

Wow 801

Chapter 801: set off! To the stars!

[Main Quest—Absolute Rule, Completed.]

[Absolute Rule (Epilogue): Along the path of your growth, you've seen countless sights you've never encountered before, forged lifelong friendships, and taken your first steps onto a corner of this world's stage. But the world remains vast for you. After completing a meticulously planned endeavor, new choices now lie before you. Every relational network you've ever known since your birth converges upon this planet, but the pursuit curse from the dominators during the nest purging leaves you deeply concerned for this planet's fate.

Should you remain on this planet, focusing on building defensive measures to prepare for the next wave of Bug Race attack? Or venture toward the unknown cosmic star field, guiding their pursuit toward a bigger stage in the vast universe while exploring new worlds?]

Pale blue subtitles intertwined and emerged before his eyes, and two mutually exclusive options finally materialized—

Explore the Universe √×

Develop the Planet √×

Faced with the choices laid out before him, Bai E instinctively used his thoughts to tap on the pale blue subtitles, wanting to examine the detailed requirements for each route...

Develop the Planet: Eliminate at least 90% of threats on the planet and establish sufficient ground and space defenses to confront the potential incoming Bug Race fleets.

Explore the Universe: Leave the planet, fly into the cosmos, and uncover the truth of the worlds...

Initially, Bai E thought the next steps would inevitably lead to the Star Sea, but unexpectedly, the main quest offered a second option.

Between the two paths provided, the development route on the planet was straightforward; Bai E could almost foresee his future of leading troops on expeditions, systematically eliminating threats like Bug nests, Orcs, artificial beings, and other calamity species threatening human life.

Yet such a future felt far too dull and rigid.

While clearing threats would indeed be necessary, establishing defense systems... what did that have to do with him?

That was work for talented minds in the scientific field. While Bai E had some grasp of technology, he held no interest in it whatsoever.

On the other hand, the option to explore the universe—though its description was brief and concise—was more than enough to stir a longing gaze toward the distant unknown.

A true man must conquer the universe!

He clicked on the option requirements merely to satisfy his curiosity; the inclination to explore the universe had never wavered in Bai E's heart.

Bai E's thoughts aggressively pointed at the "v" beneath "Explore the Universe," and a brand-new choice ushered him to a new journey—

[You have achieved clarity in your aspirations for the future. Main Quest—Departure, Activated.]

[Departure: You now possess the initial capital required for cosmic exploration. From this moment, begin constructing your own Cosmic Starship and venture forth into the unknown starry skies! Quest Requirement: Acquire foundational knowledge about the universe. Quest Reward: Spiritual Energy Level +1.]

What had unfolded within Bai E's consciousness appeared externally as no more than the span of a single breath.

Representatives of various factions standing before Bai E still waited for his next move.

Fixing his gaze on those expectant eyes, Bai E softly addressed the temporary leader of the Storm Battalion through their communicator, "Stone, that's enough. Order all warriors to retreat; tonight's operations have gone far enough."

Bai E certainly had plans to reform the city's current dynamics.

However, those changes required time to subtly take shape. On a night already stained with so much bloodshed, drastic reforms were impossible.

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As dawn came and nightmares of sleepless unrest faded, those residents in The Lower City who hadn't participated in the turmoil cautiously emerged upon hearing the security patrol's alarm bells outside.

The iron thoroughfares were riddled with potholes; certain structural beams serving as load-bearing supports had even suffered deformation.

Over time, these structural damages would become critical, making repairs and maintenance the central theme of upcoming operations.

Countless uniformed soldiers were scattered across every corner of the city, clearing the burned, war-torn corpses—be it dead security team members or casualties from the rebel gangs.

Caravans carrying bodies had already hauled away a substantial number, yet the air still bore distinct traces of gunpowder and the bloody, metallic tang of iron.

For some, last night's chaos had been the final revelry of their lives.

But to the city, what it left behind was predominantly pain.

Of course... not all of it was pain.

Setting aside the brave security team members who had perished, the rebel gang forces soaked in an instinctive pursuit of chaos had nearly been obliterated in last night's strife—a small consolation for the city.

To remove these disruptors was akin to cutting away rotting flesh from a body; only then could the remaining parts move forward lightly and freely.

The city's official forces securing ultimate victory was nothing surprising to the residents. For them, survival until morning made the outcome inevitable.

What truly surprised them was the announcement looping on the city broadcast—

"During last night's unrest, the previous city ruler tragically perished. Bai E, the General, has now assumed the role of city ruler. Under Bai E's leadership, we believe our city will only grow stronger and brighter!"

"General Bai E?" Many residents were unfamiliar with the name.

But what did it matter?

The upper-echelon rulers had no shortage of unfamiliar names. The residents hardly cared who held power.

Regardless of who it was, their lives would remain the same.

It was still the military soldiers that were reliable.

They'd eradicated the Bug Race nest from the Black Rock District, securing Blackwater City's surroundings and enabling everyone to return to the surface.

Wait... Could this General Bai E be the actual hero of the military who spearheaded the operation against the Bug Race nest?

Otherwise, why would he have been chosen to take the reins?

After all, with the previous ruler's tragic demise, rumors circulating city-wide had already pointed out that Marshal Weslin, celebrated in the post-battle festivities, was merely a clown stealing credit.

If it was Bai E...

"It still doesn't concern us, does it?"

"Let's wait until the explorers confirm that there's no threat outside the city, then we'll move out and live elsewhere."

This sentiment simmered in the minds of many.

Although they'd miss out on the massive wealth that pioneers might reap, it was still better than suffocating amidst the moldy air of the city's underground—safer too.

Yet no one realized just how much this newly appointed city ruler would change their lives...

Chapter 802: three fires for the new official

This was the morning after the night of bloodshed.

In the City Council Hall, Bai E looked at all the representatives from the assembled factions and slowly announced several policies he had long decided upon—

"First, provide a free basic health check-up for all residents of Blackwater City, and distribute basic medications on a large scale, setting up a public medical site in each area to offer free medical services to residents of Blackwater City in need."

This point was indisputable. Although many faction representatives had doubts upon hearing this news, considering this was Bai E's first decision as the city lord,

the new officer distributing some benefits to the residents of Blackwater City was also considered a strategy to win people's hearts.

Although the cost was somewhat large, since City Lord Bai E had already spoken, if his first decision were questioned on the spot, it would be somewhat embarrassing for him.

So those representatives with doubtful expressions remained silent, tacitly approving the issuance of Bai E's decree.

Of course, Bai E did not wait for any opinions; he simply continued speaking on his own.

"Second, from now on, conduct a key physical examination for all residents under the age of 18 in the city. This examination only requires testing specific indicators, and the resource investment is relatively high, but each individual only needs it once. In the future, every newborn will also undergo this key physical examination. For each individual who meets the standards of the key physical examination, the city will provide certain growth resources to assist in the city's talent reserve. Of course, according to experience, the proportion of such special talents will not exceed one per thousand, so the actual investment will not be so high that the city cannot accept it. Detailed specifics will be handled by the doctor and financial department after the meeting."

