

Wow 941

Chapter 941 - Resource Supply—Fighting Pirates

The miners looked at the tangible supplies, then at the three people before them whose demeanor was vastly different from those lofty bigwigs of the past. Silence spread throughout the tunnel.

The old miner slowly stood up, walked to the supply box, felt the solid container, and then looked at the detailed list on the inventory.

He raised his head, looking at Catherine with a complicated expression: "Ca... Captain Catherine... did you really empty your reserves?"

Catherine nodded heavily, her eyes slightly red, "The Bauhinia is gone, but the people remain. As long as the people remain, there is hope. This hope is not granted by others but earned bit by bit by ourselves. I know it's difficult. It's so hard to change even this mining district, let alone the entire Mine Star... but someone must start doing it."

The old miner remained silent for a long time and finally sighed, waving to those behind him: "... First, replace the filters, the air in Tunnel Three is almost unbreathable. Also, bring Old Li over, he's been coughing for half a month, see if these medicines can help."

A few miners silently sprang into action, beginning to transport the supplies.

Although words were still scarce, the cold atmosphere that kept others at a distance seemed to slightly dissolve.

Victor breathed a sigh of relief, looking at Bai E with eyes full of admiration.

Catherine also cast a grateful glance at Bai E.

They knew this was merely the first of many long and arduous steps.

As they feared before, even if they give their all, what they could change was extremely limited.

To develop this dilapidated Mine Star to the "national" standards required by Star Alliance auditors, the resources needed are astronomical, and right now, they struggle to even improve the basic living conditions of miners in one mining district.

The road is long, but at least they have taken the first step.

...

With the help of Catherine and Victor, as well as the miners' own efforts, the air filtration system in Tunnel Three barely got new filters installed. The air, though still murky, at least lost the pungent odor of sulfur mixed with dust.

The symptoms of several miners with chronic coughs also slightly eased after using the supplied medication.

These minor improvements are far from revolutionary, but at least they allowed the miners to tacitly accept this group's temporary settlement in a corner of the mining district, no longer completely ignoring them as at first.

However, the fundamental issue still looms—resources.

In the makeshift shanty, Catherine looked at the nearly depleted supplies on the data board and the lengthy list of needs, her brows tightly knitted.

The list includes but is not limited to: more core components for air and water circulation systems, basic medical equipment and medicine, enough food and nutritional supplements, safe and durable mining equipment spares, materials for residential area reinforcement and expansion, and even basic resources for establishing preliminary educational and training facilities... All followed by immense numbers.

"Victor has contacted some old subordinates, they are willing to provide some help, and some are even willing to come over," Catherine rubbed her brow.

"But most are also short on cash, what they can bring in personal items and savings is a drop in the ocean. Most importantly, we need a stable and large-scale resource acquisition channel. Just selling off our personal belongings and scattered donations, we can't even reach the minimum standard of a 'civilized society' for this mining district, let alone develop the entire planet."

Bai E stood at the shanty door, looking at the dim lights on the tunnel wall and the miners coming and going, still silent but occasionally glancing over, he said in a deep voice, "We do need channels. We can't always rely on investment, we must have output and exchange. Mine Star... should acquire resources through its mineral deposits."

"That's the logic." Catherine smiled wryly.

"But Mine Star's minerals are ordinary, even during the Republic period they barely sustained. Now Mine Star is nominally under the Peak Alliance's supervision. Though they haven't sent anyone to directly take over, the mining districts secretly subcontracted by major forces have long been treated as their backyards by local stronghold bosses, contractors, pirates, all sorts of riffraff.

To reorganize Mine Star's resources and establish formal trade channels, we must first confront these local bosses, and possibly the tacit approval or even support from the forces behind them."

This is almost a vicious cycle: without resources and force, it's impossible to integrate the mining district to establish order; without order and output, there can be no resource to develop force and improve welfare.

"Perhaps... we can start with one of these local bosses." Bai E's gaze turned towards the distance, pondering where to begin.

Just then, a commotion came from the entrance of the tunnel, mixed with faint metallic clangs and suppressed curses.

A few miners who had just switched shifts quickly came in, their faces more somber than usual, their eyes holding suppressed anger.

"What's the matter?" Victor stepped forward to ask.

A young miner spat bitterly, his voice filled with hate, "Damn, the black ship's here again."

"Black ship?" Bai E looked at Catherine.

Catherine's face also darkened, "They are likely the pirates' transport ships. Besides two basic mining districts, other areas of this planet have been partitioned and subcontracted. Several are under the control of lawless interstellar pirates, they mine here with... very unfavorable methods."

Victor also spoke in a low voice, "I've heard the miners here mention that about a hundred kilometers away from us, there is a place called Black Steel Mine, controlled by a group of pirates called Blood Claw. They often use black ships to transport out the ore, occasionally replenishing... manpower."

Chapter 942 Sources of Supplies—Battling Pirates (2)

Those miners heard the name "Blood Claw," and their faces looked even worse.

An old miner clenched his fist, knuckles turning white, and muttered under his breath: "Those beasts... Last month, Old Tomi's daughter from next door accidentally got taken by them. Later they found her, but there wasn't even a complete body."

Another miner cast a complex glance at Bai E and the others: "Before... nobody ever cared. The Republic didn't care, and now no one cares."

The implication in his words was clear: both despair and a barely detectable probe.

Bai E said nothing, turning to walk toward the direction of the tunnel exit.

Catherine and Victor exchanged a glance and hurried to follow.

Climbing to the surface, amidst the swirling sands, they could see dots on the horizon gradually descending—a silhouette of ships, entirely black.

Similar in style to "Black Pearl," as described by Wild Wolf in memory and seen in Freeport, but seemingly of a different model.

"The position they're landing should be the Black Steel Mine," Catherine judged.

Bai E watched those black ships silently for a moment, then suddenly asked, "These pirates, who do they sell their ores to? How do they trade?"

Catherine hesitated before understanding Bai E's intention: "You're thinking... to seize their channels? Or rob them?"

"Sent right to us, isn't it?" Bai E's gaze was calm. "We need a quick entry point to obtain a large amount of resources. Pirates control the mine, have existing ore production and transport capabilities, and might even have their own smuggling network. Moreover, they're illegal, dealing with them would bring less psychological pressure and external resistance."

The appearance of pirates was a nuisance to the miners here, but an opportunity for them.

Victor was somewhat excited but also worried: "Big brother Bai E, you mean... we should take down this pirate base, and take over their mine and supplies? But to control a mine, these pirates probably aren't weak; surely they have armed forces."

Catherine also pondered: "Moreover, we don't know whether Blood Claw has a bigger backer. Would acting directly bring bigger trouble? Our current forces are still quite weak."

Bai E shook his head, "This kind of trouble is no longer a trouble."

Development needs planning, killing only requires a target.

A bunch of pirates, as long as they're not a massive cosmic body like Blood Ming, Lei Long, or Thousand Stars, can always be wiped out.

"First gather some intelligence." Bai E said softly, "Probe them; then we can send them away. Taking it down, we can obtain a batch of ready supplies, even some ships and arms. With these foundations, we can talk about the next stage of development."

"Okay." With the backbone's opinion, Catherine nodded, "We'll handle this with Victor; we'll find a way to inquire with the miners. They have been here on the Mine Star for years and know a little about these pirates. Plus, I can try to access the recent movements within the pirate sphere through some old hidden channels."

"As fast as possible." Bai E looked at Catherine and Victor. "We didn't come here begging, nor to slowly farm. Time waits for no one; the Star Alliance's review period, Peak Alliance might intervene at any time, including those miners... They've been in despair for a very long time. We must open up the situation faster."

