

R. Paradise 721

Chapter 721: Fateful Choices

[Checking...]

[The Hunter has completed the Talent Awakening Mission. Completion: 95% (Exceptional).]

[Assessment in progress... Assessment complete. Due to the Hunter's Talent Awakening Mission completion of 95%, Talent Ability will awaken by 43%, with a maximum initial awakening of 45%.]

[Hunter, please ensure your safety during the Talent Awakening process. You will be extremely vulnerable during this time.]

[Talent Awakening commencing.]

As the prompts from the Reincarnation Paradise concluded, Su Xiao felt a searing heat on his arm where the Reincarnation Mark was located. His body began to weaken, and his consciousness grew heavy. After a few seconds, he collapsed onto the bed. This was a protective mechanism of the Reincarnation Paradise, as Talent Awakening was by no means an easy process.

In a pitch-black space, Su Xiao's consciousness awakened. Everything around him was pitch-black, and he couldn't discern how much time had passed. Suddenly, a streak of light flashed before his eyes, resembling a shooting star.

Boom!

A deafening roar echoed in Su Xiao's ears. It wasn't a shooting star but a meteorite.

The meteorite shattered the dark space, and white light streamed in from the cracks in the space. When the white light illuminated Su Xiao's body, he felt as though his body was melting like snow.

"Su Xiao... Su Xiao, wake up! You'll be late."

A faint voice called out from his ear. Upon hearing the familiar voice, Su Xiao abruptly opened his eyes.

His mouth moved, and after a moment, Su Xiao shook his head. He was in the process of awakening his Talent Ability, and everything he saw was a recollection of his past.

Indeed, his surroundings changed again, and Su Xiao found himself standing on a street. His body had shrunk, and he appeared to be around 7 or 8 years old.

Drip! Drip! Drip!

The shrill honking of a truck horn reached Su Xiao's ears, and he involuntarily turned his head to see an overloaded red truck hurtling towards him.

Squeak~

The truck's tires screeched against the asphalt road, leaving two black tire marks. The monstrous truck's front collided with Su Xiao.

Bang.

His world spun, and Su Xiao's vision reddened. In his youthful body, life was gradually slipping away.

Thump, thump...

The tiny heart in his small body continued to beat. The heartbeat resounded loudly in Su Xiao's ears.

Su Xiao knew what would happen next. Although he had been sent flying by the truck, it should have been a certain death, but he miraculously survived. He couldn't remember the exact reason, as he was too young at the time. Perhaps if the injection during his hospitalization hadn't hurt so much, he might have forgotten about being hit by a car altogether.

Thinking about it, Su Xiao chuckled. Why was the Reincarnation Paradise showing him these memories? Just when he couldn't figure it out, the scene before him surprised him.

Young Su Xiao lay on the road, and there was a pool of blood beneath him. The pale-faced slightly chubby driver knelt in front of him, filled with guilt and remorse. Just as Su Xiao was about to die, a 'seed' within him awakened. It started repairing his broken internal organs caused by the collision. Strangely, his external injuries remained.

[Detected Talent Seed activation above 20%. Repair complete. The Reserve Contractor has been rescued from the brink of death. A total of 3943 Reserve Contractors were selected in this batch.]

Familiar words floated in the air. These were the standard prompts from the Reincarnation Paradise, but the onlookers of the accident didn't notice these words.

Seeing this scene, Su Xiao finally understood why the Reincarnation Paradise was showing him this memory; it was the process of him gaining his Talent Ability.

Some people possessed innate Talent Abilities, while others awakened Talent Seeds later in life. Su Xiao belonged to the latter category.

Compared to those with innate abilities, the Talent Abilities awakened from seeds were somewhat weaker.

However, the strength of the Talent after entering the Reincarnation Paradise also depended on the individual's life experiences. Clearly, Su Xiao fell into the category of an unfortunate life.

In his misfortune, he gained a stronger Talent Ability.

Su Xiao's surroundings changed again, and when his vision cleared, he found himself in a wide corridor.

This corridor seemed to stretch endlessly. Su Xiao stood up from the ground and looked around.

The surroundings were pitch-black steel passageways, sealed on one side and stretching infinitely on the other, with darkness at the end.

"Is this the Paradise?"

Su Xiao tried to ask the Reincarnation Paradise, but it didn't respond. After inspecting the surroundings, he realized that this passage was indestructible in some sense.

Helplessly, Su Xiao could only walk toward the endless side of the passage.

He walked without an end, and eventually, his legs felt as heavy as lead. Time and space lost their meaning here. He might have walked for only a second, or perhaps several years.

"What kind of Talent Awakening is this?"

Su Xiao sighed. Did he awaken a Talent for running away? Why was he constantly moving forward? His Talent should be related to support and growth.

Just when Su Xiao's legs had become so heavy that he could hardly lift them, the scene in front of him finally changed.

In the distance of the black iron corridor, a three-way intersection appeared. There were three symbols above these three passages.

The first passage had the symbol of a staff, or rather, a staff.

The second passage had the symbol of a shield. The shield emitted a deep blue light, seeming to combine magical power and defense.

The third passage had the symbol of a sword. The sword seemed to have just beheaded an enemy and was dripping with blood.

"Fate... is in your hands."

A powerful and majestic voice echoed, causing the entire black iron corridor to hum. Su Xiao's consciousness even felt like it was about to shatter.

After a few minutes of recovery, Su Xiao breathed heavily. The owner of that voice must be a terrifying existence. He realized that even a mere glance from that entity could be deadly.

Setting aside the origin of that voice for now, Su Xiao looked at the three passages ahead. This was now a matter of choosing his direction for Talent Awakening.

The first passage seemed to be inclined towards the abilities of a mage. Su Xiao immediately ruled this out. The second passage was interesting. Judging from the appearance of the shield, it was likely a Tank-like Talent, something Su Xiao didn't expect to have. Although he was surprised, he wouldn't choose the path of a Tank; being a Tank was too frustrating since they couldn't fight back when getting hit. Slaying enemies was much more enjoyable.

As for the third passage, Su Xiao only gave it a cursory glance before heading straight for it. It was evident that the third passage was tailored for close combat.

As Su Xiao entered the third passage, a prompt from the Reincarnation Paradise appeared.

[Hint: Hunter, have you chosen this type of Talent inclination? Based on the Hunter's physical attributes, the chance of successfully mastering this Talent is 70%, the chance of death is 29%, and the chance of an unknown mutation is 1%.]

Su Xiao ignored the Reincarnation Paradise's hint. He had no other choice.

[Talent Activation in progress...]

[Talent Awakening in progress...]

Chapter 722: Maximum level of first awakening

In the passage of the unknown space, Su Xiao's heart began to accelerate. Generally, when awakening any ability, the experience was not too pleasant, especially considering the high death rate of 29% for awakening his talent. This probability was terrifying.

He had to make a choice. If he chose a mage or tank-like talent, Su Xiao's entire ability system would be transformed, essentially committing slow suicide.

"Thump, thump, thump, thump..."

Su Xiao's heartbeats grew faster and faster, and his rapidly pounding heart seemed like it was about to explode. He fell to the ground with a thud, experiencing pain all over his body. This pain was different from the pain of being injured; it came from the deepest part of his cells.

Facing this kind of pain, the battle-hardened Su Xiao almost fainted. Unfortunately, his hidden attribute, willpower, was quite high, so he didn't lose consciousness. He had to endure the torment of pain.

"Ah!"

Light and shadows flashed before Su Xiao's eyes. He suddenly opened his eyes and yelled loudly. At this moment, he was lying on a bed. He had forcefully awakened from the space of his consciousness, and this pain was incredibly intense and terrifying.

The bedsheets beneath Su Xiao were soaked in sweat. The intense pain blurred his vision. Some kind of power was awakening inside him, and this awakening process placed an enormous burden on his body.

With a thud, Su Xiao fell from the bed to the ground, and his loyal companions, Bubu Wang, Matou Sakura, and Matou Yanne, rushed into the room.

Seeing Su Xiao's condition, Bubu Wang anxiously circled around him, while Matou Sakura cowered in the corner, appearing quite afraid. Matou Yanne, with black smoke emanating from his body, stared at Su Xiao with a fierce expression in his blood-red eyes.

"Roar!"

Matou Yanne let out a furious roar, and Bubu Wang's fur bristled in response. Bubu Wang stood in front of Su Xiao, baring its sharp teeth and extending its claws into the ground. If Matou Yanne made any sudden moves, Bubu Wang would immediately pounce and engage in a life-and-death struggle with Matou Yanne.

In the midst of his excruciating pain, Su Xiao raised his trembling arm and pointed at Matou Yanne.

"Zap."

Crackling sounds echoed as an electric current surged within Matou Yanne. It was the Blue Steel Shadow energy. Matou Yanne collapsed to the ground, convulsing as if being electrocuted. Bubu Wang rushed forward and bit Matou Yanne's neck, dragging him out of the room.

Matou Sakura, huddled in the corner, timidly looked at Su Xiao. She took out a bottle of yogurt and inserted a straw.

"Here... for you to drink."

Su Xiao was in no mood for yogurt at the moment. He seriously doubted that if the pain inside his body continued for much longer, even if his consciousness could endure, his cells would collapse.

One minute passed, but there was no improvement. The deep-seated pain within his cells came and went like waves, sometimes stronger, sometimes weaker.

Bloodshot eyes filled Su Xiao's vision. Just as he felt that his body could no longer endure the pain, a warm current suddenly surged within him. This warm current significantly alleviated the intense pain wherever it passed. It was a faint red energy, not the Blue Steel Shadow energy.

