye.

In these calm days, not only were players furiously learning skills from him, but he was also rapidly increasing his own strength.

[Your Insight +0.4, Stamina +0.6, Reflex +1.0, Mystery +0.2, Light Weapon Mastery Experience +154, Light Firearms Mastery Experience +72, Ranged Weapon Mastery Experience +90, Combat Mastery Experience +60, Knowledge - Human Body Modification Project 1.0 Experience +312, Universal Experience +600, Expertise - Mechanical Rhythm Experience +1200, Spiritual Energy limit +3.]

Through his own training and feedback from player missions, his strength steadily increased over these days.

The efficiency of this improvement naturally wasn't as dramatic as from life-and-death battles, but the results were undoubtedly pleasing.

Expertise differed from specialization; training it required a large investment of experience. Without harvesting experience from players, with his own reserves, he wouldn't have been able to sustain such spending.

Meanwhile, his basic attributes were also progressing bit by bit; there was no shortcut for such things. The basics were always the hardest to improve but also the most reliable.

And now, nearly all the attributes of his body were approaching the limit of an ordinary person without genetic optimization, roughly equivalent to the level of the original 'Blood God'. Coupled with Bai E's unthinkable specializations, expertise, and skills for a commoner, those were the core elements composing a person's combat ability.

[Stamina]: 15.5/24

[Insight]: 13.2/24

[Reflex]: 14.2/24

[Mystery]: 10.8/∞

The only regret might be the 99-point limit on Spiritual Energy.

According to Yue Ying, he had reached a bottleneck.

Training in Spiritual Energy wasn't smooth sailing. An overly large Spiritual Energy could oppress one's own spirit; without a moment of sufficient determination, the ordinarily calm Spiritual Energy might not support further increases... or more accurately, sustainable increases.

He hoped to encounter an opponent in this mission stimulating enough to inspire his spirit...

...

The next day, Bai E, along with his team, waited early at the agreed-upon gathering site.

This mission naturally wasn't just Bai E's own team; such a relatively large-scale mission generally required multiple special combat squads to join forces.

Three squads, totaling fifteen people.

A standard size for a joint unit.

Before Bai E's arrival, one squad was already waiting at the gathering point.

...

Everyone sized each other up, not too familiar to greet warmly.

Another squad arrived swiftly amidst the silence between the two teams.

Seeing everyone had assembled, Bai E cleared his throat softly, garnering everyone's attention, "I'll be leading this mission, and I believe everyone has reviewed the relevant information in advance. Of course..."

Suddenly, someone interrupted Bai E.

The good-looking man with a sunny demeanor scanned the faces of the youthful-looking soldiers before him, and with insincere aplomb, asked, "Excuse me, is this...the captain?"

Bai E pursed his lips and nodded at the other, "Yes."

"You're the captain?" The man asked formally, but his eyes betrayed a lack of respect. His gaze swiftly passed over the badges on their chests and finally settled back on Bai E's face, "Judging by their numbers, they all seem to be synthetic humans from the latest batch?"

If it were not for the fact they were in a military camp, seeing the little girl and boy in this squad, he would have thought it was some kids playing outside.

The blond woman and the simple-looking, grinning large man appeared slightly more mature, but not by much.

The gap between battle-hardened veterans of many missions and fresh recruits was stark, and those chosen for special units were usually the elite who had clawed their way up through the ranks, their bloodied essence discernable with a single breath.

But this bunch... was really too green.

Young in looks, immature in demeanor, "fresh off the assembly line"... too green.

Only this "captain" carried a somewhat composed air, and unlike the others, he bore no identifier of artificial humanity... Maybe that's why he could be the captain of this special squad, even the captain with the highest authority to coordinate?

Privilege of natural humans?

...Why should a bunch of wet-behind-the-ears kids lead this joint squad?

"Yes." Bai E simply responded expressionlessly.

The captain of the other early-arriving squad, who had been observing, now stepped forward, "Brother, let's make a deal. How about you give us command this time, and you guys can take a back seat? What do you say?"

Bai E frowned slightly, "You should know that I have the highest coordination authority."

The first captain to speak wore a smirk of assured victory, resorting to regulations generally meant a guilty conscience.

Yet another natural-born high and mighty looking to gild their resume?

But he did not want to entrust his life to a bunch of rookies.

"We say that... but in practice, there are always unexpected situations, right? Brother, don't worry, just follow our lead. We'll ensure this mission goes off without a hitch."

"...Ah!" Bai E just sighed, disheartened, and put down the files he was holding.

The two captains exchanged meaningful glances, both slightly smug.

To wrestle command from a privileged captain, the boasting rights would last for years.

"Rose." Bai E suddenly spoke up.

"Present!"

"Convince them."

"Yes!"

Rose clenched her fists and walked towards the biggest guy among the two squads, beaming with enthusiasm.

"Hey! Fancy a spar?"

"Huh?" The big fellow was momentarily stunned by the radiant woman approaching him, then replied in a daze.

"Norwitz, she looks down on you, wants to beat you up," the large man's captain saw the intent behind the green captain's command.

A show of force?

Fine by him.

In any place, fists are always the most persuasive truth.

"Roar!" Norwitz let out a ferocious shout, looking angrily towards Rose; nothing infuriated him more than being looked down upon!

"Norwitz is going to hit you!"

Norwitz raised his hefty fists.

The large man's captain's lips curled into a cold smirk.

Let them understand the disparity in strength, for the better...

"Ouch! It hurts, it hurts, it hurts..." Pinned to the ground with his arm twisted back, Norwitz was on the verge of tears, "I give up! I give up!"

Still beaming with her bright smile, Rose stood up and even gave Norwitz's butt a pat, her voice brimming with enthusiasm, "Train harder, you're wasting all that physique."

She turned to the two captains, "How about you two? Want to join in? Our captain is in a hurry."

"..."

The two captains glanced at each other, instinctively turning to Bai E.

Bai E was looking into the distance, not sparing them a glance, with his arm around "Zero," walking towards a parked off-road vehicle, his voice trailing from afar.

"If you're afraid of losing face, I'll leave three. Knock down any one of them, and I'll follow your lead for this mission."

Chapter 334 The Buried Site of the Golden Age

Nine against three, and it's about the team's command rights, there's no reason to be scared, right?

"One..."

"Two..."

"Three..."

"Nineteen..."

"Twenty..."

"Twenty-eight..."

"Twenty-nine..."

"Captain, what are you counting for?" Zero asked with some curiosity.

Bai E, who was sitting in the vehicle organizing the documents in his hands, said nothing.

He heard approaching footsteps—

Three of them.

"Click!" Rose yanked the car door open and casually clapped her hands, her voice warm and slightly exhilarated, "Got warmed up, not bad."

Getting warmed up was about herself; not bad was about the opponent.

"Are you impressed?" Zero curiously moved around Rose's body to try to look outside, only to find that the others seemed to deliberately avoid his gaze.

Didn't get a good look...

"Impressed." Stony said flatly, then a bit discontent, "Rose, you moved too fast... didn't let me have a real go at it."

"Hahaha~" Rose laughed heartily, "Next time, definitely next time."

"If you're impressed, get in the car." Bai E shook his head, "We're leaving."

When I used to be a team member and got pushed around, I just took it, since I didn't have the strength or status to stick my neck out without meaning.

