

Wow 341

Chapter 341 Ambush!

Then the answer is quite simple.

"Retribution must be exacted" is a rule set within the artificial intelligence's logic.

Attacking their transport team would easily lure out those artificial intelligences hiding in the fortress ready to strike back as the nearest force capable of counter-attack.

In any era, storming a stronghold is always the least favorable option.

"When the time comes, we'll just rush them and take down their transport team. Captain Bai, what do you think?"

It sounds pretty simple.

Of course, many things in the world are simple—it's just a matter of strength, after all.

"To be frank, we have no experience in combating these intelligent machines," Bai E admitted candidly.

The other waved their hand, "We haven't dealt much with that stuff either."

Who would want to mess with those unkillable things?

If it weren't for this mission, most people would probably never come into contact with artificial intelligence in their lifetimes.

"You've prepared EMPs, right?"

"Of course," Bai E replied with a laugh, patting the off-road vehicle beside him.

"Then we're good. That stuff works against the AIs." The female warrior seemed quite bold in nature.

Being disconnected from the internet would undoubtedly be a huge blow to the artificial intelligences, but due to the special powers granted to them at the moment of their "awakening" by the electronic devil, the electricity running through their bodies had subtly transformed into what humans called "mechanical force." Within a certain distance, the interweaving of mechanical force formed a kind of electromagnetic network similar to a human local area network.

With this network, the artificial intelligences could also communicate small-scale intelligence information, even more efficiently than the local area networks used by humans.

To block the conduction of mechanical force, the first task in attacking the transport team is to seal off the entire combat zone with an EMP bomb.

"They should be coming soon." The female warrior glanced at her watch, "Let's go ambush them in advance... Remember, shut down all electronic devices. Normally, they wouldn't care about human observation, but for transport teams carrying important materials, they would also actively attack any detectable enemies within range."

It was like turning from a yellow-named monster to a red-named monster.

Bai E found his mindset somewhat odd as he responded, "Hmm~"

Some information he was aware of from the documents he had read, while some were new to him.

No matter what intentions these people from Grey Iron City harbored, they had indeed provided him with some assistance.

If they had no malice, after completing the mission together, it wouldn't be a problem for everyone to go back and report independently.

After all, they were allies... They could even share signal base stations, as there was no intrinsic hostility between them.

Bai E waved his hand and instructed his team, "Grab your gear and prepare to ambush."

"Yes!"

...

The sun cast a not-so-intense glow, hanging aloofly in the sky like a cold, white disc.

The sunlight in winter was the most comfortable—not hot, yet warm enough.

Two red craggy highlands stood guardian like teeth over the plain they bracketed. Although they couldn't see each other, both Bai E and the opposition knew the other was camouflaged and lurking on the opposite highland.

Everyone was draped in a "Camouflage Magic Carpet."

Knowing the potential adversaries they might face, the military had naturally prepared all possible supplies for the squad going on the mission.

Even the most powerful individual cannot fight alone without the support of the group and technology.

After all, each opponent they face has its traits, and each action goal always has varying needs.

The artificial intelligences didn't perceive the world solely through ordinary light and vibration, but also optics, heat signatures, and sound—all of which had to be camouflaged as much as possible.

An excellent ambush should only reveal its fangs at the moment of eruption.

The cold disc slowly moved westward as Lingling, who had been monitoring, suddenly became alert.

The high vantage point allowed for a further view—the black caravan appeared at the edge of sight.

The scale wasn't very large, almost equivalent to the size of Captain Bai's combined team when they set out, perhaps slightly larger.

No wonder the people from Grey Iron City observed for two days but didn't choose to act; considering they were also not very familiar with the artificial intelligences, they probably weren't confident they could quickly overcome the AI transport squad with just the five of them.

"Shall we make our move?" Rose lay beside Bai E, tilting her head to look at his profile.

No matter how fanciful the opposition talked, any apparent agreement was just a provisional tactic. The actual decision on whether to engage would be made after Bai had assessed the situation.

Her warmth was palpable from up close, but Bai didn't make a sound, focusing instead on observing the information.

...There were a total of fourteen visible targets.

Judging from the drop rate, each had experience points of somewhere between one thousand and under two thousand, with one big black lump boasting a full three thousand points.

A tough fight?

A bit.

But as long as the people from Grey Iron City were sincerely joining forces, taking down this transport team wouldn't be a big problem.

Without radio, Bai E could only gesture through the terrain's gaps toward the diagonally opposite direction—"Shall we move?"

The other quickly responded—"Move!"

Bai E crouched down and hugged his Anti-Material Sniper Rifle close. He did not intend to show too much combat ability in this battle; it was a sniper who could engage in close combat that he wanted to appear as to the others.

"Wait for them to make the first move, then we follow!"

"Yes."

"Tick-tock, tick-tock~" Just before making a move, the atmosphere was terrifyingly quiet.

Other than the heartbeat close at ear, there was only the sound of a watch's hands ticking... and the rumbling of caterpillar tracks moving.

The mechanized convoy used caterpillar tracks, with armor so thick and a carrying capacity so strong.

Alongside three tank-like armored vehicles were five smaller single-soldier caterpillar machine gun cars, all operated by humanoid mechanized beings.

And trailing at the end was a heavy humanoid mechanized being as tall as two armored vehicles, which was the most troublesome presence Bai E had seen.

"They're close~" Zero, listening to the noises, whispered gently.

Two hundred meters...

One hundred meters...

Fifty meters...

Ten meters...

Right beneath them!

"Whoosh!" The brawny man diagonally opposite sprang to his feet, launching an EMP projectile from the launcher in his hand straight at the mechanized transport convoy below.

Zero, who had been watching the other side closely and remembered Bai's reminder to follow suit, raised his launcher and fired as well.

Whether it was Blackwater City or Grey Iron City, the resources provided for the squad's sortie could not possibly be supplied infinitely.

The resources provided must be based on the personnel configuration and size of the squad; a five-person team could not be equipped with five EMP projectile launchers, and no doubt Grey Iron City would be the same.

Whether the simultaneous electromagnetic interference field could instantly cover the entire mechanized transport team was the core of this ambush attack.

Meanwhile, the mechanized beings continued to advance due to inertia, as the brawny man and Zero reloaded quickly, and two more EMP bombs exploded on the path where the transport team was moving.

A single team's equipment was not enough to achieve this instant interference, but two teams working together could easily accomplish it.

"Zzzt zzzt zzzt~"

"Zzzt zzzt zzzt~"

The dense electric currents, like substance, instantly enveloped the area where the bombs had exploded.

In the "world" only the mechanized beings could sense, there came a burst of static—

The voices of their kind, gone?

For ordinary electrical equipment, a single EMP was sufficient to paralyze them entirely, but for the mech-blooded mechanized race, this special weapon against electrical devices could only sever the connections between them.

They could still ensure their own combat capabilities... within their limited feedback loops for responding to external changes.

All the mechanized beings nearly stopped their forward motion at once, their electronic eyes instantly locking on the humans who had suddenly appeared on the elevated platforms on both sides.

[Target detected, hostile status confirmed!]

[Request to activate fire control system...]

[Request granted!]

[Request for temporary extermination protocol...]

[Protocol initiated!]

[Open fire! Open fire!]

A series of feedback commands flashed through their circuits, and, visibly slower than human reaction, these iron clods turned their weapons, trying to aim at the ten targets they had locked on.

At the same moment the brawny man and Zero fired, Bai and the others threw off their Camouflage Magic Carpets.

Holding an Anti-Material Sniper Rifle as tall as a man, Bai effortlessly lifted it with both hands into the air and aimed at the enemy's armored vehicle, then ruthlessly squeezed the trigger.

"Boom!"

The powerful recoil numbed Bai's shoulder, but the terrifying kinetic energy of the Anti-Material Sniper Rifle easily tore through the target's armored vehicle.

At the same time, the enemy's counterattack unfolded instantly.

Ten or so red dots aimed at the nearest stone, and the man holding the Blast Shield, inherited from the mountain, stared dumbly at the dense red dots on his shield—

?

In the next moment, a torrent of bullets baptized him.

The man barely had time to grunt before the kinetic energy carried by the countless bullets knocked him off the other side of the platform.

"Ah~~~~~ puh!"

Quite melodious...

Bai didn't worry about the man; although the fellow's strength was the lowest in this team, his advantage was his toughness and ability to take a beating.

A fall wouldn't kill him.

Reloading, Bai took aim at another armored vehicle.

Looking through the scope with one eye, Bai targeted the rotating cannon barrel of the enemy.

Another massive bullet, carrying a scorching whirlwind, burst from the barrel in an instant.

"Boom!"

Fireworks bloomed.

The five-person team from Grey Iron City quickly scanned Bai holding the sniper rifle, a flash of surprise in their eyes.

Chapter 342 Biochemical Modified Warrior

Their flesh, no matter how strong, could not possibly be harder than the armored vehicles of the mechanoids, unable to withstand such firepower.

