

Great Master 351

Chapter 351: Guests!

Although Grandma Andor had passed away, her two distant nephews and apprentices had clearly perfected her craft.

The taste of the beef in crusty pot and fried roast platter was almost the same as Arthur remembered.

A tiny bit imperfect, Arthur believed that time would definitely improve the flavors.

However, the apprentices' freestyle dish took Arthur by surprise.

Stewed chicken!

That was the freestyle dish of the two apprentices.

Called "stew," it was actually frying the chicken thighs on low heat until both sides were golden brown before stewing, then pouring in white mushrooms and garlic for sautéing before setting aside.

Then, they would start by stir-frying onions, followed by diced red carrots, and finally mixing in tomatoes until they disintegrated into a sauce. Only then did they add the previously seared chicken thighs and large prawns together with chicken broth mixed with an appropriate amount of brandy, stewing the prawns thoroughly until they were delicious.

Even though Arthur slightly minded the faint taste of alcohol, he ended up eating the whole chicken thigh.

The soup?

He took a shallow sip.

The faint fragrance of alcohol was filled with a rich taste of freshness.

It was the flavor of chicken, shrimp mixed with black pepper, basil leaves, garlic, fennel, and tomato.

The taste was not bad, but to prevent even a tiny bit of alcohol from influencing him, Arthur picked up the lemon water and began to drink it in big gulps.

People always have a tendency to be lazy.

Or put it another way...

Boundaries are always meant to be broken.

If you want your boundaries unbroken, you must guard them and never give up because of anything.

Because if you give up once, there will be a second time, and then a third time.

And after three times?

It becomes normal.

Then, it leads to the exclamation, 'It's already like this, just let it be.'

Arthur certainly didn't want that for himself.

Not that he had exceptional willpower.

Arthur was simply afraid of dying.

Marinda watched Arthur drinking water in big gulps, took a soup spoon to her mouth, gently blew on it, and deliberately winked at Arthur.

Arthur's lips curled into a smile as he placed a slice of white bread on Marinda's plate.

"Dear, have some bread," he said, his fingertips gently brushing Marinda's wrist.

Suddenly, a sense of nausea surged.

Immediately, the lady lost her appetite.

The lady gently set down her soup spoon and glared at Arthur.

Arthur responded with a smile, then his facial expression slightly changed.

Marinda stepped on his toes with her shoe.

The thick soles adequately shielded the lady's aversion to men.

"Here, have some soup,"

Marinda pushed the cream of pumpkin soup towards Arthur with an unprecedented smile,

"Hmm, okay," Arthur nodded.

But as Marinda pushed the cream of pumpkin soup, her hand trembled.

Her other foot was now being stepped on by Arthur.

"Is the bread tasty?" Arthur asked softly while exerting pressure.

"Tasty.

Is the soup delicious?"

Marinda nodded with a smile, her feet also starting to exert force.

The two stared at each other, exerting pressure under their feet, not knowing who started to rotate their ankles first, or if both started simultaneously.

The pain goes right to the heart through one's fingers.

It is even more intense in the toes.

Even for two people of robust "Physique," their faces had stiffened at this moment.

But neither of them spoke.

At this moment, speaking would mean admitting defeat.

This was something neither of them could accept.

Moreover, not only could they not speak out, but they also had to perfectly accept the other's provocation before they could retaliate.

Otherwise, they would lose.

Mysteriously, the two had reached a tacit understanding again.

Therefore—

"Darling, try adding some chili sauce."

A large dollop of chili sauce appeared on Arthur's plate.

The spiciness surged, causing Arthur's face to turn slightly red.

"Hmm, you should try this white pepper."

Arthur's wrist shook lightly, and the drifting white pepper flew towards Marinda's nostrils.

Her nostrils tickled, and Marinda's eyes almost instantly turned red.

Gulp, gulp!

Julie, who had just finished a jug of wheat juice in large gulps, looked at Arthur, whose face had turned red at some point, and then at Marinda, whose eyes had reddened at some point, and the Swordsmanship Chief couldn't help but laugh.

"Your relationship is really wonderful!"

Hearing such a compliment, Arthur and Marinda simultaneously smiled slightly, then tacitly tucked in their feet and once again simultaneously rubbed the foot that had been stepped on for a long time behind the unharmed leg.

"You just wait, bastard!"

"Heh, afraid of you, bastard!"

Their gazes intertwined, sparking an extraordinary heat.

But, this only made the Swordsmanship Chief even more envious—

"With Advisor Kledos around, Marinda, your choice for Swordsmanship Chief can finally be settled, right?"

Julie inquired.

Choosing the Swordsmanship Chief?

Arthur was puzzled deep down, swiftly collected his thoughts, and subtly glanced at Marinda.

Marinda entirely ignored looking at Arthur, but the lady's finger, resting by the edge of her plate, subtly twitched under the cover.

The plate obstructed Julie's line of sight.

But Arthur could see all too clearly.

Arthur's thoughts sprang into action, and he immediately listened intently—

"Yes, Mary will be my housekeeper and manage the kitchen, as for Edwin, he will be the Head Hunter. As for Arthur, I've already discussed it with him, he will be both the Swordsmanship Chief and Guard Commander—With Arthur having won the 'Swordsmanship Competition' of South Los, I don't think there will be any objections."

Marinda nodded slightly and said.

"Of course, but have you decided on the guests yet?"

The Swordsmanship Chief continued.

"Aside from Lord Count, I haven't decided on the other guests yet. Sister Julie, do you have any suggestions?"

Marinda affectionately asked the Swordsmanship Chief.

"Lord Ernest, Lord Dibwa, and Lord Bass would be good choices. As for Baron Korol and Baron Hausman, I will help inquire for you, Marinda.

Lord Bern's health is increasingly worrying.

However, he will send an appropriate gift as an apology for his absence.

As for Lord Lisop?

Hasn't he been the theme of our dinner tonight?"

The Swordsmanship Chief smiled warmly at Arthur.

"Of course!

From start to finish, he's been our topic.

Similarly, we should also be his topic.

And furthermore..."

Arthur responded smoothly.

Having been tipped off by Marinda, Arthur had roughly guessed what the Swordsmanship Chief was about to say—As a token of gratitude for his and Marinda's openness, the Countess of South Los had not only finalized the matters of Marinda's 'inheriting the noble title' and his 'knighthood after winning the championship', but also gifted him the estate of Lord Bern.

Arthur, although not fond of the cryptic ways of noble conversation, was very accustomed to them, handling and responding with ease.

Of course, Arthur wanted more than just these.

So, under the astonished eyes of the Swordsmanship Chief, Arthur stood up, looked toward the main door, and whispered—

"3...2...1!"

As the countdown ended, the doorbell at No. 2 Cork Street rang—

Ding-ding!

Chapter 352

Clatter, clatter.

The carriage wheels rolled over the gravel road, and unbeknownst to the coachman, a heavy rain had begun, making him exceedingly cautious. He didn't even bother to don his raincoat, instead brightening the carriage lamps and controlling the speed as best as he could.

Because the coachman was well aware that the boss sitting inside the carriage was not a forgiving person.

Especially tonight, the coachman distinctly noticed something off about his boss.

It was a mix of excitement and nervousness.

Even, when boarding the carriage, he had almost tripped.

The coachman didn't know what his boss was up to; he was just a coachman whose only duty was to deliver his boss to the destination.

As for the rest?

It was none of his business.

Nor did he dare to meddle.

"Hurry up! Speed up!"

The shout from inside the carriage forced the reluctant coachman to accelerate—he wanted to explain that the rain was too heavy, but he dared not.

Feeling the carriage picking up speed again, Todd Gili snorted coldly.

He then stopped paying attention to the so-called clever coachman.

However, he had made his decision.

After tonight, he would replace the coachman.

He didn't need someone who took liberties.

Besides, after tonight, he would be Lord Gili.

He would no longer be just a businessman.

He wouldn't have to rely on the "Jorge Jock Swordsmanship Club" for a living anymore.

He would live a richer, more carefree life.

Because he had ingratiated himself with a big shot!

Even Todd Gili himself had not expected that Lord Lisop's butler would seek him out and entrust him with a task.

Without any hesitation, Todd Gili had agreed.

To think, this was the son of a lord!

Although it felt somewhat wrong to that 'Spirit Medium,' it was better than letting himself down.

Of course, he was also cautious of the 'Spirit Medium's' mysterious nature, but the butler had assured him—he would definitely be safe.

Suddenly, the owner of the swordsmanship club had no more worries about the future.

Nobles cannot be trusted!

Of course, Todd Gili had heard this saying before.