Catherine saw from Bai E's eyes the familiar decisiveness moving forward, and the benevolent compassion from a higher position toward his people, which made her feel reassured.

"Understood, I'll go gather intelligence now."

Over the next two days, Bai E remained at the basic mining area.

Using techniques learned from Helen and the assistance of Spiritual Energy, he got several near-scrapped mining machines operational again, surprising several miners secretly.

Whenever he thought of that name, Bai E couldn't help but become distracted.

Helen... If only she could be here now.

A nearly all-around scientist; with her here, maybe the technology level of Mine Star could be raised quickly.

And she personally...

Catherine and Victor acted separately and soon obtained enough information—

Blood Claw Pirate Group is indeed a medium-sized pirate force active in this Stellar District, roughly possessing ten ships of various sizes, core members numbering a few hundred, plus controlled miners and slaves, totaling possibly over five thousand.

They are notoriously cruel and oppressive to miners.

Previously, they seemed reliant on a larger pirate force, but over the past month, their actions appear even more wanton.

Some miners vaguely heard guards chatting, saying something like "Things are messed up on top," "Boss is dead," "Now whoever seizes it, it's theirs."

Catherine also received more valuable information.

Through a reliable old ally, she indirectly gathered some whispers from the pirate circles:

Salvador, the infamous Pirate King dominating nearby Stellar District—a month ago—completely disappeared from his fleet.

Originally, his fleet came forth with rumors belying, saying the Black Emperor was merely hired by the government to help fight a certain battle.

After the battle, their pirate group ties to the Peak Alliance would be official; then they would possess a legit background in this Stellar District, behaving even more unscrupulously.

But now... The district's contests have ended for days, yet the Pirate King still hasn't returned.

Some say he died in the contest... Though this rumor isn't completely verified, even his own fleet cannot step forth to clarify.

Internally, they've even begun infighting.

This situation instantly stirred intense chaos in the whole pirate sphere.

Numerous large pirate groups that previously depended on him are fighting each other, seizing territories and resources, while more, like Blood Claw's medium and small powers are taking the chance to become independent, frenetically plundering to expand themselves.

"This matter... You probably know best." Catherine looked at Bai E.

She didn't know the details, but when called to the Thousand Stars Commerce Alliance's Starship, the Pirate King had already disappeared... He had been fine during the contest.

Considering the armed forces of Thousand Stars Commerce Alliance, on Xing Zhuo's indication, once targeted Bai E... after thinking, if there hadn't been a war of might, how could those in Thousand Stars Commerce Alliance heed Bai E's orders without reservation?

Perhaps the sacrifice for the war of might was the Pirate King?

"He did indeed die." Bai E nodded.

"Then that makes sense." Catherine continued analyzing, "So Blood Claw is currently in a period of expansion and chaos; they just rid themselves of former superior constraints, eager to consolidate territory and accumulate wealth. During this time, their vigilance toward the outside world might be high, but internally not so stable. Moreover, to seize the heritage left by Salvador, they might deploy portions of elite forces to partake in farther galactic struggles, leaving the forces on Mine Star possibly not the strongest."

Bai E listened to all the intelligence, silently moving outside the shack, gazing toward the direction of the Black Steel Mine.

The sandstorms persisted, but he seemed to hear cries of enslavement and oppression from there, and saw there minerals, equipment, ships they urgently needed...

And, a flag-worthy sacrifice to consolidate mine star morale and proclaim "New Bauhinia" as not merely an empty talk—the first trophy.

"Prepare, please." Bai E's voice was calm. "Victor, you stay here, protect the mining area, and consider organizing some willing miners to assist; they won't need to fight, just handle the subsequent reception and transportation."

"Catherine, get me a mecha."

Catherine's eyes sharpened, "The mecha is in the transport ship and can be called upon anytime."

"Then let's depart." Bai E walked out first.

"Guys!" Victor went among the miners to clap and call loudly, "We're heading to fight pirates! Who wants to join us!"

Chapter 943 Crushing All Opposition!

"Fight pirates?"

"Just the few of you?"

After several days of getting familiar, the miners were no longer strangers to the group in front of them, but upon hearing Victor's boast, they couldn't help but be astonished.

"Do you know how many of them there are?"

Although they lacked much emotion, this group had helped them somewhat; if there was nothing to do, they certainly didn't want to see them go to their deaths.

Some even darkly speculated in secret, "You guys wouldn't happen to be with those pirates, would you? Trying to lure us out, can't wait to show your true colors after all this time?"

Victor seemed deaf to the doubts, remaining enthusiastic, "Brothers, we don't need you to fight, nor do we need you to take any risks. You just need to watch from afar, and after we wipe out those pirates, you can go carry away their supplies. Trust us, follow us. If you don't trust us, wait here for us to return in triumph!"

"Let's go!"

With his words, a few young people actually stepped out from the crowd.

During this time, Victor's naturally cheerful personality had made him some friends, and now these young miners trusted their friend.

As the relatively few people were about to set out, the eldest miner propped up his cane and suddenly rose from the corner.

"Father, where are you going?" The young person beside him pulled at his clothes, "These young people are crazy, are you crazy too?"

"I'm not crazy." The old miner shook his head, looking at the air circulation machine that had resumed working behind him, "The things they brought are worth more than my life. If they want my life, I'll give it; if they need help, I'll help. Anyway, I'm old, I've lived long enough."

"Then I..."

"You can't go!" The old miner checked the younger one, "You still have Yinyin to raise. We agreed to let her study and let her leave. She's still young, she can't live in this rotten place all her life. Just let me go and see what this group really wants to do."

...

The mecha "Whirlwind" that Catherine prepared for Bai E quietly crouched behind a cluster of wind-eroded rock pillars several kilometers away from the Black Steel Mine.

The massive blue and white body underwent simple camouflage, covered with the brown sand and gravel net common in the mining area, blending almost seamlessly with the surrounding environment from a distance.

In the cockpit at the mecha's chest, Bai E closed his eyes, concentrating his spiritual energy like mercury spreading gently from him, carefully sensing the energy fluctuations and life signals within the distant mining area.

Catherine's intelligence work was very meticulous.

Over the past two days, she and Victor acted separately, gathering information from miners and through some secret channels, basically understanding the defensive situation of the Blood Claw Pirate Group in the Black Steel Mine.

The Blood Claw Pirate Group's resident force here was about three hundred, with about eighty core combat personnel, equipped with various personal energy weapons scavenged from the black market, a few vintage rapid-fire cannons, and even two modified armed tracked vehicles.

Several lookout towers were built on the high spots of the mining area, equipped with searchlights and alarm systems. Their leader was a fierce man nicknamed "Split Claw", reportedly a former assault captain under Pirate King Salvador, ruthless and ferocious.

Of course, the reason for investigating all this wasn't fear of defeat but to avoid "missing" anything.

If they're going to fight, they want to catch everything in one sweep.

After all, according to the information Catherine obtained, while the Blood Claw Pirate Group is independent, it has vague connections with several other small to medium pirate groups in the nearby Star Domain, sometimes exchanging supplies or personnel.

More importantly, deep within the Black Steel Mine, there's said to be a small underground hangar and warehouse, possibly containing stolen sensitive materials, and even possibly having secret passages or communication devices to other areas.

If the operation isn't swift and comprehensive enough, if information leaks or remnants use underground facilities to resist stubbornly or send out distress signals, drawing other forces' attention, it would complicate matters.

"We must strike decisively, controlling all crucial points, especially communication and potential escape routes. The whole process must be swift and decisive."

Thus, they devised a plan: Victor would lead a few voluntarily following miners, driving a rundown but still operational transport truck found in the primary mining area, loaded with items disguised as ores, approaching the mining area first.