This captain of Blackwater City, indeed, needed special attention.

Although his combat power came from human technological creations, being able to use such creations proficiently was a part of a person's combat abilities.

Moreover, unlike ordinary people who could only mount their guns on fixed supports for limited angle sniping, this damn captain could easily carry a sniper rifle as big as a cannon, shooting wherever he pointed, comparable to a tank's gun barrel that could charge at anyone without needing to rotate for aiming time—that was deterrence!

Must be cautious!

As for themselves... they might be able to lift such a weapon, but to say they could move evasively while maintaining precise shooting was clearly unrealistic.

The surgeries had robbed most of them of the delicate precision of a scalpel, leaving only a violent desire in their blood to vent all the pain they had endured during the modifications.

There was no doubt that the enemy had better control over their bodies.

The four individuals with other thoughts subconsciously exchanged glances, reaching a unanimous agreement—

If they really had to turn against their allies, they must not let him get his hands on the Anti-Material Sniper Rifle, or rather, they should take him out first.

In this era, an individual's combat strength, no matter how formidable, was always characterized by stronger offense over defense.

Even a mighty War God couldn't endure a barrage of rocket launcher bombardment.

The prerequisite was the War God standing still, taking it head-on...

So a surprise attack was always meaningful.

However, at the moment, it was time to join forces to wipe out the mechanoid transport team; everyone was definitely a grasshopper on the same line.

The brawny man, holding a giant sword almost as tall as a person and almost entirely made of blade, shouted loudly and leaped down from a platform more than ten meters high.

So the countless red dots that had been aiming at the rocks instantly shifted to him.

The brawny man in battle mode revealed his true nature, a bloodthirsty smile on his lips, feeling genuinely thrilled by the danger signified by the red dots.

Dragging what might have been a sword even heavier than himself, he weaved through the stationary formation of mechanoids, his giant sword dancing in tandem with his body, sweeping across the seemingly clunky mechanoid robot heads.

"Snap!" Cables came loose, sparks flickered.

Metal heads flew high into the air, followed by a swift kick from Rose, who had also leaped down from above, directly smashing into the machine gun swivel of a small tracked vehicle.

Rose, choosing almost the same mode of combat as the brawny man and wielding heavy weapons, were excellent at charging into battle and could easily cause chaos within enemy lines.

If the enemy had something akin to morale...

The initial targeting of the rocks and the chaos caused by the charge of the brawny man and Rose were consequences of individual mechanoids' insufficient computing power.

Without the "local network" of mechanical strength to communicate with each other, they were like a central controlling will that had lost its core, unable to distribute the combat power each individual possessed.

"Optimal choices" for an individual might not be the "optimal choices" for the entire transport team.

This is also the core reason why humans had to use EMPs to control the field as their first action when facing them.

But these beings, capable of becoming a worldwide disaster, were not just this level of threat.

Efficient learning was their magic weapon that allowed them to dominate the world.

Simply through the training based on the unfolding events before them, these mechanoids inlaid with different grades of "Logic Chips" spontaneously drew enough "experience" to grow from the ongoing battle.

Facing the two close-combat humans causing trouble in the formation but with clearly insufficient lethality, instantly, four silver-black humanoid mechanoids surged from the back doors of deployed armored vehicles.

"Swish swish swish!"

A dazzling array of blades gleamed in an instant, as each silver-black humanoid mechanoid unfolded a dozen finely forged blades.

"Fuck!" exclaimed the brawny man from Grey Iron City, seeing this and swearing eloquently in anger.

Their words about the people of Blackwater City were half true and half lies, but there was no deception about their lack of battle experience against the mechanoids.

This was the first time he had seen such a scene.

But he had no time for any thought of how to respond. The rapidly approaching blades already caught in his eyes.

"Da da da da da!" Bullets from the supporting fire rained down from the platforms on both sides.

You and Zero could only provide long-range support and cover with the guns in their hands in this level of combat. The young boy on the other side seemed to be doing the same.

But they were not having an easy time of it.

The intelligent machinery, learning and adapting to this type of combat, had already switched to a more effective strategy, no longer concentrating their firepower exclusively on the closest threat.

The purpose of firing was not necessarily to kill, but could also be suppression.

And since these iron lumps had no fear of life or death, nor pain, it was always the humans who needed to dodge first when it came to a shootout.

Thus, their pursuit fire became even colder and more precise.

The intelligent machinery fought in silence and coldness, yet exuded a precise and coordinated murderous intent.

Bai E, fighting intelligent machinery for the first time, was also not accustomed to such opponents and could only intermittently return fire amidst relentless dodging.

This performance caused the remaining three of the opposing team to frown uncontrollably.

To carry such a heavy Anti-Material Sniper Rifle while dodging and firing with precision, each shot causing definite damage, was indeed impressive.

Up until now, the one who had caused the most damage was undoubtedly the captain from Blackwater City.

Even if they had unusual thoughts about the opponent, a deep-seated arrogance would not allow them to be outdone, making them reveal their true capabilities without hesitation.

Their captain, Bai E, his eyes flickering with a faint blue light, and the acting captain, already gripping a long-handled power axe, roared and leaped down from the platform as well.

The last one, who had never spoken, with a scarred and remarkably cold face, ripped open the thin vest he was wearing. During an angry roar on the spot, his body seemed to inflate and grow larger.

"Roar!"

His chest expanded with his breathing, and the ribs, which are only prominent in those with extremely lean bodies, also surfaced on his chest, gradually connecting into a flat plate.

His entire chest was flat and protruding, as if a plate of iron had been implanted beneath his skin...

This Gorilla, who had grown significantly larger than any brute in their team, let out a skyward roar, even pounding his own chest with both fists like an actual gorilla, producing a dull "thump thump" sound.

Then, empty-handed, he leaped forcefully towards the battlefield below, like a mountain crashing down!

"Bang!" The falling body landed squarely on an iron lump operating a tracked vehicle, striking it squarely and sending it flying.

The first brute to be attacked also demonstrated his abilities—slashes from countless blades seemed to do him no harm as he roared and swung his great sword, releasing pent-up energy. The wounds left by the blades on his body could never last more than a few seconds.

Deeper wounds simply took slightly longer to heal, and no blood could be seen seeping from his wounds at all.

As for the acting captain whirling with his power axe like a dark tornado, he exhibited terrifying strength. The iron lumps struck by the axe head all underwent startling deformations, even the three armored vehicles bearing a blow were left with a deep dent.

Defense... Recovery... Strength...

Every member of Grey Iron City displayed their phenomenal abilities, yet all were fundamentally based on their physical prowess.

Were these the changes brought by bioengineering?

Bai E withdrew his observation, his eyes reflecting a hint of surprise.

What kind of monsters had Grey Iron City bioengineered? They seemed to be on a completely different path from the bioengineered soldiers from the Golden Age he had encountered before.

It was unclear whether it was an improvement or a regression...

"Zz—Boom!"

A violent explosion erupted from beneath his feet. Even deep in thought, Bai E had not neglected to keep an eye on the entire battlefield. With a forceful push from his legs, his body sprang into the air.

The next moment, the violent explosion burst forth from the very spot he had just been standing on.

It was from the most dangerous war machine positioned at the rear of the entire intelligent machinery formation!

Its pair of crimson electronic eyes stared intently at Bai E. Though its charged shot from the heavy cannon had missed, it obviously hadn't given up targeting him.

In its brief analysis, the most threatening thing on the entire battlefield was this human who could wield an Anti-Material Sniper Rifle for precise shooting!

Chapter 343 Tough Little BOSS

Bai E, soaring into the sky, did not lose his footing. The anti-material sniper rifle, as tall as a man, seemed like a large toy in his hands, deftly maneuvered. As his body was blasted backward by the explosion, Bai E also stabilized the sniper rifle with both hands.

"Boom!"

The huge recoil even caused Bai E's body to shift a few inches in midair, avoiding a barrage of bullets fired by the war machine that followed closely behind.

At the same time, the bullet Bai E fired hit the war machine's right arm joint with precision.

This was Bai E's first encounter with such a large intelligent mech, and he didn't have much experience, so he could only fire a shot to see what happened.

The vital parts of the enemy, like the chest and head where important electrical components were housed, were covered with extremely thick armor. The gloss of the pitch-black material suggested a defensive power even stronger than that of their armored vehicles.

Only the joints, which for the sake of nimble movement were not covered with heavy armor, seemed likely to be more effectively targeted...

However, a visible flash of light at the point of impact was fleeting.

"Hum~"

In the brief confrontation, the slender bullet from the anti-material sniper rifle ultimately failed to penetrate the target's defenses. Still, the direct encounter allowed Bai E to see the enemy's basic attributes—

[??? (Intelligent Mech) (Hostile): Health 500/500; Defensive Power 75; Mobility 100%; Traits: Electromagnetic Shield, Repulsion Shield, Alloy Armor, Gather Energy Cannon...]

"..."

All TM shields!

