

Wow 481

Chapter 481 I encountered a few NPCs.

...

[...Life value -1.]

[...Life value -1.]

[...Life value -1.]

...

[The harmful substances you have absorbed have exceeded your body's capacity, please evacuate from the dangerous area as soon as possible.]

[Harmful substances have entered your blood circulation, your life is continuously weakening, movement reduced by 20%, life value -5/min.]

Dai Lian, without saying a word, turned and ran.

The slope of the volcano was continuous, and the rocks were rugged.

Dai Lian stumbled, and his whole body suddenly fell to the ground, rolling like a gourd several times before finally coming to a dusty halt.

Looking up, he saw a pair of small feet stepping in calf-skin boots, and Dai Lian reached out his right hand, "Save, save, save..."

"Okay~" Gong Yan smiled with her lips pursed, carrying her small canvas bag as she bent down to crouch beside him.

...

[You have received emergency aid, your injury is stabilized, your life value is rapidly recovering.]

[Your body has recovered from a severe exhaustion, and your resistance to the source of damage has improved, your Concentration Resistance +1, reaching 100 points to form a trait—Adaptive Breathing Enhancement (Level 1).]

"It's helpful."

Dai Lian, having recovered, was slightly pleased. Although a friend who used to grind levels for him had mentioned it, experiencing it firsthand still brought a sense of joy from the achievement.

"Gurgle, gurgle, gurgle..." Another figure rolled over, and Gu Lan, with a dusty face, lifted her head from the ground with a giggle, "Save me too~"

"Okay~"

[You have received emergency aid...]

[Your body has recovered from a severe exhaustion...]

Kuang Xin: "Save..."

...

Seeing Gong Yan, who was still standing in place without going up to train herself, Dai Lian asked with curious eyes, "What about you?"

"Me?" Gong Yan flicked some stray locks of hair from beside her ear, "Who will save me if I go up there?"

Without waiting for Dai Lian to reply, she smiled again, "It's okay. I have Spiritual Energy that can purify the conditions on my body."

As she spoke and inhaled a gulp of smoky air, she quickly covered her mouth and nose again with her damp scarf, coughing violently, "Cough, cough, cough!"

"Alright~ As long as you're okay."

"Exhale~"

"Inhale~"

"Exhale~"

"Inhale~"

At the foot of the shadowed mountain, several figures with mottled colors were mingling on the stony ground intermixed with gray, black, and white volcanic rocks, hardly drawing attention unless someone got very close.

The three who were breathing heard some unnatural sounds faintly. Dai Lian, who had the highest perception, suddenly stopped his heavy breathing rhythm and sharply turned his gaze in a certain direction.

Tiny black dots were gradually enlarging from the distant slope above, clearly moving in this direction.

And a number of ruby-red figures were hot on the heels of those two black dots, their relatively close proximity making it easy to spot the gap between the two.

Kuang Xin and Gu Lan both stopped their normal breathing rhythm and looked in the same direction.

"Looks like someone is being chased by a monster, huh?" Kuang Xin squinted, finding it hard to see clearly.

Gu Lan spat disdainfully, "Even the kitchen squad has seen it, do you need to state the obvious?"

"So, what do we do?"

After a moment of hesitation, Dai Lian made a decision, "Rescue them!"

They were strangers in a strange land, and there was no better way to start than to save someone's life.

Having made the decision, the three of them sprinted off at once.

As they got close enough, Dai Lian took the longbow off his back and pulled out a stainless steel arrow from the quiver he carried behind him.

To prepare for this mission to Grey Iron City, they had made thorough preparations.

Facing completely unfamiliar local monsters, Dai Lian didn't dare to be overconfident.

He went for it with a skill from an adult—Power Shot!

Waves of heat bearing volcanic temperature swirled at his fingertips, and endless power gradually peaked during the slow charging process.

As the pursuers and the pursued separated positions in the chase at that instant, Dai Lian's gaze sharpened, and he released his fingers.

"Whoosh~"

The arrow was like a dragon, carrying with it the scorching fireworks of a volcano as it stirred up a wild surge in the air before shooting straight towards the chest of one of the pursuing beasts.

"Snap~"

The arrow, capable of piercing through gold and splitting rocks, easily tore through the beast's chest, and the creature that resembled an upright, red lion stiffened in an instant, then became completely frozen in place.

Its crimson body gradually lost its lustrous red sheen, turning into ordinary black-iron colored stones, falling swiftly from midair and scattering on the ground.

"The monster is made of stone?" Kuang Xin sped forward like a gust of wind, quickly reaching the vicinity of the chase, while Dai Lian was still gathering power on the spot.

And at this moment, the pursued, perhaps in despair seeing "an ambush ahead," slipped and tumbled down abruptly.

As he rolled on the ground losing control of his body, the crimson beast chasing behind would not let go of this easy prey.

Raising its forelimb, about to smash the wretched creature below with a massive claw, a shadow not much stronger than the pitiful creature suddenly flashed in between.

"Squeak~"

Strong muscles emitted a sour sound as Kuang Xin planted his feet into the ground and let out a roar from his throat, "Ahhh!!!!"

"Boom!"

With a powerful burst, even the heavy stone beast was completely overturned, its entire body violently crashing to one side and kicking up a cloud of dust.

The last red beast gazed at its prey, close at hand, its twin eyes shining with a bloodthirsty excitement, like blazing rubies. However, a flying figure came rushing from the side, and with a punch, Gu Lan, wearing a black and red glove, knocked the beast's neck askew, causing its outstretched claw to helplessly hit the ground.

Gu Lan, who landed with a bright, enthusiastic smile, adjusted her Spiritual Energy glove that was a size too large for her right hand before reaching out to help up the fallen male human, "Are you okay?"

"No...I'm fine." Wang Wenbo stupidly reached out his hand, feeling that this person, likely a female in shorts with a face smeared with black soot, surprisingly had the air of a master about her.

"Rua!"

The mad calling resounded behind them, as Kuang Xin, furiously hammering the pursuing beast, darted past Gu Lan's back.

Watching this frenzied scene before him, Wang Wenbo swallowed hard.

"Tut~"

Isn't this too fierce?

Fighting the Fire Elemental Beasts, who are these people?

But he hadn't seen them among the familiar players, so could they be those NPCs who had undergone surgery?

If NPCs have this kind of strength... It seems quite normal.

As he put away his longbow and approached just as swiftly, Dai Lian walked over with a smile, unconcerned with the two remaining red beasts who were no match for Kuang Xin. Moreover, these beasts clearly had limited intelligence, failing to change their target even when entangled with the obviously troublesome Kuang Xin, so there was no need to worry.

He was more concerned about the progress of the mission, or rather, the source of the information.

Dai Lian put on what he thought was his most sincere smile, watching the approach from afar, and in a tone that sounded steady and reliable, just like his superior, he greeted, "Friend, are you okay?"

...

"Are you okay?"

"I'm fine."

"Let's hurry up and go."

"What bad luck, how did we run into Fire Elemental Beasts?"

"Just wanted to come out and pick up some trash, is my luck really this rotten?"

"Sigh~"

"Sigh~"

...

Dai Lian's smile froze on his face as he watched the backs of the two humans walking away. He turned to Gu Lan, dryly squeezing his eyes, "I think we've been ignored."

Gu Lan also opened her eyes wide, somewhat doubting whether she was hallucinating, "Can they not see us?"

... Watching the backs of the departing figures, Dai Lian pinched his chin, analyzing rationally, "Perhaps this is the local custom? People of Grey Iron City don't like talking to strangers?"

"Emmmmm"

"Rua!"