But now that I'm the captain, how can I allow others to disrespect me?

Besides, this is the military.

A place where fists do the talking.

Don't talk about seniority— it's not about being an old soldier to be bossy, it's about strength granting that right.

Not convinced?

A beat down will convince you.

Leaving behind three people was simply a courtesy to the reputation of the other two squads; in fact, in this kind of skirmish without equipment, Bai E believed that Rose alone could take down both opposing squads.

After all, Rose had been injected with the Gene Optimization Solution, and Bai E had also taught her the Advanced Physical Training Program 3.0, her strength advancing rapidly in recent times.

In these past few days of close combat, without using any trump cards, Bai E, relying purely on his base attributes and his level six combat specialization, found it hard to beat her.

In a real fight to the death, Rose's level probably wasn't below that of the Blood God from before, and handling two squads where not all members could be combat experts should be more than manageable.

Plus, Stony and You's close combat skills were certainly not lacking either; Stony might still have been a bit unpolished in combat, You had become even more dedicated to her practice after the last big change, and Bai E had taught her the advanced physical training plan as well.

Adding these two was yet another layer of insurance.

Bai E certainly didn't want to actually lose command rights because of showing off.

"Vroom!"

The engine started, and off it roared.

In the two obedient off-road vehicles following behind the lead car, the group that had been beaten to a pulp watched with surprised and wary expressions as only a trail of dust was left in the wake of the vehicles ahead.

"Sss~ Captain... who the hell are they?"

"Sss~ Yeah, Captain... they're so fierce. Are they really the newly produced artificial humans?"

"Sss~ Damn, did we miss out on some new high-tech stuff developed by the brass?"

The captain, who had been given special attention, had both cheeks swollen high, and his speech was buzzing, "How the hell would I know! Sss~ That woman... she really hits hard..."

Only Norwitz sat at the back, a silly grin on his face, as if he was still savoring the taste of that punch that had hit his face...

"Hehe~ Hehe~"

"Anyway, just listen to them obediently, and it's done. MD, with minions like this, worthy of the offspring of those big shots."

The stronger the minions, the more it seemed to affirm Bai E's position in his heart.

Having such a group of fierce subordinates, even a pig could rack up a heap of military achievements!

...

...

The desolation of the wilderness remained as constant as ever, only a few vigilant wild beasts ran far away because of the noise of the vehicles.

Of course, owing to the influence of alien genes, even the planet's native beasts had long since become bizarre and deformed.

For those without experience, it was very easy to be overly suspicious and see threats that weren't there.

Learning to distinguish between the natural environment and enemy surveillance was also something that a mature special forces soldier needed to learn and master.

Bai E drove the vehicle, his eyes indifferently sweeping past the view outside the window.

The location marked on the map... which was the site of the signal station, was actually not too far from where they had encountered trouble that day.

Roughly the same distance, they encountered no dangers just the same.

As he was about to pass the boundary where he had felt a palpitation that day, Bai E intentionally concentrated his mind.

This was also his first time returning to the scene of the incident since the last mishap.

And quite obviously... personal experience spoke volumes—

The same position, the same feeling.

Bai E took out a communicator that he had prepared and noticed that the indicator light had turned into a dim, gray blur.

Indeed, the moment they passed this boundary, the link between the communicator and the city's information station would be blocked and replaced by some mysterious force.

As to whether or not this was the doing of bugs... that was truly unknown.

So, this was the reason why the Information Department had decided, after this attempt proved effective, to just restart the global signal stations directly?

With signal stations spread all around the world making multiple transfers of signals, this so-called "Bug Nest Domain" would no longer influence the communication.

Gathering his thoughts, Bai E pressed the accelerator.

Not encountering enemies was naturally a good thing.

He did indeed long for battle now, but if he could complete the mission smoothly without trouble, it would also be a responsibility to others' lives.

Even after having witnessed death countless times, he would still feel sadness upon the arrival of death the next time...

With a clear goal in mind, he did not stop along the way.

The ruins were hidden beneath a layer of wind-blown sand, the tough steel corners of the structure stubbornly jutting out from the earth.

It was a trace that the group had found after half a day of crawling around the ground, following the map.

The power of the Golden Age was extraordinary; the outer walls of the base station, made from a series of primary metallic alloys, were indestructible. Even after nearly 500 years of neglect, nature's erosion wasn't able to shake the foundation of this base station in the slightest.

Of course, the main reason was that for both bugs and beastmen, there wasn't much interest in stubbornly fighting against a massive iron block that couldn't be broken from the outside.

Without these two biggest threats, nature's erosive force on human technological constructs was limited, so when Bai E and his team arrived, even the corners of the outer walls of the station looked as if they had never suffered any damage.

The only problem was...

"Where's the door?" The soldier who had jumped off the truck from behind kicked at the metal corner that was poking out of the ground.

Bai E opened the car door and took a shovel out of the storage compartment at the back of the vehicle, casually tossing one to the team member who was muttering to himself, "The door is in my hands... Start digging."

[Hint: Discovered a small "ruin" that can be explored. Current Exploration Progress: 0.1%...]

"Heave-ho!"

"Heave-ho!"

Over four hundred years of changes and the successive appearances of various creatures had resulted in the Golden Age ruins being completely buried under the earth.

The ground was particularly hard...

And digging it up was also especially strenuous.

"Damn, who knew how big this base station could be?"

They were elite special forces soldiers; when had they fallen so low as to become engineers digging the earth?

The soldier looked at the blisters on his hands and felt an aching pain.

Of course, such minor injuries were nothing; what truly hurt was not seeing any hope.

The more they dug, the bigger it got... the more they dug, the bigger it got...

A broken base station, how big could you possibly be?

"It would be nice if someone could give us a hand..." A soldier leaning on his shovel took a brief rest.

While indulging in wishful thinking.

Chapter 335 "Helpful" Sandworm

Bai E paused while digging the trench, as a shadowy image flashed through his mind.

He helplessly glanced at the warrior who had spoken... Had that kid's mouth been touched by the divine?

He didn't utter a warning, for the sandy movements of the worm weren't clearly indicated in his mind; he could only roughly sense that the sandworm was attacking from underground but couldn't discern the exact spot it would emerge.

Perhaps near the vehicle?

"Boom!"

The sandworm burst forth from the earth, its ferocious bone blades revealing their sharp curves in mid-air.

"Ah!"

The warriors, engrossed in their digging, trembled as they turned to look at the giant worm that had just landed.

"Sandworm!"

"The worm!"

They cried out in unison.

Having undergone training about the newly emerged sandworms, related information sprang to their minds—

Its weakness is blunt-force trauma.

Concussion Grenade!

"Quick, grab the grenade launcher!" The captains of the other two squads commanded their members immediately.

Rose reacted even faster, pressing her hand against Bai E's chest. In the next moment, she shot out like an arrow, "Don't you intervene!"

Barehanded!

Having heard that Bai E had killed so many sandworms with his bare hands, she wanted to give it a try too.

Bai E leaned on his shovel, standing in place without any rush to act.

It was just one worm; they were more than capable of handling it, so it didn't matter whether he stepped in or not.

"Snap!" Facing a sandworm as massive as a transport vehicle, Rose was the first to charge forward.

Her tiny frame contrasted with the monstrous beast, creating a strikingly impressive scene.