This was a policy the doctor implemented in his own city. Some surgical considerations could be seen from birth in infants, and such children would receive preferential resource cultivation, with mandatory surgical transformation at the age of 12.

Of course, Blackwater City would not enforce transformations, but investing early in individuals with potential, even without surgical transformations, would allow them to undergo physical training early and transition into other types of talents.

The doctor had a lot of experience with such matters, making him and the financial department discussing undoubtedly the best choice.

Like the first policy, the second policy was also evidently to win people's hearts.

The shrewd nobles immediately saw through that these so-called special talents were absolute private soldiers recruited by Bai E for himself.

What happened to the previous city lord, as the instigator, Bai E certainly would not allow to happen to himself a second time.

Controlling the city's elite and consolidating his rule.

This is something every ruler would do, and it's understandable.

The only thing intriguing is the "doctor" mentioned in Bai E's speech, just which doctor in the city he was referring to.

Being able to quickly gain the trust of City Lord Bai E, this "doctor" is not simple...

Ignoring the changes in thoughts of the various representatives, Bai E continued to introduce the third decree.

"Third, from now on, provide at least six years of compulsory education for all children in the city who have reached the age of 6, and lift the blockade on certain advanced knowledge for all residents of Blackwater City, including but not limited to the manufacture and injection of Gene Optimization Solution, advanced physical training plans, computer information-related technologies, and human medicine-related knowledge. Specific release regulations will be provided in more detail after the meeting by Helen from the Scientific Research Institute."

"..." This point instantly touched sensitive nerves in some people, with someone wanting to voice opposition on the spot, only to be quickly pulled back by their quick-witted companion, shaking their head frantically to signal him not to speak.

If the first two decisions were to win the hearts of the general populace of Blackwater City and establish individual authority, then the third decision was undoubtedly to weaken the monopoly of these noble powers.

In the past, they had gathered considerable wealth from ordinary people through war gangs by relying on this advanced knowledge, but now, with City Lord Bai E in power, distributing the advantage originally exclusive to them across the city undoubtedly provides the possibility for those ordinary people to become new nobles.

This, of course, made many nobles find it hard to accept.

The noble who stopped his companion from speaking out was not supporting City Lord Bai E's decision but remembered the bloodshed of last night vividly and dared not provoke the wrath of the dragon at such a time.

Now, facing the matter head-on, they would gradually change the actual situation in the subtle influence in the future, a common method for these nobles;

Politics is said to be mutual compromise until a balanced situation acceptable to all is created.

The previous city lord was like this, and the current city lord... no matter how powerful he may personally be, as long as there are places where he needs them to act, such compromises are inevitable.

But not everyone retreated like this, and someone couldn't help but stand up to question, "City Lord, isn't this decision a bit too much?"

Bai E turned his head, looking expressionlessly toward the direction of the speaker, "What do you have to say?"

The person stammered for a moment but mustered the courage to argue, "The dissemination of those advanced knowledge will allow the ordinary populace to all possess the power to threaten stability. If any trouble arises among them, the consequences... are unimaginable. For the sake of city stability, I suggest that this decision requires careful discussion and review."

Chapter 803: Taking Office and Lighting Three Fires_2

"Then don't let them cause any trouble." Bai E's gaze shifted coldly. "Whether or not there are beggars in a city doesn't depend on the beggars themselves. If you don't have the confidence to govern this city, then let someone who does take over. My orders are declarations, not discussions. From now on, I don't want to hear any interruptions."

"..." The man, boiling with anger, tried to say something more.

But his companion, sitting beside him, frantically tugged at him in fear of getting blood on himself, pulling him down.

"Stop talking! Do you want to die?!"

The whispered reminder from his companion brought the bloody images of last night's corpses flooding back, chilling his heart.

It felt like a basin of cold water had been poured over his head, and reason returned to the high ground of his mind.

'What was I just doing?!

The man plopped back into his seat, not daring to utter another word.

Bai E's eyelids drooped slightly as he continued issuing his orders.

"The final order... Starting today, Grey Iron City and our Blackwater City will form a mutual defense and offense alliance, advancing and retreating as one. If one city is attacked by an external enemy, the other will launch an unconditional full-scale counterattack. The two cities will engage in comprehensive exchanges, from economic trade to scientific technology. Everyone should mentally prepare in advance."

Although the doctor spoke of complete subordination, Bai E could not treat Grey Iron City entirely as a subordinate. Necessary equality and respect had to be maintained.

"What?!"

"Holy shit?!"

"Grey Iron City?"

"When did this happen?!"

Even though Bai E had already stated that he didn't want to hear any more irrelevant interruptions, the room buzzed uncontrollably after this directive was announced.

Forming such a deep alliance with another city should logically involve the entire city's participation in the decision-making process.

Yet the fact that Bai E had quietly secured such an alliance with another city demonstrated his significant standing—even in that city.

'City Lord Bai E, you're seriously impressive.'

At that moment, this singular thought echoed in the minds of countless people.

["Lucky Strike" charge +50.]

The council ended amidst a wave of resentment, shock, and confusion.

The overwhelming impact of Bai E's decisions left many people unable to fully process them.

Even after Bai E's departure, the few remaining groups in the assembly hall gathered in threes and fives, discussing the heavy news he had announced.

"The first two decrees were still manageable, but that third one—it's going to kill us, isn't it?"

"But aren't the first two also pretty ruthless? I never thought the City Lord, as someone with a synthetic origin, could come up with such ideas."

"Must be someone advising him behind the scenes, right? I heard that Helen from the Scientific Research Institute has a close relationship with the City Lord. Those researchers are all brilliant minds—even if they're not working on technology, the city still depends on them."

"It's more than just that. I heard Aglaya from the Spirit Management Center also has a special relationship with the City Lord. Apparently, back when the City Lord's spiritual energy potential was discovered, she personally covered it up, completely blindsiding everyone."

The speaker's eyes flickered with dread as they glanced toward a lone silhouette standing in the distant corner.

As they discussed ways to rationally and subtly resist the new City Lord, they had to tread carefully around any potential "moles" who might be friendly with him.

Yet even amidst their murmuring, an angry voice suddenly burst forth, starkly arrogant. "Good my ass! Which one of these decrees is actually good? Do they think our Treasury is magically replenished by the wind? Free medical checkups, free treatments, free education... everything's free—where the hell's the money supposed to come from? He wants money? Fine, I'll give him money! I'll empty the entire city's reserves for him! And then let's see how he plans to fix such a massive deficit!"

At the City Lord's residence...

Helen and the doctor, who were planning with Bai E, shared the same doubt. "How are you going to fill such a massive deficit?"

"Yeah, labor resources can be addressed with enough force, like it or not. But a shortfall in material resources is tangible. You're planning so many major initiatives at once, it'll be really hard to plug that gap."

One was experienced in governing a city; the other, well-versed in the inner workings of their own city, had a decent grasp of the details.

The two stared at Bai E, waiting for him to offer a reasonable solution.

Bai E rubbed his face, his muffled voice breaking the silence. "I'll handle the resource issue."