In a cacophony of sound, Gong Yan, who realized something was amiss, finally arrived late, "What happened?"

"Nothing much, we just encountered two NPCs being chased, but it seems they had no mission, and they didn't interact with us," Dai Lian waved his hand dismissively.

"Oh~"

...

The two players returned to their den looking disheartened, reporting today's outcomes to their boss, "Boss, we ran into Fire Elemental Beasts."

"Oh?" In the dim light, a soft, pale chin lifted with a hint of a smile, "And you managed to run back here?"

"Hey! Just happened to run into some weird NPCs." Wang Wenbo waved his hand, speaking somewhat nonchalantly.

The other player, however, was full of interest, "Boss, you wouldn't believe it, but those NPCs were pretty fierce."

"Oh?" The boss's tone rose with curiosity, clearly more interested, "How fierce were they?"

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"What kind of ferocity?" The boss half-emerged from the shadows, his heroic, willow-leaf eyebrows raised slightly with interest.

"Actually, it wasn't that fierce..." Wang Wenbo said nonchalantly.

After surgical modifications, there were many formidable men in Grey Iron City. Seeing muscle-bound men perform every day had desensitized him.

Another player, Wang Wenyan, added, "...it was just a bit strange."

"Strange?"

"The brutes we've seen before all used their fists, but it was the first time I'd seen one use a bow and arrow—he downed a Flame Beast with a single shot, utterly ferocious! Moreover, of the two brawlers with him, one didn't seem to have much physical change; that woman's figure... was quite slender, about the same as yours, boss. But she could still knock down a Flame Beast with a punch, fiercely so."

"You haven't seen them before either?" The boss pinched his own fair chin, murmuring with curiosity, "You two roam around all day, and there's still someone in this area you haven't seen?"

Then he asked, "Where did you see them?"

"Right down there by the foot of the volcano... on the northwest side out of the city, also on the northwest side of the volcano."

"No reason for that..." The boss immediately noted something odd, "Who'd normally run off in that direction?"

Even if you're going up the mountain for resources, you'd just head north after you leave the city. Why take such a big detour toward the shady side of the mountain?

Unless... the others also wanted to avoid crowded places.

"Didn't you talk to them?"

"We did," Wen Yan nodded earnestly.

"What did you say?"

"They said, 'Are you alright?'"

"And then?"

"Then we ran away..."

"..."

"..."

The boss stared at them with his clear black and white eyes, "They saved you guys, and you didn't even think to thank them?"

"Who thanks NPCs..." Wen Bo grumbled, "Especially since we're both 'unregistered', how could I dare to just chat with anyone?"

What if someone found out about my 'unregistered' status? Wouldn't I be sent to the surgery table for a tribulation within minutes?

Scratching his head, Wen Yan said, "I was too scared being chased by the Flame Beast... didn't catch on at the time."

"..." The boss rubbed his chin to himself, speculating, "Hey, do you think this could be the beginning of some quest?"

"Hmm..."

"emmmm~"

The two brothers were cluelessly dumbfounded, looking into each other's eyes, their faces blank.

"Surely our city can't stay like this forever?"

Although not very familiar with other players' starting areas, they at least knew that other players didn't have to face such harsh conditions from birth.

First of all, you had to become acquainted with the environment. Any player who didn't acquire the "Adaptive Breathing Enhancement" trait within three days of birth was doomed.

You could either shell out money for a doctor to boost your trait proficiency or try to improve your physical constitution or stamina over time—all part of Grey Iron City players' "main quest."

The first thing was to survive; only by staying alive could you play the game.

And even survival wasn't the end of it; the world's malice was just beginning to show.

Granted, players from other cities had their struggles, but those often came from environmental challenges or from overt maliciousness driven by certain NPCs' self-interest.

But this city was different...

The city itself was the greatest malice.

Players from other cities could freely choose their own advancement paths.

They could specialize in martial arts, relying on strong physiques and combat skills to overcome everything.

They could also master the use of equipment. Early on, firearms posed a lethal threat to the players' fragile physiques. Possessing weapons that mixed sci-fi with magical elements could diversify their combat styles significantly.

Furthermore, one could cultivate Spiritual Energy, reshaping the world with willpower like a powerful sorcerer.

Each path required players to find their own ways forward.

There were no career mentors, set quest lines, or even a clear promotion system.

Everything was free, filled with unlimited possibilities. Every player's exploration of the game content was wonderful and varied, with the same scenario triggered under similar conditions, potentially leading to entirely different outcomes.

Even a villager you rescued by the roadside could share the technology for a controllable nuclear fusion reactor.

This was the charm of the game world.

That's how the official supplements described it, and how other players played after entering the game, but why was it that in their Grey Iron City, the only way to advance was through bodily modifications, and not just any modifications, but compulsory ones?

If the periodic census found any 'unregistered' people, they were first taken to undergo surgery.

If the surgery was successful, that was good news. Not only could you gain a powerful trait, but you could also significantly improve your physical quality—much faster than by training on your own. The players whose surgeries were initially successful thought they had struck gold, finding themselves in a welfare city beyond the wildest dreams of others.

However... the nightmare was just beginning.

Surgeries had a considerable failure rate.

Failed players either died on the operating table or were left gasping for life, thrown aside like rubbish, not knowing which part of them was missing, and then forced to fend for themselves in this survival of the fittest 'jungle'.

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At first, many players thought this was a feature of the game, and besides, it's a game... it would never really let players suffer a huge loss.

Whatever was lost here would be compensated for elsewhere.

The last one who thought this way was named Kuang Xin, but sadly, the game wasn't always so merciful.

After persisting for a period of time, these players felt it would have been better to have died right on the operating table in the beginning.

After achieving the "impressive" feat of going hungry for three days with nine missed meals in "Urban Survival Battle", most players chose to restart.

Only a very small minority of players continued clinging to their "faith" — they believed that the game wouldn't let them down, that their perseverance had to be meaningful.

Otherwise, would not all the suffering of the past few days have been in vain?

This was failure...

And success wasn't much better off.

The city's surgical technology was extremely immature; even when the surgery was successful, one had to face the rejection effect of the body towards additional organs, which meant that even those players who succeeded in the surgery had to rely on a concoction called "Stabilizing Repair Fluid" to stabilize their condition.

And to get this substance, which could only be produced officially by the city, one had to accept their control and act according to their instructions.

The city itself didn't seem to intentionally establish its own intelligence organization or a large-scale guard force, etc. They appeared not to care about being in control of everyone, but rather for the sake of the surgery itself.

But, in this state of affairs, the entire city... belonged to them.

For players yearning for freedom and who acted without restraint, what a frustrating place this was?

If you can't freely jump onto rooftops and tear down walls, where's the realism in this game?

Not to mention that the surgeries weren't one-off...

Grey Iron City's surgeries had many steps, with each surgery representing a new barrier.

Each surgery reiterated all the aforementioned risks.

Any player who underwent surgery and had to accept the city's control to some extent because of the "Stabilizing Repair Fluid" got recorded in the city officials' books.

As soon as either time or physical condition met the criteria for the next surgery, one would be immediately pushed onto the operating table again.

If successful, of course, one would ascend once more, but failure meant going all the way down, or like those unlucky players, being forced to restart "Urban Survival Battle".

After some time, players naturally discovered certain patterns—

If one improved themselves in between two surgeries, ensuring their constitution was strong enough and had enough traits and specialties, especially those that had targeted effects on the surgery, it could greatly increase the success rate of the surgery.

This was the only direction the players could keep "winning".

But the failure rate was still not small, at least for the players, it was hard to accept.

Distorted policies naturally bred a rebellious crowd.