But at this moment, Todd Gili's eyes were already blinded by greed, his palm resting on the side of a chest, fingers tapping lightly.

He was completely lost in the beautiful fantasies of the future.

Why can nobles not be trusted?

This is why nobles cannot be trusted!

Greed, the original sin.

"Hurry up, you lazy thing!"

Opening the carriage door and looking at the heavy rain outside, Todd Gili barked.

The coachman hurriedly jumped down from the carriage to hold an umbrella over Todd Gili.

The whole process was quick enough.

But Todd Gili still felt it was slow.

This made Todd Gili even more convinced that he should dismiss the coachman immediately, yet considering he needed a ride back tonight, he decided to stick with the original plan and dismiss him tomorrow—but he would dock his pay for tonight.

'Huh, why is there a big banyan tree here?

Was it here before?

I think it was!'

Todd Gili felt a bit dizzy but didn't take it to heart, thinking he was just overwhelmed with the preparations for the "Swordsmanship Competition" these days and too excited for tonight.

Standing in front of No. 2 Cork Street, he held a small chest in one hand and straightened his attire with the other.

Then, he rang the doorbell.

Ding-dong~

The brass bell engraved with a blessing under a chimera sounded a clear ringing, which carried far even in the heavy rain.

About two to three seconds later, the door opened—

The young 'Spirit Medium,' holding her Orange Cat, stood in the corridor, the candlelight illuminating her figure, which seemed softer against the backdrop of Pendragon.

"Good evening, Lord Kledos!

"I came for our agreement!"

Standing outside, the owner of the Swordsmanship Club revealed a humble yet enthusiastic smile, just like the one he wore the afternoon he first met Arthur.

He wanted to make Arthur feel at ease.

But...

Looking at the other person's smile, Arthur inexplicably thought of the encounter at the Red Rose Restaurant that noon—the sliced cheese teeming with writhing maggots.

Instantly, Arthur's good mood was completely gone.

He had almost forgotten about it.

But now, the person in front of him reminded him of it again.

If it weren't for the plans that followed, he would stuff a handful of live maggots into the other's mouth right now.

"Hmm, good evening."

Arthur nodded and stepped aside to clear the hallway.

Todd Gili was somewhat perplexed as to why Arthur was so indifferent.

After all, he had come to fulfill their agreement.

After all, it was Arthur who had requested this.

Could something unexpected have occurred?

Already apprehensive, Todd Gili, carrying a small box, walked toward No. 2 Cork Street with great trepidation. However, before entering, the owner of the Swordsmanship Club did not forget to stamp his feet, making himself appear a bit cleaner—even though he had done the same before, it felt like it had a special significance this time.

It seemed...

like a ritual.

A ritual of becoming someone superior.

Almost immediately after stamping his feet, Todd Gili's nervousness disappeared.

This was evident in Todd Gili's reaction upon seeing the Crimson Painting, the fierce deer head, the war armor, and the terrifying appearance of 'Ms. Anna.'

The other party was undoubtedly entering No. 2 Cork Street for the first time.

Logically speaking, he should have been as startled as ordinary people by Old Charlie's arrangement.

Indeed, at first, the owner of the Swordsmanship Club was truly taken aback.

But he quickly calmed down.

The way he moved forward was almost serene.

'Terrifying greed!'

Watching the state the owner of the Swordsmanship Club had achieved through something akin to self-hypnosis, a sincere exclamation formed in Arthur's heart—human potential is infinite, especially when the goal is within reach, it can awaken boundless potential.

Arthur agreed with this statement.

But he didn't think it was accurate enough.

He believed that 'potential' should be replaced with 'desire.'

Desire is the engine of humans!

Relentless!

Endless!

"Lord Kledos, please forgive my tardiness—you know, knowledge is immensely valuable, particularly knowledge about swordsmanship.

It took me a great effort to find these two items."

Todd Gili emphasized again.

Arthur did not dispute this.

Knowledge is immensely valuable, a universally recognized fact.

Even learning ordinary text requires spending far more money than in other industries.

As for knowledge of swordsmanship?

True swordsmanship knowledge has long involved 'Mystic Side knowledge,' which is invaluable in itself since swordsmanship was originally developed by nobles to stimulate their descendants' bloodlines.

Although there have been some changes due to the passage of time, the essence has not changed.

Therefore, the value is still extremely high.

Even now, Arthur would not ignore it.

After all, his 'Serpent of Death' bloodline still carried the labels 'thin' and 'fragmentary.'

Seeing that Arthur finally showed interest, Todd Gili did not hesitate at all and immediately opened the small box, taking out the scroll and spreading it out in front of Arthur.

Almost instantly, text began to emerge before Arthur's eyes—

[Secret Technique Discovered: Swift Bird Breathing Technique!]

[Secret Technique Discovered: Swift Bird Meditation!]

...

Chapter 353: Cold Ice Rain!

Surprise flashed in Arthur's eyes, yet the text before him continued—

[Judgment: Possesses 'Swift Bird Swordsmanship. Pseudo Lv3'. Would you like to expend 100XP to merge with 'Swift Bird Breathing Technique', 'Swift Bird Meditation Technique'?]

...

Seeing the fusion prompt appear, Arthur was not surprised.

What truly surprised him was the small box in Todd Gili's hands that contained the 'Swift Bird Breathing Technique' and 'Swift Bird Meditation Technique'.

Clearly, that Little Lisop had conducted a rather thorough investigation on him, even knowing about the "Swift Bird Swordsmanship. Pseudo" that he had used only a handful of times.

Hence, he had specifically brought out the 'Swift Bird Breathing Technique' and 'Swift Bird Meditation Technique'!

'You really went all out to set me up, kid!'

Arthur thought to himself, his face alight with ecstatic joy.

Seeing Arthur's expression, the owner of the Swordsmanship Club felt a burst of joy in his heart.

"As per our agreement, they are now yours!"

So said the owner of the Swordsmanship Club.

"Thank you for everything you've done for me.

I will always remember it!"

Arthur appeared grateful.

"An agreement! Yes, an agreement!"

The club owner murmured, but his heart was filled with disdainful sneers.

'Hah, that's all a 'Spirit Medium' amounts to?'

With a sense of contempt, having completed his task, the Swordsmanship Club owner had no further desire to stay at No. 2 Cork Street. He couldn't wait to report back to that noble person.

Thus, he promptly took his leave.

Arthur, meanwhile, with a smile, saw him out the door.

After watching the man board the carriage and noticing Edwin stealthily following from a dark corner, Arthur then turned and walked back into No. 2 Cork Street.

In the Spirit Medium Parlor, Marinda and Julie, who had just emerged from a secret chamber, were looking at the two scrolls of secret techniques inside the small box.

Emotion was evident on their faces.

However, their feelings were headed in different directions.

Like Arthur, Marinda was astonished by Little Lisop's bold move.

But Swordsmanship Master Julie was nostalgic—

"Ah, 'Swift Bird Swordsmanship'!

Back when the Grand Duke introduced this swordsmanship during the 'Seven Years' War' to train soldiers and swordsmen, it incited the opposition of the entire South County nobility.

Even the Old Earl was a firm detractor.

And now it seems...

That Grand Duke was truly remarkable!

He used this swordsmanship to gain unparalleled fame among commoners, and it made many nobles so preoccupied with their power struggles that they completely neglected the ever-changing battlefield.

Even though this was not 'Lion Swordsmanship', it was the same."

With that, the Swordsmanship Chief let out a deep sigh.

Arthur, following that sigh, reflected on the information he had consciously been gathering lately—

The Duke of the Inner Bay was known as the Lion, not only for his unique bloodline ability 'Lion Group'.

'Lion Swordsmanship' was also indispensable.

It was a swordsmanship that perfectly integrated with 'Lion Group'.

It allowed the user to exert their charisma to the utmost degree.

Or to put it another way...

'Monarch's Presence'!

Legend has it that a young Old Lion was able to turn a two-thousand-strong elite musketeer squad to defect on the spot, because he had mastered 'Lion Swordsmanship' to a high degree, complemented by his bloodline's 'Lion Group' ability.

Of course, there was another version of the story as well.

To build up the young Old Lion's reputation, the Golden Lion Family had 'burned' all the gold coins it had saved over a hundred years, creating that astonishing scene—marveling at the Old Lion's 'talent gap' that he needed so many gold coins to achieve that effect.

With someone of 'normal talent', the effect would have been tenfold.

Arthur was skeptical about this piece of news.

Although he believed that there was no such thing as an unfounded rumor, and that everything must have a certain cause, the 'Golden Lion Family' originally didn't have just one heir, the Old Lion.

