

Wow 831

Chapter 831: The First Shrine_2

"Blackwater City, Bai E, the City Lord!"

"Who is it that reversed the collapsing tide and supported the crumbling edifice?! With the strength of one, they annihilated the entire insect army that attacked our Eternal Night City?!"

"Blackwater City, Bai E, the City Lord!"

The cheers grew louder and louder.

In the moments after everything settled, Bai E's name and origin spread throughout the city of Blackwater City from every mouth.

"So, do you think we should do something for City Lord Bai E?!"

"Do something!"

"Build a shrine!"

"Erect a statue!"

"Every citizen of Eternal Night City should forever remember this human hero who saved us!"

"Build a shrine! Erect a statue!"

"Build a shrine! Erect a statue!"

The voices echoed everywhere, shaking the entire city.

This commotion undoubtedly deeply touched every person's heart.

After everything was settled, all the high officials of Eternal Night City gathered in the conference room.

"The spirit of those residents is a bit frightening..." someone murmured softly.

Feeling the fanatical atmosphere in the city, many officials of Eternal Night City instinctively felt a sense of panic. For any ruler, having such a fanatical mindset among the governed usually means something significant is about to happen.

But this time... even if something significant happens, they accepted it!

One officer suddenly stood up, his voice resonant, "What's so frightening?! I agree with their actions!"

Another officer suddenly stood up, "I also agree with their actions!"

"Build a shrine! Erect a statue!"

"Build a shrine! Erect a statue!"

When all eyes turned to him, the City Lord of Eternal Night City smiled helplessly, "Aren't you all just forcing me?"

Then the City Lord suddenly stood up, gritting his teeth fiercely, "Build a shrine! Erect a statue! Damn it, I wanted to do it long ago! If it weren't for City Lord Bai E, all of us sitting here would be considered criminals of Eternal Night City! If we met our predecessors in high-dimensional space, we wouldn't have the face to meet them! City Lord Bai E saved our entire city; if the whole city belonged to him, so what?! If he had wanted it, you would have pressed to make him the real 'City Lord' of Eternal Night!"

On the words "City Lord," the City Lord of Eternal Night City put extra emphasis.

The officials were astonished, "City Lord, you..."

"Has the City Lord privately approached Mr. Bai?"

"Actually, I thought the same, but didn't expect Mr. Bai..."

"For the first time, you have a bit of self-awareness as a City Lord..."

"That last sentence can be left unsaid." The City Lord of Eternal Night City waved his hand lazily, "Unfortunately, City Lord Bai E is unwilling. So, we must mutually accommodate in the future. The current matter, I suppose, is unanimously passed?"

Saying this, the City Lord of Eternal Night City led the way out into the bustling city, joining the human torrent, shouting loudly together—

"Build a shrine! Erect a statue!"

"Build a shrine! Erect a statue!"

The sound was earth-shattering, so much so that the Vanguard Squad of the Imperial Capital, needing rest after the toughest battles, couldn't help but wake from extreme fatigue.

In the dark room, the deputy captain of the Vanguard Squad quietly reminded Ares, "At this rate, the reputation of our Imperial Capital might not be as good as Blackwater City..."

As the deputy captain of the Vanguard Squad, he had carried an absolute responsibility before heading out.

Attracting qualified followers for the Imperial Capital was his greatest mission.

For the alliance to function, it must be filled with its voices.

This has nothing to do with ambition.

To get things done, it's the only way.

An alliance full of voices equals no voice.

A loose sand pile, what can it accomplish?

But now...

"No worries." Ares waved his hand, laughing heartily, "If it comes to it, I'll put a knife to our City Lord's neck, forcing him to abdicate for Mr. Bai."

As long as Mr. Bai becomes part of the Imperial Capital, wouldn't the prestige still belong to the Imperial Capital?

After all, these so-called voices have always been centered around City Lord Bai E. If it's this City Lord Bai E who takes power, Ares feels whether or not the Imperial Capital claims this prestige seems trivial.

"Whatever you say." The deputy captain sighed softly, "Honestly, I just wanted to remind you. The thought of having to compete with that man makes it seem unrealistic."

The deputy captain smiled wryly.

Who can contend with someone who can single-handedly annihilate an entire insect army?

As for what the Imperial Capital thinks... who cares!

His responsibility was merely to provide Ares with some advice; the final decision ultimately lies with Ares.

He was open and cheerful, but not without wit.

Since Ares didn't care, why should he worry?

Might as well... let go and join this wave of celebration!

For the first time, a statue pavilion honoring "Bai E" as a god officially appeared on this planet.

["Lucky Strike" charge +50.]

[You are being eroded by a form of faith, high-dimensional characteristics deepening...]

[You are being eroded by a form of faith, high-dimensional characteristics deepening...]

...

Lines of dense messages flashed across the panel in front of Bai E.

After being stunned for a long while, Bai E chose to fold the messages, waving to close the pale blue panel.

'Damn, have I become a god?'

Of course, the gods in the eyes of ordinary people are far from being real deities.

But regardless, the fact that others' faith can deepen the traits of high-dimensional space is a brand new discovery.

If... soaked in such faith for too long, will he one day truly become another "god" in high-dimensional space?

The key is those gods... they don't seem to be that powerful?

Moreover, from what he currently understands, those so-called gods are essentially manifestations of certain high-dimensional space rules.

If he becomes one of them, what kind of authority would he hold?

Or would he become a lesser "demon" than those gods?

Or some other type of post-natal high-dimensional being other than those demons?

He did not know, nor could he figure it out.

High-dimensional space remains a mystery to humans.

What's more, this so-called faith erosion, at least so far, hasn't resulted in any substantial changes to himself.

Even if it transforms him into something closely related to high-dimensional space, perhaps it would need to be measured in "years."

So far off, why worry now.

Shaking his head, Bai E brushed aside these thoughts.

His mind drifted, longing to fly back to Blackwater City now.

Calculating with his fingers, it had been over half a month since he came out, and he had no idea what had happened in the city.

Having a team from the imperial capital deliver the message back, he wondered if it had been delivered.

And whether those city aristocrats who received the message followed his instructions, obediently focusing their energy on other cities, rather than extracting the limited wealth from his city.

After spending a regular half-day for so-called recuperation, Bai E proposed his need to return to both those who came from the imperial capital and the officials of Eternal Night City.

"Since matters here are settled, it's time for me to go back. Being out for so long, who knows what troubles might have arisen in my city."

Bai E's request could undoubtedly be fully implemented, but regardless of whether they were from the imperial capital like Ares or the high officials of Eternal Night City, they all had expressions of reluctance during farewells.

With their faces filled with bitter sorrow, they all appeared almost tearful.

"Safe travels, Mr. Bai." The City Lord of Eternal Night City tightly clasped Bai E's hands, "Visit often... I represent the people of Eternal Night City, welcoming Mr. Bai to come and guide us at any time!"

Ares solemnly brought up important matters, "The list you wanted has been made and will be sent to you first thing! Speaking of which, the plan to recapture those signal relay stations should also be put on the agenda, otherwise, communicating this way is too inefficient."

Chapter 832: Development and Old Friends

The mission to restart the Internet Root Server was undertaken by the people of Blackwater City, so naturally, they hold the core authority over the Internet servers.

As the direct overseers of the Root Server, they are likely the city with the most technological knowledge related to the Internet.

