

Great Master 651

Chapter 651: Mikhail's Touch!

Never put yourself in danger.

Arthur realized this lesson when he was first cornered in the bathroom during high school.

Similarly, he also learned another lesson—

With a mop drenched in feces, Luby lives on.

Depending on the unparalleled "Mind Attack," young Arthur faced down four opponents alone.

At that time, Arthur understood one thing.

You don't necessarily have to be very powerful, but you must appear very powerful.

So—

To prevent retaliation, he found a small jar to fill with lime, which he kept in his backpack.

Without a doubt, Arthur was cornered once again.

Then, he took out the small jar, threw its contents at the people opposite him, and screamed at the top of his lungs, "Grandma help me!"

The four guys who got powder in their eyes were beaten miserably.

Afterward, Arthur washed that jar and filled it with powdered milk.

When he was cornered yet another time, Arthur stuffed the powdered milk into his mouth.

As he did so, he bellowed.

"Grandma, lend me your strength once more!"

In any case, to this day, Arthur still remembers the simian expression and the tiny bit of confusion, puzzlement, and utter shock on those guys' faces.

Especially when they saw Arthur pull a pair of old-fashioned iron scissors from his backpack and madly charge at them, one of them got so scared that he wet himself.

In any case, after that, Arthur had a much easier time.

The leisurely high school life was indeed marvelous, and then...

He failed his college entrance exams.

It couldn't be helped, too leisurely, really.

In the back corner of the classroom, no one paid any mind to a weirdo, whether he was reading novels, playing games, or even cooking dumplings.

"Life back then was truly wonderful,"

Arthur reminisced.

To extend that wonderfulness, Arthur of course wouldn't let himself face danger.

So, Kiri was summoned.

Being a "Death Hound" with a "Symbiosis" effect with Kuliqi, Kiri played the role of this 'Blast Hound.'

Therefore, the next moment, Lucius saw a Husky crawl out from under the dining table—

Its wise eyes proving its pedigree.

Then, it approached the 'Sacred Silk' and incessantly sniffed at it.

"Kiri?"

Arthur's tone intensified.

"Awoo! Awoo!"

Kiri barked, and then, directly snatched the 'Sacred Silk' and ran off.

No incident occurred.

Very good, very safe.

No problems.

Arriving at this conclusion, Arthur quickly grabbed Kiri by the back of his neck and took the 'Sacred Silk' out of Kiri's mouth with his other hand.

"Awoo!"

The released Kiri hopped around on the spot, still barking.

How should one put it?

Really resembled a Husky.

Arthur couldn't understand why a "Death Hound" would have this issue, but he knew how to calm Kiri down—when Arthur picked up a slipper inside the cabin, Kiri immediately quieted down and even crawled under the bed, carefully watching Arthur.

"Sorry, Kiri isn't too bright,"

Arthur set down the slipper and showed Lucius a helpless smile.

"Sled dogs all seem to be this way,"

the young Avenger had no doubts whatsoever.

The sled dogs of South County were far less majestic than those of North County, not only indispensable as helpers but also excellent at completing transport tasks.

Meanwhile, Kiri under the bed saw Arthur put down his slippers and became immensely interested in the bed inside the cabin, continuously sniffing and licking the bed's legs.

Then, he began to tear at them fiercely.

Seeing this, Arthur sighed.

Then he let the Hand of Void grab the slippers and started to harshly discipline Kiri.

Smack Smack Smack!

The slippers hit Kiri's backside again and again.

"Ouch woo!"

Kiri spun around as he was being hit, but his mouth did not stop barking.

However, Lucius was no longer paying attention to this.

This young Avenger's gaze was completely focused on Arthur, who was carefully examining the 'Sacred Silk.'