This energy didn't appear out of thin air; it was the result of an ability that Su Xiao had long neglected.

Spiritual Shadow Constitution Lv.MAX (Passive Skill)

Skill Effect 1: Modify the body, distributing the mana stored in the brain throughout the body.

Skill Effect 2: The fusion of mana and the body leads to a remarkable transformation. Mana and life form a harmonious cycle, greatly enhancing life points by 30% of the total mana value.

Note: Current mana value is 2233 points, resulting in a life point increase of 670 points.

Spiritual Shadow Constitution, combined with the talent of permanently increasing mana, was a perfect match. While the talent increased mana, Su Xiao's life points also increased slightly. Life points were closely related to vitality.

These two abilities had unintentionally formed a symbiotic relationship. Therefore, during the awakening of the talent, Spiritual Shadow Constitution exhibited special effects, stabilizing Su Xiao's body.

The intense pain was significantly relieved, and the feeling of being on the brink of death disappeared.

Ten minutes later, a thoroughly sweating Su Xiao sat up. He took out a cigarette, tremblingly lit it, and took a deep drag.

[Talent Awakening Successful. Relevant information can be reviewed by the Hunter.]

"So, having a tough life has its benefits," Su Xiao exhaled a puff of smoke, a smile appearing on his face.

"Bring him in."

Hearing Su Xiao's command, "Second Dog" Bubu Wang happily scampered out and dragged Matou Yanne back into the room.

At this moment, the Berserker, Matou Yanne, continued to twitch uncontrollably, seemingly enduring unimaginable pain.

Earlier, there were signs that he was going berserk. Su Xiao hesitated for a moment, then deactivated the Blue Steel Shadow energy that had been activated within Matou Yanne. In case

Matou Yanne had something uncontrollable within him, Su Xiao wanted to have a way to restrain him.

As soon as Su Xiao deactivated the Blue Steel Shadow energy, the Berserker, Matou Yanne, stopped moving, standing perfectly still.

Bubu Wang approached, examined him, and nodded at Su Xiao, indicating that Matou Yanne was still alive.

Leaning against the edge of the bed, Su Xiao opened his personal information list. His gaze swept through the attributes, then he looked at the talent abilities at the bottom.

Soul Devourer

Category: Slaughter Talent (Awakened once)

Level: S (Highest level for the first awakening)

Talent Effect (Passive): After killing a target, permanently absorb 1 to 30 mana points (maximum increase of 15 points) and restore an equal amount of mana and life points (if killing an enemy permanently increases 30 mana points, it will restore 30 mana points and life points).

Note: In each derived world, a maximum of 200 mana points can be absorbed. If the mana absorption limit is reached, Soul Devourer will be fully activated. After killing an enemy, the restoration effect will be increased by 50% (even if 200 mana points have been successfully absorbed, killing an enemy will still restore mana and life points based on the enemy's strength and increase the restoration effect by 50%).

Seeing the attribute after the talent awakening, Su Xiao's trembling hands shook even more severely. He had paid a heavy price to complete the prerequisites for the talent awakening task. Then, he infiltrated the Ryuudou Temple alone, single-handedly flattened it, and finally, awakened his talent despite a 29% chance of death.

All of this had paid off. After awakening, his talent ability had significantly improved, and more importantly, it had resolved the predicament of lacking mana when surrounded by enemies.

What did a lone wolf fear the most? Powerful enemies? Treacherous and dangerous terrain? It turned out that it was none of these.

It was evident when Su Xiao infiltrated the Ryuudou Temple. He had the ability to battle the Orphan of Kos, yet when faced with hundreds of ordinary Grudges, he could only keep his distance.

This was the Achilles' heel of nearly all lone wolves: the fear of overwhelming numbers.

Facing a swarm of enemies, Su Xiao couldn't continuously use the Blue Steel Shadow or Energy Shield. In this way, his combat power would be reduced by at least forty percent.

If he were surrounded for a short period, it would be fine. However, if he were surrounded for an extended period and couldn't break free, he would be doomed.

The talent ability that awakened after was excellent at solving this problem. When facing a swarm of enemies, unless Su Xiao's stamina was depleted, he would never fall. The more enemies he killed, the faster his mana and life points would recover. Eventually, he wouldn't have to worry about getting injured or running out of mana.

Chapter 723: A very useful merit badge

Su Xiao, bare-chested, leaned against the edge of the bed. His talent had successfully awakened, and the burden on his shoulders had lessened considerably.

Now, all he needed to do was complete the main quest, which would essentially mark the end of this derived world. Unfortunately, he couldn't execute the main quest for the time being.

Many signs indicated that most of the contractees in the Holy Grail World had been killed, at least as far as the contact platform within the derived world was concerned.

Apart from Su Xiao and "Umbrellaless Brother," the contact platform seemed to have turned into a ghost town. This was the first time Su Xiao had encountered such a situation. In the past, contact platforms in derived worlds had been lively places, with rivalries and cooperation among enemies and potential partners.

If what Umbrellaless Brother said was true, then there were only four contractees left in this derived world. Su Xiao didn't consider himself a contractee; he was a Hunter.

Setting aside the ultimate goals of those three individuals, their actions indicated that they were cleaning house. If Umbrellaless Brother died, would Su Xiao be next?

Su Xiao didn't believe that those three high-level contractees would spare him, so before they made a move against him, he wanted to gather all the strength he could.

Checking the time, he had four and a half hours left before meeting up with Umbrellaless Brother. After a moment of hesitation, Su Xiao left the villa with Bubu Wang and the others. They headed towards the center of Fuyuki City under the cover of night.

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The night in Fuyuki City was eerily silent, with dim streetlights illuminating the streets. Due to recent cases of home invasions and missing persons, Fuyuki City at night felt like a ghost town.

A car pulled into the central street, with Su Xiao at the wheel, Bubu Wang in the passenger seat, and Rin Tohsaka in the back seat. As for the Berserker, Kariya Matou, he had been stowed away in the trunk, which Su Xiao humorously referred to as the "special seat."

The car stopped in front of the cathedral on the central street. Su Xiao got out of the car and knocked on the cathedral's door.

Knock, knock, knock...

Despite knocking for a while, there was no response from inside. Just as he was preparing to use special means to enter the cathedral, he heard footsteps approaching from behind the door.

"Who is it?"

The tired voice of an elderly priest came from behind the door.

"It's me."

Su Xiao's voice made the elderly priest's spirit perk up.

"Could it be..."

The elderly priest quickly opened the door. At this moment, he was wearing pajamas, and there was a bit of sleep in his eyes.

"You... have you entered Ryuudou Temple?"

The elderly priest stared at Su Xiao, his eyes filled with disbelief.

"Yes."

"Come in."

The elderly priest stepped aside, inviting Su Xiao into the cathedral. After entering, the elderly priest hurriedly freshened up and appeared before Su Xiao again. He seemed much more awake now, and the two of them sat in the cathedral.

"About that..."

The elderly priest hesitated, and Su Xiao took out a necklace, placing it on the wooden table in front of him.

"This necklace."

The elderly priest's voice was hoarse, and his hands trembled as he tried to pick up the necklace several times but seemed to lack the courage.

"Irisviel is dead."

Su Xiao's words seemed to hit the elderly priest like a heavy hammer. The elderly priest lowered his eyelids, and his once-bright eyes lost their light.

"Did she... suffer when she passed away?"

The elderly priest covered his face with one hand, his voice choked, and tears seeped through his fingers.

"When I killed her, she had already turned into a monster, the Homunculus Irisviel. As for whether she suffered, not much."

"Homunculus... Irisviel."

The elderly priest, nearing sixty, choked up and seemed unable to speak.

"Can you tell me what happened at that time? Did she still have... human features?"

Seeing the elderly priest's reaction, Su Xiao recalled Irisviel's human mentality at the time. Back then, Irisviel had retained her sanity in both human and monster states.

"No human features. When I saw her, she had already become a monster, devoid of reason and unable to speak. Perhaps her consciousness had long perished."

"I see... As long as she didn't suffer too much... that's good."

"She ultimately died from a gunshot wound and transformed into a green-haired beauty, looking around twenty years old, very beautiful."

The elderly priest fell silent, using one hand to cover his eyes. After a long time, his emotions seemed to stabilize somewhat.

"If only... no, there are no 'if onlys.' This is the fate of people like us. I am just one of the lucky ones."

The elderly priest got up, and after a while, he returned to the cathedral. At this moment, the elderly priest appeared much calmer, but his eyes were still somewhat red.

"Sorry, I lost control of my emotions. My relationship with Irisviel... we were once lovers."

The elderly priest let out a long sigh.

"You were able to infiltrate Ryuudou Temple and kill Irisviel. I'm surprised. What about the other Avenger-class creatures?"

"They died peacefully."

Su Xiao didn't tell the truth. Those Avenger-class creatures had actually died quite horribly, evaporating into gas due to high temperatures.

"All of them are dead?"

The elderly priest was astonished, seemingly seeing Su Xiao in a new light.

"Uh... Ryuudou Temple has been razed by me."

"Huh? What do you mean?"

The elderly priest, who had been calm until now, suddenly sat up straight, as if he had heard something absurd. Ryuudou Temple's importance was beyond words; it was the core territory of the Fifth Holy Grail War.

"Literal meaning."

This time, the elderly priest couldn't remain calm. He stood up with a loud exhale, seemingly hearing something absurd.