Even if they couldn't resist, they could still flee and hide.

Like this group of "rats" hiding underground, they were the "Black residents" that the city was out to capture everywhere.

So, to put it another way: those who want to avoid the eyes of the city are the "Black residents".

Among the "Black residents" there were rarely any formidable individuals, or at least not among those players who refused to comply with the city's distorted rules.

But they believed it shouldn't be this way.

At least Yafei always believed so.

The deformed city must eventually undergo a thorough purification; changing the city's distorted rules might just be the inherent "main mission" that all players born in this city carry.

Those who comply with the city are dogs; those who resist the city are rats.

This is a battle between dogs and rats.

The dog camp has the city itself as their big daddy, but what about their rat camp?

Can they rely solely on their newly-spawned players? How long would it take to overturn this rotten place?

There must be a big daddy to lead the charge.

Yafei had always been looking for this big daddy, and now...

He was searching for someone powerful who didn't seem to have gained that power purely through surgical transformation and who also needed to evade the city's watchful eyes — a "Black resident".

Could this be the opportunity to overthrow the city?

Excited by this thought, Yafei stood up, "Where did you encounter them? Take me to see!"

Whether it was them or not, making contact couldn't hurt.

...

Even if it wasn't their own "big daddy," weren't these players, who were reluctant to undergo surgery transformations, eager to cozy up to the NPC powerhouse that also didn't take the surgical transformation route?

It just goes to show that lackeys will always be lackeys, with no strategic vision.

"Let's go!"

Yafei, clad in a belly-revealing lackey outfit, lightly jumped off the wooden crate she had been sitting on and led the way to the entrance of the cave, "Hurry up, don't wait for them to run off."

"Coming, coming!" Ma Wenbo snapped to attention, finally catching on.

...

"Huff~"

"Inhale~"

"Huff~"

"Inhale~"

Three figures stood in place, taking long breaths in.

Seeing that he had far surpassed the others with a 99-point proficiency, Kuang Xin was full of pride.

"Don't you know what a brutish body is?"

"Gurgle~"

The rubble rolled down from a slope that was even steeper.

The ground began to tremble slightly.

Gu Lan, who was coincidentally in a state of meditation, connecting with the world through her will during her calm breathing, sensed a smoky, fiery scent.

Confused, she opened her eyes and looked towards the gentle slope that stretched upward... There, the black-grey soil seemed to have solidified for thousands of years, making everyone forget the fact that it was actually an active volcano.

"Could it be about to erupt?"

"Is it that much of a coincidence?" Kuang Xin opened his eyes upon hearing her and retorted disdainfully, "Just because we arrived, the volcano erupts? Are we children of the volcano or something?"

Dai Lian narrowed his eyes and also stopped his breathing rhythm, "But this commotion... it looks big."

Around the rugged corner of the slope, out of sight of Dai Lian and the others, a strand of red flame was suddenly spewed out from a hole in the earth by an upward gust of air.

This strand of red flame, unlike the other ashes that were spewed out and dispersed by the wind, seemed to have its own intelligence, drawing agile arcs in the air one after another and eventually burrowing back into the ground below.

Slivers of fiery red streaks flowed between chunks of grey-black boulders, much like the meridian network in the human body forms an ecosystem, transforming ordinary stones with no sign of life into a freely moving "entity."

With a muffled groan originating from who knows where, the giant stone figure stood in confusion for a moment before its "head," constructed like a human torso, turned towards the direction of the city and then took a large step forward.

A gasp was held by Kuang Xin and the others as the giant stone figure emerged from the rugged spot.

Kuang Xin was somewhat dumbfounded, "What in the world is this?"

Dai Lian was stupefied, "How the hell would I know?"

Gu Lan analyzed rationally, "Maybe it's a local specialty monster?"

Similar in fiery red color, compared to the creature just now referred to by the locals as a fire spirit beast—a standing lion only about twice the height of a human—the giant stone figure, still in the distance, already presented a visually stunning impact.

Watching the giant stone figure start to step out as if locking onto a direction, the three widened their eyes.

"Wait... does it look like it's heading straight for us? Did we breathe in its fragrance?"

"No kidding! It's about to step on your face and you're still wondering?"

"What do we do?"

"What do we do? Draw the sword and fight it!"

...

"Boss! There they are!" Wang Wenbo pointed excitedly at the three figures standing still in the distance.

Turning his head, he saw his boss already crouching behind a rock.

"Boss?"

"Boss?"

Yafei glared at the two sharply, frustrated as if regretting their incompetence, pointing towards a "big red dot" that had just begun to move in the distance.

"A lava behemoth! Are we just presenting ourselves to it? Wait and see what they plan to do first," she said.

Wang Wenyan squinted at the scene for a while, then scratched his cheek in confusion, "It looks like they're planning to charge?"

Chapter 484 Growth

"The Lava Monster is not so easy to deal with..."

Yafei lay behind a boulder, her eyes vacant as she looked towards the relatively charging figures in the distance.

Three tiny... no, there was one more.

Apart from the slightly elevated three, as the Wenbo brothers had mentioned, there was another small black dot further down at the foot of the mountain.

Upon spotting their companion on the mountain encountering the creature, the remaining black dot also started sprinting towards their companions.

The four tiny black dots scattered across the mottled grey-black earth were barely noticeable, in contrast to the giant stone figure striding down the slope, its height of over ten meters striking awe into onlookers.

In comparison, the three approaching dots seemed pathetically futile, like a mantis trying to stop a chariot.

Lava Monsters are creatures that appear periodically on volcanoes, and the rocks that seem to make up their bodies are not their core.

Players have observed these monsters forming—it is some unknown living flame that adheres to ordinary rocks.

This creature, once formed, would lock its vengeful gaze firmly on Grey Iron City, and all humans encountered on its path of destruction towards the city would be brutally trampled.

Those in Grey Iron City were all too familiar with such creatures; in fact, ordinary people stood no chance against them, and even those players who had successfully undergone one or two operations would not rashly confront such terrifying beasts.

One operation might barely allow an escape, two might allow a slightly more composed escape, but three... there were no such talents among the players yet.

Therefore, the Lava Monsters that were known to appear from time to time were affectionately and familiarly referred to by players as "the monster siege," a challenge that only the power of the city could withstand.

"The power of the Lava Monster is very strong, one must never be hit head-on," Wang Wenbo said with a tense expression, not wanting his boss's recent surge of joy and anticipation to be shattered in an instant.

If not for the fear of being affected by the aftermath of the battle, he would have liked to remind these seemingly reckless newcomers of the formidable strength of their adversary.

Unless it were one of those fierce men in the city who had undergone specialized third operations, no one could withstand even one punch from it.

Watching from afar as the three small black dots closed in, the hearts of the three onlookers leapt into their throats when the giant stone man raised its fist.

"Run!" Wang Wenyan clenched his fist tightly!

"Boom!"

The ground shook, dust spread.

The vibration reached their feet moments later, the rumbling echo resonating in their ears.

Squinting towards the now murky direction, the three wondered what carnage lay beneath the rising dust.

"Didn't I just say not to fight it head-on?" Wang Wenbo lamented in frustration.

Wang Wenyan reminded him softly, "They can't hear us from here."

"... Seeing such a large figure, shouldn't normal people know not to engage it head-on?"

Yafei remained silent. Her excellent eyesight as a sniper allowed her to catch a glimpse of a detail—

The Lava Monster's fist hadn't managed to smash directly to the ground...

A tiny black dot stood in front of it, blocking the creature's punch with arms that, from afar, looked no bigger than the tips of needles.

And slowly lifting it up...

