

Wow 211

Chapter 211 Absolute Defense

...

Cautiously turning a corner, the dagger shielded the pistol as it turned.

Shadows assaulted in an instant, and Bai E subconsciously pulled the trigger.

"Bang!"

Before he could fire, the muzzle was already twisted upwards, the discharged bullet ultimately could only hit the rocks at the ceiling.

Sparks flashed past.

"You ant, you've already lost to me once, how dare you chase after me!" the Blood God, pressing down hard on Bai E's wrist, bared his white teeth.

Bai E, with his hands pinned down, gritted his teeth as he struggled against his opponent.

However, an external fear penetrated his marrow, to the extent that his muscles involuntarily soured and he was easily disarmed of his pistol and dagger.

The Blood God, who nonchalantly flung aside both weapons, didn't bother to use them but instead, with a burst of fury, headbutted Bai E right in front of him.

"Thud!"

Bai E's vision blurred for a moment as he staggered back two steps, and even the Blood God, standing still, seemed a bit groggy as he shook his head.

He hadn't expected that the body of this opponent, whom he had brutally beaten once, would prove to be so formidable...

But this was even better, the Blood God clenched his fist, eyes glowing red as blood.

"Let's see how much you've improved during this time!"

Bai E didn't make a sound, only adjusting the night-vision goggles on his face.

The lenses had skewed from the impact of the headbutt, instantly limiting his field of view.

Bai E, having straightened his night-vision goggles, stared silently at the large man towering over him by an entire circle.

Once he entered a true combat state, his blood visibly began to surge within him, as if his muscles were receiving courage where his blood flowed.

The limp and sour sensation was retreating from every corner of his body, and a genuine fighting spirit began to resist the omnipresent fear dwelling in the cave.

Shaking his wrists, Bai E hopped lightly on the spot a couple of times.

His body was gradually recovering its combat state, undoubtedly good news.

Facing fear head-on was indeed the only way to eradicate that seed.

Weapons? He hadn't planned on relying on weapons to defeat this enemy in the first place.

The environment inside this cave wasn't suited for the full use of weapons, though the agile dagger might come in handy.

But since his opponent had already issued a bare-handed invitation, he would not shy away from battle.

With blood circulating warmly, his body grew increasingly excited, Bai E's will ignited as he looked at the Blood God with burning intensity.

"You know? I've been waiting for this day for a long time..."

His voice trembled with excitement.

Since the day he had been brutalized by his opponent, since he'd been beaten to the ground with almost no ability to resist...

Bai E never told anyone that he was a person with a strong competitive spirit.

Whatever had caused him to fail before, he always aimed to snatch victory back in the same fashion.

He had been waiting for a formal battle with the Blood God, be it just for practice, whether in the barracks or the arena.

But surprises always come unexpectedly.

Right here inside this cave, during this mission.

"I don't know why you've become what you are now, I don't know if you can repent, and I guess you won't explain it to me..."

But right now, we are in a fight to the death.

"I'll use all my strength to incapacitate you, and after that... I'll ask you one more time, why!"

As his words fell, Bai E rushed forward, his Overlimit Drive bursting forth with full force.

"Bang!"

Body blocks resonated dully in the narrow cave corridor.

[Triggering Sparring Mode...]

There was no space to dodge, only head-on, tough confrontations.

Avoiding direct blows to vital areas was the fullest extent of dodging either could achieve.

Fist met flesh directly, and one would reduce damage by blocking successfully, or else brace for impact with their body.

Their fists flew like the wind, blocking and counterattacking almost every moment.

Without the tough skin obtained from cultivation, Bai E likely wouldn't be able to sustain such high-intensity endurance in this hard confrontation, as rapid recovery was not fast enough for such intense attrition.

Knowing he was outclassed in his level of Combat Specialization, Bai E went all out from the start.

Rapid-fire strikes.

Fists, feet, elbows, and knees combined, the onslaught was fierce and dense like a storm.

Yet the Blood God's fists were also incredibly heavy, matching the powered-up Bai E in strength, his force periodically disrupting Bai E's offensive rhythm.

Fortunately, the drastically increased level of Combat Specialization and its numerous special attributes had an immediate effect. Unlike their previous clash where Bai E was easily overpowered, this time, the fight initially seemed evenly matched.

[Using close combat to engage in rapid offense and defense with the target, Combat Mastery experience +13.] (Stacked)

"Bang!"

Caught off guard, Bai E broke through the defense and landed a punch on the Blood God's chest. The pain in his body intensified the red light in the Blood God's eyes, and his strength surged momentarily.

His palm moved like lightning to grab Bai E's right fist, and as Bai E struggled to break free, the Blood God's other fist smashed into Bai E's chest.

"Bang!"

As one hand exerted force, the other involuntarily weakened, allowing Bai E to break free.

Bai E, having taken a punch to the chest, was not to be outdone, and retaliated with a punch of his own.

"Bang!"

"Bang!"

Your punch, my punch.

...

The original assault and defense battle had suddenly turned into a turn-based one.

The heavy physical blow also ignited Bai E's ferocity, as if his mind had snapped, standing still and steadfastly trading blood with the opponent.

A punch, another punch, and yet another.

It was as if he wanted to completely expel the fear inside him through the force and true pain of his fists!

"Bang!"

"Bang!"

"Bang!"

The last sound almost coincided, the simultaneous punches from both sides forced each to take two steps back.

Rubbing his aching chest, Bai E coughed lightly, finally exhaling the breath he had been holding.

"Good! Good!" The Blood God also rubbed his chest, his eyes turning redder as he looked at Bai E, his tone fervent...

The most extreme combat undoubtedly stimulated his nerves, tearing open the combat suit that had become a restraint on his body, revealing his muscular physique clad only in a black vest to the air.

With a meaningless growl like a wild beast, the Blood God's massive body charged like a tank down the narrow passageway.

Bai E clenched his fists.

During that violent outburst, the power suppressed by fear had completely returned.

Cold desire for battle spread throughout his body.

He glanced at the semi-transparent panel with subtitles that did not obstruct his view.

[You have spent 50 points of combat experience, converting into 25 points of "Combat Mastery" experience.]

Gone... Had his special attribute bonuses reached some sort of upper limit? Or was it that the Blood God really didn't have much personal flair?

But that wasn't important.

[Your combat abilities have begun to form a strong personal style, integrating all you have learned, and you will gain a unique personal combat system, current integration progress 82%...]

Combat itself, has meaning!

Bai E stepped forward, bowing into a jab that smashed into the side of the Blood God's attacking right forearm.

Swinging his right arm, he blocked the incoming large hand, and with his left hand's two fingers joined like a sword, he pointed towards the wide-open side waist, inches away.

Confident in the effect of his attacks, almost the moment after making these moves, Bai E spun into the Blood God's embrace.

His palm struck the side of the face, chopping at the chin.

Turning his hand down, a series of chopping and pushing palms hit the Blood God's chest, forcing him to gasp for breath and losing any space to counterattack.

This was the first time Bai E had achieved a perfect combo advantage in a head-on confrontation.

"Cough, cough, cough!"

The Blood God involuntarily retreated several steps, his eyes brimming with red.

Defying science, his body stopped the backward inertia in an instant and abruptly changed direction forward.

With a speed almost imperceptible to the naked eye, another charge, both hands smashed into Bai E's chest like cannons.

"Bang!"

With that strike, Bai E's body flew backward, smashing directly into the cave wall four or five meters behind him.

[Hit by the opponent's attack, you have taken 4 points of strike damage.]

"Cough~ Cough~" Bai E, who quickly flipped into a corner to prevent pursuit, covered his chest as he stood up swiftly.

The saliva at the corner of his mouth couldn't stop flowing down; the Blood God's two punches felt like they had toppled his innards, stomach acid and bile surged up, leaving a bitter taste in his mouth.

At the same time, the images of the Blood God's attack replayed slowly in his mind...

Speed, strength, had increased again.

It was like the feeling of fighting one against three in the arena before departing...

The arena?

The fleeting inspiration was not captured, as Bai E had to focus all his thoughts on the present—

The Blood God was already at the peak level of normal human bodies, and in theory, should not be able to enhance strength and explosive power on the spot.

So, was this the power granted by pledging oneself to demons?

Those ultra-dimensional existences distorted reality with unrivaled Spiritual Energy, providing their Believers with extraordinary powers.

Damn it! Damn it!

He had to make a choice, didn't he?

Facing the Blood God, an opponent with robust vitality, Bai E did not have the confidence to take him down with one hit.

After reaching Combat Specialization Level 4, the three unlocked skills included one that was almost like a younger version of a lucky hit without the reward of dropped items.

The same burst of power, the improvement it could bring was not significant.

Tactical evasion was even less worth mentioning; in such an environment, there wasn't much space to dodge. Even a skill laced with the irrational factor of Spiritual Energy had little room to perform here.

So, it had to be the continuous... Absolute Defense.

Bai E gritted his teeth and made up his mind:

[Payment: 2 Potential Points, 551 General Experience points, 449 Combat Experience points.]

[Skill Learned—Absolute Defense.]

[Absolute Defense: From now on, you can consciously strengthen the body parts about to be hit, greatly increasing resistance to strike, slash, and pierce damage, while also slightly immunizing against (but not limited to) acid, flame, frost, and electric shocks; Vitality (Defense) +5, Vitality (Recovery) +3. Cost: 3 Spiritual Energy (30 action potential reserve)/min.]

Compared to Gun Fighting Skill, Absolute Defense consumed less, after all, it simply strengthened oneself without involving rapid response to complex environmental changes.

With his current action potential reserve, he could last at least... three minutes!

In these three minutes, complete the integration of his personal combat system to 100%, to see if the effects of this new specialty could be as life-changing as Overlimit Drive.

If not, then he would decide whether to use other cards in his hand.

With over two thousand points of general experience reserve and a chance to use a lucky hit, he was endowed with endless possibilities to turn the tables.

Chapter 212 instantly kills a hundred beasts!

...

[You have spent 100 points of general experience to learn, converting it into 50 points of "Combat Proficiency" experience.]

Even without learning any special attribute bonuses, Bai E continued to spend experience to enhance his progress on his sparring task.

"Both must proceed at the same time."

The experience computed by time and the experience converted by learning must be spent simultaneously to advance the progress in perfecting expertise.

[Your combat abilities have now formed a strong personal style, integrating all that you have learned, and you will obtain a unique personal combat system. Current integration progress: 85%...]

86%...

87%...

90%...

In continuous rapid exchanges, the progress also rapidly increased.

Facing Bai E, who had activated "Absolute Defense," even the powerfully enhanced Blood God struggled to inflict fatal damage on him.

The astonishing defensive power allowed Bai E to opt for a bolder style of fighting, focusing less on his own safety in the midst of battle and directing all his attention to the sole objective of defeating his opponent.

Fortified guard, interception, pressure points, flurry attack, joint locks, combo hits, whip strike... Bai E's mastery of special attributes took turns in action, gradually integrating from a previously scatter-shot application to a cohesive whole.

As the integration of various techniques became more harmonious, Bai E could strongly sense that the perfected offensive routines were like ripening fruits forming in his mind.

Regarding how to fully utilize his entire strength to execute a fighting style unique to himself, Bai E became increasingly confident.

As if dispelling clouds to see the sun, a realization dawned upon him.

[You have spent 200 points of general experience to learn, converting it into 100 points of "Combat Proficiency" experience.]

[Your combat abilities have now formed a strong personal style, integrating all that you have learned, and you will obtain a unique personal combat system. Current integration progress: 100%...]

Time elapsed: two and a half minutes.

Battle is the best occasion to verify theories.

