

Great Master 331

Chapter 331: Attitude in the Shadows!

Arthur had three main reasons for involving the "Bandage Swordsman."

First, to make his own injury appear more realistic — only if an accident occurred while "guiding Lost Souls" could the rumors of his injury be substantiated.

Otherwise, it would be impossible for him to lose control of the secret technique, letting the "Bandage Swordsman" appear.

And with some subsequent searching, the second objective could be achieved —

Alert Line!

In the upcoming "Swordsmanship Finals" across the whole South County, Arthur had already laid hidden alert lines involving Jimte and Kalal.

There was no reason not to lay one in South Los as well.

None?

Then create one.

When he had Malz and Wiggins start to actively inquire about and search for the "Bandage Swordsman," such action couldn't possibly escape the notice of others.

Naturally, this would lead to speculation.

At that time, letting the "Bandage Swordsman" collaborate a bit might just produce unexpected effects.

And the third?

The "Book of Death"!

Arthur hoped to use the "Bandage Swordsman's" noted interest in the "Sank family incident" to lure out Old Sunk — according to the notes, Old Sunk "died."

But who seriously keeps a diary?

With a cautious mindset, Arthur suspected this was Old Sunk's precaution against the Sank family's arrangements.

Just look at what William had gained from the Sank family!

"Soul Extraction Technique," "Soul Control Technique," "Soul Absorption Technique"!

This doesn't at all resemble a "Hunter Family."

It's more akin to a true "Black Wizard Family."

Moreover, considering the activities of "witch hunting" back then, Arthur was beginning to suspect the "Sank Family" might be pawns of certain "Black Wizards."

He, a newcomer, had already noticed something amiss.

How could the well-informed Old Sunk not have noticed?

Perhaps, this old hunter was merely going along with the mistakes.

And even if Old Sunk had truly died, Gilbert from the trio back then was still alive, and he likely knew the contents of the "Book of Death" as well.

Of course, even without any gains, it didn't matter.

This was merely acting on an opportunity.

If there were gains, it would be a pleasant surprise.

If not, then he would just keep searching patiently.

Thinking this, Arthur once again felt the onset of sleepiness.

This time, Arthur didn't resist the urge to sleep again.

And the influence of the "Orange Cat Ritual" combined with the influences of the "Serpent of Death.Thin.Cripple" Bloodline, almost the moment his head touched the pillow, Arthur fell asleep.

Just as Arthur's deep breathing sounds began, a pigeon landed in a town thirty kilometers away from South Los.

The round-the-clock manned pigeon room immediately rushed towards the manor in South Town.

"Lord, there is an urgent message from South Los."

The old butler's words instantly woke Lord Lisop.

This nearly 60-year-old Lord abruptly rose from bed, his upper body bare and without a trace of excess fat, muscular and marked with numerous scars from knives, swords, and firearms, which added an intense ferocity that belied his age.

"Read!"

The old Lord said, as he began dressing and grooming his hair.

The entire process was meticulous, as though he were still in a military camp.

The old butler, once the personal aide to the old Lord, spoke softly —

"Arthur Kredos guided Lost Souls to The Eternal Resting Land, suspected to be injured, an 'Evil Spirit' escaped from The Eternal Resting Land and killed Finley."

"Finley?"

The man whose leg you arranged to be crippled?"

The old Lord had some recollection of the name.

"Yes, initially I saw he had a good nature, so I chose him to be South Los's spy; he has done very well, having gathered a considerable amount of useful information for us over the past decade, and recommended quite a few talents.

Lord, your 'Iron Blood Team' was initially formed from these people."

The old butler promptly reminded him.

He knew, of course, that the old Lord just needed a moment to recall who Finley was.

But as a butler, isn't it supposed to make the service more convenient?

As for Finley?

The old butler believed that the Lord truly did not remember.

After all, such a minor character was always arranged by him.

"Hmm, take good care of his son, his wife—let his son join Little Lisop's trusted aides, and then find a suitable woman from within the domain, to marry and have children as soon as possible."

The old lord nodded and gave such an order.

"Your Lordship's kindness will be sung throughout the domain.

Does the name Cotton, Andor ring any bells to Your Lordship?"

The old butler suitably flattered.

He continued, reporting in an extremely euphemistic tone.

"Cotton?"

Is Andor the cook at Baron Kemir's house?"

This lord had no recollection of Cotton, who had also participated in the 'Seven Years' War,' but Grandma Andor made a deep impression on him.

Of course, it was not because of Grandma Andor's cooking skills.

It was merely because Grandma Andor was the cook for Baron Kemir.

Even if Grandma Andor's cooking was indeed superb.

"Yes, that's her, and the Lost Soul guided by the 'Spirit Medium' tonight is related to her."

Following this, the old butler began to recount the whole incident in detail.

"Ha, just some commoners, after all.

Baron Kemir is truly disappointing.

A dud is a dud!"

Leaving such a comment, the lord then walked straight towards the study, and the old butler did not follow—instead, he just stood at the door after closing it.

The old butler knew very well that the old lord would not allow anyone to hear what came next.

Even him as the butler was not permitted.

After the old lord entered the study and saw the door close behind him, he pondered slightly.

This feeling of being completely understood was not good.

'Should I change butlers?'

The old lord thought, but in the end, he shook his head.

Finding someone as reliable and capable as this one was not an easy task.

Of course, more importantly, it was not fitting for a noble's demeanor.

"I can only wait for Little Lisop."

The old lord believed his son would perform to his satisfaction.

After all, the butler had informed his son of those unseeable deeds he had handled.

Now just needed an opportunity—

When Little Lisop was knighted as a 'Knight,' that would be the time to act.

A 'Knighthood' was certainly not enough for their family; they must produce another lord!

By that time, even if his peerage was not hereditary, the Lisop Family would still be passed down forever!

Of course, the best outcome would be Little Lisop being ennobled.

And his peerage becoming hereditary.

That was certainly difficult.

But it wasn't impossible.

Because...

He had an ace up his sleeve!

A real ace!

Thinking this, the lord took out the 'Messenger Stone' hidden in a secret compartment.

In the way etched in his mind, the old lord activated the 'Messenger Stone' he considered would never be used.

The old lord began to consider his message carefully.

And just as the lord finished his message, in the servant's room at Number 6 White Bird Street, a servant who should have been asleep suddenly opened his eyes and revealed a meaningful smile—

'Finally took the bait!'

Chapter 332 I Planted a Seed!

Arthur woke up for the first time at a little before noon, turned over in bed, pulled the blankets over his head and fell asleep again.

When he woke up the second time, it was the hunger in his stomach that forced the young 'Spirit Medium' to get up.

Glancing at the clock indicating it was two in the afternoon, Arthur first stretched lazily 'on the bed' and then twisted his body, crawled out from under the blankets, and squinted his eyes as he headed to the washroom.

Half an hour later—

"Morning, Pan.

Morning, Kuliqi."

The fully awakened Arthur greeted his cat and dog while his gaze fell on the text in front of him—

[Guiding souls to The Eternal Resting Land greatly astonished the Mystic Side Persons of South Los, maintaining a skeptical attitude didn't stop them from inquiring around and boasting; XP+100]

[The appearance of the Bandage Swordsman led to more speculation among the Mystic Side Persons of South Los; XP+50]

[Guiding souls to The Eternal Resting Land has spread your name far and wide in the local circle of tycoons; XP+30]

[More people have heard of your name; XP+20]

...

Arthur's lips curled up into a smile.

Everything was as he had anticipated.

XP had brought a bountiful harvest and, without a doubt, in the days to come, the XP amount would continue to remain relatively high.

And after the 'Swordsmanship Competition' commenced?

There would be another surge.

So, Arthur didn't hesitate, his gaze directly went to one of the core 'Spirit Medium' Skills, [Noise Technique], and he chose to upgrade—

[Noise Technique Lv5: After extensive research into this secret technique, 'Xarlico,' the Imperial Court Mage, discovered more ingenious uses beyond its original basis—he started to use the 'Noise Technique' to mimic other people's voices for pranks. When he imitated a man's voice outside the bathroom, he scared the timid maids to cover their faces and scream, and when he imitated a woman's voice in the washroom, the male servants' pants would always end up wet. The court mage laughed heartily, and in his joy, he began using the secret technique to mimic his old friend 'Harrington' confessing his love to the Court Lady 'Lith.' Then, watching the two get married, the mage fell into deep thought... Okay, he admitted that this secret technique was just a lowly prank, suitable for scaring away stray cats and dogs, and didn't need to be developed further—Why? Why is this happening? Marriage? Are you kidding me? Women only slow down your research!]