If the Old Lion were really that bad, how could he possibly have received such strong support from his family?

Besides this piece of news, there were many other rumors that were difficult to distinguish between truth and falsehood—

For example: in the spring, the Old Lion needed the company of 30 ladies per day, but each time it only lasted 10 seconds, and once a lady was so dissatisfied with the short duration that she grabbed him by the collar and beat him up.

For example: the Old Lion's favorite thing was to stroll in Inner Bay at dusk, as if surveying his territory, but he always got lost, to the point that the night patrol mistook him for a suspicious person and took him to the police station, where he was locked up with a bunch of hooligans. The following day, the entire Lion Palace was in an uproar when the palace steward fetched him back, still eagerly chatting with the scoundrels, seemingly reluctant to end the conversation.

For example: the Old Lion could consume 40kg of meat in a meal, particularly fond of barbecues. Each time he faced the court doctor's advice to eat more vegetables, he would hide the unwanted vegetables under the table and feed them to rabbits, waiting until the rabbits were plump enough to roast and eat them in the middle of the night. Once, he failed to control the fire, burning half of the backyard.

For example: the Old Lion actually had no whiskers and was bald; his lush hair and beard were all fake. Once, during a meeting, he put his whiskers and hair on backward, and when someone pointed this out to him, he immediately adjusted them nonchalantly and continued to engage with his guests in cheerful conversation.

...

In summary, if you compiled these true and false stories about the Old Lion into a book, it would definitely be a bestseller.

The people of Inner Bay would definitely adore their lord's various 'interesting lives'.

Because they were truly amusing.

Even if one stripped away the aura of the Old Lion as the 'Grand Duke' and the 'Pioneer,' he was still funny enough to make people burst into laughter.

Just like Arthur, who took it as a 'joke book.'

Without truly encountering the Old Lion, Arthur would definitely not jump to conclusions.

In the face of such an adversary, any deviation would prove fatal.

What about the Earl of South Los?

The same applies.

"Lady Julie, please keep this box and the secret technique safe—I think I may need you to clear my name in tomorrow's competition," Arthur remarked with a sigh.

"That's exactly what I'm here for!" the Swordsmanship Chief laughed in response.

At the same time, the Swordsmanship Chief promptly produced a contract, detailing every event that had just occurred.

Instantly, Arthur gained an immediate impression of the reliability of the Swordsmanship Chief.

No verbal agreement was as powerful as a contract.

"Consider this my personal compensation!"

After handing over the contract to Arthur, the Swordsmanship Chief picked up the barrel of honey fruit wine that had just been opened and took one sip, waved off Marinda's offer to see her out, and headed straight outside.

"Julie is a good person, right?"

I hope she won't get caught up in the upcoming chaos and fall into the abyss," Marinda murmured while clenching her pipe, her voice somewhat muffled.

Because this lady was all too aware that it was impossible.

The other party's established identity meant she would inevitably be in the midst of the whirlwind.

As for falling into the abyss?

Who knows.

She herself didn't even know if she would remain safe and sound.

And Arthur...

He probably didn't know either, right?

Subconsciously, Marinda turned to look at her partner.

In the heavy rain, the young 'Spirit Medium' stretched out his hand to catch the icy autumn rain, his face calm yet filled with undeniable certainty—

"Chaos is never the abyss!

Chaos has always been...

the ladder leading up!"

With that, Arthur turned to Marinda with a radiant smile.

Marinda was momentarily stunned in place.

Watching the man in front of her, the flicker of the flame in her pipe quickened.

And then...

She was doused with a faceful of rainwater.

Chapter 354: The Swordsmanship Competition Begins!

When Marinda left, she almost set No. 2 Cork Street on fire.

"This woman is truly terrifying!"

Arthur, who dodged a final shady kick upon her departure, clicked his tongue and turned to pick up his cat.

"Hehehe, little kitty.

Daddy will tell you a story, once upon a time there was a mountain, and atop that mountain, there was a temple where an old father would tell stories to a little kitty, about how the women down the mountain are tigers!

Hey, women are tigers, you must be careful!"

Arthur, holding his cat, returned to No. 2 Cork Street.

Only after the door closed did the young 'Spirit Medium' sigh in his heart.

Who among my family would understand?

Not only do I have to plan my own schemes, but I also need to take into account the psychological state of my partners, fearing that any little mistake might lead to a complete failure.

Yet, still I am misunderstood!

How tough it is for me!

But my little kitty is good!

"Pan, you must not let down your old father, okay?"

Arthur rubbed Pendragon's face against his own.

Pan, with a look of disdain, kept pushing Arthur with the pads of his paws, and when he couldn't push him away, he would hit him twice, then, the kitty was left in utter despair.

Not bothering to return to the dining room to clean up, Arthur, following habit, added enough coal to the furnace and adjusted the gas valve before returning to the Spirit Medium Parlor, picking up the

books he brought back from 'Yumir Manor'—aside from the parts that interested him, Arthur only roughly flipped through the rest, not quite reaching the degree of thorough reading.

But this did not meet Arthur's expectations.

Not reaching the depth of intensive reading meant that skimming was fundamental.

This was a habit that Arthur retained from his past life—for any book of value, he did this.

Such a habit had brought substantial benefits to Arthur.

Therefore, he had no intention of changing it.

Pendragon, who had initially been let go and run out, soon returned and, seeing Arthur engrossed in reading, leaped straight into Arthur's arms, nestled there with his eyes squinted, and when Arthur's hand landed on him, he let out a series of purring sounds.

Then, Arthur even tucked his feet under Kuliqi's belly.

Kuliqi, lying at Arthur's feet, shifted his belly a bit to let his soft fur cover his master's feet more comfortably.

Throughout, the 'Death Hound's' eyes stayed closed, only its ears kept changing direction.

Outside, the rain grew heavier.

Inside, it was warm, quiet.

The night, gradually passed.

When the next day arrived, even though there was still a little rain, it could not dampen the enthusiasm of the people of South Los.

The thrice-yearly 'Swordsmanship Competition' was an extraordinary celebration for the average citizens. For this, local merchants had prepared well in advance, and according to their respective business associations, they brought out their carefully chosen goods and hung out their huge signs.

These signs were not only large but also brightly colored.

The key was to stand out!

In such extensively attended festivities, every merchant was wise and wouldn't miss the chance for advertising.

Besides, the fees for these stalls were not cheap, so the merchants naturally wanted to make the most of it.

The money collected from the fees naturally belonged to the Lord Count.

The Earl would use these funds to hire circuses, bards, and singers to warm up the crowd for the 'Swordsmanship Competition' that wouldn't start until noon.

Of course, the money would certainly not be completely used up.

The rest would naturally be invested into the upcoming 'Cold Winter Festival'.

One should know that both the 'Harvest Festival' and the 'Cold Winter Festival' are sponsored by the Earl, who must also supply a limited amount of alcohol and meat to the residents of South Los.

That is not a small expense.

Do you expect the Earl to pay out of his own pocket?

Unrealistic.

For the Earl to contribute a little, and for the remaining costs to be shared among the merchants, that was already a kindness.

And this ratio was roughly about 1:9.

When Arthur stepped out around eleven in the morning, the drizzling rain had already stopped.

Edwin was driving the carriage to pick up Arthur, as always.

"Good afternoon, Arthur."

Marinda's chauffeur greeted him.

Without needing Arthur to ask, he relayed the events of the previous night—

"Just as you and the Lord predicted, Little Lisop was ready to kill to seal the lips of others.

We saved the person.

The killer was fooled by an Illusion Technique.

This fellow had a bit of repute in the Old Town of South Los before, disappeared for several years; I thought he was dead, but he turned out to have offered his services to Lord Lisop."

Saying this, the chauffeur opened the carriage door for Arthur.

"That Lord Lisop seems to have more ambition than we imagined,"

Arthur commented.

This wasn't baseless speculation.

It was what the 'Bandage Swordsman' had heard from Eli, the scout and part-time intelligence trafficker.

After the 'Bandage Swordsman' played his part as expected and temporarily exited the scene, this fellow stuck to him like a plaster.

Arthur knew all too well what the other party wanted to do.

It was nothing more than having tasted the sweetness, wanting to pry more information from the 'Bandage Swordsman'.

But Arthur did not have the 'Bandage Swordsman' cast the fellow out.

Because this guy was pretty clever, he seemed to have noticed the 'Bandage Swordsman's' lack of information and would occasionally let slip some secret news.

Therefore, Arthur not only learned that Lord Lisop had an official Guard, but he also had a covert Guard.