"Uh, uh, uh, ah!"

Kuang Xin's forehead bulged with veins as he firmly braced his feet, sunk into the ground, against the earth behind his heels.

Absolute Defense, taught by Bai E, made his body sturdy as iron, fully integrated; by nature already biased towards physical prowess, under the Advanced Physical Training Program 3.0, his physical attributes had reached the human limit of 15 points. Added to his inherent brute force talent and the explosive power from Overlimit Drive, also taught by Bai E, his strength was beyond the imagination of an ordinary person.

At this moment, after initially blocking the energy-charged punch of the giant, the motionless stone fist was gradually lifted up.

Standing by, his teammate would not just watch Kuang Xin fight alone. Facing an unknown and strange giant creature, the best response was to take it down first.

Having put on the Spiritual Energy gloves once again, Gu Lan flexed his wrists and sprinted towards the stone man tussling with Kuang Xin. He stepped on the creature's rugged surface, reaching the top of its head, and with a raised fist, smashed down towards the rounded stone skull before him.

"Crack!"

The condensed Spiritual Energy was transformed into a substantive force by the mysterious function of the gloves, and the punch, which did not seem all that powerful, displayed an explosive force even more exaggerated than Kuang Xin's.

Spiritual Energy can morph anything.

Though each individual's Spiritual Energy has its own attributes and the tendencies often act as limitations, meaning individual Spiritual Energy cannot whimsically change.

But humans possess wisdom, and those craftsmen with Spiritual Energy create works that allow limited individuals to exhibit infinite variations.

Gu Lan, who had joined Kuang Xin's trio, never left her original guild since those guild players were, after all, on her payroll.

Thanks to the hard work of the "mining" personnel, this glove was another combat weapon she had acquired at great expense.

"No wonder the big gorilla loves close combat; it really is thrilling."

After causing the stone man to stagger, Gu Lan nimbly landed on the ground and, shaking her slightly sore wrist, chuckled to Dai Lian not far away.

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Dai Lian nodded, also feeling somewhat envious, "Indeed impressive."

The archery skills he had learned were more powerful, but nuclear weapons couldn't be released at will. For the time being, he didn't have enough Spiritual Energy to support using this kind of decisive technique as a regular attack. Before finding the stone creature's weakness, acting rashly was likely a waste of effort.

As for his other abilities... Gun Fighting Skill was certainly cool, but its power was limited by the firearms themselves, and with the guns he currently had, it was rare to break the defense of such stone giants.

Until Kuang Xin gathered more information, all he could do was simply watch the show.

"Boom!"

Having already been gaining a slight upper hand in the grappling, with Gu Lan's punch coming in support, the stone creature's center of gravity was disrupted, and it was immediately flipped over completely.

"RUA!"

Kuang Xin, having flipped his opponent, pursued his victory. Clenched fists covered in Absolute Defense force field couldn't stop pounding down on the stone creature pinned beneath him.

Even though these volcanic stones were fused into one entity by mysterious forces, the nature of their material was only so reinforced. Under the relentless pounding of Kuang Xin's fists, stone chips flew in all directions.

...

"GA!" The three onlookers in the distance dropped their jaws in an instant, watching this scene unfold before their eyes in utter disbelief.

"Isn't this fierce?"

Only someone with triple surgery could possibly achieve this feat, which even in their entire Grey Iron City would be considered a famous strongman.

"But one can't be careless. Besides strength, the molten giant's flames are bone-eating maggots; even the slightest touch would burn one to ash. Jumping into water won't extinguish it either."

...

"PFFT~"

Flames suddenly burst out from between the gaps of the stone assembly, and the fierce blast of heat made Kuang Xin, who had activated Absolute Defense, instinctively leap backward.

Absolute Defense blocked physical attacks, but it wasn't said to shield against magical attacks.

However, as someone with strength-oriented reflexes that weren't particularly excellent, and his whole being in an overexcited state during the heat of battle, he couldn't dodge in time and was still touched by the flames.

"HUHUHU~"

Watching a flame cling to his left arm, Kuang Xin instinctively tried to pat it out.

As a result, the flame, which was originally only on his left arm, was successfully transferred to his right palm as well.

The pain of the flame's scorch was not deep-seated for players, and amidst the scorching sting, there was even a kind of warm caressing sensation; Kuang Xin didn't feel pain, just curiously waved his hand and looked back at Dai Lian, his expression dopey as he said, "This fire can't be put out, right?"

[Your body is suffering from the scorching of flames, HP -1.]

[... HP -1.]

...

"Al!" Wang Wenbo sighed deeply, "Might as well amputate early..."

Yafei pinched his chin, mumbling to himself, "It seems they truly aren't locals."

The people of Grey Iron City wouldn't be unaware of the traits of the molten giants; even those with great strength who could withstand the giants didn't dare to engage in close combat continuously—the opponent's irregular flame eruptions were the greatest threat to those close-combat brutes.

"Should we go inform them to run away, instead of dying here?" Wang Wenyan suggested quietly, "The molten giant isn't something a few people can take down."

...

"Boss?"

"Wait." Yafei gestured with a wave of his hand, stopping Wang Wenyan, who wanted to run out and warn them.

In the distance, the situation had undergone a new change; the fourth person, who had been further away, had finally caught up with the three ahead during this drawn-out struggle.

Without knowing what the newly arrived figure did, the flames attached to one of the black dots abruptly vanished.

...

What kind of supernatural power was this?

...

"Yanzi?"

Having merged Spiritual Energy with medical skills, Gong Yan easily extinguished the flames and turned to Kuang Xin with a soft smile, "Don't worry, I'm here."

"Boom!"

The stone giant's fist, carrying the roar of the wind, slammed over, and without looking back, Kuang Xin reached out with one hand to block it... and then was sent flying like a solid cannonball.

As if to confirm the result of his attack, the stone giant's eyeless head also turned toward the direction Kuang Xin was flying, nodding rhythmically in time with the bouncing of Kuang Xin's body off the ground, like skipping stones on water.

The gentle hum of the Longsword had started without notice, its sharp edge tearing through countless fragments of stone, striking a strand of flowing red energy inside the stone.

Like a snake struck in its vital spot, the red energy struggled and writhed frantically, as the stone figure also began to move violently, trying to throw off the diminutive human clinging onto it.

Gu Lan's figure called out clearly, "Dai, right here!"

While entangling the stone beast, Kuang Xin had not been idle. With her deeper mastery of Spiritual Energy, she had seen more than others from the start of the fight, and with each encounter, her keen Spiritual Energy had locked onto the "fatal weakness" of the stone giant.

Clinging single-handedly to the stone surface and holding back the opponent's escape with her own Spiritual Energy and the red energy, Gu Lan gritted her teeth fiercely, her voice popping out from her throat, "Hurry... ah!"

"Got it," Dai Lian responded calmly, his hands already drawing the bow and readying an arrow.

The heat of a volcanic wave gathered at the tips of his right fingers, while ash-gray dust swirled visibly around the arrow.

...

"Lava Behemoth..."

"Stop with the behemoth..." Wang Wenyan tugged at her brother, pointing toward the figure standing with a drawn bow, and said to the boss, "It's him. He exploded a Fire Spirit Beast with a single arrow."

Although the Fire Spirit Beast's rank and strength were far inferior to that of the Lava Behemoth, the feat of killing it with one shot was unheard of.

And now, the same strike was to be displayed upon the Lava Behemoth.

Yafei's gaze sharpened slightly, the imagination in her head during the younger brother's storytelling spilling into reality at this moment.

This was a power she had never seen before; could these people really be the hope for this city?