[Effect: Based on Spirituality, consuming a bit of physical strength, silently chant the Glyphic Language Hei to create 1-3 loud bangs or 1-5 rustling noises within a 25-meter radius of the caster, or you can mimic another person's voice]

(Remark 1: The loud bangs are approximately 120 decibels)

(Remark 2: The rustling noises can be the sound of the wind blowing through the windows, the sound of leaves, footsteps, low cries of boys, girls, unclear speech, angry wails, or sounds like the ripping of trousers, passing gas, or diarrhea)

(Remark 3: To mimic another person's voice, you must have heard the voice and record it using the Glyphic Language 'GG')

(Remark 4: When recording with 'GG,' only three voices can be recorded at a time; to record a fourth, one of the others must be erased)

(Remark 5: This skill has reached its limit)

...

'Mimic someone else's voice?!'

Arthur's eyes lit up.

Although it wasn't the 'fishwife's scolding' or 'moans of ecstasy' he had guessed, this type of mimicking was even more fitting for a 'Spirit Medium.'

'It's truly one of the core Skills of a 'Spirit Medium'!'

Arthur thought to himself.

As for the remarks of [Noise Technique]?

Emmm...

Even though the Imperial Court Mage 'Xarlico' is quite pitiful, here's to wishing the court jester 'Harrington' and the Court Lady 'Lith' happiness and joy.

Afterward, Arthur's gaze turned to the [Stone Bullet Technique] from the great master Hercules. The Lv2 [Stone Bullet Technique] just needed 100XP. Previously, Arthur might have hesitated when XP wasn't growing rapidly, but not anymore. He wanted to see what the [Stone Bullet Technique] would become—

[Stone Bullet Technique Lv2: While serving as the librarian of the Imperial Library, aside from reading. Hercules loved playing stone bullets with the street kids to relax his brain and exercise his wrists. However, as he remained unbeaten, no one wished to play stone bullets with Hercules anymore, so this young master began to entertain himself—What fun is there in tossing one stone at a time? Of course, it's more interesting to play with hundreds at once! When hundreds of stone bullets collide together, the crisp sound brings me even more pleasure!]

[Effect: Based on Spirituality, consuming physical strength, chant Glyphic Language Pa to control hundreds of pebble-sized stones within a 100-meter radius and direct them at any target within 100 meters of the caster's line of sight]

...

(Remark 1: The Stone Bullet Technique does not require chanting Glyphic Language and can be cast silently.)

(Remark 2: You can control a hundred stone bullets at once, either launching them all together or in batches, as you see fit.)

(Remark 3: The power of the stone bullets is equivalent to the power of a common youth throwing stones with a slingshot.)

...

'Just as I guessed!

At Lv2, I can manipulate hundreds of pebbles, and the power is pretty decent too!

So at Lv3...

Hiss!

Just a few?

Arthur stared at the XP requirement for the Stone Bullet Technique Lv3, and subconsciously a twang of surprise escaped him.

The young 'Spirit Medium' rubbed his eyes and used his fingers to carefully count the zeros after the 1.

Five!

Five zeros!

That is 100,000!

One hundred thousand XP!

'One hundred thousand, huh, one hundred thousand!

What's the point?

Are you planning to pull a meteor from outer space with Stone Bullet Technique Lv3? Or maybe lift an island into the sky and smash it down?'

Arthur's face was a mix of emotions.

Although there was a precedent that upgrading from Lv1 to Lv2 required jumping from 1 XP to 100 XP, isn't 100,000 XP a bit too much?

It's like preparing for an Ancient Beast to evolve into a Tyrannosaurus Beast, but ending up going straight to a zombie Tyrannosaurus Beast!

It was indeed beyond expectation.

Even Arthur took a good ten seconds or more to return to his normal state.

'The Stone Bullet Technique at Lv3 must be really strong, huh?

But 100,000 XP is too much, I'd have to become a 'Savior' to achieve that in this lifetime!'

Arthur couldn't help but murmur complaints inwardly.

Then, the young 'Spirit Medium' decisively picked up the Heart of the Banyan, smeared it with his blood from his fingertip, ready to plant it in the yard of No. 2 Cork Street — the yard at No. 2 Cork Street couldn't compare to the one at Yumir Manor, in fact, the yard at No. 44 White Bird Street was much smaller than that of Yumir Manor.

But judging by the size of the banyan tree in the yard of Yumir Manor at that time, it would just barely accommodate — with the thick trunk entirely filling the yard, visitors would have to squeeze sideways to get to the door.

To this, Arthur was indifferent.

Because that was at least twenty years from now.

Now?

It's still just a seed.

Arthur's requirement was just that a year later the Heart of the Banyan would grow into the War Tree and bring more protection to No. 2 Cork Street.

So, after finishing the blood smear on his fingertip, Arthur walked out of the room, went straight to the center of the courtyard, pried up a square brick, and buried the Heart of the Banyan underneath.

And then—

An abrupt supernatural event occurred!

...

Chapter 333: Startling Surprise!

Just as Arthur was about to cover the soil and water it, the recently planted "Heart of the Banyan" burst through the soil and grew rapidly in the wind.

With the first breath, it still appeared as a tender sprout.

With another breath, it transformed into a small sapling.

With yet another breath, it stood over 3 meters tall.

By the time the "Heart of the Banyan" ceased its growth, it had reached a height of 15 meters.

And the text visible to Arthur had completely changed—

[Applying special blood, assessing...]

[Assessment passed!]

['Heart of the Banyan' has anomalously promoted to 'Death Serpent Banyan'!]

[Name: Death Serpent Banyan]

[Type: Other Types]

[Quality: Epic]

[Attributes: 1. Death Extraction; 2. Death Threat; 3. Snake Vine; 4. Snake Thorn; 5. Stealth;]

[Remarks: A special plant from Hilt Tower, tainted by your blood, it has undergone a transformation beyond imagination, becoming bizarre, powerful, and loyal. It guards No. 2 Cork Street according to your command, or you may direct it to a new courtyard—a mysterious promotion that even the heirs of Hilt Tower could not understand; your blood is truly magical!]

...

[Death Extraction: Absorbs surrounding Aura of Death to nourish itself, for repair and growth, and can also store the Aura of Death]

[Death Threat: Naturally emits a Death Threat which makes lower-level Undead involuntarily protect themselves. When a creature harbors malice, it must make a Will-2 check; if the check fails, it falls into a state of confusion and terror.]

[Snake Vine: Vines hidden within the canopy are as flexible as snakes, not only capable of whipping enemies but their toxin can also paralyze enemies]

[Snake Thorn: A massive root system hidden underground serves as the Death Serpent Banyan's secret weapon; every creature pierced by it rapidly loses life, becoming nourishment for the Death Serpent Banyan]

[Stealth: The Death Serpent Banyan can completely submerge underground, moving quickly, but it can also choose to pull out its roots and walk upright, albeit slowly]

(Note 1: Total of 121 Snake Vines, attack range of 50 meters radius from the Death Serpent Banyan)

(Note 2: Total of 51 Snake Thorn roots, with the main root ignoring defenses of up to 3 defense levels and the remaining secondary roots ignoring defenses below 1 defense level; main root range is a 100 meters radius from the Death Serpent Banyan, secondary roots are within a 50 meters radius)

(Note 3: When the main root is damaged, the Death Serpent Banyan will suffer a fatal injury)

(Note 4: Death Extraction accelerates the growth of the Death Serpent Banyan, its current stage is: War Tree)

(Note 5: As long as the heart of the Death Serpent Banyan (War Tree level) remains, it will not die but will need to be replanted)

(Note 6: Special blood has accelerated the growth of the Death Serpent Banyan; within one year, you will receive a War Tree fighting for you, and within three years, an Ancient War Tree. As it grows into a War Tree, the number of Snake Vines and Snake Thorns increases and the speed of Stealth improves. As it grows into an Ancient War Tree, not only will it possess some degree of consciousness, but it will also master some basic arts of death, snakes, and plants, yet its loyalty to you will never change; with time and the absorption of 'Aura of Death,' the Death Serpent Banyan will continue to grow until it reaches its limit)

...

Arthur looked at the Death Serpent Banyan quite unexpectedly.

This mutation was truly beyond his expectation.

Originally, he had prepared to plant it first and let it grow slowly, but who knew that after being smeared with his blood, the "Heart of the Banyan" would immediately become a War Tree-level "Death Serpent Banyan," and that the time for its growth would greatly shorten, requiring only three years to reach Ancient War Tree level.