Their task was to attract the pirates' attention, create chaos, and simultaneously verify the pirates' firepower points and personnel distribution up close.

Bai E would then pilot the mecha in stealth, ready to launch a thunderous strike as soon as the transport team reached the designated location, or if pirates showed signs of activating large defensive weapons or issuing alarms, swiftly crippling the pirates' command center, firepower points, and communication facilities.

The forces on the Mine Star are entangled, especially after the Bauhinia disbanded, leaving no overt suppression.

Everyone has their own agendas, shortening the whole process as much as possible to reduce other mining area forces' coveting of the primary mining area.

...

At this moment, Victor was driving that clanking transport truck, bumping along towards the gate of the Black Steel Mine amidst the wind and sand.

Apart from him, there were a dozen or so anxious young miners on the truck, and hiding amidst the pile of debris in the truck bed was Catherine—she was responsible for using spiritual energy for close-range checks and maintaining contact with Bai E at all times.

Chapter 944 Crushing All Opposition

As the truck gradually approached, the searchlight from the tower beside the rusty iron gate of the mining area swept over, locking onto the truck with a blinding beam.

A few pirates, dressed in ragged leather armor and wielding firearms, lazily gathered around, cursing under their breath.

"Where did this junk come from? What are you hauling?" A one-eyed pirate tapped the gun barrel against the driver's door.

Victor forced a smile, explaining according to the prearranged story: "Big brother, we're from the 'Waste Pit' in the east and dug up some good stuff. We want... want to exchange with Boss Claw for some food and filters."

"Waste Pit? Can anything good come out of that godforsaken place?" The one-eyed pirate skeptically eyed Victor and the miners on the truck.

Though nervous, the miners' tattered clothes and emaciated appearance matched those who have struggled to survive long-term on the Mine Star.

Another pirate jumped onto the truck bed, rummaging through the covered tarpaulin, and seeing that it was indeed black, with some metallic gleam stones underneath, lost interest in checking further.

"Go ahead, park the truck at the third depot and wait for inspection. You know the rules? We take fifty percent."

"Got it, got it!" Victor nodded repeatedly, starting the truck and slowly driving through the gate.

Upon entering the mining area, the scene before their eyes made the miners' hearts sink.

The mining area was larger than they had imagined, filled with crude shacks, piled-up ores, and rudimentary smelting furnaces billowing black smoke.

More pirates roamed around, either supervising ragged, shackled slave miners at work or gathering to gamble and drink.

At a rough glance, there were no fewer than a hundred pirates within sight, and each one was armed.

On a distant high ground, two rapid-fire cannons' muzzles gleamed coldly under the searchlights, with the slight flicker of what appeared to be an energy shield generator nearby.

More terrifying was that as the truck moved in, they could feel numerous hidden eyes watching them with scrutiny and malice.

Catherine, hidden in the truck bed, extended her spiritual energy perception quietly, also feeling a chill: the number and level of armament of the pirates were stronger than expected, and more dispersed, with hidden sentries in some secluded corners and underground entrances.

To seize control instantly would be no small feat.

"Are we going to attack them?"

"Really?" The miners on the truck began whispering among themselves.

At the start of their journey, besides nervousness, there was a bit of excitement about doing something big.

Attacking pirates! A feat only heroes from legends would undertake.

Yet now, up close and seeing those fierce-looking individuals and their menacing weapons, their spirits deflated instantly.

Me? Fight pirates?

Really?

Just a few of us here, aren't we just marching to our deaths?

Where's that man who said we wouldn't have to fight? Where did he go?

Could he be negotiating with the pirate leader how much we're worth selling for?

"Don't talk." Despite the unease in his heart, Victor spoke up to stabilize their mood, "Bai said it can be done, you just need to focus on moving the goods."

Following the pirates' directions, Victor parked the truck near the third depot.

This area was relatively spacious but far from the pirate's residential shantytown and the warehouse that seemed to be an underground entrance.

A few pirates followed, demanding they unload the cargo for inspection.

"Hurry up! What's the holdup?" The one-eyed pirate urged impatiently.

As the miners started to unload slowly under Victor's signal, he glanced around with anxiety.

Why hasn't Bai E made a move yet? If they delay any longer, and a pirate leader shows up or demands they go elsewhere, the plan could change.

Just then, from the largest metal shack in the mining area, adorned with a blood claw banner, emerged a burly bald man with three ferocious claw scars on his face, the leader "Claw."

He seemed to have been briefed and was looking towards the depot, his gaze fierce.

Catherine's voice came through Bai E's mecha communication device: "The leader has appeared, and there is increased energy reaction at the suspected underground entrance, possibly indicating activation of personnel or equipment. Immediate action is advisable!"

Almost simultaneously as Catherine transmitted the message—

"Whizz—!!!"

An ear-piercing sound tore through the din of the mining area and the whimpering wind!

Everyone, pirates, miners, and Victor, instinctively looked up at the sky.

A streak of blue-white light, like lightning tearing the sky, suddenly erupted from behind the wind-eroded stone columns, racing toward the center of the mining area at eye-popping speed!

At the heart of the light was the "Storm" mecha, dropping its disguise, engines fully powered, and its rear thrusters spewing fiery tails!

"Enemy attack!!!" A quick-reacting pirate shrieked the alarm.

But it was too late.

The mecha's speed exceeded their comprehension.

Almost as soon as the alarm sounded, the blue-white giant was hovering above the mining area.

In an agile roll and dive, the huge alloy battle blade on its right arm gleamed coldly under the searchlights, exuding a deadly glow.

"Boom!!!"

The first strike aimed at the high ground of the two rapid-fire cannons.

The blade's light swept past like a curtain, and the gun emplacements, shield generator, along with several pirate gunners nearby, turned into fragments and flames amidst an earth-shattering explosion and the screech of metal tearing.

"Buzz—!" The mecha's left arm raised, and the built-in rapid-fire cannon spewed fire like the scythe of death, precisely sweeping over some watchtowers and notable fire points.

The alarm abruptly halted, and the searchlights shattered one after another.

"It's a mecha! It's a mecha!" The pirates panicked, firing wildly into the air, but the energy beams and bullets only sparked faintly upon hitting the mecha's thick armor, barely scratching it.

The Claw leader's eyes bulged, roaring: "Activate anti-air! Deploy all weapons! Bring him down!"

Meanwhile, he quickly retreated toward the large shack where there was an emergency passage leading directly to the underground facility.

However, Bai E's target was very clear.

The mecha made a sharp stop-change in direction mid-air, ignoring the sporadic attacks below, its eyes locked onto the retreating Claw and the heavy metal door with energy fluctuations beside his shack—

That was likely the underground entrance.

Spiritual Energy surged, executing hundreds instantly!

The alloy battle blade in the mecha's hand was instantly enveloped in a layer of radiant spiritual light, the blade seeming to blur for a moment.

In the next instant, countless sharp blade images poured down like a tempest, not directly targeting Claw, but covering the area in front of the shack and the rooftop where the communication antenna seemed to be located.

"Boom boom boom boom—!!"

The continuous explosions completely engulfed the area, tearing the metal shack into pieces, the hidden communication devices and antenna rods vaporized under the blade energies, and the ground plowed into deep furrows.

Though Claw reacted quickly, rolling away to dodge, he was still flung by the blast wave, hitting a pile of ores hard, spurting blood, unable to rise for a moment.

The mecha finally landed firmly with a loud "boom," shaking the ground.

Standing between the underground entrance and most pirates, like an invincible War God of steel.

"Drop your weapons, surrender and live!" Bai E issued an icy and authoritative voice through the mecha's external speaker, while the spiritual energy pressure spread like something tangible, covering the entire mining area.