...

Fingers released, arrow flew.

A hurricane of flame swept through, the steel arrow piercing the stone.

"Snap!"

A hole large enough for a clay pot appeared, completely through from front to back, leaving the red energy previously pinned by the Longsword nowhere to be found, causing the red lines in the stone figure's fissures to scatter instantly.

Like the vanquished Fire Spirit Beast, the now 'coreless' boulder resumed its original complexion, its constituent parts cascading to the ground, spreading around in a scatter.

"Whew~ whew~" Gu Lan, who had just landed, clutched her waist and bent over, her hands on her knees, breathing heavily. Although the fight seemed smooth and without hitch, it had been immensely draining on her.

If there was another, she doubted she could hold on.

"But seriously, I can't figure it out – why are we going toe-to-toe with it?"

"...I can't make sense of it either," said Dai Lian, putting away his bow, deliberately averting his gaze.
"Weren't you the one who charged first?"

Gu Lan rolled her eyes irritably, "It was the gorilla who charged first."

"Don't we need to test the caliber of the local beasts whenever we arrive at a new place?" Kuang Xin, who had been punched away and was now lively and jumping, ran back up, "It's also a chance to check our teamwork and current combat strength~"

"Spontaneous incidents show the real strength more. We're much stronger than before," Gong Yan summarized with a smile, walking up to Gu Lan with a little bag, lifting one of her arms, "You're hurt."

"Ah~" Gu Lan looked at her blood-soaked arm, only then realizing she had been injured, "Haha~ Didn't notice."

As Gong Yan bent down to tend to the wounds on her back, facing a certain direction, she whispered so only those nearby could hear, "There are people behind us."

"Ah~" Dai Lian looked straight in that direction, replying, "I see them... they're coming over."

"... Those are the two kids we saved earlier."

"Be careful; even a lifesaving grace might not be reliable."

Chapter 486 Are you guys also players?!

As they approached, Yafei pushed Wang Wenbo from behind, causing the youngster to stagger right in front of Kuang Xin and his group.

After steadying himself, Wang Wenbo touched the back of his head and looked at Kuang Xin with a beaming smile, "Um... folks, good day. We... we're the two fellas you just saved. Got too nervous and ran off, but now, we brought our sister over to thank you."

With Wang Wenbo's introduction, Yafei smoothly made her entrance.

With her hands clasped behind her back and a bright smile on her face, "Yes sir, these two kids just lose their heads and run when they get nervous. They don't even think to thank their saviors."

"It was nothing," Dai Lian said, approaching from the side and casually waving his hand, "What were you trying to do before, going up the mountain?"

Knowing nothing about the place, Dai Lian cautiously tried to pry information out bit by bit.

"Them?" Yafei glanced at her two brothers behind her, explaining with a bitter smile, "We're not much capable, so we risk our lives looking for scattered minerals near those vents to exchange for meager funds. The vents near the city side of the volcano are pretty much cleaned out, and we dare not venture higher, so we thought to try our luck on this shadow side of the mountain. Running into those fire sprites was just plain bad luck."

Guessing that these folks might be powerful NPCs from other regions, Yafei proactively revealed information, trying to see if she could trigger some pivotal quest keywords.

"..." Dai Lian squinted, his brain rapidly analyzing.

The limited information he had gathered was that in this city, abilities were solely determined by surgeries, and those who were struggling often had no surgeries or had failed surgeries. Only these people were less regulated by the city's control.

But it wasn't guaranteed that these people wouldn't try to accomplish great deeds hoping for better treatment because of their low status.

If they truly appeared like clueless newcomers from outside the city, they could easily be tricked and exploited by others.

Although with their cleverness it was unlikely they'd fall for it, wasting time was unnecessary either.

So, it was better to maintain a sense of mystery, play it safe. If the others had ulterior motives, they'd surely make the first move.

"A small deed, done in passing, not worth mentioning," Dai Lian said airily, his calm demeanor unshakable.

"Um... folks~" Yafei's spirited eyes flicked to the huge pile of boulders scattered around from being shot through, "The combat skills you used just now, we've never seen 'em before... they don't seem to be a trademark of our city?"

Dai Lian's lips curved into a smile, full of mystery, "Oh? You've seen a lot?"

"Seen a lot... it's decent," Yafei giggled, "If you're not familiar with the city, perhaps we could show you around? Where would you like to go?"

"..." Dai Lian didn't say anything, just calmly watched the young girl in front of him.

This was something he had learned from his own superior... the demeanor of a powerful figure.

Sure enough, Yafei immediately took a half step back and just waved her hand, "Of course... if you need privacy, we can leave right away, we'll never breathe a word about you!"

"That won't be necessary." Gu Lan knew it was time for him to chime in, working in sync with Dai Lian. He strode forward with a cheerful smile, "Are you familiar with this city?"

"Of course!" Yafei stood tall and proud, "Whatever you wish to do, I can find a way for you."

"Is this your way of repaying us?" Gu Lan's lips curved slightly.

"Um..." Yafei giggled as she pinched her fingertips, "It would be even better if you all would help us out with a little favor."

"Speak up, what do you need?" Dai Lian asked in a level tone.

"We are just some nobodies who aren't qualified for surgery..." Yafei said pitifully, "It seems like you didn't get your strengths through surgery either, so if it's convenient... we were hoping you could teach us, the methods of cultivation."

Of course, it's important to seek a benefactor, but it was also essential to gain some power for oneself.

NPCs have their combat narratives; however, the decisive factor in victory might still rely on the confrontations between players.

Rat Camp was full of people who had undergone successful surgeries, whereas they had either not had surgery or had failed surgeries, and there was a natural gap in power. If they couldn't find another way to bridge this overall disparity, it was highly likely they wouldn't stand a chance against their rivals.

Therefore, to overthrow the heinous rule of this city, not only did they need a leading figure to charge, but they also needed other underground professional mentors beyond the path of surgery.

Perhaps these gentlefolk before them...

"Teach you?" Gu Lan chuckled and shook his head, "No way, you couldn't learn it."

"We're all quick learners." Hearing a glimmer of hope, Yafei said anxiously, trying to persuade.

Could their, the players', understanding ever be poor?

If the NPCs were willing to teach, they simply had to spend experience points to learn.

Having been in this game world for quite a while, Yafei knew a fact—sometimes you have to take the initiative to gain something.

"..." Dai Lian's eyes sharpened with clever thought, and he instantly considered a possibility.

Quick to understand, doing poorly, yet so spirited and vivacious...

Chapter 487 Are you guys also players?!_2

Gong Yan, who had remained silent at the back, now stepped forward as if surprised and excited, "You guys are players too?"

"..."

"..."

Stunned as if having seen a ghost.

All three faces were blank.

The word "too" provided enough explanation—the four incredibly powerful individuals, were they also players?!

"You... you're players too?" Wang Wenbo, who had only spoken at the beginning and then stayed behind the leader without saying a word, now stepped forward with a choked yet excited tone.

"Ah~" Gu Lan turned to look at Gong Yan with a calm demeanor, seemingly acknowledging it.

Dai Lian also glanced at Gong Yan with a slightly puzzled look but didn't say much, maintaining his "cool" persona.

Going from being referred to as "superiors" to suddenly becoming fellow players felt like all the swagger from before had vanished completely.

"You guys are so amazing!" Now knowing they were all players, Wang Wenyan immediately jumped in front of Kuang Xin, who had been standing with his arms crossed, "Dude, you're so fierce to be able to solo the Lava Giant. How did you train?"