After wiping the drool off the 'Sacred Silk' with a nearby napkin, Arthur finally began to read the words in front of him—

[Name: Mikhail's Touch (Fragmentary)]

[Type: Miscellaneous Item]

[Quality: Hero]

[Attributes: Enhancement]

[Remarks: Miha and Yiluo were twin sisters until they merged into one to become Mikhail, gaining recognition by some during the 'Shadow War' of the Empire. They were considered symbols of 'Pain' and 'Suffering,' and in some places, they were also seen as 'Calamity,' but this did not overshadow their abilities as witches...]

...

[Enhancement: When an item is wrapped with the fragmentary 'Mikhail's Touch,' it imparts an eternal enhancement effect]

(Note 1: When enhancing, the item must possess 'Spirituality')

(Note 2: The item need not be entirely covered by the fragmentary 'Mikhail's Touch,' but completely wrapping the item will increase its Quality significantly)

(Note 3: The fragmentary 'Mikhail's Touch' cannot enhance 'Legendary' level items, nor can it raise items beyond 'Epic' level)

(Note 4: The fragmentary 'Mikhail's Touch' cannot enhance living beings)

...

'Such a great find!

To think it really is an enhancement tool for equipment!'

Although Arthur had speculated about the 'enhancement' after witnessing Yula's scene, he was still surprised when he actually got the [Mikhail's Touch (Fragmentary)].

Even with the limitations of being unable to elevate 'Legendary' level items and not being able to upgrade past 'Epic' level,

it was still more than good enough for Arthur.

He had far too many pieces of equipment that needed enhancing.

Starting from ordinary sword weapons like [Spider's Claw] and [Song of the North Wind], ordinary accessories such as [Warning Wind Chime], to special items like [Atos's Box], [Bracelet of Carmen],

[Carmen's Leap], to even more special items like [Mark of Thunder] all fell within this range of enhancement.

Even if it's just a one-time [Protection Coin], if its strength increased, it would be a worthy investment for Arthur.

As Arthur thought about taking a big gamble to see if [Mark of Thunder] could possibly advance to being Epic level, suddenly, the ring [Blood of Doting] started conveying a craving to Arthur.

No!

To be precise, the fragmentary Bloodsucking Ancestor Worm within [Blood of Doting] was sending this craving to Arthur.

It was an intense craving.

Arthur could even start to hear the Bloodsucking Ancestor Worm's shriek in his ear.

Keep in mind, this was unprecedented.

Even when he had acquired [Blood of Doting] initially, he kept teasing the Bloodsucking Ancestor Worm with his words, but perhaps because it was fragmentary, the creature merely grunted and then remained silent, even when it mistakenly sucked non-genuine 'Fresh Blood' from the [Exquisite Human Puppet] posing as 'Blood Descendants,' it only protested briefly then went silent again.

Yet this time, facing [Mikhail's Touch (Fragmentary)], it showed such a reaction, and Arthur immediately had new plans in his heart.

But that would be for later.

For now?

Arthur looked at Lucius and showed a kindly smile.

Chapter 652: The Twins' Coincidence!

Upon seeing Arthur's kindly smile, Lucius's hands shook momentarily.

It was not fear.

But excitement.

For the young Avenger knew the meaning behind that smile.

He,

was about to complete the transaction!

The "Sacred Silk" he had produced had received Arthur's approval.

However, even though the young Avenger had his suspicions, without a precise answer from Arthur, he still couldn't confirm it in the true sense of the word.

Thus, in the next moment, the young Avenger directly asked—

"Is it, is it acceptable?"

When Lucius asked, his voice was trembling.

"Of course!

Its value far exceeds your imagination.

Therefore, for fairness's sake, apart from the previously agreed Ritual, you may also trade something else with me, such as some secret techniques."

Arthur stated this.

Whew!

Lucius exhaled deeply.

Finally!

He could finally take his revenge!

And indeed, the South Los "Spirit Medium" was as kind-hearted as the rumors suggested!

Lucius couldn't grasp other aspects, but feeling Arthur's "fairness", the young Avenger acknowledged Arthur's kindness from the bottom of his heart.