The display from the loot chance was completely different—

[??? (Intelligent Mech) (Hostile) (Elite) - Killing with a "Lucky Strike" will drop: Guaranteed (Steel*5000, Battle Experience 3000 points); Possible (Technology: Basic Steel Smelting Process, Technology: Basic Parts Forging Process, Knowledge: Energy Shield Science, Trait: Body of Mech)]

It was also... The content displayed by the loot chance is typically something that can be directly utilized by oneself, or even if it can't be used immediately, it can be kept in reserve for future activation.

But the multitude of shields, armor, cannons, and such possessed by the intelligent mech adversary would only be applicable if there was sufficient hardware support.

It's not like he could burst the enemy and become Iron Man on the spot, right?

Looking at the many exciting technologies displayed, Bai E felt somewhat tempted.

This one has got to burst!

Now with a large enterprise to support and the endeavor to grow and expand, technology was essential for humans.

He had long wanted to blow up the fences, the hodgepodge machines, and the turrets in the military camp. This target was clearly more appropriate.

The only trouble was... before the enemy's energy was exhausted, even the output from his anti-material sniper rifle would hardly penetrate the defense.

An energy-type shield enveloped the enemy completely, any hit below its maximum energy acceptance range could not inflict direct damage on it.

Unless... he used his true strength.

Bai E's eyes swept across the battlefield, unhurried.

The situation was still clear, apart from this little BOSS, the other lower-level intelligent mechs couldn't cause too much trouble for this makeshift alliance.

Even intelligent mechs must deal with the difficulty of resource limitations; their creations could not simply be a pile of materials.

In fact, if the losses were of no concern, either team had the capability to take down this intelligent mech transport squad on their own, so... perhaps he didn't need to rush?

Maybe the enemy was in more of a hurry than him?

Bai E suppressed the urge to burst forth and decided to wait and see if the squad from Grey Iron City could pull some ace out of their sleeves, giving him a pleasant surprise.

As he pondered this, Bai E saw the armor on the chest of the little BOSS open up suddenly, and two small missile arrays appeared before him in an instant.

The dense warheads emitted intimidating cold glints, causing Bai E's hair to stand on end.

The next moment, along with a buzzing sound, missiles shot out one after the other, tracing unpredictable arcs in the air, all homing in on Bai E.

Are they just targeting me?

"Damn it all!"

The moment Bai E discerned the direction of the missile attacks, he couldn't afford to provide fire support from the high ground any longer. Clutching his anti-material sniper rifle, he leaped backward, jumping down from behind.

And those small warheads, evidently equipped with limited-angle, directional tracking capability, mostly exploded on the high ground. Debris cascaded down, and the "front tooth" that had stood on the desolate plain for who knows how many years was abruptly broken off.

...

Fortunately, both Ling and You were quick-witted. After the first gather energy cannon aimed at Bai E, they knew that staying with him would only bring misfortune. They had already scurried down the rope, so the blast's aftermath didn't reach them.

Meanwhile, the remaining rocket heads, still half successful in swerving past the pillars, continued to pursue Bai E behind them.

"Boom Boom Boom Boom!" A series of explosions erupted behind the stone columns, causing the already crumbling "front teeth" to collapse even further amidst violent shaking.

"..."

"Captain!"

The intense commotion drew everyone's attention, but only Stone called out in a somewhat sorrowful voice.

Rose just glanced over and then hacked down on the machine gun mount of a tracked vehicle beside her with her knife.

Not only humanoid machines were AIs; these vehicles also had their own independent operational capabilities.

Watching the ally being focus-fired, an uncontrollable smirk surfaced on the face of the hulk from Grey Iron City, but it faded as quickly as it appeared.

Because after "eliminating" the most significant threat, he, being closest to the mini boss, had now been targeted.

Facing those blood-red electronic eyes, the hulk felt as if the phantom pain of countless missiles chasing his tail and exploding was actually happening to him.

"Captain!" the hulk bellowed.

He was just a tough punching bag, quite clear about his own role, but couldn't handle such tough and tall opponents.

The blue light in Captain Bai E's eyes had intensified to the extreme, as if ready to burst forth at any moment.

The next moment, her body shot out like an arrow, crashing directly towards the direction of the mini boss.

The anti-aircraft gun on the shoulder of the mini boss instantly targeted her, but the chaos in its targeting prevented it from firing.

She successfully closed the distance.

Bai E extended her right hand, pressing it onto the lower half of the mini boss's back. The dense energy flow gathered in her hand like a solid mass, the blinding white light pulsating as if ready to explode at any moment.

"Huh!"

Feeling a throbbing in her temples, Captain Bai E grimaced in pain, her lips tightly clenched.

After holding on for the last possible moment, feeling a sudden release of gravity, Bai E pushed with her feet and flew backwards.

The energy bullet collected in her palm could no longer be controlled, and she couldn't even direct it, so she smashed it in the most convenient direction.

"Whoosh!"

The air compressed, the world went silent.

The next moment, the shockwave spread out, and the condensed energy bullet exploded into a mushroom cloud on the plain...

The dust billowed into the sky.

[Warning, Warning! Insufficient energy! Shield system cannot operate normally!]

During that brief moment, Bai E, who hadn't taken any action until then, was not merely watching the situation unfold.

Fully aware of which was the greatest trouble, she had from the start focused her gaze on the most challenging target.

With the help of the spiritual energy connection, she had managed to analyze the minimum requirement to break the shield—

She hadn't been able to completely deplete the mini boss's energy reserves, as the shield system itself required a massive supply of energy. Without sufficient energy, the system would collapse on its own.

But that was all...

Using human will to forcibly extract the energy from an intensely concentrated mechanical body, her spiritual energy could only manage so much.

After laying the foundation for victory, Bai E retreated immediately.

However, the shockwave from the distant energy bullet swept over methodically yet urgently, the rumbling noise re-entering her ears.

The fierce shockwave effortlessly lifted her slight body, throwing her several meters high before she heavily smashed onto the ground, rolling more than ten meters away.

Like a torn rag... her life or death unknown.

Chapter 344 close-range DPS

No one knew that the energy bullet that was drawn out could unleash such terrifying power.

However, amidst the raging hurricane, everyone was too preoccupied to care about anything else. Fortunately, the group of melee brutes had heavy machinery companions at hand, and by grabbing the corners they were not blown away by the explosive blast.

Even so, the assortment of iron shards, stones, and sand whirling in the blast hit their bodies like a hail of bullets.

A broken piece of iron swept across Rose's face, leaving behind a deep bloody gash.

As for Zero and the boy from Grey Iron City, it was even worse; while they were shooting, they were blown away. Only You, as if having anticipated the danger, managed to dodge by swiftly moving to the backside of a stone pillar relative to the explosion point and found cover, successfully escaping disaster.

"Huff, huff, huff~"

As the violent winds died down slightly, You shook off the sand and dust from her short hair and then saw Bai E sitting next to her, looking ragged... along with a rock.

"Captain!" Her eyes lit up with surprise.

Even knowing Bai E was formidable, the sight of him being chased and bombed by so many missiles still had her worried. Seeing Bai E with his clothes in tatters but no visible serious injuries, she finally breathed a sigh of relief.

After all... No matter who the opponent was, or how troublesome, it seemed that as long as Bai E was there, nothing was a problem.

["Lucky Strike" Energy +3.]

Bai E was startled briefly, then smiled warmly at You, even instinctively stroking her head.

"It's okay, I'm here."

He was hardly hurt at all, thanks to the protection of Spiritual Energy along with the "Absolute Defense" pushed to its limits. Since no missiles hit him directly, he suffered no serious injuries, and the minor wounds healed up quickly under the effects of "Regenerative Blood" and "Quick Recovery."

He also provided some quick first aid to the rock that had been knocked down and knocked out by countless bullets.

His original intention to hide was to use the missile strikes as a diversion to observe the real strength of the people from Grey Iron City.

But the current changes...

Were too fierce...

Simply too fierce...

While speaking, Bai E cautiously peeked out and, seeing the devastated battlefield, was left somewhat astonished.

The enemy, relying on their own strength, might not have been able to unleash such terrifying power, but extracting the high-density energy from the mechanical body to release the power had caused this devastating damage across the entire battlefield.

Fortunately, the simple burst of energy did not come with heat or radiation effects; otherwise, these people would have been severely injured, if not dead.

Even so, they were by no means in good shape.

Was it time for him to take action?

No.

The voice of the Grey Iron City gorilla who was easing up from an old injury was still full of vigor—

"It's going to recharge with an energy block! Stop it!"

What the mechanical transport vehicle was carrying remained unknown, but as a core resource for mechanical beings—energy... just like water, food, and air are to humans, who doesn't carry some spare energy when going out?

Energy drained? No problem, just swap in another concentrated energy block!

His reminder wasn't particularly useful.

In fact, the impact of the explosion had limited effect on Grey Iron City's three melee brutes and Rose. Without the gorilla's reminder, the remaining four also noticed the small BOSS's intentions.