"The underground mana is fine; I checked it when I disabled the spiritual barrier."

The elderly priest visibly relaxed.

"Father, this time, have I helped the Church by dealing with this problem?"

Su Xiao lightly tapped his fingers on the wooden table.

"Yes, Irisviel was once a proxy, and this matter should have been resolved within the Church. However, those bastards from the Mage Association suddenly intervened, saying that the Avenger-class creatures had research value. It's simply absurd."

The elderly priest handed Su Xiao a list, which was made of parchment and quite delicate. On the back, the symbol of the Church was displayed.

[Hint: The Hunter has triggered the 'Church of Oranyan' contribution redemption mechanism and can use Church contribution points to redeem items from the list. Current Church contribution points: 2219.]

These Church contribution points were all that Su Xiao had obtained from razing Ryuudou Temple. Aside from Irisviel, none of the Avenger-class creatures in Ryuudou Temple had dropped treasure chests.

Su Xiao took the list, and a list of items appeared.

[Soul Crystal (Large) x1]

Quality: None

Category: Concentrated essence of pure soul.

Rating: None

Description: The Soul Crystal is a rare item that can make Abyssal demons and other dark races temporarily set aside their dignity, becoming your henchmen, even in any world's hard currency.

Exchange Price: 1000 Church contribution points.

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[Holy Water (Medium Bottle, 99% Concentration)]

Origin: Fate/Zero, Church of Oranyan

Quality: Pale gold

Type: Consumable (usable twice)

Effect 1: After drinking, restores 80% of health and 80% of mana, and rapidly heals injuries.

Effect 2: When splashed on enemies, deals 800 points of holy damage + 300 points of true damage to dark-type enemies, and inflicts forced purification/incineration effects on dark-type enemies.

Rating: 300

Description: Drinking it or splashing it, this is a difficult choice.

Exchange Price: 800 Church contribution points.

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[Ghost Hunter]

Origin: Fate/Zero, Church of Oranyan

Quality: Pale gold

Category: Crossbow

Magazine Capacity: 1

Durability: 68/68

Attack Power: 73~135

Equipment Requirements: Strength 30, Agility 50, Intelligence 10, Basic Ranged Skills LV.25 or higher.

Equipment Effect 1: Mithril Bolts (Passive) - If Ghost Hunter is in an empty chamber state, it can generate an energy crossbow bolt within one minute. Generating an energy crossbow bolt consumes 50 mana and comes with Mithril special effects.

Equipment Effect 2: Silent Hunter (Passive) - The crossbow bolt is completely silent upon firing and blocks a certain level of perception. Bolt penetration +9, armor piercing +8.

Equipment Effect 3: Hunter's Mark (Active) - After activating this skill, you can mark any distant target. If the crossbow bolt hits the marked target, the Mithril crossbow bolt will explode inside the target, stunning or disorienting the target for 1~3 seconds.

Tip: Hunter's Mark (Active) lasts for 10 seconds.

Tip: Hunter's Mark (Active) consumes 100 mana.

Tip: Hunter's Mark (Active) has a cooldown of 2 hours.

Rating: 280

Description: The hunt begins.

Price: 81000 Park Coins

Exchange Price: 500 Church contribution points.

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Apart from these three items, there were other equipment and items on the list, but none of them were as valuable as these three. Su Xiao had his eye on all three of them, but he only had 2219 Church contribution points, which was slightly embarrassing.

Su Xiao looked at the elderly priest, and the elderly priest noticed Su Xiao's gaze. He raised his eyes, staring at the ceiling.

"Father..."

"Cough, cough, cough..."

The elderly priest coughed violently, as if he were suffering from asthma.

"Ah, I'm not very useful at my age. What did you say just now?"

Chapter 724: Contractual

From the elderly priest's attitude, it was clear that he wanted to get a better deal.

Su Xiao wasn't sure if he would have another chance to come here, and even if he did, earning merits from the Church of Oranyan wouldn't be easy.

"Father, you want to obtain the Holy Grail, right?"

"The Holy Grail?!"

The smile on the elderly priest's face gradually faded, and he unconsciously looked at the back of Su Xiao's hand.

"Indeed, you are related to the Holy Grail War. I didn't notice any Command Spells on you when I first met you. Could it be that you are..."

Thinking of a possibility, the elderly priest's heart skipped a beat.

"You don't think I'm a Heroic Spirit, do you?"

Su Xiao leaned back in his chair, crossing his legs casually.

"Heh."

The elderly priest chuckled softly. He had seen many Heroic Spirits before, and their speech and behavior were noticeably different from modern people. Moreover, Heroic Spirits were constructed of energy, and the elderly priest had a way to identify them.

"You're neither a Master nor a Heroic Spirit, so are you planning to participate in the Holy Grail War?"

The elderly priest's gaze grew somewhat fervent. Su Xiao had managed to raze Ryuudou Temple, which showed extraordinary capabilities. If he joined the elderly priest's camp, he would be a formidable ally.

"Who knows, but you might need my help in the future."

Su Xiao looked at the elderly priest with a smile. When communicating with non-hostile plot characters, he usually wore a smile to conceal other emotions.

"I'll think about it..."

The elderly priest hesitated, and after a while, he nodded.

"Consider it a 5% discount for you. Wait here for a moment."

The elderly priest left the church, presumably going to a secret room in the underground part of the church. After a while, he returned with three items in his hand.

"This is Soul Crystal (Large), Holy Water, and the Ghost Hunter."

The three items were placed in front of Su Xiao. He immediately pocketed the Soul Crystal (Large) and the Holy Water. As for the Ghost Hunter, it was a finely crafted crossbow, entirely made of metal, in all black, with a somewhat retro appearance.

Su Xiao was about to draw the crossbow string, but the elderly priest handed him a small winch.

"With this thing, it's impossible to draw the crossbow string with human strength... Are you kidding me?!"

The elderly priest's eyes widened.

Creak~

Su Xiao pulled the crossbow string, and the attack power of this crossbow was comparable to that of the Spider Queen, indicating its formidable strength.

After stringing the Ghost Hunter barehanded, Su Xiao's mana slowly decreased as an energy crossbow bolt gradually formed in the weapon.

"What did you say just now?"

Su Xiao was focused on examining the Ghost Hunter and didn't catch the elderly priest's words.

The elderly priest looked at the small winch in his hand and shook his head.

"It's nothing. Where were we?"

"The Holy Grail."

Su Xiao raised the Ghost Hunter, whose accurate range was within 150 meters. Beyond that, it wouldn't hit the target. However, for a crossbow-type weapon like this, 150 meters was already supernatural.

"Yes, the Holy Grail. Are you interested in helping me obtain the Holy Grail? I can offer you..."

The elderly priest seemed somewhat hopeful.

"No."

Su Xiao put away the Ghost Hunter. It was a powerful weapon, silent and suitable for mid-range assassinations.

"You're so resolute in your refusal. Have you considered my feelings? I just gave you a 5% discount."

The elderly priest seemed displeased.

"I'm considering your feelings, which is why I'm refusing."

Su Xiao's words clearly left the elderly priest somewhat speechless. His face began to look unpleasant.

"Father, with your physical condition, you can easily live to 80 or 90 years. Why rush to meet your end?"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean... to pursue the Holy Grail, even though you've seen it before. You should understand the principles behind it. The first two Greater Grails were indeed priceless treasures, as for the third one, I don't need to say it, and now it's already the fourth Greater Grail. Can you imagine how much malice is concentrated within it? Are you so eager to die?"

Su Xiao stared at the elderly priest, and there was only a core left in his hand, the rest of the apple having been eaten.

"You... I can understand your point of view. To be honest, even without your reminder, I am well aware of the risks. But who would willingly give up on pursuing the Holy Grail? Not only do I know this, but the Tohsaka family, the Matou family, and the Einzbern family all know it too. It's a universal wish-granting machine. Even if it's tainted, so what? Just give up like that?"

The elderly priest sighed, and he reached for a cigarette.

"Give me a cigarette."

Su Xiao handed him a cigarette.

"Although I still don't know your name, I trust you more than some other collaborators. At least you don't have any hostility towards me."

The elderly priest exhaled a puff of smoke, and with Su Xiao's lead, he relapsed into smoking, possibly due to recent frustrating events.

With the interference of the Paradise of Reincarnation, Su Xiao's relationship with the elderly priest wouldn't become hostile. That's why the elderly priest trusted Su Xiao more after he successfully razed Ryuudou Temple.

"Don't you feel unwilling if you don't see it with your own eyes? I get it, the allure of the Greater Grail is irresistible."

Su Xiao remained silent, as he had other motives for staying at the church.

"By the way, Father."

"Yes?"

After their conversation, the two had become somewhat more familiar.

"Can you contact the Einzbern family?"

"This... it's classified."

The elderly priest dodged the question, feeling that something wasn't right.

"If you can contact them, I plan to get in touch with the Einzbern family. Don't worry, I won't join forces with them to go after you. If we successfully establish contact, I will take measures to prevent them from causing trouble for you."

"I'll think about it..."

"There's no time to think about this. I'm in a hurry."

Su Xiao needed to speed up his actions as Umbrellaless Brother could strike at any moment.

"So, can I understand that you can help me restrain the Einzbern family?"

"Yes, but there's one condition. You can't join forces with them to target my camp. Although I don't know how you found out about my situation, my pursuit of the Holy Grail must not be leaked."