After all, Arthur held the power to dictate terms and need not reveal the value of the "Sacred Silk."

And him?

Even faced with such a situation, he would have agreed nonetheless.

But Arthur didn't do that and instead was honest and upfront.

Whew!

Lucius then took a deep breath, stood up, and bowed deeply to Arthur, saying—

"Thank you for your kindness."

After speaking, the young Avenger straightened up and then placed his right hand over his chest, performing a Knight's salute.

It seemed that only a series of such salutes could express the gratitude in the young Avenger's heart.

"No, I'm just purely in pursuit of fairness!

My creed is fairness! Fairness! And fairness again!"

Arthur stated earnestly.

Lucius could feel Arthur's seriousness.

Not just the expression, but Arthur's voice had risen several notches as well.

Yet, for some reason, Lucius always felt that there were two or three words missing?

It felt somewhat disjointed.

And while Lucius was pondering which two or three words were missing, Arthur had already spoken again.

"So, which will you choose, the 'Tower Oath' or the 'Bloodlust'?"

Without any hesitation,

the young Avenger gave his answer.

"'Bloodlust'!"

If possible, Lucius would have preferred to choose the "Tower Oath."

Coming from a middle-class intellectual family, Lucius had an adaptability to knowledge and learning that was difficult for ordinary people to imagine, so he would enjoy six hours of study per day—because, before his father and mother met with disaster, Lucius entertained the idea of learning more and then becoming a family tutor.

But now...

For revenge, slaughter was more appropriate.

"Are you sure?"

Compared to the 'Tower Oath,' 'Bloodlust' has greater drawbacks.

That kind of mental torture can drive a person mad."

Arthur cautioned Lucius.

"Avengers are all madmen.

I'm no exception.

I will kill all my enemies before I truly go insane—and afterwards?

It doesn't matter."

Determination filled Lucius's eyes.

Anticipating this, Arthur did not dissuade him further but began to inform Lucius of everything needed for the "Bloodlust" Ritual, the steps of the Ritual, and the precautions to take.

After correctly guessing twice in a row and confirming there were no mistakes, Lucius once again thanked Arthur.

Then, the young Avenger's face turned slightly red.

"Compared to your mercy, I know I am somewhat shameless.

However, I truly hope that you can lend a helping hand to eradicate the 'Inland River Cult' at Port Dordot of West Berlin!

Of course, both I and the 'Pain Church' will also make an effort to assist you."

After finishing, the young Avenger dared not even look at Arthur.

Because...

Shame!

Lucius felt an unparalleled shame for his own presumptuous behavior.

He swore that regardless of whether Lord Kledos agreed or not, he must properly repay this Lord.

Otherwise, he would feel guilty and uneasy.

Meanwhile, Arthur breathed a sigh of relief in his heart.

He had been waiting for this moment!

Arthur was just worried that the secret technique of Yula would fail due to Lucius' 'sense of shame,' and if that happened, Arthur's plan would need major adjustments.

After all, it would be quite unseemly for one side to be missing in the battle.

Fortunately, the worst had not come to pass.

"I've said that what I believe in is fairness.

And you have presented the 'Sacred Silk' as a bargaining chip.

Then I should put forward a corresponding chip, the 'Bloodlust Ritual' is part of it, helping you eliminate the 'Inland River Cult' at Port Dordot of West Berlin is another part.

But...

In facing a battle like the 'Inland River Cult,' which could set off a chain reaction, I need to confirm something—are you willing to commit how many people from your power for this action?"

The number of people determines the scale of the operation.

A few people versus dozens, or even hundreds, that's a completely different concept.

Lucius naturally understood this.

But he could not determine the exact number of people.

Although according to the current situation, his church would definitely commit wholeheartedly, that was just his guesswork; without a precise answer, how could he possibly communicate with the Lord before him.

Immediately, the young Avenger bowed and apologized.

"I apologize, Lord Kledos, for my negligence.

I will contact the church leaders right now.