In an instant, the four who had recovered from the shock each grabbed their distinct weapons and together assaulted the enormous war machine from different directions.

The solid clash of steel rang across the battlefield, but with limited effectiveness.

Facing the war machine's hefty 80-point defense capability, the damage they could inflict with melee weapons was truly limited.

Bai E, out of the blue, fired a shot with his pistol, only to find that the thing was still at full health.

Even if the shield had dropped, its armor was robust enough.

Now he decided to change his previous thought... If he wasn't there, either team might not be able to overtake the mechanical transport team.

Did the people of Grey Iron City have any other tricks up their sleeve?

Bai E didn't intend to keep waiting.

What if the other party had no ill intentions? What if they were truly sincere in cooperating?

At this moment, the enemy had already shown a sufficient level of striking power, and it felt somewhat insincere to just stand by as a spectator.

"Rest well."

Bai E picked up the anti-material sniper rifle in his arms and stood up, moving out from the cover of the stone pillar.

"Click~" The bullet was chambered.

"Boom!" Orange flames exploded.

The bullet crossed the space, making the air itself hot and dry.

"Boom!"

The power of the anti-material sniper rifle remained formidable, as the bullet lodged into the connective area of the enemy's neck, setting off a shower of electrical sparks.

[Successful "Heavy Strike," penetrating enemy armor, +2 experience in light firearms expertise.]

[Enemy takes 38 points of damage!]

"..."

Damn, only that much damage.

Bai E narrowed his eyes, feeling somewhat displeased.

But he also noticed another trait in the enemy's attribute information: Mecha Energy Fullness.

[Mecha Energy Fullness: Mechanical soul, can replace damaged mechanical cables and components to maintain original functionality, and is capable of self-repair over time.]

The EMP bomb only paralyzed their shared mecha energy connection; the mecha energy within those mechanical beings was still exerting its intended effects.

A disrupted cable couldn't set off a domino effect that caused the entire machine to lose control; minor destruction was merely a scratch to its whole body.

A trait not present in those lower-level mechanical beings.

No wonder humanity's main forces don't really have a strategy against these things.

But at this moment, they were just the enemy!

"Click!" Bai E's bullet was chambered again.

The enemy's small cannon was also aiming over.

Sworn enemies glared at each other intensely.

As the number one threat, Bai E became the war machine's first target to eliminate the instant he reappeared.

Even though the shield system couldn't be used, its other systems were still fully operational.

Bai E smiled lightly at the crimson electronic eyes and his figure swayed.

["Gun Fighting Skill," activate!]

He had no intention of taking a direct hit again.

The damage from the energy main cannon was much greater than his missile array. Just being close to the blasts from the missile array's shockwaves meant he had to catch his breath not to mention a direct, solid hit from the enemy's main cannon—unthinkable.

Holding the anti-material sniper rifle, which was almost the same size and even heavier than himself, Bai E demonstrated unimaginable agility, so much so that the war machine's lock-on system kept reporting errors internally.

The scene was somewhat bizarre... The war machine's raised right arm, equipped with the main cannon, tried to aim at Bai E. However, it couldn't fire, continually thwarted by Bai E, who was changing positions constantly and closing in rapidly.

Make Bai E the primary target to be eliminated!

Attacks with less output than the missile array were insufficient to take down this opponent!

The gather energy cannon needed time to charge!

The judgment made from synthesizing numerous feedbacks resulted in this scene.

This was the logic of artificial intelligence in action—everything was based on probability. If there was no assurance of exceeding the predetermined success rate threshold, they would cease firing.

And thus, they appeared... somewhat sluggish.

Bai E with his gun had already rushed close to the enemy.

Who says a gunman can't deal damage up close?

Chapter 345 Phoenix

Even the mightiest gun is still a gun, and all guns fall under the dominion of Gun Fighting Skill.

As Bai E moved with agile grace, he climbed swiftly up the surface of the war machine, stepping on its clearly defined steel armor plates.

With both hands wrapped around the barrel, the gun's muzzle nearly pressed against the spine at the back of his opponent, Bai E suddenly pulled the trigger.

"Boom!"

Due to certain practical constraints, even artificial intelligence found it difficult to create a fully armored individual that was both heavily armored and as flexible as the human body.

The massive war machine had its own vulnerabilities, which were obviously easier to target for a critical hit when up close.

"Boom!"

"Boom!"

Shot after shot, each one hit its mark.

Nevertheless, the adversary did not sit idly waiting for demise, but its close combat weapon modules and support modules clearly could not cope with Bai E in his Gun Fighting Skill state.

The only trouble now was the health bar.

Even with every shot being a critical hit, facing an opponent with a high as 500 health points, Bai E would still need a dozen or more shots to take it down.

Whether Bai E would run out of steam first, or whether the war machine would be destroyed, became the final bit of suspense left in this battle.

Realizing that their attacks neither breached the armor nor did the enemy pay any attention to them, the three members of Grey Iron City squad finally faced a hard truth—

This ambush's final BOSS battle might not have much to do with them after all.

Nevermind dealing damage, they weren't even up for taking it.

What does it feel like to have a front-liner with high evasion?

Well, the answer is quite evident.

Watching the figure skillfully navigating atop the war machine while holding a ridiculously large gun, larger than his own body, the three warriors from Grey Iron City, who had just snapped out of their frenzied wartime state, sat on a low-level AI each, looking somewhat dazed and lost in thought.

"This lad is definitely one of us from Grey Iron City."

"With that kind of strength, wouldn't it be more straightforward to pick up a knife and hack at people like we do?"

"Our captain doesn't use knives," Rose, who was sitting beside them, chimed in with a smile, playing along with the lie Bai E had prepared in advance, "He only shoots."

"Oh~"

"I see~"

The Grey Iron City trio voiced their understanding.

But Rose's gaze drifted to the distance, to their white-haired captain still lying on the ground, her condition unknown, with a strange look in her eyes, "That's your captain, right? Don't you care at all whether she lives or dies?"

She'd been lying there forever. Might as well consider her dead... But not even a person to collect the body?

"She won't die..."

"Even if we all died, she wouldn't die."

The people from Grey Iron City didn't seem worried in the slightest, not even bothering to glance back, leaving their captain lying on the ground.

"Probably just knocked out temporarily by the backlash of Spiritual Energy, she'll wake up on her own in a bit," they casually speculated.

"..." What a nonchalant response.

Rose was speechless.

Yet, she found that the white-haired captain indeed started to stir before her very eyes.

First fingers, then toes... bit by bit, her entire body began to awaken as if from sleep.

Eventually, she sat up abruptly on the spot and then let out a yawn...

"Eh?" While yawning, her body stiffened, and she looked around.

The outdoor environment made her tense instantly, as if recalling past memories. She turned sharply to look at the battle happening behind her and caught sight of Rose watching her.

Her wandering gaze quickly took in the entire battlefield, and the white-haired woman's eyes finally met the curious ones of Rose.

"I'll ~ eat ~ you ~"

The smile that crept across the white-haired woman's face seemed sinister and frightening. The message she mouthed towards Rose—a verdict or perhaps a challenge—was full of bloodthirstiness.

However, in the next moment, as if it were all an illusion, her face switched back to a sweet and obedient smile.

On that delicate face, whose gender was hard to discern, it looked quite convincing.

Rose bit her lip, feeling dubious about everything she had witnessed.

'Either she's gone mad, or I have...'

"Is there... something wrong with your captain's mind?" She wasn't one to mince words and simply asked what was on her mind.

The Grey Iron City trio chuckled, "You noticed so fast, huh? She's not a normal person."

"Every time she wakes up from losing consciousness like this, it's like she becomes someone else. You'll get used to it..."

"Just don't know what she has turned into this time."

"..." The normally fearless Rose felt a chill down her spine and silently shifted her seat a little closer to where Bai E was fighting.

Bai E's battle had also reached its final stage.

The 99 points of Spiritual Energy reserves made his endurance in battle extremely terrifying, and his thick health bar merely delayed the inevitable death of his opponent.

When the health bar reached its final moments, Bai E silently recited—

"Activate 'Lucky Hit'."

The first intelligent-machine mini-boss he encountered possessed quite a bit of seemingly decent knowledge and technological capabilities; not looting it would be a disservice to all his strenuous efforts.

The long barrel of the gun pressed against the war machine's forehead, the dark muzzle radiating a ferocious bloodthirsty intent. Squeezing the trigger, the bullet roared out of the chamber.

"Boom!"

Shrapnel exploded, scattering across the sky.

In the instant of the last shot, Bai E noticed a new trait in the enemy's battle attributes: self-destruction.

You motherfucker, why didn't you say so earlier?!

He urgently activated "Absolute Defense," as the detonating energy source already unleashed an unimaginably powerful shockwave, carrying with it shards of steel.

Fighting intelligent machines meant one explosion after another.

These entities, powered solely by energy, carried lethal threats all over; even in death, they could inflict tons of damage on the enemy.