The warrior holding the hastily assembled grenade launcher hesitated to shoot, as the worm hadn't fully emerged from the ground, and its visible body was in a straight line with Rose and himself; he feared hitting a friendly.

"Move!"

Without turning back, Rose gestured with her hand and then flipped in the air, landing a kick on the sandworm's lower jaw.

The intention to engage in hand-to-hand combat was crystal clear.

"Damn!" The captains of the two squads cursed quietly, each directing their own close-combat experts, "You guys help out!"

The soldier with the grenade launcher began to move in an arc based on the sandworm's emergence point, trying to circle around Rose to reach the creature's back and land a couple of shots.

Another captain, also quite skilled in close combat, had approached Rose by this time, watching her – still with a passionate smile on her face – striving to outmuscle the sandworm. In his eyes sparkled an uncontrollable mixture of fear and envy.

"Big sister, how about you join our squad? I'll make you the captain."

So fierce! So fierce!

How could such a formidable person be underused and under someone else's command?

What virtues and abilities did that kid named Bai E have to deserve commanding such a powerhouse?

Rose glanced at him, "You guys? Far from enough."

"But still better than that kid..." the talking captain looked back, noting Bai E still digging the trench not far away...

???

Why was he still digging? Didn't he see the fight had already broken out?

"That kid..." Rose followed his gaze back, then burst into laughter, "You'd better pray that kid doesn't take action."

If it came to a situation where he needed to get involved, then this mission would no longer be so easy.

Rose focused again and with a soft shout at the spot, forcibly snapped off the two bone blades that were slashing down.

The captain next to her with his shield felt his throat constrict.

Is this really a newbie from the last batch? It's been a month since the last batch; has she become this fierce already?

...

Bai E diligently continued to shovel dirt—admittedly, the object was buried quite deeply. They had been digging around the gradually emerging metal exterior wall, going down in circles to reach at least two meters deep, but still hadn't found the entrance to this base station...

It would be nice to have some help.

Bai E glanced at the sandworm not far away, now being gradually driven back under the siege of a bunch of melee brutes... especially Rose. He felt a bit of regret that his "Hive Mind Will" wasn't powerful enough; otherwise, he could simply command these sandworms to dig for him, and that would be the end of it, right?

"Ssshhh!"

The dark imagery assaulted him once again, and Bai E raised an eyebrow.

The next moment, a colossal force overturned the soil beneath his feet, and Bai E's body was propelled high into the air by some unseen power.

"Flying... flying up?"

The first warrior to witness this event stared dumbfounded, the evening sky's sunset serving as the backdrop for the figure being hurled into the air.

Bai E, in mid-air, quickly adjusted his center of gravity; plummeting from a height of dozens of meters, he showed no sign of panic.

Overcome by weightlessness, Bai E nonetheless managed to adjust his posture in an instant, even sparing the effort to glance at Rose—who was also looking his way—and spread his hands open.

There was a hint of helplessness.

'This was them coming after me, not my fault.'

"Boom!" Bai E, falling from the sky, landed a punch right on the top of a sand worm's head, the unparalleled force spreading out from the core point of impact.

Charged with power, even using the one-punch strength that could instantly kill a hundred, the explosive force penetrated the insect's chitin shell and traveled downward.

"Crack~"

The shell cracked inch by inch, gradually widening.

The shattered Chitin Armor could no longer protect, or rather confine, the flesh beneath it, which was shockingly blasted open by the astounding force, the flesh and blood exploding first.

"Pfft!"

Gore and blood were ejected in all directions, but conspicuously avoided one.

It was as if an invisible barrier stood before Bai E, the jetting flesh and blood unable to cross the boundary by even half an inch.

The most vital central nervous system was smashed by one punch, and while it wasn't fatal, the momentary weakness caused the sand worm to slump down limply.

The creature, having just emerged from underground, didn't even get a chance to show off its might before carrying its king, it lay down collapsed.

Bai E lightly hopped down, landing on the ground from over a meter high on the sand worm's body.

"I'll leave this one to you."

"Crack~" Bai E pulled out the shovel stuck in the ground and, full of excitement, ran towards the direction of the large hole made by the sand worm.

Let's see if this sand worm has been helping with the work...

"Gulp~" The sound of swallowing saliva was exceptionally clear in the quiet scene.

Rose, grinning, reached out to lift the chin of the team captain who was gaping, "It's a regular performance, relax a little."

That kid... that kid...

What kid? That's obviously my dad.

The captain, who had tried to poach Rose, shut his mouth, his gaze steely.

All the soldiers in the city are brothers; once this battle is over, he would seek guidance from this good brother, this good father.

["Luck Strike" energy charge +13.]

And by now, the good father in his heart had already jumped into the underground tunnel made by the sand worm.

The sand worm naturally couldn't drill through the base station walls made of metal from the Origin Alloy series, yet its path stayed close to the wall's edge. Following its tunnel all the way down, Bai E actually saw a noticeable door gap at a winding turn.

The silver-gray metallic door seam was still mostly covered in dirt, but just the exposed part was enough to bring delight—

Finally found the door, heh!

Taking advantage of the ongoing fierce battle elsewhere, Bai E began to dig immediately.

"Shush, shush, shush!"

"Shush, shush, shush!" Dark silhouettes appeared one after the other.

Two more?

Bai E pressed his earpiece and whispered inside, "Do you need help?"

Rose's voice, panting through clenched teeth, rejected outright, "No need!"

Three teams, and they can't take down four sand worms? What face would she have to be with Bai E's team?

"Just try not to have any losses," Bai E whispered back, not saying anything further.

Sacrifice was indeed the cornerstone of the Empire; human warriors needed the stimulation of blood to maintain lasting combat strength, but since he was present, it was best to avoid injuries if possible.

"Understood," Rose replied tersely, with the sound of a violent clash of steel in the background.

Trusting Rose's judgment, Bai E was somewhat reassured. Since she had given her word, he didn't need to worry too much.

As the disturbances above started to subside, Bai E's solitary excavation was also nearing its end.

A pale artificial light source illuminated the underground hole, where Bai E brought the only technician in the team to the silver-gray door.

Bai E patted the smooth wall with his palm and said to him, "It's up to you now."

The ruins of the Golden Age invariably had concepts of locks, and the methods to unlock them often survived, held by the various crumbling cities.

As long as the civilization hadn't declined too drastically, creations from that era were absolutely reliable and robust.

Even after more than four hundred years, the vestiges of the Golden Age still sheltered all mankind of this era.

The technician pulled out a small bag he was carrying, taking a small, silver-gray mechanical key from the innermost compartment.

The gate, almost impossible to break with external force, could be opened easily by hand once the key was inserted. The sliding doors opened to the sides, which was necessary given the limited space that might have been obstructed by the underground soil otherwise.

Both holding flashlights, they walked inside.

The interior of the base station was pitch black, and at the center illuminated by the flashlight, there stood a semi-transparent crystal pillar that reflected the light.

The crystal pillar was located in the middle of a circular tower base, looking fragile yet exquisite.

There were some cables around, but the overall technological style was quite different from what Bai E had anticipated.

The technology of mankind's Golden Age was certainly quite different from the present...

"It's taken care of upstairs," Rose's voice came through the earpiece.

"Mm~" Bai E hummed softly in reply, "Let them regroup, package the bodies, and if there's nothing else, you can come down and have a look."