I will give you an answer very soon."

After speaking, the young Avenger left the cabin quickly.

And this was exactly the outcome that Arthur wanted.

He needed the people behind Lucius to stand up.

Not just Yula!

But also many other high-ranking members of the 'Pain Church'!

Only by dragging all these individuals into the fray would his plan succeed.

And Arthur also needed to confirm his own suspicion.

He remembered that the Marquess of West Berlin's third and fourth daughters were twins.

And the Mikhail's Touch (Fragmentary) that they had just discussed involved Miha and Yiluo, also twin sisters.

Was this a coincidence?

Arthur didn't quite believe it.

After all, the 'Pain Church' in West Berlin, without the support of some major figures, could not have grown to its current size.

Beyond this suspicion, there was also Yula's situation.

Was Yula pushed forward?

Or...

Was the real mastermind still hidden behind the scenes?

This was something Arthur cared deeply about.

If it was the former, he just needed to focus on the twin sisters of the West Berlin Family.

But if it were the latter?

The corners of Arthur's mouth twitched upward.

One Mikhail's Touch (Fragmentary) was not enough.

He was going to fleece them completely.

Of course, this was for later.

Now?

Arthur looked towards one side of the cabin, where a large ring of smoke appeared, and a slender hand reached out from it, towards him...

Raising the middle finger.

Chapter 653 The Plot and the Scheme!

Marinda, gripping the 'Holy Serpent Shield' in one hand and flipping the bird with the other, emerged from the smoke and entered the cabin, her deep blue eyes filled with contempt for Arthur.

"Good morning, Marinda.

What would you like to eat?"

As he spoke, Arthur smoothly pulled out a chair for Marinda.

Of course, he also conveniently took the 'Holy Serpent Shield' from her and placed it to the side.

Then, he made a gesture as if he was sorry she wasn't wearing a coat, as he would definitely have hung it up for her.

In response, Marinda raised her other middle finger at Arthur.

"Do you think treating me like a mail carrier is polite?"

Marinda asked.

Though there were no couriers in the world before them, professions like mail carriers still existed.

Of course, most people couldn't afford such services.

Even the middle class found the fees challenging to bear, only the truly wealthy nobles had the means to support such convenient services.

Marinda was naturally among them.

In fact, mail carriers visited her weekly, bringing her items from major cities that included, but were not limited to, Inner Bay.

"My feelings for you are always burning hot."

Arthur lowered his head, gazing into those deep blue eyes with an indescribable tenderness.

The emotion flooding his deep eyes caused Marinda to stiffen.

Then the lady bit her pipe and blew a puff of smoke right into Arthur's face, shielding his deep eyes and observing him as he rubbed his apparently stinging eyes. This lady then tucked away her pipe, curved her lips into a smile reminiscent of a grinning cat, and said, "So Grindelwald is the leader of your Black Cat Faction? Quite an interesting fellow, especially to those bad guys, possessing a mysterious charm."

"Hmm, he's a decent person."

Arthur nodded nonchalantly, seemingly just giving a simple evaluation of Grindelwald.

Meanwhile, Marinda observed Arthur discreetly.

When she noticed that her actions hadn't caused any peculiar reaction from him, a hint of disappointment crept into her heart.

But soon after, she picked up a slice of raw toast and began spreading potato and egg salad on it — the mixture, when added to milk, easily spread over the bread.

After wiping the edges of the bread with a knife, Marinda elegantly enjoyed the food.

"Don't you need honey and milkshake?"

Arthur picked up the condiments and gestured.

"Too sweet,"

Marinda waved her hand dismissively.

"Life is already too bitter, and only sweets can redeem everything."

Arthur shrugged and poured the honey and milkshake over the toast.

No!

To be precise, he soaked it.

Watching the toast completely submerged in the two liquids, Marinda felt it would make her teeth ache.

"Watch out for cavities."

Marinda cautioned.