The elderly priest produced a piece of white parchment and wrote and drew on it before handing it to Su Xiao. This was a 'Self-Enforcement Contract,' something akin to an oath.

The elderly priest was quite cunning and had prepared this in advance.

After glancing at the contents of the 'Self-Enforcement Contract,' Su Xiao signed it. What the elderly priest didn't know was that this 'Self-Enforcement Contract' had limitations; it only applied to beings with mana in their bodies or to native residents of the Holy Grail world.

Su Xiao was neither a native nor had a trace of mana, so signing it was no different from scribbling on a piece of toilet paper.

Chapter 725: I can still do the robbery

The reason Su Xiao asked the elderly priest for help in contacting the Einzbern family was mainly due to the elderly priest's special status.

If Su Xiao were to contact the Einzbern family directly, they might not respond, let alone help him establish contact with Emiya Kiritsugu, who was currently participating in the Holy Grail War.

The elderly priest was the supervisor of the Fourth Holy Grail War, and his words carried weight. His request would not be easily ignored by the Einzbern family. Su Xiao did this to try and gather more forces to deal with the three high-level contractors.

Approximately at the same time as the agreed-upon meeting with Umbrellaless Brother, Su Xiao left a list of phone numbers with the elderly priest and left the church.

...

At night, in a forest one kilometer outside Fuyuki City.

An owl perched on a tree branch, tilting its head to observe a human below. The scent of blood on the person aroused the owl's wild instincts.

"Hoot, hoot, hoot..."

After calling a few times, the owl took flight. It preferred smaller prey like mice and insects over such a large target.

Umbrellaless Brother leaned against a tree, his clothes tattered, and his face charred. He had a severe wound in his lower abdomen, which was critical. Although there was no heavy bleeding, the entire wound was burnt and charred, with a dark red energy surging inside, resembling magma.

Umbrellaless Brother took out a watch and checked the time. He sighed helplessly. There were still three hours left until his appointment with Su Xiao. Considering Su Xiao's cautious nature, he might arrive at the last minute. With his current injuries, he wouldn't be able to hold out for three hours.

"Kouen..."

Umbrellaless Brother tried to push himself up from the tree, but his efforts failed. After escaping from Arson and others twice, he had exhausted his recovery items.

The first time was when he escaped during Arson's pursuit of a small adventure group, and the second time was when he escaped with his powerful defensive and escape abilities. Although he had successfully escaped twice, there wouldn't be a third time.

Umbrellaless Brother's breathing grew weaker. He held a ring in his hand, his wedding ring. Thinking about his three-year-old daughter in the real world, his heart ached.

"Xixi, I wish I could watch you grow up..."

Umbrellaless Brother coughed a few times, the pain from his injuries making his complexion even worse.

Crack! A branch not far away was snapped, and Umbrellaless Brother's gaze sharpened. He struggled to stand up. If it was an enemy approaching, he was prepared to fight to the death.

From the bushes emerged Bubu Wang, and when Umbrellaless Brother saw him, he smiled.

"Just in time... really timely."

As soon as he finished speaking, Umbrellaless Brother collapsed to the ground.

"Bubu, share the aura with him."

Su Xiao, who was sitting on a tree branch not far away, spoke. He had arrived about half an hour ago but had stayed hidden to observe if Umbrellaless Brother was being pursued by enemies.

Once he confirmed that there was no one tailing Umbrellaless Brother, Su Xiao jumped down from the tree and approached him.

At this moment, Umbrellaless Brother's pupils were gradually dilating. Upon realizing the severity of his injuries, Su Xiao furrowed his brows.

An hour later, inside a villa on the outskirts of Fuyuki City.

A weakened Umbrellaless Brother opened his eyes and was horrified by the scene before him.

Umbrellaless Brother was lying on an iron bed. Under the illumination of the light, a man wearing a mask and medical gloves was looking down at him from above. On a wooden table beside the man lay medical instruments covered in fresh blood.

The man held a syringe, apparently preparing to inject him. Seeing this, Umbrellaless Brother opened his mouth but couldn't utter a word.

Umbrellaless Brother was terrified. The scene before him resembled something from a horror movie—sealed room, a psychopath dissecting or modifying him.

As his memory gradually cleared, Umbrellaless Brother let out a sigh of relief, realizing that Su Xiao was the one who saved him.

"Byakuya, thank you for saving... Frank!"

Umbrellaless Brother was about to express his gratitude but, when he tried to sit up, he found that he had been injected with a large dose of anesthesia. More importantly, some of his vital organs were hanging in the air, like his kidneys and liver, connected to a tube leading to an iron box at the bedside.

"You... are you going to dissect me?"

Umbrellaless Brother stuttered. He didn't know Su Xiao well, and if this man turned out to be a psychopath, it would be bad.

"No, this is to prevent you from turning into a 'vegetable.'"

"Huh?"

Umbrellaless Brother didn't understand what turning into a 'vegetable' meant. In fact, taking out his organs was to prevent them from becoming like trees.

Umbrellaless Brother had a strong constitution, and Su Xiao had diluted the first formula before injecting it into him several times. Given his injuries at that time, it was a last-ditch effort. Initially, there were signs of tree transformation, but after the shield tattoo appeared on Umbrellaless Brother's arm, the transformation lessened.

"You can rest for a while."

Su Xiao injected the syringe into Umbrellaless Brother's body again, and his eyelids grew heavier.

"Wait, I feel like I can still be saved."

"Still being saved..."

Umbrellaless Brother lost consciousness as Su Xiao continued the surgery. With experience from helping Nagato perform surgery, Su Xiao was more familiar with surgical procedures, especially considering the robust physique of contractors.

After an unknown period of time, Umbrellaless Brother's fingers moved slightly, and he gradually opened his eyes. As his consciousness returned, he felt an unbearable pain.

"Ugh..."

Umbrellaless Brother groaned and instinctively tried to touch his abdomen. However, when his hand came into contact with his stomach, he froze. The sensation in his abdomen was not normal.

Umbrellaless Brother struggled through the pain and sat up. What he first noticed was a metal box placed on the bedside table. A tube ran from his abdomen to the box, connecting him to it.

"You... you..."

Umbrellaless Brother stammered. He didn't understand what was happening. His abdomen had turned pale, and there were small tree saplings growing on the surface.

Umbrellaless Brother's intestines had been burned more than three-quarters, and without extreme measures, he wouldn't regain his combat capability in the short term. Moreover, his chances of survival were less than one in ten.

After the initial panic, Umbrellaless Brother gradually calmed down. As long as he didn't die, he could recover any injuries when he returned to the Paradise of Reincarnation.

The door was pushed open, and a young girl with a tray walked into the room. When Umbrellaless Brother saw her, he was taken aback.

"Sakura Matou?"

Sakura stepped back a few steps, clearly a bit shy.

"Byakuya, that person is awake."

After Sakura shouted for more than ten seconds, Su Xiao entered the room.

"Byakuya, thank you for saving my life."

Umbrellaless Brother didn't mention the previous surgery; he knew that Su Xiao had saved him.

Su Xiao walked to the bedside and nodded after a brief examination of Umbrellaless Brother.

"You still thought you'd kick the bucket. Tell me, what's the situation with those three individuals?"

Chapter 726: Envoy

Upon hearing Su Xiao's question, Umbrellaless Brother sat up straight on the hospital bed.

"Have you heard of the Blood Gate Adventurers?"

The first words from Umbrellaless Brother made Su Xiao understand what was going on: Stan, the leader of the Blood Gate Adventurers, was seeking revenge.

"There have been some grievances in the past."

"Some... grievances? Does that mean they've come for revenge on you?!"

Umbrellaless Brother's expression was somewhat grim. He was caught in this situation, and seeing Su Xiao's relaxed demeanor made him even more frustrated. The one who should have been pursued and in danger, Emiya Kiritsugu, was safe and sound, while he, who was not the main target, was on the run.

"What kind of grievances do you have with them?"

Umbrellaless Brother sighed. Complaining wouldn't change the current situation, and besides, Su Xiao had just saved his life.

"As for the grievances..."

Su Xiao and Umbrellaless Brother briefly explained the history of their conflicts with the Blood Gate Adventurers, leaving Umbrellaless Brother somewhat bewildered.

"Just for these grievances... Stan actually sent Arson to hunt you down? Has he lost his mind?"

"That's what puzzles me too."

Su Xiao had not revealed one crucial detail to Umbrellaless Brother: his serial number was untraceable, making the tracking costs significantly higher.

"So, are we teaming up now?"

Umbrellaless Brother removed the bandages from his body. This guy had an extraordinarily strong vitality; otherwise, he wouldn't have escaped Arson's pursuit twice.

"Yes, why else do you think I saved you? By the way, do those three individuals have tracking methods?"

"They do. One of them, a woman named Chou, has a familiar..."

Umbrellaless Brother stopped midway in his explanation.

"Can you describe the familiar's specific features?"

"..."

Su Xiao noticed that Umbrellaless Brother wasn't responding, so he looked at him.

"It's this kind of familiar, damn it!"

Umbrellaless Brother pointed to the window, where a colorful butterfly was perched on the glass outside.

"They're following us. How do we get rid of this thing? It's obstructing our battle."

Umbrellaless Brother pointed at the tube in his abdomen that was connected to an iron box. Su Xiao approached and, amidst Umbrellaless Brother's shocked protests, pulled the tube out.

"Is this really okay? I feel a bit dizzy."

"It's fine. It's just your remaining Pillar Cell trying to backlash against you."

Su Xiao contacted Bubu Wang and had him hide with Matou Sakura.