Although he didn't particularly like using certain methods to acquire resources, resource scarcity was the city's most significant constraint for now.

Resources were necessary not just for the city's prosperous future but also for building the Starship they dreamed of.

In the absence of external threats, humanity's exploitation of wild resources could only be safer, though always limited by manpower and time constraints.

Only his unique advantage allowed him to bypass all reasoning, delivering resources as if by divine intervention.

The boldness of this claim was shocking. The two brilliant minds knew the enormity of the task.

But since Bai E had made his stance clear, they decided to trust him for now.

"Alright, I'll proceed with directly handing over the inventory lists," Helen said, standing up.

"I'll negotiate with your Treasury Department. Without the resource deficit in consideration, I don't think there will be major issues in the negotiations."

"Thank you both," Bai E said softly, expressing his gratitude.

After sending the two on their way, Bai E turned to Kiro Lan, who had been waiting behind him all along.

"Everything you mentioned earlier—has it been handled?"

The rumors revealing the true hero behind the destruction of the Blackrock District Hive had been disseminated by Kiro Lan.

Bai E didn't care about empty accolades, but acquiring the necessary resources required him to make this move.

Back in his military days, he had already experienced the benefits of a good reputation. Simply showing up and making appearances was enough to earn him a significant number of energy charges.

What was once only a military camp had now expanded to an entire city.

If he didn't take advantage of this opportunity to gather as much energy as possible, he'd be doing a disservice to his long-unused cheat ability.

"All taken care of." Kiro Lan, smiling with satisfaction, gazed at Bai E. "My lord, we can depart anytime."

Kiro Lan was elated to see Bai E finally acknowledge his own singular brilliance.

Ideas like "building the nation through technology" paled in comparison to the unifying belief in a clear and resolute goal.

What this era lacked wasn't technology but a genuine belief to guide people out of the abyss of confusion.

As the only True God walking this world, Bai E should have long recognized and accepted the natural aura of divinity surrounding him.

Even Morphie, standing behind Kiro Lan, gazed approvingly at the True God he both loved and hated.

Whatever misguided actions Bai E had shown in the past, at least this time, he was finally heading in the right direction.

Only a deity fervently worshiped by their believers could exercise the authority befitting a god.

"Let's go," Bai E sighed lightly, unwilling to explain further.

After all, this sort of thing defied explanation!

"Understood!"

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"The great hero has arrived! The great hero has arrived!"

"The great hero who destroyed the Hive and quelled the chaos has arrived!"

"Is he really our new City Lord? So young and handsome..."

"I told you! Not just anyone can become the City Lord, can they? Only a paragon of virtue and talent like him could win everyone's support!"

"Did you hear about the decrees announced earlier by the district officials? Our new City Lord issued them right after taking office! Free medical checkups, free healthcare, free education! And if we're fortunate enough to be selected, we might even be groomed as key talents for the city! They say he fought for ages with the nobles to push these through!"

"Oh, City Lord, I'll have your babies!"

With a smile on his face, Bai E waved to the crowd as he passed, though his heart was as still as a dead sea.

Chapter 804: Emperor's Capital Reply Letter

["Lucky Strike" charge +50.]

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["Lucky Strike" charge +50.]

...

["Lucky Strike" charge +50.]

The Grand Parade!

For several days, Bai E was either en route to the Lower City of Blackwater City or heading to the wilderness to hunt for materials.

His special ability couldn't be exposed—every time he used it, he would retreat to the wilds to activate it.

Afterward, he'd directly notify the city, instructing them to send personnel to collect the goods.

As for the reason, Bai E didn't offer even half an explanation.

After all, the facts were there. How they speculated was up to them.

"Could it be that these are supplies from Grey Iron City?"

"Bullshit! Grey Iron City is almost unable to survive on their own. How could they send supplies to us?"

"Then where did all these goods come from?!"

From food to construction materials, medicine to industrial products, there wasn't anything they could imagine that Mr. Bai couldn't provide.

"I heard Mr. Bai has a private force outside the city. Could the goods be sourced from there?"

"I think that's likely. Otherwise, with batch after batch of supplies arriving continuously, they certainly didn't fall from the sky."

"The scariest part is that the delivery people leave no trace! These past few days, I've sent people wandering all over the wilderness, trying to find out who's backing Mr. Bai with such resources. But guess what?! They didn't find a single soul!"

"All I can say is that our Mr. Bai has connections beyond imagination—a man capable of wresting the city's sovereignty from the old city lord is indeed extraordinary!"

["Lucky Strike" charge +25.]

Bai E paused slightly, unsure where this 25-point increase had suddenly come from.

After days of receiving +50 after +50, this unexpected +25 seemed particularly conspicuous.

"My lord?" Kiro Lan's inquiry came from beside him. "You've worked hard these past few days. We've finally reached the last district, and this phase of our operation will be temporarily concluded. Shall we set off now?"

Blackwater City was vast, with the Lower City divided into innumerable smaller districts.

To ensure that the residents of the lower strata could personally witness Bai E in the flesh and form a genuine connection of faith, Kiro Lan had meticulously arranged these days' itinerary.

Still, no matter how detailed the schedule, it always came to an end sooner or later.

What's more, feedback from intelligence agents indicated that the Lower City's residents were starting to feel fatigued by this prolonged parade.

For some people, it was their first time seeing Bai E in person, but as information circulated rapidly and many had already heard extensive propaganda and descriptions about him, the initial excitement and novelty were wearing off.

To some, these parades increasingly resembled staged performances—"acts" put on by those at the top.

And for certain individuals, this sentiment had gradually given rise to subtle resentment.

Ironically, such "murmurs" stood out more within a crowd that was otherwise silent.

Considering the human tendency to follow the herd, if this discontent gained momentum, it might backfire, producing results contrary to the intended goal.

It was time to conclude the first phase of the "God-making Campaign."

Bai E had roughly sensed this shift as well. His ability to "absorb emotions," paired with the Spiritual Energy attribute of "Heavenly Eye," had made him adept at analyzing the moods of those around him.

Everyone... was starting to get annoyed.

This realization brought him some relief.

Gaining what he wanted through something as performative as this parade was undoubtedly necessary for progress, but it stirred a deep sense of revulsion within him.

Now that the limit had been reached, he even felt a strange sense of gratitude. "Let's make this the last one... Set off."

No matter how individuals on all sides truly felt, for the majority who hadn't yet seen the new city lord, getting a glimpse of the man who had announced and effectively carried out so many welfare policies was fulfillment enough.

Before Bai E had even arrived, residents who had caught wind of the news were already bustling along the roadside, eager to be the first to see the new lord's face in person.

Excited chatter was exchanged among them, their emotions visibly vibrant.

"Have you heard? The new city lord is inspecting every corner so he can personally understand how we common folk live, making it easier to plan better reforms going forward!"

"Exactly! When did those old noble lords ever bother to look in our direction? Even if they accidentally got a whiff of our air, they'd probably scrub their noses clean for half a day afterward!"

"You're ridiculous—believing such nonsense? It's nothing more than a show for him to flaunt himself early in office. Do you honestly think these elites care about us struggling folks?"

