

R. Paradise 881

Chapter 881: Speed

A faint red aura enveloped Kanzaki Kaori, slowly eroding her. Raising her arm, she noticed red marks on her previously smooth skin. These marks resembled magical runes but had nothing to do with magic.

"The rate of stamina consumption is increased, defense is lowered, and my mind is intermittently disturbed."

Kanzaki took a deep breath, attempting to dispel the red aura with her special internal magic. However, Aura Release was a passive halo effect that persisted as long as it was successfully applied once. The debuff would only disappear if Kanzaki distanced herself more than 30 meters from Su Xiao.

Of course, there were other ways to dispel the Aura Release effect, such as using mind-cleansing skills. However, given Kanzaki's combat style, it was unlikely she possessed such abilities.

As Kanzaki struggled with the effects of Aura Release, Su Xiao didn't stand idly by. Having gathered information about Kanzaki's skills and condition, he approached her slowly, intending to go all out with his attacks. As a master swordsman, Su Xiao knew that facing a skilled swordsman meant that any mistake could lead to a fatal chain reaction. Prioritizing defense would only put him at a disadvantage.

Rebuttal Shields appeared around Su Xiao, but this time, they took the form of 20-centimeter-long energy short blades, floating around him. These energy blades lacked guards and hilts, consisting only of the blade itself—this was the offensive form of the Rebuttal Shields, the Energy Blade Form.

A total of 56 energy blades hovered around Su Xiao. Their attack range was limited, extending about 1.5 meters from Su Xiao, with weak defense but decent slashing power and excellent penetration.

Although the attack range wasn't extensive, Su Xiao could, at critical moments, eject the energy blades by consuming mana, attacking without warning. The downside was the high mana consumption.

Facing an opponent like Kanzaki, pure defense was unwise. If she used her Only Flash technique, even the defensive form of the Rebuttal Shields might be broken in one strike.

As Su Xiao slowly approached, Kanzaki bent her body, gripping her sword with both hands.

Boom!

Both Su Xiao and Kanzaki vanished, reappearing less than half a meter apart. Su Xiao could even hear her breathing.

Ding.

Sparks flew as their swords clashed, their eyes locking.

Ssss~

A thin metal wire, glowing with a greenish-blue hue, snaked towards Kanzaki. She was surprised that her enemy's combat style was so similar to hers.

Unfazed, Kanzaki knew how to handle this kind of attack. She shifted, bending one leg and driving her knee towards Su Xiao's side. This girl held a grudge.

Given Kanzaki's physical strength, if the knee strike hit, it could fracture Su Xiao's ribs or at least leave him breathless.

But Su Xiao's combat experience was vast. As their swords clashed, he bent one leg, using his shin to meet Kanzaki's knee.

Bang!

A powerful force traveled up Su Xiao's shin, pushing him back two steps. As he stabilized, ten energy blades shot toward Kanzaki.

Before Su Xiao could steady himself, Kanzaki had already disappeared, the energy blades missing their target. She was too fast.

A whistling sound came from behind Su Xiao, making him lean forward instinctively.

Zing!

A bright blade sliced close to Su Xiao's back, even cutting a few strands of hair.

Missing her strike, Kanzaki changed her horizontal slash to a downward chop.

However, before her blade could fall, a white centipede-like creature wrapped around her leg.

Boom.

An explosion echoed through the street, engulfing Kanzaki in flames.

Before the fire dissipated, Kanzaki walked out, her leg showing slight injuries. The flames couldn't harm her, but the explosion's impact did.

Kanzaki forgot that while her physical strength was immense, her clothes couldn't withstand an explosion. She stood almost naked before the roaring flames. Her jeans were reduced to short shorts, and her white T-shirt was in tatters, leaving her exposed.

Although Kanzaki was embarrassed by her torn clothes, she couldn't focus on her modesty. She wanted to change into something new.

Su Xiao scrutinized Kanzaki to check for any injuries, not for her figure.

Click, click.

Flashes nearby resembled those of a camera.

Hidden behind a trash can, Bubu held a DSLR camera in his front paws, clicking the shutter occasionally and even changing angles—truly a professional paparazzi dog.

Kanzaki stiffly turned her head. Seeing the 'canine' holding the camera, she didn't know how to react.

Su Xiao tugged with his left arm, tightening the broken wire around Kanzaki's right arm.

Realizing this, Kanzaki quickly raised her arm, searching for something. In less than a second, she found the hook at the end of the wire and flicked it off with her sword. The wire left bloody marks on her arm as it fell away.

Seeing this, Su Xiao decided to retract the wire. Kanzaki was too familiar with this attack method, instantly locating the hook and freeing herself.

Bubu noticed Kanzaki hadn't fallen for the distraction and threw the camera into the trash, knowing the photos were just a diversion to help Su Xiao.

On the battlefield, swords flashed in the night as Su Xiao and Kanzaki disappeared again. After several clashes, they reappeared, leaving deep slash marks on the surrounding roads.

After an initial exchange of blows, they engaged in a fierce melee, their blades clashing repeatedly. Su Xiao's sword strikes left deep cuts on the nearby mall's walls.

These sword beams were Su Xiao's attempt to slow down Kanzaki's rapid movements. Her speed was astonishingly fast; sometimes, her sudden acceleration was too quick for Su Xiao's dynamic vision and reflexes.

With her 83 agility points, Kanzaki wasn't just fast—she was terrifyingly fast. After a brief warm-up, they began aiming for each other's vitals.

Swish.

A slash appeared on Su Xiao's shoulder, blood splattering on his face. Kanzaki had hit him, though the wound wasn't deep.

Chapter 882: Only Flash

Blood dripped from his fingertips as Su Xiao's perception reached its peak. Despite this, he struggled to keep up with Kanzaki Kaori's speed. After their 'warm-up,' Kanzaki unleashed her full speed, moving at an almost unbelievable pace.

Su Xiao stood in place, seemingly alone. Kanzaki hadn't left; she had merely moved so fast that she vanished from most people's sight. Suddenly, Su Xiao raised his sword, feeling the heavy pressure. Kanzaki reappeared, using the kinetic energy from her high-speed movement to overpower Su Xiao momentarily.

Clang!

Their blades clashed and separated just as quickly. Each had their own advantages—Kanzaki's speed versus Su Xiao's vast combat experience.

The area around them became a forbidden zone, with buildings and public facilities within a hundred meters either sliced apart or damaged by the aftershocks of their battle. Just as Su Xiao forced Kanzaki back, a gust of wind signaled her reappearance at his side, prompting him to dodge.

Swish.

A slash appeared across Su Xiao's chest, not deep but spanning his entire torso. Despite the wound, Su Xiao smiled.

A muffled groan followed as Kanzaki, who had just slashed Su Xiao, clutched her abdomen, retreating a few steps. Four energy blades were embedded in her abdomen, blood dripping onto the road.

Kanzaki reached to pull out the energy blades, but Su Xiao had already leaped forward.

From the start of the battle, Kanzaki had avoided close-quarters combat with Su Xiao, knowing her long weapon put her at a disadvantage. As she attempted to use her speed to retreat, an alchemical crow swooped down from behind her, its unusual aura causing her to hesitate.

The alchemical crow's main function was reconnaissance, but it wasn't entirely devoid of combat capability. Alchemical creatures had a unique aura, a mix of life and death that instinctively put people on alert.

Kanzaki's momentary pause allowed Su Xiao to close the distance. During his approach, Dragon Flash disappeared, and several energy blades shot towards Kanzaki's sword, preventing her from blocking his advance.

With a crash, Su Xiao collided with Kanzaki, who immediately realized his intention for close combat. However, primarily a swordswoman, Kanzaki wasn't afraid of a brawl. Ignoring the potential for exposure and inappropriate contact, she planted her long sword beside her, realizing its length made it less useful than a mere stick in such a fight.

Kanzaki threw a swift punch at Su Xiao's chin, her fist moving so fast it left afterimages.

Bang.

Su Xiao's head snapped to the side, pain blooming in his jaw. But he hadn't engaged in close combat just to trade punches. Su Xiao grabbed Kanzaki's arm, a short knife appearing in his other hand.