The palm-sized colorful butterfly fluttered outside the window. Su Xiao held Zanpakuto in his hand, and the Apostle's Eye floated in the air, constantly vigilant of the surroundings.

"Pillar Cell... backlash?! Is there any risk?!"

"Turning into a tree."

Su Xiao remained calm, but Umbrellaless Brother was in a state of panic.

"What?!"

Umbrellaless Brother turned pale. He immediately recalled a scene: the moment before the death of Tsunade in the Naruto world, when she turned into a tree.

"Like Tsunade?"

"No."

Su Xiao's answer relieved Umbrellaless Brother, but what Su Xiao said next drained all color from his face.

"Orochimaru transplanted Tsunade's Pillar Cells after her death, while in your case, it's Pillar Cells from when you were alive. The two have different levels of vitality. If..."

"Wait, can you explain it more simply?"

Umbrellaless Brother swallowed hard. His gaze seemed to say, "I have a cute daughter waiting for me in the real world. I need to survive."

"Simply put, when Orochimaru transplanted Tsunade's Pillar Cells, there was a chance for her Pillar Cells to resist. As for the Pillar Cells in your body, if they erupt, you'll turn into a really tall tree, very tall."

Su Xiao approached the window, which showed that it was noon. The courtyard of the villa was empty.

"So, I could die at any moment now?"

Umbrellaless Brother's lips twitched, and he looked at his abdomen.

"You can think of it that way. The tube implanted in your abdomen before was meant to suppress the Pillar Cells. Since you wanted to remove it yourself..."

Su Xiao's words left Umbrellaless Brother dumbfounded.

"Then, should we put it back? I regret it now. It's not bad to carry that iron box with me, especially when it can protect my vitals in critical moments."

"We can."

Su Xiao noticed that there were no enemies near the villa for the time being. He picked up the iron box with the tube and approached Umbrellaless Brother. He inserted the sharp-ended tube back into Umbrellaless Brother's abdomen.

"Hey, isn't this too hasty? You're doing it while I'm still alive!"

Splurt!

Umbrellaless Brother winced in pain.

"Here."

Su Xiao handed the iron box back to him. At this point, Umbrellaless Brother looked completely dejected. He tied the iron box to his abdomen as if it were his new home.

Umbrellaless Brother was a wild tank-type contractor who didn't use shields but wore heavy metal gauntlets that extended to his forearms. Each gauntlet was as thick as a human torso.

He didn't need a shield because his two gauntlets could serve as a shield, and they were more versatile, suitable for both offense and immobilizing enemies.

Steam emanated from the gauntlets, and Umbrellaless Brother moved his shoulders.

"Are you sure about our escape route?"

Umbrellaless Brother leaned toward the window, looking at the empty courtyard.

"Why escape?"

Su Xiao was puzzled.

"Shouldn't we? The enemy consists of three third-order contractors, one rank higher than me!"

"So what?"

Su Xiao didn't care about the enemy's order. Without a direct confrontation, he would not flee. Moreover, fleeing at this point wouldn't make much sense.

"Bro, can I call you 'bro'? We're not escaping; it's a strategic retreat."

Su Xiao remained unfazed, determined to find out if he could face the three high-order contractors head-on. Constantly evading wasn't wise, as they would eventually catch up. Umbrellaless Brother's earlier experience was the best proof.

"Roar!"

A furious roar echoed from the villa's courtyard. Su Xiao fixed his gaze and saw none other than Berserker, Matou Kariya.

"Why hasn't he retreated?"

Under normal circumstances, Matou Kariya and Matou Sakura should be hiding in the shadows.

"Roar!"

Matou Kariya roared again, his body shrouded in black smoke. Oddly, there was something unusual about Matou Kariya, as his eyes emitted a pinkish glow.

"Is that a Heroic Spirit?"

Umbrellaless Brother had never seen Matou Kariya in this modified state.

"This is Matou Kariya. You can think of him as the Master version of Berserker."

"How strong is he?"

"Not very, but very resilient."

"That's good."

Umbrellaless Brother breathed a sigh of relief.

"But now he's our enemy, controlled by that woman named Chou. She's the Charm Specialist I mentioned earlier. Although she specializes in charm, her melee combat abilities are exceptionally strong."

Su Xiao nodded. Without Matou Sakura, Matou Kariya being controlled was a troublesome situation.

Completely enveloped in black smoke, Matou Kariya stood in the courtyard. Strangely, the three high-order contractors were nowhere to be seen.

The sound of footsteps came closer, and blank-faced civilians began approaching from all directions. There were about dozens of them, their eyes glowing with pinkish light, and they were all strapped with explosives.

These civilians surrounded the villa, and when Matou Kariya roared in front of them, all those people raised their heads and looked towards the villa.

"This kind of dirty trick... Is Arson not here?"

Umbrellaless Brother seemed to have figured something out, and a smile appeared on his face.

"Byakuya, I've thought of a possibility. If this possibility is true, today might be our chance to turn the tables."

"What possibility?"

After muttering a few words quietly, Su Xiao's eyes lit up.

"Are you sure?"

"Not entirely, but I'm more than sixty percent certain. I know a bit about Arson. That guy wouldn't set up such a formation. If he were here, this villa would have been burned to the ground long ago."

Chapter 727: Captive of Love LV.43

Outside the villa where Su Xiao was located, a man and a woman stood in front of the main entrance. The woman was alluring, and the man was slightly chubby.

"Dié, are we sure about doing this? Although Arson..."

The chubby man appeared somewhat uneasy. They were both contractors responsible for hunting in the Holy Grail world. Originally, their target was Umbrellaless Brother, but upon arriving, they discovered that their primary target was also present.

"They are just two second-order contractors. Arson is currently busy... probably."

"But..."

The chubby man hesitated.

"Don't worry about it. Stan, the big boss, once said that whoever takes down that guy will be handsomely rewarded. Don't forget, Arson is not in our team. He may be the vice-leader, but our team leader is no pushover either. If Arson benefits, we'll get a small share at best."

Dié gave the chubby man a seductive look, and after a moment of contemplation, he nodded.

"I'll go with your plan, but let's be clear: if things go south, you take responsibility."

"Haha, 'things go south'? You crack me up."

The chubby man laughed and shifted his gaze toward the villa.

"These two guys seem pretty composed; they haven't come out on their own."

"That means they're not complete fools."

Energy surged from Dié's body. While ordinary Nen energy was white, Dié's Nen was pink, visibly pink. Her Nen energy was extremely vast, surpassing even leaders like the Phantom Troupe or Hisoka by far.

This was still with her power restricted. If she were in a third-order world, her strength would be at least two to three times greater.

"Slaves, charge!"

Dié shouted, pointing towards the villa.

"Roar!"

Matou Kariya, controlled by Dié, let out a furious roar and led the civilians, all wearing explosive vests, charging towards the villa.

Despite the situation, Su Xiao and Umbrellaless Brother remained inside the villa. Both knew that rushing out now wasn't a wise choice, even though the villa was on the verge of being destroyed.

One of the civilians reached the villa's base. His face bore a twisted smile, and from his expression, it seemed he wasn't completely controlled but willingly became a human bomb for Dié.

Boom, boom, boom...

Explosions echoed, debris and rubble flew around, but the explosions caused by regular bombs were different from alchemical explosions; they didn't produce much fire.

Once the shockwaves from the explosions ceased, smoke billowed from the wreckage of the villa. Within the debris, Matou Kariya was pinned beneath a concrete block.

Limbless body parts were scattered in the villa's courtyard, and dozens of people were blown to pieces, filling the air with a strong burnt and bloody smell.

A piece of concrete was kicked away, and Su Xiao, unscathed, emerged from the wreckage, his Counter Shield floating around him.

On the other hand, Umbrellaless Brother was far from being as graceful as Su Xiao. He was covered in dust but otherwise unharmed.

"Roar."

A furious roar came from Matou Kariya, lying nearby, controlled by the enemy. He was trapped under a large concrete pillar, his eyes emitting pink light, and his body filled with pink energy.

"Nen energy?"

Su Xiao placed his foot on Matou Kariya's chest, and his Spirit Blade energy flowed out through his foot.

Matou Kariya convulsed as if he had been electrocuted, and the pink light in his eyes faded under this 'electrotherapy.'

"Oh? To be able to dispel my charm effect, no wonder the boss values you so much, handsome. How about a little sparring, my dear?"

Dié smiled seductively, beckoning Su Xiao with her finger. Her nails were long and sharp, painted with red nail polish. Oddly, her middle finger was unpainted, suggesting it had a 'special' purpose.

"Spar?"

Su Xiao engaged in an unusual pre-battle negotiation with the enemy. On the other hand, Umbrellaless Brother charged at the chubby man, making it clear he wanted to avoid a confrontation with the woman and chose the chubby man as his opponent instead.

"Have you already chosen your opponent? I must say, you're unfortunate. If Arson were here, at least you could have died quickly."

Dié took a step forward, astonishingly wearing high heels during battle. It was clear that she intended to engage Su Xiao in close combat.

"You entered the lower-order world not just to seek revenge on me, right? If you're going to such lengths just because I killed one of your Seed Guild members..."

Su Xiao didn't finish his sentence, as Dié raised her hand.

"No need to beat around the bush. We're here for one purpose – to kill you, plain and simple."

Dié placed her fair fingers against her red lips, blowing a kiss toward Su Xiao.