Explosive damage!

"Pfft," a broken piece of metal shot out instantaneously, striking the dead center of the forehead of the white-furred team captain, who had been turning her upper body and smiling sweetly. Her body stiffened and she fell once more.

"..."

Rose, who had been carefully observing the situation, awkwardly hid behind the body of an intelligent machine she had lifted, witnessing this dramatic scene.

Dead again?

Um... knocked out?

She must be dead now, right?

The explosion came quickly and left just as fast.

The battlefield was a mess, with the surviving fighters awkwardly rising, dusting off their clothes.

The two consecutive explosions nearly destroyed the area, but fortunately, such area attacks lacked precision. Those close to the explosion's center could mostly withstand it, while fragile characters like You and the boy from Grey Iron City took cover behind barriers.

Despite everyone being injured and disheveled after an ambush, fortunately, there were no casualties... right?

Rose, her clothes somewhat tattered, walked over to the white-furred team captain, kicked at the unresponsive foot hidden under the combat boot, and looking at the piece of metal deeply embedded in the forehead, she asked with a hint of curiosity, "Is your captain dead?"

The Grey Iron City gorilla, who had returned to his normal form, cast a sidelong glance at Rose and unusually retorted, "If your captain is dead, ours can't possibly be."

"..."

Rose crouched down, touched the other's neck incredulously, and then looked up excitedly, "But she's cold as ice..."

"Rose..." Bai E went up to pull Rose aside, whispering a reminder, "She's not dead."

The loot subtitles were still there; the opponent was indeed not dead.

Seeing how the Grey Iron City people ignored their captain and even intentionally kept their distance, Bai E knew they must have suffered because of this aspect.

Probably they were just waiting to laugh at Rose for getting close to their captain...

"...It's likely (Trait: Phoenix...)"

God knows how far Grey Iron City's biotechnological modification had developed, for such an abnormal ability to appear.

Their captain, unlike her three subordinates, did not have a body that could take damage; almost anything could break it, but she could come back together again, which was a bit outrageous.

Bai E wondered if this ability was common among them or if it was a special case that varied from person to person.

Bai E glanced at the Grey Iron City folks and sensibly chose not to ask more.

He just pulled Rose aside and gathered his team of four again.

"Everyone check your equipment and recover your condition,"

Ambushing this squad of intelligent machines was just the first step of the plan, next...

Bai E brought an intentionally preserved, undamaged intelligent machine to the area just outside the EMP lockdown zone.

Leaving a live one to send out a distress signal to the nearest intelligent machines was also part of their plan.

An invisible mechanical force fluctuated through the air. Once out of the EMP blockade area, in one-millionth of a second, the network of mechanical forces reconnected, and the alert was sent out immediately.

That was the limitation of intelligent machines; even if Bai E and his team outright spilled their plan, non-original intelligent machines would still faithfully execute every programmed reaction to outside changes.

Even if they knew it was a trap, they would still call their companions to step into it.

They might be called intelligent machines, but they were not so "intelligent."

Just like their combat style, cold but precise, invariably responding to any change with unchanging stability, their cruelty occasionally veered into dullness.

Without the manipulation of electronic demons, they were nothing but soulless husks.

Allowing the low-level intelligent machine by his hand to send an alert to the fortress, Bai E turned to check the loot he had just critically hit...

Chapter 346 Mechanical Body

[Loot acquired: Steel*5000, 3000 Combat Experience, Technology: Basic Steel Smelting Process, Technology: Basic Component Forging Process, Knowledge: Energy Shield Science, Trait: Mechanical Body.]

The 5000 units of steel in the Consciousness Space were far more spectacular than the mere scattering of bullets at the beginning. Rows of perfectly textured steel were neatly stacked on the ground, piled higher than a person, and filled with a satisfying sense of fulfillment.

There was no need to elaborate on combat experience. Technology and knowledge were merely acquired; further mastery or upgrading of their levels would require the payment of general experience or special research experience. Without sufficient research experience, Bai E was reluctant to use general experience that could enhance combat capability for direct level-ups.

Set aside for the moment.

As for the last one...

[Trait—Mechanical Body: Your familiarity with mechanical properties allows you to understand the structure of machinery like the back of your hand. From now on, you have a talent for all mechanical-related knowledge and technology, with a -20% reduction in experience consumption when investing experience to upgrade levels; and you can more easily bring out the original capabilities of mechanical structures when operating them ("You can resonate with a 'mechanical structure' by selecting it, and after more than 48 hours of close contact, you will establish a resonance link with your target, with the resonance level growing continuously with contact time until it reaches its maximum value"), and mechanical restrictions are greatly reduced. (Note: Reaching the maximum resonance level is a prerequisite for the birth of 'Machine Spirits').]

The description was rather ambiguous, but Bai E's eyes locked onto the last line at a glance—

Machine Spirits! A necessary condition for their birth!

Heavens! So Machine Spirits really exist in this world?

By relying on looting, Bai E guessed that some high-ranking individuals in the city were also gifted and could obtain similar abilities through their own understanding, which is why they were so certain of the existence of Machine Spirits.

It's just that he didn't know what specifically they were used for...

Mulling over his personal development, Bai E heard a noise coming from behind him.

"Boom!"

A violent explosion erupted not far behind him. According to Bai E's memory, the location of the blast should be where the white-haired team leader from Grey Iron City was lying.

So this was why those from Grey Iron City deliberately kept their distance from their team leader?

Thus, within a single breath, Bai E suppressed the nearly triggered stressed reaction due to the unexpected situation, showing a somewhat unruffled demeanor as he slowly turned around to observe what had happened—

A pit had appeared next to the white-haired team leader.

With her as the epicenter, the entire ground had sunk in, except for the piece of ground she was sitting on, which was left standing lonely like a tower under her buttocks.

The first thing the newly awakened white-haired team leader saw close up was a myriad of metal slag and even some shattered mechanical bodies still sparking.

The subconscious reaction of being on the battlefield led the white-haired team leader to perform an indiscriminate surge attack, pulverizing the soil and rocks within a one-meter radius into even finer structures.

Such expressiveness caused Bai E's pupils to contract.

The energy reserves he had extracted from that war machine had given him no substantial feeling yet, and what was displayed now was her own actual attack power.

Such formidable Spiritual Energy, probably of a second-tier level.

Having followed Yue Ying and learned for many days, Bai E had some understanding of the levels and divisions of Spiritual Energy—

A hundred points of Spiritual Energy is the threshold for the second tier, but having a hundred points of Spiritual Energy does not mean one is at the second tier.

This type of outward impact ability, even among those with second-tier levels of Spiritual Energy, is rare to see.

Very impressive...

Worthy of a team leader.

"Tch!" A member of the Grey Iron City squad, who had been closely observing the reactions of the Blackwater City team, spat out with a somewhat lackluster interest.

Every time their team leader "fainted" and woke up, it was as if she had become a different person, which naturally often resulted in a "grumpy" personality.

The current outburst was quite normal, they had long been accustomed to it. What they found more interesting... was the reaction of those from Blackwater City.

Watching people unfamiliar with their team leader make all sorts of strange actions due to the team leader's outburst was one of their few sources of entertainment.

Unfortunately, those team members were indeed startled, with the bulky one even going so far as to hold up his Blast Shield, trembling like a frightened quail at the first sign of trouble. However, their team leader...

Had no reaction.

He turned nonchalantly and cast a casual glance...

"Is he slow to react, or just confident?" the large ape, now back to its normal size, stroked its chin, somewhat curious.

"First, let's rule out slow reactions..." The acting team leader looked at Bai E with a wary eye, "This guy is big trouble."

That was the first time she had seen anyone wield such a big and heavy Anti-Material Sniper Rifle and fire from close range.

This fighting style was a bit wild.

So it really was crucial not to let him get that sniper rifle; they had to strike while his hands were empty!

As the "true *core brain" of the team, the acting team leader made a covert decision.

Meanwhile, the captain with white fur at the center of everyone's attention stood there in a daze for quite some time before realizing the battle had ended.

His fragmented memories from before gradually surged up, and from those past memories, he found his rightful place—

An Angel Envoy for Dr. Sabos!

Then he remembered he was the captain of the elite squad from Grey Iron City.

With a cold look in his eyes, the white-furred captain glanced at the five prey without a hint of "kindred" spirit on them, blinked, and hid the malice in his eyes that no one else could see.

Putting on a calm face, Bai drew the bloodless piece of metal from his forehead, and the wound healed immediately.

Standing up lightly, he looked down at the vast expanse of pale skin exposed by the tattered combat suit and directed a chilly gaze toward his acting team leader. The blur of memories made him forget where his off-road vehicle was parked, which had spare clothes in it.

"Where's the car?"

Facing their leader's suddenly chilly gaze, the acting team leader from Grey Iron City visibly shivered, "Over there..."

Saying this with some hesitation, he trotted off, "I'll lead the way for you."