Even though the inherited knowledge was roughly the same for everyone before, during their oversight of the Root Server, they must have unearthed considerable data for reference. In theory, their technological expertise regarding the Internet should be the strongest.

To establish such close communication links on a global scale, Blackwater City's involvement as the leading driver is indispensable.

Listening to War God's reminder, Bai E nodded in response, "I understand."

Restoring communication capabilities globally is also his most urgent priority.

Without this instant communication capability, how could he integrate the industry chains of his region, let alone the entire world?

And without full supplies from every link of the industrial chain, how could he ever build a starship to journey into the depths of space?

"Don't worry, I'll instruct them to start taking action as soon as I return."

Ares nodded gently, looking at Bai E with a tinge of reluctance. "Well then... goodbye."

As the two strongest individuals in single combat on this planet, he knew the days ahead would rarely afford them a chance to meet again.

Each would lead their armies to reclaim lands for humanity, tasks that would occupy all their time moving forward.

"Goodbye." Bai E nodded farewell with gentle eyes, then summoned his mecha in mid-air, transforming into a streak of blue-white light streaking across the night sky.

Watching that fading arc, everyone witnessing the scene couldn't help but feel envious.

"So dashing..."

"Flying all the way back to Blackwater City using Spiritual Energy? Bai E truly is spiritually affluent!"

"Even flying alongside a mecha—does Bai E's Spiritual Energy truly never run out? Not even fifth or sixth-tier users have that kind of ability, right?"

"What nonsense are you spouting? There isn't a single fifth-tier Spiritual Energy user globally right now; what are you fantasizing about?"

"Isn't Bai E one of them?"

"...You're right. So what tier is Bai E exactly?"

...

The shadows of the city gradually faded from view, as Bai E's mecha swept through the clouds, his gaze coldly surveying the vast earth below.

Human cities, wilderness warlords, roaming Beastmen, and even Bug Race nests—all these sights emerged before him, displaying a myriad of bizarre forms.

Even with flight, the vast expanses of the planet would take several days to traverse from the northern polar circle to Blackwater City, nestled in the center of the southern hemisphere.

From the sky, Blackwater City revealed an unprecedented state of flourishing.

Unlike the other cities he had passed, all with their gates firmly shut, Blackwater City... was open.

The city gates stood wide open; the towering and sturdy walls no longer acted as barriers, limiting the exploration of the outside world by the humans inside.

Countless vehicles of intricate design freely entered and exited through the gates.

Rows upon rows of private convoys formed long black lines along wilderness tracks carved by human footsteps, resembling armies of ants extending radiating tendrils around the city's perimeter.

The scene was far more spectacular and proactive than before.

Gone was the Bug Nest that once plagued the Black Rock District.

But there were still beasts—and Beastmen.

The threat of the Beastmen was no less significant than that posed by the Bugs.

However, over the past few days, several expedition teams venturing into the "New World" encountered some of the legendary rough Beastmen, only to discover that these Beastmen were not entirely uncommunicable.

The Beastmen, reportedly under the management of a single powerful leader, upon hearing that the teams were from Blackwater City, not only provided certain road escorts but even expressed intentions to trade.

As more people came into contact with these Beastmen, this news—spreading almost instantaneously among Blackwater City's exploration teams—ceased to be mere rumor and became part of their established understanding of Blackwater City.

So, our city has grown this formidable, huh?

Not only had it annihilated the Bug Nest, but even these ferocious and boisterous Beastmen had been subdued by their Bai E City Lord.

This... was their Blackwater City!

With this strong sense of confidence, the outbound convoys carried Blackwater City's renown and glory to every corner radiating from the city's center.

The wilderness warlords, the migrant oases... and even, other sovereign cities.

Carrying the breeze of "Freedom Trade," Blackwater City's influence began extending to the entire world!

Listening quietly to Kiro Lan's report on the city's recent trends, Bai E nodded in approval of the nobles' actions.

The news he had ordered brought back from the imperial capital had naturally been disseminated, without omission, to the ears of every mid- to high-level figure in the city.

The nobles who had been warned by Bai E in advance harbored almost no doubt that Bai E would secure first place in the regional competition.

Prepared long before, they promptly launched preparations at the earliest opportunity.

Not only did they actively form their own diplomatic missions and merchant fleets, but they also provided information and encouragement to anyone in the city with an urge to explore.

A significant reason the rumors about the Beastmen spread so rapidly across all the city's exploration convoys stemmed from the efforts of these nobles to fan the flames.

Chapter 833: Development and Old Friends_2

Strongly asserting contact can easily provoke resentment from other cities. Instead, establishing a foundation of trust through peaceful commercial interaction is a better starting point. This was their initial plan.

Whether their approach was on the right track or not, at least they were truly striving to carry out their directive.

As for the final outcome, it would depend on further developments.

"As for the team of information experts you requested, my lord, we are actively working on its formation. As the Minister of Information, Minister Eric has dedicated a great deal of effort to the matter."

The most important step in intercity communication, of course, is the ability for real-time interaction.

In fact, the capability to help restore information technology is one of Blackwater City's unique strengths.

Using technological superiority to aid in gaining an advantageous position in city relations was also part of their various plans.

"That's good." Bai E nodded.

Fortunately, the city had someone like Kiro Lan—an absolutely reliable subordinate. Even during Bai E's absence, everything in the city was progressing smoothly.

"Additionally..." Kiro Lan's eyes shone with a peculiar glimmer as she spoke, "There's a woman who's returned from the Root Server base. She's been waiting in the city for your return. Would you like to meet her?"

Though she was seeking permission, Kiro Lan's tone carried a faint trace of reluctance.

As a fellow woman, she was all too aware of the fiery anticipation in the words of the returning woman when she spoke of Bai E.

This made her... slightly uncomfortable.

"A woman?" Bai E was momentarily stunned, memories drifting to the distant past.

A woman returning from the Root Server base—other than Minister Eric's assistant, there shouldn't be anyone else.

Miss Aryan... that seems to be her name.

The last time they met was back when Bai E subdued the "Virtual World."

It was also from that moment that Bai E gained the most significant advantage in this world—

An almost inexhaustible supply of Spiritual Energy drawn from the Virtual World!

"Where is she?" Bai E asked.

Back then, Bai E's actions—whether or not this reserved woman had realized anything—remained unclear.

However, up until Bai E rose to become the city's leader, no inquiries or scrutiny related to the "Virtual World" had ever been directed their way by city officials. This suggested that, even if the woman had noticed something, she had chosen not to report even the slightest detail to the city's authorities.

In any case, Bai E felt it necessary to express gratitude in person.

"She's in the VIP guest reception room."

Her residence in the Central City District had been ruthlessly destroyed on the night of the Bloody Night in Blackwater City.

And since she herself wasn't in the city at the time, no one reported it.

Upon her return, she had been staying exclusively in a guest room.

For someone of her stature, as long as she was willing to formally apply to the city for housing, her request would certainly be granted.

But the fact that she had made no such move implied... she had never intended to stay in the city for long.

Her return this time was likely driven by some unfulfilled wish, nothing more.

With a soft sigh, Kiro Lan led the way, taking Bai E to the city's VIP guest residence.

A woman dressed in a comfortable white coat was sitting on the sofa, scrolling through the tablet in her hands.

The reflection on the screen cast a subtle scholarly glow on her youthful face.

Bai E deliberately made a slight noise as they approached, instantly pulling the woman out of her concentration on the contents before her.