"Mr. Bai is no elitist! He came up from the ranks as an ordinary soldier, a man who climbed his way up from the bottom!"

"Precisely! You call these rumors false, but what about the health screenings, medical care, free education, and growth funds that have started everywhere? Aren't all these programs happening right now? Didn't you take advantage of a free medical check-up or receive free treatment yourself?"

"Hah!" The resident being confronted shrank back, still stubbornly retorting, "We'll see about that—it's just an early term posturing. Everything will go back to the way it was before, mark my words."

"Speaking of, my rascal kid joined some gang members to explore the wilderness earlier. He just got back last night and left for a health check this morning, but it's been hours now—no news yet. I'm wondering if he picked up some illness out there or not?"

Chapter 805 Emperor's Capital Reply Letter_2

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On the journey to the final destination, Bai E suddenly noticed Kiro Lan seemed to have received some news. She excitedly approached him and leaned in, saying, "We just received word that in the district we're heading to, there's a 16-year-old child who recently participated in a special physical assessment and meets the criteria. You can announce on the spot that he will receive the Growth Fund. Examples like this, so close to them, will make it easier for them to feel your grace."

"Alright." Bai E nodded indifferently.

Soon enough, the so-called 16-year-old child was brought before Bai E.

His body was somewhat frail, but his eyes were big and bright, exuding a vibrant spirit.

Faced with the inevitable grandeur surrounding Bai E, aside from a hint of reverence, the boy showed surprisingly little fear.

"What's your name?"

"Enoch, my lord."

"You will be one of the pillars of Blackwater City's future. Work hard." Bai E patted his shoulder and didn't say much more.

Yet, even so, among the countless young children who had listened to endless stories of Bai E's exploits, Enoch, who had now seen the new city lord in person and even experienced his touch, instantly developed a deep and unimaginable admiration.

"Yes, City Lord!" Enoch's eyes burned with fervor as he looked into Bai E's eyes. "I will do my best to become someone valuable to this city!"

As the convoy moved forward slowly, they finally entered a road packed with crowds.

A vast number of people squeezed on both sides of the road, and Bai E only needed to wave gently for an entire section of the crowd to erupt into boundless enthusiasm.

["Lucky Strike" energy +50.]

Never before had the energy charge for Lucky Strike increased so rapidly.

It was just as Bai E once envisioned: as his status and position grew, accumulating Lucky Strike energy became this straightforward.

When the vehicle came to a halt, Bai E stood atop the off-road vehicle and summoned the boy named "Enoch" from behind him.

Below, Enoch's father had nearly gone mad, shouting and weeping uncontrollably amidst the frenzied crowd, "That's my son! That's my son!"

Facing all the residents who were eagerly gazing at him, Bai E smiled and announced the boy's news, "Just now, after repeated verification by our frontline personnel, we've confirmed that Enoch is the talent our city needs for the future! Starting now, we will provide him with a monthly Growth Fund of no less than 1,000 Blackwater Coins. In fact, it's not just about him—anyone here has the chance, through effort and determination, to become the talent our city needs. Humanity has slumbered in this dark era for too long. It's time we dedicate our entire lives to the revival of all humanity!"

Bai E raised his arm and shouted passionately, "Long live humanity!"

Below, a sea of loyal followers echoed in thunderous voices, "Long live humanity!"

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Several days later, when the messenger squad captain returned to this strange city carrying orders from his superior, he felt as though he had entered the wrong place.

If not for being certain that the coordinates they locked onto were absolutely correct, and that the city indeed bore the name "Blackwater City," they might have turned back to search again.

The self-assured faces and expressions filled with hope for the future seen among the residents on the streets—could these really emerge from the same bleak and hopeless urban environment he saw last time?

What on earth happened during the time he left this city to report back?

Finally, upon seeing the familiar diplomat he knew, the messenger squad captain's tense expression relaxed, and he eagerly approached, curious, "It's only been a few days—what happened to your city?"

The diplomat glanced at the residents walking with heads held high and couldn't help but shake his head a little wryly.

"They all came from the Lower City."

After Mr. Bai took office, he even lifted the circulation restrictions among the Upper City, Middle City, and Lower City.

Residents who had lived their entire lives breathing the mildewed air of the Lower City now finally had the chance to come to the surface.

And with Mr. Bai's support, they no longer needed to fear being driven back underground into the darkness by the brutal security forces at any moment.

Naturally, one by one, they gradually gained confidence.

"Of course, the one who brought about these changes to the city is still our new City Lord."

The diplomat stated the fact with a tone of awe and admiration, his gaze also filled with reverence.

Though the city's officials were mostly of noble birth, even among the nobles, some fared poorly.

Previously, in such chaotic times, there had hardly been any connections with other cities or powers. As a diplomat, he was practically redundant.

Being able to hold such a position, naturally, he belonged to the type of nobles who were unpopular in aristocratic circles.

During the time of Mr. Bai's rise, those who were once peripheral nobles suffered the least impact.

Therefore, in every sense, this diplomat worshipped the new City Lord, who had revitalized the city, from the depths of his heart.

Hearing such a mysterious remark from the diplomat, the messenger squad captain blinked nervously and asked, "The new City Lord?"

Last time they came, the city was still under the previous City Lord's rule, and from what he understood, that person leaned more toward forming alliances.

If the leadership had changed and their previous agreements with Blackwater City were no longer valid, what were they supposed to do?

Unexpectedly, the diplomat playfully winked at him, "The new City Lord—you know him... and are quite familiar with him."

Familiar enough that the report he sent back must have been filled with this individual's name.

The captain of the messenger squad, understanding the diplomat's implication, suddenly lit up with surprise. "It's General Bai E!"

"Ah~ now he's called Mr. Bai."

"Yes, yes! Mr. Bai it is." The captain finally relaxed. "I said it last time—someone with that kind of strength, the people of Blackwater City must be blind to keep him as just a general."

The diplomat didn't comment on that. Though he and the captain of the imperial messenger squad were quite familiar and had a good private rapport, it was better not to let such 'scandalous' comments out.

Clearing his throat lightly, the diplomat straightened his expression. "Enough small talk. Last time, you said you'd return to seek approval from the Imperial Capital. Now that you're back, I assume you've got a clear answer?"

On matters of importance, the messenger squad captain was just as serious. "That's right. In fact, we've already contacted several major cities around the globe, and most have expressed a willingness to cooperate. However, given the discrepancy in strength among participating cities, the newly formed alliance obviously doesn't have enough resources to support every city simultaneously. Therefore, after discussions among the Imperial Capital's high command, it was decided to hold a global summit in the Imperial Capital, with representatives from all major cities in attendance."

"The first purpose of this summit, naturally, is to foster connections between the cities. Due to the abandonment of internet technology, we've all lost contact with one another. Taking this opportunity to reconnect and establish relations is the most critical goal."

"Secondly... it's to elect regional leaders." The messenger squad captain gave the diplomat a flattering smile before continuing, "Although the Imperial Capital is already well aware of your city's strength, if we establish the surrounding area as a regional zone, we would still need the other cities in the region to be fully convinced of Blackwater City's capabilities, wouldn't you agree?"