Of course, most importantly, the "Death Serpent Banyan" could burrow into the ground and move quickly—with the advent of gunpowder, some rules of the 'Mystic Side' had long changed, especially for some large flammable creatures, proving to be a fatal blow.

Just like that War Tree in 'Yumir Manor' which had grown to War Tree-level; even if it was of a regular type, without the aid of gunpowder or oil, it would be virtually impossible to destroy it in one strike; it inevitably required a sacrifice of lives.

But if it could burrow underground, that situation would greatly change.

At the very least, one strike could make the "Death Serpent Banyan" even more lethal, not to mention in combination with "Death Extraction" and "Death Deterrence."

If used well, the "Death Serpent Banyan" could truly become a war machine.

A gleam of light flashed through Arthur's eyes.

He had already thought of a use for the "Death Serpent Banyan."

But that would be later!

Now?

Facing the frightened, incredulous gazes of the surrounding neighbors, Arthur flashed an embarrassed yet polite smile.

The only consolation was that someone would help him deal with the aftermath—

Whew!

In the smoke filled with a rich mint and hints of apple, Marinda appeared before Arthur, expressing her dissatisfaction.

"If you plan to make any large movements, please inform me in advance!

Otherwise, it puts me in a difficult position.

Or do you think that the Lord Count's guards are idle?"

With these words, a faint mist began to envelop Cork Street and Dar Alley under Arthur's gaze, spreading out into the surroundings.

As the mist spread, the ordinary people within its range began to faint.

A dozen of the Countess of South Los's guards appeared in the mist, starting to pay close attention to the neighbors near Arthur's house—in Arthur's watchful eye, these guards approached the neighbors and whispered softly.

"This tree was planted 20 years ago."

"You played under this tree when you were a child."

...

Such phrases continued to echo, and the fainting ordinary people began to whisper them too.

"This tree was planted 20 years ago."

"I played under this tree when I was a child."

...

After completing this, the Count's guards saluted Marinda and Arthur and then promptly left.

The frantic crowd soon calmed down.

When the surrounding neighbors woke up, everything had returned to normal, especially Mr. Duer, who nostalgically looked at the "Death Serpent Banyan" and even muttered unconsciously.

"When can I go play under the tree again?"

However, upon noticing Arthur's gaze, Mr. Duer immediately clutched his stomach.

"Good afternoon, Arthur!"

Sorry, I need to use the bathroom!"

Saying this, the neighbor fled in haste.

Clearly, the fact that touching a 'Spirit Medium' could bring misfortune had already been deeply ingrained in this neighbor's heart.

Watching the closed door of the other side, Arthur shrugged helplessly on the surface, but internally he pondered.

'Is this the 'protection' for ordinary people?

If it reaches a certain extent, where you can't blame it on things like natural gas explosions, does it activate automatically?'

Arthur had speculated more than once before on how the nobles hide the 'Mystic Side' from ordinary people, but seeing it firsthand was still considerably shocking.

That kind of mist and the manipulation of memory were enough to refresh anyone's memory.

Fortunately, it was useless against people from the Mystic Side.

'Perhaps this is why those from the 'Mystic Side' consider themselves superior!'

One side can dispose of life and death at will while the other remains unfazed.

How could the latter ever consider the former as their equal?

Even the most humble person would become incredibly arrogant over time.

Arthur couldn't help but sigh.

But in the next moment, the young 'Spirit Medium' was startled.

Because he thought of something—

Were his 'predecessor's' memories real?

And, were his own memories real?

Could his so-called transmigration be fabricated?

Chapter 334: Indomitable Spirit!

An unexpected idea caused Arthur to freeze on the spot.

To disguise this strangeness, he almost subconsciously looked up at the towering Death Serpent Banyan—the instincts of a Spirit Medium had long been imprinted deep within his soul.

'My memories are most likely real!

If these memories were fabricated...

That would be interesting!'

In the blink of a thought, Arthur was not panicked in the slightest, instead, he was filled with a thrill that surged from the depths of his soul—assuming, this speculation was true, then he very much wanted to know who was doing this to him.

And why they were doing it?

Furthermore...

From this, was the world before his eyes even real!

'Tsk, it's unclear! Unclear!

Such a terrifying world!

I dare not even think about it!

Arthur quickly composed himself, pressing these thoughts deep into his heart.

Because, he was well aware that whether it was true or not, he wasn't capable of confronting it now.

Instead of constantly pondering, risking discovery by the possible existent beings.

It was better to suppress it deep within his heart, to slowly explore, to accumulate strength, and then, to take action when the opportunity arose.

A smile appeared on Arthur's face, seen by Marinda.

"What are you scheming now, you little schemer?

Keep it down!

Your smile is chilling to the core!"

Marinda's mouth twitched.

"Of course, it's about those fools who thought I was hurt!

Who else could it be?

Severely injured, I had no choice but to plant a War Tree to protect myself—makes perfect sense, right?"

Arthur bowed his head, his smile lingering.

"Ah, yes, yes, yes!"

Marinda, having at some point picked up one of Arthur's signature phrases, kept repeating it, then she proudly brandished her pipe.

"How's the taste of tobacco fed honey fruit liquor for a year?"

For this lady, matters were just as Arthur said.

The method before his eyes was just to make his 'fact of being injured' more realistic.

As for the 'War Tree'?

Although rare, with the resources of Cat Faction Hei, having one or two already was not surprising for her.

Therefore, compared to these established facts, Marinda was more interested in the tobacco in her pipe.

This was an unexpected success!

Arthur sniffed delicately for a moment.

He indeed detected the sweetness of honey.

And this hint of sweetness nicely offset the sharpness of mint, further bringing out the refreshing scent of apple, suggesting balance so delicate that a bit more would be too much, a bit less would be too little.

"A flavor that's just right!"

Arthur assessed truthfully.

This remark caused the corners of Marinda's mouth to curl upwards as she playfully tapped Arthur on the chest.

But immediately, the lady regretted the action.

The onset of nausea had her gaze at Arthur full of regret.

'Arthur, how perfect it would be if you were a woman!'

Reading the lady's gaze, Arthur gave her the middle finger in response.

The lady, with her pipe in her mouth, threw up two middle fingers in return.

However, before leaving, the lady left Arthur a small bag of tobacco.

About 10 grams.

"Enough for two bowls, you better be grateful!"

With a slight coquettish tone, she disappeared behind the Death Serpent Banyan, vanishing from sight.

Looking at the small beautifully packaged bag of tobacco in his hand, Arthur knew this was something Marinda had prepared especially—akin to a friendly share.

He chose to accept it openly.

Even though he didn't smoke a pipe just yet.

But in the future?

What if he came to like it?

Who knows.

Nobody can be sure of the future, just as even gods can't stop people from eating—feeling his increasingly hollow stomach, Arthur put the small bag of tobacco into Atos's Box and so, in his pajamas, he walked past the Death Serpent Banyan and left No. 2 Cork Street.

"Merlin!"

Arthur shouted towards Dar Alley.

"Coming, sir!"

Merlin, with jet-black hair and a slight build but fair skin, ran to Arthur at top speed, holding today's newspaper and Arthur's first meal—after returning to South Los yesterday, Arthur had settled the remaining wages and decided to continue employing Merlin, noticing his diligence and unique daily routine.

It was still fifty Zeroes a day.

Merlin needed to buy the newspaper for Arthur in the morning, tidy up the courtyard, and also purchase Arthur's first meal.

If needed, he would also purchase a second meal.

Aside from the newspaper, the rest of the expenses were to be accounted for weekly—however, due to Arthur's "good reputation", the nearby shops all agreed that monthly accounting was satisfactory.

Beyond these duties, if there were visitors in the morning, noon, or afternoon, Merlin was also obliged to inform them of the appropriate time to visit and to record the visitors' information.

It was somewhat similar to the second or third manservant in a noble household.

Arthur believed that Merlin would perform these tasks well.

"Sir, may I place these here?"

"Of course!"

Merlin set down the newspapers and the basket containing food at the doorstep of No. 2 Cork Street, and hurried off after Arthur's affirmation.

Though still very polite, Arthur nevertheless noticed something off about Merlin.

That 'offness' was...

Alarm!

The alarm he showed looking towards the Death Serpent Banyan!

'Could it be just a coincidence?' Arthur wondered, as Fujin silently followed him.

He needed to confirm something.