Never before has Bai E felt such a profound "understanding" of battle.

His opponent stood there as if numerous bubbles leaped off his body, each indicating a different method to defeat him.

Countless methods awaited execution.

"Huh," Bai E exhaled deeply.

At last, it had come.

[Sparring task — Bareknuckle. Current progress has reached 100%; specialty is generating...]

[Please select the special attribute you wish to serve as the core of your personal fighting style: combo hits, fortified guard, seizing opportunities, joint locks, interception, pressure points, whip strike, flurry attack.]

Under the ghastly green night vision lens, the panel resembling a pale blue screen appeared unaffected before his eyes, waiting for Bai E's decision.

There were eight choices in total, each representing different specialties, and the core essentially dictated the direction of subsequent specialties.

If considering only the present, no matter how powerful the Blood God's body, it remains human, so techniques specifically targeting the human body—joint locks, pressure points—would undoubtedly be the prime choices. However, they have great limitations, implying that their effects on other types of enemies might be restricted.

No choice should be made based solely on the current situation; unless the other options are significantly inferior, these two are unlikely to top the list.

Fortified guard and interception? Too conservative and passive. Bai E has never been one to wait passively. If he could flatten the opponent in one encounter, why would he opt for a lengthy battle? Pass!

Seizing opportunities and whip strike, each capitalizing on the ability to find openings or using obscure techniques with the flexible extremities of the body, centering the core on either of these seems too much like a gamble. Bai E couldn't even imagine what kind of specialties they would form.

That leaves combo hits and flurry attack.

Both attributes specialize in high-frequency attacks, except one relies on the momentum of stacking bursts and overdrafts, growing fiercer with each strike, and the other relies on exploiting every part of the body to produce unexpected sequences of attacks.

Speaking of which, flurry attack also relies on the body's elements...

So, it's decided—combo hits.

The decisions in his consciousness happened incredibly fast, with the analysis of the pros and cons of each of the eight special attributes completed almost instantaneously.

[Core confirmed: Combo hits.]

[Specialty is generating...]

The next moment, the pale blue screen shattered before his eyes as a fist large as a sand pot broke through and slammed towards him.

Bai E steadied his breath with a heavy voice and blocked with his arms.

"Bang!"

His figure was instantly sent flying.

The boost from Absolute Defense was still active; though his body was unharmed, the tremendous force of the punch still sent Bai E flying uncontrollably.

Crashing into the rugged stone wall was far from a pleasant feeling, and beneath the sensation of a quaking earth and tumbling rocks, dust fell continuously.

Bai E struggled to his feet, clutching his chest. Even under the enhancement of Absolute Defense, Bai E still felt his breath tight in his chest.

As the battle wore on, his opponent also gradually increased his strength in the fight, to the point where even at full Overlimit Drive, Bai E could not match the Blood God's power.

...

Is this the power from a demon? It's a completely different power boost from the Rat People, and furthermore...

The drop rate subtitle above their heads showed that the opponent hadn't completely become a demon's Believer or chosen one.

What must drop wasn't a "blessing," but merely a "gaze."

This demon...seemed to be even more formidable than the "Benevolent Father" that the Rat People once devoted themselves to.

At least in terms of outright combat ability.

What's more critical is that, after joining the demon's ranks, the strongest move Blood God seemed to have gained was the rapid strike he could use every so often.

This strike far exceeded the limits of human reaction, fierce and unparalleled in strength.

Had it not been for Absolute Defense, my grave would be meters high with grass by now.

But...that ends here.

Let's see if you've obtained more power from the demon or if I've obtained more power from the cheat!

[Skill exchange mission—Underground Fighting, completed.]

[Mission Reward: Specialization—Instant Slay a Hundred Heads, generated.]

[Instant Slay a Hundred Heads: After days and months of honing your own skills, you have reached the pinnacle in applying your techniques.

From now on, you can use all your skills to deliver an "instant" ultimate strike against your target.

The multiplier for this strike is decided by the "Spiritual Energy" or "Action Power Reserve" you expend, using up to 5 points of Spiritual Energy or 50 points of Action Power Reserve to create a maximum effect of "9" times the actual hit, which can be considered as "a single hit" when striking the same target or "simultaneously" when hitting multiple targets;

Because of the different "bare-handed" or "weapon (non-firearm) type," the strength of your strike will also differ. The power of the strike initiated with a "ranged weapon" will be "2" times your "bare-handed" state based on the specialization abilities you currently possess.

Even without expending any Spiritual Energy or Action Power Reserve, this skill can still enable your normal attacks to achieve at least "2" times the actual hit effect, but your body will need time to recover from the load of such an instant burst (Cooldown: 5 seconds).

(Growth Potential: From now on, every special attribute you gain in "Combat Specialization" or "Weapon Specialization" will be reflected within this specialization. After sufficient growth, the power of this specialization will receive an unimaginable and extraordinary enhancement.))

Every specialization, like a short essay, is bound to be unbelievably powerful.

Even without looking at the display on the panel, Bai E instinctively knew how to use this newfound specialization the moment he acquired Instant Slay a Hundred Heads.

Confronting his onrushing opponent, Blood God's face was a picture of madness from his intoxication with the fight...Bai E gave him a similarly chilling smile in return.

In his vision, Blood God's figure blurred, yet the attack that almost surpassed sight failed for the first time in their battle.

As the palm's afterimage misleadingly swept past the eyes, Bai E moved skillfully to the side of Blood God.

By the time his hesitant gaze followed Bai E's movement, Bai E had already moved behind him.

Experts are always most guarded against attacks from behind; under absolute combat reflexes, Blood God reached back to grab, but Bai E's steps never stopped, retreating to the side just as Blood God extended his hand.

Within the confines of the narrow corridor, Bai E created an impossible off-angle attack opportunity through his footwork.

Bai E's personal combat style, centered around "combos," wasn't just about chaining attacks; it integrated all his special attributes together.

The combination itself was important, but how to exploit the greatest vulnerability needed for executing combos depended on cooperation with other special attributes to find the opportunity.

No vulnerability? Then create one!

"Bang!"

An upward karate chop crashed against Blood God's lower jaw, and before the hit's double-effect could manifest itself on his body, Bai E's incessantly moving feet had already swept past Blood God's back again.

Time seemed to slow down in that instant. Blood God's developed dynamic vision allowed him to catch the moving figure surrounding him, but the response of his nerves, like someone drunk, was always half a step late.

Unable to keep up with the changes, unable to predict.

The phantom-like Mystifying Steps became an unreachable spectral bubble for Blood God; what seemed like random steps followed a special trajectory in perfect sync with the rhythm of the attacks.

"Slap~"

"Bang!"

Bai E's attack was no longer straightforward punches, but attacks made with both palms...

Fan, chop, lift, slash, smash!

The towering figure of Blood God was toyed with in the palm of Bai E's hand like a puppet, his instinctual offensive capability only dragging him deeper in pursuit through a quagmire.

And even the completely crazed outburst of "rapid strike," born from utter rationality, was futile.

Whether it was reason or brute force, both utterly abandoned him at this moment.

Hard clashes that fueled Blood God's blood to boil, and the blood of both combatants surged with his desire to fight, but being played with one-sidedly was unbearable.

"Roar!"

A reckless roar erupted, and furious killing intent spread like a gale, rippling outwards.

In the face of this sudden outburst, Bai E's attack rhythm was disrupted.

As his body was involuntarily blown back, he saw the lettering above his opponent's head subtly shifting—

[95A09/Blood God (Human) (Chaotic) (Elite)—Using "Lucky Strike" for the kill may drop: Guaranteed (3500 combat experience points, Gaze: Blood Trial)...]

In that high-dimensional space unreachable by ordinary people, an indescribable, unfathomable, unobservable, intangible existence glanced at this place for the first time...]

Chapter 213 Boom!

The most savage fight seemed to provide unbridled, raging power directly to this demon's chosen one.

The more one plunged into madness during combat, the more one could receive feedback from the strength.

Utilizing a burst of murderous intent to repel Bai E in that instant, taking advantage of the brief imbalance in Bai E's body, the Blood God suddenly initiated a sprint and with one punch... shattered the night vision goggle strap on Bai E's face.

The countless attacks earlier had informed him that Bai E's physical strength was even more formidable than his own; to completely defeat this once-despised ant in this battle, he first had to render him unable to see in the Dark Environment, to stand a chance of achieving final victory.

He had had numerous opportunities to destroy this device in the prior fight, but he did not make a move.

It was only after realizing that there was indeed a possibility of defeat that he made this ultimate choice to ensure victory.

Shattered...

The previously sickly green field of view disappeared, and the world became pitch black.

Bai E touched the remnants of the night vision goggles within reach of his fingers, finding that the lens area was already twisted and cracked, rendering the whole device incapable of fulfilling its intended function.

He simply yanked it off and threw it away.

The Dark Environment?

Not panicked.

This wasn't the first time he had found himself in such a predicament.

The self-training he had undergone deep in the forest, facing the wolf pack before setting out, was precisely for coping with the situation he faced now.

External objects after all are unreliable; it's the true strength that belongs to oneself that can stand unbeaten at any moment.

The Blind Fighting attribute he had trained was indeed important, but a calm and collected mindset when dealing with darkness was clearly more critical.

Bai E closed his eyes, completely shutting off the channel of observing the outside world through vision, and distributed all his attention more intently on his hearing and touch.

The level 2 Blind Fighting began to take effect...

Bai E cautiously took half a step back, crossing his hands in front of him, waiting for the opponent to make the first move.

"Whoo~"

The howling wind above his head was fierce, and the sound of wind being torn by fists was not so noticeable mixed within it.

Hesitating slightly in the distinction, the Blood God's fist was already close to his body, missing the optimal moment to block.

"Bang!"

The effect of Absolute Defense was still present, and Bai E merely took two steps back to deflect the force.

Tilting his head slightly, Bai E tried to filter the roaring of the wilderness wind, gradually getting accustomed to the "abnormal" sounds in this environment.

"Your progress is indeed significant..." the Blood God's voice sounded rather boastful.

With a twitch of his ear, Bai E seized the opportunity and burst forward instantly.

Passively waiting was never his style; he seized every possible chance to take the initiative!

He was no longer the weakling that had just arrived in this world; with the strength he possessed now, if he lacked the confidence and courage to subdue his enemies in battle, he would find it difficult to face the questioning of his own heart later.

In the interlacing of four hands, every bit of rubbing between palms and wrists was clearly transmitted to the brain through the ubiquitous tactile nerves on his skin.

Blind fight! Blind fight!

Confronted with the Blood God's hands blocking his attack, Bai E captured every thread of muscle resistance during the brief entanglement.

Even without the sight, his combat instincts still caught a sliver of chance with hearing and touch!

Parting the Wild Horse's Mane!

The midsection wide open!

Forcibly breaking through the Blood God's center, Bai E took advantage of the situation to move in, landing a fierce Iron Shoulder strike to the opponent's chest the next moment, and with his left hand, he immediately grabbed the opponent's right hand that attempted to pull away.

Thinking of fleeing?

Once you're in close, don't even think about getting away!

Even if the Blood God were to burst out with murderous intent again like he did just now, having experienced it once and with mental preparation, Bai E was confident that he would no longer be affected as much.

As joint techniques accompanied his footwork, Bai E's form shifted.

His familiarity with the opponent's body size allowed him to understand the opponent's position along the arm; his whole body, under the enhancement of "Whip Tail," was as flexible as a whip, engaging in close combat with the Blood God.

"You shouldn't have spoken," Bai E said with a cold tone.