Arthur responded by grinning at Marinda, showing his white teeth, and tapped them lightly with a spoon several times, creating a crisp sound as the young Spirit Medium began his breakfast.

And Marinda, having finished her meal first, waited quietly with her pipe.

It wasn't until Arthur had swallowed the last piece of fried sausage that the lady finally spoke up.

"What exactly is going on?"

"Hasn't Grindelwald explained it to you?"

Arthur looked perplexed.

Arthur, of course, knew Grindelwald had explained it, since, after all, Grindelwald was Arthur's alias; not only had he explained through Grindelwald's mouth, but he had also observed Marinda in a different state through Grindelwald's eyes.

Proud, frigid, and emanating a powerful aura.

All in all, she presented an 'off-limits' demeanor.

Quite unlike how she was with him.

Compared to that demeanor, Arthur preferred Marinda the way she was now.

After all, that demeanor resembled a meticulous robot.

And Marinda at the moment?

Quite amusing.

Thinking this, Arthur blinked his eyes, coordinating with the question Marinda was about to ask.

"You explained, but I want you to tell me your true purpose,"

or in other words...

"Did you secretly support the rise of the Inland River Cult?"

As she spoke, Marinda stared intently at Arthur.

Suddenly, Arthur looked helpless.

"If I had supported it, then what would have been the meaning of yesterday morning's scene?

Killing myself?

I don't have any special predilections,"

Arthur retorted.

"Of course you don't have any special predilections, but you, my friend, always find such overt reasons when you want to do something—this time is no exception,"

Marinda removed her pipe, her deep blue eyes gleaming as if she had seen through Arthur's little trick.

Suddenly, Arthur became interested.

"Go on."

The young Spirit Medium wanted to hear this lady's perspective.

"First, you are diverting Inner Bay's attention. You use your 'Inland River Cult' as bait, fishing for those in Inner Bay who are against you, forcing them to cooperate with the Inland River Cult and then you can truly take control.

Second, the development of the Inland River Cult in Seberlin has not been going smoothly.

Though it has gained some ground in Port Doldot, it falls far behind the local forces, especially the Pain Church.

Even the small pub you established beside the Ateil Trail in Seberlin, which developed into the Secret Market, is the same.

You can't shake the fundamental influence of the Pain Church in Seberlin.

So, by inserting yourself into the mix, you attract the followers of the Pain Church, preparing to catch them all in one net.

I presume...

There are members from the Pain Church on board the 'Oriental', aren't there?"

Having said that, the lady reached out to relight her pipe.

Between each puff, mint-scented smoke began to spread.

And Arthur?

Smack, smack, smack!

Without any hesitation, Arthur clapped for the lady before him.

Not only because of this lady's intelligence capabilities but also because what she said made sense, both the first and second points.

If he really owned the Inland River Cult, he indeed would do so.

Unfortunately...

The Inland River Cult was not actually his.

Marinda tilted her head, looking at the applauding Arthur, her deep blue eyes filled with confusion.

Was she wrong?

This lady believed she had a good understanding of Arthur.

The way Arthur was acting now did not look like she had guessed correctly.

If she had been right, Arthur certainly wouldn't be this composed; he would beat around the bush, and perhaps, he might even throw out some bombshell news to divert her attention.

And the latter was what Marinda wanted.

At the same time, the lady didn't think she had guessed incorrectly.

It must be...

An oversight!

Yes, an oversight!

"Where did I overlook?

What could it be?"

The lady pondered, her eyes reflecting her deep thoughts.

Watching the thoughtful Marinda, Arthur almost burst out laughing; he enjoyed partners who liked to think.

To better facilitate this lady's thinking, Arthur brought over a cup of orange tea—with added mint leaves.

While placing the drink in front of Marinda, Arthur gently asked—

"Port Doldot, do you want it?"

Instantly, Marinda trembled.

She understood.

Chapter 654: Happy Cooperation!

Seberlin, Port Doldot!

Marinda wanted!