For someone like Merlin, who was 'extremely close' to him, Arthur maintained a more cautious attitude, just as he would towards those 'strangers' who approached him again.

Standing beside the Death Serpent Banyan, Arthur's gaze shifted to the drunk vagabond.

The vagabond's filthy coat material was indiscernible, his hair completely tangled, and his face was so dirt-encrusted it seemed to scab.

The fellow simply stood on Cork Street, staring steadfastly at Arthur.

Arthur also returned the look with a slight smile.

"Do you recognize me?"

The vagabond opened his mouth to reveal a mouthful of yellow teeth.

"Not at all."

Arthur honestly shook his head.

"Then, do you know me?"

The vagabond asked again.

"I do."

Arthur nodded.

Then, the other party started questioning again—

"How do you know?"

"I guessed."

"Your guess wasn't accurate enough."

"Just as you were too late?"

"As long as I have arrived, it's not too late!"

"Hmm, have some tea."

The pair walked into No. 2 Cork Street, exchanging words, and as Arthur waved his hand, a cup of black tea prepared by the Hand of Void appeared on the small parlor table.

"I prefer drinking alcohol to drinking tea."

"The alcohol is too strong."

Arthur picked up his teacup.

"The tea is too cold, gets colder the more you drink."

The vagabond didn't move, just glanced at the teacup.

"That's why I have prepared black tea."

Arthur gestured again, the vagabond stared at the cup and looked again, but shook his head.

"Black tea does not warm the stomach enough."

Though he said this, the vagabond finally picked up the teacup, and like drinking liquor, downed it in one gulp, then bowed courteously—

"Thank you for everything you have done for Cotton and Nicole!"

With these words, the vagabond straightened his back, and bowed again to Arthur.

But this time, it was a military salute—

"Daredevil Team Captain Bob reporting to you!"

Saying so, the member of the Daredevil Team took a box from his chest, opened it towards himself, and then placed it in front of Arthur.

As Arthur clearly saw the contents of the box,

his eyes instantly narrowed.

Chapter 335: Miss Qiu's Security Company Listed!

The box contained a 10-milliliter test tube, and due to the test tube being laid flat, the volume of the liquid inside could not be read accurately; however, Arthur estimated that it contained about 5-6 milliliters.

Of course, this was not the point.

The point was the potion inside—

[Death Soldier Potion (Optimized)]!

Arthur was surprised by the [Optimized] suffix on the [Death Soldier Potion].

But what surprised Arthur even more was that at this moment, Bob radiated a fluctuation of [Spirituality].

It was a friendly, wholeheartedly submissive fluctuation, and under this oscillation, the [Death Soldier Potion (Optimized)] revealed more remarks—

[Death Soldier Potion (Optimized): During the 'Seven Years' War', Bob gradually came into prominence in Daredevil Camp. He not only won the appreciation of his superiors but also the respect of his comrades. He saved his superiors and comrades' lives more than once, especially when he took the 'Death Soldier Potion' a second time and emerged unscathed. His superior immediately appointed him captain of the first squad of Daredevil Camp. Some individuals proficient in 'Potion-making' took a great interest in Bob, hoping to obtain some of his blood. Bob cooperated fully, exchanging it for some 'Mystic Side knowledge.' In an unexpected raid, Bob also inherited a 'Potion Master's' legacy, including some basic and advanced potion formulas. But most importantly, it contained the 'Death Soldier Potion'...

After the war, Bob and a few comrades lived in North County for a while, but as his comrades passed away one by one, Bob was reminded of the pain of his mother's death, which made him choose to leave. Over the next thirty years, Bob wandered, honing his killing skills while mastering the legacy left by the 'Potion Master', making some modifications to it.

Effect: When someone under your gaze takes this potion, they will become a Death Soldier loyal to you.]

(Remark 1: Even an optimized [Death Soldier Potion] still has a risk of failure, and if it fails, the consumer will die.)

(Remark 2: The physical and psychological state of the consumer will affect the success rate of the [Death Soldier Potion].)

(Remark 3: The [Death Soldier Potion] is ineffective on those who already possess or have awakened to be a [Spiritualist].)

(Remark 4: After surviving the potion, the Death Soldier's [Physique] will greatly increase, and they will be fearless of pain, with a certain resistance to soul-affecting secret techniques.)

(Remark 5: The optimized [Death Soldier Potion] significantly reduces the impact on the lifespan of the Death Soldiers, but they remain infertile.)

...

Arthur looked at the [Death Soldier Potion (Optimized)] before him and a smile appeared on his face.

The young 'Spirit Medium' was surprised by the suffix following [Death Soldier Potion] and also surprised that Bob had become a Mystic Side Person, but Arthur was not at all surprised that Bob would offer the [Death Soldier Potion].

Arthur was quite certain that after receiving Malz's letter, the other party had already arrived in South Los.

Why not appear directly?

The other party was observing him.

Observing to see if he was worth appearing for.

And it was for this reason that the other party appreciated everything he did for Cotton and Nicole.

Similarly, it was also because of Cotton and Nicole that the other party chose to appear and to be candid.

Just as Malz had said, Bob was a very pure person.

In the face of such a pure person, Arthur would not conceal—

"How much does it cost to make one?"

Arthur asked directly.

"Around 500 gold coins, with a certain failure rate. In my refinement, one out of two is successful," Bob replied.

"And the success rate of consuming it?"

Arthur continued to inquire about the key point.

"If the consumer is in good enough condition, there is a one in five chance—this was the success rate during the 'Seven Years' War'!

After consuming the optimized potion, the chance is roughly between one-half and one-third, but the exact success rate still depends on the consumer's condition."

Bob stated candidly.

Arthur immediately began calculating—

A 50% success rate for the potion?

That means creating one [Death Soldier Potion (Optimized)] would cost 1000 gold coins!

Plus the success rate of consumption, calculating at one-third...

3000 gold coins!

And this was the optimized version!

If it was not optimized, it would cost 5000 gold coins each!

'No wonder with the way those nobles operate, they haven't organized a large 'Daredevil Camp'—with the wealth of Old Lion and Mother Tigress, a thousand-man team would be a breeze, but losing half of them in a battle would be something both could hardly bear, surely leaving them breathless with heartache!'

Arthur could clearly imagine the love-hate relationship those Great Nobles had with the 'Death Soldiers'.

Love, for their loyalty and ability.

Hate, a costly price.

Of course, there's the most important point—

Lifespan!

After taking the "Death Soldier Potion," one's lifespan is affected.

Power does not come from nothing!

Either possess talent or overdraw life.

The former are the minority, the latter the majority.

And the most common?

Is still mediocrity.

Whether by active choice or passive circumstance, this is the life most people lead.

After all, 5000 gold coins is an amount the vast majority in South Los will never earn in a lifetime.

And with a 5000 gold coin investment and 'the effect lasting only a few years' as a premise, even the great nobles would consider it carefully.

Similarly, when it came to Arthur, the investment was reduced to 3000 gold coins, but he also needed to consider this issue.

Therefore, Arthur was very concerned about [Remark 5], as the optimized "Death Soldier Potion" significantly reduced its impact on the potion-taker's lifespan.

By how much was it weakened?

Arthur immediately inquired this of Bob.

"Those who take the unoptimized 'Death Soldier Potion' can live at most for 5-10 years. I have taken the 'Death Soldier Potion' twice and have broken this shackle.

But I am the only one who has taken two doses of the 'Death Soldier Potion' and still survived."

No need for "Eagle Eye" or "Insight," Arthur could clearly see the memories and pain that surfaced in Bob's eyes as he spoke.

'Was the initial intent of the optimized potion for the sake of comrades-in-arms?'

Arthur speculated.

After the "Seven Years' War" ended, those soldiers who left with Bob probably also took the 'Death Soldier Potion.'

As their lives reached their end, these few soldiers might have all tried taking a second dose of the 'Death Soldier Potion,' but failed.

Arthur thought this to himself, while Bob's voice continued—

"Those who take the optimized 'Death Soldier Potion' can live for at least 25 years!"

Arthur didn't ask Bob how he came up with such precise data.

But upon learning that each 'Death Warrior' could live for over 25 years, Arthur knew his 'Miss Qiu's Security Company' could be launched.

3000 gold coins each?

Then he would start with 30!

With the 'contribution of 100k Black Gold' from Harris, Arthur was not worried about the initial construction of the 'Death Soldiers;' all of these people would become members of his Black Cat Faction.

And with coastal trade set to begin, especially with 'tax exemption' as a premise, Arthur believed the number of 'Death Warriors' under his command would surely grow steadily.