The black-framed-glasses-wearing woman turned her head, and the moment her gaze landed on Bai E, her expression froze, followed by a wave of pure delight washing over her face.

"Bai E!" she exclaimed, her voice brimming with joy. Then, as if realizing something, she quickly reined in her excitement, slightly lowered her head, and softly corrected herself: "No, I should address you as Lord City Master now."

"It's fine. You can call me whatever you like. Such titles are trivial and shouldn't matter." Bai E casually settled into the single-person sofa beside her, smiling warmly as he asked, "Why did you return from the base?"

"There was an important discovery—some physical data that couldn't be explained clearly online, so I requested to return with the team." Aryan spoke in the same light-hearted tone as always, sharing her thoughts. "I've handed all the technical documentation over to Helen. For further details, my lord, you may consult her. It concerns body modification technology from the Golden Age—yes, the very same bioengineered subjects that once obstructed us."

As she spoke, Aryan's eyes stayed fixed on Bai E's face.

This was her only legitimate opportunity to gaze openly at him.

The explanations she gave about transferring files and finalizing details were all excuses. The truth was she simply wanted to see Bai E one more time.

The initial stirrings of her heart had grown only more poignant with time, though she had since found great fulfillment and purpose diving deeply into the vast technology within the servers.

Still, her lingering feelings refused to fade completely.

"It's good that you came back. But why stay in a place like this all this time?" Bai E glanced around.

The VIP guest quarters were, of course, luxurious and well-maintained, but they lacked any real sense of home and clearly weren't suited for long-term living.

"I wasn't planning to stay long..." Aryan tucked a strand of messy hair behind her ear, smiling softly. "There are still some things I haven't finished handing over, but I'll be leaving in a few days."

How many "a few days" would last, however, depended on how long Bai E stayed.

'Just one glance. One glance is enough.'

Then, she would return to her work with ease.

Aryan silently reminded herself of this.

The former special operations squad member had since risen to become the ruler of Blackwater City.

The gap between them, of course, left no room for the possibility of any further development.

She was fully aware of this reality. Therefore, she only wished to safeguard Bai E's "assets" for the rest of her life in quiet servitude.

As for the server intrusion records she had erased to protect Bai E back then... those would remain buried deep within her to eternity.

However, she hadn't expected Bai E to gaze deeply into her eyes and lightly broach the subject of those past events...

"At the time, you must have realized something, didn't you?"

Aryan was not a fool.

Bai E did not believe she'd let her rationality completely fall apart due to a fleeting youthful infatuation, even in her younger days.

The woman who was now under Bai E's scrutiny froze, her face gradually showing signs of flustered panic.

Her delicate thoughts seemed to have all been laid bare. Overwhelmed with both agitation and embarrassment, her eyebrows lowered, and her long lashes trembled slightly. "You... you knew everything?"

Bai E smiled faintly. "I just thought it was fitting for someone as intelligent as Miss Aryan to figure things out."

Crimson spread across Aryan's skin, starting at her neck and climbing to the tips of her ears. Her voice trembled slightly as she replied, "Actually... actually, I pieced things together only after you left. But even then... even then, you didn't leave behind anything incriminating at all. I... I was just guessing."

"Your guess was correct. Back then, I went specifically for the so-called 'Virtual World.'" Bai E admitted openly, expressing sincere gratitude: "Which is why I must thank you for your protection at the time. Thank you, Miss Aryan."

"There's... there's no need to thank me."

"Alright, let's not dwell on this anymore. If we keep talking, you're going to overheat entirely..." Seeing Aryan's flushed face, Bai E smiled helplessly.

The teasing comment left Aryan stunned for a moment before she quickly lifted her head to look at him. "Wait... Lord Bai E, you can joke too?"

"..." Bai E's lips pressed into a thin line, remaining silent.

For a long time, his self-imposed isolation had caused him to nearly forget the kind of person he once was.

Surely, it wasn't the cold, mechanical persona he had shown to others over the years?

Indeed... what type of person had he been before?

He could scarcely remember anymore...

As the time spent wandering through this world grew longer, memories of his previous life were becoming increasingly blurred.

Chapter 834: Yue Ying is too proactive

When Helen was seen, she was browsing through various past records.

But despite combing through the texts, she still couldn't find too much relevant information, and thus frowned slightly with frustration.

"What's wrong?" Bai E asked directly upon meeting her, "Ran into some trouble?"

"Yes." Helen nodded with a trace of worry and cast a glance at Miss Aryan standing behind Bai E, giving a faint smile, "The information Miss Aryan brought back is incredibly insightful for the human modification technology we're currently utilizing. It could even provide absolute optimization for our modification plans. However, the issue is that the materials Miss Aryan brought back only include technical details, but very little about material science. I need more information in this area in order to discuss with the doctor whether we can recreate this technology."

"Have we finished examining the records from Blackwater City?"

"I've gone through nearly all of the records, but...haven't found any related information." Helen nodded again.

Bai E frowned slightly as well, inquiring about solutions, "How do we resolve this?"

"Two approaches...either go to other cities to look through their archives, or find tangible examples of Golden Age modification surgeries for me to reference. But...neither is easy."

Traveling to other cities wouldn't be a problem under the current conditions of the alliance, but among so many cities, who knows where useful records might be found?

As for finding tangible examples?

Back then, all Golden Age modified warriors who guarded the Root Server base had been completely wiped out. Their corpses weren't deliberately preserved, their internal structures were destroyed, especially the biochemical components which had entirely lost their vitality.

Even if someone were to dig them out and send them back, there wouldn't be much meaningful information to reference.

"Finding living examples for reference would be best..." Helen said softly, her gaze fixed upon Bai E as she murmured, "In the future, you might traverse the world in warfare. The relics left behind by the Golden Age are surely more than just this one. In other equally significant relics, there may still exist

remains of Golden Age biochemical modified humans. If possible, perhaps you could try to capture a few living specimens..."

Bai E was slightly stunned, reaching out into the void and extracting something—

A soft material with both biological and artificial characteristics, its surface coated in a milky-white liquid. The entire structure was vibrant and pristine, as though freshly created from some machine.

"What about this?"

Back when the strongest ancient warrior possessed by the electronic demon was killed, these biochemical components had blasted out from their body.

These biochemical structures implanted into the body might be the core elements allowing those warriors from the Golden Age to survive to this day.

They ought to be of tremendous significance to Helen's research.

Seeing the object in Bai E's hands, Helen was initially stunned, then immediately overjoyed, "This is exactly it!"

It was completely identical to the manufactured products described in the information Aryan brought back, and even this fresh.

"Where did you get this?" Helen enthusiastically used Spiritual Energy to receive this precious sample without contact.

Before Bai E could answer, she continued speaking to herself, "With this sample, perhaps I can fully understand its mechanisms."

Amid the centuries of changes brought about by shifting environments, human physique might differ from the past in certain ways.

What suited humans during the Golden Age might not necessarily suit humans today, let alone now when we're layering Grey Iron City's human modification techniques and Blackwater City's genetic optimization technology onto this biochemical modification foundation.

Only by fully understanding its mechanisms can we ensure seamless usage in the future, with no room for errors—or at least any unforeseen issues would fall within expectations, allowing timely adjustments.

"Only 'perhaps'? Is there still some problem?" Bai E asked in confusion.