Seeing the sudden appearance of the knife, Kanzaki felt a cold sweat. She had observed Su Xiao earlier and knew he carried no daggers.

Su Xiao reversed his grip on the short knife and stabbed at Kanzaki's chest, his movements swift and brutal.

Thud, thud, thud...

The blade pierced flesh and muscle, blood splattering as multiple wounds appeared on Kanzaki's chest. The scene was both savage and thrilling—a true fight to the death.

Qinggang Ying energy surged into Kanzaki, heading towards her brain. Kanzaki gritted her teeth, struggling to stay conscious. She was fortunate not to trigger the control effect of Qinggang Ying's Lv.30 ability, 'Soul Electric Shock.'

After three stabs, Kanzaki, eyes bloodshot, grabbed Su Xiao's wrist. Though wounded, she had avoided fatal strikes by shifting her body each time.

Grabbing Su Xiao's knife hand, Kanzaki felt a sharp pain in her hand. Su Xiao twisted the knife, stabbing it into her palm at an impossible angle.

As the short knife pierced her palm, Su Xiao drove it into the ground.

Clang. Asphalt fragments flew.

The short knife, pinning Kanzaki's hand to the ground, forced her into a half-crouch. She was in so much pain that tears filled her eyes, and with only one hand free to fight, she clenched her fist and punched towards Su Xiao's groin.

The move shocked Su Xiao, making him conjure a 150-point strength energy shield to block the punch. The shield cracked under her blow.

Su Xiao dispelled the shield, pressing one foot on the knife hilt and raising his other leg, shifting his weight. He kicked towards Kanzaki's head, much like kicking a soccer ball. Desperately, Kanzaki raised her free arm to shield her face.

Bang.

The impact sent a shockwave through the air as Su Xiao's kick landed on Kanzaki's arm, nearly driving her to the ground.

Ensuring Kanzaki wouldn't counterattack immediately, Su Xiao drew Dragon Flash. Seeing this, Kanzaki gritted her teeth and leaped back.

Rip. Flesh tore as Kanzaki pulled her left hand free, ripping it from the knife, the gap between her index and middle finger cut open.

Leaping back, she grabbed her sword's scabbard and slashed at Su Xiao's throat.

By now, Kanzaki had killing intent. She wasn't naive, understanding that holding back would be fatal.

Su Xiao leaned back, narrowly avoiding the blade as it grazed his chin.

Kanzaki's sword was too long for Su Xiao to reach her with Dragon Flash, but she still held her blade ready to block any potential sword beams from Su Xiao, which would only waste his energy.

Landing, Kanzaki distanced herself from Su Xiao by several meters.

Drip, drip.

Blood from both fighters stained the ground, their close combat leaving both heavily injured.

Su Xiao flicked his toe, picking up the short knife and stowing it in his storage space, gripping Dragon Flash tightly as he watched Kanzaki.

Kanzaki leaped back to a pile of rubble, kicking it aside to reveal the scabbard of her long sword. She sheathed her weapon and assumed a stance, her aura intensifying as she seemed to gather power.

Seeing this stance, Su Xiao realized she was preparing to use Only Flash.

Zing.

A blinding flash of light appeared before Su Xiao, a speed beyond comprehension. With her Saint Physique activated, Kanzaki moved faster than sight or perception could track.

As Su Xiao sensed the incoming slash, all he saw was the dazzling blade. He couldn't see Kanzaki's movement at all.

Thankfully, as the blade appeared, a golden shield formed around Su Xiao. It was the effect of the skill attached to his sheath, Divine Radiance: creating a lesser invincible shield that lasted for one second.

Chapter 883: The Fierce Patient

The lesser invincible shield protected Su Xiao as the blade flashed, and Su Xiao vanished.

Boom!

Su Xiao crashed into a mall on the street, breaking through the outer wall and flying into the interior at high speed, knocking over dozens of shelves before being buried under a pile of colourful clothes.

Climbing out from the clothes, blood dripped from the corner of Su Xiao's mouth. His internal organs felt displaced, registering only a vague sense of pain mixed with numbness.

The lesser invincible shield successfully blocked Kanzaki Kaori's Only Flash. While it stopped the slash, the power behind the move was overwhelming.

"Cough, cough..."

Su Xiao coughed dryly. He wasn't wounded by the slash but by the impact. Although the shield blocked the slash, the force turned into a shockwave that the shield couldn't fully absorb, leaving Su Xiao to endure it with his body.

He took out a bottle of Potion No. 1 and downed it in a few gulps, feeling a sharp pain in his chest that quickly subsided due to the potion's effects.

A few seconds later, Su Xiao climbed out of the pile of clothes and stood up just as Kanzaki Kaori entered the mall through the hole he had made, holding her sheathed Seven-Flashes.

Kanzaki looked pale; using Only Flash after being injured had significantly affected her.

Yet, she assumed the stance of another Only Flash, ready to use the move consecutively. During the earlier battle, she had realised her predicament. Deep inside 'enemy' territory, attempting to take Index, a person of immense significance to the magical side, was impossible without force.

Understanding this, Kanzaki's resolve in battle changed. She was prepared to kill Su Xiao, fearing what might happen if Index fell into his hands. For her, a villain possessing the Forbidden Tome was a disaster for the world.

Seeing Kanzaki take the familiar stance for Only Flash, Su Xiao also sheathed Dragon Flash. The lesser invincible shield had a long cooldown, and the Rebuttal Shield might not withstand Only Flash. Given Kanzaki's speed during the move, dodging was impossible.

Since he couldn't dodge or block it, Su Xiao also decided to make sure Kanzaki would suffer. Even if he died, he intended to take her down with him. He converted 300 mana points into Qinggang Ying energy, enveloping the sheathed Dragon Flash.

As he slowly drew the sword, blue light surged with immense cutting power, making Su Xiao's aura sharper.

Swish.

Tiny cuts appeared on the ground beneath Su Xiao's feet. At the same time, the offensive Rebuttal Shields around him vanished, replaced by dozens of new ones.

These new Rebuttal Shields took various shapes, forming a combined full set of energy armour.

The shields flew toward Su Xiao, assembling into a suit of armour that covered his entire body, even his head.

"Void Slash."

With a swoosh, Su Xiao disappeared.

"Only Flash."

Kanzaki also vanished.

A blue slash streaked through the mall, colliding with a silver slash.

Their collision didn't produce an explosion or a loud bang, just the sound of sharp blades slicing. A flurry of slashes filled the air, tearing through the mall leaving clothes shredded and scattered.

Seconds later, the slashes dissipated, leaving the mall's structure heavily damaged, almost in ruins.

A severed arm fell to the ground, still gripping a sword—Dragon Flash.

A sneaky figure darted into the mall—Bubu. The dog grabbed the severed arm and ran, carrying a person on its back.

As Bubu ran, it left a trail of bloody footprints—Su Xiao's blood. Su Xiao retreated because he was severely injured and sensed other arrivals nearby. These weren't from Kikyo but likely a magician. Staying would have been foolish. Su Xiao would have waited to settle the fight with Kanzaki if not for the incoming reinforcements.

Kanzaki stood in the mall, unable to pursue, with a deep slash across her abdomen, exposing her organs.

Though Su Xiao seemed more grievously injured and nearly incapacitated, the reality differed. Su Xiao's self-developed sword technique, Void Slash, had a potent secondary attack.

Kanzaki stood dazed as a red-haired man with a barcode tattoo entered the mall—a magician named Stiyl Magnus from the same organisation as Kanzaki.

Stiyl, who had arrived shortly after the battle began, chose to remain hidden, waiting for the right moment and setting up his spells. He had ambushed Kikyo, severely injuring her, preventing her from intervening when Kanzaki used Only Flash a second time.

Holding a cigarette, Stiyl walked up to Kanzaki, who looked at him with bloodshot eyes.

"Stay here, Kanzaki. I'll deal with that dangerous guy."

Stiyl intended to pursue Su Xiao, but given Bubu's ability to hide, finding Su Xiao was wishful thinking.

"I'm... barely holding on..."

Kanzaki's words were cut off as a blue energy spike erupted from her collarbone.

"What is this?!"

Stiyl was shocked.

"Stay... away from me."

Kanzaki's body trembled as she pressed a hand to her chest, closing her eyes.