30 Death Warriors secured.

Would 3000 Death Warriors be far behind?

10000 Death Warriors is not a dream either!

A slight smile played at the corners of Arthur's mouth as he anticipated that day's arrival.

And now?

It was time to select the initial members.

The necessary criteria were to be parentless, spouseless, childless, and in good health.

None of which required Arthur's worry.

There were too many in Rat Street who met similar requirements, Wiggins could handle everything.

In fact, as soon as Bob had shown up, Fujin had already gone to notify Wiggins.

Wiggins would be able to arrive shortly.

However, before Wiggins arrived, Arthur had another matter to take care of—

Come out, my 'Bandage Swordsman'!

Chapter 336 Wandering Heretics Among Mortals!

Dusk, the setting sun was like blood.

The 'Bandage Swordsman,' with a blood-stained cloak, stepped out of Dar Alley and came onto Cork Street, tracing the elongated shadows of the buildings at twilight.

The rapidly rising yet increasingly spaced buildings created an intricate interplay of light and shadow.

When the blood-red sunlight shined on the 'Bandage Swordsman's' bloodstains, the filth within the blood became as dense as mud, making him appear like an Undead crawling from the earth.

When the profound darkness enveloped the 'Bandage Swordsman's' bloodstains, the blood within seemed to congeal like fire, giving the impression he was an Evil Spirit amidst blazing flames.

He did not belong to either light or darkness.

He did not belong to the human world.

He suddenly halted in his steps.

Because...

Smoke from cooking fires!

The lingering scent of cooking smoke, the ultimate taste of the human world.

He heard the bustling, urging voices from the kitchens.

He heard the cheerful, expectant voices of the children.

He heard the weary yet spirited voices in the dining rooms.

Each sound made him and the entire street all the more out of place.

He was like a heretic!

He quickened his pace, amid the terrified and evasive gazes of the passersby, under the expectant eyes of the stalkers, he moved towards No. 2 Cork Street, step by step.

Seeing the sudden appearance of a large banyan tree, he gripped the hilt of his sword tightly.

"Hehe, the show is starting!"

"What on earth is this thing?"

"Should be an Undead creature, right?"

"Who cares, just keep watching!"

His sharp hearing allowed Eli, a Scout in name for Count Bert, to catch every word of the stalkers around him, which made him curl his lip in disdain.

Undead creature?

Where is there an Undead that can use the 'Slash of Vanquishing Evil'?

But what is this 'Bandage Swordsman'?

Eli was clueless.

But what he did know was because of this 'Bandage Swordsman' appearing right now, not only did he make a fortune, but he also traded for two excellent props from the Cloak Society and Count Bert.

The danger of the Mystic Side kept him from advancing.

Yet the props of the Mystic Side drew him in like moths to a flame.

Who wouldn't love the safe and convenient props of the Mystic Side?

And if you could get your hands on a couple more, who would refuse?

So Eli, who had sworn to himself that he would retire after selling the information, came back again.

'One more time!

One more time and I'll retire—'

'Find a secluded street in the Shire District to set up a shop, run a small tavern!'

Just like last time, Eli told himself this again.

He kept his gaze firmly on the 'Bandage Swordsman,' watching as the figure suddenly took a step to the left, just when the stalkers were still puzzled—

Whoosh!

Crack!

The sound of something cutting through the air had already resounded.

The spot where the 'Bandage Swordsman' had been standing now had its cobblestone surface shattered.

But all the stalkers, including Eli, failed to see what launched the attack!

Then, the 'Bandage Swordsman' took another step to the left.

This time, every stalker widened their eyes.

But,

They still saw nothing clearly.

Still a 'whoosh' followed by a 'crack.'

All they saw was the cracked ground.

'What is that thing?'

Faced with the unknown, Eli instinctively retreated 10 meters and then pulled out the Dagger that had accompanied him the longest.

Some stalkers who also stepped back, their vigilance at first apparent, now looked on with scorn upon seeing Eli's Dagger—they thought that even if they failed to acquire the 'scroll,' they should at least obtain a respectable Firearm.

Dagger?

Even a dog wouldn't use it.

After that, the stalkers only spared a fraction of their attention for Eli.

It was only when they noticed that Eli was retreating again, almost about to leave Cork Street, did the disdain in the stalkers' eyes grow thicker.

Their position was already more than thirty meters away from No. 2 Cork Street, sufficiently safe. How much further back would someone like Eli retreat?

Fifty meters? Sixty meters?

Immediately, no one paid any more attention to Eli.

Such a coward wasn't worth it.

Moreover, the 'Bandage Swordsman' had made another move.

After taking two steps to the left, the 'Bandage Swordsman' leaped to the right in a large bound.

Whoosh whoosh whoosh!

Crack crack crack!

Amidst the continuous sounds of tearing through the air, the ground far to the left of his original position was shattered, a clear sign that the unknown attacks had changed.

But, the 'Bandage Swordsman' had anticipated this once again.

That's right!

Prophetic!

All the stalkers simultaneously harbored this thought deep down.

However, anyone with a bit of insight knew that such 'prophecy' did not exist. It should be a form of battle 'instinct'—an instinct formed by honing one's skills to the utmost and integrating life-and-death combat experience.

It looked simple, but it was incredibly difficult.

Whether it was honing one's skills to the utmost or integrating countless life-and-death experiences, it was not something ordinary people could achieve.

The former was limited by Talent, while the latter was restricted by Death.

To be able to integrate both...

'This 'Bandage Swordsman' is definitely not an unknown nobody!

A strong figure related to the Sank family?

Who could it be?'

Every stalker began to speculate.

And this was exactly what Arthur wanted.

Using Fujin's eyes, he observed the expressions of all the stalkers from the shadows, then he had the [Death Serpent Banyan] launch its next attack.

Of course, it was necessary to 'inform the Bandage Swordsman' beforehand.

The next moment—

The whole Cork Street darkened.

As if night had fallen.

But, every stalker stared dumbfounded at the sky above them.

Hundreds of vines appeared there, blocking the last vestiges of twilight.

At this moment, they finally understood what had been attacking them.

Vines!

Shock reflected in the eyes of each stalker.

They had never imagined that these vines, only as thick as two fingers, could become so powerful, shattering the cobblestone pavement with a whip, breaking bones and snapping sinews on contact with a body!

Even those clad in armor wouldn't escape unscathed!

More importantly...

Quantity!

With so many vines, even if the 'Bandage Swordsman' truly had prophetic ability, he would still be whipped to dust.

But at this moment, the stalkers no longer had the time to worry about the 'Bandage Swordsman'!

Watching the hundreds of writhing, coalescing vines above them, every stalker's scalp began to tingle; those closest to No. 2 Cork Street scrambled backward in a panic.

But, it was too late!

The vines fell like rain.

Those stalkers closest and next closest to No. 2 Cork Street were directly whipped into a pulp.

While those farthest from No. 2 Cork Street were the luckiest, protected by the bodies in front of them and aided by their own speed.

They ran out of the [Snake Vine]'s range of attack.

Almost instinctively, those who escaped turned back to look with lingering fear.

Then, those stalkers stood there, frozen.

Chapter 337: The Colossal Entity of the Human World!

The whipping vines fell like a tempest, yet the 'Bandage Swordsman' strolled through them with ease.

Every time the vines struck down, they barely missed the 'Bandage Swordsman,' as if they were just a hair's breadth away from hitting him.

But a miss is as good as a mile!

That slight difference allowed the 'Bandage Swordsman' to step forward, one step at a time.

He was getting closer and closer to No. 2 Cork Street.

Feeling the 'Bandage Swordsman's' approach,

immediately, the banyan tree began to shake.

Within the rustling of leaves, one could sense the feeling of anger.

The ceaselessly thrashing vines all came to a halt.

It was then that the stalkers, who had run far away, finally relaxed and let out a breath.

"Such a terrifying 'Bandage Swordsman'!"

"If such dense attacks can't harm him... then he must be confident about dodging a volley of rifle fire, right?"

"Definitely!"

"Truly terrifying!"

"But, he's still doomed, right?"

"For sure!"

"Those vines have gathered up, they won't give him any more chances!"

As they watched the vines line up, murmurs of discussion rose among the stalkers.

An experience of escaping death seemed to have drawn them closer together.

As for Eli, he discreetly increased the distance once again—he could see clearly that these seemingly chatty fellows were all armed.

And their intentions?

One could guess with their big toes.