"The sample is too scarce..." Helen stared at the biochemical component suspended before her, like an art piece, "With only this single sample, I don't dare to destroy its structure for research. Progress will obviously be slow, and I can't guarantee success. If we had more..."

Before Helen could finish her sentence, she was overwhelmed by the sight of a large number of biochemical components suddenly appearing before her.

"What about now?"

"..." Helen swallowed hard, nodding with difficulty, "Now there's no problem."

Helen gazed excitedly at the multitude of biochemical components floating above her head, her face brimming with joy, "With these samples, I can confidently attempt anything!"

"Use them freely, if there aren't enough, there's more." Bai E waved his hand, magnanimous, "As long as it benefits your research, feel free to let me know any difficulties."

"Rest assured!" Helen tightened the gold-rimmed glasses on her nose, "Leave it to the doctor and me."

"Then I won't disturb you further." Bai E nodded, taking his leave with Aryan, who had remained silent beside him.

As they left the research institute, Aryan's face was lit with a radiant smile, "The lord is indeed impressive... Now that Helen has the corpses needed for her research, my effort in personally delivering the information wasn't in vain. If there's nothing else, my lord, I'll take my leave."

Aryan looked up at Bai E, her gaze filled with contentment—just meeting Bai E was her greatest wish.

From now on, even if she were to spend the rest of her life unseen in that Root Server base, this memory would remain the most beautiful one for a girl experiencing her first stirrings of romance.

"I will guard the base diligently for the lord, assisting you in conquering territories worldwide, and ensuring your martial success!"

Chapter 835: Yue Ying is too proactive_2

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The young girl came and went.

Just as everything familiar in these chaotic times can undergo drastic changes under the tides of the era.

Returning to the military camp, Bai E immediately noticed the changes within.

Countless shirtless recruits were sweating under the sun, training with maximum efficiency to cultivate their attributes and meet the requirements for injecting the Gene Optimization Solution as soon as possible.

After the city's sovereignty transferred into Bai E's hands, the supply of Gene Optimization Solution no longer prioritized those so-called noble heirs.

In contrast, ordinary civilians no longer needed to consume such precious resources.

From now on, there were only two ways to obtain the Gene Optimization Solution—

Joining the military or venturing into exploration.

Exploration units sent beyond the city would also receive certain technical support, enabling them to manufacture and inject the Gene Optimization Solution independently.

Under such a policy, apart from joining exploratory missions outside of Blackwater City, those who sought strength had no choice but to enlist in the military, serving for a certain term to gain personal power.

Upon hearing the news of Bai E's return, Rose immediately came to greet him. The valiant female warrior was as vibrant and bold as ever, and her time steering major military affairs in Bai E's absence had lent her a sense of dignified authority.

Now that handling broader fields was required of him as the city's ruler, Bai E wondered if entrusting all military affairs to her might be the best choice.

Bai E entertained such thoughts as he extended his arms for a warm embrace with the spirited Rose.

Rose, ever direct and unreserved, let go quickly. She took two steps back, cheerily examining the man before her, "Gone so long—why does it feel like you've changed again?"

"Have I?" Bai E smiled indifferently.

When external threats diminish, the reawakening of one's personality may lead to subtle shifts in demeanor.

That Rose, who spent the most time with him, noticed these imperceptible changes instantly was not surprising.

Rose shook her head, choosing not to dwell on the matter.

She simply felt that the man before her had become even more approachable and confident, his aura deepening into a mesmerizing charm.

It overlapped more and more strongly with the perfect image in her heart.

"What you instructed before leaving has mostly been completed. Although we aren't sure what kind of talents you're specifically looking for, based on your criteria, we've preliminarily classified personnel across all military regions and combat institutions in the city. However, for certain specialized fields, there aren't many warriors. If you'd like to form a dedicated army, the numbers... might not be enough."

"Just a temporary idea. For now, let's focus on identifying and nurturing talents in all domains. Dividing the units must proceed gradually; there's no need to rush."

"..." Rose arched her brow deliberately, sensing something, "What's this? By the sound of it, these matters still fall to me? You're heading out again?"

"Indeed," Bai E chuckled helplessly. "World peace is still a long way off. During this trip to the Imperial Capital, I had a delightful chat with their legendary War God. The alliance's primary purpose is to help all humanity reclaim absolute sovereignty on this planet. So, in the days to come, we'll all be busy. Regarding the camp, I may have to leave everything to you. You've been doing well, and frankly, I trust no one else."

"..." Rose's eyes glimmered briefly before she smiled, "You really know what to say to put pressure on me. But for your trust, fine—I'll take good care of this military region for you."

"There's no choice..." Bai E sighed softly, "After all, the number of people I can trust completely is but a few. Once the alliance sends over its finalized rescue list, I'll embark on worldwide actions."

"From the way you say it, it feels as if our earlier adventures as a team happened years ago."

"Doesn't it?" Bai E laughed heartily, "I just wonder whether we'll have more of those carefree moments in the future."

"Since you're not planning to stay long upon returning, I won't occupy your precious time." Rose suddenly winked playfully, grinning mischievously, "There's someone waiting for you in your room."

During your absence, she asked me several times about the date of your return... Now, don't keep her waiting."

"Someone? Who?" Bai E was momentarily surprised, "What someone?"

"You'll find out when you get there." Rose waved her hand and turned away, "I have things to do. Off I go ~ "

Curious, Bai E returned to the room he'd been away from for so long.

From a distance, he extended his senses but couldn't detect any trace of a living presence.

'Could it be empty?'

As this question flashed through his mind, Bai E pushed open the door and stepped inside.

A shadow darted toward him instantly, and Bai E instinctively raised his hand to block.

However, upon seeing who it was, Bai E abandoned resistance.

In the next moment, Bai E found himself pinned against the closed door.

Staring at the close, flawless face emitting a sweet fragrance, and the soft, cold body pressed against his own, Bai E felt a wave of heat surge through him.

"You..."

Before he could finish his sentence, his lips were sealed by soft lips.

Pale pink lips were cool, tender, and silky, their sweet scent flooding Bai E's nostrils.

Delicate hands moved instinctually over his body, sending electric tingles coursing through him.

Once there's a first time, a second always follows...

Yue Ying, too proactive.

For a moment, Bai E's mind embraced only this final thought.

...

Such reckless days are always fleeting. The Imperial Capital's efficiency was high, quickly categorizing all globally endangered cities by risk and proximity for Bai E.

Some cities' situations weren't much different from that of Eternal Night City.

Previously, many believed that the Bug Race's ultimate beasts were incapable of actively attacking human territories, which allowed certain cities to withstand their onslaught.

But with Eternal Night City's experience in hindsight, everyone realized one truth.

For the majority of threatened cities, the Bug Race had always possessed overwhelming superiority.

Their restraint in attacking was merely to facilitate the infiltration of their "lurker" mutants, unknown to human society.

No one knew why the bugs chose to infiltrate humanity via "lurker" mutagens.

But whatever their goal, eradicating them from this planet remained an imperative.

In the region closest to Blackwater City, a city named "Thorn City" became Bai E's first target for rescue after the alliance's formation.

There was no need for an army, no need for convoys.

Bai E alone was enough to be a force unto himself.

Piloting a mecha, he sped across the terrain, covering in less than a day a distance that would normally take one or two days.

Under the twilight, the city lay in ruins, its walls marred by craters, the scars of war evident everywhere.