Moreover, not only did she want, she had also acted before, but...

All had failed!

The "Inland Church" and the "Pain Church," although at odds, kept their conflicts private; outwardly, they presented a united front.

Of course, the most important factor was still the West Berlin Family.

It was the Marquess of Seberlin who truly caused Marinda to suffer defeat.

Just thinking about the unexplained deaths of her sixteen trusted subordinates made Marinda narrow her eyes—

"Are we sure that old fox can be dragged down?"

Marinda's abrupt inquiry made Arthur laugh.

He appreciated the speed of Marinda's reactions.

Clearly, Marinda had guessed that the Marquess of Seberlin stood behind the "Pain Church," and that the Marquis would not act openly.

"Not easy, but possible,"

Arthur said vaguely.

Without Lucius's 'action', he too did not have a definite answer.

Marinda was already accustomed to Arthur's vagueness.

Moreover, at this moment, what this lady cared more about was—

"What are the chances?"

The lady asked.

"Twenty percent,"

Arthur estimated silently.

Twenty percent profit, one daughter for ten percent profit, is naturally expensive.

It's certainly difficult to aim for twenty percent profit!

But what if it concerns 'honor'?

After all, as a reliable father, he wouldn't want the news that his twin daughters are controlled by a cult to be known, would he?

It's also possible that he's a ruthless father who could directly kill his own twin daughters.

Although the rumors suggest the Marquess of Seberlin adores his four daughters.

But who can truly know the truth?

As a 'Spirit Medium,' one must be prepared for every eventuality.

Therefore, Arthur also prepared another set of words: The Marquis of Seberlin was bewitched by demons, and the ancestors of the West Berlin Family came to him for 'exorcism.'

This kind of lie is obviously easy to expose.

But what if the Marquess of Seberlin were dead?

No one cares about the dead.

The Nobles would salivate over the lands of Seberlin.

The commoners?

They're even less concerned about these matters.

Commoners don't understand the greater goods and evils; as long as the person killed was of higher status and worth than them, they would secretly rejoice.

If they could be comforted with some policies for the well-being of the populace...

Then there would be even fewer problems.

The only issue is how to kill the Marquess of Seberlin.

The rumored Great Nobles are not easy to provoke.

Arthur wasn't sure.

So, he had to drag Marinda into this, letting her face the Marquis directly.

Him?

As a young, upright, innocent, and kind 'Spirit Medium,' he would naturally assist from the sidelines.

Of course, if he could use Marinda's connections to drag the Countess down as well, that would be even better.

"Twenty percent chance?

That's a bit low!

But, if we could gain a foothold in Port Doldot, it would be worth it!"

Hearing Arthur's words, Marinda frowned.

But then, the lady made a decision.

Do it!

She had already seen the ceiling of her industry in South Los.

It was destined to reach its limit as time passed.

Rather than wait until that moment to make plans, it was better to take a risk now with Arthur.

After all, Arthur wasn't the kind to shoot in the dark; he certainly had some level of assurance.

Twenty percent?

It must far exceed that.

Thinking this, Marinda prepared to discuss the following arrangements with Arthur.

However, when she looked up, the lady spotted Arthur looking at her with a strange gaze.

It was a look filled with surprise mixed with disappointment.

Instantly, the lady felt puzzled.

"What's the matter?"

The lady asked in return.

"Marinda, although I don't want to say it, do you always underestimate me?"

If there were only a twenty percent chance of gaining a foothold in Port Doldot, I would never resort to such a measure. I would simply blow up the entire Port Doldot.

Then, rebuild a new port from scratch!"

Arthur said with a serious face.

Marinda was taken aback.

Instantly, the lady thought of something, her eyes filled with disbelief.

"What are you talking about?"

Though she had a guess in her mind, the lady still asked.

"Profit!

What I'm talking about is a twenty percent profit!

It's twenty percent of Port Doldot's earnings!"