"Ah haha~" Kuang Xin scratched the back of his head, "Ordinary... ordinary... "

Always hanging out with this group of a few people in the team, and being teased by them, now it was somewhat embarrassing to be praised to his face...

Yafei's eyes, filled with disbelief, swept back and forth across Dai Lian's and Gu Lan's faces, as if just realizing the fact, her face full of astonishment, "You're players too?"

Players!

Players, indeed!

Where had they ever seen players as fierce as this in Grey Iron City?

Even those few who had successfully completed the second surgery and strutted around the city, their performances weren't so exaggerated.

The first and second surgeries were all about basic physical enhancements, and the strengthened cardiac and pulmonary functions ensured greater physical burst power as well as endurance and recovery.

But to have those people face off against a Lava Giant...

No matter how many came, it would be like delivering food to the beast.

Yet just now, these four players, who didn't carry any high-powered thermal weapons, managed to easily take down a Lava Giant with simple coordination!

Are the players from the outer city all this strong?

If the informed players of Grey Iron City knew about this, wouldn't they have already turned the world upside down?

This strength was definitely not average; it was merely that the few players before them were top-tier.

Indeed... at this stage, players who could leave their birthplaces and cross vast wastelands to come to other cities, how could they be anything but tough?

"You guys... are too fierce."

'That seems quite thrilling, doesn't it?'

Dai Lian's expression remained unchanged, "Average."

"What quest did you come here for? Can you take us with you?" When there was no conflict of interest, communication between players was much more straightforward; Yafei moved closer, hugging their legs tightly.

Without any interest conflicts, as long as one had a sweet mouth to shout "666", it was often possible to follow behind the big players and get a share of the loot.

Gong Yan smiled warmly and took the initiative to come closer, "We've taken on a quest to find something in Grey Iron City."

"Something? What something?" Yafei puffed out her chest, "Just give me a name, and I can tell you where to find it."

"Stabilizing Repair Fluid."

"..."

"Is it difficult?" Gong Yan kindly inquired, seeing the change in Yafei's expression.

"It's not too hard," Yafei's face stiffened, "just a bit troublesome..."

The city might never have intended to strictly control everyone by creating a demand for Stabilizing Repair Fluid as a required resource for surgery, but since it was something everyone needed, limited supply was an inevitable consequence.

Only those who had undergone surgery were eligible to participate in scheduled check-ups, receiving a limited amount of Stabilizing Repair Fluid and getting it injected on the spot, with no chance to squirrel any away.

There was hardly any way to obtain the substance through official channels.

Of course, where there were people, there were schemes. Black markets indeed had a small circulation of low-grade Stabilizing Repair Fluid, along with the shoddy counterfeit products made by private workshops in some cities. As for their effectiveness, it was all down to luck.

"If you're planning to spend a fortune to buy it... I could find some for you, but I can't guarantee the quality. Or, do you have some special channels of your own?"

"You just mentioned... grades?"

"Yes..." Yafei nodded, "The more surgeries you've had, the higher the grade of fluid you need. The black market primarily trades in grade one and two fluids. Anyone who has successfully undergone more than three surgeries is considered a core pillar of the city, and those involved in such clandestine activities don't dare to leak such resources. Getting caught would mean a death sentence. No one dares to buy, and no one dares to sell... at least, not to my knowledge."

"..."

Dai Lian, Gong Yan, and the others exchanged glances, falling into a wordless silence.

Seeing their expressions, Yafei guessed their mission target, "So... it's not high-grade Stabilizing Repair Fluid you need, is it?"

"..."

"I see..." Yafei nodded, "At your level, the type of mission you might take on would indeed be this challenging. Otherwise, you wouldn't have traveled from afar. By the way, where are you from?"

"Blackwater City," Kuang Xin replied cheerfully.

All players, and almost all buddies.

Dai Lian's brows were tightly furrowed, his mind preoccupied with the mission, "So, is there a chance or not?"

"There is, but it's going to be tough," Yafei didn't completely dash their hopes, "the city's armory. Maybe we can figure out a way to sneak in and steal some. We'll definitely be wanted by the city afterward, but since you're from outside, you can just run after the job is done. I've heard someone tried it before... They got caught... but we could learn from their approach."

"Steal?" Dai Lian echoed the word, his gaze peculiar.

"You... don't plan to rob it, do you?"

"If we can drive in and fill a truck, then I don't see any problem with 'stealing'," Gu Lan explained with an amused grin.

Before leaving, the elder had instructed them to bring back as much as they could.

After all, this was a resource they would need to supply over the long term; they couldn't just run to Grey Iron City every now and then. It was best to fill up all at once.

"How much do you actually need?!" Yafei's mouth hung open in shock.

Using a vehicle to load? She couldn't even begin to imagine how generous the reward for this mission would be.

"But no matter how generous the reward, it's useless if the mission couldn't be completed, right? The four of you are strong, but you can't fight an entire city," Yafei sincerely began to worry for them, "Why not drop the mission? Getting caught would really mean a death sentence, and there's no resurrection in these early stages of the game. With your strength today, you shouldn't take this kind of risk."

"No way!" they exclaimed in unison.

Faced with four resolute faces, Yafei was momentarily taken aback.

Chih-ch'ang.

The rewards must truly be outrageous.

"How about... we head back to our station first, and I'll try to find you some connections?" Yafei offered her suggestion.

"That works."

...

"Do you usually live in places like this?" Looking around the dimly lit surroundings, Kuang Xin asked curiously.

"Ah~" Yafei smiled helplessly, as an unknown type of fungus emitted a faint bioluminescence, maintaining the dim light inside the room and causing the young girl's face to appear somewhat shadowy and elusive, "There's no helping it. Those of us who don't want to undergo surgery hide in places like this."

It was an underground natural hollow, with numerous small "rooms" created by the wanton growth of stalactites, each "room" filled with silhouettes.

"Here, not only players but more so... those NPCs who refuse cybernetic enhancements and those whose surgeries failed."

Everyone needed the basics: food, shelter, clothing, travel, including players.

Huddling together for warmth was necessary, as was a certain amount of resource exchange.

This was the last sanctuary for players who refused cybernetic enhancements, though it could hardly be called delightful.

"Rest here for a while. You can talk to the Wang brothers about anything. I'll go find you some connections," Yafei had everything arranged and waved goodbye, "Wait for my good news."

Chapter 488 Assault Plan

"It seems their surgery indeed has a very high failure rate."

When they first heard that surgery could directly and drastically enhance one's physical quality, Kuang Xin and the others were also very tempted.

In a sci-fi game world, the setting of body enhancement through surgery wasn't something they rejected, and since it was just a game, as long as it wasn't too outrageous, no one would refuse actual strength increase.

While coming to Grey Iron City to complete tasks, they also harbored the thought of strengthening themselves through the surgeries offered here.

Add to that, they were destined to bring back a large quantity of Repair Stabilizing Liquid; if they skimmed a bit for themselves, they could ensure that they wouldn't be controlled by others due to this special resource.

But now...

Before their eyes were either the numb, withered faces of refugees or the feeble figures of the disabled with missing arms and legs.

With high surgery failure rates and great risks, even the native residents of the city refused those free body enhancement surgeries.

Just like the young girl said earlier, they had worked hard to obtain their current level of strength development, there was no need to gamble their future in the game on an uncertain factor.

The four arrived in a strange environment and for a moment, no one spoke. They all scanned everything within sight with scrutinizing gazes, silently observing the place.

"Ugh~"

A muffled grunt emerged from somewhere in the silent darkness.