Squelch.

Another energy spike burst from her abdomen.

Normally, Void Slash's secondary attack would erupt simultaneously. However, without Su Xiao's control, the spikes appeared sequentially, giving the target a chance to resist.

Kanzaki used her magic to delay the spikes' emergence, controlling where they would appear to avoid vital organs. While effective, the process was excruciating.

Seeing the spikes pierce Kanzaki's body, Stiyl felt a chill just watching, alone experiencing it.

The Qinggang Ying energy within Kanzaki also attacked her magic, dealing substantial tree damage. If her luck was bad, she might die.

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On the street, Bubu ran swiftly, carrying Su Xiao, who had briefly lost consciousness and was now awake but dazed from blood loss.

Su Xiao's right arm was severed, and a deep wound spanned his chest, revealing his organs. Fortunately, Bubu had retrieved his severed arm and Dragon Flash.

Taking out a walkie-talkie, Su Xiao said, "Aleister, the mission didn't go smoothly. Cough, cough..."

After coughing up some blood, he continued, "But given the current situation, if they lack healing magic, they won't reappear soon."

The walkie-talkie crackled before Aleister's voice said, "You're severely injured."

"Obviously. If there's a skilled doctor, I'd appreciate a referral."

Su Xiao tossed the walkie-talkie to Bubu and picked up his severed arm.

"Turn left, 300 meters. Then right, 700 meters... After nine blocks, you'll see a hospital with a capable doctor."

The walkie-talkie crackled again before the call ended.

Ten minutes later, Su Xiao arrived at the hospital and dismounted from Bubu.

Carrying his severed arm, he slowly walked into the hospital. Several patients at the entrance stared at him, shocked. It wasn't uncommon for someone to come in with a severed limb, but Su Xiao's chest wound was particularly gruesome.

Su Xiao approached a young, attractive nurse nearby.

"Where do I check in?"

His question left the patients dumbfounded, thinking such severe injuries shouldn't require check-in.

"You... your injuries don't need check-in. Quick, get to the emergency room!"

Despite the nurse's urgent plea, Su Xiao refused to be wheeled in on a stretcher. He walked to the operating room, carrying his arm and smoking, though the nurse snatched the cigarette away before he entered.

Bubu, covered in blood, sat alert at the operating room door. Normally seen as goofy, his eyes now gleamed with vigilance, ready to act if any threat appeared.

Chapter 884: Good and Evil

The next morning, in a hospital room.

Sunlight filtered in through the white curtains, and the room was filled with fresh air, free from the typical hospital smell of disinfectant.

Su Xiao was leaning back against the bed, his right arm wrapped in bandages, including all five fingers.

Bubu was lying on a nearby bed, fast asleep. The dog had stood guard at the door all night to prevent any enemies from taking advantage of Su Xiao's weakened state.

Su Xiao moved his right arm, which had been severed at the upper arm and reattached during surgery the previous night. Now, it was perfectly reconnected without any issues.

A middle-aged doctor performed the surgery. Su Xiao recognized him from the original story as Heaven Cancellor, a doctor with medical skills so extraordinary that he could perform heart surgery under local anesthesia. Reattaching an arm was considered a minor procedure for him.

Not only was his right arm fixed, but the wound on Su Xiao's chest was also stitched up. With Heaven Cancellor's medical skills and Su Xiao's natural healing ability, the chest wound was nearly healed, only requiring the removal of the surface stitches.

"Heaven Cancellor's medical skills are even more advanced than I thought, but he's also more dangerous than I imagined."

Indeed, after interacting with Heaven Cancellor, Su Xiao sensed an underlying danger. Though the doctor appeared to be a simple middle-aged physician, there was more to him than met the eye.

Years ago, Aleister was severely injured by people from the magical side and buried alive. The doctor who saved him was Heaven Cancellor.

Heaven Cancellor not only saved Aleister but also played a crucial role in the establishment of Academy City.

In the original story, few dared to directly interfere with or obstruct Aleister's plans, but Heaven Cancellor was one of them. Afterwards, Aleister merely remarked, "I have a benevolent-hearted 'enemy'," and let it go.

Aleister's attitude indicated Heaven Cancellor's special status in Academy City. Although he didn't participate in its management, once he spoke out, even Aleister couldn't ignore him.

As Su Xiao pondered, the door opened, and a middle-aged, balding doctor in a white coat entered.

The doctor had some graying hair at the back of his head, was slightly overweight, and had a round face, giving a generally kind and gentle impression.

However, no matter how Su Xiao looked at him, the combination of his body shape, face, and hair made him resemble a frog.

The frog-like doctor was Heaven Cancellor. He walked into the room with a nurse following behind.

The nurse approached to check the IV bag hanging by the bed and took out a thermometer.

"My temperature is fine," Su Xiao said, waving her off and pulling out the IV needle from his hand. For him, as long as his arm and chest wounds were okay, he could leave the hospital. However, he didn't know how long the recovery process would take.

"When can I be discharged?" Su Xiao asked.

The nurse hesitated for a moment. "If you're feeling okay, you can leave today."

In most hospitals, such a statement might seem absurd, but this was Heaven Cancellor's hospital. A quick discharge wasn't surprising.

"Leave us," Heaven Cancellor said, and the nurse walked out of the room.

"You can leave now, but if you want to 'work', at least wait until tomorrow or the day after. If the nerves in your reattached arm break again, I can't guarantee you'll be able to use your weapon," Heaven Cancellor said, hinting he knew something.

"Can't it be sooner? The nature of my 'work' is special. If my 'business opponent' recovers first, I might not get another chance to be hospitalised," Su Xiao said, lighting a cigarette. Heaven Cancellor didn't stop him.

As the smoke drifted and was carried away by the breeze, the room filled with a faint scent of tobacco.

"Of course... not. Your rapid recovery, in a way, is unfortunate for others," Heaven Cancellor's attitude was neither hostile nor friendly.

"Doctor, hearing that from you is quite ironic. As one of the creators of this large experimental ground, do you really care about others' misfortune?" Su Xiao probed Heaven Cancellor's stance. The doctor's skills could significantly aid his future tasks.

"It seems you know a lot. Did Aleister tell you? Rest assured, there's no Misaka Network here," Heaven Cancellor replied, sitting on the bed next to Bubu. His visit wasn't just to check on a patient.

From the moment Heaven Cancellor entered, both had been testing each other.

"I'm not the type to rush in blindly," Su Xiao replied. Heaven Cancellor being one of the creators of Academy City wasn't a huge secret.

"True. For someone in your line of work, knowing some secrets here isn't surprising. But you called this place a large experimental ground? You misunderstand the purpose of Academy City's existence," Heaven Cancellor sighed, looking out the window.

"Many have sacrificed here, young people full of vitality. Yet, this place has also birthed technologies that benefit humanity. For Aleister, it might be a large experimental ground, the cornerstone of a crazy plan. But for me, it's the vanguard of scientific development. Superpowers are just a small, flawed part of it."

After speaking, the room fell silent.

"You're not planning to... kill him, are you?" Su Xiao asked, staring at Heaven Cancellor.

"No. If he dies, this place would become a battlefield in no time. If I wanted to, I would have done it decades ago, not now when Aleister is so powerful."

As Heaven Cancellor stood up and walked to the door, he suddenly spoke, "In the Twelfth District, there's a temple with a beautiful view. After you recover, you might want to visit. You could find something unexpected."

Heaven Cancellor left the room, and Su Xiao extinguished his cigarette, realizing that Academy City wasn't solely under Aleister's control.

A hidden force, Heaven Cancellor, was equally formidable.

The enigmatic statement before Heaven Cancellor left was an offer, suggesting Su Xiao choose between supporting Aleister or Heaven Cancellor. Both were part of the scientific side but from different branches.

"I see. I wondered how contractors operated in Academy City. Turns out there's a relatively gentle force like Heaven Cancellor's," Su Xiao thought, standing up. With known clues, he deduced that some well-informed contractors wouldn't immediately flee Academy City. Staying offered more opportunities to trigger side quests.

However, Su Xiao wasn't inclined to join Heaven Cancellor's faction. Cooperation was fine, but joining? No. Their methods differed too much. He preferred working with Aleister. Heaven Cancellor's interest in him stemmed from his strength.