"Then we can only pray that his strength matches his ambition,"

the chauffeur joked.

Edwin thought this Lord Lisop was as good as dead.

Being targeted by his own master and Lord Kledos at the same time, even the favor of the goddess of Destiny wouldn't be useful unless he was a bastard of Destiny; otherwise, his demise was certain.

"Hmm, I'll wish him well,"

Arthur said as he boarded the carriage.

The carriage started to move slowly as Edwin cracked his whip.

And the blessing of 'Death' had already been sent.

Lord Lisop, who was in his own manor, seemed to sense something and looked around as he raised his head—just now, he had felt a chill down his spine.

This feeling was somewhat foreign to him.

Since he had left the battlefield, he hadn't experienced this sensation.

But he never doubted this feeling.

Lisop knew full well that it was this intuition that had given him everything he currently had.

Even though it was later confirmed not to be Bloodline, but a kind of quasi-Talent, it didn't affect the Lord's trust in his own instincts.

Especially at this moment!

'Have I exposed my traces?

No!

I absolutely cannot allow it!

I must act immediately!'

Thinking this at the bottom of his heart, his face twisted into a peculiar ferocity.

It was a kind of bloodthirsty, excited, and distorted pleasure.

Just the thought of that result made the burly frame of the Lord tremble.

At this moment, the bell rang out in Elta Square—

The Swordsmanship Competition had officially begun!

Chapter 355: Who Said Standing While Sleeping Isn't Heroic!

Ding! Ding! Ding!

The bell tower in Elta Square began to ring, totaling twenty-seven times—each celebration in South County begins with twenty-seven bell tolls to commemorate the original Twenty-Seven Braves.

And because the eras of the Braves differed, the twenty-seven bell tolls were not in succession but divided into three sets.

The first set of three tolls represented the Hero of the Sword, Hero of the Shield, and Hero of the Staff from the Golden Age who acquired a piece of land for humanity to thrive on from dragons, elves, orcs, dwarves, and other races.

The second set of nineteen tolls represented the nineteen heroes who emerged to fight for humanity during the Imperial Age and the Fog War.

The third set of five tolls was for the five heroes of the 'disappeared century' of the Holy Empire.

As for the first twenty-two heroes, the people of today hold no doubts about their existence.

But as for the five heroes of the Holy Era, their existence was questioned due to the lack of records.

However, as an ancient custom, it was still preserved.

Amidst the echoing bell tolls, the Swordsmanship Chief of the Earl of South Los stood on the high platform, reciting the count's blessing—

"When the storm comes, please hold fast to the rope in your hands!

When the waves rise high, please hold tight to the oar in your hands!

I wish to give you courage and promise..."

Because of the Earl of South Los's habit of staying out of the public eye, he did not appear in this 'Swordsmanship Competition' as usual.

Indeed, not only at the 'Swordsmanship Competition,' but also at the four fixed festivals of South County—'Peace Festival' and 'Storm Calming Day'—the Lord Count rarely made an appearance.

The last time he appeared was at the 'Storm Calming Day' three years ago.

However, even though the Lord Count did not appear, the blessing speech was still lengthy, enough to make Arthur sleepy.

For today's 'Swordsmanship Competition,' Arthur did not stay up all night reading; he went to bed early.

And then...

He didn't fall asleep.

It's strange how people are unable to sleep the night before they have important things to do, yet when the time comes to handle these tasks, sleepiness attacks.

Just like Arthur at this moment.

He certainly had slept the necessary 'six hours.'

But right now, his eyelids felt as heavy as if they weighed a thousand pounds.

Especially with the Swordsmanship Chief's recitation of the blessing speech ringing in his ears, it was almost as if it were a lullaby.

Arthur knew what the next part of the blessing speech would be without even listening.

It was nothing more than revisiting history, looking forward to the future, and extolling the South Los Family...

It was always the same.

There was no difference.

No!

There was a difference.

When he stood and listened before, Arthur couldn't sleep.

Now, standing and listening, he could fall asleep, supported by the strong balance provided by the enhancement of his Physique and the secret technique 'Cat and Snake.'

Moreover, his slight snoring was controlled so well that it seemed like prolonged breathing.

Unless someone stared directly at Arthur, they would never notice he was asleep.

And since Arthur was at a front row position, it was virtually impossible for him to be discovered.

The only one who might realize Arthur was asleep, the Swordsmanship Chief Julie reciting the blessing, was 'intently' reading—her 6,000-word speech was personally written by the Lord Count, and she had to recite it without missing a word; she was so focused that she didn't notice Arthur dozed off.

About half an hour later, the recitation finally neared its end—

"The 'Swordsmanship Competition' begins now!"

When she reached the word "begins," the Swordsmanship Chief let out a sigh of relief.

She had finally 'read' it all.

And that change in mood immediately altered her tone of voice.

Arthur was instantly awakened and instinctively began applauding.

Clap, clap, clap!

The crisp sound of clapping was followed by applause all around the next moment.

On the other side, Little Lisop snorted disdainfully to himself.

'Show-off! Just wait until I bring you down!' he thought.

Arthur clearly felt this malice.

But it didn't matter; he was eagerly waiting.

Holding the A-01 card, Arthur walked directly to the ring representing District A—the 'Swordsmanship Competition' had rings set up in eight districts, A to H.

Arthur's card was for District A1.

'Whale Slaying Sword' Kangsion was in B1.

'Storm Sword' Deljo was in C1.

And Little Lisop was in District D.

The three sons of the Bern Family were in District E.

As for 'Lord Ernest,' 'Lord Dibwa,' and 'Lord Bass,' three young nobles from noble houses, they were in districts F, G, and H, respectively.

The exceptions were Little Lisop and the three sons of the Bern Family.

Because their 'servants' had suffered an accident, they had to compete themselves.

What about the draw results?

Of course, it was fair and just!

A public drawing under the watchful eyes of everyone—how could they cheat using heated wooden balls?

Impossible!

"Absolutely impossible!"

According to the order, Arthur was the first to go on stage.

As contestant number one, he needed to fight at least nine matches before he could enter the quarterfinals, which was extremely disadvantageous for anyone, but Arthur was the exception.

The opponent was a student from the 'Joel Jock Swordsmanship Club.'

Upon seeing Arthur, the opponent's face turned pale.

This student remembered well how Arthur had effortlessly defeated his own coach, whom he couldn't last three moves against.

Right then and there, the student was about to concede defeat.

But at that moment—

"Draw your sword and attack like you do in your regular training!"

Arthur spoke up.

The student was stunned.

So were the spectators all around.

What was going on?

Arthur, ignoring the gazes of those around him, faced the opposing student with a gentle smile and nodded encouragingly.

"Alright!"

The encouraged student nodded vigorously and then drew his sword to attack.

He had a certain foundation, but that was about it.

Approximately the level of 'Basic Swordsmanship Lv1.'

Arthur watched the opponent's blade and footwork, silently evaluating.

After deftly sidestepping the thrust, Arthur said aloud.

"Move your wrist, don't brute force it, you're using a sword, not swinging a hammer."

"Oh, got it!"

The student nodded repeatedly and attacked again.

By that time, the crowd had realized that Arthur was giving a lesson.

"Such a benevolent lord!"

"Indeed!"

"This lord's character is even better than his swordsmanship!"

"Correct!"

...

The area was filled with endless words of admiration.

And this was exactly what Arthur wanted.

When it came to harvesting a heap of reputation in the 'Swordsmanship Competition,' flashy fights were one approach, but displaying virtue was even better.

Because people liked the latter.

It also further irritated Little Lisop.

It definitely wasn't because he was about to take over 'Joel Jock Swordsmanship Club,' and in order to better run the club and attract more people, he had to openly select talented individuals.

Definitely not!

As for why 'Joel Jock Swordsmanship Club' would belong to Arthur?

You have to pay the price when you make a mistake, right?

Given the huge mistake Todd Gili made, it was only right and reasonable to compensate Arthur with the 'Joel Jock Swordsmanship Club,' wasn't it?

Smack!

After another exchange, the sword in the young student's hands was knocked away by Arthur's swift hand.

This time, the young student didn't attack again.

Instead, he bowed respectfully, as an apprentice would.

"Thank you for your teachings!"

He spoke with genuine gratitude because even just a few attacks had made the student feel his swordsmanship had greatly improved.

'If I could receive guidance from Lord Kledos regularly, my swordsmanship would surely advance rapidly.'

With this regretful sentiment, the student picked up his longsword, bowed again to Arthur, and then finally leaped off the stage.

The second contestant followed.

Just like the first, it was a teaching match.