"Yes."

Chapter 336 Ancient Ruins?

This mission turned out to be unexpectedly simple.

Apart from the interference of a few sandworms, the whole process went smoothly.

Even those four sandworms delivering vegetables, it's hard to say whether they came to help or to cause trouble...

Bai E and his team successfully restarted the base station.

The entire base station was divided into two levels, the upper level being the main body of the base station with crystal columns at its core, as seen by Bai E, while the lower level contained a small nuclear reactor.

The decision to disconnect from the network, made during the Golden Age, was orderly and composed, and the shutdown of these base stations was also under well-managed conditions, with almost all facility functions perfectly preserved.

As long as one had the secret key left from those times, restarting it was a simple matter.

[Current exploration degree of the ruins: 100%. Ruins authorization expanded, you can leave your identity information in the ruins backend to obtain the highest authority, ensuring that you can always transmit messages through this base station in the future.]

[Hint: Ancient "ruins" available for exploration discovered. Current exploration degree: 20.1%...]

"..."

Ancient ruins?

The unexpected popup message surprised Bai E.

He had simply restarted a small base station; how could it be linked to ancient ruins?

Was there more to this place than meets the eye?

But the fact that it started with a 20.1% exploration degree indicated that these ancient ruins weren't very large. Did a small base station occupy one-fifth of it?

Or was it that... the root server explored last time was also included in it?

This seemed like a more reasonable explanation.

Bai E's thoughts were nimble, instantly linking together potentially related content.

However, no matter what, it didn't have much to do with the current situation.

Stones' exclamation of surprise came to his ears, "Wow! So beautiful."

Yes, beautiful.

As the power turned on, rings of flowing lights gradually illuminated, and the soft lighting brought the over four hundred-year-old ruins to life.

Not at all... In fact, it looked much more high-end than all the modern technology Bai E had seen.

The metal with high-tech soft corners and the central crystal column emitting a faint blue light painted a picture of the future.

This was a scene rarely seen in this era.

Even You, whose eyes were usually clear and alert since the team's reformation, had sparkling, crystal-clear light in her large eyes as they swept over the various facilities here.

The four members of the team looked around but didn't dare to overstep, facing those exquisitely intricate objects, they hadn't the courage to reach out and touch them.

"They're not that precious."

The technology of the Golden Age was outstanding for its reliability and practicality, which was what Bai E had learned from Minister Likok these days.

Furthermore, the moment the ruins exploration degree was fully unlocked, Bai E also saw from the panel's transformation how to obtain the highest authority of this base station.

While speaking, Bai E came up behind Rose, wrapped his right arm around her waist from behind, and lifted her right hand to press it against the crystal column in front of them.

The crystal column emitting a faint blue glow fluctuated the moment the two pressed their hands against it, projecting their rotating headshots in the changing light.

[Current highest authority holders: 2. Authority reset channel has been closed.]

"What's this?" Rose asked, tilting her head to look back at Bai E with questioning eyes as her sticky lips parted slightly to ask in a low voice.

Bai E, who was very close to her, gave her a mysterious smile, "Shh~ don't make a fuss."

The two lowered their hands, and the technician, who had finished his testing, looked up excitedly, "Captain Bai, it's done."

After restarting the base station, he had tried to use it to transmit a simple message to the base and almost instantly received a response.

To prevent interception by the "Bug Nest Domain," they had deliberately devised a dynamic message interface that varied, and the result was precise and accurate.

It proved that the information base stations established around the world could effectively eliminate the influence of the "Bug Nest Domain" and continue to perform their intended functions.

The mission was a great success!

Bai E smiled reservedly, "Good that it was successful."

The technicians stayed behind.

No matter how sophisticated any high-tech creation was, it could always suffer damage; despite the reliable technology of the Golden Age, it could never exist independently of human beings.

And now, without the aid of artificial intelligence, the system wouldn't repair itself if a problem arose.

Without human intervention, a tiny BUG could directly crash the entire system; the presence of maintenance personnel was necessary.

Luckily, the small base station had a complete life support system to accommodate up to five maintenance personnel, providing water, air—all the essentials.

Only food was not supplied.

However, the three off-road vehicles that had come were mostly loaded with food, which was also prepared for this purpose.

Leaving enough supplies for three squads to use on the way back to the city, the vehicles were almost completely emptied, and the freed space could now also accommodate some sandworm flesh—killing two birds with one stone.

Swift and decisive.

After confirming the success of the operation, the three special squads returned to base, traveling both day and night.

...

The next day, around noon, the convoy arrived back at the camp.

As per the original plan, once the action to reboot those information relay stations had been confirmed successful, the Scientific Research Institute concurrently advanced its demands to the military.

Within the city's radiative reach, numerous abandoned stations awaited revival, thus bringing a spring to the special joint squads.

Tasks were endless.

"Rest up, we set off again early in the morning," Bai E casually instructed his team members upon return to the camp and immediately stepped away.

It was noon, a good time to meet with players to update a quest.

Watching Bai E's departing figure, Stone touched the back of his head somewhat naively, "Why is our captain in such a hurry?"

"Isn't it normal to want to contribute more to the military district?" Ever since Bai E saved him from beneath the blade-arm of a praying mantis bug, Zero had regarded Bai E as his War God.

A god's actions are always seen with a halo of beautification.

"Maybe it's for military merits?" Rose's gaze flickered as she watched Bai E walking away.

Military merits? Or perhaps rank?

In the eyes of the higher-ups, Bai E's identity was that of a completely natural human, and a natural human with outstanding achievements and sufficient military merits could rise smoothly through the ranks within the military.

Through regular interaction, she had gradually realized that Bai E's inner self was far from the inflexible persona he presented to others.

This man had his ambitions.

Whether it was the hidden Spiritual Energy or the electronic prompt voice she heard yesterday when touching that pale blue crystal column during the mission, both elements confirmed this.

Mysterious and dangerous.

The thrill of these realizations excited Rose and she became entranced. She wanted to follow Bai E to see what plans this man really harbored in his heart.

As for reporting him...

As time passed, every artificial person formed their own understanding of the world and their distinct personalities.

The essence of her being still flowed with dedication to humanity; this had never changed. However, exposing a comrade's secrets to the so-called military or even city's higher-ups did not equate to contributing to humanity.

Bai E trusted her, and she would never betray his expectations.

...

Construction of the underground warehouse was complete. Bai E hadn't yet decided on the next construction project, so construction work paused.

Yet in their free time, a few players still gathered here to rest and socialize; it was their territory.

Only in this concealed corner could they feel utterly at ease.

And making it a habit to meet here every noon had become their routine.

Upon seeing Bai E's arrival, the players who were working on crafting proficiency stood up in unison, "My lord."

"Hmm..." Bai E nodded, "How has Black Street been these past two days?"

Two days had passed since the betrayal incident.

Bai E had no time to observe personally and could only listen to the players' narratives.

"Not bad, they've shown a clear change in attitude, and these past two days, they've become... quite enthusiastic."

"My lord..." Xu Ruoguang, mingled among the players, suddenly raised his hand like a student, "I wanted to ask when we could arrange for a large bathhouse? Or at least some cleaning facilities. Some people... have a strong odor."

Dai Lian glanced at him, thinking the kid was acting a bit like a brown-noser.