If Heaven Cancellor represented the benevolent faction of Academy City, Aleister was the malevolent one. Though adversaries, they shared technology without interfering with each other's governance. They were like warm-blooded and cold-blooded animals, not 'tigers' clashing in one mountain.

With Su Xiao's 'kind' demeanor and dismal 6 charm points, joining the benevolent faction was unwise. Villains spoke the same language.

Chapter 885: Subsequent Handling

Su Xiao walked out of the hospital's main entrance, followed by a yawning Bubu.

There weren't many pedestrians on the street, and most were vibrant students aged between 14 and 19. During the day, Academy City felt full of life and energy.

As he walked among the pedestrians, Su Xiao took out his walkie-talkie.

"Aleister, I'm discharged."

For a long time, there was no response from the walkie-talkie. Su Xiao tapped it a few times.

Beep, beeeep, beeeep~

A nearby pedestrian's phone rang. The pedestrian answered the call, looked puzzled for a few seconds, then handed the phone to Su Xiao.

"It seems to be for you..."

Su Xiao glanced at the bewildered student, then at the walkie-talkie in his hand, and finally at Bubu. Did Bubu drool on the walkie-talkie last night, causing it to short-circuit? After a moment, he took the phone.

"I've dispatched the Hound Troop to the vicinity, but whose side are you on now?" Alester's voice came through, having intercepted the phone's signal.

"It seems my previous information was incorrect. This place isn't solely your domain. As for whose side I'm on, do you need to ask? Compared to that doctor's way of doing things, I prefer a simpler, more direct approach."

"It seems my 'old friend' didn't manage to sway you," Alester's tone had a hint of amusement. Su Xiao chuckled. He had a feeling Alester had known all along that he wouldn't join Heaven Cancellor's side, as there was no connection between Tsuchimikado Motoharu and Heaven Cancellor.

"Our ideologies don't align, so working together is impossible. I'll handle the aftermath of last night's incident. Once this is resolved, I'll meet Tsuchimikado Motoharu."

"You will meet him," Alester confirmed.

Su Xiao hung up and returned the phone to the student, who remained baffled, unable to keep up with the situation.

After the student left, two men in black suits approached Su Xiao.

"Mr. White Night, we're from the Hound Troop."

"Where are those two from last night?"

"The Tenth District. It's a complicated situation there. Last night, they met with a magic spy who sheltered them."

A Hound Troop member handed over several documents. Su Xiao skimmed through them to understand the situation.

"What about Awaki Musujime?"

"Ms. Musujime is recuperating. She was seriously injured in last night's battle and is currently in the same hospital you were in."

"Is that so?"

Su Xiao pondered for a moment. "If it's that hospital, we can contact her now."

Two hours later, Academy City, Tenth District.

The Tenth District bordered the Seventh District, located on the outskirts of Academy City. No schools were there, and there were only many 'experimental animal' incineration sites. The only juvenile correctional facility in Academy City was also established here.

Without outstanding research projects, the institutions here weren't affluent. Over time, they became dilapidated and eventually became slums within Academy City.

Yes, even Academy City had slums. However, compared to the outside world, the slums here didn't face hunger or cold or struggle to meet basic needs.

Many idle people gathered in the Tenth District, their violent tendencies activated by the environment, leading to a high crime rate. Any student, especially female students, would avoid this place after 6 PM.

Alester tacitly allowed the poor security environment here. To Alester, this was a dumping ground for useless things, reducing the risk of secrets being exposed to the outside world due to the poor security deterring students.

Under this tacit approval, the Tenth District became notorious, with many groups of powerless individuals, known as Level 0s, running rampant. Despite their lack of abilities, they operated like terrorist organizations.

A black car drove through the Tenth District. The driver was a sniper from the Hound Troop, and the front passenger, also a Hound Troop member, had a laptop on his lap, displaying several surveillance feeds. One specialized in sniping, the other in intelligence gathering.

In the backseat, three individuals and a dog were crammed together.

Awaki Musujime's pale face was pressed against the window, her eyes rolling back in annoyance.

"Couldn't you... get another car? I want to kill you all," she grumbled, glaring at Su Xiao. Wearing minimal clothing in the cramped backseat, she was almost sitting on Su Xiao's lap.

Su Xiao didn't look too pleased either. He wouldn't have been squished in the car if he hadn't been worried about the target escaping. Bubu was extremely adept at squeezing in.

Compared to the two of them, Bubu was much more composed; its small eyes seemed to say, "Master, that woman feels soft, right?"

Bubu's fluffy tail wagged, occasionally brushing against Su Xiao's face. Seeing this, Awaki Musujime felt a bit vindicated. Her large chest was being squished, which was embarrassing.

Screech. The car came to a sudden stop.

"Mr. White Night, we've arrived at the designated location."

The sniper in the driver's seat opened the door and retrieved a case from the trunk, quickly disappearing into an abandoned building.

In the front passenger seat, the Hound Troop member handed out three earpieces, which Su Xiao, Awaki Musujime, and Bubu put on.

Climbing out of the cramped car, Su Xiao stretched his stiff right arm. Although he couldn't wield a sword yet, he could fight with it in 15 to 20 hours. But just because he couldn't use his right arm didn't mean he couldn't fight. Besides, the enemy was more severely injured.

Su Xiao, Awaki Musujime, and Bubu walked towards a Forest of Fire bar. According to the intelligence, Kanzaki Kaori was recovering there.

A sign outside the bar read: "Open for three months, now hosting a welcome and thank you event, discounts on drinks, 25% off for groups of two or more."

Despite noon, the discount attracted customers, with people entering and leaving the bar.

"It seems this is the place. The discount... just a cover to hide the target," Awaki Musujime muttered into her earpiece.

"Are you ready?"

"I'm in position, ready to provide fire support. Given the bar's layout, I need precise coordinates."

"No problem," Awaki Musujime replied, tossing a key-sized signal emitter to Su Xiao.

"Activate this; three seconds later, the location will face indiscriminate fire."

Awaki Musujime had experience working with the Hound Troop and seemed unusually enthusiastic about this mission.

Or rather, Awaki Musujime held a grudge. She suffered severe burns over 60% of her body last night. Even with Heaven Cancellor's treatment, she wouldn't be scarred, but the memory of being roasted by flames lingered.

Su Xiao caught the signal emitter and led the way into the bar.

Pushing open the wooden door, Su Xiao found a bar that was not in modern style but more reminiscent of old European design. The interior was filled with round wooden tables, and the seats resembled wooden stumps.

"That student last night was pretty good; it was too bad she escaped."

"Are you crazy? Causing trouble in the Seventh District?"

"Bartender, another bottle of Fire Leech."

The bar buzzed with conversation, mostly from patrons between their teens and thirties. A short-haired woman in a purple dress moved among the guests, wearing a gold snake-shaped earring on her left ear. She seemed to know everyone, frequently greeting or chatting with patrons. She appeared to be the bar's owner.

Chapter 886: Suffocation

Su Xiao looked at the bar's female owner, considering his words before speaking: "Selina Gabrielle Virginia..."

He paused. Seeing this, Awaki Musujime elbowed Su Xiao and mouthed something silently.

"Uh... right, Karina Salome. What a ridiculous name; it's so long."

As Su Xiao uttered the bar owner's full name, the noise in the bar ceased, and all the patrons turned their attention to Su Xiao and Awaki Musujime.

"So, they have come," Selina squinted her eyes dangerously, her thin lips painted with black lipstick pressed tightly together. If she were to be compared to an animal, it would be a venomous, vibrantly colored snake.

"Everyone, my trouble has arrived," Selina licked her lips, standing protectively in front of the patrons.

"Someone has the guts to mess with the Flower Serpent."

"Flower Snake, just as we discussed, if we solve this problem for you, tonight you're mine."

Dozens of patrons stood up, pulling out various guns from under the tables. These were advanced weapons unmatched by those outside Academy City. Sensing the impending danger, the unrelated customers in the bar fled within seconds.

With dozens of guns aimed at them at such close range, Awaki Musujime immediately retreated behind Su Xiao.

"Kill them with those energy blades that shoot out," she suggested slyly. Su Xiao remained unmoved and pressed the signal emitter in his hand. He tossed it towards the patrons while a 150-point energy shield appeared.