Having completely given up on sight, Bai E's sense of touch became even more precise; but whether it was an illusion or not, the strength exerted by the Blood God seemed to have diminished from earlier?

Bai E did not understand the mechanism of the demon-bolstered strength, but the tangible change was evident before his eyes, and he had to seize the opportunity.

The prolonged battle reduced the Blood God's defensive ability to a nadir, and the tangible feedback from flesh-on-flesh contact let Bai E know that his attacks had breached the Blood God's defenses.

[Use close-quarter attacks to breach the target's defenses, Combat Specialization experience +22.](Stacked)

[Deal 18 points of strike damage to the target!](Stacked)

The battle information from the panel popped up belatedly.

Expending the last remnants of his action power reserve, Bai E stopped saving for Absolute Defense.

Instant Kill Hundred Heads!

Heavenly Twin Palms!

"Crack!"

A crisp sound of breaking bones.

The twin palms that struck the Blood God's jaw nearly snapped the spine, and the jawbone dislocated and fractured under the blow.

Quadruple!

"To count as one hit" means... kinetic energy stacking!

Ten strikes with a power level of 10 might not break defense, but a single attack with a power level of 100 is enough to make any opponent crumble.

Turning palm into fist, he brought his bent elbow thundering down!

Apex Elbow Strike!

Once he grasped the opportunity, Bai E would never give his opponent a chance to turn the tables!

"Bang!"

[Deal 62 points of strike damage to the target! The target has entered "Critical Injury Status"] (Stacked)

"Drip~ Drip~"

Blood dripped from the corner of his mouth, and Bai E, expressionless, gripped the Blood God's neck, which was already limp, and pressed him against the wall.

Slowly opening his eyes... they shone like the morning star.

In the darkness, Bai E couldn't see the other's expression, but he didn't care.

Just as he had promised before, Bai E asked softly,

"Why?"

Why embrace the demon? Why harm teammates? Why... become what you are now?

"Why..."

Bloody God's voice was fragmented. Bai E's assault had nearly shattered many of his vital organs. Even if he were brought to the military's medical room now, it would probably be a troublesome issue, let alone being hundreds of kilometers away from the base, in the midst of the Dark Cave.

The red light had long since faded from Bloody God's eyes. Only after Bai E thoroughly defeated him did he seem to wake from some delirious dream, with everything he had done vividly returning to his mind.

'What have I done...'

The artificial human's original loyalty resurfaced, once again taking control of his body.

"Be careful..."

He struggled to speak, offering up all his experience to those who came after.

"Be wary of your desire to fight... it will lead you to the abyss."

"Beware of your fear... you can confide in your comrades."

"Be careful of your discontent..."

Beneath his usually expressionless face was a heart scarred in ways no one knew.

He was afraid, so he never dared to break the rules, failing to achieve any truly outstanding combat feats to this day.

He numbed himself with combat, drawing sole meaning for his life from the cheers following victory.

The rumors and gossip of others gradually made him feel entitled to the legendary Gene Optimization Solution, and the persisting sense of loss slowly grew into discontent.

He was afraid of failure.

He chased victory.

Thus, he disappointed both his comrades and that great will watching over him.

The automatic response was him masking his fear in the face of danger to the extreme, and ultimately, his fear of Bai E led him to sabotage the night vision goggles as a tactical strategy.

The betrayal of combat incited disapproval from their "Master", and the power that supported his own fighting began to recede like the tide.

From the moment he sabotaged Bai E's night vision goggles, he had already betrayed the concept of "combat" itself.

If everything could be done over...

Would he suppress his combat desires, overcome his fear, or suppress his discontent... becoming a super soldier his comrades could rely on?

Or would he remain loyal to combat itself and completely burn himself out in the pinnacle battle against Bai E, potentially even returning his soul to the "True God"?

He didn't know the answer.

But now, it was all too late.

Everything had abandoned him.

"It wasn't me..." Bloody God struggled to extend his powerless right arm, pointing to the depths of the cave, "It's there... the source of it all."

"I never embraced the demon voluntarily..."

A dying man's words are good.

Opening his eyes to confirm Bloody God's location, that explosive caption once again floated above his head—

[95A09/Bloody God (Human) (Chaotic) (Elite)—Using "Lucky Strike" to kill drops: Guaranteed (Fresh Meat*2400, Combat Experience 2500 points); Probability (Trait: Blood of Regeneration, Mastery: Combat Specialization Layer +1, up to level 6, Mastery: Nimble Weapon Specialization Layer +1, up to level 6); Possible (Skill: Extreme Pain Relief, Specialty: Rage Torrent).]

Back to the way he looked when they first met...

Demons are born from all creatures' myriad emotions, and any poor emotion could become a channel through which demons erode humanity.

Combat, fear...

As Bai E's contact with this world deepened, his strong link led to his own emotions becoming more and more intense.

It's fine to fight, but not to be overly zealous.

It's fine to be afraid, but one must brave it.

Any poor emotions must be addressed head-on positively.

So... what about discontent?

Facing unjust treatment, what should Bloody God do?

What should I do?

Conform? Or change?

His mind momentarily drifted to the distant future, and Bai E narrowed his eyes, pulling his wayward thoughts back.

[Activate "Lucky Strike".]

The path you have not walked, I shall continue for you.

[Struck the target's vital point, inflicting 12 points of fatal damage!]

[Target's breathing has ceased, and vital signs are lost.]

[Obtained loot: Fresh Meat*2400, Combat Experience 2500 points, Trait: Blood of Regeneration, Mastery: Combat Specialization Layer +1, up to level 6, Mastery: Nimble Weapon Specialization Layer +1, up to level 6, Skill: Extreme Pain Relief, Specialty: Rage Torrent.]

[Trait—Blood of Regeneration, the body's physical condition is being transformed, countdown: 9 hours 59 minutes 59 seconds until effect...]

Completely plundered!

But that wasn't all.

There was an unexpected gain—

[...Progress 2542/500, you have successfully increased the Specialty—Blind Fighting to level 3.]

[...Progress 2042/1000, you have successfully increased the Specialty—Blind Fighting to level 4.]

[Blind Fighting (Level 4): "Dark Environment" Insight (Hearing) performance +4, Insight (Touch) performance +3, Insight (Smell) performance +2.]

The experience burst from the Lucky Strike unexpectedly was also applied to the level increase for the Blind Fighting specialty.

After using the last opportunity, the charge returned to a non-usable stage at 70/100.

But regardless, compared to that one explosive opportunity, Bai E trusted his basic abilities that were always available to use.

He looked up slightly, gazing in the direction pointed by Bloody God.

The lair of the demon was calling out to him...

Chapter 214 Alone

After swallowing a No. 3 throat lozenge, Bai E sat quietly in the darkness to recuperate.

The howling wind above his head, the dark environment, was constantly trying to mire him in a quagmire.

However, having just gone through the most intense battle, the fervent emotions were still echoing in his chest, preventing the gloomy negative emotions from affecting Bai E in the slightest.

He was just contemplating to himself—

Is the ultimate enemy, a demon?

The remnants of the Blood God's words didn't reveal more about the source of his power or the types of demons.

Bai E could only speculate based on the information he already had.

In the depths of the nest, was it a Believer chosen by the demon, endowed with power? Or... the true form of the demon.

If the Blood God, not even the true chosen of the demon, possessed such power, how terrifying was the being that lurked deep within this nest?

Whether it was the true chosen of the Demon God or the demon itself, both likely possessed unimaginable power.

Bai E was not an expert in this field; the little he knew about demons came from asking due to the ratman incident.

He knew that there were many types of demons and that they had different abilities due to different birth emotions; this was the most important intelligence he had gathered.

For example, the uncontrollable plague in the ratman and the blessing of never suffering from disease...

So, judging by the powers demonstrated by the Blood God, the demon power in the depth of this nest was... strength?

Turning fear into strength?

Unilateral authority or a diversified one?

Everything was unknown.

The unknown bred fear more easily...

In the quiet, Bai E listened closely to his own heartbeat.

The seed was still there...

It's impossible to deceive oneself; he still harbored fear towards that unknown entity deep in the cave.

If he didn't overcome it today, every deep night in the future, when recalling this wind-eroded land and its dimness, occasionally hearing the breeze blowing over the plains... would cast him into the deepest abyss.

This is the demon!

Every slight emotion at the beginning will eventually become the loophole for them to invade!

They are omnipresent.

Bai E reached towards his waist, where there... was a 99ml bottle of Exorcism Essential Oil.

A precaution taken before coming, which he hadn't expected to truly come in handy.

Demons... demons!

Feeling almost fully recovered, Bai E stood up, feeling the walls.

It was pitch black in the darkness, and he could not see a thing.

In battle with others, he could rely on blind fighting to sense his opponent's location, but in the face of an unmoving environment, he was truly a blind man...

The Blood God didn't have night vision goggles on him, and it was unknown whether the power granted by the demon allowed him to see in the dark.

Fortunately, the final battleground was not far from where he had encountered the fallen night vision goggles, and Bai E groped his way back in the dark, guided by memory.

It still worked...

The moment he put the night vision goggles back on, the familiar ghastly green perspective returned to his eyes.

The traces of the hourglass left on the ground also returned to his vision.

Following the path he had taken in pursuit of the Blood God, Bai E retraced his steps in the opposite direction.

Before truly entering the depths of the cave, he needed to determine the status of his teammates first.

If possible, he intended to first carry their bodies out to a state of physical safety; only then could he truly open his mind and make an all-out effort.

With the Exorcism Essential Oil, said to truly harm demons, Bai E felt he wasn't without a chance.

True strength was the resolve to act against any adversity, not high-level specialized skills or high-tech weaponry.

Several rigid bodies appeared in his line of sight—

Dashan, Song Ying, You, Tiger...

Facing the fear that surged from within, they were still struggling in the vast sea of the psychic world.

All darkness and eerie howling turned into otherworldly fantasies seeking human lives, and those things they feared the most seemed to bubble up from the depths of consciousness, becoming terrifying illusions that were both real and unreal, tangible and intangible.

When could they escape? Could they escape at all?

No one could provide an answer, and all Bai E could do was carry their bodies out.

Approaching Dashan, who was at the back of the team, Bai E reached out to pick him up by the waist without any guard.

However, the moment his hand touched the body, a surge of darkness instantly flooded into Bai E's mind.

It felt as if he was being tied down with heavy stones and cast into the deep sea that gradually suffocated him.

The boundless gloom, along with the terrifying pressure, compressed every inch of his skin and even seemed to squeeze out the air from his lungs bit by bit.

In the silence, the only sound was his own heart beating wildly in his chest, throbbing as if it could break free from the confines of his ribcage...

"Huff~"

Bai E suddenly stepped back.

His body was numb and cold as if electrified.

The vision he glimpsed was chilling to the bone; was this the psychic world in which Dashan was now immersed?

After taking a deep breath, Bai E, mentally prepared, reached out again without hesitation.

Darkness assaulted Bai E's will, but a trace of clarity always reminded him of his responsibility.

He had to leave this place with his teammates, and he could not fall at this moment or abandon them.

After grabbing hold of Dashan, Bai E didn't hesitate to reach for Song Ying...

Endless darkness twirled overhead, unspeakable unknown fears chased him from behind, and the world seemed to shrink into a chessboard-like square, leaving only the comparatively tiny "self," eternally fleeing from the unknown "fear" that pursued from behind.

Darkness, pursuit.

Completely different from the overwhelming pain of the mountains, underneath Bai E's slightly furrowed brows was a mind besieged by unimaginable spiritual assault.

Yet the hands that tightly embraced the two never loosened in the slightest.

Any change was worth attention.

Compared to when everyone first succumbed, what changes occurred when he made contact with Hu and You's bodies?