"Hiss~" The man who cried out in pain clutched his chest. Awakened from deep sleep by the pain, he instinctively let out a cry. But knowing his voice would only resonate with others suffering from similar pains, the man forced himself to suppress the impulse to cry out and ease his agony, yet the tearing-like sharp pains still made him uncontrollably let out a hoarse whimper from his throat.

Noticing that Kuang Xin and the others were looking in that direction, Wang Wenbo, who had been standing by the side, took the initiative to explain, "Everyone is like this, the underground is damp and dark, their wounds easily become infected and worsen... There are hardly any painkillers; they can only endure it on their own."

"" Gong Yan tightened the small pack slung over her shoulder and walked towards that direction, "I'll take a look."

"She's a doctor," Gu Lan volunteered.

"But..." Wang Wenyan began to speak but was gently pulled back by Wang Wenbo in secret.

Watching the silhouette painstakingly navigate the uneven ground in the dim light, Dai Lian's eyes were filled with tenderness.

"She's still so kind-hearted."

She couldn't bear to see people suffer, even if they were just some unremarkable NPCs.

The injuries of the surgery failure cases weren't particularly complicated; otherwise, they couldn't have survived until now. With timely care, or even just a clean environment and sufficient nutrition, they could easily recover.

But even these were mere pipe dreams.

The worsening wounds weren't complicated to treat. Using the medicine she brought, she easily treated the wounds and then bandaged them; the man awoken by the pain fell back into a warm slumber in the waves of drowsiness amidst the peaceful and tranquil surroundings.

Looking at the now stably-breathing person who had fallen asleep in front of her, Gong Yan's lips held a pure smile.

["Knowledge—Bandaging (First Aid)" has reached its maximum level and cannot be improved.]

Even if her skill proficiency had maxed out, this experience was still novel and interesting to her.

And watching this unfold nearby, a man with a lame leg hopped up in excitement and hopped towards her, "You're a doctor, right? You're a doctor, right? Please take a look at me! Please take a look at me! See if this leg can stand normally again! I beg you! I beg you! I really need a pair of legs that can move normally!"

"Don't rush! Don't rush!" Gong Yan quickly got up to meet him, ignoring the foul stench of rotting flesh on him and supported his arms, "Sit down first, let me see what's wrong."

But the man's cries carried far in the dark and quiet cave, no doubt drawing nearly everyone's attention.

"Doctor!"

This term was not often heard in this place.

Those who performed surgeries on everyone were also called "doctors."

But those were devils! They were "demons" that brought misfortune to everyone here.

Yet, if one could alleviate everyone's suffering, a "doctor" appearing here was undoubtedly someone everyone would pray for and long for.

In an instant, numerous frail or disabled figures struggled to their feet, surging toward the direction whence the voice had emanated.

A mass of shadows, the noise of footsteps and cries filled the previously quiet and peaceful underground cavity.

"Doctor, save me! Cough, cough, cough! Doctor, save me! I'm dying! I'm dying! I don't want to die!"

"Doctor! Please save my father! He was crushed by two boulders working in a dark mine, and now his entire body is almost rotting away..."

"Doctor..."

"Doctor!"

The crowd surged like throwing a handful of bloody meat into a shark tank, triggering an instant uproar.

Even Wang Wenbo, who had anticipated something like this, was startled.

He knew that a situation like this would arise, having stayed here for so long, he was all too aware of what a doctor meant to everyone here.

Chapter 489 Assault Plan_2

However, it was precisely because he knew that he deliberately did not remind them.

Gong Yan couldn't bear to see the people here suffer, and neither could he.

It was just that his own abilities were insufficient, so now that someone was willing to provide treatment, he was naturally happy to go with the flow.

But... it was too chaotic.

In such chaos, it was too easy for accidents to happen.

Barbarism always instilled fear in those who adhered to order.

Realizing that the situation was spiraling out of control, Kuang Xin and others immediately went up to help, forming a human wall hand-in-hand and did their utmost to prevent the crowd from getting too close to Gong Yan, all the while shouting loudly for everyone to keep their rationality.

"Don't panic! Don't panic! Everyone will get a turn! Everyone will get a turn!"

"Stay where you are, we'll take care of everyone!"

"Stop pushing! There's going to be trouble!"

Everyone was shouting at the top of their lungs.

Some were desperate for salvation, others pursued order.

But in the chaos, there was no order, and hard objects flying out of the darkness landed on the foreheads of those forming the human barrier.

Feeling an itch on his scalp after being hit by a stone, and only when a thread of that itch reached the center of his forehead and was about to burrow into his eye socket did Wang Wenbo subconsciously reach up to wipe it.

His hand came away slick...

Realizing what had happened, Wang Wenbo couldn't care about anything else, and just wiped his hand casually on his own clothes before gripping his comrade's hand tightly once more, trying hard to block the crowd in front of him, and he shouted loudly, "Stop pushing! If you scare the doctor away, then there will be no one to take care of you!"

"Ah!"

"Ah!"

The crush of bodies was a threat not only to Kuang Xin and others; in the crowded swarm, incidents of shoving and trampling were prone to happen, and screams were piercing even amidst the chaos.

"Bang bang bang bang bang!"

Loud gunshots suddenly echoed throughout the cavern, and it was this violent outburst that brought the excited crowd back to their senses.

Gong Yan held a pistol, standing behind the wall formed by Kuang Xin and others, her gaze calm as she swept over the crowd in front of her and said softly, "I can give each and every one of you a physical examination, but you must return to your own places. I will move to each position methodically and without missing anyone. Do not try to disrupt my schedule, or I will leave immediately. I won't repeat myself, and I think this is your only chance."

The calm voice conveyed firmness... and confidence.

No one dared question the "doctor's" word.

Their lives were too humble for them to dare question someone with authority.

Someone opened their mouth wanting to beg for special treatment, but in an instant their mouth was covered by the quick hands of someone nearby, turning their plea into a brief whimper.

"Disperse, disperse, everyone go back."

"Don't disturb the doctor. The faster the doctor works, the quicker it will be your turn, stop causing trouble."

Silence, reluctance, departure...

Amid a mix of expressions, the crowd finally quieted down again.

After bandaging the broken leg with gauze, Gong Yan whispered, "Don't touch water, limit movement, for at least a week, I'll remember to change your dressing."

"Thank... thank you." Knowing what his cry of alarm had precipitated, the man stuttered his thanks, a little afraid to meet Gong Yan's eyes.

"It's okay..." Gong Yan smiled softly at him, "What did you used to do before?"

"Me?" The man looked embarrassed, "A gigolo..."

"That's fine." Gong Yan patted his shoulder and stood up to head in another direction.

Seeing Gong Yan's approach, the man who was leaning against the damp and cold wall and gasping for air was clearly surprised, "My... my lord."

"Don't be excited, stay calm." Gong Yan's voice was even as she squatted down, starting to check the man's condition with her own methods, and idly asked, "What did you used to do?"

"A miner underground..."

...

As evening arrived and the faint light from outside the cave had long since dimmed, the silhouette of a young girl suddenly rushed in through the entrance.

Seeing several silent big brothers who had come from the outer city, Yafei asked with a bright smile on her face, "One piece of good news and one piece of bad news, which do you want to hear first?"

Dai Lian's eyes lit up as he promptly replied, "The bad one first."

The good is the surprise, and the bad can be planned for in advance.

No matter what difficulties they faced, anything that stood in their way of achieving their goals needed to be dealt with.

"The bad?" Yafei spread her hands, "Apart from robbing the military armory, I haven't found a second way to obtain high-grade Stabilizing Repair Fluid."

"Hmm," Dai Lian nodded.

This plan was discussed by everyone upon first meeting; he had been prepared for a while.

If it comes to it, they'll just fight. They'll worry about the rest if they can't win.