"Open fire!" A burly man wielding a multi-barreled rotating machine gun was about to pull the trigger when a bullet shot through the bar's front wall.

The bullet tore a hole several dozen centimeters wide in the wall before passing through the crowd. Blood and limbs splattered everywhere, showcasing the power of the heavy sniper rifle. One shot pierced through three patrons, proving that being hit by a sniper rifle bullet was not just about leaving a bullet hole; it would blow open a large cavity.

Fierce gunfire poured into the bar. After ten seconds, the left side of the bar was littered with shattered corpses, blood, and flesh splattering the walls and ceiling.

Under the overwhelming firepower, the patrons instinctively dropped their guns. Most knelt on the ground, hands on their heads, trembling.

Sounds of retching filled the bar as several young men with handguns bent over, vomiting the strong liquor they had just consumed, adding a sour stench to the bar.

"Run!" someone shouted, and the patrons began sticking close to the walls, trying to get as far from Su Xiao as possible while running towards the shattered wall.

What had moments ago been a scene resembling a terrorist group quickly dissolved into chaos. The bar's owner, Selina, lay on her side on the ground, one leg shattered by a bullet, a blood-stained book beside her—her spellcasting medium.

Selina, though a magician, specialized in gathering intelligence and surveillance, not in combat.

Su Xiao walked over to Selina, crouching down. Selina's face twisted in pain as she glared at Su Xiao with hatred.

"Where is Kanzaki Kaori?"

"Spit!"

Su Xiao turned his head to avoid Selina's spit.

"One day, this place will vanish under the power of magic, and that day is approaching..."

Before Selina could finish, Su Xiao suddenly grabbed her top, pulled it over her head, and stomped on her abdomen. Selina, now in her underwear, struggled desperately, thinking Su Xiao was going to "rub her into the ground." Seeing this, Awaki Musujime let out a soft snort, mumbling for him to hurry up and finish.

However, minutes later, Selina would have preferred being rubbed into the ground over the agonizing torture she endured.

Su Xiao picked up a blood-stained bottle of liquor nearby, opened it, and poured the contents over Selina's head. The alcohol soaked through the fabric, causing her to inhale the burning liquid into her airways.

"Mmmm!" Selina's struggles became more intense. After emptying the bottle over her head, Su Xiao released her.

Selina pulled the shirt off her head, her face red as she coughed violently, as if trying to hack up a lung.

"Cough, cough, cough, ugh~"

After violently coughing, Selina lay on the ground, trembling and gasping for air. The burning suffocation she had just experienced was worse than death.

"Where is Kanzaki Kaori?" Su Xiao's tone remained calm.

"I won't... tell you..."

Su Xiao once again covered Selina's head with her shirt. Seeing this, Awaki Musujime teleported another bottle of even stronger liquor into his hand, showing a bit of mischievous delight.

Selina's cries became tearful as the liquor was poured over her again.

Ten minutes later, Selina lay limp on the ground, her body occasionally convulsing as a mixture of various liquors dripped from her mouth and nose.

"Where is Kanzaki Kaori?" Su Xiao repeated, his tone still calm, but it sounded like the devil's whisper in Selina's ears.

"In... in the..."

Selina gritted her teeth.

"In the Juvenile Reformatory... east side... an abandoned warehouse."

Giving this information seemed to drain Selina's strength, and tears rolled down her cheeks.

"Thank you for your cooperation." Su Xiao stood up and walked out of the bar. Alester knew where Kanzaki Kaori was, but he wouldn't provide the exact location, involving the public face of relations between the science and magic sides and various manipulations.

As Su Xiao exited the bar, a dozen members of the Hound Troop in black combat uniforms, steel helmets, and gas masks surrounded it.

Unbeknownst to him, the bar had already been cordoned off. These were the Hound Troop's cleanup crew.

Gunshots rang out from the bar as the Hound Troop members followed their standard procedure: leaving no survivors, though exceptions were made for valuable targets.

Su Xiao looked at a building several hundred meters away. Activating his earpiece, he said a few words, and the sniper who had driven earlier quickly ran over.

"Mr. White Night," the sniper began, instinctively trying to salute, but then stopped, realizing he was no longer a soldier, just a disposable member of an execution squad without even a name.

"You did well. From now on, you're part of my action team."

The sniper's shots had impressed Su Xiao, showing precision and decisiveness.

"Mr. White Night, I..."

The sniper began, but Su Xiao waved him off.

"The man in the black gas mask," Su Xiao addressed a squad leader from the Hound Troop. "Get me in touch with Kihara Amata."

The squad leader didn't speak, simply taking out a communicator. Following orders was his instinct.

Su Xiao hadn't interacted much with the Hound Troop. Still, his impression was that they were ruthless, effective with firearms, and strictly followed orders without emotional interference, acting with deadly professionalism.

Moments later, the squad leader connected with Kihara Amata.

"What's the matter?" Kihara Amata's voice crackled through the communicator.

Chapter 887: Sniper

"I need a sniper," Su Xiao stated bluntly.

"Haha, how do you like my subordinates?" Upon hearing Su Xiao's request for one of his men, Kihara Amata's voice was filled with smug satisfaction.

"White Night, you and I are both direct subordinates of Aleister, so we are equals in rank. However, I handpicked the Hound Troop members. Want one? Keep dreaming!" Kihara Amata's tone shifted drastically from polite to dismissive once he realized what Su Xiao wanted.

Su Xiao had dealt with many people like Kihara Amata and knew exactly what they were thinking.

"That magical operative has valuable research potential," Su Xiao said, glancing at the bar not far away.

"So what? My subordinates already took care of them," Kihara Amata responded nonchalantly.

"Oh? Really?"

"Are you doubting that I hid a magical operative?" Kihara Amata's tone grew defensive.

"Isn't it common for researchers like you to occasionally keep someone for research purposes?"

"Fine, tell me, which lucky guy wants to leave the Hound Troop? Leaving is only possible through death," Kihara Amata relented, sounding annoyed.

The sniper's heartbeat quickened upon hearing this. Joining the Hound Troop had been a last resort for him. For the sake of a certain goal, he was willing to make deals with devils if necessary. However, since joining, he despised Kihara Amata, who treated him as a killing tool. Although Su Xiao was not particularly friendly, the sniper could sense that he was regarded as a warrior, not just a tool.

"Yegor," the sniper introduced himself. Judging by his name, it was clear he was Russian. Yegor was a transliteration that roughly meant "farmer."

"Yegor..." Kihara Amata fell silent for a moment. "You sure know how to pick. I recently brought him from the battlefield. He is an excellent sniper, so I immediately used him in the Hound Troop. I have not had time to brainwash him yet."

Kihara Amata's reluctance was palpable.

"Given the value of that magical operative, trading a sniper is a good deal," Su Xiao said, sensing Kihara Amata's decision from his tone.

"Deal. I am curious how that woman hid in the Tenth District for so long. Of course, I cannot rule out the possibility that Aleister allowed her to stay there," Kihara Amata concluded.

Su Xiao ended the call, understanding that in the underworld, profit was paramount. Kihara Amata seemed arrogant but was not foolish enough to self-destruct. Besides, he had a curiosity about magic.

The squad's membership grew from three to four: Su Xiao, Bubby, Awaki Musujime, and the newly added Russian sniper, Yegor.

Yegor removed his gas mask and helmet, revealing a bald, muscular white man about two meters tall, with muscles bulging under his black combat uniform.

Standing together, the three humans and one dog did not look like members of the same squad. Despite his average height and build, Su Xiao exuded a fierce aura that marked him as the leader. Awaki Musujime, with her red hair tied in two thin ponytails and a bandaged chest, looked more like a schoolgirl than a fighter. Bubby, yawning occasionally, had an air of innocent mischief reigning supreme among foolish canines. With his muscular build and battle-hardened demeanor, Yegor resembled a fearsome warrior.

This odd squad projected an aura of being formidable and not to be trifled with.

"Let us head to the Juvenile Reformatory," Su Xiao ordered. The three humans and one dog set off towards their destination.

Ten minutes later, a black car stopped near the Juvenile Reformatory. Having changed into his old military uniform, Yegor looked less like a killing machine and more like a fierce, fearless soldier.