Just today, the mature lady Gu Lan coughed twice from being too close to a resident with a pungent body odour, and right away, this kid took note and even directly brought it up with the lord.

A child who could be taught...

"Fine," Bai E nodded, physical cleanliness and mental purity were equally important, and maintaining good hygiene was key to remaining healthy and strong.

Moreover, the body and will were often interlinked; most people's willpower weakened when they felt physically weak, which also needed attention.

"I will discuss it with Gilder later."

"Anything else special?"

"Nothing else..." Dai Lian touched his chin as if pondering, but he had a plan in mind for things that needed to be reported to the lord—if there was nothing, then there was nothing.

Seeing this, Bai E smiled, "Well, I do have something here. Let's see who's available."

[Your jurisdiction has now established its first guard team native to the territory. You need to select a captain with sufficient experience and strength to ensure the guard team can perform its duties effectively. You may choose either a "native" or a "non-native" for this responsibility. If the target accepts your invitation, their relationship with you and their abilities will directly affect the functional attributes of the guard team. Please choose carefully: ...]

This was the panel message he received while leaving Blackwater City to carry out the mission, most likely triggered by those veterans officially registering and beginning their duties under Gilder.

The choice of targets was limited; it was basically a few players, as well as Gilder, the Rat People, Rose and You of the team members, Morphie, Kiro Lan, and other natives with whom he had somewhat closer relations.

There was even Yue Ying...

Of course, whether she'd accept was another matter entirely.

Chapter 337 Second Veteran Barracks

Clicking through those names, Bai E could even see a preview option: the potential impact on the guard team's functions after these people took office.

Kuang Xin: Decree+???, Majesty+???

Gong Yan: Coordination+???, Decree-???, Happiness+???

Gilder: Majesty-???,

Kiro Lan: ???

Yue Ying: ???

The specific details were not clear, and the impact was quite vague, serving only as a simple reference.

In fact, even without these reference data, Bai E had his own judgments in mind.

The options of the natives were not considered at all, whether they were teammates in the military camp, or known individuals like Kiro Lan and Yue Ying—they were not suitable.

They all had their identities and lives and could not stay in Black Street year-round.

Gilder and the rat people were indeed residents of Black Street all year round, but one managed all the matters of Black Street as a major steward, and the other was a demon Believer who was not convenient to make public appearances.

Equally unsuitable.

Only players could take on this function.

A special functional institution required a specific director, whose abilities would significantly influence the entire institution.

Bai E found the sensation of a management simulation game, and was quite interested in selecting a suitable target for himself.

Having clarified his needs, Bai E looked forward to seeing the players before him.

"I wonder who of you is interested?"

To become the ostensible team leader of Black Street's veterans?

The few players exchanged glances. Desiring freedom, they hesitated for a moment. The obligation to patrol Black Street daily as a task already made them somewhat irritable; now, they were to be completely tied to Black Street by official duty.

Even if they were not thinking of leaving Black Street and the adults to play, the heavy word "responsibility" undoubtedly made them want to naturally escape.

For a time, no one spoke up.

"Let me do it! Sir!"

Xu Ruoguang looked at Bai E with eager eyes and voluntarily raised his hand.

For some reason, he felt as if he were naturally supposed to take on such responsibilities.

Bai E glanced at the preview effect of his assuming office—

Xu Ruoguang: Heresy-???

"..."

Well, that was fine. Having someone was better than no one.

Bai E wasn't comfortable using a guard team composed entirely of outsiders; inserting a "person of our own" could at least serve as a pair of eyes and ears, so as not to become deaf and blind.

Although the territory under his jurisdiction was still small, Bai E was gradually beginning to feel that heavy pressure characteristic of ancient emperors.

When one could only understand the living conditions of their subjects through the relay of others, the fog filling that space was enough to make one feel bewildered and uneasy.

[You have invited "Xu Ruoguang" to become the captain of your territory's (Black Street) guard team.]

[The target has accepted your invitation.]

[You currently have:

Management Center—Gilder: Productivity+10%, Collaboration+5%, Foreign Trade+5%, Financial and Internal Affairs Stability Increase;]

Guard Team—Xu Ruoguang: (Developing...)]

"..."

Just having taken office, his personal characteristics had not yet taken effect.

Bai E nodded, mentally closing the panel.

Regardless, just don't leave it hanging.

Bai E, who was used to playing all kinds of games, absolutely detested those "red dots" and felt uncomfortable all over if he didn't click them.

After making arrangements on the players' side, Bai E made a beeline for Black Street.

Greetings also had to be sent to Gilder's side—the players were right, personal hygiene couldn't be overlooked either.

An unhealthy body could also invite disaster, and the tiniest, most insignificant details on an individual could have their consequences magnified countless times when applied to group management.

In this conflict and feedback, both Gilder and Bai E were gaining experience in management.

Having made the arrangements, Bai E stepped out from Gilder's doorway, his body slightly relaxed in the sunlight, his gaze sweeping over the squad of old soldiers currently patrolling the long street, his eyes becoming a bit distant.

He didn't see Tiger.

He wondered how Tiger was getting along among these old soldiers.

...

The barracks for the old soldiers had not only the courtyard that he first saw when he arrived but another one as well.

Tiger had never been there; he could only occasionally see some old soldiers delivering food, water, and clothes there.

"Are those guys also our brothers?" Seizing another opportunity, Tiger stopped a soldier who was delivering things and asked.

"Yeah." The soldier with the prosthetic limbs smiled indifferently, moving somewhat awkwardly; he patted his right leg, which had shrunk so much the muscles were nearly invisible, "Not everyone is qualified to get prosthetic limbs; those who still refuse to accept reality are just left to live slowly together."

"Oh~" Tiger responded in a seemingly stiff manner, asking nothing further.

The old soldier smiled and passed by Tiger.

After turning the corner, out of Tiger's sight, the soldier who originally guided Tiger stopped the soldier Tiger had questioned and asked, "How did he react?"

"Seems like... no reaction."

"No reaction?" The guide frowned, disbelieving.

The one who could reach the position of a special forces squad leader wasn't someone with only muscles in his brain; such an obvious hint couldn't be missed by him.

Yes, a hint.

Tiger had been at the old soldiers' barracks for a while now, and seeing everyone else with prosthetic limbs, he should have been anxious about not receiving his own.

In fact, he actually asked twice, but the guide, who saw no color of "comradeship" in Tiger, wouldn't offer the precious prosthetic limbs to someone not on the same path as themselves.

Today, he intended to lay his cards on the table.

But now it seemed, those cards weren't clear enough?

Or was the other party simply feigning ignorance, living day by day?

While the other party could afford to wait, he was unwilling to wait.

If one couldn't firmly stand on their side, then off to the neighboring courtyard they should go, to rot together with their eternal loyalty!

They did value the camaraderie among comrades, but first... everyone had to be real comrades indeed!

"Huh~" The guide let out a light sigh, straightened his clothes, and walked past the corner.

"Tiger!"

Tiger turned his head, his eyes revealing some understanding, but his face still showed a simple and honest smile, "Here."

The other party walked over quickly and wrapped an arm around Tiger's shoulder, "Let's talk."

"Alright."

Half an hour later...

The personal belongings previously arranged in the room were moved, and Tiger walked with a limp, leaning on a crutch, into the other old soldiers' barracks through the gate, amidst the sighs of the guide.