The sentries stationed on the city's defenses were tense, vigilantly watching for movement from the wilderness beyond.

Any trace of rustling grass or shifting winds would instantly trigger their alert.

Blackwater City, which once fought its way to the Bug race's nests, now carried the reputation of being an elder brother figure among neighboring cities.

And as Blackwater City became one of the alliance's five eligible members of the Supreme Council, this city immediately called for assistance from the alliance.

Chapter 836: Arrogant at first, respectful afterwards

The sentry in charge of security on the city wall spotted a black dot descending from the sky in the distance.

"Is that some kind of mutated bird?"

The seasoned veteran squinted in confusion, "Ordinary birds don't grow that big, do they?"

This made the rookie stiffen with fear. "Could it be... a new bug variant?!"

"Doesn't look like it..." The veteran shook his head after using a telescope to observe the metallic glint on the surface of the object. "Not sure what it is. Never seen anything like it before. Better prepare for anti-aircraft security."

Once the anti-aircraft cannons near the city wall were fully prepared, the visitor in the sky slowed its approach upon reaching a certain distance from the city. It stopped flying and landed on the ground, advancing toward the city in a deliberate and non-threatening manner.

A massive blue-and-white mecha strode slowly across the ground, causing the earth to tremble faintly.

The sentries on the wall became instantly excited.

"Is that... a mecha?"

"Holy hell... A mecha that big and it can still fly? What kind of cutting-edge tech is this? Why do our city's big clunky turtle shells look so stupid in comparison?"

"I heard rumors that support from the big brother of our alliance might arrive soon. Could this be it?"

"What 'big brother of the alliance'? It's clearly the big brother of our region."

"Right, right! Regional big brother! But regional big brother's support... couldn't possibly just be this one mecha, right?"

When the mecha approached close enough, the radio communication channel between the two parties finally connected.

"Szzzt--"

Amidst crackling static, a slightly distorted voice of the visitor came through, "This is reinforcements from Blackwater City. Requesting to meet Thorn City's City Overlord."

The messenger receiving the transmission froze.

"Reinforcements from Blackwater City, really?"

He had indeed been informed that reinforcements from Blackwater City were on their way, but no one said the reinforcements were just a single mecha!

So he responded to stall for time, "Please hold on, we are requesting clearance from the City Overlord's dedicated line."

Setting aside the external communication channel, the messenger turned and dialed the internal line of the City Overlord.

"Reporting to the Overlord: A mecha has arrived outside the city, claiming to be reinforcements from Blackwater City."

A mix of static and faint female voices came from the other side before a response was given, "The City Overlord wants to know how many are here?"

The messenger hesitated. "O-only one mecha."

"Just one mecha?"

"Just one mecha... but it can fly."

The muffled voices on the other end rose sharply in volume, and one could clearly hear someone shouting, "Overlord, the sentries reported that Blackwater City sent a flying mecha!"

After a string of indistinct curses, the voice on the other end finally answered clearly, "The City Overlord says to make them wait! Beep--- Beep--- Beep---"

"Wha..." The messenger stared dumbly at the now-dead phone line.

This put him in quite a predicament.

On one side, potentially critical support from the regional big brother... although it was just one mecha.

On the other side, an order from his own City Overlord... who seemed increasingly disinterested in leadership.

Faced with such a dilemma, he had no choice but to make a decision.

After much hesitation, he nervously picked up the radio communication channel again and timidly replied, "The City Overlord requests that you please wait a moment. He'll be joining shortly."

"I heard that." Bai E narrowed his eyes slightly, a cold light flashing in his pupils.

With his increasingly refined command of his Spiritual Energy, he could now do much more.

For instance, using the innate 'Heavenly Eye' psionics, which had a special affinity for information, to monitor the opposing party's communication frequencies...

It seemed the City Overlord truly wasn't all that interested in his job anymore.

The messenger's face froze at Bai E's response. He could not fathom how Bai E overheard conversations on another channel, but for now, he could only nervously offer an explanation for his city. "Our City Overlord likely has urgent matters at hand and cannot break away at the moment. As soon as he finishes, he'll come over right away!"

"..." Bai E neither agreed nor disagreed. He simply hung up the call calmly.

The towering mecha remained standing in place, making even the sentries on the wall feel awkward about its presence.

The reinforcements from Blackwater City had arrived from afar. Even if it was just a single mecha, they couldn't let it stand around outside the city so stupidly, could they?

"The City Overlord is being... a bit much."

"Shh! Speak carefully!"

"Hey! It's moving!"

"Where's it headed?"

"Oh no! Did we drive them away?"

"What do we do? This was the alliance reinforcements we've been desperately waiting for!"

"Let them leave, then! It's just one mecha. Honestly, Blackwater City doesn't seem all that sincere about helping. They probably sent it just to make a token effort for the alliance. Now our City Overlord refusing to meet them gives them the perfect excuse to not even fake it anymore. It's great."

"Tch! What a goddamn world! If we're doomed, everyone's doomed together! This world's going to hell, sooner or later!"

...

The shadow of the city grew distant behind him.

Bai E wasn't actually leaving in anger.

It's just that he figured if he was going to waste time, he might as well find something to do.

Thorn City was one of the cities most plagued by the threat of insect hives, incessantly tormented by the Bug Race's unending invasions.

Their fungal creep had even spread to an alarmingly close distance from the city.

If the Bug Race so desired, they could launch a devastating assault against Thorn City at any moment.

From Eternal Night City's experience, the Bug Race was fully capable of initiating large-scale campaigns but refrained from annihilating humanity outright due to some unknown agenda.

The key to this agenda lay with the mutant insectoids known as "Infiltrators," who had either already embedded themselves within human society or were planning to do so.

Chapter 837: Arrogant at first, respectful afterwards

The lurkers are the key reserves of the Bug Race, lying dormant until needed. However, once the city poses enough of a threat to the mothers of these lurkers, they will call their offspring to resist

desperately, and simultaneously summon the nests outside the city to pour forth, all in an effort to save their own lives.

Eternal Night City suffered greatly last time when forced to fight a two-front battle. Now facing a potentially similar predicament, Bai E would not let the same disaster befall himself twice.

Seizing the moment before the city begins a large-scale investigation of the "lurkers," Bai E opts to take out the Bug Nests outside the city directly in advance.

This way, he can ensure that the developments of the battle, both inside and outside the city, remain firmly under his control, and make absolutely certain there are no errors in the rescue plan.

With these thoughts weighing on his mind, it wasn't long before Bai E piloted his blue-and-white mecha over the mucus-covered, bug-infested fungal plains.

The core Bug Nest was located at the very heart of this fungal terrain.

Drawing the alloy combat blade lightly, Bai E controlled the mecha as it streaked through the air like a meteor, slamming directly onto a small hill brewing with bug activity.

"Boom!"

The ground trembled, and a tide of insects surged forth.

Countless bugs clad in black shells poured out at high speed, like an overwhelming army of ants rushing from various nest openings across the terrain, accompanied by massive beasts bursting from hidden burrows, stretching their gargantuan and grotesque forms into view.

No creature had ever dared violate the sovereignty of these devourers to such an extent. Even those nested inside their despised metal contraptions weren't immune from being torn apart and devoured!

...

"Boom!"

"Boom!"

"Boom boom boom!"

The commotion from the far end of the battlefield shook hearts and minds.

On the walls, loose stones quivered and tumbled from the vibrations coursing through the earth.