"Sir, we are at the Juvenile Reformatory. Based on the terrain, there are seven warehouses. Five are regularly used; one is semi-abandoned but occasionally stores durable goods. The target is unlikely to hide in these six warehouses. The seventh, fully abandoned warehouse is the best hiding and recovery spot. It is conveniently located with 10-20 people daily foot traffic. The underground has three abandoned drainage systems, and it is closest to the city's edge. In an emergency, the target might attempt to breach the electronic defense perimeter," Yegor explained.

Impressed by Yegor's tactical acumen, Su Xiao used the Apostle's Eye to scan him.

[Comparison of intelligence attributes completed. Su Xiao's intelligence attribute is 15.8 times that of the target. Acquired 100% of the target's data.]

Name:

Yegor

Category: Human

Affiliation: Dark (Su Xiao's Squad)

Health: 100%

Mana: 50

Strength: 10

Agility: 9

Endurance: 10

Intelligence: 5

Charisma: 6

Skills:

Heavy Weaponry Mastery (Passive Lv.29): Increases heavy weapon attack power by 40% (weak point strikes, trajectory prediction, etc., rather than enhancing the weapon's original damage). Greatly enhances proficiency with heavy weaponry.

NX-type Neural Combat Assist Device (Passive Lv.25): Increases nerve reflex speed by 10% and dynamic vision by 23%, allowing for the visual tracking of particle-sized objects.

Implanted Neural Decay Device (Passive Lv.10): Permanently reduces pain sensation by 20%. After significant blood loss, the neural decay device activates, reducing heart rate and using an internal oxygen supply system to mix oxygen into the bloodstream, slowing blood loss and extending combat time.

Arm and Torso Bone Augmentation (Passive Lv.16): 53% of Yegor's bones have been augmented to withstand heavy weapon recoil.

Subdermal Nano Biofiber Protective Layer (Passive Lv.16): Significantly enhances physical defense, increasing body strength by 9.

Yegor's attributes were not exceptionally strong; in some cases, they were quite weak. However, his skills more than compensated for this, especially given the extensive augmentations he had undergone as a member of the Hound Troop. His sniper abilities, shown during the recent mission, had demonstrated precise timing and accuracy, which impressed Su Xiao.

After exiting the vehicle, Yegor handed Su Xiao an electronic map indicating the location of the abandoned warehouse.

Yegor's gaze scanned the surrounding buildings, searching for a suitable vantage point for sniping.

"Head to the abandoned research facility 350 meters to the east," Su Xiao instructed.

Yegor blinked in surprise but quickly recognized the spot as an optimal sniping position.

"I need armor-piercing rounds, optical flashbangs, and electromagnetic shock rounds for fire support. Timing is at your discretion," Su Xiao continued.

"Understood," Yegor replied, grabbing his case and moving to the designated location. He suspected that his new commander might also be proficient in sniping.

Arriving at the Juvenile Reformatory, Su Xiao, Awaki Musujime, and Bibtney observed the surroundings. Yegor's tactical assessment suggested that the abandoned warehouse was the most likely hiding spot for Kanzaki Kaori.

"Let us move in," Su Xiao said, leading the way. The group cautiously approached the warehouse, prepared for any potential threats.

Upon reaching the warehouse, Su Xiao noticed that the area was unusually quiet, with little to no foot traffic. The silence indicated that something was amiss.

"Stay alert," Su Xiao whispered, signaling Awaki Musujime and Bibtney to fan out and cover different angles.

The tension in the air was palpable as they neared the warehouse entrance. Su Xiao, with his keen senses, could detect faint movements inside. He raised his hand, signaling for the team to halt.

From his position, Yegor had a clear view of the warehouse entrance and surrounding area. He steadied his sniper rifle, ready to provide cover fire if needed.

"On my mark," Su Xiao instructed, preparing to breach the warehouse.

As the team readied themselves, the door to the warehouse suddenly creaked open, revealing a figure clad in black, cautiously peeking out.

Su Xiao's eyes narrowed, recognizing the figure as one of Kanzaki Kaori's possible guards. He signaled for Yegor to hold fire, waiting to see if the figure would reveal any more information.

The guard stepped outside, glancing around nervously before returning to call out to someone inside. Taking advantage of the moment, Su Xiao silently moved forward, closing the distance.

With swift precision, Su Xiao incapacitated the guard, ensuring no alarm was raised. He then motioned for the team to follow, cautiously entering the warehouse.

Inside, the dimly lit space revealed scattered crates and debris. Su Xiao's sharp eyes scanned the area, noting potential hiding spots and ambush points.

As they advanced, the sound of muffled voices became clearer, indicating Kanzaki Kaori and her accomplices were nearby.

Su Xiao gestured for Awaki Musujime and Bibtney to flank the voices while he approached head-on. The plan was to catch Kanzaki Kaori off guard and force a swift surrender.

However, an explosion rocked the warehouse before they could move, sending debris flying. Su Xiao, Awaki Musujime, and Bibtney took cover as the shockwave passed.

"Status report!" Su Xiao called out, checking on his team.

"We are fine!" Awaki Musujime replied, her voice steady despite the chaos.

"Bibtney's good too!" the dog barked in affirmation.

Regrouping quickly, they resumed their advance, now more cautious of potential traps. As they neared the source of the voices, Su Xiao spotted Kanzaki Kaori and another figure—likely the magical operative Yegor had mentioned—discussing something in hushed tones.

Su Xiao's hand tightened around his weapon as he prepared to engage. This confrontation would determine the success of their mission and possibly alter the balance of power within Academy City.

With a silent nod to his team, Su Xiao signaled to strike.

Chapter 888: Awaki Musujime's Resentment

Inside an abandoned warehouse, darkness enveloped the space, carrying a faint, musty odor.

Click. A metal lighter flicked open, a small flame dispelling some of the darkness, illuminating a man's face.

A cigarette was lit, and the smell of tobacco gradually filled the warehouse.

"Stiyl, smoking is bad for your health. Take care of yourself; you're still young," a woman's voice sounded.

"So what? Before I die of lung disease, I'll probably have already died in battle, maybe even soon," Stiyl said with a self-deprecating laugh. He lit the cigarette to mask the smell of blood in the warehouse and to hide the stabbing pain in his heart. He sensed something was wrong, not from the enemy but from within their own ranks.

The man and woman in the warehouse fell silent, the quietness broken only by the sound of a pin dropping.

Sure. The sound of something crawling echoed. Hearing this, Stiyl snapped his fingers, and a ball of flame rose in front of him. Stiyl specialized in fire magic, and with the aid of runes, he could wield powerful fire spells.

In the world of A Certain Magical Index, magicians differed from most others. Most magicians used mana as their primary power source, supplemented by elemental communication to cast spells. In A Certain Magical Index, magicians used runes as the primary medium, with mana as a supplement, rarely communicating with elements. This approach minimized self-consumption, reducing mana usage significantly. Without runes, these magicians were practically useless, unable to cast powerful spells and requiring temporary magic circles for even basic spells.

Both methods had their strengths and weaknesses. Mana-based magicians excelled in skirmishes, while rune-based magicians excelled in fortifications.

The flame illuminated the warehouse, revealing a space of about 300 square meters filled with wooden crates and jars. In the corner, a woman sat on a wooden box, most of her body hidden in the darkness. Only her arms were visible, and her right hand showed thick calluses.

In the light, Stiyl saw the source of the crawling sound: a snake, entirely white, with clearly defined scales. It looked lifelike, yet Stiyl sensed it wasn't a living creature.

"What is this?" Stiyl frowned, feeling an ominous premonition.

"It seems to be some kind of alchemical creation; it has a similar aura," the woman in the room replied.

"This is bad!"

"We have enemies!"

No sooner had they spoken than a wave of air and flames surged towards them.

Boom!

A blinding flash of light erupted in the warehouse, the explosion's dull roar startling the juvenile delinquents in the nearby reform school.

The explosion quickly subsided, and air currents accelerated around the warehouse. As the flames consumed the oxygen within, the pressure difference caused the warehouse's iron door to buckle inward, air rushing through the gaps in the doors and windows.

Crack, crack...