Most pirates, already terrified by the overwhelming assault, had their courage utterly collapsed.

The leader's fate was unknown, heavy weapons destroyed, communications cut off; faced with a mecha like something out of a myth, their will to resist crumbled instantly.

"Clang!" "Clang!" Weapons clattered to the ground one after another.

Numerous pirates dropped to their knees, raising their hands high.

Only a few diehards or marauders tried sneaking toward the mining area's edges or hiding in the barracks.

But the mecha's shoulder missile nests slightly adjusted, with soft "whoosh whoosh" sounds, several small missiles precisely landed ahead of them or where they hid, the explosive flames once again asserting absolute control through force.

Overwhelming!

Chapter 945 Preparations for the Expedition

Victor and the miners on the vehicle were already watching with their mouths agape, their fear long replaced by unparalleled awe.

They knew that the man named Bai E was powerful, and that mechas were formidable.

But witnessing firsthand how one person and one mecha, like thunder sweeping through a hole, instantly destroyed an armed pirate base, the visual and mental impact was indescribable.

Especially the young miners who followed along, they were trembling with excitement, their eyes filled with fervor and reverence as they looked at the blue-and-white mecha.

"What are you standing around for?" Catherine leapt out from the back of the vehicle, lowering her voice to Victor, "Take people to control the surrendered pirates, confiscate weapons, and tally the numbers. I'll take a look at their leader."

The battle lasted only one or two minutes from start to finish.

The power of the Blood Claw Pirate Group in the Black Steel Mine had crumbled completely.

Subsequent cleanup operations quickly commenced.

Under the intimidation of the mecha, the surrendering pirates were concentrated and contained.

Catherine found the severely injured but not dead Split Claw and conducted a brief interrogation.

Victor organized the miners to start counting materials and sealing warehouses.

Bai E did not leave the mecha but maintained vigilance. The commotion here couldn't be hidden from the forces of the other mines.

Meanwhile, he used the mecha's scanning system to meticulously explore the entire mining area, especially the underground parts.

Sure enough, under the original sheds, he discovered a concealed elevator shaft leading to an underground space about half the size of a football field.

Inside were two small transport ships, some maintenance equipment, an ammunition and weapons depot, and a seemingly advanced communications terminal.

More importantly, from both Split Claw's mouth and some encrypted data disks found in the underground space, Catherine deciphered critical information.

"The main force of the Blood Claw Pirate Group isn't here." Catherine reported to Bai E, her eyes shimmering with excitement, "Split Claw is just the head of the mine guard. Most of Blood Claw's ships and elite forces, led by their leader Blood Claw himself, have gone to the battle for Salvador's legacy!"

"Salvador's legacy?"

"Yes. After Salvador's death, the vast wealth he left behind, secret base, starship fleet, and some unknown technological data became a coveted prize for countless pirates and forces. Though independent, the Blood Claw Pirate Group also wants a share.

Their leader has joined forces with two other medium-sized pirate groups and is heading to a place called 'Reef Star Domain,' where a secret treasure trove of Salvador is believed to be, holding part of his rare mineral plunder and several modified performance warships from his early raids."

Catherine paused, then continued, "Split Claw confessed that before their leader left, he issued orders for him to safeguard the mine, continue producing ore in exchange for supplies, and keep an eye on news from 'Reef Star Domain.' If the leader succeeds, he would send someone back to mobilize more resources and manpower. Right now, the battle there is probably in full swing, communication is difficult, and Split Claw hasn't received any definite news for a while."

This legacy, Bai E needed as well.

Moreover, could he let others have the fruits of his own battle?

"Is the location of 'Reef Star Domain,' along with Blood Claw leader's specific action routes, known competitor intelligence in the data disks?"

"There's a general star map coordinate and Blood Claw's own action plans. As for competitors, Split Claw doesn't know much, only mentioning that besides the two collaborating pirate groups, there may be other well-known pirate groups like 'Black Flag' and 'Star Breaker' eyeing it, and even... possibly some agents from the Peak Alliance secretly participating."

Catherine's tone was grave, "The risks are high, but so are the rewards."

"Risks coexist with opportunities. We need to quickly acquire a large amount of resources. Taking down this mine is just the first step. If we can seize the legacy, only then will we truly have the capital to develop Mine Star."

Bai E made a decision: "Once we finish cleaning up here and consolidate our forces, the next target is 'Reef Star Domain,' to seize Salvador's legacy!"

At that moment, a group of miners, looking more downtrodden than those from the basic mining area, huddled together and came before the mecha.

They looked up at the towering steel giant and suddenly all knelt down together.

"My Lord!" The leading miner's voice was hoarse but clear, "You killed Blood Claw's scoundrels and saved us. Our lives aren't worth much, but from today onward, everyone in this mine, as long as you don't mind, we are willing to serve you as our master and follow you! We just beg you... to give our children a hope!"

Behind them, more miners—from both Black Steel Mine's slaves, the young and strong from the basic mining area who followed, even those forced into wrongdoing among the surrendered pirates, now showing regret—slowly gathered around, all silently watching.

In their gaze, there was the relief of surviving a disaster, confusion about the future, but more importantly, a primal sense of attachment and anticipation generated when seeing powerful forces bring order and hope.

Victor looked at this scene with excitement, and Catherine was slightly moved.

Bai E stepped out from the mecha, landing in front of the leading miner, reaching out to help him up.

His gaze swept over the kneeling crowd, his voice calm yet carrying an undeniable strength: "Rise up, I'm not here to be a slave master. The Blood Claw Pirates have been eradicated. From today, Black Steel Mine abolishes slavery. All willing to stay will be distributed according to labor, to build together. We will establish order, restore production, and improve lives. Those willing to leave can receive basic supplies and depart. Those willing to stay will become members of the 'New Bauhinia.'"

Chapter 946 Preparations for the Expedition (Part 2)

He paused, then continued, "But I must tell you, this road will not be smooth. We defeated the pirates here, but there are more enemies outside, larger challenges. We need to fight for resources and face the various forces eyeing us in the Stellar District. There might be bloodshed, there might be sacrifices."

"But I also promise, as long as you follow me, you will no longer be mining slaves bullied by others, but warriors and builders fighting for yourselves, for your families, for a better future. We will have our own ships, our own weapons, our own home. The Mine Star should not forever be a forgotten and plundered corner."

Tears welled up in the cloudy eyes of the miners, for the first time feeling that there might be hope in life.

"Victor." Bai E turned to the young Mech Pilot, "You take people to assist the miners here, first settle the injured and clear out the most basic living areas. Catherine, you come with me."

In the temporarily cleared-out shack that originally belonged to the pirate leader "Split Claw," Bai E, Catherine, and several young miner representatives from the base mine were gathered, their eyes filled with eagerness.

"The situation here is worse than at the base mine." Catherine looked at a rough list just compiled, her brows furrowed, "Under slavery, miners have almost no living security. Most huts are drafty, water purification equipment is outdated and broken, food consists only of the poorest nutritional paste, and medical conditions are almost nonexistent... Many miners have injuries and chronic illnesses."

She handed the data pad to Bai E, "The materials we tallied from the pirate warehouse mainly consist of ore, some weapons and ammunition, two old small transport ships, and a small amount of supplies the pirates enjoyed themselves. Resources to improve the miners' living conditions... are a mere drop in the bucket. Just to reach basic survival standards for nearly a thousand people here requires filters, medicine, food, and building materials... a number we currently cannot afford."

Bai E silently looked at the list.

The situation did not fundamentally improve by taking over one mining area; it became even heavier with the addition of more people.

The pirate heritage in this mining area was not as rich as imagined, and most of the output had obviously been regularly transported away.