Then came the third, the fourth...

Gradually, the people in the square were completely drawn to the A Block stage.

Compared to the other seven stages of fierce battles, the A Block stage was just too unusual. If it had been a mix of fighting and teaching, the former would surely be more attractive, but with seven stages of combat and only one teaching match, the latter unconsciously drew attention.

Because it was different.

Especially after 'Whale Slaying Sword' and 'Storm Sword' effortlessly 'cleared' their matches, Arthur's stage drew even more attention.

And every time an opponent finished an attack and Arthur began to comment on their swordsmanship, there was always a cheer from the crowd.

'What a populist clown!

If you want the adoration of these commoners, then you must endure their criticism—who told you not to realize that these fools are only fit to be deceived!'

Little Lisop, the last to appear in the D Block, was constantly monitoring Arthur.

Watching more and more people gather around Arthur, the son of the lord knew his chance had arrived.

Eyeing the two fighters still battling in the D Block and the three people queueing in front of him, the son of the lord walked toward the A Block with a noble's distinctive drawn-out intonation, shouting just before Arthur's next contestant could go on stage—

"Wait!"

Chapter 356

A distinct, special tone drew the attention of everyone near Arena A area.

People looked puzzled at this young noble dressed in a white base shirt, riding breeches, and a brocade jacket—not because Little Lisop was so famous that all the people of South Los recognized him, but because of the way the riding breeches showed off the white stockings on his lower legs, a style exclusive to traditional nobility.

Of course, there were also those eye-catching...

High heels.

In fact, as far back as the Seven Years' War, victorious soldiers had identified nobles by their high heels.

After all, one could discard wigs and coats.

But the foot deformities caused by wearing high heels over many years were impossible to change in a short time.

Many speculated maliciously that the reason why noble attire was simplified during the Pioneer Era was to make future escapes more convenient.

Thus, a man wearing high heels could only be a conservative noble.

This was already common knowledge among the people of South Los.

For this reason, those nearby refrained from shouting or cursing.

Little Lisop was very satisfied with the angry yet silent expressions around him.

This made him feel 'powerful.'

Just like his father.

Especially when Little Lisop saw the fleeting displeasure on Arthur's face, the upcoming burst of pleasure made him involuntarily pick up a handkerchief and gently wipe non-existent sweat from his palms.

But the next moment, the nobleman's son's hand stiffened.

"Get down, you pretentious fellow!"

"You, a lord's son, why pretend to be a Great Noble?"

"You don't have a title!"

"Get down!"

...

Suddenly these sounds emerged from some corner of the crowd, and then, they became incessant and overwhelming.

This disturbed Little Lisop.

Especially when he saw the mocking look on Arthur's face, his irritation quickly morphed into rage.

Immediately, the nobleman's son raised the handkerchief to his lips, covering his expression.

Then, the nobleman's son subtly altered his original plan.

He skipped some steps of the plan, eager to witness the tragic downfall of the "Spirit Medium" before him.

As for whether the remaining steps would affect the overall plan?

Of course not!

After all, he was destined to win!

How could he lose with conclusive evidence?

"Ladies and gentlemen, please quiet down.

You might be puzzled and dissatisfied by my presence here.

But actually, I am here for 'fairness'—

The fairness that belongs in the arena!"

The tone was still unique, but as he raised his voice, it lost all semblance of elegance, sounding as if a duck were quacking.

However, the content of his words still captivated the surrounding common folk.

Curiosity appeared in the eyes of the people.

This made Little Lisop's face break into a smile. The lord's son, walking in high heels along the perimeter of the rectangular arena, circled twice to peak their curiosity to its highest before returning to his original spot—about three meters opposite from Arthur.

This was an excellent position.

One that Little Lisop had carefully chosen.

He could clearly see the expressions of the crowd surrounding the arena and also see the expression of the Spirit Medium across from him.

Seeing Arthur's brow furrow, as he opened his mouth to speak yet ultimately closed it without a word, Little Lisop laughed inwardly.

'Ah, noticed something's amiss?

Too late!

With several silent, cold laughs, Little Lisop cleared his throat twice and began to speak to the expectant crowd—

"Do you know why our 'Spirit Medium' Arthur Kredos is so powerful?"

"Why?"

His speech was interrupted, but this time Little Lisop wasn't annoyed; instead, he looked towards the man he had arranged there and slowly said.

"Because he stole our family's treasure—

'Swift Bird Swordsmanship'!"

As soon as these words were spoken, the crowd erupted in astonishment.

People's eyes, when turned towards Arthur, were filled with surprise, disbelief, and a bit of... 'So that's how it is' realization.

Arthur distinctly felt such gazes.

For this, the young 'Spirit Medium' was utterly unmoved.

He had anticipated such a scene long ago.

Not a tiny bit surprised.

Because...

This is human nature!

People love to first deify and then pull the deities they have shaped off their pedestals.

They never tire of this self-made and self-destructive process.

The 'joy' it births is purely seductive and makes one delightfully corrupt.

Or maybe...

This is an enticement brought forth purely by evil.

And there's no one who can resist it.

Arthur admitted he couldn't either.

Therefore, he chose to stay away from such people and things.

But what if he was 'labeled' one of them?

No fear, nor refusal.

Only a faint excitement.

'Thank you, world, for having the 'Mystic Side'!'

Arthur sincerely thanked the world.

When great power was bestowed upon him, it always made complex matters seem simple.

Externally, Arthur was looking at Little Lisop more coldly—

"Do you know what you're saying?"

"Of course!"

"Then do you know the consequences of slandering others?"

"Of course!"

"And are you able to bear those consequences?"

"Of course!"

With each question, Arthur stepped forward, the 'Death' aura around him deepened.

And though Little Lisop was shaking all over from the 'Death' aura, almost kneeling to beg for mercy, not a bit of stutter tainted his words.

They were resounding.

Forcefully emphatic.

Little Lisop looked at Arthur, who had now approached, with immense satisfaction in his eyes.

This son of a Lord assured.

The 'Spirit Medium' before him was ferocious only on the outside.

The opponent had clearly figured everything out, planning to intimidate him with the aura of an 'Entrant', and then, likely, to go back home to deal with the 'Swift Bird Breathing Technique', 'Swift Bird Meditation'.

How could he possibly let him have his way!

Whew!

Right in front of Arthur, this son of a Lord took a deep breath, then loudly said—

"I, Little Lisop, have absolutely not slandered 'Spirit Medium' Arthur Kredos!

All present can testify!

If I have slandered 'Spirit Medium' Arthur Kredos, I am willing to become your attendant, I am willing to compensate with all my fortune.

Including but not limited to properties in South Los and South Town."

Little Lisop paused.

Then, he continued in a voice that only he and Arthur could clearly hear.

"Oh, by the way.

I have a ten percent stake in the coal and iron mines business in South Town.

I think that should offset my disrespect towards an 'Entrant', right?

Of course, that's assuming I have slandered you."

Saying this, Little Lisop turned and looked towards the high platform.

There was Lady Julie, the Swordsmanship Chief representing the Earl of South Los.

This son of a Lord bowed first, then loudly called out—

"Lady Julie, please mediate justice for me!"

Chapter 357: Ask for a Hammer, Get a Hammer!

Just moments ago, the disturbance in Arena A area had already captured the attention of people in other parts of the venue.

And with the cry of this son of a noble, the eyes of the entire Elta Square were now focused here, and the duels that were taking place in the arenas had also come to a halt.

"Hiss!"

"What? 'Spirit Medium' Arthur Kredos actually stole someone else's secret technique?"

"Do you know?"

"The reason 'Spirit Medium' Arthur Kredos is so powerful is that he steals other people's secret techniques!"

"Do you know?"

"The reason 'Spirit Medium' Arthur Kredos is so powerful is because he can steal other people's secret techniques!"

"Do you know?"

"'Spirit Medium' Arthur Kredos can obtain other people's memories and secret techniques by consuming their souls!"

...

In less than five minutes, rumors had begun to morph into tall tales.

Moreover, they spread in every direction with unbelievably exaggerated content.

"Ha, the little games of nobles!"

'Storm Sword' Deljo scoffed.

He had encountered similar situations himself.

However, after he had beheaded that bastard, all the rumors fell apart on their own.

Nonetheless, he had faced some punishment for it.

For instance: a hefty fine.

When he paid the fine, he could clearly sense the glee of the opposing Minor Noble family—because of this, he suspected that they might have deliberately provoked him.

The subsequent half-year of his squad tightening their belts only further convinced him of the nobility's shamelessness.

Just like what was happening now.