"You think about it here, we're not trying to harm you." The soldier who brought Tiger placed the items on him, sniffed the odd smell coming from inside the open gate, and even as a war-hardened warrior, felt somewhat uncomfortable, so he turned quickly to leave.

A distant voice floated back, "Think about it. If you have a change of heart, you can get in touch."

Chapter 338 Intelligent machine!

They set off once again.

This time, their target was a base station to the west of the city, approximately at the edge of Grey Iron City's urban radiation range.

It was the same three special squads uniting for the mission, everything seemingly no different from the last time.

"...but be careful of those Zhenche nearby," Bai E said, sitting in the vehicle, making overall combat arrangements to the other two squads via the team's short-range radio.

Although the internet had been reactivated, corresponding products hadn't caught up in time, so they were still using the vehicle-mounted short-range radios for communication within the team.

External threats also existed.

In this era, there were no absolutely safe outdoor environments, with orcs, bugs, humans, Zhenche, and even wild beasts and so on, all forces mutually hostile, ready to fight on encounter.

The current world's situation was in such a dynamic equilibrium where no one could subdue the other.

Thus, all neutral resources in the wild would have a power nearby that could influence it.

The base station, being the objective of this mission and said to be at the intersection of the radiation ranges of Grey Iron City and Blackwater City, was only so for humans themselves.

The other races didn't take seriously any radiation range without control capability.

"Roger that!"

"Roger that!"

The leaders of the other two squads instantly responded.

The joint squads for each mission were randomly assigned; the teammates for this mission were not the same as the last time, but that did not hinder Bai E from convincing Rose to reason again.

If one is in the right, one can travel across the world without a hitch; without reason, one finds it hard to take even a single step.

That's precisely the point.

The longer distance, compared to the last time, also took more time.

The journey nearly took a whole day, and by the time they approached the target, it was thoroughly late at night.

Clouds shrouded the sky, and dim stars hung high.

The visibility was extremely low.

"We're five kilometers away from the target. Should we approach tomorrow instead? Rest for the night?" Rose, sitting in the co-driver's seat, offered her suggestion.

"Hmm..." Bai E looked at the darkness outside the window. Apart from the areas lit by the beams of the two headlights, all else was enshrouded in darkness.

Approaching the target in such conditions was indeed not a good choice.

As a base station capable of undertaking the duty of an internet signal relay center, its allure to those Zhenche was probably not small.

In the past, it wasn't noticed, and there was insufficient surveillance of such places; no one knew what this place had become.

Now that they had decided to restart it, the risk at this base station was not insignificant—this was the core reason Bai E took on the task of reactivating it instead of it being actively assigned.

With risk comes greater military merit.

Bai E was not afraid of challenges, but he wasn't reckless either.

After all, facing potential adversaries—the Zhenche—he was not completely familiar.

Before departure, the military camp had provided relevant information, but documentation could only ever serve as reference, not as an on-the-spot combat manual when encountering enemies.

"Turn off the engines, rest here. We continue at five in the morning," Bai E commanded through the team's voice communication.

"Roger that!"

"Roger that!"

The obedient squads instantly replied.

The night passed swiftly.

At dawn, as soon as the sun rose from the horizon, the people resting in the vehicles opened their eyes under the first rays of sunlight.

"Move out!"

The five-kilometer distance was covered in a blink, and the target rose up from the horizon.

Unlike the base station near the bug nest, geological activity wasn't frequent on this piece of land, and there were no human or other biological disturbances, so the base station still stood erect on the ground.

But at the very moment Bai E could barely make out the base station, his brows furrowed, and he stepped on the brakes.

"What's wrong, boss?"

"Officer, what's happened?" the two vehicles following close behind immediately asked over the team voice communication.

"Someone..." Bai E answered succinctly.

More accurately, not someone, but... machinery.

The main body of the base station is neither particularly large nor small, but at this moment, the perimeter had been expanded quite a bit.

The seemingly solid metal walls enclosed the entire base station, and the oil-stained black steel walls presented a substantial texture under the sunlight.

Small machine gun turrets were mounted on those steel walls, with accompanying red scanning beams moving in a fixed cycle along the barrel, gauging all potential enemies outside.

Intelligent machines!

They had already occupied this place and even operated it for some time!

Given the unknown strength of the opposition, a frontal assault would be no different from seeking death.

"Retreat for now."

Memories regarding the intelligent machines flooded Bai E's mind before setting off, prompting him to issue the command.

The existing intelligent machine entities originated from the Golden Age several hundred years ago, but during these centuries, their scale hardly expanded, and as time eroded their numbers, they only decreased.

These intelligent machines were also known as the first generation, being those that rebelled alongside the birth of the electronic demons, powerfully demonstrating a certain extent of the human capabilities during the Golden Age.

Apart from the first-generation intelligent machines inherited from the Golden Age, the subsequent generations produced for resource collection and maintenance of combat abilities were far less formidable than their predecessors.

Even the most powerful technology requires a stable environment and almost infinite resources. Without the resource-gathering and manufacturing abilities of humans from the Golden Age, the intelligence and mechanical structural strength of the intelligent machines created by the first generation saw a significant decline.

But no matter how much they declined, the method by which machines observe the world undoubtedly involves various light and temperature scans, and their alert distances far exceed human eyesight and hearing.

A brief encounter like the one just now might have already been noticed by the enemy.

But the enemy might not necessarily react...

The significance of electronic demons to intelligent machines lies exactly here; however intelligent they might be, they are ultimately just programs that react to different external stimuli. They will never possess the subjective capacity to act on what's known as "desire."

Without electronic demons, they would remain silent.

And if they had any single pursuit... it would be the last order given by the electronic demons before their silence—maintain themselves, collect resources.

To sustain their daily consumption, these intelligent machines tirelessly scavenge for usable resources like a swarm of indefatigable worker ants and bring them back to their fortresses.

Their scale won't expand but won't contract either; undisturbed, they could stay the same for thousands of years.

Of course, if they suffered heavy consumption due to a skirmish, they would gather materials even more frantically to replenish their strength.

In short, these are a bunch of... tin cans that generally won't bother you unless you disturb them.

Similar to those green-skin lads, impossible to eradicate completely; the more you fight, the weaker you become, the more at risk you are of other species taking advantage of your vulnerability. Thus, humans can only choose to ignore these beings as much as possible.

And now...

The direct conflict has arrived!

The three vehicles stopped and gathered together, and the captains of Team 5 and Team 6 looked at Bai E, asking with a somewhat worried expression, "What should we do?"

They'd just undertaken an ordinary mission; how could they have encountered such a formidable calamity?

Encountering an intelligent machine resource gathering squad was fundamentally different from directly assaulting their well-developed fortresses, with just their three small teams?

"Let's see the situation," Bai E, biting his fingertip and gazing thoughtfully, decided after a moment. "Let's circle around the fortress first to assess the situation."

Humans need material supplies, and intelligent machines also can't live on air alone.

Aside from those large first-generation intelligent machines, not every intelligent machine entity has an almost limitless small-scale nuclear reactor for energy.

They also need to replenish energy, even engine oil, and replace damaged parts and the like.

Encountering this legendary opponent for the first time, Bai E could only rely on limited information and his own wisdom to analyze the situation and make decisions.