Countless sentinels stationed at the walls stared in terror at the direction of the sounds, their faces filled with bewilderment as they tried to grasp the horror unfolding out there.

"Could it be the Bug Race launching a full-scale invasion?!"

"But these are clearly the sounds of battle! Could it be some force engaging the bugs at their nest?"

"Orcs? Or perhaps the Intelligents? If they're fighting, that's great—best if they destroy each other, or at the very least inflict severe losses on each side!"

"Maybe it's that mecha from Blackwater City? Didn't I see it heading in that direction earlier?"

"Don't joke around! Haven't we fought the Bug Race countless times? A single mecha causing such a commotion? It would've been torn apart and slaughtered the moment it entered!"

"Maybe their mecha isn't the same as ours? Why else would they be the regional powerhouse while we're the poor souls always at risk of being bug food?"

The tumult persisted for ages.

So much so that these distant spectators, initially confused and shocked, gradually sank into an emotional deadlock, as if becoming stagnant, lifeless water.

Until a reconnaissance squad sent to investigate returned with news, leaving everyone in disbelief!

"A lone blue-and-white mecha is battling inside the Bug Nest!"

"Around the mecha, countless bug corpses were decapitated!"

Captured recordings from afar matched perfectly with the mecha that had introduced itself earlier as reinforcements from Blackwater City!

This astonishing fact immediately ignited a frenzy among the sentinels stationed at the wall.

The mid-level officers in charge of defending the wall could no longer contain their emotions and swiftly reported the news to the city's upper echelon.

In no time, even the city lord—barely managing to dress himself—was flanked by high-ranking officials as he arrived at the towering wall to watch the colossal disturbances occasionally emanating from afar.

"Are the videos accurate?"

"Are the only reinforcements really that single mecha?"

"So humans can be this powerful? If I'd known, we'd have allied much sooner!"

The city lord kicked aside a hesitating scout captain, yelling, "Request? Request what?! Mobilize every available personnel to investigate! Report back in batches with updates on the situation out there!"

As everyone waited anxiously, the cacophony from the Bug Nest finally began to quiet down.

Soon after, heavy footsteps echoed, resonating slowly and steadily as they moved closer from afar.

"Thud. Thud."

At last, when the massive blue-and-white figure emerged from behind a mountain corner and appeared before Thorn City's walls, the entire wall erupted in thunderous cheers and cries.

"Victory!"

"Humans have won!"

"The boss is incredible!"

Yet for reasons unknown, some of the more sensitive Spiritual Energy users couldn't shake the persistent aura of cold austerity clinging to the victorious figure.

"Boom! Boom!"

With each step, the sound grew heavier, bearing a weight far beyond what the mecha itself should hold.

A crimson beast's head, dripping corrosive acidic fluids, was being carried back toward the city in the mecha's grasp.

From a distance, the triumphant mecha raised the severed head of the giant beast, and with a force akin to launching a cannonball, hurled the beast's head toward the city wall.

"Boom!"

Debris flew, the wall vibrated.

The overlord's head slammed into the wall, spreading cracks outward from the point of impact.

Officers and sentinels stationed there stumbled and fell over, some shouting impulsively, "Enemy attack! Enemy attack!"

"What enemy attack?!" The city lord, firmly supported by his subordinates, bellowed at the panicked officers. "This is Thorn City's spoils of war, can't you recognize that?!"

"Exactly!" The officials, recovering from their initial panic, refused to believe that the reinforcements from Blackwater City—who had come to help fend off the bugs—could possibly be an enemy.

If he were an enemy, why would he help Thorn City eliminate the bugs?

Everyone leaned over the edge of the wall, scrutinizing the grotesque head of the Bug overlord—a creature they had previously never dared to look at directly.

"What kind of bug's head is that?"

"The overlord's, probably?"

"Have you seen an overlord before?"

"In pictures, I think it looks just like this..."

"Don't all bugs look kind of the same?"

"The reinforcements wouldn't bring back some ordinary bug's head, right? It has to be the overlord's head!"

"We've won!"

The towering, bloated city lord hastily called out to the surrounding senior officials of Thorn City, "Why are you all still standing there? Go welcome our honorable reinforcements!"

"Yes, yes! We must welcome them!"

"Quickly! Summon the ceremonial guard! Lay down the red carpet, let's honor them for ten miles!"

Chaotic sounds burst forth instantly.

Meanwhile, only a few low-ranking runners exchanged wary glances as they quietly muttered to one another, "Didn't that lord leave earlier after being offended by our city lord?"

"Feels like there might've been a bit of personal emotion in the way he threw that beast's head just now."

"Our reinforcements wouldn't turn into our disaster, would they?"

"Probably not... We're all humans, after all. A little neglect isn't worth holding onto grudges like that. He's big, he's important—he wouldn't stoop to our city lord's level."

...

A mass of people streamed out from the city, forming neat ranks in the open space beyond the walls.

The leading crowd wore genuine smiles, all eager to welcome the return of their champion.

And all of this had materialized in the brief time since Bai E had carried the overlord's head back to the city.

In stark contrast to the cold reception earlier.

"We ask the honored reinforcements to step forward so we, on behalf of Thorn City's citizens, may offer the utmost respect!"

A blaring loudspeaker broadcasted this message below as Bai E scoffed coldly, opened the cockpit, and leapt straight down from a height of several dozen meters.

Striding directly up to Thorn City's delegation, Bai E stared directly at the city lord, who had stepped forth to speak, his face devoid of expression as he smiled coldly, "Replace your city lord, then we can talk."

Chapter 838: Thorns in the Shadow

Everyone thought they had misheard.

The leader, the city lord, looked utterly bewildered as he stared at the unfamiliar man before him, "Comrade from the reinforcements, did you just say... what?"

Jiang Bai's gaze was cold and indifferent as he calmly repeated, "I said, get a new city lord, then come talk to me."

The crowd, now certain they hadn't misheard, immediately erupted in an uproar.

Someone immediately lashed out, "How dare you! Do you even know who you're talking to? Standing before you is the city lord of Thorn City!"

But the critique was lonely; no other voices rose to support him.

In normal times, anyone bold enough to speak to their lord like this would likely have their ashes scattered by now.

But today... after witnessing the terrifying might of this man who single-handedly obliterated an entire hive, no one dared to argue over such trivial nuances.

All they could do was wonder — was it some sort of misunderstanding?

Or even if there had been minor conflicts in the past, couldn't they be settled peacefully?

After all, they were allies. What was the point of such hostility?

The city lord's eyelids twitched slightly, "Sir... I don't quite understand what you mean? I am the rightful city lord of Thorn City, unquestionably legitimate. If you have any concerns, feel free to express them. Anything within my power, we will cooperate fully!"

Bai E frowned slightly, his voice dark and low, "Was I not clear enough? I told you all—replace your city lord!"

The city lord's expression clouded entirely, "Sir, you're overstepping your bounds!"

Bai E ignored him and turned his gaze to the crowd standing behind him, "Someone step forward! Say just one sentence, and you'll be the new city lord."

"Sir, this is outrageous!" The city lord's face darkened further, almost roaring in threat, "Let me remind you, Thorn City is not afraid of you!"

Yet behind him, a storm of hidden schemes was brewing.

While most people weren't aware of what grievances existed between the reinforcements and their city lord, few were concerned with the specifics, and even fewer cared about the rights or wrongs.