Even without knowing the full story, Deljo was certain that this was the work of nobles.

"This guy is doomed!"

'Whale Slaying Sword' Kangsion looked with absolute certainty at the smug Little Lisop.

A noble without a legacy is just like that.

If it had been a Noble Family with three generations of legacy, they would never choose to target an 'Entrant.' Only these upstart nobles would fail to understand what an 'Entrant' really represented.

It was an existence entirely different from 'Arcana Level' and 'Great Arcana Level.'

No!

Even when dealing with 'Arcana Level' or 'Great Arcana Level,' a Noble Family with three generations of legacy would be extremely cautious.

Because they were well aware that their own status stemmed from ancestors possessing the same power.

As for the 'new nobility'?

Their Meritorious Service is commendable.

And worthy of admiration.

But power...

That is fundamental.

Just like those great pirates who roam the seas, even though they are despised by everyone, they still earn the reverence and even worship of others.

Because they possess strength that ordinary people do not have!

The sea can accommodate everything, but the powerful always stand out, so distinctive!

Just like that Pirate General of the Western Sea!

He is the best example.

He earned his current status and position with his own fists, punch by punch.

'Pirates are probably the most pragmatic people in the world.'

Probably because...

They are not protected?'

Kangsion thought inwardly, his gaze sweeping over the civilians around him who had become agitated.

This 'Whale Slaying Sword' clearly remembered that just moments ago, these people were praising that Master—he, who had completed his match early, had witnessed the whole process.

This made Kangsion reflect on the Earl of South Los.

It was he who had spoiled his own subjects.

In a sense, he could be considered a good lord.

Because on his Whale Island, such an individual would have been hanged long ago, and that person's wife and children would have become slaves.

And this was already an act of mercy.

On other islands, the families of such individuals would be hanged as well.

'Truly an 'enviable' South Los!' Kangsion thought to himself as he listened to the ever-growing clamor of the crowd, with heartfelt emotion in his heart.

However, this 'Whale Slaying Sword' had no intention of intervening.

He was well aware that the Master had planned all along.

So, the wielder of the Whale Slaying Sword quietly watched the Earl of South Los's Swordsmanship Chief walk toward the arena—

"Good afternoon, Swordsmanship Master Julie!"

Little Lisop bowed respectfully to the Female Swordmaster.

As his head was lowered, the son of the Lord couldn't help but smile.

Listen to the voices around!

"Bastard!"

"Liar!"

"Get down from there!"

"Spirit Mediums' should be sent to the Burning Stake!"

The voices were as tumultuous as before.

But to Little Lisop, they sounded so sweet and pleasant.

'Commoners are only worthy of being deceived, not treated kindly!'

Thinking about his father's words, Little Lisop straightened his back, his smile already replaced by a serious expression.

"Swordsmanship Master Julie, I earnestly request for your justice!"

Lord Arthur Kledos has stolen my family's secret technique!"

"Are you sure?"

The Countess's Swordsmanship Chief countered.

"Sure!"

Little Lisop answered with utmost certainty.

"Are you sure?"

The Countess's Swordsmanship Chief asked again.

This time, Little Lisop immediately sensed something was wrong.

However, Little Lisop did not think about himself but thought of Arthur's lover, Marinda, the lady known for her cruel methods who was closely associated with the Countess, even rumored to have become the Countess's financial backer.

So, are they trying to pressure me under the guise of the Countess's identity to brush this off?

'Ha!

Too naive!

Do they really think the Lisop Family would fear that Mother Tigress?'

With a series of cold laughs in his heart, Little Lisop looked at the Swordsmanship Chief with an even more serious expression.

"Are you going to shield a thief?"

"I will not shield a thief!"

The Female Swordmaster shook her head decisively.

Then, she turned her gaze to Arthur.

"Advisor Kredos, do you have anything to ask?"

This inquiry puzzled Little Lisop.

It also confused those around.

Because it did not seem like a question for a thief, but rather a consultation.

And the next scene confused everyone even more.

The eyes of the young 'Spirit Medium' filled with compassion, his voice softly inquiring Little Lisop—

"Are you certain?"

Watching Arthur at this moment, hearing his question, Little Lisop felt a bit panicky.

This time, he began to doubt himself.

Was there something wrong in the plan?

Impossible!

Every part of the plan was perfect; even the people involved were silenced, and if there were any problems, it would still be without evidence. At the very least, they could use these fools to attack the 'Spirit Medium.'

With that thought, Little Lisop reaffirmed confidently.

"Sure!"

As these words were spoken, everyone saw the look of regret and dullness appearing on the young 'Spirit Medium's' face, and even a touch of sorrow.

As if he couldn't bear to see what was before him, the young 'Spirit Medium' turned away.

The next moment—

A contract appeared in the middle of the arena.

It floated in the air, displaying its contents to everyone around.

And when the people clearly saw its contents...

Boom!

The crowd erupted.

Chapter 358: Arthur Gives Wings to Everyone's Dreams!

The contract was made of lamb skin with Glyphic Language for the watermark, and the content written was in the common language.

The blossoming radiant glow signified that the contract had already taken effect.

Of course, what most captured people's attention was the written content!

From the appearance of the owner of 'Joel Jock Swordsmanship Club' last night to his departure, the Female Swordmaster had plainly described everything she witnessed.

Even, it had written about events that could possibly happen today.

And this was the crux!

Because—

The Swordsmanship Chief had repeatedly asked the 'Spirit Medium' from a bystander's perspective if they should really give the other party another chance.

The 'Spirit Medium' had the same response each time.

Give.

Recalling the scenes that had just unfolded, everyone had a moment of realization.

No wonder such a dialogue had occurred just now!

So, that was it!

At this moment, no one doubted the authenticity of the contract.

'Mystic Side People' never doubted the authenticity of 'contracts'.

Those with vast experience had also heard of the reputation of 'contracts'.

As for ordinary people?

Perhaps everyone was just following blindly.

But after calming down, they all saw Little Lisop's ashen face—even those who couldn't read, upon seeing Little Lisop's expression, wouldn't doubt a single word on this 'contract'.

Then...

Guilt, self-blame.

People looked at Arthur, who remained composed on the stage, and suddenly felt too ashamed to show their faces.

What had they just done?

Why had they doubted such a compassionate man?

Why did they question such a tolerant man?

After soul-searching, everyone couldn't help but lower their heads, not daring to look at Arthur again.

But then, everyone looked up again.

They turned their gaze to Little Lisop.

Right!

They weren't wrong!

The one at fault was Little Lisop!

It was this damn Noble who had led them on purpose!

'Nobles are untrustworthy'!

This age-old saying struck a chord in everyone's instinctual core at that moment—the final defense mechanism inherent from birth.

Escape!

Escaping may be disgraceful, but it works!

Especially under these circumstances, passing the blame to a reprehensible Noble was indeed the best option—

"Bastard!"

"Despicable fellow!"

"You swindler!"

Little Lisop was being cursed as vehemently as Arthur had been just moments ago.

After all, it was the same group of people who were cursing.

They vented the unease that arose from their guilt through cursing, as if by insulting Little Lisop, the mistakes they had made before no longer existed.

Some of the more extreme individuals even picked up stones from the ground and threw them straight at Little Lisop.

Swish!

Thwack!

The stone, thrown with force, was aimed directly at Little Lisop's eye.

If it hit, it would be far from trivial.

But a hand intercepted the stone.

It was Arthur.

The young 'Spirit Medium' with a gentle smile looked around at the people and said softly,

"I can feel everyone's anger!

But I can feel even more so everyone's goodness!"

Arthur's words once again captured the attention of those around him.

Goodness?

Everyone was taken aback.

They were indeed angry, but goodness?

Could they, in their recent actions, be considered good?

Each person began to question.

Arthur, capturing the expressions of everyone in view, still smiled, his face even showing a touch of being moved—

"Please never doubt your own goodness, for only truly good-hearted people would feel such great anger in the face of deceit!

You even forgot your own status, crossed over the boundaries of class.

All to seek justice on my behalf.

Isn't this enough to demonstrate your goodness?

Look at this.

It is the best proof of your goodness."

Saying so, Arthur opened his palm to reveal the stone in his hand.

An ordinary stone, but for some reason, it seemed to radiate an inexplicable glow in the eyes of everyone.

And Arthur continued to speak.

"I will always cherish it.

It represents the most beautiful light in the hearts of all of you.

It is something I must remember for the rest of my life."

With that, Arthur bowed slightly.

Excuses we find for ourselves can only deceive us, but excuses given by others are the true wings that free us from 'constraints'.

Arthur was willing to give wings to everyone.