Stalkers were, in some ways, worse than robbers, because robbers specialized only in robbery, whereas stalkers often took on the role of robbers as well.

Sometimes they even doubled as thieves.

Overall, highly unprofessional.

Of course, he was different.

Unlike the average stalker, he was a professional scout, who just occasionally trafficked information and picked up spoils of war.

Moreover, he at least had the patience to wait until everything was over.

Even if he guessed the outcome, he had to watch until the end.

Furthermore...

Thinking of the 'Slash of Vanquishing Evil' the 'Bandage Swordsman' possessed, Eli didn't think the battle would end this way—about the 'Bandage Swordsman' being Undead and mastering the 'Slash of Vanquishing Evil,' he had only sold that information to the 'Cloak Society' and 'Count Bert.'

Why not 'spread the word'?

Naturally, because the 'scarcity' of news represents its value.

Although after today, this news would no longer be 'scarce,' what did it have to do with him?

When he sold it, the information was genuine and valid.

More importantly, he had made his earnings!

And...

He was about to earn much more!

Eli looked towards No. 2 Cork Street with great anticipation.

The dense banyan vine had obscured the sky, and as they uniformly fell, it seemed as though the heavens were collapsing.

Seeing the scene he had anticipated unfold, a few impatient souls among the stalkers who had just escaped death could no longer hold back, lashing out at the people around them.

The quick-reacting ones dodged and began to retaliate after escaping the first strike.

The slow ones lay in pools of blood.

The killings born out of chaos intertwined with the most despicable parts of the human heart, morphing into a hideous visage that leered at its prey.

Or rather...

Gifts!

In their eyes, these were gifts.

Gifts known as 'windfalls.'

But when that dazzling white light appeared, they all turned around in shock; they saw that burning, sharp slash split the dark sky.

They saw the 'Bandage Swordsman's' scorched palm.

Black as death, as if belonging to the Undead!

Undead?

Undead!

The stalkers realized in an instant!

'The 'Bandage Swordsman' was Undead!

But how could the Undead use "Slash of Vanquishing Evil"?

Just like the first time Eli encountered the "Bandage Swordsman" using "Slash of Vanquishing Evil," the worldviews of these stalkers were shattered.

They stood there, dazed, somewhat at a loss as they watched the "Bandage Swordsman" standing in front of No. 2 Cork Street.

A low growl filled their ears.

Just by observing that pitch-black, bone-chilling palm, they understood the frustration it held.

Just like Eli, they began to speculate.

Arthur, with Eagle Eye's vision, glanced over the stalkers, pausing slightly on Eli before controlling the "Bandage Swordsman" to exhibit a very puzzled expression.

But in the next moment, the revealed cyclopean eye showed a hint of surprise.

Without paying any more attention to No. 2 Cork Street or the banyan tree, the "Bandage Swordsman" turned and dashed into a nearby alley.

The stalkers who had previously been fighting over their greed didn't hesitate to follow.

But Eli did not.

This professional Scout rushed to the nearest information trading hub.

The information about that banyan tree was quite valuable, after all.

As for the loot on the ground?

Who does the loot in front of No. 2 Cork Street belong to?

Unless he was out of his mind, he would definitely not touch those things.

Arthur looked appreciatively at the professional Scout and manipulated the "Death Serpent Banyan" to pull back all the bodies and loot on Cork Street—the bodies became the best nourishment for the "Death Serpent Banyan," much like the previously crushed corpses had restored the "Snake Vine."

And the loot?

Arthur would go through it later.

For now?

He needed to address the lady in front of him.

A lady who stood at an imposing height of 2.5 meters—solidly built yet not at all bloated.

This lady had fiery red hair that was left untied, and she carried a colossal sword on her back like a door. Anyone seeing this lady would naturally feel a psychological pressure due to her stature and build; those of a timider disposition might even fall over in fright, despite the lady's face being not at all unpleasant.

However, Arthur recovered quickly from his initial surprise.

He was purely astonished by her height.

Then came the warranted caution.

Even though she had appeared alongside the Count's Guards.

The Count's Guards, wrapped up tightly with only their eyes exposed, began 'cleaning up' once more, but their gazes occasionally swept over Arthur—with the benefits of "Eagle Eye" and "Insight," Arthur clearly read emotions such as 'not you again,' 'enough already,' 'I'm tired' from the eyes of these guards.

In response, Arthur expressed that his attention was entirely captured by the lady in front of him, and he did not notice anything else.

"Hello, Kledos Advisor, I am Julie, Lord Count's Swordsmanship Master!"

The lady introduced herself.

"Good evening, Swordsmanship Master Julie,"

Arthur replied with the proper etiquette.

Then, suitably, a look of confusion appeared in his eyes.

Seeing the perplexity on Arthur's face, the Swordsmanship Master laughed out loud.

"Please rest assured, as the Shire District Police Station's Advisor personally employed by Lord Count, you won't have to compensate for these damages!"

The Swordsmanship Master pointed at the smashed pavement, joking.

The implication in her words was clear: We're on the same side, no need to worry.

Arthur obliged with a smile.

And likewise, joined in the jest.

"If compensation is required, may I go to the Shire District Police Station and get reimbursed by Chief Malz?"

"Of course, as long as Chief Malz still has money—that Chief has recently spent a fortune at the club, probably even dipping into his pension fund."

The Swordsmanship Master winked at Arthur, displaying a knowing smile that any man would understand.

"No wonder that bastard gave me a menu when he was at my New House Salon!

I thought he was reminding me to eat well when I'm alone!

That scoundrel, toying with my emotions!"

Arthur grumbled indignantly.

The Swordsmanship Master burst into hearty laughter.

When the laughter subsided, she immediately asked.

"What's the deal with that 'Bandage Swordsman'?"

"An accident."

Arthur sighed softly, his eyes brimming with helplessness.

Seeing the helplessness in Arthur's eyes, the Swordsmanship Master sighed in relief and thought to herself—

'Just as the Lord Count expected!'

Chapter 338: Grant Someone the Authority, a Future Boundless!

The Swordsmanship Chief clearly remembered, when the news arrived last night, Lord Count immediately showed a smile—

'Guiding the Undead towards 'The Eternal Resting Land', and now there's an extra one that seems to have crawled out from 'The Eternal Resting Land'?

It seems our Mr. Kledos is also a tender person!

He...

was trying to find a way to resurrect his own parents!

In the 'Mystic Side', resurrection of the deceased has always been deemed taboo.

Because—

It's too dangerous!

Since the Imperial Age, every resurrection attempt has never ended well.

The slightly better outcome is the death of the ritual performer.

A more common outcome is the entire family dying together.

An even more serious case would result in the death of everyone sharing the same bloodline.

Just like in the mid-Silver Age, the once-glorious Edward Family met with total disaster because the Edward brothers tried to resurrect their mother.

All people of the Edward Family who shared the same bloodline died overnight.

As a result, a distant relative with little blood relation, in name only, 'Bert' inherited the title, land—what was left after being devoured.

Nobody expected that this 'Count Bert' could restore the glory of the Edward Family.

After all, what he inherited wasn't even a farm.

It was a...

Mill.

And one so decrepit that many factions looked down upon it.

But relying on that very mill, 'Count Bert', considered a country bumpkin, spent ten years becoming the true Count Bert, founding a Bert Family that could not be ignored.

Some rumored that the country bumpkin Count Bert had inherited the Edward Family's secret legacy.

Others whispered that Count Bert actually carried the Edward Family's bloodline, and thus was protected by the land.

Otherwise, why would a meteor fall from the sky to crush thirty thousand rebels to ashes during their decisive battle with the rebels?

Everyone thought the country bumpkin Count Bert was doomed at that time; a fight of 1000 against 30,000—anyone would know the outcome.

But it was this incredible reversal that cemented the bumpkin as the Lord Count.

And this miraculous turnaround only made the 'Bert Family'.

The Edward Family?

They still turned to dust in history.

Therefore, as the Swordsmanship Chief and Countess of South Los, Julie was here.

She needed to remind Arthur—

"Death will not be trifled with!

All reversals are taboo!

Even that one from the 'Death Poetry Society', who pridefully calls himself 'Child of Death', cannot... So please be cautious, Kledos advisor."

Observing the solemn appearance of the swordsmanship chief before him.

Arthur instantly understood the purpose of her appearance at the doorstep of No. 2 Cork Street.

She had mistaken him for wanting to resurrect his 'parents'.

No!

It was the Earl of South Los who had made that assumption about him.