What they knew was this—this was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity!

The old city lord became the lord because he possessed the greatest resources and power in Thorn City.

This didn't mean everyone respected him.

In fact, in the years spent despairing over the hive, the city lord had all but entirely neglected urban development and focused solely on protecting his rule.

This had long frustrated many ambitious officials, who had grown increasingly discontent with the iron-fisted measures he employed to crush any resistance.

But now...

This might just be their chance to rebel.

In the past, no one had ever imagined that a single individual could so drastically alter the city's political dynamics.

Even someone as legendary as the War God of the Empire's capital would, in their assumptions, need years of maneuvering and climbing to hold a decisive position within the city.

But now...

A true War God capable of single-handedly annihilating a hive could, without question, raze Thorn City to the ground as well.

Faced with someone who could destroy a city alone, what political dynamics could still exist?

Wouldn't the city become whatever shape that individual dictated?

This man wasn't likely speaking casually when demanding a new city lord, was he?

All they needed to consider was whether this unstoppable reinforcement truly intended to support the new leader in good faith—or treat them as a pawn to be discarded after use.

If he genuinely intended to back them, even a complete nobody with zero influence in Thorn City could instantly rise to become the city's true ruler!

Standing behind the furious city lord, a multitude of people exchanged glances, their ambitions stirring.

Aware that any attitude shown toward this formidable ally would only amount to impotent rage, the city lord turned to glare at his faction with burning fury, fully aware of the simmering discontent brewing within ranks, "What are you doing?! What are you thinking?! Do you want to betray me?!"

His accusations seemed only to inflame the rebellious intent in certain hearts, spurring one wavering man to decisively step forward.

Ignoring the city lord entirely, he locked his gaze onto Bai E, "My lord, if you truly promise to protect me, then I will be the new city lord of Thorn City!"

This declaration triggered an immediate wave of support.

"My lord, I am also willing to be the city lord!"

"My lord, I can be the city lord too!"

Even a nearby ceremonial drummer raised his mallets, shouting, "My lord, let me be the city lord!"

Bai E, however, remained focused solely on the first individual who had stepped forward. His steady gaze affirmed the candidate with a single nod, "It'll be you."

"Madness! You're all mad!" The old city lord's finger swung towards the crowd, "This is rebellion! Treason! You'll all pay with your lives! Guards! Elite Guard! Arrest them all! Execute them on the spot! Leave no one alive!"

The elite guard swiftly closed in from all sides, but none dared make a move against the lone, imposing figure of the outsider.

The armor-clad soldiers hesitated, itching for action yet deeply apprehensive.

Knowing full well what was on their minds, the city lord turned back to stare daggers at Bai E, spitting his warning, "This is Thorn City's internal matter—it has nothing to do with you or Blackwater City, sir! Even if this reaches the Alliance Council, right is on our side! I suggest you learn your place!"

His words were both a warning for Bai E and a veiled message to guide his elite guard.

Chapter 839: Thorns in the Shadow_2

The other party was ultimately just an outsider. Even if the situation escalated and reached the Alliance, as the rightful city lord, he would still hold the upper hand.

"Do it!"

"Who dares?" Jiang Bai squinted his eyes, releasing the Spiritual Energy field.

Killing was far simpler than intimidation—he only hoped these people wouldn't be foolish enough to force his hand.

Seeing that the guards, who were initially poised to charge, suddenly stopped in their tracks, the city lord became frantic and stomped his feet. "Go! What are you waiting for?!"

His chubby fingers even directly pointed at Bai E. "He's not inside his Mecha now—no matter how strong a Mech Pilot is, his body is still made of flesh!"

Before the words finished, a pitch-black shadow instantly shot out from his fingertip.

Bai E, ever vigilant, reflexively slashed with his sword—a Longsword imbued with enchantments had appeared in his hand without anyone noticing. It deflected the incoming dark claw blade in an instant.

"Clang!"

The terrifying clash of metal reverberated sharply, piercing through everyone's eardrums. Bai E hoisted his sword and sneered coldly at the city lord, who merely appeared human, "So, you finally couldn't resist revealing yourself, could you?"

His Bug Race detector had already alerted him long ago. However, given that a large group originating from Thorn City had emerged, pinpointing the exact culprit was difficult.

Bai E had been waiting all along—for this, or these bugs, to take the initiative to reveal themselves.

But what he didn't expect was that the bug disguised as a human turned out to be the city lord himself!

The sudden turn of events between the two caused the initially chaotic groups to plunge into terror. Everyone stared in horror at the old city lord's pitch-black claws protruding from his hands.

Those weren't organs human bodies should possess—they were the chitinous shells only ever seen on bugs before.

Immediately, a few among the informed recalled the intel brought back by the competition squad sent to the Alliance—

A mutant bug had managed to disguise itself as a human and infiltrate human society.

Such mutants had only been confirmed to exist in one place: Eternal Night City, to the far north.

And now...

Had these mutant bugs already infiltrated Thorn City as well?

The city lord, whose disguise was now thoroughly exposed, gave up all pretenses.

The position of city lord was, of course, the perfect cover, but now that his adversary was determined to strip him of his title, there was no point in maintaining the pretense.

Seeing his identity exposed, he had to seize this opportunity to create as much destruction as possible.

As he had declared, he thought Bai E, separated from his Mecha, was at his weakest.

If he could kill Bai E now, there was still a chance for him to rise again.

The city lord's disguise was compromised? Then he'd simply change to another identity.

Changing identities required time, but he had plenty of that.

On one condition... he absolutely had to eliminate this human, who had just destroyed his broodmother and posed a lethal threat!

"Swish, swish, swish!" The pitch-black bone blades glinted in the twilight, each strike laden with menace.

Bai E dodged continuously, occasionally using the enchanted Star-Eater Blade in his hand to parry.

The appearance of bugs within Thorn City needed to be prolonged to make the severity of the situation sink in for its inhabitants. This would make it easier to secure full cooperation from the entire city later.

Operating alone provided flexibility, but when coordination was needed, lacking a team could expose drawbacks.

This was the first city in his rescue mission, and the circumstances here would offer invaluable lessons for the rest of his journey.

From afar, Thorn City's officials stared at the electrifying two-person battlefield with wary expressions, murmuring in awe.

"The city lord... What happened to him?"

"Is this some new type of human augmentation technology? Why haven't we heard anything about it?"

"I never thought the city lord was this powerful!"

"What city lord? That's not human—it's a bug!"

"A bug!"

"A bug!? How could it possibly be a bug?! How could a bug look like the city lord?"

"You haven't read the report from the squad returning from the imperial capital, have you? New variants of bugs have emerged that can perfectly mimic human appearances and infiltrate our society. They were exposed during a competition at the Alliance's summit—this was when the entire Alliance learned of this revelation."

"Why didn't we know this?!"

"Of course you didn't know! The city lord ordered all informants to keep quiet the moment he received the news!"

"Oh~ That explains it!" Someone suddenly realized. "The city lord himself had already been replaced and disguised by a bug—that's why he completely suppressed the information."

"No wonder this esteemed guest directly targeted the city lord upon arrival—it turns out he could tell the city lord was a bug all along! Wait! If bugs can disguise themselves as the city lord, doesn't that mean they can disguise themselves as any one of us?!"

The moment someone voiced this disturbing possibility, the previously close-knit team scattered in all directions.

Everyone worked to create distance from the others, fearing that someone near them might be another bug's disguise, ready to strike when least expected.