As she did so, a strand of pink Nen energy stretched between her lips and fingers, forming a heart shape. This pink heart-shaped Nen energy floated in mid-air, sending ripples outward, instantly enveloping Su Xiao.

[Tip: The Hunter is under the influence of 'Captivated by Love LV.43,' causing his abilities to exceed the limit of the second-order world power system. This ability has been reduced to LV.35 intensity.]

[Charm attribute evaluation in progress... Evaluation failed.]

[Willpower attribute evaluation in progress... Evaluation failed.]

[Intelligence attribute evaluation in progress... Evaluation failed.]

[Warning: You are under the influence of 'Captivated by Love LV.35.']

[Tip: The Master Swordsman LV.30 additional ability 'Mind Blade' is activated. You are immune to the current charm effect.]

The pink light in Su Xiao's eyes gradually faded. Seeing this, Dié furrowed her brows.

"A Master Swordsman above level 30? Not bad at all."

Dié was a top-level third-order contractor, and as soon as Su Xiao resisted her charm ability, she deduced the cause from his weapon.

A diamond ring on her hand began to sparkle. Su Xiao immediately identified it as a detection-type equipment.

"63 Strength, 63 Agility, 60 Vitality, 60 Intelligence, 6 Charm... What kind of bizarre attribute distribution is this, with all four attributes simultaneously developed?!"

After detecting Su Xiao's information, Dié was taken aback. She had never seen a contractor with all four attributes simultaneously developed.

"How did you achieve this?"

The seductive smile on Dié's face disappeared as she found the guy in front of her rather abnormal.

Su Xiao didn't respond to Dié. He realized that obtaining information from the enemy wouldn't be easy, so he decided to remain silent. Holding his Zanpakuto, he advanced towards the enemy.

"It looks like I need to be careful. We don't want to mess things up."

Dié clasped her hands together.

"Split."

Bang, bang, bang...

Like bursting balloons, the heart-shaped Nen energy floating in the air began to split, creating dozens of copies that drifted around Dié.

Su Xiao stared at the heart-shaped Nen energy, and his instinct warned him not to let it touch him.

Dié waved her hand, sending those heart-shaped Nen energies toward Su Xiao. Simultaneously, she rushed toward him in her high heels.

It was rare for an enemy to proactively charge at Su Xiao. However, considering that Dié was a top-level third-order contractor, it was understandable.

Su Xiao controlled one of his Counter Shields, launching it like a flying blade at the incoming heart-shaped Nen energy.

This was a new use of the Counter Shield – cutting off the energy supply of one piece of the shield to launch it from a distance.

The Counter Shield collided with one of the heart-shaped Nen energies, and with a crisp sound, the Nen energy shattered like a bubble. The Counter Shield remained undamaged and continued its path toward Dié.

Dié, charging forward, kicked the Counter Shield with one foot, her legs stretched perfectly straight, and the Counter Shield shattered like glass.

Chapter 728: Susanoo

Seeing this scene, Su Xiao's pupils contracted. Even someone like Kakashi Hatake couldn't kick the Counter Shield into pieces with one foot, but this woman did it effortlessly.

Was this woman's strength too terrifying? Su Xiao looked at her long and powerful legs. While they were indeed strong, they couldn't explain such an exaggerated display of power.

If it wasn't because of her immense strength, then there might be an issue with that heart-shaped psychic energy.

While Su Xiao was contemplating, dozens of heart-shaped psychic energies were rushing toward him. These heart-shaped psychic energies were fast, agile, and could hover in the air. Dodging them was almost impossible.

As dozens of heart-shaped psychic energies collided with the Counter Shield, they shattered upon impact. Su Xiao then struck the Counter Shield with his fist, creating numerous cracks before it ultimately shattered.

These heart-shaped psychic energies could significantly reduce defensive capabilities. Even a highly durable Counter Shield was weakened to this extent. If these heart-shaped psychic energies touched a human body, the outcome would be unimaginable. Perhaps the human body would become as fragile as glass.

Just as Su Xiao understood the enemy's ability, the woman, Dié, had already closed in.

"You're not bad," Dié commented as she raised her leg for a flying kick. She was wearing extremely short shorts, and this kick inevitably revealed a bit too much.

Although the kick wasn't very fast, Su Xiao's attention was subconsciously drawn to the woman's beautiful legs. It wasn't because he suddenly lost control, but due to Dié's captivating ability. While the Mind Blade could immunize him against her control skills, her charm skill level was too high, and he could only resist it with his willpower.

Hissing through the air, Su Xiao narrowly avoided the kick by moving his head to the side. However, a streak of blood appeared on his cheek as the heel of Dié's high heel shoe scraped across his face.

Don't underestimate Dié's kick; she unleashed an incredible burst of speed, comparable to Su Xiao's swift sword strikes. Moreover, her legs were enveloped in a large amount of psychic energy.

All of this was not the main point. The main point was that Dié excelled in control abilities, and close combat was just an auxiliary skill for her.

Under the suppression of the Second-Derivative World, it was astonishing to see Dié, a control-type contractor, engage in close combat with Su Xiao and not fall behind. This difference showcased the gap between Third and Second-Derivative Contractors.

After delivering the kick, Dié had exhausted her old strength and had not yet generated new strength, creating the perfect opening for a counterattack.

Su Xiao swung his sword toward Dié's leg, targeting her beautiful leg.

"Hard!"

A large amount of psychic energy wrapped around Dié's long leg, and Su Xiao's sword struck her small calf.

Ding!

The sword struck Dié's calf, but she used her psychic energy to harden it, withstanding Su Xiao's attack.

Having been struck once, Dié immediately shifted her weight, planting her other foot on the ground and flipping over. It didn't look as effortless as it seemed; a shallow bloodstain had appeared on her injured leg.

The cyan energy infiltrated Dié's body, and her blood vessels bulged on her face.

"This..."

Feeling the intense pain surging through her body and receiving combat information from the feedback of her reincarnation mark, Dié couldn't maintain her composure any longer.

"Subjected to an unknown energy erosion, you've lost 140 psychic energy."

"Subjected to an unknown energy erosion, you've taken 140 real damage, plus an additional 20 real damage (10% of psychic energy consumed), 23 slashing damage, and 35 cutting damage."

Seeing this lengthy series of notifications, Dié's expression changed repeatedly. Even as a Third-Derivative Contractor, she had never encountered such high single-instance real damage before.

"Is that sword... a growth-type weapon?"

Dié looked at Su Xiao's Dragon Slaying Flash, and her eyes gradually lit up.

"Indeed, this time it was correct to act alone without relying on Arson. I'll take this sword."

Psychic energy surged around Dié, and as she blew a kiss, heart-shaped psychic energies began to emerge.

"Stiff!"

Dié's body was suddenly enveloped by the surging psychic energy, forming a protective armor around her legs.

"Mind Shout..."

Dié formed a heart-shaped hand gesture with her hands and directed it at Su Xiao. She suddenly realized that he was immune to her control ability, despite her being a high-level control-type contractor. Mind Blade's ability to resist control skills was already impressive, but this persistent charm was something new for her.

Thinking about this, Dié felt somewhat speechless. She had encountered a level 30+ Swordmaster before, and she vividly remembered the unstoppable feeling of a long sword that came straight at her without any regard for control. She had nearly died at the hands of such an opponent.

If Su Xiao were a Third-Derivative Contractor, Dié would have immediately fled. However, since he was only a Second-Derivative Contractor, even though his abilities countered her, she believed she could still win.

At this moment, Su Xiao's expression did not look good. Third-Derivative Contractors were stronger than he had anticipated. If the information provided by his partner, No Umbrella, was correct, the strongest of the three high-level contractors had not even appeared yet.

Even so, this was an opportunity. This woman was likely the tracking and control member of the three-person team. If he killed her, even if Arson was powerful, he wouldn't be able to find Su Xiao. Su Xiao doubted that the Blood Oath Adventurers could track him down in every derivative world.

With these thoughts in mind, Su Xiao's gaze gradually became sharper as a new Counter Shield formed around him.

He swung his long sword, releasing a pale blue sword energy at Dié.

Dié waved her hand, and several heart-shaped psychic energies met the sword energy.

When the sword energy collided with the heart-shaped psychic energy, as expected, the psychic energy shattered. Dié's palm acted like a blade, striking the sword energy head-on.

Crackle!

Electric arcs surged as Su Xiao's sword energy splintered, and the heart-shaped psychic energy failed to touch the sword energy.

Before Dié could control the heart-shaped psychic energy to reach the sword and destroy it, Su Xiao had already taken the initiative to attack.

"You..."

Although Dié was somewhat "heartbroken," she still controlled the heart-shaped psychic energy to fly towards Dragon Slaying Flash.

Sizzle!

Electric arcs surged, the cyan energy on Dragon Slaying Flash scattered, and the heart-shaped psychic energy couldn't touch the blade of Dragon Slaying Flash.

Su Xiao's arm muscles bulged as he struck out with all his strength.

Bang!

This kick hit Dié's side, causing her curvaceous waist to bend inward.

Although Su Xiao had successfully hit her weak spot, he suddenly had a feeling of hair standing on end.

Seeing Dié's body shift like a flying Dié, she circled from in front of Su Xiao to behind him at a speed so fast it left afterimages.

More than a dozen heart-shaped psychic energies collided with the Counter Shield, and Dié quickly punched to break the shield.

Crackle!

The Counter Shield shattered, not because it was weaker than the heart-shaped psychic energy, but because there was an enormous gap in skill levels between Su Xiao and Dié.