Chapter 806 Preparation of integration

"Of course, we're all human allies, and there's no need to escalate conflicts just to assess each other's strength. After discussions in the Imperial Capital, they decided to use a small-scale competition format to determine which city in each region qualifies for a dominant position."

"The competition consists of five individual matches and one team match. Each participant can only compete once, meaning that each city must send a team of at least ten elite warriors to participate. A missing participant in any slot will be considered forfeiture."

"The winners will gain partial resource allocation rights from all alliance-participating cities in their region, as well as significant decision-making power over regional development strategies."

"The specific resource proportions and strategic decisions will be negotiated uniformly after the representative teams of each city arrive."

"Even the Imperial Capital itself will take part in this competition. Naturally, the competition venue will be held near the Imperial Capital."

In the council hall of Blackwater City, the diplomat giving the briefing ended with a slight nod to everyone. "This is the information conveyed by the envoy from the Imperial Capital. Now, he needs a response from Blackwater City. If we agree, we must send out our team immediately and depart with him."

As soon as these words dropped, the hall erupted into an uproar. "How absurd is this? How can such a major issue be decided through a showdown between a few individual warriors?"

"Isn't this just targeting Blackwater City?"

"Exactly! Doesn't everyone know we only have one Mr. Bai?"

The rule that one person can only compete once is clearly targeting their Blackwater City, isn't it?

After witnessing Mr. Bai's combat prowess, the people in the city had long since lost hope in anyone else's fighting ability.

Without Mr. Bai stepping into the battlefield, the outcome was nothing short of an uncertainty.

"Why don't we just not participate at all? Without that so-called damn alliance, our Blackwater City can still thrive!"

The external threats they once feared? Gone.

The city's logistical and material shortages? Resolved.

The incredible abilities Mr. Bai had recently shown made them realize that Blackwater City's longstanding predicaments might truly be coming to an end.

With Mr. Bai around, what trouble could possibly hinder Blackwater City's rise?

Even without an alliance, Blackwater City was bound to make its mark on this world!

Why take such a huge risk, gambling their resources for someone else's benefit?

Previously, the Elder Council's inclination towards forming an alliance had not been disclosed to everyone in the city, leaving many citizens with not even the slightest thought of an alliance in their subconscious.

Of course, even those who were informed in advance were now murmuring doubts to themselves.

'We've already demonstrated our ability to single-handedly clear out a swarm nest. Why don't they just hand us regional dominance outright? Why go through all this drama?'

'This whole competition nonsense—doesn't it just put us on equal footing with others to compete?'

Only those who firmly believed in the alliance from the start maintained their stance. "What are you all afraid of?! Are we so cripplingly reliant on Mr. Bai that we can't handle this tournament on our own? The city is so large—surely we can't expect Mr. Bai to personally intervene in everything in the future!"

"Besides, didn't the Imperial Capital, which is orchestrating all this, also declare that they would personally compete? If their fighters lose, they will hand over dominance as promised. If even the Imperial Capital dares to take this gamble, why can't we? Honestly, some of you have just been enjoying your cozy lives for far too long!"

Seeing the topic spiraling towards meaningless arguments, the diplomat hurriedly added, "In fact, the Imperial Capital also had similar concerns about this issue. Some cities believed that the Imperial Capital had figures like the 'War God.' If such individuals were allowed to repeatedly participate in matches, it would render the competition meaningless. If one hopes to govern an extensive region and sustain humanity's stability over the long term, relying on those rare individuals who appear sporadically over the ages will not suffice. The true foundation of a city lies in warriors whose abilities are backed by repeatable and verifiable experience."

"So, warriors are the true foundation? Does ruling a region depend entirely on muscles? Where does politics fit in? Or technology? Deciding everything through warrior competitions seems far too one-dimensional to me."

The diplomat looked seriously at the one who raised this point and replied, "Every armed warrior represents the technological and industrial foundation of an entire city behind them. In fact, the upcoming competition in the Imperial Capital will not restrict the use of weapons or equipment. If they wish, the warriors can even drive tanks into the arena."

"..."

The one who raised the question was left speechless.

"Then, as usual, let's put it to a vote. Whether or not to join the alliance will be decided by ballot."

"Vote for what?!" someone exclaimed with fervor, staring up at the highest platform. "I only support Mr. Bai's decision! Whatever others say is pure nonsense."

Since Bai E's inauguration as City Lord, many realized that Blackwater City was no longer the same as it used to be.

When one person's strength could suppress an entire city, and that person also possessed substantial material resources along with a loyal army, the opinions of everyone else had become virtually irrelevant.

If not for the possibility that Mr. Bai still needed these people's expertise to stabilize the city, the so-called nobles sitting in this hall would have long been swept aside without a trace.

The only reason they were still talking at all was the hope of voicing their opinions. After all, perhaps there were matters even Mr. Bai himself wasn't entirely certain about."

Chapter 807 Preparation of integration_2

They only provide their opinions; the final decision has always rested solely in Mr. Bai's hands.

Sitting in the elevated seat, Bai E remained silent until the room gradually fell quiet. Only when every pair of eyes turned to him did he speak slowly: "First, agree to the messenger's conditions. Tell him that Blackwater City is assembling the team, and we can depart first thing tomorrow morning."

"Understood, sir!" The diplomat responded with excitement and immediately turned to leave to relay the message.

"Second..." Bai E slowly scanned the audience before speaking in a deep voice: "I will not personally take part in this tournament. However, I can guarantee that, regardless of the rules, Blackwater City will inevitably achieve ultimate victory. I have just one requirement for you... prepare to liaise with the other cities!"

"Upon securing the lead qualification, I will promptly eliminate all threats within the region while requiring you to integrate the productivity of all regional cities at the fastest possible pace. In terms of military power, I can coordinate; in terms of politics and economics, that's your stage to shine. If you enjoy this, I'll give you the platform."

"At that point, everyone will have their assigned tasks. If you can't keep up, then you won't need to follow."

With those words, Bai E turned and left, leaving behind a hall steeped in dead silence.

It wasn't until a few minutes after Bai E's silhouette disappeared that the once-quiet hall began stirring faintly.

"Mr. Bai's ambition... is enormous."

"Indeed... I never imagined Mr. Bai would harbor such goals."

Military coordination... integrating productivity...

If these goals are truly achieved, how different would this be from outright controlling those cities?

Seizing cities... unifying the region...

Is global unification next in line?

Here they were squabbling incessantly over petty city disputes, while their city's leader had already set his sights on the entire world.

Every word Bai E uttered seemed to deliver an impact far beyond their expectations.

And no matter how implausible it might seem at the time, every word would later prove to have been part of Bai E's plan.

"I can't sit still—I need to start preparing."

"In the coming days, I'll need to train my nephew more. In my family, he's the only one with any talent. I'm getting old and can't take up the mantle anymore—communicating with other cities is a job for the youth."

Nobody doubted Bai E's words.

To many in the city, the growth of this man, a warrior born of artificial origins, had been completely transparent.