If possible, Arthur wouldn't mind completing the 'Kledos Family' for the sake of gratitude, but he was aware of such a 'Death Taboo.'

Many of the books in the secret chamber of Yumir Manor had mentioned this.

Therefore, without absolute certainty, Arthur would never attempt it.

However, that was something he knew.

When facing others, of course, he had to 'act' accordingly—

"Hmm, I won't!

I will absolutely not meddle with 'Death'!"

Arthur affirmed with utmost certainty, his tone decisive.

Then, the young 'Spirit Medium' emphasized.

"Accident!

It was all an accident!"

"That's good!"

The Female Swordmaster smiled and nodded, then———

"It was a pleasure to meet you.

...

"I hope next time we can share a drink and be merry!"

Without further pleasantries, the Female Swordmaster briskly left with the Countess's guards. Arthur, with a smile still on his face, saw them off before heading back to No. 2 Cork Street.

But the moment the door closed, an additional hint of playfulness crept into Arthur's smile.

'The Lord Count is a bit too sensitive!'

In the past, his interactions with the 'Countess' were mostly facilitated by Marinda acting as an intermediary, but now Julie had suddenly appeared, bypassing Marinda entirely.

This made it clear that the Countess had begun to take him seriously.

She had placed him within the scope of those she deemed necessary to observe.

For Arthur, who was just starting out, this wasn't good news.

So, make the best of a bad job.

He had to give that Mother Tigress something to hold onto, to put her at ease.

'Arthur Kredos, who is obsessed with 'resurrecting his parents,' starts to dabble in death, researches death, and even inherited the contemporary 'Black Cat' of the 'Cat Faction.Black' precisely because of this, is much safer than the one who accumulates power and recruits subordinates.'

Alas!

I'm not a bad person.

I just lack a sense of security.'

Arthur sighed to himself.

He had even guessed what kind of measures the Mother Tigress would use to 'lure' his 'obsession.'

'When the time comes, show the appropriate 'struggle'—as the contemporary 'Black Cat' Arthur and as a son to his 'parents,' it is essential to swing between duty and familial love!'

With this in mind, Arthur's gaze shifted to Bob and Wiggins, who had finished their conversation.

"Sir, based on your requirements and current conditions, 30 'Death Warriors' will take about three months—mainly because a considerable amount of time is spent in the initial selection. They need to undergo at least three months of intensive training within our company at the docks to effectively improve the success rate of the Death Soldier Potion," said Bob.

"Three months?"

That's acceptable!"

Leave professional matters to the professionals. This had always been Arthur's principle, as long as he retained control over the final result.

"For those who are eliminated, don't waste them; integrate them into the standard security team—you can discuss with Malz and Kuke. They certainly wouldn't mind a bit more police force.

After that, it's all about showing our professionalism when called into action.

I want the people of South Los to think of us first when they need security," Arthur reminded Bob.

It wasn't just what he said; the crux lay in communication with Malz.

Arthur did not want Bob's 'premature arrival' to be misunderstood by Malz, creating unnecessary distance.

Clearly, Bob understood what Arthur meant and immediately nodded in agreement.

As Bob and Wiggins left, Arthur gave the latter a subtle signal without leaving any trace.

Suddenly, the previously disheartened Wiggins perked up.

His look toward Bob became even more cautious.

Unlike the previous 'wariness' of mistakenly thinking his position was being replaced, this caution stemmed from the 'mission' given by the superior.

Indeed, how could the superior abandon him so easily?

He must have a more important mission!

Not only to manage Rat Street well for the superior but also to keep an eye on this stranger!

Reminded of this, as he truly left No. 2 Cork Street, Wiggins stealthily gestured to Arthur, signaling "leave everything to me."

Watching the departing pair, Arthur inwardly sighed—

'It's so hard to be the leader of a small organization!'

Arthur truly wanted to throw everything away and live the life he desired, recklessly and without concern.

Unfortunately...

That wasn't possible!

If he really did that, it would probably end up like another 'Muck Cart Murder.'

That terrible experience was enough to last a lifetime.

Another time?

Arthur respectfully declined.

So, after a brief moment of sentiment, Arthur's eyes grew sharp—

'Preparation for registering for the Swordsmanship Competition, huh?

Baron Korol, Baron Hausman, Lord Lisop, Lord Bern, Lord Ernest, Lord Dibwa, Lord Bass...

You're also preparing to register, aren't you?

I want half of your men dead before the competition even starts!'

...

Chapter 339: Sign Up!

The registration address for the "Swordsmanship Competition" was at Elta Square.

The Elta Square, previously struck by a "gas lamp explosion," had undergone a complete repair under the auspices of the Earl of South Los, who "personally funded" the restoration, yet this explosion made the Earl start to reconsider the safety of "gas lamps," delaying the planned renovation of the "gas lamps," previously set to start in April of the following year, once again.

Even the persistent lobbying and persuading by several "Gas Lamp Companies" of Inner Bay bore no fruit.

Rumor had it that these "Gas Lamp Companies" were already looking for help from others indirectly—shares that were once 100% were being continuously reduced.

Especially under the competition among these gas lamp companies, the share ratio was visibly being carved away, incrementally bought up by the locals of South Los.

Of course, all of this was none of Bern's concern.

Bern didn't even know about these things.

As a coach at the "Joel Jock Swordsmanship Club," what he cared about more was this "Swordsmanship Competition"!

He was 20 this year, but hadn't had his 20th birthday yet.

So, he still qualified to participate in this "Swordsmanship Competition."

Besides him, there were also two other students in the club who met the requirements—beyond their ages, they must at least withstand ten moves under his instruction.

Otherwise, it would just be a waste of the registration fee.

However, by the time Bern finished registering with the two students, he realized...

It seemed like he might also be wasting the registration money.

The contestants in this "Swordsmanship Competition" were too strong.

Not to mention the contestant that had just brushed past him, heading towards the eastern corner of the square, tall like a small giant, the one standing in the western corner was also extremely formidable; he felt a stinging sensation in his eyes just from a brief glance.

There were also contestants at the northern and southern sides of the square.

Though they did not stand alone like in the eastern and western corners, but in groups of threes and fives.

Still, each group of contestants exuded a unique aura.

That aura...

It was somewhat like the "Spirit Medium"!

The thought that these people all possessed the strength of the "Spirit Medium" made Bern couldn't help but wryly smile.

Moreover, what was more important was that all of these people were strangers.

As a coach with a bit of fame within the South Los swordsmanship circles, Bern was just twenty, but he was familiar with most sword practitioners.

Unless...

'Nobles?'

What happened?

Why did all these nobles send someone to compete?'

Bern had some understanding of the ways of the nobles.

They couldn't possibly take the field personally in the "Swordsmanship Competition," but the "Noble's" rights allowed them to choose to have their attendants participate on their behalf.

This kind of thing has happened in past "Swordsmanship Competitions."

But it was only an occasional occurrence, once or twice.

A participation on such a large scale as seen now, however, was unprecedented.

This aroused Bern's attention considerably.

But no matter how the young coach speculated, he was clueless.

About the 'Swordsmanship Competition Champion's reward including a knighthood title,' at this stage, it was still circulating only among a small circle of people in the know.

Outside this small circle?

No one would be informed of anything further.

Just like Bern and those commoners similar to him.

They wouldn't know what was happening until the very last moment.

And by the final moment, even if they knew a great deal, everything would have already been decided, with no chance of change.

So, for most people of South Los or them, the "Swordsmanship Competition" was more of a celebration with a performance element.

The protagonist?

It would never be them.

Certainly, even minor characters and extras could get a "reward" in such a celebration.

It was like the owner of "Joel Jock Swordsmanship Club" who was constantly weaving through the crowd.

Todd Gili, the owner of the "Joel Jock Swordsmanship Club," originally wanted to replicate the "miracle" of the last Swordsmanship Competition.

But upon realizing that the people standing at the north, south, east, and west corners of the square were all extraordinary, he quickly gave up his original plan.

The owner began to flash a smile and started networking.

Bern and the two students didn't care about this.

It wasn't something they needed to worry about.

What they needed to worry about was the Swordsmanship Competition that began tomorrow.

So, after greeting their boss, Bern left with the two students—taking advantage of the remaining time to once again clarify the battle plan for himself and his students.

The appearance of those family servants of the nobility...

It disrupted his original plan.

Clearly, many commoner contestants who were not content were thinking the same as Bern.

They came in a hurry and left in a hurry.

Fighting for the only chance they might have to "make something of themselves."

Even if...

The hope was slim.