Had he defeated the Blood God?

Had he attracted the attention of the "Lord of Fear"?

Did he intend to use the suffering felt by his teammates to bring me down?

Manipulative lowlife!

You, are not worthy yet!

"Bang~"

"Bang~"

Two bodies were thrown inside the carriage...

And then two more bodies were thrown inside the carriage...

Even with comrades on his back, the familiar partners of the past could not offer him any consolation for his spirit.

Every teammate touched by Bai E shared their fear with him; Bai E saw their innermost irrational, illogical, and unruly fears, changing reality and illusion.

He also saw more...

After transporting all members of his team back, Bai E set out again to search for the members of the other two teams.

Everyone was equipped with a special hourglass to record their movement routes, which was not too difficult to track.

Rescuing the bodies of teammates was a natural duty.

If he were to hold a grudge and refuse to help because of their past ridicule... that would be planting a flaw in his heart akin to the Blood God's.

Someone mocks you sharply, and you mock back just as sharply;

Someone looks down on you, and you immediately scorn them in return;

Someone boasts in front of you, and you quickly prove that you are even better;

Someone is indifferent towards you, and you immediately become distant and aloof.

The things you detest can easily turn you into the very thing you once despised.

This is the greatest damage an "enemy" can do to you.

There are demons in this world...

Those heart-manipulating demons await their opportunity at all times.

Bai E absolutely... absolutely will not allow any opportunity that could be exploited by demons!

Not to mention, he needed controlled experiments to verify some suspicions in his heart.

Following the previously agreed-upon exploration areas, Bai E traced the left-behind paths of each warrior and found every scattered member.

This also meant sharing the "fear" of each comrade during the process...

A total of 12 people were recovered.

There were 16 people on the mission in total, minus Bai E, there were three corpses—including the Blood God and two unfortunate soldiers who were killed by the Blood God before Bai E took action.

"Bang!"

"Click..."

As the carriage's side door was about to close, it was stopped by a feeble, delicate palm.

Looking up along the arm, Bai E saw the slowly awakening You and her eyes struggling to open.

"You... where are you going?"

In the endless darkness, a cold sun had risen in her heart, unknown when.

The not-too-blinding light scattered those nonsensical, undefined fears, allowing her to finally, with difficulty, awaken in the real world.

She did not know where the cold sun came from, only that upon awakening, the first sight of Bai E was the one who had once again saved everyone.

Bai E smiled gently, and explained softly, "I'm going to help you break free from the nightmare..."

"Take us... let's leave, just getting away from here will be enough," said You, her voice still trembling, her soft, continuous voice made one feel pity, like a lost and frightened stray kitten.

"We can't leave," responded Bai E, shaking his head gently; his voice was mild but his tone determined.

Compared to the last confrontation with the Bug Race's mental domain, the current spiritual attack had a more enduring impact.

One was simply a violent, unreasonable suppression by force.

But demons took root in emotions; once fear existed in the heart, no place was different.

Even if he led everyone away from that cave, they could not completely emerge from the darkness of the spiritual world.

Just as he had initially speculated, geographical escape had lost its significance.

When facing a higher-dimensional demon that could ignore space, only by truly facing and defeating it in the spirit could one be truly liberated.

In the hearts of all the soldiers present, a seed of fear was likely planted.

No matter where they went, they remained pawns of the Lord of Fear.

More soldiers who were waking up weakly lay in the carriage, looking at Bai E outside the door, "Don't risk your life for us, you're not affected..."

"Yeah... just take us away."

"The enemy here... is not something you can deal with."

"Tsk!" Several hands pulled open another car door that had already been closed, and those weakly awakened soldiers learned who it was that saved them from that dark cave.

"I apologize for what I said before... you are the bravest soldier."

"Don't enter that cave again, we'll just go back and report the situation."

"Wait for me on the truck, if I don't come back, you guys go back and send a message..." Bai E said, shaking his head with a smile, gently stepping back and slowly, yet resolutely, closing the carriage door.

"I'm not just doing this for you..."

'It's also for... cultivation.'

Chapter 215 True Form of the Demon

Bai E, once again entering the cave alone, moved with light steps and chose a descending path without looking back.

While rescuing the members of the other two squads, Bai E had already discovered that the honeycomb-like passages here had almost no dead ends, each path leading eventually to the ultimate core location—

The absolute heart of this nest.

Is bearing all the pain of one's comrades worthwhile?

Of course, it is.

Bai E repeatedly felt the various fears emanating from different comrades, as well as the truths those fears revealed—the fear of that demon!

The master of fear incarnate, the embodiment of fear itself, also suffered the torment of fear itself!

It feared human defiance, it feared its true intentions being seen through.

It tried to corrupt Bai E's will by exploiting the mental worlds of all his comrades, then let them awaken to instinctively persuade him to leave with his people.

It feared direct confrontation!

It feared revealing its own vulnerability!

The demon that played with fear was itself a plaything of fear!

A demon... that only played tricks with illusions.

Without any concrete evidence, Bai E trusted his own judgment.

...

Upon crossing a certain boundary, everything suddenly became clear.

The cavernous hollow expanded greatly before his eyes, the wide underground space seemingly endless in the darkness ahead.

It was unclear whether this was the natural work of spirits or the artificial expansion by the refugees who came here.

At this moment, a sea of bowed heads prostrated on the ground, worshiping their "deity" in a certain direction.

The refugees weren't dead...

Of course, they weren't dead.

How could the souls of the deceased provide the intense emotions that the demon required?

Instead, this "deity" needed to protect its poor "children" for its own sustenance.

No traps? Because there was no need for traps.

It needed ignorant beings to step in to provide sustenance for itself, or the wild beasts that strayed into the cave to sustain these impoverished refugees.

In the dark hollow of the cave, only a high throne of bones stood quietly.

The shadows in the dark carved out a circular arc, and as Bai E stepped into the expanse of this cavern, the symmetrical shadows suddenly unfurled.

Like bat wings, the black shadows blocked out the light, and a pair of demon wings thunderously spread open!

[??? (Demon) (Chaos) (???): ???]

The demon itself!

Not a chosen believer, but... the actual demon itself!

As if waiting for Bai E's arrival, there was movement in the darkness only when he appeared.

The nearest refugee was involuntarily lifted into the air, the man seized by an unknown force screamed in despair, "Ah! Ah! Don't! Please, don't! Save me!"

His limbs flailed wildly without control, as if he knew his fate that was to come.

Hearing the man's anguished cries for help, the cluster of bowed refugees lowered their heads even further, their bodies trembling like a sieve.

The refugee pulled by the invisible force eventually drifted slowly before the demon, and a muscular arm powerfully grasped his throat.

And so, even the scream turned into a choked, whining struggle.

"Hiss~"

Reddish misty vapor connected from the refugee's head to the open mouth of the demon, the ultimate fear of death of the dying being the "delicacy" It most appreciated.

Hearing their kin's painful cries before death, the fear emanating from the surviving refugees palpably intensified.

Of course, Bai E couldn't see the energy derived from emotions, but he could clearly feel the fear invading his body grow even more fierce.

Similarly, the terrifying presence radiating from the horrific demon seemed even more daunting for a moment.

The fear provided by all sentient beings was his greatest source of power.

So... you want to make me feel fear?

No!

Bai E, long accustomed to such an environment, would not succumb to such an obvious emotion. On the contrary... he thought the demon was bluffing.

The real great demons dwelt in higher-dimensional spaces, controlling the fates of countless beings.

Even for them, manifesting in the material world was an extremely difficult task.

Although they were humanity's nominal enemies, their essence... was no different from true deities.

The demon before him, enslaving a mere group of miserable refugees, seemed just a little... pitiable.

Perhaps this demon was born from the initial fear and panic these refugees felt towards the unknown future and environment when they first arrived here.

With a flick of the body, Bai E drew his bow and nocked an arrow.

To confront fear itself, one couldn't just look and walk away.

Emotions stem from within; people can deceive friends, deceive enemies, but they can't deceive themselves, nor can they deceive demons.

Some might speculate on the mastermind behind the scenes and be content to retreat, thereby unaffected from then on;

Some people took one distant look at the demon's true form and, after confirming their suspicions, perhaps could then retreat;

While others needed to challenge that demon to prove their bravery, regardless of whether they could injure or defeat it...

Sometimes, a simpler mind might lead to an easier life.

But Bai E couldn't do any of that.

Born proud, why speak of retreat?

Not only did he wish to strike, but he also arrogantly sought to find a way to completely vanquish this demon!

To win was not the ultimate goal, the desire to win was.

The bowstring made a grating "creeking" sound under stress, and after a slight readying of his aim, he took the wind's assistance to its limit.

"Whoosh!"

The arrow tore through the air, swift as lightning!

And yet, such a speedy attack seemed to the demon as if it were in slow motion.

Watching the arrow come straight at it through the air, the demon even opened its arms early in preparation to embrace... the attack.

"Hum~"

The steel arrowhead collided with the demon's blood-red muscular surface with barely any indication of kinetic resistance before helplessly falling to the ground.

Ineffective!

The hideous demon sneered in Bai E's direction, and the image that should have been too far to see clearly somehow lit up directly in Bai E's pupils.

Across the surging crowd of hundreds of refugees, the demon raised its claw and made a grabbing motion, and Bai E suddenly felt himself uncontrollably flying rapidly towards the demon.

While seemingly struggling frantically, Bai E's left hand calmly clenched the dagger hidden behind him, which had been coated with... Exorcism Essential Oil.

However, Bai E's situation clearly differed from that of the refugee just now; his heart devoid of any fear and intent on counterattacking, the demon could not extract from him any of the nourishment it craved.

Without heart-wrenching screams of despair emanating from deep within, how could the common refugees deepen their fear and worship of the demon?

Intelligent beings are mostly emotional creatures; however, emotions have a shelf life, and time is the enemy of all things.

Nothing will stay sunk in the same kind of fear for long; accustomed to despair, they will gradually adapt.

Only by constantly applying new stimuli, making them feel fear directly and intensity from all angles, will the emotion of "fear" they provide be both greater in quantity and "tastier."

A self-important fool wishing to challenge me?

There are such beings among humans; the six so-called "human warriors" who came earlier had tried to do the same, yet now they've become the ones who crawl at my feet with the deepest fear.

Bai E's body gently landed about ten meters in front of the demon, and the closer distance allowed for a clearer view of the demon's entire appearance.

Even under the pallid green vision of night-vision goggles, the red muscles shimmered with their innate luster, mysterious lines akin to runes sketching fascinating patterns on its body, the grey-black bat-like demon wings lay quietly folded, its face ferocious and fangs bared.

Such a familiar feeling, it seemed demons should look just like this.

No...

Bai E suddenly realized.

This wasn't the demon's real appearance... or rather, demons don't have a true appearance.

What living beings see of demons is merely a projection of their own imagination.

Demon... demon...

Through Bai E's eyes, "seeing" the presumptuous human's imagination of it, the Lord of Fear's lips curled into a cruel, wicked smile.

It craved fear, submission... mere slaughter could not satisfy its desires. The more resolute the human warriors like the one before it, the more intense the emotions they would emit when they fell!

Glancing sideways, warriors who had received the signal, their bodies trembling, looked back with sincere advice to their comrades from the same homeland.

"It's no use..." muttered the warrior still in the standard combat uniform of the military camp, one of the reconnaissance soldiers who had previously gone missing. His voice shook with endless fear, "It's no use, the True God will eventually rule the world, the entire world will submit to the Lord's will!"

All things must end, only fear is eternal.

"Bullshit!" Bai E sneered coldly, nocking an arrow and drawing the bowstring.