Arthur enunciated each word, his eyes appreciating Marinda's expression at that moment, especially the disbelief in her deep blue eyes.

He found it quite lovely.

So, he certainly didn't act this way just to enjoy Marinda's expression.

He, Arthur, was just going with the flow.

Marinda, on the other hand, was truly furrowing her brows.

"Impossible!

Absolutely impossible!

Unless you can not only hold the Marquess of West Berlin's soft spot but also withstand the Marquess of West Berlin on the battlefield... Wait a minute!

You're not thinking of having me withstand the Marquess of West Berlin, are you?"

Marinda finally came to her senses.

And of course, Arthur couldn't possibly admit to it.

"It's not you withstanding the Marquess of West Berlin; it's both of us withstanding him, making him hesitate to take action."

Arthur certainly wouldn't admit his true thoughts.

"That's too dangerous!

The Marquess of West Berlin is rumored to be strong enough to reach the 'Ascend Steeper' level!

Even possibly being an 'Ascend Steeper' himself!

If we do this, the risk we're taking is too great!"

Arthur looked at Marinda with a smile, considering the reasons she laid out.

In summary, it was just—

We need more money!

As long as Marinda didn't outright refuse, this matter was already a success for Arthur.

In fact, when Marinda saw Arthur smiling at her, she already couldn't continue her speech.

The lady wasn't the thick-skinned type.

Having her true intentions discovered, the lady spoke directly.

"I want half!"

"Twenty percent!"

Arthur's smile faded, his expression turning solemn.

Then, he provided more reasons.

"I have prepared the groundwork for two and a half years.

The risk I took and the expenses far exceed your imagination.

Twenty percent is the limit I can offer."

Marinda hesitated slightly, not because she didn't believe Arthur's words. Having encountered humiliating defeat in West Berlin herself, she certainly believed that Arthur must have taken great risks and spent untold amounts of gold and effort to create the current situation.

It couldn't just have been achieved by chance, could it?

Impossible!

And the lady's hesitation was to calculate whether her investment and the returns were proportional.

In the end—

"Thirty percent!"

That's my bottom line!"

The lady said.

Arthur didn't answer immediately but frowned, his fingers unconsciously tapping on the table.

Thud, thud-thud!

Once, twice.

Just when Marinda thought this collaboration would fall through, Arthur sighed.

"Since it's you, Marinda."

Having said that, the young 'Spirit Medium' extended his hand again —

"Pleasure doing business with you!"

Chapter 655 Devour!

"Pleasure working with you!"

Marinda said, shaking hands with Arthur briefly.

Though she released the grip almost immediately, Arthur was certain that Marinda had indeed become a bit desensitized to him—the tightness in her muscles didn't occur, her hairs didn't stand on end, and her stomach didn't make any strange noises.

This...

Was a good thing, right?

Arthur wasn't too sure.

After all, he hadn't yet witnessed Marinda spitting on someone else.

Who?

Who said she spat on the Countess of South Los?

It definitely wasn't him.

Considering the height difference, if she were to spit, it would surely land right on top of that earl's head.

Pfft!

Arthur suddenly burst out laughing.

Facing Marinda's puzzled look, Arthur waved his hands repeatedly.

"Sorry, sorry, I suddenly thought of something and just couldn't help it," he said.

Arthur went to pour himself some orange tea.

He needed to compose himself.

Marinda looked at Arthur with suspicion.

This lady always felt as if Arthur had just been thinking something very rude.

But at this moment, the lady had no time to dwell on such thoughts.

She had to go back and get ready.

You see, facing the Marquis of Seberlin was no simple matter.

"Contact me anytime."

Having said that, the lady blew a smoke ring and dove straight into it, disappearing from sight.