Watching the acting leader walk away with their leader, the remaining three members of Grey Iron City huddled together and murmured.

"Not sure what personality we got this time..."

"Looks pretty scary..."

"Shh-shh~"

Bai E stepped on the sand disturbed by the explosion, strolled over casually, looked at the three from Grey Iron City, flashed them a big white-toothed smile, and cheerfully asked, "Does your captain change personalities with each death?"

"What death?"

"Which eye of yours saw our captain die?"

"..."

Full of confidence, their gaze sincere, they didn't seem to be pretending.

Were they just psychologically strong? Or were they also unaware of the truth?

Bai E raised an eyebrow, but didn't press further.

"Come on, let's see what kind of treasures are inside their transport vehicle?"

Chapter 347 Decisive Battle

Although ambushing the transport vehicle was meant to lure the enemy out, field battles were generally easier than sieges.

But the materials intercepted could also be valuable, bringing some back could be exchanged for military exploits... or perhaps devise a way to use them?

After all, much of the tech tree of the mechanical beings was inherited from the Golden Age, and despite some changes due to their individual differences, most of it presumably blended seamlessly with the current human tech tree, likely causing no issues if used directly.

As a low-level artificial intelligence, although the armored vehicle also had some of the mechanical beings' characteristics, it wasn't as integrally robust as the war machines, and with its central control system shattered, it couldn't keep Bai E out, turning into a neutral unit just like any ordinary armored vehicle.

"Tch!"

Bai E yanked open the bat-winged doors, and beneath the unfolded iron doors lay the materials it was transporting—

Transparent blocks that looked like chunks of ice, somewhat similar to the central crystal pillars seen previously at the information base.

This artificially synthesized crystal material, identified as the most frequently used material science technology during the Golden Age, was not commonly utilized by current humans, although the mechanical beings continued to cherish the glory of the Golden Age.

Bai E casually picked one up, cradling it in his hand, as subtitles aptly appeared above the block—

"Logic Cube: capable of supporting a 'Computing Power Module' excavated entity, an information technology inherited from the Golden Age, extremely expensive to manufacture."

Perhaps this was why the current humans hadn't adopted similar technology on a large scale.

Too expensive...

Only the mechanical beings, with it at their core, would mine and manufacture these things at any cost.

What if it was destroyed?

A thought crossed Bai E's mind, and another subtitle popped up—

"Logic Cube (Neutral)—Using 'Lucky Strike' to destroy may yield: Guaranteed (Logic Cube*60, Scientific Research Experience 3000 points); Possible (Knowledge: White Stone Material Science)."

Wow, could it actually yield knowledge?

For a moment, Bai E was slightly tempted.

But given that the system rated them as expensive to manufacture, even if he learned how to create or obtain these things now, the cost was probably more than he was willing to accept at the moment.

Not to mention, he had no immediate use for them, and with only 130 energy points left—enough for one "Lucky Strike"—Bai E was reluctant to waste his chance on something that currently had no use.

Hmm... maybe he could covet one to take back and destroy when there was time.

Then there were the two large black metal boxes.

Bai E didn't dare to mess with the mechanical beings' things, but just by placing his hand on the surface of the boxes, a line of subtitles appeared—

"Energy Core Suppressor: The extracted energy cores pulsate and surge, their contained energy constantly radiating powerful emissions. Only a specially manufactured suppressor can inhibit the activity of the energy cores."

Undoubtedly, inside the black metal boxes, there lay the energy source that the war machine had tried to replenish itself with.

Although small nuclear reactors are an option to provide sufficient energy for small machines, the technology that extracts energy into a semi-physical form known as energy cores offers another solution for small machines to obtain enough power.

Why are human mechas so huge?

That's because current humans are unable to mass-produce small nuclear reactors reliably, and the large size of the mechas is mostly to accommodate their nuclear power sources.

Bai E wondered if destroying the mechanical beings' extracted energy cores would yield their technology, but there were no subtitles to help with energy cores that he couldn't directly see or touch.

Given the previous two explosions, Bai E was now somewhat traumatized by these things.

Perhaps he could bring them back to the Scientific Research Institute and find an opportunity to observe them later?

The energy cores and Logic Cubes were the only two visible items inside the armored vehicle, with the rest being open space.

The interior volume of the armored vehicle was evidently much smaller than it appeared from the outside, with the scant materials it carried and the mechanical soldiers that had jumped out from inside being all of its contents.

Beyond that, there was only a display screen hanging in the central position at the front of the vehicle.

The vehicle itself had no control panel for operation, after all, the armored vehicle itself was a kind of mechanical being, able to move on its own.

The mechanical beings had no obligation to create machinery that others could control... In other words, Bai E and the others couldn't drive these large machines back.

Their massive mass also made it impossible to drag or transport them back; they could only take away the logic cubes and the suppressor metal boxes that contained the energy cores.

"Split them fifty-fifty?"

"Split them fifty-fifty."

The division of the spoils was easily agreed upon by both sides.

Now that the convoy had been attacked, there was no need to hide their tracks, and the off-road vehicles that the two teams had hidden were driven over.

They loaded their spoils into the vehicles, pulled out the mortars and land mines to set up ambushes, and all the while, they didn't see anything stir on the distant horizon.

Not coming out?

Actually, there wasn't a soul inside that fortress... The mechanical beings? Or did those in the fortress have higher order commands to ignore these attacks?

The decision-making processes of the mechanical beings were completely different from those of humans, often limited to the two options "yes" or "no," without considerations like "let's see" or "let's discuss it."

The absence of action for so long implied they were letting the matter slide.

So...

"Have you considered the appropriate response in this scenario?"

The two refreshed squads once again converged, and Bai E was the first to ask a question.

The Captain with white hair kept a cold face, the eye not covered by hair seeming distracted, without saying a word.

Bai E didn't expect her to answer, her unstable personality made her unsuitable to be a true brain, her existence probably only served to guarantee combat strength.

The decision-making power of this squad probably lay in the hands of the acting Captain, so Bai E's gaze merely politely swept over the white-haired Captain's face before fixating directly on the acting Captain.

Confronted by Bai E's inquiring gaze, the warrior woman from Grey Iron City slightly furrowed her brows, her already aged face looking momentarily heavier like a forty-something old lady, "I don't know."

Away from combat, the warriors from Grey Iron City appeared much more composed, but their answers were still unexpected.

"..."

Such an honest answer.

The acting Captain looked sincerely at Bai E, "Our initial plan actually only had one step, to attack the transport team and lure them out. If we found the transport team too tough or if the troop size from the fortress exceeded our capacity, we planned to retreat any time."

If we can't beat them, we run.

For the tasks assigned by the city's Military Department, Grey Iron City didn't place as much importance on them as Blackwater City next door.

After all, for Grey Iron City, every human who could endure several rounds of surgical modifications was precious, their combat power couldn't be wasted as casually as Blackwater City's artificial soldier warriors.

For some tasks with greater risks... either go back for reinforcements or simply give up.

The underlying logic of decision-making was clear and straightforward.

"In fact, if we hadn't encountered you, we might not have really gone after their transport team."

After a great battle, there seemed to be a sense of camaraderie formed between the sides, and the acting Captain seemed quite sincere when speaking.

"..." Bai E frowned, feeling a bit troubled.

He was reluctant to easily give up any task he received.

Moreover, for the warriors executing missions outside of Blackwater City, the military could tolerate failure, but not ignorance of failure.

Either die out there, marking the danger level of the target task or region with their lives.

Or gather intelligence, articulating the danger level of the target task or region with precise data.

Merely "feeling" that the fight was too tough and then planning to run, meant facing a military tribunal upon return.

"What if we insist on pushing through?" Bai E looked at the acting Captain, his eyes conveying a sincere inquiry, "Would you be willing to join us?"

The people from Grey Iron City were quite strong, adept at charging into battle.

When storming a position, it's exactly these types of cannon fodder we need; indeed, they played a significant role in restraining the enemy during the recent ambush.

Even with Bai E's individual strength, he sometimes needed the restraint his teammates provided, otherwise the previous encounter with the sandworm and sea of bugs, which nearly resulted in their annihilation, would have been a lesson forgotten.

"..." The acting Captain didn't answer right away but hesitated, glancing at the other members of his team.

Undercurrents rippled and after observing his teammates, the acting Captain turned back to Bai E and replied honestly, "Could you give us some time to discuss it?"

No one absolutely convincing as the core brain, eh?

Bai E nodded, responding with a smile, "Of course, no problem."

"..."

"Maybe we should just let it go? Their Captain is quite formidable, and we don't have full confidence in fighting against him,"

Feeding every other living creature they encountered to their own Captain, if they were sure they could silence them or preclude any follow-up implications, was an unspoken command they had always carried out during missions.

They had long become accustomed to this practice.

"This time, there is indeed a risk, let's just retreat."

The Blackwater City squad Captain, who had leaned in and dished out damage with his big gun, had left them with a lasting impression; even they who always felt invincible harbored a hint of fear.