"We cannot stop." Bai E's voice was steady, "Stopping means sitting idle until resources are exhausted. The legacy of the 'Reef Star Domain', we must seize it."

"I agree." Catherine nodded, "But neither this place nor the base mine can be left unguarded. Although the main force of the Blood Claw Pirate Group is not here, the movements here can't be hidden from other forces in the mining district. We must leave enough strength to prevent others from taking advantage and prevent new allegiance from faltering due to a lack of protection."

"Is there any news from those former subordinates you contacted before?" Bai E asked.

"Yes." A trace of comfort flashed in Catherine's eyes, "Victor has contacted some of his former subordinates, and they are willing to offer some help, with many even willing to come over."

She pulled up another communication record, "They are already on their way and should arrive within the next two days. Once they arrive, they can maintain the order of the mining district and its basic defenses. They all have a certain level of military training, capable of dealing with ordinary small pirate or local thugs' harassment."

"Very good." Bai E made a decision, "Once they arrive, take over the protection work. Then you and I will set out. Additionally, we need to draft a temporary management directive, focusing on a few core points:

First, abolish all slavery and forced labor, and record all work by labor for future uniform reward distribution; second, establish basic patrol and self-defense teams, with personnel selected from miners willing to join, trained and led by your former subordinates; third, concentrate the distribution of existing materials, prioritizing the injured, women and children, and the most basic living needs; fourth, restore and maintain key production facilities, gradually resuming orderly mining while ensuring survival to accumulate resources for future development."

Catherine quickly took notes: "Understood. Distribution based on labor, self-defense arming, material allocation, production restoration... I will refine it into regulations and publish them in the two mining districts."

Bai E looked at the few young miner representatives from the base mining district: "Are you willing to follow Victor and Captain Catherine to take care of this place and our home? This is also a battle, crafting a stable rear for ourselves."

The young people stood tall, nodding vigorously: "Sir, we are willing! You saved us, gave us hope, we won't let our rear catch fire!"

"Good." Bai E's gaze swept over everyone, "Until I bring back enough resources from outside, we can't truly start building a home. Until then, holding on and waiting also demands courage."

He stepped out of the shack, watching the miners busy transporting pirate corpses, clearing debris, and helping the injured.

The miners of the Black Steel Mine looked at him with gratitude and awe, the news quickly traveling back to the original mine district along with the transport.

In the tunnels of the base mining district, the discussions for the first time in years became lively.

"Have you heard? Those bastards in the Black Steel Mine have really been wiped out!"

"Is that mech-piloting sir really that powerful?"

"Not just powerful, I heard he abolished slavery on the spot and said things will be distributed based on labor in the future..."

"Really? Not another empty promise?"

"Doesn't seem like it... Those guys who went along came back and said they saw it with their own eyes! The pirate nest has been taken down, and the stuff is being inventoried. Also, Captain Catherine's people are coming to help guard our home..."

"So you're saying... there might really be a future following this leader?"

The longstanding ice of despair finally cracked, pierced by a powerful force bringing real change.

Many miners who had been observing now actively inquired about the situation of the "New Bauhinia," with some skilled technicians and strong laborers even secretly seeking Victor or familiar miner representatives, expressing willingness to contribute to the new order.

Bai E stood on the newly cleared ground of the Black Steel Mine, watching Catherine commanding people to post temporary management directives, watching Victor organizing the self-defense team, and gazing at the distant stars.

...

"Did he really make a move?" Xing Zhuo received reports from his subordinates.

Although he resigned in disgrace, the council rejected his request.

In fact, because he has experience in facing the Bug Race fleet head-on, he was appointed as the joint commander to annihilate the Bug Race fleet this time.

Before setting off, he received news from the Mine Star that originally belonged to Bauhinia...

In fact, the Alliance wasn't concerned about this resource-poor Mine Star.

Since Bauhinia disbanded and surrendered, they hadn't sent anyone to actually take over.

However, Bai E's words personally left a mark on him.

The other party was just one person, and developing a planet is definitely not something that can be accomplished by personal force... but he always felt that man seemed capable of anything.

And just a few days later, that man made a thunderous move and eradicated a pirate-controlled mining district.

He began to wonder if he made a mistake by not reporting Bai E's decision to the highest council...

But currently, what's more important is, without that man sitting in charge, can the joint fleet he leads really eliminate the Bug Race fleet lingering near the match planet?

In fact, the Alliance recently hasn't had time to deal with anything else, as they are focusing all their power on this matter.

They want to use an indisputable victory to make the so-called "Bug Race threat theory" disappear and once again prove the supremacy of human civilization.

But as the frontline commander of the joint fleet, he had no confidence...

Chapter 947 Destruction

On the third day after the Black Steel Mine was breached, when Catherine contacted a dozen or so retired veterans and brought them with dozens of trustworthy personnel, Bai E and Catherine had basically completed the preparations for the expedition to the "Reef Star Domain".

The temporary management regulations had been promulgated, causing quite a stir in the two mining areas.

Abolishing slavery, distribution according to labor, establishing a self-defense force, centralized distribution of resources... Each clause impacted the miners' long-numbed nerves.

Although most miners in the basic mining area did not express themselves directly, Catherine noticed the private discussions and the changes in their eyes.

It was a quiet longing for "order" and "hope" after many years of silence.

While Bai E was inspecting the two small transport ships seized from the pirate warehouse and urgently repaired, Victor hurriedly came with news to report.

"Brother Bai... Someone wants to see you, from the neighboring Gray Ridge Mine area."

"What's the matter?" The forces on the Mine Star were mixed, even after investigation, Catherine couldn't figure out what forces were behind each mining area.

At least this Gray Ridge Mine area, they didn't know who was behind it.

"He said he would only say it after meeting you."

"Alright." Bai E put down the tool and followed Victor to meet the person from the Gray Ridge Mine area—

A middle-aged man with a decisive demeanor, carrying the aura of a soldier.

"Mr. Bai Er, I'm sent by Mr. Xing Zhuo." The person introduced himself immediately upon seeing Bai E, showing a form of sincerity.

"Xing Zhuo?" Bai E was not surprised.

He had talked about his plans to him, so it was normal for him to plant spies.

"What did he ask you to convey?"

"The above are the exact words of Mr. Xing Zhuo, I'm just reiterating them." The man imitated Xing Zhuo's tone, with a serious expression.

"Mr. Bai Er, it's me, Xing Zhuo. The highest council of the Peak Alliance has approved the cleansing operation against the Bug Race fleet. I will serve as the commander-in-chief of the joint fleet for this operation. The fleet is fully assembled and will officially set out in two days, targeting the residual Bug Race fleet near the last competition planet."

The man paused, and even the expectation and plea in his tone were vividly imitated, "I know you have your own plans, but the threat of the Bug Race is for all humanity. For this operation, the alliance mobilized the regular armed forces, with a scale far exceeding those 'envoy' starships from the last competition. But I still believe your experience and strength are indispensable. If you are willing to join

the battle, the response ship I arranged is waiting in the orbit of the Mine Star. Please, consider it again."

After speaking, the man fell silent, waiting quietly for Bai E's response without saying another word.

Catherine was also listening quietly beside, looking at Bai E.

She knew Bai E's decision but also understood the pressure Xing Zhuo was under at the moment—

In that report, Xing Zhuo was the one who strongly emphasized Bai E's value and the Bug Race threat.

If this cleansing failed, his situation would become very difficult.

"Reply to him: I have something I must do. Wish them success in their battle."

In just a moment, Bai E made a decision.

The Bug Race was indeed humanity's great enemy, but those few insectoid biological ships were by no means the entirety of the Bug Race's power.