He had never made grand promises that he couldn't fulfill.

When he said they would win the tournament, they would win.

It didn't matter whether or not he personally took part—wherever his presence was felt, the word "defeat" simply didn't exist.

Thus, when Bai E said that those who couldn't keep up didn't need to follow, they took it at face value.

The unstoppable torrent of the times would sweep away every tear of the weak.

Bai E's words were like the first force applied to a meticulously designed system.

That force traveled forward along the mechanical transmission system, causing each gear and lever it encountered to begin operating in their own distinct ways.

And when the entire system started moving together in a unified direction, the era's chariot—carrying all of Blackwater City—began galloping madly toward the distance...

Bai E left the council hall and returned to the military camp.

No matter his current position as city leader, Bai E would never forget the military camp, the core of his humble beginnings.

As the words of the messenger relayed by the diplomat in the council went: it was never the occasional flashes of brilliance over the long course of time that brought true glory to humanity—it was the countless ordinary individuals who composed this endless river of time.

Only an army built from ordinary people could firmly secure humanity's footing on this planet.

"Call the Storm Battalion commander to me," Bai E instructed his messenger as he returned to the military camp's station.

Not long after, Stone appeared in front of Bai E, wearing half of his Storm Battle Armor.

Seeing one of the artificial soldiers who had undergone training alongside him in the past, Bai E's face showed a trace of a smile. "Why are you only wearing half your armor? Just finished training?"

"No," Stone replied with his usual honest smile. "Wearing just half conserves wear and tear while ensuring readiness in case of emergencies."

"Who taught you that?"

"You. She didn't qualify for the first batch of modifications, so she's been circling around us endlessly..."

"..." Bai E pressed his lips together, a faint smile forming.

Seeing his former teammates now leading their own lives and finding moments of light-hearted joy, Bai E felt his mood lighten amidst his many responsibilities.

"What do you need, Captain?" Stone asked proactively.

No matter Bai E's current rank, Stone still habitually addressed him by their original field designation.

"I need to make a trip to the Imperial Capital. Select ten men from the battalion to accompany me."

"Any specific requirements?"

"No, just take whoever's willing to go. It's just for a match."

For the ten members who would join him in the Imperial Capital tournament, Bai E planned no rigorous selection process.

Among the two hundred initial Storm Soldiers, their abilities were on a relatively equal level, so nitpicking made little sense.

Additionally, as the Imperial messenger mentioned, the strength behind each warrior reflected the city's foundational depth.

It was what it was—internal contests weren't necessary at this stage.

And besides, even if they were defeated... Bai E had an ace up his sleeve.

"Alright." Stone grinned brightly, "Count me in first."

"..." Bai E glared at him before shaking his head with a helpless smile. "Not you. You need to stay in the military district to train the recruits for me. That includes Rose, You, and Ling. While I'm away, you all have tasks to complete."

"What tasks?" Stone asked curiously.

"Categorize the soldiers in the battalion according to their specializations. Identify those skilled in close-quarters combat, ranged assault, Spiritual Energy manipulation, or possessing unique spiritual constitutions. Also, evaluate the adaptability of modified soldiers to their respective augmentations. Not just the Storm Battalion, but every soldier in the military district. Perform a comprehensive categorization; I'll need it when I return."

Just as he had previously promised the players, Bai E intended to further refine the classification of soldiers in the district into specific types, forming specialized battalions tailored for different situations, particularly for the modified Storm Soldiers.

From the battles against the Zerg hives, it had become clear that in high-level engagements, low-tier soldiers, no matter their numbers, were merely cannon fodder.

Only true elites could handle crises that ordinary warriors would find insurmountable in their lifetimes.

It wasn't just the Zerg—whether facing orcs, synthetic beings, or demons, soldiers specialized in different capacities could produce vastly different results when addressing varying threats.

Bai E was preparing to deploy forces around all the cities in the region to establish his layout. Although he did not yet know the exact scope of the Imperial Capital's regional divisions, he first needed to ensure his strategy was adequately rationalized.

Judging by the "Bloodshed Night" battle results, Storm Soldiers equipped with Storm Battle Armor had combat capabilities far surpassing ordinary warriors. Even against a Tier 3 Spiritual Energy practitioner painstakingly trained for years, they could hold their own.

Such levels of combat power didn't need to be concentrated in a single place. When fires broke out across the regions designated by the Imperial Capital, these Storm Soldiers would act as the emergency response unit in his place.

Before that day arrived, they needed enhanced, tailored development based on their distinguishing features.

Simultaneously, it was necessary to preemptively identify other ordinary soldiers who could potentially become Storm Soldiers for specialized training, thereby reducing their maturation time.

As Bai E laid out his plans, Stone stared intently, etched every word into memory. When Bai E finished speaking, Stone nodded in acknowledgment. "Got it! I'll tell Big Sister Rose about it."

With that, he strode off in his imposing armor. "Now I'm going to select the team for the captain. I promise they'll all be fighting to join!"

Chapter 808: Empire Capital!

A squad of ten warriors, along with the diplomat and his team, a total of seventeen people led by Bai E, followed behind the messenger team from the Capital as they departed from the growing city of Blackwater.

To ensure an absolute victory in this mission, Bai E, serving as the final safeguard, naturally had to join the team.

A total of four off-road vehicles and two heavy armored transport vehicles cut across the desolate wilderness.

The armor of the ten Storm Warriors was immense in size; without two heavy transport vehicles, it would have been impossible to deliver them to the Capital.

The journey to the Capital was long and would take four to five days on the road.

Bai E sat alone on the cargo bed of one of the transport vehicles. While guarding the equipment, he also provided the warriors a chance to catch their breath.

Whether Bai E wanted to admit it or not, with his current status, anyone sharing a small, confined space with him would inevitably feel pressured.

A few hours or half a day might not have been an issue, but spending four to five days in proximity could overly burden the warriors.

Only the team captain of the messengers from the Capital, unbound by subordinate relations, mustered the courage to climb onto the roof of the vehicle for a casual chat with Bai E.

"Mr. Bai, have you ever traveled so far from the city before?"

The two sat atop the roaring vehicle as the fierce winds of the desert swept the landscape around them.

An endless expanse of earthy yellow extended to the far horizon, merging with the dark canopy above.

Without human intervention, nature had failed to halt the encroachment of desertification.

Grainy winds brushed past their faces, threatening to carry off spoken words as they left the lips.

But the messenger captain's strength was extraordinary. Words guided by Spiritual Energy reached Bai E's ears effortlessly.

"About this far," Bai E nodded, gesturing toward the north with a wave of his hand. "But in that direction."

"That direction?" The messenger captain surveyed briefly before conjecturing. "Near Grey Iron City?"

"More or less, though I've never been there myself."

"Indeed... Communication between cities has been effectively nonexistent for a long time." The messenger captain, evidently an ambitious man, sighed. "I wonder how long it will take for true connections to form between cities after this alliance meeting."

Mere communication through the internet held no meaning. Only by unleashing the flow of production capabilities and human resources between cities would the essence of this alliance be realized.