That's why their attitudes softened much after the combat; once they stopped seeing the opposition as prey, the shift in mentality went unnoticed even to themselves.

Looking at his teammates whispering their differing viewpoints after avoiding the others, the normally silent white-haired Captain suddenly scoffed with a cold laugh, "Agree to it."

"Huh?" The gorilla was the first to look at their Captain with confusion, wondering if he had hallucinated.

A cold gleam flashed across white hair's brow, "I said, agree to it."

"Sure! Sure!" The gorilla instantly cheered up.

Looks like the Captain rolled a 9...

Every time the Captain fainted, she would change personalities and occasionally exhibit those categories with high intelligence.

They couldn't discern intelligence, but they could recognize assertiveness.

When intelligence and assertiveness combined, their Captain tended to become more proactive and willing to make decisions.

Whenever such personality emerged, it brought them an immense sense of reliability and calm.

"Then let's agree to it." The acting Captain nodded, looking fearfully at the true Captain.

"However..." the white-haired Captain's voice was indifferent, continuing, "our target isn't that fortress..."

Chapter 348 Go!

The negotiation concluded.

Bai E heard the opposing team's acting captain give the answer he wanted, "We can move with you... but if it's not feasible, we will cooperate with your retreat as much as possible after giving you a heads-up."

"Sure!" Bai E readily agreed, "No problem."

Voiced decisions were always better than abandoning one's own in the heat of battle.

Bai E hadn't expected the other party to fully share his enthusiasm, but their sincere articulation of their thoughts was surprisingly unsettling...

"Pack everything up, the supplies we won't be needing for now should be stashed somewhere to reduce our load. Prepare for the assault!"

Bai E glanced at the battleground they had just set up for an ambush. With a curt tone, he issued orders.

"Yes, sir!"

...

As they truly neared the enemy fortress in their vehicle, the voice of the opposing team's acting captain rang out through the radio they had successfully synced.

"Captain Bai, you must realize that there are only two reasons they could act against the supporting base settings—either they have received pre-input superior commands, or there is an original generation of artificial intelligence commanding. Aren't you afraid it's the latter possibility?"

Bai E was well-versed in these facts about AI since becoming a captain and was of course no stranger to them.

This time, he just chuckled softly, calmly responding, "I know... but if we can't obtain enough information, our city's understanding of this remains a blank slate."

"..." The other party was silent for a moment before asking softly, "Is Captain Bai an artificial person?"

"...Yes."

...

The fortress was situated against a crimson backdrop.

The sunlight was slanting from the west in the sky, but there was still some time before it would set completely.

Bai E raised his wrist to check the time, "4:32 p.m., we have at most one hour of combat time left."

Nighttime was never the domain of humans.

The AI, with its various means of observation, had far superior capabilities to discover and pinpoint targets in the dark compared to humans, and if they couldn't take it within an hour, it would also mean the enemy's tenacity and continued nighttime operations would offer them no advantage.

"If we can't take it down, we retreat; now is our last chance."

As the leading advocate for the combat plan, the combined operation of the two small teams defaulted to follow Bai E's commands.

Hence, his speech became even more decisively commanding.

The attack on the transport team had been broadcasted; the lack of response from the fortress did not mean the AI at large had no reaction.

They might have already dispatched reinforcements from their more distant base, currently en route.

So the hour before nightfall was their last period of combat, and if they could not take it tonight, they could not hope for tomorrow.

To seize it directly! Or to gather enough AI information to inform the military were his only two choices.

"Big Mountain, move aside, I'll drive."

It was an unwritten rule in the military that soldiers skilled in close combat were prioritized for learning to drive, as those adept at ranged attacks were more effective aboard a moving vehicle.

However, at this moment, Bai E trusted his own skills more.

Sitting in the driver's seat, Bai E buckled his seat belt and gave terse instructions.

"We're charging directly."

Facing an unknown fortress, notions of tactics were irrelevant.

Nothing was as straightforward and decisive as a frontal charge, the reason they had dumped all unnecessary vehicle equipment was for agility in this very moment.

The performance of the all-terrain vehicle was fairly good, and in evading the turret attacks, the vehicle could move a greater distance than a human, making it easier to dodge.

The sunroofs were open, Zero and You both holding the barrel, aiming at the fortress in their line of sight, ready to fire at any moment.

Rose took Bai E's large gun, resting it on the unfolded and secured car door, waiting to handle critical firepower points.

Her talent was all-around; she had recently dabbled in long-range shooting skills, which, though not as proficient as her close combat skills, were useable.

"Hum! Hum!"

The engines of the two stationary all-terrain vehicles began to roar violently; amidst the tremble of the car bodies, they sounded like beasts poised to strike with piercing roars.

"Charge!"

Bai E's voice tersely fell in the communication channel, and then the brakes of both vehicles released at the same time, the primed cars shot out like arrows.

Across the vast land, two tiny black dots charged towards the distant black steel fortress in a lonely assault.

"Squeak squeak squeak~" The AI's fixed machine guns and turrets, under their independent but interconnected intelligent systems, immediately began to swivel and aim precisely at the two charging vehicles.

Facing the rapidly moving and position-changing vehicles, their internal systems were quickly analyzing and summarizing the vehicles' movement patterns, including any limitations on maneuverability due to mechanical quality, which determined the performance ceiling of the two all-terrain vehicles.

The AI's mechanical force linked them together, and the powerful integrated network soon perfectly distributed the performance data represented by the actual behavior of the two all-terrain vehicles to every independent system.

And because of the mechanical force communication, the different roles of each gun position were also unified and harmonized.

Prediction, interception, pursuit.

One third of the turrets and machine guns arranged for the two all-terrain vehicles' charge immediately opened fire, with bullets and shells of various sizes and specs drawing different trajectories at different speeds, targeting the same speeding vehicle.

Chapter 349 Go!_2

The members of the Grey Iron City squad turned pale as the barrage targeted them. Their exceptional neural reflexes might not allow them to instantly analyze the landing points of all bullets and shells to steer their vehicle out of the way, but at least they could quickly discern the direction of the incoming attacks.

"Why are they all firing at us!" The burly man gritted his teeth and gasped for breath.

"Are those AI units blind?" The gorilla was equally indignant.

The firing machine guns and cannons were all aimed at them, while the vehicle hurtling forward in the next lane was completely ignored.

Only Captain Bai, silent, stared deathly at the trajectory of the incoming projectiles from beneath his white, irregular fringe.

The trajectories were so dense and well-sealed that even with Lin's skills pushed to their limit, some unavoidable hits were bound to land on the vehicle.

To expect a regular SUV, unequipped with human shield technology, to stand against the long guns and heavy artillery of AI? It would be quicker to dig a hole and reincarnate on the spot.

"Try to avoid the artillery fire," Captain Bai ordered softly.

"Yes!" The fully focused boy snapped back, teeth clenched tight.

The wheel was spinning wildly, explosions echoed by their ears, the ever-present danger of being hit looming in their minds. The pupils of everyone in the combat-ready Grey Iron City squad appeared slightly constricted, their breathing heavy.

"Damn it, dodge!"

A bullet whizzed over the roof of the car, making a "zzt" friction sound.

Startled, the gorilla slapped out with his hand, but under the guidance of his last shreds of reason only hit the backrest of the driver's seat, not the boy who was driving.

"I'm doing my best!" The boy's forehead throbbed with veins as he raised his voice for the first time in response to his teammate.

"Faster, faster, faster, faster!" The acting captain stood in the middle, head out the sunroof, holding a shoulder-launched grenade launcher, mumbling to himself.

Their weapons had clearly shorter ranges than the mounted armaments of the AI, and their personal skills weren't exceptional either. Until they got close enough, they were just sitting ducks.

"I know!" The boy pressed the accelerator to the floor, his eyes filled with a thick resolve to perish together.

If I can't live, then no one will!

A silver-gray bullet abruptly enlarged in their view.

"Buzz!" A bullet capable of piercing the vehicle's front windshield suddenly appeared in focus and dramatically expanded in the boy's pupils. However, as it approached the windshield, it seemed to hit an invisible barrier, visibly vibrating as it struggled fiercely.

What would have felt like slow motion in his mind happened in an instant in the real world. The bullet that could have passed through the windshield and struck him between the eyes fell impotently to the vehicle's hood due to the mysterious force, rolling down with a thud.

"Don't get distracted, focus on driving." The calm and steady voice of the captain rose from the back seat, as Captain Bai focused intently without saying much else.

Only occasionally did his peripheral vision glance over his other three teammates, the pupils involuntarily revealing a hint of emotion that might be called "confusion."

"Damn it, why only attack us and not them!" The gorilla, muscles tensing, seemed on the verge of transforming right there in the car.

Captain Bai glanced at him, then turned his eyes back to the vehicle racing alongside them.

The transparent windows at the front didn't block the view, and the figure gripping the steering wheel on the driver's seat came into his view from the side...