Letting the humans in the universe face it alone might indeed lead them to truly recognize the threat of this race... regardless of victory or defeat.

The message quickly returned.

Far away in a gathering starport of the Peak Alliance, Xing Zhuo stood on the bridge of the flagship "Glory of the Thousand Stars", looking at the dense, endless steel giant ships outside the window, feeling no inner confidence.

"He refused, as expected..." Xing Zhuo sighed with a bitter smile and pinched his brow.

Although anticipated, disappointment and unease surged like a tide.

He turned, looking at the insectoid fleet signals marked on the giant tactical star map behind him, the few grim icons seemingly staring at him with malice...

"Chief, all sub-fleet commanders have arrived, the last collaborative meeting before the war can begin." The adjutant quietly reminded at the side.

Xing Zhuo took a deep breath, suppressed the unease in his heart, and regained the authority of the commander-in-chief: "Let's go."

...

In the spacious flagship conference room, the atmosphere was completely different from the grim pre-battle scene outside the bridge.

On both sides of the long table sat senior officers from various member forces of the alliance, wearing neat uniforms decorated with different insignias, conversing in low voices, most with relaxed or somewhat indifferent expressions on their faces.

"Just a few biological warships, last time they only caught Xing Zhuo off guard."

"Indeed, what was that fleet last time? A competition fleet, just for show! Look at what we've brought this time, the seventh and ninth rapid response fleets, and the Thunder Hammer heavy assault ship group... A volley from the main cannons would turn those biological giant ships to dust!"

"Xing Zhuo is still frightened from last time, thinking of inviting that Bai E mech pilot? No matter how good he is, what role can individual force play in a fleet battle? Even the residual impact of a main ship gun barrage he can't withstand."

"I heard he refused the invitation of the three giants? Wise of him, if he came, he'd just be stealing credit. This time it's our military's time to shine."

Amid the discussions, Xing Zhuo walked in with his adjutant, the conference room slightly quieted.

Xing Zhuo sat in the main seat, skipped the pleasantries, and went straight to the point: "Gentlemen, the target intelligence has been shared. The Bug Race fleet consists of five biological giant ships, possessing powerful spiritual energy coordination, biomass cannon platforms, and internal defense systems. The last encounter showed they have highly intelligent tactics and adaptability. Our main force for this operation..."

Chapter 948 Destruction (Part 2)

He elaborated on the battle plan in detail, the core of which was to use the fleet's firepower advantage for long-range suppression while dispatching elite Mecha units to disrupt the command nodes at opportune moments—

This tactic clearly bore the mark of the successful experience from Bai E's last operation.

However, before he could finish speaking, a squadron commander from a certain military power interrupted him.

"Commander Xing Zhuo," the middle-aged officer, whose epaulets were adorned with stars, had a tone of courtesy, but the disdain in his eyes was evident, "Is your plan perhaps too cautious? According to the last engagement data, although the opposing biological capital ships have strong defenses, they are not invincible against the main guns of our Thunderhammer-class battleships.

We suggest adopting a direct, classical firepower coverage tactic, carrying out a saturation strike from beyond their range, and annihilating them in one fell swoop! Why risk sending valuable Mecha units to perform high-risk boarding tasks?"

Another commander echoed, "Exactly. Commander Xing Zhuo, the fleet you led last time was not a professional warship, so some losses are understandable. But this time, it is different. We have brought the entire armed forces of the Peak Alliance, a true war machine. Crushing them is what we should do."

"As for that Bai E Mech Pilot." Someone else interjected, with a faint mocking tone, "Personal bravery holds limited meaning on an interstellar battlefield. Last time might have been a coincidence, or the Bug Race didn't fully target you. This time, let them witness the true power of a human fleet."

Xing Zhuo looked at these self-assured, even somewhat arrogant officers, and the unease in his heart grew stronger.

He recalled Bai E's figure moving freely within the Bug Race's mothership, remembered the destructive Spiritual Energy screech and the Mother Worm's frenzied counterattack before its death.

He wanted to emphasize the Bug Race's learning abilities and tactical variability, and how Bai E's eerie restraint and understanding of the Bug Race could play a crucial role at critical moments.

But his words got swallowed back.

He knew that in front of these officers, who were used to thinking in terms of massive capital ships and steadfastly believed in the truth of firepower, emphasizing personal roles and unknown threats too much would only be seen as cowardice and as an aftermath of last time's defeat.

His authority had already been undermined by last time's strategic error and the rumors of his need to resign in disgrace. Insisting at this moment could instead affect command efficiency.

Ultimately, Xing Zhuo only responded in a deep voice, "The Bug Race are not mindless Cosmic Monsters; they have unified will and tactics. My plan takes multiple possibilities into consideration. Of course, you can flexibly adjust the tactics within the overall framework based on the actual battlefield situation. But be sure not to underestimate the enemy."

This was, after all, his responsibility; the Peak Alliance had given him the role of commander to grasp the grand strategic direction and make the final decisions, while the specific tactical command had always belonged to these more "professional" officers.

'This Xing Zhuo is indeed scared.'

The officers exchanged glances, and they all saw the confirmed expression in each other's eyes.

Since returning this time, there have been rumors that Xing Zhuo was frightened, losing his edge.

But this might be for the best; leaving the real battle to these professionals would lead more easily to victory.

"Rest assured, Commander!" The first general who spoke out straightened his back and promised, "In two days, you will see the Bug Race fleet turned to cosmic dust under the fire of the human joint fleet!"

...

Two days swiftly passed.

On the Mine Star's orbit, Bai E and Catherine boarded a slightly larger, hastily repaired pirate transport ship.

Victor and a dozen veteran soldiers stayed behind to maintain Order and basic defense for both mining sectors.

The miner volunteer soldiers on the ship, after short-term training led by a few veterans, could barely maintain the ship's normal operation.

"Set out, target Reef Star Domain." Bai E ordered.

Almost simultaneously, the vast joint fleet of the Peak Alliance, amidst the roar of countless engines and energy lights, grandly warped away from the assembly port, heading towards the starry sky that once gave Xing Zhuo countless nightmares.

During the fleet's journey, the officers remained confident and even began discussing awards and victory celebrations on internal channels.

Xing Zhuo stood alone by the bridge window, looking at the starlight swiftly outside, a cold sweat in his palms.

Finally, the fleet reached the edge of the target Star Domain.

On the tactical screen, five hideous Bug Race biological capital ship signals appeared again.

They floated silently in the void, seemingly unchanged compared to last time?

"Bug Race fleet detected! Three minutes before entering our optimal range!" the radar operator reported loudly.

"All ships deploy according to the predetermined formation! Charge the main guns! Prepare the missile bays!" The proponent of the firepower coverage strategy excitedly issued orders, as if already seeing the fireworks of victory.

Xing Zhuo opened his mouth, trying to remind something, but in the end, just gripped the railing tightly.

The human fleet, like an iron giant bird spreading its wings, turned countless gun barrels and missile launchers toward the Bug Race fleet, the hum of charging echoing in the fleet channel, solemn and grand.

However, just as the human fleet was entering attack position, about to strike first—

Suddenly, an anomaly occurred!

The five previously seemingly stationary biological capital ships had their bioluminescent blue turrets light up instantly, far brighter than last time!

Not only that, countless orifices suddenly opened on their sides and underbelly, like beehives!

The next second, a swarm of Bone-Eroding Flying Locusts, ten to a hundred times denser than last time, erupted like a black storm!

No longer disorganized, they formed organized, layered shockwave formations.

Among them were numerous new, larger flying insect units, with exoskeletons glinting metallicly, never seen before!