After breaking the shield with one punch, Dié stood behind Su Xiao. She wrapped her arms around his waist, creating a soft embrace. He could even feel her full chest pressing against his back, causing it to deform.

This embrace was sensual yet equally deadly.

Dié's supple waist twisted backward, attempting to throw Su Xiao over her shoulder, and Su Xiao's head was about to hit the ground at high speed.

Boom!

Dust billowed, and Dié maintained her throwing posture. In her soft embrace, Su Xiao's body was arched backward, with his head pointing downward.

Kacha!

The sound of bones breaking could be heard. At this moment, Su Xiao's body was surrounded by an energy exoskeleton, which was formed by an energy shield, somewhat resembling Susanoo from the Uchiha clan.

"Sus... Susanoo? No, it's not!"

Initially shocked, Dié quickly realized that this was not Susanoo upon seeing the appearance of the energy exoskeleton.

Chapter 729: Life and death are only in an instant Novel Paradise of Rein

This move was developed by Su Xiao and Orphan of Resentment after their battle. It is still in the experimental phase and has many shortcomings.

Beforehand, Su Xiao had realized that the Counter Shield was excellent for defending against weapons, but it was not as effective against blunt strikes or charges. It not only injured him but also increased the area of attack on him.

So, Su Xiao developed this move, using an energy shield to form an outer exoskeleton on his body for cushioning. This exoskeleton is not very sturdy, but it can significantly reduce the impact when it shatters.

Su Xiao took a deep breath, and with his Zhanlong Flash reversed, he slashed at Dié holding him tightly.

Splatter.

Blood splattered, and a wound was cut on Dié's side, not a shallow one. Dié let out a muffled groan, and her body started trembling.

Su Xiao's lips curled up. As he had guessed, the defense against his strikes wasn't using psychic energy but some equipment or items.

If Dié could defend against Su Xiao's strikes with psychic energy, her psychic power would be overly exaggerated. Moreover, she was not an Enhancement-type but a Specialty-type.

After being injured by Su Xiao's strike, Dié immediately released her grip, and with her knee, she fiercely hit Su Xiao's lower back.

Su Xiao was pushed several steps forward by the knee strike, and he clutched his lower back. The impact was strong, and it hit his kidney.

Dié's body arched, and she sprang up from the ground like a carp, holding a knife in her hand.

Clang, boom!

Mud splashed, and the sound of the explosion spread out as the two of them fought in a melee.

Five minutes later.

Bang.

Dié kicked Su Xiao, causing him to step back. Warm blood dripped from his chin. Two minutes ago, his left arm had been touched by that heart-shaped psychic energy, and it had completely lost sensation.

The Azure Steel Shadow energy inside Su Xiao's body was slowly devouring this peculiar psychic power, and it wouldn't be long before he could recover. But until then, his arm must not be hit by the enemy, or it would shatter like porcelain.

Dié, a few meters away, was also in a tough spot. She had taken several cuts from Su Xiao, and her body was slightly convulsing, causing her intense pain.

"Damn psychic powers, it's shameless!"

Dié spat out a mouthful of bloody saliva, her seductive appearance from earlier now gone. She looked like a tough woman with eight-pack abs on her lower abdomen. Despite her appearance, she exuded a unique charm. She was a close combat fighter not weaker than Su Xiao in terms of combat abilities.

The Zhanlong Flash danced in Su Xiao's hand, and at this point, he no longer regarded Dié as an alluring Contract Holder.

After the initial skirmish, Su Xiao found that Dié was probably more of a support Contract Holder. She possessed control abilities, tracking abilities, and the ability to weaken the enemy's defense.

Even though she was a support fighter, she was a top-tier third-order support fighter. Setting aside the differences in attributes and skills, the equipment alone was enough to give Su Xiao a headache.

Dié's attributes and skills were suppressed, but her equipment was not. This was why she could engage in close combat with Su Xiao. Moreover, as someone who had been active in the Reincarnation Paradise for a long time, she had a wealth of combat experience.

Even so, Su Xiao still felt that he could defeat the enemy in front of him. The reason was that this tough woman seemed to be afraid of pain. Yes, she was afraid of pain.

Comparatively, Su Xiao frequently engaged in close combat with his enemies, and getting hurt was a common occurrence. Under such grueling training, his pain tolerance had significantly increased.

Dié was different. She was the head controller of the Blood Gate Adventurer Team, and during battles, she had many teammates to protect her. Her combat experience mostly came from the arena, while Su Xiao had fought his way through life and death.

"Pain can stimulate a person's ferocity and alert the brain and body to areas with problems. It seems you're not accustomed to it."

Su Xiao approached Dié, who instinctively took a step back. She bit her lip tightly, feeling resentful.

"Only perverts enjoy the sensation of pain, you pervert."

"Thanks for the compliment, but I don't enjoy the sensation of pain."

Su Xiao rushed towards Dié aggressively, and Dié, who had already taken several cuts, leaned towards defense.

Clang.

The long blade struck Dié's forearm, but the sensation felt more like striking an invisible or transparent armor than a human body.

Su Xiao squinted his eyes and dodged Dié's kick. He prepared to strike.

In the previous situation, Dié would have used her body to withstand the Zhanlong Flash and then counter with a kick, causing Su Xiao's injuries. However, when the long blade was about to strike her chest, her pupils contracted, and a golden shield appeared.

Clang.

The Zhanlong Flash was blocked by the golden shield. Dié's ample bosom was well-displayed as she backed away a few meters.

Su Xiao calculated in his mind that based on their battle so far, Dié probably had a piece of equipment that could generate invisible armor, which had very high defensive capabilities, enough to block the Zhanlong Flash with +32 sharpness. This demonstrated her formidable defense.

This invisible armor generated a new one approximately every 60 seconds and entered a cooldown phase of 3 to 5 seconds. The previous cuts on Dié were made during these cooldown periods.

Troublesomely, Dié had a second shield-type equipment that could be seen, which was golden and could be used every 8 to 10 minutes, lasting 2 seconds each time.

Furthermore, Dié had an equipment that temporarily increased her strength and agility attributes. When she received a back throw from Su Xiao earlier, it was due to the boost from that equipment. During those ten seconds, Dié's strength attribute was at least 5 to 10 points higher than Su Xiao's.

After a thorough analysis, Su Xiao classified Dié as having a significant amount of high-quality equipment, but her attributes and skills were suppressed, making her similar to him in strength.

Fortunately, Su Xiao was immune to Dié's charm control; otherwise, he would have lost long ago.

Thinking about this, Su Xiao couldn't help but feel relieved. Luckily, it wasn't three against one; even one support fighter was so troublesome. How strong would the Blazing Blood Guild's main forces be? At the very least, Su Xiao was not currently capable of dealing with them, even if their strength was suppressed.

Su Xiao closed in on Dié without a word, and the long blade in his hand slashed continuously, leaving traces of cuts in the air, which disappeared in an instant.

After another two minutes of fighting, a light emanated from the necklace on Dié's neck, and her speed suddenly skyrocketed. It was the equipment that increased her strength and agility.

Here it comes!

Su Xiao was on high alert, but at the same time, it was an opportunity. The equipment that generated the golden shield had already entered its cooldown phase, and the invisible shield could last for 10 seconds.

With a whoosh, Dié disappeared in front of Su Xiao. Her speed was so fast that it couldn't be captured with dynamic vision.

The moment Dié disappeared, Su Xiao was struck on his spine.

"Dance of Flowers: Romantic."

A pink energy emanated from Dié's knee strike and spread out. Su Xiao spat out a mouthful of blood.

[Warning: You are under the control effect of 'Aixima Secret Blade,' attributes for strength and stamina are being assessed.]

[Stamina attribute assessment in progress... Stamina attribute assessment successful.]

[Strength attribute assessment in progress... Strength attribute assessment failed!]

[You have entered an abnormal state: Dizziness, duration 2 seconds.]

Before losing consciousness, Su Xiao used all his remaining mana to construct a counter shield. Two layers of counter shields formed around him.

Two seconds passed in a flash, when Su Xiao's gaze regained clarity, a sharp pain came from the spine position behind him, the back of his head was hit hard, his ears buzzed, and the most fatal thing was that his neck was strangled, and he was already showing signs of a lack of cerebral sustenance.

Su Xiao's hand grabbed at the arm at the neck, at this time, Die had already formed a guillotine with both arms, the possibility of breaking free was not very high, in the case of complete blood blockage, within seconds Su Xiao would pass out due to insufficient cerebral blood supply.

A smile appeared on Die's face, she seemed to have seen the large amount of benefits given by Stan, already her elevated status within the Blood Gate Adventure Group.

The matter of entering the Holy Grail World was of great importance, as long as it could be done properly, even if it acted against Desolate Incineration's wishes, in the end, Stan would not say anything.

Thinking of this, Dié's arm that was strangling Su Xiao's neck tightened even more, her delicate cheeks were pressed next to Su Xiao's ear, and Su Xiao could clearly feel this woman's panting.

Su Xiao's arm powered up, although he couldn't break free from the guillotine that had been formed, he was able to pull the other party's arm out of a little gap, as for why he didn't use his sword to decapitate the other party, it was because the other party's kind of invisible shield was still in place, and at this time, there was little significance in making a sword, but instead, he would be killed because of it.

Su Xiao took a big breath, the arteries and veins that had been severely squeezed appeared to have gaps, and a small amount of blood was supplied to the brain.

"3.2.1!"

Su Xiao recited silently in his heart, and when the count reached 1, he let go of Dié's arm and threw the Chopper Flash in his right hand to his left hand.