The Lord of Fear stood high on its throne, as if waiting for the futile struggles of mortals.

"Hum~"

"Hum~"

The arrows Bai E fired could pierce metal and split stones, yet to the Lord of Fear, they were like annoying mosquitoes that made a buzzing sound but never dared to get too close.

The attacks were completely ineffective, not even a hint of the expected resistance.

"It's no use..." another warrior trembled as he lifted his head, "The Lord is the one True God of this world..."

Bai E's brow furrowed slightly, but he made no sound.

With his limited knowledge, he believed that demons that manifested in the real world could be combatted.

Only Exorcism Essential Oil could cause true harm to them, but that did not mean ordinary resistance would have no effect—

Strength could repel, and flames could burn... Even without Exorcism Essential Oil, a sufficiently powerful warrior could ensure they weren't consumed by a demon.

The Exorcism Essential Oil was just the simplest means to force them back into higher dimensions.

At this moment, it shouldn't be like this...

The attacks shouldn't be ineffective; even the top-tier Four Great Demon Gods manifesting in the world shouldn't be able to completely ignore all attacks.

Bai E's gaze inadvertently swept around before settling on himself.

Quietly contemplating, he looked inward with a focused expression.

It was... "faith."

Chapter 216 Plan to Defeat the Enemy

Even with the courage to strike at demons, the awe for the unknown realm he harbored made himself an "prey" in the authority of the other, or rather, a Believer.

Because he feared his attacks would be ineffective, the attacks were certain to fail...

This was a trap Bai E himself hardly noticed.

So... should he hypnotize himself?

The Lord of Fear gave Bai E no time to think.

Any impulsive emotions required a continuous onslaught of facts; once humans had time to think calmly, their so-called "wisdom," "morality"... would allow them to gradually slip from control.

With feet like bird's claws, he stepped down from the throne of bones, the exposed blood-red muscle without skin emitted a strong scent of blood.

Bai E cautiously retreated.

Not knowing what the adversary wanted to do, not knowing his mode of attack...

Every unknown brought panic, and worse still, Bai E, despite being mentally alert to these points, was unable to control his descent into the confusion of the unknown.

Fear is faith...

Even he... had become nourishment for the other's growth.

"Boom!"

The Lord of Fear erupted suddenly with a plain attack, and a punch felt like being run over by a truck.

Bai E's body instantly flew backward, and on landing, he knelt and slid back several meters on the ground.

By the time Bai E finally stopped, his hands were planted on the ground, blood running from the corners of his mouth, his mouth filled with a sweet, metallic taste.

Pain!

Excruciating pain!

Every inch of his flesh felt as if it were being pricked by needles, Bai E's fingertips dug hard into the ground, almost driven mad by the humanly unbearable pain.

The Lord of Fear's strength seemed to carry an assault targeted precisely at the flesh, turning the fear he collected into a tangible poison, infusing all of it evenly into Bai E's body with that punch.

Spiritual Energy's power tainted reality, and even "self-restraint" couldn't suppress such pain, as it was more than just a pure hormonal emotion.

"It's no use... all your resistance is in vain, only by entering the Lord's embrace can you find complete peace," the voice of the earlier scout still advised from a distance.

Bai E bent over, his head down, biting down hard on his teeth, feeling the gradually adapting pain.

Hearing another's voice, a gritty breath came from the shadows, "Enter His embrace... like you, jittery and unable to stop?"

No! Absolutely not!

The pain caused his muscles to spasm unconsciously, almost uncontrollably.

Although he was slowly getting used to it, the pain was fading too slowly.

The body... the body...

Extreme Pain Relief!

A skill obtained from the Blood God!

[Extreme Pain Relief: You have learned the ability to numb your senses. From now on, at the cost of temporarily losing "tactile sense," you can completely ignore all the pain you feel, and maintain optimal combat condition until your body suffers widespread damage. Maximum duration: 1 hour, exceeding the limit may result in permanent loss of function in parts of the body.

Cooldown time: 24 hours after closing the skill effect.]

Every warrior lucky enough to survive countless battlefields must learn this ability to disregard pain and continue fighting.

Only then can they fight with abandon, exhausting their last drop of blood!

"Cough~ cough~"

With the pain entirely blocked out and unable to feel his outer skin as if anesthetized, Bai E struggled to his feet, his will no longer affected by pain, and his thinking back to normal.

Such speed...

Such strength...

The demon, grown powerful from absorbing countless fears, was this formidably strong!

Indeed... the Blood God had only acquired a portion of the power bestowed by demons and displayed such terrifying battle might, and if it weren't for the sharp decline in his strength after his night vision goggles were knocked off, the outcome of their battle might have been in question.

Now facing the demon itself, it should be even harder to defeat.

But demons in the real world too must speak with their strength.

In this world, even with an irrational element like Spiritual Energy, swords, guns, and firearms are still the absolute rulers!

Battle is the only melody of the world!

With a fierce spit of bloody, sweet-tinged, viscous saliva, Bai E moved his arms.

If he could overcome the mountain that was the Blood God, then he could also overcome this demon who wielded fear.

Let's see!

Let's see if the skills I possess today can earn me a chance against you!

Hands forming palms, crossed in front of his chest.

The power of the Lord of Fear was several notches above that of the Blood God, but that figure, similar to humans, had some commonalities with humans in terms of combat skills.

Refined techniques were Bai E's confidence against his opponent.

After defeating the Blood God, his Combat Specialization Layer leveled up out of nowhere.

Level 5 Combat Specialization! Plus all the attribute enhancements that came with the rise in combat specialization layers.

Added to that are abilities like "Overlimit Drive," "Instant Kill Hundred Heads," and defensive ones like "Regeneration Blood," "Resist Death," and "Absolute Defense."

Bai E had never felt as strong as he did now, his real and substantial abilities were the necessary prerequisites to face this world with courage.

Watching the human warrior who had managed to stand up again right in front of him, the Lord of Fear's thick, purple-red lips slightly flattened, "You can still get up?"

...

...

On the vehicle halted in the wilderness, soldiers were waking up one by one, and as they gradually freed themselves from those nightmarish delusions, the chilly and debilitating sensation in their limbs was also slowly fading away.

They were gradually regaining some of their mobility.

"Wonder how he's doing?"

"There must be a demon inside... those lowlifes summoned a demon!"

"Can you move yet? Maybe we should send one vehicle back to the barracks to report the situation here, and get those professional executors from the Arbitration Place..."

"But brother B27 is still inside... We have no idea how he's faring."

"Should we go back in and check?"

As time gently soothed the scars, the soldiers who had awoken from the murky, nightmarish scenes that they could not clearly recall were almost ready to forget the suffocating terror they had felt before... just like anyone who wakes up from a nightmare in the middle of the night, time heals all.

They felt they could move again...

The fastest-acting soldier even reached out to slide open the vehicle's side door, when suddenly a spinning, topsy-turvy sensation surged up, and boundless darkness once again enshrouded his world...

"Bang!"

"Bang!"

The sound of a fist striking flesh was the first to echo in the soldier's mind.

As if growing accustomed to the darkness, the soldier's incorporeal eyes began to "see" clearly what was happening in the dark—a sphere covered in arms like a spiky ball was mercilessly slaughtering the brave soldier over and over again.

The demon moved with such speed that it seemed to teleport, easily appearing behind B27 every time he was knocked down.

The soldier who had vowed to free them entirely from their terrifying plight was now in such a dire state it seemed as if he would die at any moment, his body so battered it was nearly impossible to find an inch of unmarred skin, his lip corner smeared with bruised blood mixed with mud...

It was evident he was trying hard to resist every attack from the "demon," but the combat stance he adopted was always obliterated by an irrational force.

"Kneel down!"

"Quick, kneel down!"

In the dark dungeon, the oppressive mass of heads came together in a single voice, chanting a deep tone that was foolish and terrifying.

For some reason, the soldier inside the vehicle felt as though he had turned into one of them.

'Kneel down...'

He firmly suppressed the urge to cry out as such.

He looked with hope at the solitary point of light in this darkness.

To flee? Or to fight back?

He didn't know.

He didn't know what he wanted to see...

He just wanted to see a glimmer of hope.

To see a ray of hope that humans could counterattack the demon.

"Bang!"

The flash of the pistol in the darkness was brief as the beaten soldier unexpectedly counterattacked in midair.

The flame from the primer surged and propelled the bullet out of the chamber, the spinning bullet tearing through the air, leaving a searing trail in its path!

"Snap~"

The bullet hit the demon's crimson chest, sinking millimeters deep in an imperceptible fashion, then the forceless bullet fell to the ground...

Still no effect.

However, looking down at the shot on his chest, the demon's eyes showed a flicker of panic...

How could this be?

How could this be?

Could it be that despite being beaten down like this, he still believed he could defeat him?!

The very thought of this terrifying possibility triggered the Lord of Fear into instant action, his silhouette flickered, and in an instant, he appeared before Bai E as he landed.

"Boom!"

Two arms, even sturdier than those of a Blood God, crashed down powerfully, the demon no longer attempting to subdue this human warrior who was so difficult to break mentally.

"Snap!"

The punches, were they blocked?

"Haven't you noticed?"

Bai E crouched into a high stance, bracing the demon's fists that came smashing down, slowly raising his bowed head, his eyes ablaze with golden flames.

Rage surged!

[Rage Surge: Your rage is endless, the flames of anger drive your body, from now on, the "anger" emotion you feel will boost your "reflections," up to a maximum of +3 in combat performance.]

The Lord of Fear possessed no great technique, merely relying on the countless sacrifices of fearful emotions to attain unimaginable speed and strength.

Bai E, who had been attacked countless times, had long grasped his attack patterns and frequency.

If he were willing, he could certainly give as good as he got with the full force of his current power.

But, he had to make sure his plan was absolutely successful!

The pitiful-looking Bai E smiled lightly, the corners of his mouth slowly widening into an increasingly manic grin.

"From just now, I haven't attacked you once..."

Chapter 217 If you feel afraid...

"Because I'm afraid..."

I'm afraid you coward wouldn't dare to share our battle situation with everyone!

Saying that we must free all comrades from the enemy's control isn't just lip service!

Now, everyone should be able to see it, right!

His Gun Fighting Skill activated instantly, and Bai E, with a pistol clenched in his mouth, performed a flip kick and propelled himself into the air.

While midair, Bai E sheathed his gun.

The dexterity of his manual skills allowed him to perform all these intricate movements with remarkable agility.

He drew his bow in the air, his fingers quickly locating the specially marked arrow in the quiver on his back.

Drawing the bow, nocking the arrow...

Instant Kill Hundred Heads!

Ninefold power!

Shoot!

Under one arrow, several afterimages followed closely, and almost transcending time, the arrow struck precisely into the chest of the master of fear, muscled and brawny.

"Puchi!"

The arrowhead buried deep, unmatched in sharpness.

Ever since he realized the problem, he had always been able to hurt the opponent; it was just that he feared letting the enemy discern this and had thus never taken the initiative to attack.

With "Absolute Defense" at his disposal, Bai E didn't mind playing along with the enemy's act.

Following closely behind the arrowhead was a sizzling smoke, spreading from the point where the arrow had penetrated the flesh, akin to the hissing of roasting meat.

The arrowhead of that particular arrow had been completely soaked in Exorcism Essential Oil by Bai E before arriving at this final dungeon.

[Exorcism Essential Oil (99ml): Apply by smearing or soaking to bestow weaponry capable of striking demonic flesh with astonishing Spiritual Energy power! Upon hitting the demon's body, the weapon will inflict irreversible damage. (Note: The empowering effect lasts for a maximum of 2 hours, beyond which it dissipates.)]