Simultaneously, the main guns of the biological capital ships—

Those gargantuan tumor-like organs no longer fired a singular plasma beam, but split into dozens of finer, faster, highly-tracking blue rays, charging precisely like living creatures towards the human fleet's vanguard escort ships and gunboats!

What chilled all human officers was the sudden emergence of hundreds of small, fast biological ships from the shadows of the biological capital ships in the previously empty constellation!

Shaped like barracudas, they moved swiftly, weaving through the locust swarms, heading straight for the human fleet formation's flanks and engine areas!

"Enemy attack! The scale far exceeds expectations!"

"New units! Defend quickly!"

"Flanks breached! Small, fast targets, too many!"

"Our missiles are intercepted by the locust swarm! They... they actively intercept!"

"Main guns fire! Fire quickly!"

The previously orderly human fleet channel was instantly drowned in terrified shouts and explosions.

The Bug Race's counterattack from the start displayed an intensity and tactical focus completely different from last time!

They seemed to have anticipated the human's firepower coverage tactic, using seemingly endless locusts and new units as consumption and interception layers, shielding those fast biological ships for lethal penetration!

Xing Zhuo looked pale at the tactical screen, where friendly symbols quickly turned red and disappeared.

This time, the Bug Race fleet's aggression, coordination, and troop variety were far superior to last time!

Last time, their focus seemed more on capturing or testing, but this time... it was a complete, destructive war stance!

"They... are stronger than last time..." Xing Zhuo murmured, a chill rushing from his feet to his head.

Is it due to Bai E's existence? Or have they evolved anew from the last engagement with human warships?

But whatever the case, facing a purely human fleet now, they began to show their true fangs!

"Commander! The vanguard fleet has suffered heavy losses! The formation is disrupted!"

"Request to adjust tactics! We need dispersal, we need mobility!"

"Boarding! We must execute the boarding plan to disrupt them internally!"

Xing Zhuo almost screamed it out, remembering Bai E's success last time, that being the only verified potentially effective tactic.

"Boarding? Under this kind of firepower? Our Mecha units will be torn apart by those new flying insects and biological ships before getting close!" a squadron commander retorted, half crazy, his ships under heavy attack.

Chaos, collapse began spreading in just over ten minutes after engagement.

Xing Zhuo painfully closed his eyes, seeming to hear Bai E's calm refusal sound once again.

If he were here... if he were here...

Chapter 949 Xu Ruoguang

Two days after setting sail, Bai E's transport ship also arrived at the periphery of the Reef Star Domain.

The view through the porthole was unnerving.

An expansive, gray asteroid belt stretched out like a scar across the universe ahead, with rocks of various sizes reflecting a cold sheen under the faint starlight.

They were not stationary but slowly rolling and shifting through complex gravitational interactions.

The gaps between them fluctuated in width, occasionally ejecting tiny fragments that traced silent paths in the vacuum.

Deeper inside, distorted light refractions were faintly visible, caused by gravitational anomalies creating visual distortions, a nightmare for spacecraft navigation systems.

"The terrain here is more complicated than the data described," Catherine stared at the scanner screen, slightly furrowing her brows.

On the screen, the green line representing safe passage was as thin as a thread, winding intermittently through the red blocks representing dangerous areas.

Just as they were preparing to find an entrance, the scanner captured several fast-moving signals.

"There's a ship," Catherine whispered.

Bai E looked at the screen, spotting a few ruggedly designed ships, each with different paint jobs, emerging from the asteroid belt's shadows.

They too had obviously noticed Bai E's transport ship but didn't immediately approach, instead maintaining distance, prowling around like sharks.

The models of these ships were varied; some were clearly modified decommissioned military vessels, while others were civilian ships equipped with weapon modules, painted with terrifying skulls, bloody claws, or other abstract horror motifs—classic space pirate style.

"It's the Black Flag and Star Breaker people," Catherine judged based on the ship characteristics and intelligence obtained from Boss Claw, "Many are eyeing this legacy. They might be patrolling here to intercept 'latecomer' competitors like us."

Bai E's transport ship was seized from the Blood Claw Mine, and it bore some features of the Blood Claw Pirate Group, which were crudely modified but still detectable by experts.

Perhaps that was precisely why the pirates didn't immediately attack but watched vigilantly.

"Ignore them, proceed as planned to contact the Blood Claw main forces," Bai E said calmly.

Their objective was clear—they didn't come to tangle with these small pirate groups.

Catherine nodded and moved to the communications console.

A surrendered small leader of the Blood Claw pirates was onboard, currently guarded by two mining volunteer soldiers, his face pale.

Following prior instructions and threats or inducements, he nervously took the communicator, tuning to the encrypted channel used internally by the Blood Claw Pirate Group.

After a burst of static, the communication connected.

"This is... Gray Mouse," the surrender pirate reported his code name, his voice trembling, "There's a situation in the mine.... Boss Claw told me to find a way to contact the captain, there's an emergency to report."

The channel was silent for a moment before an impatient voice responded: "Gray Mouse? What could happen at the mine? Boss Claw can't even manage a mine? The captain's busy, doesn't have time for your nonsense! At this crucial point in the legacy struggle, don't come causing trouble!"

"Wait!" Seeing the other side about to disconnect, Catherine signaled for Gray Mouse to speak according to plan.

Gray Mouse swallowed nervously, quickly saying: "It's not trivial! It's... it's a batch of top-grade Black Crystal Ore, freshly extracted, of extremely high purity! Boss Claw said this stuff might assist the captain's legacy struggle, and I must deliver it! And... there's something else strange found at the mine, might be related to Salvador's treasure clues, need to report to the captain in person!"

Black Crystal Ore is a highly valuable rare energy ore in this Stellar District, and Catherine did find some inventory while checking the pirate warehouse, now used as bait.

As for the "strange clues"... during such sensitive treasure hunts, any potentially relevant information would grab attention, even if fabricated.

Indeed, the channel was silent again for a few seconds, seemingly weighing the options.

Finally, the voice said: "Report your position. The captain is near the Broken Rock Area, close to the outer edge of the legacy treasure point. We'll send a reception ship over... your news better be useful."

"Useful, useful!" Gray Mouse assured eagerly.

The communication cut off.

Soon, a coordinate location was sent over, situated in a relatively spacious area deep within the asteroid belt, surrounded by a few iconic giant rock fragments.

"Broken Rock Area... looks like Blood Claw's main forces have already penetrated near the legacy treasure point."

Catherine entered the coordinates into the navigation system, "We have to proceed carefully, many forces have probably gathered there."

The transport ship activated its engines, cautiously entering the asteroid belt.

The hull occasionally vibrated slightly, avoiding incoming debris or navigating through weak energy turbulence.

Along the way, they sporadically spotted silhouettes of pirate ships, some hidden in large rock shadows, others flashing by in the distance, seemingly maintaining a fragile balance and standoff, all waiting for the final treasure to be located, or for others to break the stalemate.

Following the coordinate guide, they gradually approached the "Broken Rock Area."

The asteroids here were evidently larger, like suspended rock mountains, forming relatively stable spaces between them.

Under the shadow of one huge rock, seven or eight anchored ships of varying sizes could be seen, among them the largest—a medium-sized assault ship painted with a conspicuous blood-red claw design—the flagship of the Blood Claw Pirate Group's main forces.

Chapter 950 Xu Ruoguang 2

A small shuttle was launched from the flagship, heading towards Bai E's transport ship.

"I'll go," Bai E said to Catherine, his gaze calm.

The plan was simple, everything revolved around close-quarters combat.

As long as he could get close to the Blood Claw Leader, he could subdue him at the fastest speed, force out the exact information of the treasure location, and use it as a stepping stone to enter the final contest.

Catherine nodded, simply reminding, "Be careful."