Seeing the still worried faces of the other two team captains, Bai E smiled, "We can't just turn around and run, can we?"

If there weren't large first-generation intelligent machines in place, seizing this fortress that has become an intelligent machine battlefield wasn't entirely hopeless.

Even if they couldn't conquer it, gathering information was a duty they had to perform as special squads.

They couldn't just come for nothing.

Their job was to roughly determine the threat level of this point of danger and report it upward. The military would then decide whether to dispatch a large force based on the ratio of the necessary effort to overcome the difficulty versus the benefits afterward.

The prerequisite for these decisions relied on the information gathered by their small teams, known for their mobility.

"Let's go," Bai E decided, "We'll split up and move!"

Chapter 339 Grey Iron City warriors

Unless they came face to face, the Wisdom Machine army generally wouldn't charge senselessly into battle like the green-skinned boys would.

Therefore, Bai E wasn't too worried about the safety of the other two squads.

Moving separately was undoubtedly beneficial for quickly gathering intelligence.

The three vehicles traced different paths across the earth, steering around that steel fortress and heading in different directions on either side.

...

"Someone's coming?"

Atop the crimson Gobi, a black shadow flickered and vanished.

The man who put away his binoculars asked his disguised teammates, "Did the city deploy other squads?"

Her pupils rapidly contracting, a woman who was next to the binocular-clutching man peered out, took a brief look, then shook her head and withdrew, "Even a second glance would tell you that's not a vehicle from our city."

The standardized heavy machine gun and flamethrower mounted on the roof were neither something ordinary forces could manufacture nor possess, and their models were completely different from those they used.

Without a doubt, this was a team dispatched by an official organization from another city.

"Other cities are coveting this base station too?"

"Isn't that fucking obvious? With the internet reboot, which city doesn't want to fight for control of these base stations?" The burly man, who was half-lying on his back and looking at the sky, glanced at the binoculars man with a mocking smile.

"So where did they come from?" The binoculars man couldn't help wanting to look back, but he was worried about revealing their squad's position and didn't dare to actually do it.

"Besides us, who's the closest if not Blackwater City? Who else could it be?" the burly man said with a sneer, apparently very disdainful of the new kid in the team, "If you want to look, just look, don't fucking dawdle."

"But I'm afraid we might expose ourselves..."

"We are hiding here not to avoid other humans but to stay out of sight of those metal clunks. Besides..." The burly man's ears twitched, he suddenly stood up, waved his hand down, and shouted loudly, "Hey, guys! Look over here!"

As he spoke, he glanced down at the boy with the binoculars, "Did you think that just because we're hidden, they can't find us?"

...

"There are vehicle tracks..." Bai E's eyes narrowed slightly as he patted You, who was responsible for driving, on the shoulder, signaling him to slow down.

"Mhm~" You nodded, "Fresh, hasn't been long since they passed."

She was the tracking and reconnaissance expert in the team, and could instantly discern evident facts.

And they definitely weren't from a teammate. Everyone had split up to explore different directions; there's no way they would have passed through here so soon.

"And the load was heavy."

The vehicle was similar to the off-road vehicle they were in, but the tracks were deeper, indicating either a heavy load or many passengers.

Following the direction of the tracks, one could see they led near the Wisdom Machine steel fortress on one end and extended towards a distant ravine on the other, gradually disappearing under the horizon.

"There are outsiders."

"And they are organized."

And bold enough to conduct a survey on Wisdom Machines. Aside from Grey Iron City, a city of comparable size to Blackwater City, he could think of no other possibility.

Grey Iron City was also interested in this base station? And they, too, hadn't made a move yet.

Where were their people? Had they already surveyed enough information and evacuated? Or were they, like Bai E and his team, still in the observation stage?

A flurry of chaotic thoughts streaked through Bai E's mind, as suddenly, a black figure energetically waving its arms jumped onto a distant red hill.

"Hey, bro! Look over here!"

"..."

Surprise filled the vehicle, and everyone exchanged glances.

It appeared that the people from Grey Iron City were quite enthusiastic?

"Let's go over and take a look," Bai E decided.

No matter what, in the face of foreign species, humans stood on the same side by nature.

"Okay," You turned the steering wheel, heading straight for that hill.

...

The burly man standing on the high platform looked back at the boy with the binoculars and said, "Just now, their vehicle already slowed down, clearly they've noticed the tracks we left. Even if we don't approach them, they would eventually find us. Better to make the first move and show good will. Got it, kid?"

Speaking thus, the brawny man took a step forward.

Beneath his feet... there was a drop of several meters.

"Whoa!" Shi Tou, sitting in the vehicle, witnessed this scene and subconsciously let out a cry of alarm.

The next moment, he found that the person from Grey Iron City who had jumped down easily squatted to dissipate the impact and then stood up as if nothing had happened, casually dusting off the dirt on his hands.

Even smiling and waving at them cheerily, his robust voice drifted in through the open window, "Drive over there, hide, don't let those iron clads detect us."

There was some silence in the vehicle after witnessing this scene, Rose and Bai E exchanged glances, each revealing a hint of interest in their eyes.

Was this person from Grey Iron City showing off his strength?

Listening to the other's words, You slightly turned her face towards Bai E's direction for instructions, "Captain?"

"Do as he says."

The other party had shown goodwill, so it might be worth it to play along with his approach.

"No need to stop, no need to stop." Seeing the vehicle slowing down, the brawny man jogged over.

"Bang!" A dull sound erupted as the brawny man grabbed the luggage rack with one hand, his whole body hanging off the side of the driver's door, grinning broadly as he quickly scanned the vehicle's

occupants, extending his free hand energetically beside him, "Over there, over there, there's a slope. Drive down and hide in the rift."

"Okay." You didn't ask any more questions, returning the enthusiastic smile and did as instructed.

"Are you also here to restart this base station?" Hanging outside the vehicle didn't prevent the brawny man from warmly asking about their purpose.

"That's right." Bai E took over the conversation, drawing the other's gaze to himself.

"You're the captain?"

"Hmm."

"Impressive." The man's eyes swept over Bai E, a faint red light flickering up and down Bai E's body.

Among the five people from Blackwater City, it was this captain and the blond woman who hadn't spoken yet whose physical prowess and aura were the most formidable.

Calling himself the captain probably wasn't a lie.

Bai E smiled modestly, "Not bad."

Then he asked, "Have you been here long?"

"Not too long, arrived a couple of days ago," the brawny man replied quite casually.

"Found anything?"

"Something, yes. I'll explain in detail later."

"Oh? Is there a chance?" Bai E asked curiously.

"Of course there's a chance. Haven't seen any First-Generation Wisdom Machine Bodies so far, just some derived offspring intelligence machines, not hard to deal with."

"So what are you doing here..."

"Waiting for a chance." The brawny man bared a set of white teeth, gleaming as if they were made of porcelain.

The image of bloodied teeth being flung away by a pair of pliers flashed by, accompanied by a heart-wrenching scream... Bai E had a momentary distant look.

"...Waiting for their logistical team to pass by."

"Oh~" Bai E, snapping back to reality, nodded, and when he looked at the brawny man again, there was a trace of complexity in the depths of his eyes, "Can we join forces?"

"Of course!" The brawny man laughed heartily, "If we weren't joining forces, why would I call you over? We're all humans, we're brothers when faced with other species! Plus, once the task is done, both of us can report back, isn't that killing two birds with one stone?"