After all, even that lone individual capable of destroying a bug nest was engaging the bug-disguised city lord evenly—if more disguised bugs attacked, how could they possibly defend themselves?

However, Bai E didn't leave them to stew in fear for long.

Allowing this bug to demonstrate its true form was merely to deepen Thorn City's awareness of the threat.

Seeing the crowd had fully grasped the gravity of the situation, Bai E unleashed his full strength.

The enchanted Star-Eater Blade swept out with an endless stream of sword shadows—a devastating attack that instantly dismembered the disguised broodmother into shredded flesh.

In the end, the mangled form riddled with wounds collapsed to the ground, revealing the unmistakable octopus-like head for all to see.

Seeing this, the officials completely shed all doubts. "So it's true!"

"The old city lord really was a bug!"

"Bugs truly have infiltrated human society!"

The officials stared in horror, their thoughts frozen and their minds scattered.

Countless gazes turned to the outsider standing before them, hoping this noble fighter—a man who had eradicated bug nests and uncovered the fake city lord—would help free Thorn City from this shadow of danger.

With a single hand, Bai E lifted the octopus-headed corpse and tossed it at their feet. His steely gaze swept across the faces of their fearful crowd, as he spoke in a low, steady voice: "You should all understand the current situation by now, correct?"

"Yes, yes, we understand!"

The man who had been the first to step forward now came to the forefront, respectfully replying to Bai E, "My lord, we've only just learned about what transpired during the Alliance competitions in the imperial capital."

He pointed to the corpse of the octopus head, his face filled with lingering fear. "Previously, we were all deceived by this fake city lord and entirely unaware of the truth. We beg for your mercy, my lord— please save Thorn City in the name of the Alliance! I represent the entire city in thanking you for your heroic intervention today!"

"That is precisely the reason I came." Bai E nodded and strode toward the city. "I can identify whether there are still hidden bugs among your population, but I need everyone's full cooperation."

"Of course!" The man followed closely behind Bai E.

As his eyes swept over his former bureaucratic colleagues, who were now looking at him with pleading eyes, he cautiously made a request to Bai E. "My lord, I have an additional request..."

"Speak."

"Could you inform us if there are any other mutant bugs disguised among us? Otherwise, even in conducting our duties, everyone might remain plagued by fear."

Bai E cast his gaze over the crowd and offered a reassuring answer. "Here, there are none."

Chapter 840: Patching Vulnerability Plan

Bai E's response undoubtedly instilled the highest confidence in every Thorn City official present.

The officials who had only heard scattered rumors gradually pieced together the origins of this esteemed figure who had come to aid them.

A portly man squeezed his way next to Bai E, cautiously asking, "May I ask, my lord, are you the City Lord of Blackwater City, Bai E?"

"Yes."

"I knew it!" The man was overjoyed. "I heard from the delegates returning from the championship that the leader who led his warriors to claim the regional championship for Blackwater City was none other than you, my lord. It was also under your sharp eyes that those Bugs disguised as warriors from Eternal Night City were exposed. To think that the aid arriving for our city would turn out to be you, my lord! It's truly Thorn City's blessing! May I ask how long you plan to stay here and whether you have any special requirements for daily living? We would gladly arrange for a palace to be built for you."

Bai E's gaze remained indifferent, dismissing the flattery and probing embedded in the man's words. "Having your people conduct the most stringent preparations and allowing me to inspect every resident in your city as quickly as possible—that would be the most responsible action toward the alliance. Aside from you, many other cities are also under threat from the Bug Race. I don't have the time to linger here too long, so there's no need to trouble yourselves."

Upon hearing this, the Thorn City officials exchanged glances—some joyful, some anxious.

Only the man Bai E had designated as the city's lord looked disheartened.

'As expected, what I feared from the very beginning has come to pass.'

'This esteemed lord is here solely to resolve the issue and not to truly support anyone to become Thorn City's City Lord. The one who stepped up first will inevitably be treated like a disposable pawn.'

Yet, in front of a man capable of single-handedly confronting both the Bug Race nests and the cities, no matter how reluctant he felt, he dared not utter even half a word in protest.

'Once he leaves, perhaps that will be the time I must flee for my life.'

As if sensing the man's thoughts, Bai E, who was striding into the city, glanced at him from the side and casually asked, "What's your name?"

The man immediately straightened up, stepping forward with excitement as he replied, "My lord, my name is Eugene!"

"Alright, I've noted it down. Later, I'll have some personnel from Blackwater City come and assist you in restoring Thorn City's order and economy. Do your best. Don't let the people of Thorn City down."

The man's face lit up with joy, "I will not fail your trust, my lord!"

"Hmm." Bai E nodded expressionlessly and took the lead, stepping into the city.

When it comes to matters involving the life and death of every individual, even the most bureaucratic cities must display their most resolute execution.

In less than half an hour, an orderly queue of Thorn City's citizens—dressed in their finest—had already formed before Bai E.

One glance was enough to tell that these people were the kin and close relatives of the city's officials. Upon learning that there might already be Bugs disguised among them, each person's greatest concern was, of course, for their family and friends.

Bai E had no interest in demanding equality for all at a time like this. In fact, it could even be said that gathering ordinary citizens might not be as fast nor as efficient as utilizing the officials' personal connections, which at least wouldn't waste time.

The method was the same as that used in Eternal Night City: groups of ten were assembled, each group spaced apart by a certain distance, and they passed in front of Bai E, one by one.

If none of the targets triggered a stronger reaction indicative of Bug Race imagery, they could be deemed safe.

For a city with a population ranging from hundreds of thousands to millions, the efficiency of inspecting ten individuals at a time was undeniably low.

In truth, Bai E hoped that, as in Eternal Night City, once news of the Bug-cleansing operation spread, those Bugs who knew they couldn't escape his eyes would choose to hide, rallying the remaining infiltrators for a desperate last stand.

Even as Bai E appeared inattentive, sitting there as though lost in thought, the officials—though aware this man was here to aid their city—couldn't help whispering among themselves with a mix of doubt and curiosity.

"Does the lord really not have any special detection tools? Something like X-rays or thermal imaging? After all, these Bugs are disguised so perfectly that even in day-to-day contact, we couldn't detect any irregularities. Can he really identify them just by looking?"

"Shh! Do you want to die?! Whatever the lord says is what it is! His eyes are the ultimate measure; just watch closely, and stop spouting nonsense!"

"I mean... I'm just curious. How could someone like him appear among humanity? Even the rumored War God from the Imperial City isn't one-tenth as formidable as him, right?"

If the Imperial City War God truly had the power to single-handedly fend off Bug nests, wouldn't the news have spread worldwide by now?

"What do you know? If you're so knowledgeable, why aren't you the War God yourself? Just sit tight and watch! Why so much idle chatter?"

"...Wait! Over there—the lord seems to be making a move!"

As they were talking, Bai E—who had appeared to be in a daze—suddenly narrowed his eyes and waved to stop a group of visibly uneasy individuals passing before him.

This was the first group of inspected people to be stopped. Both the individuals themselves and the Thorn City guards maintaining order were puzzled.

"My lord?"

Bai E didn't answer but calmly ordered, "You ten, step apart at a fixed distance and pass in front of me again!"

Many of the inspected individuals looked bewildered, instinctively glancing at Bai E before turning to the familiar Thorn City personnel nearby.