Concrete fragments burst from the warehouse's wall, forming fist-sized holes as bullets from heavy sniper rifles tore into the space.

After ten seconds, one-third of the wall was demolished. Half a kilometer away, Yegor reloaded his sniper rifle. He lay on the roof of an abandoned research facility, covered in dark green and gray cloth, blending seamlessly with the concrete rooftop.

Yegor picked up a magazine, pressing his thumb against the topmost electromagnetic shock round, ensuring it was fully loaded. The number of bullets in his rifle was something he always kept track of.

Inserting the magazine, Yegor pulled the bolt, his face expressionless. Outside of necessary communication during missions, Yegor was a man of few words, capable of not speaking for a month while remaining psychologically stable.

Aiming, pulling the trigger, releasing an electromagnetic pulse at the specified location and time, firing the next bullet within 8 to 30 seconds, preferably armor-piercing rounds—these were Yegor's thoughts. Currently, his mind was focused solely on eliminating the target, with no extraneous thoughts.

Blue and white light flashed within the warehouse for two seconds before dissipating. Su Xiao, who witnessed this, nodded approvingly. Yegor was more capable than expected.

"Let's deal with the man first," Su Xiao said as he walked towards the warehouse.

"Of course," Awaki Musujime replied, filled with determination. If it were any other mission, she wouldn't be as eager, and she typically didn't follow orders strictly.

Su Xiao found this normal. He had known Awaki Musujime for less than 48 hours, and she was assigned by Aleister, not someone who owed him loyalty. Moreover, he had no illusions about his charm. He never expected Awaki Musujime to follow him unconditionally.

This time was an exception. Awaki Musujime was exceptionally cooperative because of her grudge against Stiyl Magnus, who had ambushed her the previous night, severely burning her body. Wrapped like a mummy, she had secretly shed a few tears under the covers, worried about her appearance. No woman was indifferent to her looks, and her previous threats of cutting off her chest were more about the frustration of her ample bust hindering her in combat rather than a serious intention.

Su Xiao entered the warehouse, a wave of heat hitting him immediately.

Sunlight streamed through the holes in the wall, illuminating the rune-covered walls, floor, and ceiling. These runes were all fire-attributed.

"Kill them, Witch Hunt King," Stiyl commanded, standing in the warehouse, his black robe tattered and a wooden board lodged in his abdomen.

"Roar!"

A four-meter-tall flaming figure roared. This was the Witch Hunt King, and the heat in the warehouse emanated from it.

Su Xiao leaped back as flames surged towards him.

Engulfed in flames, Su Xiao saw Stiyl throw a rune. The rune disintegrated, drawing all the oxygen within ten meters to Su Xiao, causing the fire around him to combust more intensely, turning orange-red and hinting at blue.

Breaking free from the flames, Su Xiao was surrounded by energy shields that absorbed the heat, turning red.

He quickly dispelled the shields, breathing in fresh air deeply.

Landing smoothly, Su Xiao drew Dragon Flash with his left hand, blue steel shadow energy coursing along the blade.

"Plan B," Su Xiao shouted.

"OK," Awaki Musujime responded, turning on her military flashlight, emitting a red beam in the daylight.

A tiny red dot appeared on Stiyl's chest, unnoticed as he focused on controlling the Witch Hunt King to attack Su Xiao. The Witch Hunt King was his strongest ability, emitting temperatures up to 3000 degrees.

Awaki Musujime stared at the red dot on Stiyl's chest. Her spatial ability had high versatility but required a reference point to avoid deviations.

With the setup in place, the confrontation was about to intensify, and Su Xiao's team prepared for the critical strike against Stiyl Magnus.

Chapter 889: Power Struggles

Awaki Musujime's mind raced through calculations. Within 0.6 seconds, the computations were completed, and Stiyl Magnus vanished from his original position. When he reappeared, he was only two meters away from Su Xiao!

For Stiyl, this level of coordination was a nightmare. Previously, the "Witch Hunt King" stood between him and Su Xiao, along with numerous magical traps he had set up in his former position. For Su Xiao, closing the distance with him was not simple.

However, an unguarded Stiyl found himself under Su Xiao's blade, with the long sword mere centimeters from his throat.

As the blade sliced through the air, a pale blue streak of energy trailed behind it.

Splat!

Blood spurted three meters high as Stiyl's head flew, his face frozen in disbelief. Neither the "Witch Hunt King" nor his numerous magical traps had served any purpose.

In a confrontation, Stiyl, though not Su Xiao's equal, could have held his own for several rounds. Given Su Xiao's current injured state, killing Stiyl would have required some effort. However, Stiyl's lack of understanding of Awaki Musujime's spatial abilities led to his demise under Su Xiao's blade. For Stiyl, his death was inexplicable.

In reality, Su Xiao and Awaki Musujime had practiced their coordination multiple times, determining the strikes' distances, positions, timing, and trajectories. Their training and planning culminated in this lethal effectiveness.

In the battle, Su Xiao only needed one strike to decapitate this genius magician from the British Puritan Church's special unit, Necessarius.

[You have killed Stiyl Magnus.]

[Stiyl Magnus was a key member of the British Puritan Church. You have gained 3.2% World Source, bringing your total to 8.8%.]

[Your talent, Devourer, has activated, permanently increasing your mana by 30 points. Your maximum mana is now 3176 points.]

[You have acquired the magician's Rune Card: Dark Purple (Rune Card: Treasure Chest item).]

The rewards for killing Stiyl were not as generous as Su Xiao had anticipated. This wasn't due to Stiyl's lack of strength but because Awaki Musujime played a crucial role in the kill.

Su Xiao had long realized that fighting alongside storyline characters often resulted in reduced rewards. The final gains were calculated based on the target's value minus the contribution and influence of the storyline characters, then factoring in Su Xiao's contribution.

However, these factors did not affect the mana increase from Su Xiao's Devourer talent.

Thud. Stiyl's head hit the ground.

"Stiyl!!!" A heart-wrenching cry echoed from the warehouse. This was not a mere shout but a lament.

The "Witch Hunt King," which had been charging toward Su Xiao, halted and rapidly disintegrated. The flames from Stiyl's magic dissipated.

Su Xiao flicked the blood from his sword, forming a semi-circle spray on the ground. He looked toward the warehouse, seeing Kanzaki Kaori kneeling inside, her eyes vacant and filled with tears.

Su Xiao scrutinized Kanzaki, frowning. Awaki Musujime did not immediately use her spatial ability, knowing Kanzaki's prowess in close combat.

"Shall we continue?" Awaki Musujime asked.

"Wait," Su Xiao said, walking into the warehouse. Inside, Kanzaki Kaori, still kneeling, did not look at him. Her sword lay discarded beside her.

Seeing this, Su Xiao felt something was wrong. Even with Stiyl dead, Kanzaki wouldn't be so devastated. From their previous encounter, he knew she was stubborn and strong-willed, not someone who would drop her sword and weep in despair.

"Who are you? Where is Kanzaki Kaori?" Su Xiao's figure blurred as Dragon Flash pressed against her throat. Upon closer inspection, he realized this woman only resembled Kanzaki in appearance and clothing but had a different aura.

"You will die a miserable death..." the imposter hissed, lifting her tear-streaked face.

Narrowing his eyes, Su Xiao understood. His blade slashed across her throat, and a few seconds later, the imposter transformed back into an unfamiliar woman.

[You have killed Sylvia Rockefeller.]

[Sylvia Rockefeller was an ordinary member of the British Puritan Church. You have gained 0.23% World Source...]

The woman was not Kanzaki but a much weaker individual. Her reward yielded minimal World Source and mana points without treasure chest items. Her mental state was too fragile. With Stiyl's death, she completely collapsed, losing her will to fight. Judging by her age, she might have been a passionate admirer of Stiyl, the kind who adored him fervently. However, Su Xiao considered another possibility: she knew she was destined to die today, playing her role of crying and hatred to the end.

Gravely injured Kanzaki was nowhere to be found, making the situation even more perplexing. Su Xiao sat on a wooden crate in the warehouse, lighting a cigarette to contemplate.

After a while, the pieces fell into place.