"Puchi!"

The master of fear violently yanked the steel arrow from his chest; in his absolute strength, the arrow instantaneously bent.

In the gap left where the arrow was pulled out, a light green gas continued to erode His body like sulfuric acid, leaving behind an unwoundable gap under the faint white smoke.

Bai E stood his ground, his voice echoing calmly, "So, you can be hurt after all?"

All his displays of weakness were to achieve this moment.

To defeat a demon that draws power from fear, one must first sever its source of power.

The moment Bai E started bringing each teammate back, experiencing their individual nightmare illusions, he surmised all that the demon required.

Emotions are temporary; the half-real, half-illusory visions that lack logic cannot immerse someone indefinitely.

To continuously enhance His power, He needed to occasionally expose those intelligent beings under His dominion to new levels of fear stimulation.

A once-daring and arrogant challenger repeatedly hitting a wall under absolute power, conquered in despair and pain by Him, would undoubtedly instill shared fear in other humans.

This demon that reigns over fear wouldn't miss any chance to sow seeds of terror; it's His authority, His instinct.

But now... He is not invincible.

"You too can be hurt... you're just an ordinary demon..." Bai E slouched, using time to heal his wounds, laughing coldly.

Whether his attack can affect the opponent depends on whether he has unwittingly been included within the enemy's dominion of fear.

But after completely examining his heart, casting away any possible emotions of fear and worry, certain "real" elements began to emerge.

The master of fear's power, truly immense, is powered by the transformed Spiritual Energy from the multitude of refugees' emotions of fear, greatly strengthened His physical body.

Even if his attacks could effectively hit, he would still not be a match for the opponent's strong power and speed, alone at the end.

Without breaking the terror "worship" of all refugees, including his teammates, towards this demon, it would be difficult to truly defeat Him.

When was this plan set?

From the first time He targeted me specifically!

The first step is to take away the faith from His hands!

"Thinking of shutting off the link?" Bai E laughed coldly, "My companions are not foolish idiots; to cut off the link now would only prove your own insecurity."

The master of fear, initially intent on shutting off the visual link shared with the human warriors outside, suddenly dismissed the thought.

"Then... kill me!"

Bai E raised his bow, his voice resounding through the cavern, "After killing me, continue your false reign. The beings under your rule will engulf the entire territory of the human empire, and the new fifth Demon God begins His step from here!"

If He could start from this cave and gradually erode every human city until truly bringing all of humanity into fear of Him, perhaps His power could indeed rival the legendary Four Demon Gods.

In that high-dimensional space of pure "intelligent beings' thoughts" known as Spiritual Energy space, as long as there are enough "believing" thoughts, anything is possible.

But Bai E won't give Him that chance.

Every word he utters, contains a trap!

"Whoosh!"

The arrow tore through the air, with double power.

In a bleak space, an isolated human launched a lone resistance against the high and mighty demon.

"Swoosh!"

The afterimage flashed by, and the demon's claw, made of red muscles, grasped the arrow that shot toward it.

Without the "Instant Kill Hundred Heads" driven to its maximum extent, it was very difficult to match its speed and strength.

"You're right..."

The Lord of Fear spread its wings, its body rising into the air as it stretched its arms with relish, as if embracing something.

Its voice was deep and hoarse, as if numerous layers of resonance rose at the same time, exploding directly in the heart, easily stirring the heartbeats.

"Thud!"

"Thud!"

The heart was pounding violently, as if drumming directly on the eardrum.

"Kneel down now!"

"The true God is angry."

The scout from before was prostrate on the ground in an instant, trembling violently.

The wrath of the Lord of Fear, like a tsunami, instantly engulfed every heart connected by fear, making all the humans in the cave instantly remember the most terrifying nightmares.

Even a soldier in a vehicle on the ground lost himself in this burst of fear.

Those different terrifying illusions once again dragged them into a void of fantasy, as if the haziness between half-awake and half-asleep made it difficult for them to focus enough attention on guarding their own minds.

The emotions of fear that erupted instantly transformed into tangible power, like rivers flowing into the sea, merging into the body of the Lord of Fear, who was suspended in midair.

The powerful aura surged out violently, and even the space in the cave seemed to carry a hazy sense of fluctuation as if dissolving into a higher-dimensional space.

The thick demon's claw suddenly clenched tight, and the fine steel arrow in its hand turned to dust in an instant.

Feeling the power raging and surging inside it, the Lord of Fear, with its head up and eyes closed, slowly opened its eyes, its gaze coldly locking on the distant Bai E.

"You do indeed deserve to die..."

Any change in emotions requires a gradual process. To gain the same power growth, one needs layered and progressive emotional fluctuations.

Stimulating the fear memories deep in the hearts of living beings can't be used without limits, and every use is like overexerting the total emotional change that each individual can provide in the future.

But to capture this only variable with absolute power, all of it is worth it!

"As long as I kill you..."

"You're wrong..." Bai E took out the small glass bottle from his arms and bit open the cork with his mouth.

In the midst of intense heartbeats and howling winds, his lone voice resounded boldly, "Do you know... I actually quite like this era."

"Even with so much suffering, they continue to live bravely."

"Even when facing unknown dangers, some are willing to sacrifice themselves to create new living spaces for humanity."

"They confront the whole world with their tiny bodies, courage being the only thing they can proudly wield."

As he bit open the cork, Bai E took out all the remaining arrows from the quiver on his back with his other hand.

"Do you think I'm that special one?"

"You're wrong."

"Kill one of me, and there will be thousands, millions more."

"After I die, everyone can be me..."

"You think you can make humanity surrender, but I believe they will eventually break free from your control."

The slightly viscous yellowish liquid dripped from the bottle, soaking the arrows.

Bai E's eyes swept over the group of prostrate people on the ground, his voice passionate and assertive.

"My brothers and sisters, if you're scared, just open your mouth wide."

"If you want to make a sound, then call my name."

"Bai E! Remember this name!"

"As long as the sound of arrows piercing the wind continues, as long as gunfire flashes before your eyes, it means I haven't fallen!"

"I will be here, always here!"

The yellowish Exorcism Essential Oil appeared to be a tangible liquid, but this substance, being between Spiritual Energy and material form, would not truly flow like water over the arrows and onto the ground.

They flowed like real life, instinctively enveloping every corner of the arrowhead the moment they made contact.

The arrows, now with spirits attached, exhibited a faint glow under the occasional focus of consciousness.

Bai E's voice continued, invading the hearts of those humans sinking into dark fear.

"Even if, I fall here today, then in the gunfire that reappears in the future..."

"It means I have come back!"

Bai E nocked an arrow, making a light decision in his mind.

[Payment: 2 Latent Points, 1,000 Combat Experience Points.]

[Skill Acquired—Powerful Shot.]

[Powerful Shot: You shoot an arrow that transcends the ordinary, which will not veer off course or stop for any reason until it reaches maximum range; the kinetic impact of this strike is doubled, the piercing attack power is doubled, but the power reduces by 10% after passing through each target, dropping to a minimum of 60% (used in combination with "Special Attribute—Wind Fixing," it forms "Special Skill—Piercing Wind Breaker").

Cost: 3 Spiritual Energy points (30 Action Power Reserves) per use.]

"Wanting to control humanity with fear..."

"Do you think you're worthy?"

Chapter 218: Belief

Bai E swallowed another No. 3 energy strip in his mouth.

Even though the efficiency of recovering energy reserves would slow down a lot with the massive use of this substance in a short time, it was still better than not replenishing at all.

As Bai E gained more abilities that required the use of energy reserves or Spiritual Energy, even with the No. 3 energy strips, his reserves were increasingly insufficient.

The need for Spiritual Energy was urgent, yet the most hopeful clue to its acquisition lay with that young lady from the Elf Race.

He had no idea when he would genuinely acquire the legendary ability of Spiritual Energy.

A fleeting thought crossed his mind, and Bai E's gaze became resolute.

[Activate "Power Shot".]

Piercing Wind Breaker quickly gathered strength.

"Swish!"

The arrow, wrapped in a fierce wind, stirred up waves within the cave.

Refugees close to the arrow's flight path were easily knocked down by the wind, and the sky-full of whirlwinds eventually converged at the bloody, muscular chest of E, the Master of Fear, and drilled in.

With undiminished force, the arrow pierced through layers of rock, disappearing to who knows where.

[Trigger "Piercing Wind Breaker"! Successful penetration of the target's defense, long-range weapon mastery experience +3.]

E, the Master of Fear, stared dumbfounded at the spot where he had just moved, unbelievably observing the wound pierced by the arrow, with white smoke slowly drifting from it...

Completely transpierced.

The windstorm caught the attention of some refugees who were blown about.

Without permission, they dared not lift their heads.

But as their bodies were helplessly tossed around, the scene glimpsed by those brief flashes of surprise firmly embedded itself in their minds...

"An arrow never aims directly at the target's current location," Bai E said softly.

In the recent exchanges, although Bai E had not counterattacked, he had already figured out the opponent's pattern of action.

The power and speed of E, the Master of Fear, were undoubtedly exceptional, but his skill... leaves much to be desired.

Straightforward, with no frills.

"Is this the power you claim can conquer the world?"

Bai E spoke with scorn, knowing that the outcome of the battle did not rest on him.

It lay... with all the refugees present.

He had to give them confidence!

"If you can't even deal with me, how will you face the world?"

"Swish~"

"Swish~"

Two arrows, like fish, split in two different directions, both shooting towards the opponent.

Without using the skills "Power Shot" or "Instant Kill Hundred Heads", the speed of the arrows was not fast to E, the Master of Fear, and those demonic pupils could even see clearly the trajectories of the two arrows coming from the dark.

In fact, even if the arrows hit, the Spiritual Energy attached to them would only cause limited harm to Him now.

Those unhealable wounds could only do so much.

Compared to the powerful soul energy He had absorbed, the Spiritual Energy coming from the arrows was but a drop in the ocean.

But being continuously hit would surely reignite the confidence of those already shaken humans.

He must dodge... them.

"Swish swish~"

In the moment of dodging, two arrows instantly changed direction, drawing a large arc, hitting His body from different directions at the same time.

[Trigger "Double Shot", "Arcing Strike"! Successful hit on the target, long-range weapon mastery experience +3.]

The arrows didn't penetrate deep into the flesh, and no white vapor emerged...

The previous two arrows were just a test of the efficacy of the Exorcism Essential Oil. Realizing the actual harm the legendary oil, capable of truly injuring demons, could inflict was limited, Bai E didn't waste any more.

It might not be that the oil was too ineffective, but rather that the Spiritual Energy continuously replenished itself from the endless fear emotions transformed into His power.

Without cutting off His source, it would also be a waste to shoot out all the arrows anointed with the oil.

For the same reason, Bai E didn't use his last few dozen energy reserve points on output like "Power Shot" and "Instant Kill Hundred Heads".

Before truly knocking down the opponent, he first needed enough time for the refugees' hearts to ferment with vigor.

All he had to do was not truly fall before that fermentation was complete!

But even ordinary attacks, ordinary arrows, could still penetrate three inches into the flesh upon hitting.

"Pfft~"

E, the Master of Fear, pulled out the two arrows lodged in his front and back, his emotions a mix of shock and fear.

It had begun! The emotions supplied by those humans were starting to wane!

Although the extent was small, they were indeed dwindling!

He had to finish Him off! He had to do it quickly!

"Boom!"

"Snap!"

With his arms crossed in front as a shield over his chest, Bai E did his best to mitigate some of the force using his body's strongest parts, yet he was still blasted away in an instant.