"But before that, we need to eradicate those threats first." Bai E's gaze stretched to the horizon.

A towering black pillar stood tall on the earth like a colossal smokestack, its oppressive aura of death radiating outward.

That was another hive.

One even more daunting than the Blackrock District Hive near Blackwater City.

And that was just the most conspicuous threat.

On the journey from Blackwater City to the Capital, Bai E had repeatedly spotted traces of intelligent machines and wandering beastmen.

Fortunately, these entities seemed to recognize the deterrent presented by such a standardized convoy, while the convoy members, focused on reaching the alliance meeting, refrained from unnecessary skirmishes. Thus, an uneasy peace was maintained.

However, in the future, all of them... would undoubtedly become threats.

Not to mention the few mutated beasts Bai E had personally slain along the way, including a pack of mutated hyena-dogs.

At present, Blackwater City could only protect an area of three to four thousand square kilometers centered around the urban zone.

Beyond that, these diverse threats remained like nails deeply embedded across humanity's map. Without eradicating them, ordinary people would never dare venture beyond the cities into the wilderness.

While Bai E had the capacity to swiftly annihilate major static threats like the hives, the countless scattered threats across this vast expanse would require an army of elite warriors to execute comprehensive sweeps.

And to nurture such warriors, integrated resources and production capabilities were absolutely essential!

Even population, too, had to be treated as an invaluable resource.

Unity was imperative.

The messenger captain, too, stared at the towering black pillar ahead with a heart full of worry. "Yes... Even after those threats are cleared, trade routes will need to be reopened. We'll have to build highways and railways between cities and assign troops to patrol and defend them..."

Everything once achieved during the Golden Age had been buried under nearly 500 years of winds and sands.

What remained was a landscape filled with scars and the knowledge locked away in archives, waiting for humanity to reclaim its place atop the world one day.

"...I just don't know if I'll ever get to see that day."

"You will," Bai E, who took a liking to this messenger captain, smiled and assured him, "Trust me. It won't be long."

Infrastructure's speed has always been humanity's miracle.

What humanity lacked was merely hope.

One only had to glimpse at Blackwater City to catch a hint of what was to come.

Since the issuance of the city's expansion decree, an abandoned building that once served for illegal fighting had been completely repurposed, and numerous makeshift structures had sprung up on the open grounds outside the city.

Blackwater City's walls would soon transform into honorary relics of its history, and its residents would carry humanity's glory to every distant land guarded by soldiers.

With Bai E leading the way and the warriors taking shifts to rest, the journey, originally forecasted to take four to five days, was compressed into three and a half days.

The Capital's platinum-and-gold interwoven walls appeared from the extreme distance, visible to everyone long before they arrived. Yet, as the saying goes, "seeing the mountain doesn't mean you're close," and approaching the Capital consumed nearly the last half-day of their journey.

Chapter 809: Empire Capital!_2

Until they gazed at the direction of the Imperial Capital from the flat expanse of land outside the city, everyone realized just how limited their understanding of the Imperial Capital truly was.

This majestic city of the apocalypse, beneath the gloomy daylight, presented a breathtaking scene.

It stood like a forest of steel, shimmering dramatically against the desolate wasteland. Not only was it striking in a physical sense, but it also projected an undeniable sense of security on a psychological level.

The towering city walls were imposing and solid—on par with, and perhaps even rivaling, the Dominators. Though they had weathered the passage of time, they betrayed no signs of decay, instead growing firmer, as if carved from bedrock.

On the walls, runes etched with Spiritual Energy glimmered faintly under the sunlight, occasionally casting a cold, spectral light across the city's surface like an invisible barrier safeguarding the tranquility within. The massive shield encircling the city formed a stark contrast to the surrounding wasteland, symbolizing the final bastion of Order and civilization.

Amid the endless dark and desolation, this city stood unwavering—a testament to humanity's intellect and courage, a resolute declaration of life's faith and future hope under the apocalyptic shadow.

This was truly an eternal fortress that would never fall!

Standing at the foot of the Imperial Capital, even the five members of the messenger squad born and raised in this city couldn't help but puff out their chests in pride.

It was only after visiting other cities personally that they truly realized the miracle their hometown represented in this shattered world.

And now, to welcome the delegation teams from over a thousand cities, the Imperial Capital had evidently constructed a sprawling temporary residential zone outside its walls.

"Everyone, follow me." The messenger squad leader, seated in his vehicle, took the initiative to drive ahead, providing guidance in the comm channel to the Blackwater City team. "Since it's your first time in the Imperial Capital, we'll be hosting a simple welcoming ceremony for you."

Three off-road vehicles and two transport trucks followed the messenger squad's lead onto a wide stone road.

Neatly cut giant stones formed the smooth path of this road.

The road stretched to the steel gates that soared high at the end—leading into the Imperial Capital itself.

Walking along this road gave the impression that the towering city might collapse from the skies at any moment, crushing everything below, an overwhelming sense of pressure.

Perhaps this arrangement was intentional by the Imperial Capital?

With the alliance of over a thousand cities, if the Imperial Capital failed to showcase its formidable strength upfront, hosting such an alliance might indeed prove challenging.

After all, judging from the Imperial Capital's promises, even it had to send representatives to compete for regional leadership—suggesting there were other cities eyeing its absolute leadership status.

And, coincidentally, Bai E had exactly the same thought.

If an opportunity presented itself, why not seize it?

Even if things didn't work out, leaving an impression on other cities could still pave the way for future expansion.

After all, Helen had mentioned that building a Starship would drain the resources of even a dozen or twenty cities in one region—and even then, it might not be enough.

However, as the vehicle rolled onto the massive stone road, Bai E felt an odd sensation.

A slippery image flashed through his mind, accompanied by the insect-like sounds and smells that seemed almost tangible to his senses.

Bai E paused briefly, realizing he had inadvertently activated a certain ability—

Bug Race Nemesis.

[Title—Bug Race Nemesis: ...No Bug Race entity can easily approach you. You can effortlessly sense the presence of any Bug Race member within a 10-kilometer radius centered on you. The closer they are, the more accurate the position...]

Within 10 kilometers, there were bugs!

And not just one, nor the ordinary worker bugs or drone bugs.

Throughout the journey, this wasn't Bai E's first time triggering this sense of Bug Race imagery.

Through repeated encounters, Bai E had roughly studied the fluctuations in feedback this ability provided based on the type of Bug Race entity encountered.

Judging by the imagery he just sensed, the signals generated by this time's bugs far surpassed those of a mantis-led group of worker and drone bugs!

It was the strongest group of bugs Bai E had encountered thus far.

But the problem was—how could bugs appear within 10 kilometers of the Imperial Capital? And worse still, elite members of the Bug Race with ranks even higher than the mantis bugs?

Could it be that the Imperial Capital had imprisoned live bugs for experimentation?

Or were those cunning bugs hiding underground near the city?

Bai E furrowed his brows slightly, suppressing this suspicion in his mind.

The voice of the messenger squad leader came through his earpiece, introducing, "Up ahead to greet us is the deputy marshal of our Military Department. The residential area for all of you during the coming days has been arranged by him. Due to distance, our Blackwater City team is among the last arrivals."