"That makes sense." Bai E pursed his lips and smiled, "How many people do you have?"

"Five." As the vehicle slowly drove downhill, the brawny man let go of his arm, "I'll go call them over, you guys find a place to hide below, remember to completely extinguish the fire and turn off all electromagnetic devices, those iron clads have very keen 'noses'!"

"Okay." Bai E agreed without hesitation, watching the other's figure recede in the rearview mirror, then gestured silently to You.

Understanding this, You raised the car window, and tranquility enveloped the inside of the vehicle.

"Inform our position to them, have them maintain distance and stand by. We'll... play it by ear."

"Captain?" Shi Tou looked at Bai E with some confusion, "I think they seem quite nice~"

Bai E shook his head and chuckled, "When you're out and about, it's best to keep your wits about you."

Chapter 340 strategy

The intentions of the other party were still unknown, but their strength was definitely formidable.

[??? (Human) (Alliance) — When killed with "Lucky Strike", it drops: Guaranteed (Fresh Meat*1800, Bio-Component (Imitation)*150, Combat Experience 2800 points); High Probability (Mastery: Combat Specialization Layer +1, up to layer 6, Mastery: Heavy Weapon Specialization Layer +1, up to layer 6); Possible (Trait: Adaptability Implant, Trait: Biomechanical Body (False), Trait: Death Defiance).]

Just from the drop rate panel, it was no less impressive than the Blood God from before.

And it clearly stated the source of the opponent's combat power — biochemical modification.

They followed the same combat power route as the soldiers stationed at the Root Server ruins of the Internet we explored before, just that today's technology differed greatly from that of the Golden Age.

Grey Iron City...

After becoming the team leader, Bai E unlocked quite a few privileges.

In the past few days, besides basic training, he had also gone to the citadel's Knowledge Hall to cram a great deal of common knowledge about this world.

Naturally, there were detailed records about the current world order and the nearby cities relatively close to Blackwater City.

Since the demise of the last Emperor of the Empire, the Empire was only a name, fragmented and fallen apart.

Each city governed itself, each becoming its own overlord.

In short, the Empire "went bust and split the assets"...

Of course, due to the covetous gaze of foreign races, the process of splitting assets was relatively peaceful. Each city chose different development paths according to its strategical inclinations, including its natural resources, among other factors.

Blackwater City was relatively moderate, mainly focusing on machinery and biotechnology, eventually becoming a city whose primary warfare weapons were artificial humans.

Grey Iron City, on the other hand, did not entertain the concept of artificial humans. Although their situation was not as perilous as Blackwater City's, they faced another danger — the poison fog.

Or to be precise, toxic spores.

Once a city takes root, it cannot simply pick up and leave.

The perpetual poison fog meant those born there suffered from it from a young age, with less than fifty percent of newborns surviving initially.

And even those children lucky enough to survive were not immune to the toxic fog that permeated the air. Therefore, biotechnological modifications in response to the environment were extremely important to Grey Iron City.

This was the backdrop hundreds of years ago...

Even four hundred years after the remnants of the Golden Age had been left behind, the long-term coexistence had already led to the locals of Grey Iron City developing resistance to the toxic spores. This inherited habit of body modification also continued to persist.

It was said that their body modification techniques were barbaric and wild, with the process often accompanied by unimaginable pain. Every individual lucky enough to survive the modification gained tremendous enhancements in combat strength.

Focusing on biochemical modification at their core, they had their own methods of increasing combat effectiveness tailored for bio-modified bodies.

Every one of their bio-modified warriors was regarded as a superhuman in the eyes of ordinary humans.

In fact, their goal was precisely this: to create a city-state where every citizen was a superhuman.

Apparently, so far, they had developed numerous body modification surgeries, with each completion being a leap in quality. However, according to the limited information obtained by Blackwater City — much like the limitations of the Gene Optimization Solution on the human body — there had yet to be a person who successfully underwent all the surgeries.

It was just uncertain how many surgeries this seemingly amiable Grey Iron City warrior, who was quite the manly prowess, had completed.

...

"He's lying," said the burly teammate, glancing towards a tall and thin, pale figure of indeterminate sex in the group, his eyes filled with a hint of awe.

Blackwater City was aware of Grey Iron City, and Grey Iron City also knew about Blackwater City.

Unlike Grey Iron City's absolute elite strategy, Blackwater City preferred to create a rabble.

...

For any significant mission, they would definitely not just dispatch a squad of five.

The five-man squad I saw must be only part of their operation, the rest... they chose to hide.

And hiding... typically signifies malice.

"Oh?" said a gender-neutral, raspy voice that also couldn't be identified as male or female, the white-haired creature looking towards the direction of the rift, "It seems our allies don't trust us."

"But no matter..." the white-haired one extended its crimson, slender tongue and licked its lips, its gaze shining with a bloody glow, "I will eat them up!"

The boy with a telescope, who had recently joined the squad, couldn't help but shiver at these words.

Just like witnessing a human chew on duck necks, he could almost see his squadron leader crouched over the corpses of his kin, gruesomely gnawing at his own kind.

Before joining the team, he had heard that the captain he was assigned to was not normal, and now it was clear he was far from it.

"Let's go, meet them," said the only member of the team who could be certain was a woman, striding with her long legs toward the direction of the rift, "Let's see if these people from Blackwater City can be of any help."

...

Bai E saw the entirety of the opposing five-man team.

Three men, one woman, and one who was indistinguishable.

Apart from the boy who seemed nervous and timid, the other four... judging from experience, seemed to have comparable strength.

"We are all here for the base station, let's skip the small talk and get straight to the point," said the one woman from the five, stepping forward and extending her right hand towards Bai E.

Bai E looked up and asked with a smile to the female warrior who stood half a head taller than himself, "Are you the captain?"

The female warrior looked quite aged, with sallow skin, thick lips, and did not wear a full-body combat suit, but a sleeveless black jacket and shorts, appearing more like a carefree mercenary.

"Acting captain," the female warrior turned aside, giving way to the white-haired figure whose half body was blocked by her silhouette, "She's the real captain."

The white-haired creature's eyes, hidden beneath the uneven white bangs, glanced at Bai E, a flash of dark red shooting through them.

There was no smile, nor any intention to speak.

Bai E nodded towards her in greeting, then turned his attention back to the acting captain, "Have you already figured out a plan?"

"Hmm..." the female warrior nodded, "We've been observing for two days..."

The purpose of the mechs dominating this place was the same as what they had always been doing—accumulating resources.

Or rather, mining.

Much like extracting oil, iron, rare earth minerals, and other tangible resources, within this Golden Age relic of an information base station, the mechs could also mine a resource called "Computing Power Module."

It would be crafted into "logic chips" and implanted into each new-born mech, acting as their "brain."

This was their purpose in building a fortress here.

And precisely because of this, even though the mechs' actions were equivalent to restarting the information base station, it could not be connected to the human internet network and function effectively.

It was necessary to destroy their extraction equipment to free the "trapped" base station from its cage.

Of course, understanding their purpose was just essential intelligence gathering; it was more urgent to ascertain the enemy's strength and configuration.

"They also need supplies, and the 'Computing Power Modules' they mine need to be transported to their true lair. They will have a dedicated transportation team for this task, and it will pass through here every day."