Standing in the shadows of the bell tower, Marinda with a pipe in her mouth, her gaze swept over the competitors at the east and west corners of Elta Square with derision—

The contestants there were the "family servants" representing the interests of "Baron Korol" and "Baron Hausman."

This was "noble privilege," and no one could say anything about it.

However, Marinda was still surprised at the shamelessness of both barons.

This lady recognized the two contestants.

One, with a large and strong stature like a little giant, was Kangsion, the "Whale Slaying Sword" with a considerable reputation in the Nearshore Islands.

The other, a slender man exuding a sharp aura, was the well-known ruins explorer "Storm Sword" Deljo from Bert Territory.

Both were Great Arcana Level contestants.

In their respective territories, they each had their own forces.

The former owned Whale Island and had at least 200 men under him, controlling various facilities on the island such as docks, pubs, inns, and brothels.

Although the latter did not have many people, a complete adventure team of 12 was not to be underestimated by anyone.

And persuading such people was not easy.

"Heh, to acquire the knighthood, did you reveal part of your family's core legacy?" Marinda sneered to herself.

She knew a bit about Baron Korol and Baron Hausman.

She also knew that the core legacy that could touch the Entrants, even just a part of it, would be attractive to Arcana Level powerhouses like Kangsion and Deljo.

So much so that they were willing to appear as family servants for both households—this was to circumvent the "noble rules" that began in the Silver Age: non-nobles shall not touch "noble knowledge."

Although with the onset of the Pioneer Era, these "rules" had loosened in some places.

But in most areas, they were still unbreakable.

At least that was the case in South Los.

But what this lady was even clearer about was that having a legacy wasn't enough; one also needed Talent, otherwise, the Korol and Hausman families would both be Entrants by now.

Therefore, her eyes were full of mockery.

Not mocking Whale Slaying Sword and Storm Sword, but mocking the Korol and Hausman families.

"Sometimes, the existence of rules isn't a constraint, but a protection...

I hope you understand what you're doing!" Marinda thought to herself as her gaze moved to the north and south corners.

Immediately, her eyes grew stern.

Chapter 340: He's Here!

In the southern corner of Elta Square stood men from the houses of "Lord Ernest," "Lord Dibwa," and "Lord Bass."

They were the second son of "Lord Ernest."

The nephew of "Lord Dibwa."

The nephew of "Lord Bass."

All three of them possessed 'Succession Rights', but would never become the 'Heir'.

In front of them, there were at least four to five successors in line.

Therefore, after learning about the rewards for the 'Swordsmanship Competition' Champion, they took their chances here.

Moreover, because of the Earl of South Los's 'preference' towards Arthur, these three nobles allied with the Earl couldn't exercise their 'Noble Privilege'.

They could only rely on their own abilities.

Won?

They would naturally acquire the title of 'Knight'.

Lost?

That was just due to lack of talent.

In any case, with the Earl of South Los's intervention, there was a rare display of 'fairness' between Arthur and the three noble youths.

Marinda's gaze swept past these three.

What truly made the lady ponder were the contestants from the north corner, representing "Lord Lisop" and "Lord Bern."

There stood Little Lisop, far from robust like his father, dressed impeccably, smiling and greeting the merchants seeking connections.

Clearly, those who shared the same thoughts as the owner of 'Joel Jock Swordsmanship Club' were not in the minority.

Around Little Lisop stood four distinct individuals.

A young man with an expressionless, icy demeanor, holding the hilt of his sword behind Little Lisop—he was the 'Servant' of the Lisop Family.

He was also one of the participants in the 'Swordsmanship Competition'.

The remaining three, with their tanned skin clearly weathered by wind, rain, and sun, making their features more rugged, stood in the three front positions to the left and right.

Even though they were dressed in western suits, the jewelry on their ears and hair revealed that they lived at sea for many years.

Pirates!

Marinda recognized the origins of these three at a glance.

She had known before that the three sons of the Bern Family were in constant conflict.

But she hadn't expected things to escalate to this point.

They even dared to use the power of pirates.

'Aren't they afraid of being hanged?'

The lady's eyes narrowed slightly with danger—she had no fondness for pirates whatsoever.

When her business was just getting started, these scoundrels caused her no small amount of trouble.

So, when she gained power, she turned four Pirate Islands into her private territory.

The dead pirates fed the fish.

The living pirates grew sugar cane for her during regular times.

Of course, the most important role of these living pirates was still to let her newly enlisted guards 'taste blood'—after a relatively mild first bloodshed experience, they would be much more likely to survive in battle thereafter.

Therefore, to give her own people a better chance of survival,

Marinda would regularly hunt for pirates.

It could be said that their identities had long determined that their struggle would be to the death.

And now?

Pirates had appeared before her.

Marinda was holding back from taking action.

She knew she could not disturb the 'Swordsmanship Competition' held in high regard by the Countess.

But fortunately, her reliable partner had a legitimate reason to get rid of these guys.

And her?

She needed to consider the Bern Family's affairs.

Her partner's price wasn't low, and coincidentally, she also needed a complete estate to match her Baroness's status.

As for Baron Kemir's estate?

That place was too old and broken, not befitting her status.

More importantly, Baron Kemir's estate was not close to South Los.

While this did not hinder her travels, it would impede the hosting of the 'Lady of the Long Night Salon' — compared to the minor affairs at number 6 White Bird Street, the lady preferred to hold salons within her own estate.

Of course, she would invite the Countess in advance.

Even with secrecy, it must be done "open and aboveboard."

Just like her partner.

Thinking of Arthur, the lady's brow furrowed slightly.

'Arthur, why haven't you come yet?

This guy couldn't have overslept, could he?'

Marinda guessed, puffing on her pipe.

Similarly, Little Lisop, who was dealing with the merchants around him, also wondered why Arthur hadn't arrived yet.

'Is it because he needs to treat his wounds, so as not to be detected by others?

Or...

Did others, just like him, use some little tricks to delay the 'Spirit Medium's' journey?'

Little Lisop's gaze involuntarily swept across the corners of the east and west sides of the square.

If someone made a move in advance, in Little Lisop's eyes, it could only be one of these two houses.

As for the 'Bern Family'?

Although he had already formed an alliance with the 'Bern Family,' deep down, Little Lisop still looked down on the 'Bern Family' for their vulgarity and ignorance.

How dare they collaborate with pirates!

Wait to be hanged by Mother Tigress!

Little Lisop glanced at the three pirates representing the 'Bern Family,' their faces full of defiance, and his contempt for the 'Bern Family' grew.

Without a doubt, with the death of Old Burne,

The 'Bern Family' was definitely doomed.

Should he take action?

He must take action!

But he had to be careful not to alert the Earl!

Little Lisop's mind was racing, but when dealing with the merchants, he was impeccable.

Even if he despised them in his heart.

He still needed to maintain the necessary demeanor.

Just like the man in front of him who claimed to be the owner of the 'Joel Jock Swordsmanship Club,' who actually wanted to discuss with him about seizing the championship of the Swordsmanship Competition!

'Ignorant insects!

They have no idea what this 'Swordsmanship Competition' signifies!'

Thinking this, the son of the lord still smiled warmly.

"Of course, if there is a chance, we must collaborate!"

The words of Little Lisop delighted the owner of the 'Joel Jock Swordsmanship Club'.

"It is an honor to meet you here," he said.

In his excitement, the owner of the 'Joel Jock Swordsmanship Club' bowed again.

He even forgot that Little Lisop had already said such words several times before.

Time passed by the minute and second.

Soon, there were less than 10 minutes left until 5 o'clock in the afternoon.

Freeman, in charge of registration, couldn't help but stand up once more to look out toward Elta Square.

For anything related to his 'father,' Freeman was concerned.

And this was already the seventh time this 'Newborn Bloodline' had done so.

This made Amiel, who was beside him, rub his temples.

Lady Talin, who had stayed up all night reading novels, just wanted to go home and catch up on sleep—the story of the detective Truman was quite intriguing.

She hadn't expected that everything was manipulated.

But such an interesting novel wasn't officially published.

Instead, it was privately printed by the author at his own cost.

That author named 'Garcia' has always been very poor, right?

Why does he suddenly have money?

And just as Lady Talin from Talin was pondering this, she clearly sensed the heavy breathing of Freeman beside her.

Immediately, Amiel, who had been 'slacking off,' straightened up and simulated a serious demeanor.

Because, allowing Freeman to undergo such changes at this moment, there was only one possibility—

The 'Spirit Medium' had arrived!