The Chopper Flash inverted and slid down in Su Xiao's left hand, he grabbed the interrupted position of the Chopper Flash, and because his left hand was protected by a metal arm guard, the blade did not cut his hand.

The sharp tip of the blade stabbed back, brushing past Su Xiao's cheek and heading straight for Dié's eye socket.

"This can't be!"

Dié lost her face, she couldn't care about strangling Su Xiao, she hurriedly let go and leapt back, she couldn't figure it out, she couldn't figure out how the enemy grabbed the 4 seconds gap between the disappearance of her 'kinetic armor' and attacked her, coincidence? Coincidence? Of course not, this is the information Su Xiao got after receiving a dozen kicks + a back drop + five knee strikes.

Pfft.

Chopper Flash stabbed into Dié's eye socket, and Aoi Shadow energy went straight to her brain.

"AHHH!!!"

Dié let out an oozing scream, Su Xiao paid no attention to it, backhandedly grabbing Dié's collar, the long knife in his hand continued to stab forward.

Brushing and pulling, the long knife penetrated through Dié's brain marrow, stabbing out from the heavenly inspiration.

Su Xiao's movement was unceasing, pulling out the Chopping Dragon Flash, aiming at Dié's throat was a slash.

Blood splattered several meters away, half of Dié's throat was cut open, she staggered back several steps with both hands covering her throat, blood gushing out from within her fingers.

The kinetic energy armor will Dié's whole body re-covered, but unfortunately it is too late, she took out a bottle of dark purple potion to pour into the mouth, but the potion from the throat wound sprayed out.

"It's...impossible, I'm actually ..."

Dié retreated a few steps back, her voice taking on a sobbing tone, and after a few seconds, her body began to be powerless, and she collapsed to the ground with a thud.

[Hint: Hunters kill high rank bit contractors, scarlet card drop rate increases].

A scarlet card fell to the ground, and this scene fell into the eyes of the little fat man who was tangling with Brother Umbrella who was already bruised and swollen and in a precarious situation.

"Crap!"

Looking at Dié, who had already turned into a corpse, the little fatty froze in place.

Bang.

Brother Umbrella's sandbag-sized metal gloves whacked Little Fatty in the face, and Little Fatty's nose blood splashed from the blow.

Chapter 730: Tank's nemesis ability

Umbrellaless Brother successfully landed a blow, and a smile appeared on his swollen, pig-like face, while his narrowed eyes revealed a sinister look.

"Just now, you enjoyed hitting me with your shield, didn't you? Our teammate is dead, aren't you panicking?"

Umbrellaless Brother laughed heartily, though he couldn't help but wonder how Su Xiao managed to kill a Third-Tier Contract Holder.

There were several factors contributing to Su Xiao's victory over the Dié. Her complacency, her supportive role, and the suppression of Third-Tier Contract Holders when entering the Second-Tier world, among others.

Although there were various factors at play, the result was that the Dié had turned into a corpse, and Su Xiao had survived. Regardless of the process, the result was what mattered most.

After the Dié's death, the chubby guy holding a golden-quality shield had a very unpleasant expression. He wiped the blood from his nose and felt a chill in his heart.

The chubby guy was a Third-Tier primary tank and wasn't worried about being pursued by Su Xiao and Umbrellaless Brother. Unlike the Dié, the chubby guy, despite his weak offensive abilities, had insane defensive capabilities. Just the golden-quality shield alone had a defense so strong that it was astonishing.

What the chubby guy was concerned about was the Blazing Blood Guild, particularly Stan. With the Dié's death, how would he explain the situation to them? Losing the Dié's tracking ability would make it challenging for them to continue pursuing Su Xiao in this derivative world.

As for pursuing Su Xiao in the next derivative world? That was out of the question. As long as Su Xiao survived this time, the Blazing Blood Adventurer Team wouldn't want to bother him anytime soon if they didn't want to go bankrupt.

It was precisely because of this that Stan had dispatched three top-tier Third-Tier Contract Holders to hunt down Su Xiao. These were the most powerful Contract Holders who could enter the Second-Tier world, showing Stan's determination.

The three of them had specific roles. The Blazing Blood was responsible for killing, the Dié for tracking and supporting, and the chubby guy was insurance, to prevent the Contract Holders in the Holy Grail world from teaming up to attack the Blazing Blood.

With a Third-Tier primary tank on their side, even if the Contract Holders from the Holy Grail world united, they wouldn't be able to do much against the three.

Umbrellaless Brother and the chubby guy fought fiercely outside the villa. They were engaged in a "tug-of-war," although in reality, it was mostly Umbrellaless Brother taking the beating and occasionally counterattacking.

The chubby guy used his shield to block Umbrellaless Brother's punches. With a loud thud, a steam-powered iron fist slammed into the shield. The chubby guy resembled a mountain, standing firm and not retreating an inch.

"Byakuya, let's join forces and take him down."

Umbrellaless Brother was clearly getting pumped. Despite taking a beating earlier, he let out the frustration that had built up after the Dié's death.

Not far away, Su Xiao sat on the ground, blood dripping from the tip of the Zhanlong Flash. His whole body felt like it was falling apart, and it would take some time to regain his combat strength.

"Two minutes."

Su Xiao took out the Number 1 potion, bit off the cork, and drank it.

"Two minutes?!"

During a break in the battle, Umbrellaless Brother looked at Su Xiao, clearly indicating that he couldn't hold out for two minutes.

As Umbrellaless Brother looked at Su Xiao, the chubby guy shifted his footing and moved his entire body closer to the shield he held. The shield suddenly accelerated towards Umbrellaless Brother.

Bang!

Umbrellaless Brother was sent spinning with a dizzy head, his eyes filled with stars.

"During combat, losing concentration can get you killed. Besides, two minutes will pass quickly."

Su Xiao lit a cigarette and smiled at Umbrellaless Brother.

"You say it's easy, but I'm the one taking the beating..."

Umbrellaless Brother muttered and his eye, swollen from the impact, was barely open, giving him a somewhat comical appearance.

The chubby guy realized that Su Xiao wasn't planning to attack for the moment, so he focused most of his attention on Umbrellaless Brother. He was planning to retreat strategically; running away.

The rectangular shield was a solid iron-gray color throughout. As the chubby guy activated a shield skill, the surface of the shield's metal protruded and formed an embossed face that looked like a devil's mask. The devil's mask had a gaping mouth full of fangs.

Hmm~

The devil's mask at the shield's mouth emitted red light, like a cannon charging up.

Umbrellaless Brother took several steps back, feeling the intense pressure from the devil's face.

Boom!

A beam of red light shot out from the devil's face, and Umbrellaless Brother let out a miserable howl as he was sent soaring into the sky. His body rotated in mid-air, like a windmill.

With a thud, Umbrellaless Brother landed face-first, and his face scraped against the ground as he continued to move forward, kicking his legs erratically.

After sliding on his face for over ten meters, Umbrellaless Brother flopped down on the ground, chewing on a mouthful of dirt.

Umbrellaless Brother appeared to be in disarray, but he was not severely injured. The mouth-cannon on the shield was a skill for pushing the opponent away. Although it had a strong repelling effect, the actual damage it inflicted wasn't significant.

Just after repelling Umbrellaless Brother, the chubby guy turned around to make his escape.

Splatter~

Blood splattered as a silent and deadly energy crossbow bolt hit the chubby guy in the shoulder. The kinetic energy from the bolt was so strong that the arrowhead was vibrating rapidly.

The energy crossbow bolt only pierced the chubby guy's body at the arrowhead. Despite the fact that he wasn't wearing any metal armor, his physical defense was extraordinarily high.

Keep in mind that the attack power of the Specter Hunter was comparable to the Spider Queen, and Su Xiao was only about 30 meters away from the chubby guy. Even so, a single arrow would only lightly wound the chubby guy. If he had been a Second-Tier primary tank, that arrow could have either killed him or pierced straight through his shoulder.

The chubby guy grabbed the still-vibrating energy crossbow bolt, applied force, and pulled it out. The bolt dissipated into the air.

"Is that meaningful?"

The chubby guy looked at Su Xiao with a sidelong glance, clearly indicating that even if he couldn't escape, Su Xiao and Umbrellaless Brother couldn't do much to him.

"Of course, it's meaningful."

Su Xiao pulled the crossbow string of the Specter Hunter and attached the crossbow bolt. This process would take one minute.

As long as Su Xiao had some time to rest, he could regain his combat strength, and by that time, the chubby guy would be in for some serious trouble.

If Su Xiao were alone, and with the chubby guy holding a golden-quality shield, there would indeed be no way for him to win. But now, there were two of them.

Although Umbrellaless Brother was battered and bruised, he was a reliable teammate who wouldn't flee during battle. He didn't fear risking his life in combat and had a clear battle strategy.

As long as Umbrellaless Brother kept the chubby guy busy in a frontal confrontation, Su Xiao could attack from behind, bypassing the golden-quality shield.

With the chubby guy's physical defense, Su Xiao's regular slashes wouldn't be effective. However, the true damage from the Azure Steel Shadow could make the chubby guy experience despair, especially when combined with the true damage from the Demonic Seal.

As long as he could penetrate the armor, there was no tank that Su Xiao couldn't defeat.

"You bastard, I'm going to fight you!"

Umbrellaless Brother roared and charged at the chubby guy. His ferocious demeanor took the chubby guy by surprise, and Su Xiao was also astonished, wondering what had gotten into him.