Bai E said no more, turning and heading towards the airlock.

He was wearing armor found from the pirate warehouse, slightly worn but fitting, with a simple disguise on his face, making him look like an inconspicuous small pirate leader.

Spiritual Energy was retracted, like a hibernating beast.

The shuttle docked, and the hatch opened.

Two expressionless, fully armed pirates entered with guns, vigilantly scanning the inside of the transport ship.

The Gray Rat was escorted by them, with Bai E following behind with his head lowered.

Stepping onto the shuttle, after a brief journey, they entered the interior of the Blood Claw flagship.

The cabin was filled with the mixed smell of oil, sweat, and poor-quality tobacco, the passages were narrow, the lights dim, with supplies and weapons piled haphazardly everywhere.

The pirates gathered in groups of three or five, some were wiping weapons, others were gambling, their eyes carried a ferocity and restlessness typical of desperate people... kill them all and it wouldn't be wrong.

Bai E was taken to a cabin near the bridge.

Four particularly robust guards stood at the door, exuding a faint sense of menace.

Inside the cabin, the space wasn't large. A tall man, with half his face covered by a metal mask and eyes as sharp as a hawk's, was facing away from the door, looking at a star map projected on the wall.

The star map marked several red dots, presumably the speculated locations of the treasure.

Hearing the commotion, the man turned around, it was the leader of the Blood Claw Pirate Group himself, Blood Claw.

A deep scar cut diagonally across the exposed half of his face, from forehead to chin, making him look particularly sinister.

The electronic eye under the metal mask glowed red, scanning over the Gray Rat, and finally resting on Bai E.

"Top-grade black crystal ore? Strange clues?" Blood Claw's voice was hoarse and oppressive, "Boss Claw sent you, you'd better have something valuable. If you're wasting my time..."

The Gray Rat was so scared his legs went weak, unable to speak.

Bai E stepped forward, still with his head down, speaking in a deliberately hoarse voice, "Leader, the ore is on the ship. As for the clues... Boss Claw said it might be related to the 'key' to open the treasure."

As he spoke, he quietly released his Spiritual Energy perception, instantly locking onto the five people in the cabin, including Blood Claw.

"Key?" Blood Claw's eyes focused, attracted by the word.

Salvador's treasure was said to have complex spiritual energy or biological locks, requiring specific methods or tokens to unlock, which was one of the reasons for the stalemate among various forces.

However, having ascertained the surrounding information, Bai E had already moved.

Without warning, without gathering strength, his figure vanished like a specter, appearing in front of Blood Claw the next moment.

His speed was beyond the capture limits of human retinas, the four elite guards didn't even have time to raise their guns.

Blood Claw, worthy of being a seasoned pirate leader, instinctively leaned back at the sense of crisis, the metal-covered left hand instantly extending a sharp combat blade, slashing towards Bai E's neck.

Simultaneously, he opened his mouth to shout, wanting to call his subordinates outside.

But everything was too late.

Bai E's right hand clamped down on Blood Claw's blade-wielding wrist like an iron vice, applying force that instantly dismantled the resistance in his arm, the combat blade clanging to the ground.

His left hand, fingers together like a knife, struck like lightning at a point on the side of Blood Claw's neck, Spiritual Energy penetrating, cutting off the other's ability to vocalize and most physical control.

Blood Claw's body stiffened, his eyes bursting with incredible horror, realizing he was completely unable to move, not even able to blink, only his mind still working.

Only then did the four guards react, roaring as they charged.

However, Bai E didn't even turn around, just slightly shaking his Spiritual Energy, sending an invisible shockwave spreading through the room.

The four guards were hit as if by a high-speed hovercar, grunting as they were sent flying back, crashing heavily against the cabin walls, knocked unconscious.

The whole process took less than two seconds.

The cabin returned to silence, only the sound of the Gray Rat's teeth chattering.

Bai E released his hand, Blood Claw stood rigidly in place, only his eyeballs could move, full of fear and despair.

He had never seen such terrifying skills, this was not a level pirates or ordinary martial artists could achieve!

"Now," Bai E resumed his original voice, calmly looking at Blood Claw, "tell me the exact treasure location of Salvador's legacy, the way to unlock it, and which forces are gathered there now and their respective situations. You can choose not to speak, but I have ways to make you talk."

Blood Claw's electronic eye flashed wildly, but in the face of absolute strength disparity and the threat of death, he chose to submit—

The treasure location was deep in the Broken Rock Area, inside a super-large hollow asteroid code-named "Colossal Jaw," the entrance concealed, requiring specific energy frequency fluctuations to unlock.

Currently, at least three relatively strong forces had gathered: besides Blood Claw's own alliance with two other medium-sized pirate groups, there was also a detachment from the "Black Flag" pirate group and people from the "Star Breaker" pirate group.

In addition, there seemed to be one or two unidentified but well-equipped ships watching from afar, suspected to be agents sent by some forces of the Peak Alliance.

The various forces were wary of each other, temporarily not daring to attack the treasure location directly, partly for fear of triggering unknown defense mechanisms, partly also wary of being taken advantage of by others.

They were trying to crack the entrance while secretly competing with each other, looking for opportunities to weaken their opponents.

"Aren't you Blood Claw, Rusty Hook, and Night Owl in an alliance?" Bai E asked.

Blood Claw's eyes darkened with a hint of gloom, "Just a temporary cooperation... everyone is on guard against each other. Rusty Hook's cripple wants to take it all for himself, Night Owl, that cunning woman, has her own plans."

Among pirates, there's no real trust.

Having understood the basic situation, Bai E made up his mind.

He needed to use Blood Claw's identity to intervene in this contest.

"Now, contact the leaders of Rusty Hook and Night Owl," Bai E commanded, "tell them you found a possible key clue and invite them over to discuss. Remember, do as I say."

He wanted to take down these pirate leaders in one go, integrating their forces, or at least have them temporarily cooperate.

"From now on, I'm your subordinate... remember, you're going to be their boss."

In the vast universe, individual strength alone is never enough.

The role he could play in large warship duels was limited, and if the opponents dispersed to conduct guerrilla warfare, it would be quite troublesome.

Most importantly, if the final "heritage" was substantial, he would need people to control transportation.

These pirates had to be utilized.

...

On the Night Owl pirate ship, a woman with a smoky eye and an eye patch lightly pinched the chin of a small man in front of her.

"As you said, I'll give this Pirate King's legacy to you. Have you prepared the 'reward' you promised... Xu Ruoguang?"

Xu Ruoguang was pinched in the face, full of displeasure, but for the sake of the supplies, he had no choice but to engage in polite deception with the other party.

"The opponent is not just one, they are even stronger than us, why do you think you can beat them?" Xu Ruoguang sneered, "Let's talk after getting the items, I can help you or help others."

"Then you won't have that chance." The woman tightly embraced Xu Ruoguang's neck, "No one else will be willing to give you everything... Guang."

Xu Ruoguang broke free in frustration, turning away, "I'm going to check the ship, don't call me if there's nothing!"

If not for obtaining this batch of supplies to build his fleet and return to support the people on the planet, why would he mix with a group of pirates?

Watching the pretty boy leave, a deputy finally leaned close to the woman, "Boss... do we really need to go to this extent for this pretty boy? He just saved you once... and that wasn't a problem for you either."

"That's because you haven't seen his heart..."

A heart, ardent, pure, full of faith.

For her, it was like a beam of light suddenly appearing in the darkness.

Nobody is born a pirate.

Heartfelt attraction can be that simple sometimes.

"But it's clear he's just using you..." The deputy was indignant on behalf of the boss.

"I will give him everything he wants. I will help him achieve what he wants to do. He will see eventually and never betray me."