It wasn't just the pace of the Blackwater City delegation—it was also the messenger squad's back-and-forth travel time.

The great distance magnified such logistical costs, and even with Bai E ensuring his subordinates traveled in shifts nonstop throughout the nights, they still ended up among the last to arrive.

As such, the messenger squad leader sounded awkward in the comm channel, "Many of the teams from cities that arrived earlier have had some complaints about waiting for the delayed batches like ours. If you hear any gossip, I hope you'll ignore it. During the alliance, harmony is of utmost importance."

A large forest harbors many birds, and coordinating delegations from over a thousand cities inevitably invites complications.

Simply preventing visiting delegations from fighting among themselves had already thrown the Imperial Capital's organizers into chaos.

As soon as the messenger squad came within the Imperial Capital's signal range, they were already informed via remote comm of the Capital's current predicament.

Each city's delegation needed to follow the rules and exercise restraint—a responsibility they had to bear as participants.

"Understood." Bai E smiled faintly, responding immediately through the comm channel.

Pre-match words carried no significance.

As long as no one openly provoked him, Bai E would choose to ignore any confrontation.

Yet, clearly, someone would defy the host's rules.

As the convoy slowly proceeded toward its destination along the stone-road path, long-awaited jeers suddenly echoed as if stationed there specifically to greet them.

"I thought it'd be some three-headed, six-armed Demon God—this few people made us wait three days for them?"

"Why are we even bothering with these marginal folks? Not like they'd even qualify to mine!"

Two burly men, covered in tattoos, squatted by the roadside, staring boldly at the convoy as they spoke.

Though their words sounded like casual banter, everyone knew they were meant for the convoy to hear.

Further away, a group of spectators burst into chaotic laughter—some even whistled—waiting for tempers to flare and a fight to break out.

It wasn't their quarrel. Stirring up trouble was a welcome entertainment.

"Restraint! Restraint!" The messenger squad leader repeatedly reminded them through the comm channel, "These southern Sea City folks have been affected by nuclear-contaminated seawater—their minds aren't very clear. They've been stationed here since day one, provoking anyone they see."

Not just their warriors—their diplomatic team was cut from the same cloth.

"Understood." Bai E sighed helplessly, pursing his lips and ordering his team through their private comm, "Ignore them."

The ten storm warriors, though visibly angered, begrudgingly rolled up their car windows under Bai E's command.

Out of sight, out of mind.

Chapter 810: War God!

However, this "showing weakness" move seemed to fuel the arrogance of those few people even more. After all, there weren't many cities left behind Blackwater City, so if they didn't show off now, there wouldn't be any more opportunities.

"Another worthless city. The fact that people from such cities don't even have an ounce of guts—why bother coming to the competition?"

"Exactly! When they lose, will they run home crying? Fighting these kids is just boring. Even if these cowards somehow win the competition, I wouldn't respect it!"

"..." Bai E froze for a moment.

He suddenly thought the other party's words actually made quite a bit of sense.

Indeed.

The essence of this world is still survival of the fittest, especially for the people and cities that have managed to endure in this era of chaos.

These people are untamable by nature, sneering at anything weak or timid.

Just like those two boosters said, if there were cities holding such beliefs in Bai E's domain, then even if he won openly in the competition, it would likely be difficult to mobilize resources from those cities under any agreements.

Winning a competition doesn't necessarily mean having strength. The courage to step forward at any time is... at least in the eyes of these people, perhaps it's more important.

Since that's the case...

Bai E lowered the car window and cast a casual glance at the two men.

"Bang!" The force of Spiritual Energy materialized into a shockwave, slamming into the two men's chests like a heavy hammer.

The burly figures were instantly sent flying backward, landing on the compacted dirt ground more than ten meters away, rolling around like tumbling gourds before finally stopping.

The actual damage wasn't significant, but the humiliation of such an incident clearly pushed the two strong men who had initially been hit into full-blown fury.

Quickly scrambling back to their feet, the burly men stared directly at the source of the force.

However, just before they stepped forward, their minds finally grasped what had just happened—

The opponent hadn't physically attacked.

It was merely the sheer impact of Spiritual Energy that sent them flying instantly.

Although their lack of defense played a role, the ability to achieve such a feat—just how overwhelmingly powerful must their opponent be?

As their minds gradually cleared, they noticed the car window slowly rising again. Behind it was a face devoid of emotion.

A cautious realization finally crept into their hearts.

'This opponent isn't some pushover.'

They had simply chosen not to bother with them.

The jeering voices from the surrounding crowd also seemed to fall silent in the wake of this hammer-like blow.

To unleash an impact of this magnitude using only Spiritual Energy—this newcomer city's player certainly seemed like someone better avoided...

Then, people began asking questions: "Which city are these newcomers from?"

"Yeah, which area? Wouldn't want them assigned to the same district as ours later on."

"The districts haven't been fully finalized yet. Who could know something like that right now?"

"They probably aren't in our vicinity. We haven't seen much of these people before."

"If they arrived this late, they're probably from one of the farthest batch of cities... Makes sense we wouldn't have crossed paths."

"Hey! Another group of tough characters showing up. This competition already has several fierce players... No idea whose home ground this will end up being." Others were simply here for the drama. "Anyway, there's no harm near our city, so we're just planning to freeload in the alliance. Sticking to powerhouses sure beats fighting the grind on our own!"

"Impressive! Respect!" Someone gave a thumbs-up from afar toward the convoy. For strong cities, making a good impression in advance always seemed like the smart play.

["Lucky Strike" has gained +50 charge.]

Within the convoy, the messenger squad that had been nervously watching Blackwater City's team ever since the provocations began finally let out a sigh of relief as they saw the incident resolve so easily.

However, the female team member in the vehicle glanced through the rearview mirror at Mr. Bai seated in the passenger seat of a transport vehicle from Blackwater City. Her eyes were filled with disbelief: "The power of Mr. Bai is simply mind-boggling! I can't help but wonder how he'd fare against our War God—who's truly the unrivaled force here?"

Before encountering Blackwater City's Bai E—who was now Mr. Bai—they had always regarded their War God as the supreme combatant of this world.

The entire Empire Capitol revered him as a source of pride, and some fanatics had even attempted to bestow upon him the title of "god!"

This renown was universally acknowledged, extending even beyond the Capitol into nearly every other city, where tales of the War God were widely circulated.

Yet, the instant they saw Bai E, all of this faith seemed to crumble in a single moment.

Because no matter how formidable the War God might be, he couldn't singlehandedly destroy an insect nest.

Even if Bai E had achieved this feat with the aid of a mecha—a powerful amplifier of strength—it aligned perfectly with the competition's core philosophy: that a city's technological equipment is equally considered part of a soldier's overall capability. Bai E's ability to harness mecha's power ultimately reflected his own strength.

He could penetrate an insect nest solo. The War God couldn't. That... was the difference!

"I wonder if he'll compete. If he does... wouldn't that guarantee absolute victory in the solo matches, and possibly in the team competitions too, regardless of who the opponent is?"