After all, he was a "Spirit Medium"!

There was no good or evil, no right or wrong.

What was there?

Benefit!

Tucked beneath numerous "protective shells" was the most pure benefit.

That was what the young "Spirit Medium" pursued.

But no one could really see this clearly.

When Arthur bowed in greeting, all those around him immediately returned the gesture in unison, be they common folk, merchants, contestants, or those "Mystic Side Persons."

The former was utterly moved by Arthur's kindness and benevolence.

The latter, though still skeptical, had to go with the flow.

As a result, an unprecedented scene occurred in the vast Elta Square—

A salute from tens of thousands!

Some Painters from Clara Street, sculptors, and playwrights who witnessed this scene shook all over and teared up.

"This is it!

Yes, this is it!

This is the scene I want!"

Many began to mutter to themselves.

"A pen, a paintbrush, give me a paintbrush!"

Many more shouted excitedly.

Arthur saw this scene and looked at these people with an immensely kind gaze.

They were his XP creators, after all!

Although the scene before him was enough to generate a massive wave of XP, the key was a steady flow!

"Does anyone have a paintbrush?

Please lend it to these gentlemen for the time being. I am willing to pay for the use.

Of course, if it's too expensive, that won't do.

I'm just a not-so-wealthy 'Spirit Medium'."

Arthur said this from the stage.

Immediately, laughter emanated from those around.

"I'm willing to sponsor these gentlemen. I've already sent my servant to fetch paintbrushes and all the tools," another voice offered.

"And me!"

"Me too!"

The merchants in the crowd stood out.

With their keen sense of smell, they had discovered a business opportunity.

Although they were initially apprehensive, as they felt the increasingly amiable gazes from around, these merchants knew they had made the right bet.

The remaining merchants, feeling annoyed but not wanting to fall behind, also joined in.

Arthur, of course, would not stop them.

He couldn't wish for more.

So, the young "Spirit Medium" on the platform smiled, and that smile encouraged those who joined later.

Even a few young Painters had already taken out their charcoal pencils and begun sketching the "Spirit Medium" on paper.

And through the filter of their hearts, the "Spirit Medium" depicted on the papers began to lose its accuracy, turning the merely handsome features into extraordinary beauty, moving towards resembling the divine statues once seen in Temples, with eyes clear as spring water, a smile filled with compassion and kindness, and his black clothing shining in this moment.

And Little Lisop at Arthur's feet?

Diminutive and ugly, in Arthur's radiance, he became akin to a "Fallen Demon" or some other malevolent creature.

The figure of the Female Swordmaster on the stage had also been sized down appropriately.

In short, all the glory was cast upon the "Spirit Medium."

The rest?

No longer important.

With his exceptional vision, Arthur saw this sketch.

'How lifelike!' he acknowledged with great affirmation.

But Arthur did not forget what was important.

So, he spoke again—

"Ladies and gentlemen, please allow me to step away for a moment to attend to a personal matter."

Arthur said, looking towards Little Lisop.

Instantly, everyone understood what Arthur intended to do.

No one objected to Arthur handling this matter privately.

Because, at the end of the day, it was Arthur's personal affair.

In fact, many were guessing that the benevolent Lord Kledos must be preparing to let off a scoundrel like Little Lisop in private.

Why privately?

Of course, for fear that the impulsive crowd would do something out of line.

What a compassionate lord!

People admired in their hearts as they watched the figure turning and descending from the stage, and once again, they bowed in salute, shouting from the depths of their souls—

"Very well, Master!"

Their voices thundered through the sky.

The voices echoed on and on.

The voices made Arthur's steps lighter.

'What a pity, with the "Mystic Side" here, otherwise I would have been able to call out loud—but still, I left something behind.

When I become the "Shadow Earl," things will go even smoother!' Arthur thought, as he stepped into the Bell Ringer's room beneath the Bell Tower.

Little Lisop followed behind him, dazed.

And when both of them had entered—

Creak!

The door closed firmly.

Chapter 359: Breaking the Deadlock

The sound of the door closing echoed in Little Lisop's ears, and it was as if he had just woken from a dream.

Without any hesitation, the son of the Lord turned and ran.

Upon reaching the door, he first pushed hard, then pulled forcefully after his initial attempt failed.

But the door was already securely locked, and no matter how hard the son of the Lord tried, he couldn't open it again.

Then, the son of the Lord began to shout.

"Let me out!"

"Let me out!"

"Open the door!"

His exhausted cries were enough to make one frown, but not a single sound came from outside.

However, the son of the Lord did not give up; not only did he continue shouting, but he also began to bang heavily on the door.

Bang bang bang!

The loud banging echoed throughout the room.

But, as before, there was still no response.

It was at this moment that the son of the Lord finally gave up.

Little Lisop turned around and looked at Arthur, who was seated on one of the two chairs in the room, and then at the contract and pen on the coffee table—a contract that hadn't been written on yet.

What was it for?

The son of the Lord knew all too well.

This was his "Indenture Contract"!

As he thought of the miserable days ahead, the son of the Lord's lips trembled slightly, not because he wanted to say anything but purely out of fear.

After a good four or five seconds—

"Lord Kledos, I think there has been some misunderstanding between us!"

With an awkward yet polite smile on his face, the son of the Lord bowed submissively to Arthur and spoke softly.

"Hmm."

Arthur nodded as if in agreement, his eyes and face void of any superfluous emotion, still with that calm smile.

But a sudden coldness fell upon Little Lisop.

The son of the Lord instantly understood what Arthur meant.

If he said any more nonsense...

He would surely die.

Instantly, the son of the Lord slumped onto the floor, defeated.

Yet the unwillingness in his heart made him raise his head again the next moment and ask a question.

"When did you know?"

"I don't know.

I never speculate about others with malicious intent.

But I also don't want to get hurt."

Arthur answered like this.

Such a 'cautious' response was necessary when dealing with a noble's son, as no one could be sure if the other party carried any kind of recording prop.

Arthur certainly didn't want to become a villain overthrown by a word or two from the other party.

After all, he, Arthur Kledos, was a young, upright, naive, and kind 'Spirit Medium'.

Correct!

And he was still temporarily respected by the people of South Los!

How could he possibly make such a basic mistake? Especially when his skills "Eagle Eye" and "Insight" were flashing their alerts, it was even less likely.

Arthur's face maintained a gentle smile, and his words grew increasingly gentle—

"If you don't want to fulfill the agreement, I won't blame you..."

His words were full of tolerance.

But the coldness became even more intense.

Little Lisop knew that his last scheme had failed as well.

The son of the Lord helplessly released the 'Recording Stone' he had been clutching in secret, then stood up, brushed the dust off his body nonchalantly, and boldly picked up the pen on the table to start writing the 'Indenture Contract'.

His face no longer showed panic or defeat.

All that remained was defiance.

Without a doubt, all of this had been a ruse by the other party.

Facing himself, who was driven into a corner, the son of the Lord hadn't given up either.

Even after signing an "indenture contract," it was the same.

After all, he was just an "attendant," not a "slave."

"I still have a chance!

All of this is just because I'm unlucky!"

Little Lisop thought to himself.

Arthur took one look and guessed the young lord's thoughts.

But the young "Spirit Medium" didn't care.

For, from the moment the other party had voluntarily stepped up to challenge him, he had completely lost his chance.

The "contract" did include only a tenth of the dry shares in the deal involving the three shops in South Los and the coal and iron mines in South Town, but these were enough to become the "key" to leverage the entire South Town.

And, most importantly...

This would become his bargaining chip!

The chip to "ask" the Earl of South Los for Cat Faction items.

As a "Cat Faction. Hei" and the current Black Cat, reclaiming what belonged to the Cat Faction was beyond question.

Definitely not because he wanted to test whether it included the Cat Faction's "entry-level atlas."

After writing the "contract," Arthur raised his hand and stored it in "Atos's Box," then softly said.

"Since you've made your choice, please wait here.

I still need to finish the competition.

Afterward, I'll take you back to No. 2 Cork Street."

After speaking, the young "Spirit Medium" seemed filled with emotion, shook his head involuntarily, and let out a sigh.

Watching the "Spirit Medium's" demeanor, Little Lisop politely responded—

"Alright, I will wait here for you."

On the surface, this was a master and servant well-versed in etiquette.

Even, the servant's etiquette was a bit better, maintaining a respectful posture even after the master had left.

But the Female Swordmaster standing outside the Bell Tower easily noticed the small movement of the other party—

The palm that he slipped into his jacket pocket was trembling ceaselessly.

Clearly, he had acknowledged his defeat.