The recently unleashed power of E, the Master of Fear's demonic strength, was fierce and unmatched, something he could not currently contend with.

Even though he had activated "Absolute Defense", he still felt a tightness in his chest.

"Extreme Pain Reliever" indeed cut off the pain, but symptoms like suffocation and numbness still persisted.

As Bai E was sent flying back, with no time to care about his breathlessness, he still struggled to adjust his center of gravity midair to land smoothly because...

The attack from E, the Master of Fear, would arrive right at the moment of his landing.

...

Inside the vehicle, You furrowed her brows hard, desperately resisting the illusion that made her feel despair.

She knew this was a demon's trick, but emotions never listen to reason.

The only glimmer within her rational mind was the figure who was facing the demon alone.

If she was afraid, she could call out his name...

"Bai... E..."

Her weak voice called out intermittently and softly.

"Bai E..."

There were other soldiers also voicing out in the agony of their torment.

"Bai E..."

The voices became gradually clearer.

"Bai E!"

...

"Bang!"

Bai E, merely knocked back, wiped the blood from the corner of his mouth and looked defiantly toward the Lord of Fear ahead, "What's wrong? Getting slower? Weaker too? You're weakening, aren't you?"

The Lord of Fear looked around to find several sneaky glances peering from the darkness.

The noise from the prolonged battle had proven one fact—

The demon feared by everyone seemed not as powerful as imagined.

"How dare you look at me!"

The demon's low growl swept across the field like a storm, and the bodies of all the refugees present began to levitate slowly into the air, just as the first refugee who had been absorbed did at the start.

The uncontrollable reality and the fear of their unknown destinies made these refugees once again recall the Lord of Fear's power.

Indeed... perhaps a few elite humans could maintain their combat stance when facing the Lord of Fear, but they were just ordinary people.

Their power was limited...

Their will was not strong...

They couldn't do it...

Eyes dimmed...

"You can do it!"

"Bang bang bang!"

The sound of pistol shots suddenly overtook the howling wails that haunted the atmosphere.

Bai E's voice shone alone in the hollow cave.

"Every one of us can do it! The reason It can do all this is because you believe It can."

"Abandon your fear of It..."

"It's useless..." The Lord of Fear's thick lips curved into a sinister smirk as he reached out his hand, and the demon's claw clenched in the void.

It was like fish out of water, like air being instantly sucked away.

The refugees floating mid-air curled up in agony at once, gasping in their throats, choking in this dim world.

"They will never break free in their lifetime..."

"Heh~"

Bai E sneered coldly, recalling the key that was most central.

He remembered the fleeting visions of fear from the refugees when he first attempted to escape by car.

Yes... that was their most profound fear.

Of their fates... of their futures...

"My fellow kinsfolk, I know what you're worried about."

"This world will not be forever shrouded in darkness."

"I have come to take you back into human society."

"No one will ostracize you again, no one will bully you again."

"You will live in a garden flowing with flowers and honey, no longer wandering misfits for the sake of existence."

"My name is Bai E."

"Remember my name!"

"I promise to give you a land of life! No one can take that away from your hands anymore!"

"Perhaps life throws a few tough trials at us, but please always believe..."

"When you're too weary to fight the currents, there will always be someone who sees your efforts and extends a saving branch."

"I will try my utmost to reach out for you."

"But also please..."

"Believe in me just once..."

...

"Bai... E..."

Someone hissed through gritted teeth.

"Bai... E..."

Another followed in confusion.

"Snap~"

"Snap~"

Among the multitude of struggling bodies suspended in mid-air, suddenly two fell thunderously to the ground.

The boy and girl looked around in bewilderment as they landed; their fellow kinsmen still hung in the air... had they come down?

Clutching their chests... they no longer felt the suffocating sensation.

Am I... free?

Bai E's voice was steadfast from afar, "You can do it, It's merely manifested from your fears. You should be Its master!"

Just like the question of whether an attack would be effective or not, the authority over one's body can only be relinquished if one "believes" the other can dominate their fate—it's an invisible covenant signed with destiny.

However, what truly lies within one's heart... can only be determined by oneself!

"Dad... Mom..."

"Uncle... Uncle..."

The young voices, though tender, bravely took the first step, "We can do it, we really can."

After summoning their courage, it was as if a cold sun rose within their darkened souls, dispelling all confusion and pain.

Apparently, fate would not leave them to a dead end after all.

The voices of the two young teenagers became another horn of defiance in the cave, aside from Bai E.

"Snap~ Snap~"

Watching more and more figures fall from mid-air, Bai E lit two flare sticks that pierced through the darkness, casually fixing them to the card buckle on his combat suit at the back.

They rose like two flags behind Bai E.

He notched an arrow to his bowstring, several arrows soaked in Exorcism Essential Oil reflecting the orange glow of the flare sticks.

"Impossible! It can't be!" The Lord of Fear's once insurmountable aura was rapidly withering, his eyes filled with disbelief as he watched body after body fall from the sky.

"They can't possibly do it!"

"Whether they can or not... is not for you to decide, nor for me," Bai E said coldly, laughing, "But you... it's time for you to disappear!"

Chapter 219: Expelled!

Fear can spread, and so can courage.

When a familiar companion took the lead as an example, it seemed not so difficult to break free from the demon's control.

More and more figures fell from their suspended state in mid-air, which meant that the reign of the Fear Lord over them had come to an end.

"Whoosh~"

"Whoosh~"

Arrows whistled through the wind, each one piercing through the chest.

Bai E had not used any techniques or abilities to enhance the penetration power, yet the drastically weakened body of the Fear Lord was clearly no longer able to withstand Bai E's arrows.

Of course, the penetrating power of the arrows themselves was secondary, the real damage was inflicted by the Exorcism Essential Oil that hit the wounds along with the arrows; these were the true protagonists causing harm.

The white smoke that dispersed seemed to contain countless tiny faces, screaming and wailing, as endless torrents of chaotic emotions transformed into the most disordered Spiritual Energy impacts, challenging even these high-dimensional, emotion-feeding demons to cope.

The resistance of the refugees weakened its power, the decline in power led to a reduced grip over the refugees... A vicious cycle reached its limit, and at a certain moment, all the refugees suspended in the air fell to the ground at once.

As the power converted from emotions receded like tide from that body, the desiccated demon's shell finally revealed the true form of a small demon.

The delayed combat information then slowly popped up on the panel—

[Using Exorcism Essential Oil on a specific target, your attack has 50% converted to special attack damage.]

[You deal 5 points of Spiritual Energy damage to the target!]

[Fear Lord (Demon) (Chaos) (Elite) (Weakened state): Health 9/100; Defensive Power 6; Trait: High-Dimensional Being...]

[High-Dimensional Being: High-dimensional beings do not truly perish in the material world, after their physical form in the material world sustains a catastrophic blow, their core will return to the high-dimensional space, where after absorbing enough power, they will hatch and be reborn again. How much of their memories from before the rebirth they retain depends on their "rank"...

Each death means they have drawn more experiences from the past.]

"I will come back! I will come back again!"

The small demon, with its shriveled reddish-brown muscles and less than one meter in height, stared venomously at the human who had brought about its downfall, as if to memorize his appearance for after its rebirth.

"You can't kill me! I will come back and bring you into the high-dimensional space, where your soul will suffer eternal torment!"

Bai E, expressionless, drew back his bowstring, and as he gathered power, strength converged upon the arrowhead, "Come a hundred times, and I'll kill you a hundred and one times!"

"Whoosh!"

As quick as lightning, an arrow pierced the chest.

[You deal 12 points of Spiritual Energy damage to the target!]

[Your attack exceeds the target's current physical tolerance, the target is about to be expelled.]

The space where the Fear Lord stood became indistinct in an instant, as if a misty mirror of light suddenly appeared behind it.

Almost no one could gaze at that area; the hazy feeling only brought dizziness and made heads spin. Even Bai E couldn't look directly at it.

Circling around the withered demon's body was a rapid swirl of air that did not blow a single person's clothes on the spot.

An even more brilliant flash of consciousness flickered past, and the emaciated body instantly shrank into a flesh egg and fell into the mirror behind it, disappearing completely as if sinking into a droplet of water.

The reverberations ebbed slowly, and the space gradually smoothed out the ripples.

[You have completely expelled the target, combat ends, gain 300 battle experience points.]

[Notice: Your actions have attracted the attention of an unknown existence!]

After a fleeting sense of palpitation, Bai E withdrew his gaze from that space.

Revenge?

Let it come!

Bai E lightly swept his gaze over the refugees who were still recovering their senses in the darkness and exhaled lightly, finally relaxing completely.

As the battle intent receded like the tide, the effects of skills like Absolute Defense and Maximum Pain Relief also vanished in an instant, and a sensation of soreness and numbness surged throughout his body and deep into his bones and marrow.

One hard fight after another, the battle with the Blood God had already pushed him to the limit, and facing the Fear Lord had been even more punishing. Even Bai E, who had survived numerous life-and-death battles, could not withstand the backlash of pushing his body to the limit, and he collapsed, barely maintaining a semblance of composure by leaning against the wall behind him.

"Hiss~"

Ouch~

...

Gone...

Completely gone...

The refugees who had yet to recover sprawled on the ground, stood up in a daze.

The familiar dark caverns seemed so alien now.

Without the writhing shadows in the corners, without creatures that might burst out of the darkness to devour them, even the sound of the wind above no longer seemed as terrifying as before.

The hollow feeling in the heart, as if something had been scooped out, had vanished, and so had the sense of caution where even a slightly louder noise could send shivers down the spine.

A warm current flowed through the body, as if the days of poverty and pain were gone forever.

All of this... it seemed to all stem from one belief.

Was it he who saved us?

Their gazes gradually focused, all looking in the same direction.

Two glowing light sticks in the dark illuminated a tiny space where the man who saved everything rested against the wall, one hand on his knee, his gaze fixed on the distance ahead... as if contemplating the future.

["Lucky Strike" charge +50.]

["Lucky Strike" charge has reached 120/100, ready for use!]

"M... Master."

An old and cautious voice sounded before him, Bai E blinked his eyes, snapping out of his reverie.

Facing the three figures, one large and two small before him, Bai E tried to smile as gently as possible at them, "Hello."

He looked intently at the two young children, a boy and a girl around fourteen or fifteen years old, both skinny and frail, covered in dirt, but with bright, spirited eyes...

Bai E was deeply impressed by them because it was these two children who had first mustered the courage to break free from the control of the Lord of Fear.

In any place, the power of a role model is always boundless, after all, he, an outsider, could never be as convincing as these two fellow tribespeople they knew well.

Without their initial resistance, whether the outcome would have been successful was questionable; even if he could ultimately drive away the Lord of Fear, his own situation would likely have become very dire.

"You were very brave just now... What are your names?"

If possible, Bai E even wanted to reach out and pat the boy's head, but unfortunately, he could not.

He was just too exhausted.

"Morphie."

"Kiro Lan."

The boy was more enthusiastic, while the girl was somewhat reserved.

Bai E nodded, "You did very well, you're heroes."

Receiving praise from the man they saw as "the strongest," the boy's face showed a visible delight, while the girl modestly bowed her head, seemingly reluctant to accept such sudden praise, "Actually... we didn't do much."

"Those who have the courage to face reality are all great."

Bai E explained with a smile, then he looked up at the refugee elder who had been waiting quietly.

"Are you their leader?"

Any group of more than three people, when living together for an extended period, almost always needs a leader who can make decisions on important matters.

These refugees, numbering at least four or five hundred, could never have left the city to live in isolation and survive without a unified will.

The elder nodded, his graying hair bearing the marks of time, and the wrinkles on his face as deep as valleys and gorges, "Yes."