Perhaps... it was just because their skills were stronger, right?

Their more unpredictable and bizarre driving patterns had led to the AI's analytical capabilities being unable to formulate a new attack plan with a high enough success rate.

Hence it had yet to strike.

This was an inherent defect in AI, similar to encountering a software bug. Without the active intervention of higher-level AI, they would always remain silent until they had sufficient assurance of their actions.

But that captain from Blackwater City wouldn't have it easy either. Driving patterns also have inertia; he had to maintain this unpredictable path. Once his actions slowed, the barrage from the AI cannons would follow.

And they... didn't have their own Spiritual Energy shields.

...

"Help them out," Bai E, in the driver's seat, glanced at the neighbors taking a beating and spoke concisely.

The newly-acquired "Machine Body" trait gave him absolute familiarity with any mechanical system he touched, though its description was vague and didn't have the precise data bonuses that most powers did.

Even without establishing a resonant link, his control over the vehicle he was handling had improved a notch.

Road feel, wind resistance, the vibrations from the vehicle transmitted clearly to his body, even the threats from the AI targeting systems felt like tangible lines enshrouding the vehicle's path.

All he needed to do was to avoid those "lines."

"Can't aim..." Rose gritted her teeth in response.

Although she had some shooting skills, she wasn't proficient enough. In this frenzied, rapidly changing tempo, it was good enough that she hadn't thrown up, let alone aimed.

Bai E's driving had a bidirectional impact on shooting accuracy.

"..." Bai E tapped the brakes lightly, slowing down the pace.

Since they were temporary teammates, he couldn't let them suffer too much damage before they really got close, leading to unnecessary exhaustion.

The enemy captain's Spiritual Energy was strong; it wasn't worth wasting it on blocking bullets for the vehicles.

So, in an instant, Bai E's vehicle and the two-thirds firepower coming from the mechanical fortress fired almost simultaneously.

The intensity of the barrage, now doubled, turned the faces of the four people in the Grey Iron City squad's vehicle green.

But the next moment, as they realized the fire wasn't aimed at them, their expressions turned from shock to joy.

"Right, right, right! Blow them up!"

"Blast those fools to death!"

In the heat of battle, the group's language was uncensored, their words spilling out without restraint.

"They can't die," murmured the white-haired team captain, his eyes tinged with worry.

Living flesh brings the potential for improvement; charred, cannon-blasted meat is nothing but waste.

...

Seeing the barrage of shells coming at them in an instant, You and Rose showed no fear. They had complete trust in their captain.

"Boom!"

"Boom!"

"Boom!"

Only when they were close enough could their weapons unleash their true range and power.

The three of them fired one after another.

The captain was fulfilling his duties, and it was their turn to execute his commands perfectly.

Yet, even though Bai E had slowed down the frequency changes, their teammates' hit rate was still pitifully low.

Fortunately, humans don't act on success rates alone. The enemy's cannons and machine-gun positions were fixed, so as long as they kept firing, there would always be a chance.

The charge path, neither long nor short, became the stage for both sides' gunfire exchange.

Trails with tail flames from various projectiles crisscrossed in the air, drawing different arcs and falling around the moving vehicles, kicking up gusts of heat.

From the flaming chaos, guns protruded from the sides of the vehicles, bullets swiftly advancing through them, shooting forward with scorching blasts of heat.

Hundreds of meters passed in the blink of an eye...

"Boom!"

The suddenly exploding cannon became the first flower to bloom on the walls of the fortress.

Watching the cannon that had just been firing at them, the emotionally charged bruiser paused, turning his head back towards his companions in search of affirmation, "Are they helping... us?"

The gorilla stood with its mouth open, "Probably... yeah?"

"But they themselves..."

"They don't need to counterattack," the white-haired captain said, his eyes sharp, now filled with an increased mix of desire and wariness for the driver of the vehicle.

Yet, a tiny bit of human emotion beneath the surface voiced a "suggestion."

Complicated sentiments flickered in his heart before being washed away by the flow of orders.

The eyes that had just wavered steadied once again... All excellent "parts" would ultimately become the strength of the Doctor!

Chapter 350 First-generation AI

["Lucky Strike" charge +5.]

"..." Bai E, who received the prompt, felt a bit strange.

He glanced at his teammates... It seemed like everyone was seriously shooting, too busy to pay attention to him.

So... were the five people from the neighboring team the ones?

It looked like this assistance hadn't been in vain.

Bai E felt somewhat relieved.

The final exchange of gunfire didn't last long, with the hundreds of meters passing in the blink of an eye. Several flames rose on the fortress walls—those were the remains of the destroyed.

Underneath the flames of relentless artillery fire, You rolled out of the vehicle and scattered a large number of grenades towards the back of the fortress.

With the reaction time passed, more active smart-robot soldiers had undoubtedly poured out from inside the fortress, ready to defend their "home."

The alliance team's adversaries weren't just the fixed cannons and machine guns; the emerging multitude of smart-robot soldiers was also a significant nuisance they had to face.

The far-weapon specialist combat soldiers, adept at long-range shooting, and the close-weapon specialist combat soldiers with melee combat modules were the two most common types of smart-robot soldiers that everyone had encountered in the ambushes before.

Because of their loading capacity limitations, their individual destructive power might seem less significant than fixed cannons and machine guns, but for some peculiar reason, the intelligence level of these humanoid robots was notably higher.

When connected by machine force, they could even act completely disregarding "success rates," and the distance close enough made it harder for the off-road vehicle to evade completely.

"Abandon the vehicle!"

The charge towards the smart-robot fortress was a one-way road, and at the last moment, abandoning the vehicle was inevitable.

This meant that if they couldn't take the fortress entirely, their purely physical extraction would face the baptism of countless bullets.

The difference lay only in the extent to which they could damage the fortress's robotic warfare capabilities.

With a Blast Shield in hand to protect those around him, Bai E and the others rolled off the speeding vehicle and got to the base of the fortress.

The only advantage at this short range was that the fixed cannons on the other side lost their intimidation power.

"Boom!" The moment they jumped off, the off-road vehicle met its end in a violent explosion.

Shielded by the Blast Shield and waiting for the fierce explosion to subside slightly, Bai E, crouched at the foot of the not-so-high fortress wall, pressed his earpiece and clearly asked through the voice channel, "Anyone hurt?"

"No."

"No."

"Just grazed."

"My hand's a bit numb..."

The Blast Shield could indeed stop the bullets, but the accompanying kinetic impact was solidly endured by their bodies.

Zhou, the least agile of them, had resisted countless bullets to get to the base of the fortress.

"Then use your foot as a boost, and I'll pull you up last," Bai E quickly decided.

The walls of the smart-robot fortress were not very tall, about the height of two people, but the surface was smooth and curved, making it difficult to climb directly; they needed someone beneath them for a boost.

Zhou, tall and sturdy, was undoubtedly the most suitable candidate.

After glancing at Grey Iron City's team, which was a mere ten meters away, and finding they too had successfully reached the base of the fortress wall, Bai E opened the channel to them, "Get ready to climb."

The rough voice of the opposing team leader responded in time, "No problem."

"I'll lead the charge; follow me," Bai E instructed, wielding the Blast Shield above his head to thwart the shots of the few far-weapon specialist combat soldiers who showed themselves. He backed up a few steps along the wall, then burst into a sprint.

Stepping on the Blast Shield held up by Zhou and with Absolute Defense and Gun Fighting Skill activated, Bai E, one hand with the shield and the other with the gun, dashed up in an instant.

In mid-air with a flying somersault, his left hand with the Blast Shield covered most of his body while his right hand's machine gun opened fire at those smart-robot soldiers inside.

"Dadada!" The spewing flames were effective against those mechanically constructed soldiers. Low-level robot soldiers faced inherent limitations in technology or resources in all respects.

The materials making up their bodies certainly weren't exceptional, so their impact resistance was limited.

Lacking standard materials and intelligence levels, their mechanical power was equally limited, unable to compensate for or repair any damaged structures throughout their bodies.

Perhaps the defense capabilities of smart-robot soldiers might be notably stronger than bare human warriors, but against heavy firearms, they were just as limited, and their movements were rigid, far less capable of seizing opportunities than humans.

If an average frontline human soldier had defensive C and offensive B abilities, then these low-level smart-robot soldiers might only have defensive B+ and offensive C abilities.

They could take a hit a little better... That's about it.

Bullets hitting the armored parts might only leave a deep dent, but those hitting the less armored parts easily penetrated, sparking a flurry.

With a level 4 expertise in shooting, augmented by an extra level of performance provided by Weapon Master, and the additional boost from Gun Fighting Skill, most of the bullets fired found the weak spots on the robots for critical hits.

A barrage of fire in mid-air, and as his metal combat boots landed on the metal walls of the fortress, the flames exploding from three combat robots served as Bai E's dramatic backdrop.

Zhou, who also "flew" onto the wall, averted his gaze, his eyes heavy with solemnity.