But he didn't believe he had completely lost.

He believed he still had a fallback plan.

For example...

The father who was a lord.

And this was precisely what she wanted.

A long time ago, Lord Lisop had become a thorn in the side of the South Los House.

If it weren't for the "Noble Rules" and the carefulness of that lord, the Lisop Family would have been exterminated long ago.

"Threaten with selling coal and iron mines to that Old Lion?

Hmph, this time I want to see how your Old Lion will save you!"

The Female Swordmaster became incensed whenever she thought of her past encounters with that lord.

Although he was not a hereditary lord, everything within his territory still belonged to him while he was alive.

Simply put, everything in South Town was under his control.

Those two mines included.

And it was precisely because of these two mines that for many years, he had always maintained some sort of "initiative"—the Old Lion publicly praised Lord Lisop more than once for his brave performance in the "Seven Years' War."

What the Old Lion desired, the South Los House was naturally well aware of.

As for killing Lord Lisop?

The Old Lion would love nothing more than for the South Los House to do so.

If the South Los family did, the Old Lion would have grounds to intervene in South Los Territory.

After all, Baron Bolna, whom Lisop saved, had long since become a staunch supporter of the Duke of the Inner Bay, and by "Noble Rules," if Lisop were to meet an unexpected death, Baron Bolna had both the responsibility and the duty to investigate the cause of his savior's death and to seek revenge.

Thus, there was a deadlock between the two parties.

However, that was before.

Now?

The point to break the deadlock had appeared!

The Female Swordmaster, looking at Arthur beside her and turning several thoughts in her mind, finally settled into a smile—

"The wheat juice last night was good, can I go and try it again tonight?"

Chapter 360: Each Has Their Own Scheme!

"Lord Lisop, you really do invite disdain!"

Upon hearing the Female Swordmaster's somewhat impatient inquiry, Arthur sighed internally.

The Female Swordmaster noticed Little Lisop's subtle movement.

Arthur saw it too, of course.

As for Little Lisop reaching out to his own father, Arthur was not surprised.

In fact, Arthur would have been surprised if the other party had not done so.

According to his plan, the next step would be to negotiate with Lisop.

And that so-called wheat juice mentioned by the Swordsmanship Chief was just an excuse to get involved.

Arthur's attitude was also at play.

The attitude he adopted after acquiring a ten percent stake in the South Town coal and iron mines.

People are prone to change at any time.

Such changes not only alter oneself but also influence others to undergo corresponding changes.

Friends can become enemies.

Enemies can also become friends.

Only interests are eternal.

Therefore, to have eternal friends, one must surely share interests.

Or rather...

Having a common goal can suffice as well.

The Countess of South Los, on the other hand, was different.

Her current role for Arthur was like a 'protective umbrella'.

Arthur needed her to deal with enemies that might arise, like the Old Lion.

Therefore, the Countess of South Los's involvement was all to Arthur's advantage and no harm.

So—

"Anytime is fine,"

Arthur gave a positive response.

Hearing such a decisive answer, the Female Swordmaster's smile grew wider.

"I was in too much of a hurry last time and forgot to bring a gift.

Next time I go, I will surely bring one!"

The Female Swordmaster said this.

"I am most grateful."

Arthur replied, and then, they shared a smile with each other.

You have your stance, and I have my response.

That's always how things are settled.

Interests are also distributed in such a manner.

Arthur and the Female Swordmaster returned to the A-stage arena.

However, this time, the Female Swordmaster did not take the stage but instead completely handed it over to Arthur—in her eyes, this was Arthur's stage.

There was only one protagonist in today's 'Swordsmanship Competition,'

And that was Arthur.

A tall and sturdy woman like her, standing at two meters and fifty centimeters, would do well not to steal the limelight by going on stage.

The very self-aware Female Swordmaster once again represented the Countess to announce the continuation of the 'Swordsmanship Competition,' then, entrusting everything to her deputy, quietly left Elta Square.

Although the Lord Count might already be aware of everything, she still needed to report back as it was her duty.

Of course, more importantly, she needed to prepare a gift for Arthur.

The words she had just spoken were not merely for the sake of speaking.

And for all of these, she needed to consult with the Count.

Both Kangsion, wielder of the Whale Slaying Sword, and Deljo, bearer of the Storm Sword, watched the departing Female Swordmaster and the Count's Guards emerging from the crowd and the shadows with varied expressions.

"Indeed, choosing such a cautious method to come to South Los was most correct!"

Deljo, the Storm Sword, frowned inwardly.

As a pure adventurer and treasure hunter, Deljo and his team constantly traveled and treasure hunted.

As such, he could clearly feel the undercurrents surging through all of South County in recent years.

As for why?

It was, of course, due to the Old Lion's advancing age!

The reason he accepted the invitation to South Los, apart from the offer of an 'Entry-level Atlas' from Baron Hausman, a reward too tempting to refuse,

Was his desire to come to South Los 'Open and Aboveboard'!

Otherwise, his sudden appearance in South Los would have surely drawn attention!

And even, would have exposed his real purpose—

That relic!

The very thought of the ruins of the "Tower of Mist" made the "Storm Sword" uncontrollably excited.

Compared to the "Entry-level Atlas" reward offered by "Baron Hausman," it was the ruins of the "Tower of Mist" that he truly valued.

If his earlier investigations were not wrong, within these ruins there were not only multiple "Entry-level Atlases," but also a great many treasured props and secret techniques.

After all, this was the tomb of one of those four wizards.

Although he did not know which one.

But regardless of which, it would grant him everything he had ever dreamed of.

The "Storm Sword" wished he could take action right away.

But no, he couldn't!

Under the watchful eyes of the public, everyone was paying attention to the "Spirit Medium," and if he chose to leave, it would be far too conspicuous.

'Calm down! Calm down!'

The "Storm Sword" told himself there was still ample time to find the location of the ruins, forcing himself to calm down, but the occasional anxiety that crossed his face caught the eye of the "Whale Slaying Sword" nearby.

'What's this guy so anxious about?'

The "Whale Slaying Sword" wondered, paying closer attention in secret.

Similarly, Arthur, who had been discreetly keeping an eye on the two, also noticed the unusual behavior of the "Storm Sword."

'Hmm? Besides what I've guessed before, could he have other business in South Los?'

Arthur thought to himself, hiding his curiosity and stepping onto the stage unhurriedly.

Even though the "Swordsmanship Competition" had been interrupted by an accident, its resumption was even livelier—

Of course, only around Elta Square's A-zone stage.

Clap, clap, clap!

With Arthur's entrance to the stage, the applause erupted instantly.

"Sorry, everyone.

I was held up by some personal affairs.

Now, let's continue!"

Arthur said this and bowed once more.

Afterward, he looked toward his next opponent.

As before, it was another instructional match.

But unlike before, this time even the audience 'joined in.'

With every effortless dodge by Arthur, people gasped in awe.

With every piece of instruction from Arthur, people responded with applause.

And eventually, even after Arthur had finished his match, there were still people seeking guidance.

Arthur did not refuse.

Not only was it very beneficial to his prestige, but he was also about to own a Swordsmanship Club.

This enthusiastic instruction would help the Swordsmanship Club grow—such a club owned by a highly skilled and willing-to-teach swordsmanship Champion would be an unrivaled attraction for the youth passionate about swordsmanship.

And so, the instruction continued until late into the night.

Even when the last participant to receive guidance stepped down from the stage, Arthur maintained his smile but playfully shrugged his shoulders—

"Everyone, I think I missed dinner time.

Marinda, did you save some food for me?

I feel like I could eat a whole cow right now!"

Arthur called out toward Marinda outside of Elta Square.

His demeanor was just like that of most men returning late from overtime work.

This familiarity unconsciously narrowed the distance between Arthur and the people around him, leading them to subconsciously embrace Arthur as one of their own.

And this was exactly what Arthur wanted.

Even though the present world had its 'Mystic Side,' the support of the majority was still important.

Marinda kept up her smile.

She conducted herself with proper decorum—not only did she actively take Arthur's hand, but she also nestled against him, lifting her head slightly with passionate love flickering in her eyes as she gazed at Arthur.

Everyone who saw this scene smiled knowingly.

They liked this scene.

So, Arthur and Marinda performed it for everyone to see.

But no sooner had they gotten into the carriage—

Ugh!

Marinda let out a series of retches.

Arthur quickly withdrew to the corner of the carriage.

The young "Spirit Medium" feared being splattered with vomit.

This disloyal act prompted Marinda to flip Arthur the bird.

But Arthur was indifferent, simply asking in a soft voice—

"Are you ready?"