He then asked, "What about the good?"

"The good is that the main force of the city is out!" Yafei was excited, this was a pleasant surprise for her as well, "I heard from the brothers guarding the city that one night some time ago, our city's Dr. Wang, along with most of the private guards from our city, left it all at once and haven't returned as of yet. By the way, you might not know this, but Dr. Wang is the actual controller of our city, his private guards are the top most loyal forces here, and the ones usually maintaining the city's Order are just contractors. As for the remaining forces, they are like scattered sand; they have no direct connection with the armory. If we want to make a move on the armory, they might even create chaos to help us out."

Dr. Wang did not directly control the city with an iron fist, nor was he stingy with the essential Stabilizing Repair Fluid for all those who underwent surgery, which led to an unstable city ecosystem whenever he was personally absent.

There were many who wanted to show their sincere loyalty as well as many who wanted to fish in troubled waters.

"Do you still have people?" Yafei's expression was full of excitement.

The thought of attacking the city's military armory was exhilarating.

What were players here in the game for?

Destruction! Devastation! Rebellion!

Players were born free, all things are illusions, and everything is permitted!

"Call the rest of your people, shall we start a guild raid?!"

"Ah?" Dai Lian was slightly startled, not understanding why the girl had such a strange idea, "The rest of our people?"

"Ah~" Yafei looked puzzled, "You don't have anyone else?"

How could they think about driving a car straight into a grand military armory of a city if they had no one?

She thought that to gather such top-notch elites, an extremely formidable guild in the real world must have organized to deploy all of its resources to carry out a grand guild task.

Just waiting for the elite vanguard to gather intelligence, then the entire guild's force would surge forward to carve out a high-difficulty task reward for their top fighters with a sea of people strategy.

This was a commonly used trick by large guilds, and Yafei knew it well.

But...

"I think you have misunderstood..." Gu Lan shook his head, "We only have four people."

"You four are planning to rob a military armory?" Now it was Yafei's turn to be astounded.

Who would think of storming a city's military armory with just four people?

Even though there might be many among the forces in the city who harbored thoughts of chaos, the necessary condition was that the commotion had to be big enough to start a fight!

For minor disturbances... who cares about catching a few petty thieves?

"Then should we just abandon the mission? No other choice."

Yafei's face fell, and the excitement from before flew away.

A pair of dull eyes scanned over one, two, three, three... huh?

Three?

Wasn't it four people? How did it turn to three? Now there's even less reason to fight.

"Where's your fourth person?"

"Her?" Kuang Xin looked back into the darkness somewhat sorrowfully.

It had been a whole day... Yanzi hadn't rested.

Even in a game, one would feel tired, right?

"I'm here." A calm voice sounded from behind Kuang Xin and the others, as Gong Yan walked over from the darkness, her face showing a hint of fatigue.

"Are you done?"

"You've worked hard."

Dai Lian and Gu Lan offered their comfort first, Gong Yan smiled and shook her head, then turned to look at Yafei, who was half a head shorter, "No, we still have a way."

Chapter 490 out

"Is there another way?" Yafei looked at the stunningly beautiful woman, somewhat puzzled.

"Of course, there's another way," Gong Yan turned her head to look at the darkness behind her and said softly, "Them."

Seeing is believing.

This was the main reason Gong Yan took the initiative to treat everyone in the cave.

The accounts from Yafei were after all just one-sided, coming from her perspective alone. Only the facts observed through one's own eyes and ears could truly restore the truth of the matter.

Most of Grey Iron City's population had long been complaining about the city's mandatory surgery policy for every individual, and the lack of responsibility taken for any failed operations. The calls to break this policy and restore their peaceful lives were growing louder.

Of course, the ones I asked on the train were those who had bought tickets, and those I asked in this underground cave were all the ones dissatisfied with the policy; the number of those who benefited from the policy was still unknown.

But even if the proportion was small, the existence of these people could not be ignored.

Given the huge base number, it's clear that not a few people in the city harbor resentment towards this policy. If we could rally these people into a force, then a surprise attack on the city's limitedly defended armory wouldn't just be empty talk.

Bullets can easily penetrate flesh, but even a multitude of weapons needs people to use them.

With people, everything becomes possible.

"But they're too weak," Yafei shook her head, not feeling optimistic, "They can't even secure the nutrition needed for a normal life, let alone expect them to fight. Unless you're willing to spend a lot of resources and wait a long enough time, let them regain their health, and train them to be real fighters."

"No," Gong Yan had her personnel gathered, and Dai Lian's thoughts became clear again, "as long as they can have a full meal, everyone has the courage to give it their all."

As he said this, Dai Lian looked at Yafei with burning eyes, "You said that the 'flame breath' we obtained after killing the lava monster can be traded for low-grade Stabilizing Repair Fluid, but what if it's traded for water, food, medicine, and other supplies for them?"

"Two months!" Yafei blurted out, seemingly having calculated this before.

As soon as she spoke, she realized her reaction might seem odd to the others, so she hurriedly explained, "The 'flame breath' produced by the lava monsters is the only top-tier wealth we might come across. Every time such creatures appear, we consider whether we can kill one on our own to sell for money, so we've already calculated what treasures like these could be exchanged for. There are about four or five hundred people here, and a strand of 'flame breath' will be enough to feed all of us for two months."

"No! That's not necessary," Gong Yan shook her head, "Our mission is time-sensitive; two months is too long."

"A single bite can't fatten a person, we can't possibly condition everyone's body to perfection with food alone, instantaneously."

"I never said we were counting on their individual qualities, what we need is... numbers."

If four or five hundred people can eat for two months, then what if the time is shortened to one month, half a month... or even a week?

Wouldn't that mean a thousand people, two thousand people, or even four thousand?

In such a big city, how could there be only this handful of people resisting city policies, surviving by the skin of their teeth?

After some investigation, Gong Yan easily learned that there were more than just this gathering place hiding from city inspections in the city's periphery. By treating injuries and providing water and food, one might quickly raise a large group of people willing to risk everything once with her as an "army."

"This..." Yafei was stunned by the grand idea of the glamorous older sister in front of her.

Mobilize the city's entire underground force at once? What grand ambitions.

This was a path Yafei had never considered, and a direction the past her could never have reached.

"So... what do we need to do?" Yafei asked softly.

"Procure enough supplies."

"Too many."

If it were just trading for a bit of Stabilizing Repair Fluid, that would be manageable; a few boxes could be carried all at once, it would be risky, but not too conspicuous.

But if it's trading for water, food, medicine, the sheer size of the supplies could easily attract covetous eyes.

"When the time comes, I need you to help me."

Only force is the absolute guarantee for such dangerous behavior.

"No problem," Dai Lian agreed immediately.

"Additionally, I need you to help investigate the defense forces near the armory, as well as all the forces and the surrounding terrain environment that may be involved in this action. If possible, get another batch of weapons as well. If funds are tight, we can appropriately reduce some food and medicine supplies."

Even ordinary handguns are better than nothing.

"Okay, I'll try."

Yafei nodded in agreement, feeling a rush of excitement at the prospect of working under such formidable leadership.

Having grown up in this shitty city for so long, she had long been irked by those awful things. Now, with the chance to challenge such detestable rules, her body was trembling with excitement.

Watching Yafei's petite figure disappear back into the darkness, Kuang Xin and Dai Lian turned as if they didn't know each other and stared together at Gong Yan, their eyes filled with surprise.

"Why look at me like that?" Gong Yan's face always bore that gentle, water-like smile, "While treating them earlier, I gathered some information. I think if we need to, we might be able to make use of them."