After acknowledging his position, the elder seemed a bit nervous, rubbing his hands and speaking hesitantly, "Master, you said you would lead us... lead us to a new life?"

Those "flowery and honeyed" lives were far too ideal, so much that just speaking of them was difficult.

His only hope was to leave this cursed place.

Although the hearty mushrooms and occasional small animals they caught could barely sustain them, clothing, medicine, and other supplies were simply beyond the capability of these people who had left human society behind to produce by hand.

In the long run, they would not be able to survive, and the size of this group of refugees would only diminish.

Not to mention that mere survival has never been the sole requirement of humans.

A void in their spirits would only invite greater disaster.

They had already proven that once...

And now... it seemed like heaven could no longer bear to watch them suffer so much.

The reason the elder had quietly waited for the savior before him to finish speaking with the two children was that he wanted to see what kind of personality this godsent savior possessed.

Looking at him now, he seemed even more gentle and tolerant than the elder had imagined.

Below that calm composure lay an unfathomable depth of foundation.

The elder wondered how this savior would arrange for them.

"I wonder, Master... where do you come from?"

The elder spoke softly, utterly humbling himself, as his backbone had long since been shattered by endless suffering, leaving behind only the meekness of seeking a stable life for his companions.

Bai E did not reply immediately but continued to calmly look into the elder's eyes.

A silence prevailed until, confused, the elder raised his head to meet those brilliant eyes, like morning stars.

"Ma... Master?"

"You are no less than anyone else; remember that, do not belittle yourselves, do not choose to be humble. Those higher-dimensional beings are always watching the mortal world, waiting for every opportunity to invade. Never, become their tool."

The resignation of the rat people, the misery of the refugee community... were lessons for everyone to heed.

Perhaps he couldn't influence the overall situation of the city, but there was no problem speaking his mind to this group of refugees whom he had just saved.

"Yes..." The elder's voice paused, his countenance shifting to a more resolute tone, "Master!"

"I come from Blackwater City, I am a warrior..."

Only then did Bai E speak softly, revealing his origin.

After the adrenaline rush, it was time to confront the reality of the situation.

Chapter 220: The Origin of the Refugees

"...So, Lord, you say you came to escort us to the city following orders?"

Bai E nodded and said, "Yes."

A regular soldier from the army barracks was the one rescuing them from the grip of demons?

But could someone who dares to confront demons so directly and shines with the aura of a leader be just a regular soldier?

A formerly disgraced officer demoted for misconduct? Or was it merely a temporary retreat?

However, the fact that a city was willing to send someone to actively accept them was always good news.

The elder was advanced in years, seen much and knowledgeable, yet he had spent his entire life in the same wilderness oasis.

He had heard of cities but had never truly encountered one.

After being ostracized from the oasis, they had already lost faith in their kin; hearing that they could live in a city made them feel both lost and excited.

"Lord... what is a city like?" an eager boy asked, his eyes shining with anticipation.

"A city..." Bai E said with a distant look in his eyes, for he also did not know what it was like inside a city, but with the protection of the army barracks outside, people inside should certainly live more safely and comfortably, right?

"A city is a home surrounded by steel."

"And what about you, sir?" a girl piped up, her clear eyes fixed on Bai E's face, asking with a hint of hope.

"Me?" Bai E smiled at her, "I'm a soldier; I live outside in the army barracks."

The girl's eyes lit up, "Then can I go to the barracks?"

"The barracks are for fighting; you should focus on living well."

Other places Bai E didn't know, but at least in Blackwater City, according to the information he had—

With the consumption of artificial humans, the pressure to conscript from natural humans wasn't large.

Even if Kiro Lan were to enter the barracks, she would most likely learn to become a qualified nurse just like Mashati whom they had met before.

But if not necessary, there was no need to enlist.

Bai E just smiled and explained, "However, it will be your own choice. I just received orders to take you back. Maybe once in the city, you'll find a more interesting life waiting for you."

"So we can join the barracks if we want?" the girl seemed somewhat insistent.

Bai E spread his hands helplessly, "If you volunteer, you probably can, but that's not up to me."

Having received her answer, the girl didn't press further, "Understood, sir..."

"As for you..." Bai E addressed them after calming their emotions, "Where are you from, and how many are you?"

This was related to making judgments about the refugees' background and planning the relocation.

"We come from Jinshuizhou Town..." The elder spoke softly about their group's origins.

A simple issue of resources.

The capacity of a wilderness oasis to sustain a population is finite, and with the population swelling, natural selection inevitably filters out the weaker individuals.

This group before him was one that had been filtered out.

The process was inconsequential now; fortunately, they were still alive... covers it.

"When we left, we were six hundred and thirty-one; now, there are only four hundred and seventeen left." As he spoke, the elder glanced back at the body drained by the demon, excluding it from the count.

"Four hundred and some..." Bai E mused softly. The number was almost double what he had initially been informed.

However, as long as these people were willing to cooperate, moving two hundred or four hundred people did not differ fundamentally in difficulty.

"Zzzz~"

Having broadly understood the situation, Bai E heard the voice of his teammate through the earpiece; the determined tone of Ying, as if regaining strength, "Bai E, how are things on your end?"

While slowly regaining the ability to act during the wait, those who had stayed in the vehicle had already rationally analyzed their current situation.

Out of rationality, they needed to send someone back to the barracks to report the situation here.

A demon invading the real world was a serious matter, something only the professionals at the Heretical Arbitration House could handle.

And out of emotion, they didn't want to see their brother Bai E fighting alone.

Especially after having shared the real-time images inside the den with the demon, they felt even more anxious.

But it seemed that the Bai E had discovered the demon's weakness and valiantly started to resist; the following events were beyond their observation.

The demon, needing more strength, actively stimulated the seeds of fear in their hearts, causing their consciousness to fall into a haze.

The images shared by the demon in their minds ended unnoticed while they struggled against the void and darkness. When they tried to recall, they found their memory blurred by the struggle and fear, making it impossible to clearly remember all the details.

Only their trust in a particular name was deeply rooted in their hearts—

Bai E.

Invoking this name in despair as if it truly brought warm salvation.

So, when everyone awoke once more from the terrifying illusion in their minds, Ying immediately contacted Bai E.

"My side?" Bai E glanced again at those refugees slowly regaining their senses, watching them huddle together in the dark to soothe their inner scars, he smiled and replied, "All is well."

"Good!" Ying's voice was buoyant, "We're coming in."

"Oh, and..." Bai E remembered something and spoke as a reminder, "Bring some food in."

"Alright."

After ending the conversation, Ying looked excitedly at the other warriors, "He's fine."

Everyone's situation was generally the same; the images shared by the demon only stayed on the moment when Bai E was fighting alone.

Then, a surge of emotions not their own forcefully welled up, threatening to drown them. Despite everyone's cautious resistance, at some point they vaguely lost track of the shared images.

When they snapped back to their senses, the images shared by the demon had already ended.

"Looks like Bai E drove away the demon?"

"Really... impressive."

The captain of Squad 2, his face flushed with shame, looked at Ying and said, "We owe it to Bai E from your team again this time. Otherwise, we would have been trapped here."

A soldier in the corner buried his face, not daring to meet anyone's gaze, 'On the way here, I told him he could call me when it's dangerous...'

What Bai E had advised before departing to be cautious proved to be correct. Unfortunately, even with utmost caution, it seemed to be in vain in this place.

There were no sudden attacks, no external threats.

The real danger came from within.

The Tiger Squad didn't split up, yet the heart of each member became an isolated island.

Except for Bai E...

It was said that this brother had performed remarkably well in the spiritual domain of the Bug Race's overlord in their nest, but since they were in the reserve echelon at that time, they didn't experience the feat that saved more than four hundred people.

Now it seems that if the spiritual energy domain of that Bug Race overlord had been as strong as what they were experiencing now, Bai E's achievements from that battle would have been unimaginable.

"Do we go in now?" a soldier maintained his skepticism, "He might not have really driven away the demon. Those scouts that disappeared before also became the demon's minions, right? His words now could also be a trap guided by the demon, hoping to lure us all back."

Faced with an enemy like the demon, which they did not understand, any assumption extended toward the most extreme direction.

"I don't think it's likely," Song Ying glanced at the speaking soldier, "Bai E has never let anyone down. He will definitely not become the demon's minion."

"But none of us present were able to avoid the demon's invasion. How could he be the only one? I find it hard not to believe this is a trap set by the demon."

"Don't forget, he was the one who saved us."

"I could have woken up on my own without his help." He recovered the fastest among all the soldiers who had stayed in the vehicle, and that was the source of his confidence that he was no worse than anyone else.

His teammate tugged at the corner of his clothes and whispered, "If it had been a trap from the start, then Bai E wouldn't have needed to rescue all of us from the cave."

The skeptical soldier looked earnestly at his teammate, "You should know, even on the Bug Race battlefield, he wasn't the only one who could move in and out of the frontline. But now, he is the only one who has resisted the demon's spiritual corruption. Don't you have the slightest doubt?"

The driver responsible for operating the vehicle hesitated before speaking, "I tried it once on the battlefield of the Bug Race..."

"That's because you couldn't handle it." The eyebrows of the skeptical soldier remained calm, "I don't mean to target anyone, but when we are on a mission, we need to be as cautious as possible."

"..."

Everyone present was an elite.

Every elite was proud.

They found it hard to believe that anyone else could easily resist and even counter something they themselves couldn't withstand.

The skeptical soldier's words didn't sound very pleasant, but they did have some merit.

"How about we leave some people in the vehicle?"

The captain of Squad 1 nodded, "Alright, let's do that. Ka Ruigan, you go with Ying's and the other squad to take some food to those refugees."

"Okay."

"No problem."

Both squad captains agreed without hesitation.

...

Within the cave, the five scouts who had gone missing earlier had also woken up from that terrible state, and Bai E had deliberately asked elders to call them over.

He wanted to gather more information from them.

But now... these former elite soldiers seemed to be in a poor mental state.

Bai E's gaze swept over the derelict and grim expressions on their faces.

They were sharper than the ordinary refugees, but perhaps that was why they had been targeted more specifically by the demon.

"The two photographs in your hands were left by me, but actually, after leaving that information, I regretted it," one of the soldiers confessed regretfully. He was one of the first scouts to arrive here.

Unlike the ordinary refugees, their faith had been completely destroyed after being immersed in fear of the demon for a long time.

Even after the demon had been driven away, their mental state could not return to its previous vigor.

"I had the same experience as you all. After I woke up from the illusion and escaped the cave, it felt like I left a piece of my heart behind, and I wanted to pick it back up..." As he spoke, the soldier's eyes suddenly reddened, and he abruptly bowed his head to cover his eyes, a choking sob squeezing through his palms, "But I... I never expected it to turn out like this."

He felt as if he was done for.

Even after most of the refugees had bravely taken their first step in rebellion, he still couldn't shake off the demon's control.

Had the demon, whose power had fallen to a certain level, not been directly driven back to a higher-dimensional space by Bai E, he feared he would still be a pawn in the demon's hands.

"It's all in the past." Bai E was quite helpless and could only offer weak words of consolation, "It's all in the past. Actually..."

Bai E looked at the less than favorable mental state of the few scouts in front of him and still asked resolutely, "I want to know, during the entire process of being controlled by the demon, what exactly were you feeling?"

Although asking them to recall those unbearable memories might be torturous, Bai E had to probe their wounds in order to learn more information.

And there were some questions that had to be asked before the arrival of their comrades, especially since they involved the Exorcism Essential Oil he used. The origin of this stuff... was not so easy to explain.