"That old fox, claiming his mind is controlled by life support devices? Nonsense," Su Xiao muttered. The "old fox" referred to Aleister. In this situation, Aleister was the beneficiary. Su Xiao also gained significantly, laying the groundwork for his Tier 3 advancement task.

He understood the whole situation. Aleister's intention had indeed been to eliminate Kanzaki. However, even if Kanzaki survived, Aleister could accept it if she stopped causing chaos in Academy City.

With Kanzaki severely injured, the British Puritan Church received the news, leading to a second negotiation between Laura Stuart and Aleister. Laura Stuart was a cunning strategist.

Given the circumstances, the negotiations went smoothly. The Index Librorum Prohibitorum would remain under the custody of the Science Side temporarily, a compromise Laura Stuart reluctantly agreed to.

Compared to the Index, protected by multiple safeguards, Kanzaki's life was more important—a tangible combat asset, a "nuclear weapon" level of force for the Magic Side. Losing such a valuable piece in Academy City would have left Laura Stuart in deep despair.

As a result, Aleister allowed the British Puritan Church to forcefully take away the "gravely injured and unconscious" Kanzaki. In return, Stiyl Magnus became the sacrificial lamb, an abandoned pawn.

When Su Xiao saw the imposter Kanzaki kneeling and weeping, he sensed something was off. The crying was too over-the-top, almost fake, and she offered no resistance.

It was clear that Stiyl refused to accept the British Puritan Church's order to retreat, effectively abandoning Index and leaving Academy City. Without the mindset of a defeated soldier, Laura

Stuart decisively abandoned him, deploying a magician spy to impersonate Kanzaki. This preserved the Magic Side's strength and gave the Science Side some face, preventing a complete fallout.

The power struggle between factions was indeed ruthless and unfeeling. Those who didn't comply were abandoned. Su Xiao played his role in this grand scheme, inching closer to becoming a "director."

Taking out a communicator, Su Xiao contacted Aleister.

"Aleister, Kanzaki has been dealt with," he said.

"Oh? Wasn't that a magician spy?" Aleister's voice came through.

"In a way, yes, but it was Kanzaki," Su Xiao replied.

In the Windowless Building, Aleister's lips curled into a smile upon hearing this.

"Perhaps. This matter ends here. As long as my core plans aren't disrupted, you have free reign in Academy City. I've informed Tsuchimikado Motoharu. He's ready for your call," Aleister said, ending the call.

Su Xiao exhaled, successfully laying the groundwork for his Tier 3 advancement task.

"That old fox," Su Xiao repeated. Had he not insisted Kanzaki was "dead," Aleister might have assigned him another task, citing failure. The "unconditional assistance in finding the Codex" claim was a bluff. Su Xiao wasn't there to be Aleister's "muscle." He did these tasks for freedom of action and to meet the multi-spy Tsuchimikado Motoharu.

"Time to get down to business," Su Xiao said, heading out of the warehouse, Bubby following closely. Awaki Musujime, humming, went in another direction. As always, outside Aleister's assignments, Awaki Musujime wouldn't act with Su Xiao. Expecting storyline characters to submit through mere intimidation was a fantasy, especially a rebellious girl like Awaki Musujime.

As for capturing her heart, Su Xiao would laugh at the idea. A mentally sound, independent girl wouldn't fall for someone after being cramped in a car or a couple of missions. That's the stuff of Shounen manga protagonists. A violent villain like Su Xiao, even after a hundred missions, wouldn't make Awaki Musujime swoon; she'd be more likely to grow wary.

Chapter 890: Emotions

Inside a restaurant in the Seventh School District, various diners sat at their tables with different expressions on their faces. Their clothing varied, but they all shared the same dazed look, as if they had witnessed something extraordinary.

Su Xiao sat at one of the tables, chewing his food while contemplating his next steps. He casually forked a piece of steak, taking a large bite.

"Woof!" Bubby suddenly barked, snapping Su Xiao out of his thoughts.

"What's wrong?" Su Xiao asked, puzzled. He looked at the table before him, noticing it was now piled high with stacks of plates, some reaching half a meter tall.

Bubby jumped from the chair, grabbing Su Xiao's arm with its mouth, clearly indicating that he should stop eating.

Su Xiao realized something was amiss. He glanced at the restaurant's clock; it had been about two hours since he entered, yet it felt like only a short while had passed. Even though he had been deep in thought, spending two hours like this seemed excessive.

Su Xiao rubbed his chin, replaying the events in his mind. Since entering the restaurant, he had ordered food multiple times, consuming six to eight times his usual amount. Strangely, he hadn't noticed until now.

"Have I been acting strangely recently, Bubu?" Su Xiao asked as he had used the Reincarnation Mark to check his status. In a world dominated by magic like this one, it wasn't surprising to fall under someone's spell unknowingly.

Bubu sat beside him, thinking for a moment before grabbing an orange juice bottle and pretending to pour it over its head while covering itself with a napkin.

Seeing this, Su Xiao chuckled. "Using water torture on that woman? That's not unusual for me..." He paused, his pupils contracting as he realized something. Normally, he preferred psychological manipulation over physical torture to break an enemy's will. This method usually yielded more accurate information. But this time, he had resorted to physical torture without considering other methods. The information he obtained was not as reliable as it could have been.

"That was impulsive," Su Xiao muttered. "No, I wasn't even thinking." Reflecting on his state during the interrogation, he recalled his sole focus had been killing the enemy to gain freedom of movement in Academy City, ignoring everything else.

"Bubu, punch me," Su Xiao said suddenly.

Bubu looked bewildered, its expression seeming to ask, "Did I hear that right?"

"Don't just stand there, do it..." Su Xiao began.

Thud! Bubu punched Su Xiao's leg with its paw, somehow managing to make a fist.

"My head..." Su Xiao tried to correct, but another punch landed on his chin.

"Harder..."

Thud! The third punch hit him squarely. Bubu looked utterly dejected, silently questioning Su Xiao's newfound "attribute" and wondering if the medication was needed.

"Stupid dog, I told you to hit my head full force..." Su Xiao's sentence trailed off as the red light in his eyes faded. He had experienced this red light before, once while staring at Awaki Musujime from a dark building.

"Getting hit causes my mind to clear. My thoughts become single-minded, fixated," Su Xiao realized. He left a stack of large bills on the table and left the restaurant with Bubu, feeling very full.

As he strolled down the street, digesting his meal, Su Xiao considered his situation. He might be under the influence of someone's ability, perhaps marked by magic or a skill affecting his emotions. The duration of the skill seemed long-lasting.

A young, attractive female student walked by, her light perfume catching Su Xiao's attention. He turned to look at her, and she smiled politely in return.

Bubu sensed something was wrong and bit Su Xiao's leg. The mild pain snapped him back to reality. He had been considering an absurd thought—taking the girl and assaulting her.

"This is getting stronger," Su Xiao thought, quickening his pace. He found a hotel, rented a room, and locked himself inside. Sitting cross-legged on the bed with Dragon Flash across his lap, he began to meditate. Meditation always helped stabilize his emotions.

As Su Xiao entered a meditative state, he felt seven symbols on his arm: 々, ‹‹, ㄗ, ㄎ, ㄣ, X, and ㄋ.

He used a carbon pen to trace these invisible symbols onto his arm, keeping their positions and sizes identical. Afterward, he took out a magnifying glass from his storage space.

[Euphesus Magnifying Glass]

Quality: Blue

Type: Special Equipment

Effect: Emotion Amplification (Active): Targets a designated individual for a Willpower check. If the check fails, their most intense emotion is amplified by 100% for 5 minutes.

Su Xiao had kept this magnifying glass in his storage for emergencies; now it was time to use it. Activating its ability on himself, he felt an intense greed, desiring everything in the world.

Five minutes later, Su Xiao understood the meanings of the seven symbols:

'々' represents anger.

'‹‹' represents arrogance.

'ㄗ' represents gluttony.

'ㄎ' represents sloth.

'ㄣ' represents envy.

'X' represents lust.

'ㄋ' represents greed.

These emotions were amplified based on Su Xiao's environment, interacting in extreme ways. During the water torture, his anger and arrogance were heightened.

Worse yet, Su Xiao had no idea when he was marked or who was responsible. Aleister? Unlikely. Heaven Cancellor? Even less likely.