Meanwhile, Arthur finished his cup of orange tea and, making sure there was no one around, he then turned to look at the object that set his heart racing and his blood boiling—the 'Holy Serpent Shield'—

[Name: Scales of Xitidar (Perfect)]

[Type: Other Class Item]

[Quality: Legend]

[Attributes: Ingestible]

[Remarks: Xitidar is proud. Having once tasted the sap of the 'Golden Tree', it has transformed from an ordinary serpent into an unimaginable being capable of controlling seas and overturning rivers.

In fact, that's just what it did.

Inside the 'Inner Sea', it rampaged without restraint.

Any passing ships would be treated as toys by it.

Especially when these toys periodically offered it food named 'humans,' it played even more gleefully.

As time went by, Xitidar grew tired of this meaningless game. It submerged its body in the Inner Sea and rested its head upon 'Mt. Elron,' basking in the sunlight.

The warm sun made it ponder a question: It wished to taste the sap of the 'Golden Tree' once more.

Instinctively, it felt that by tasting it again, it would undergo earth-shattering changes.

However, it couldn't get anywhere near the 'Golden Tree' at the moment.

So, it started to choose beings capable of approaching the 'Golden Tree.'

To this end, Xitidar wasn't worried, for it had plenty of choices.

During this time, temples dedicated to it emerged along the shores of the Inner Sea. It was revered as the 'God of the Inner Sea' and worshipped by countless beings.

Then, it chose one particularly delectable piece of 'food' from among the many beings and sent it to the base of the 'Golden Tree.' This piece of 'food' didn't use the small knife it was given to cut the 'Golden Tree' but instead set it ablaze!

It grew angry!

It had been fooled by the food!

It was terrified!

The food suddenly became so powerful, improbably so, that a mere lift of its hand tore off one of its prideful scales.

It fled!

But...

It will certainly return!]

...

[Ingestion: For those with special serpent bloodlines, ingesting this scale will purify the bloodline to a certain extent and fill in gaps within it to some degree, but ordinary serpent bloodline will have no effect upon contact with this scale, and other beings will become bloodthirsty and violent upon touching it.]

(Remark 1: The blaze of the 'Firebearer' has eradicated most of the negative statuses from this scale, making it safe for the suitable consumer without bearing any negative consequences.)

(Remark 2: Bloodline purification and completion occur simultaneously, and are not optional.)

(Remark 3: Swallowing it whole will enhance the effect.)

...

Arthur looked at the "Scales of Xitidar," truly his eyes lit up with joy.

Although "Swift Bird Swordsmanship" had somewhat mended his "Serpent of Death" bloodline, it was still far, far from fully restored.

Originally, Arthur was considering how to truly accelerate the restoration of the "Serpent of Death" bloodline.

He had no leads on this matter.

Unlike other Mystic Side knowledge.

Anything related to bloodlines was the most core secret of various forces and families.

Arthur had originally planned to find an appropriate opportunity to ask Grandma Susan for advice.

But now it seemed...

...that he wouldn't need to!

Without any hesitation, Arthur set up the space with "Demon-Repelling Holy Salt," "Evil-Repelling Brick Powder," and "Barrier Oil."

Then, he gave instructions to the cat, dog, and bird following him.

"Although it's not as crucial as a ritual, you three still need to guard well," he said.

Pendragon: Meow!

Kiri: Woof!

Fujin: Caw!

All of them responded accurately.

Fujin flew to the top of the cabin.

Kiri concealed himself in the shadows.

Pendragon sat in front of Arthur, his originally fluffy fur now slightly bristled, with the airflow swirling and thunder faintly resounding.

Unlike Kiri and Fujin's obedience.

Pendragon was genuinely worried that something unexpected might befall Arthur.

The young Spirit Medium immediately smiled and raised his hand to pat the cat's head.

"Don't worry, it's just a little dessert after a meal," he reassured.

Having said that, Arthur stripped off all his clothes and accessories, and then, his body began to expand, especially his mouth which widened to an extreme.

The traditionally-sized "Kite Shield," a "Scales of Xitidar" large enough to shield half a body, was easily stuffed into Arthur's mouth by him.

The texture was a bit like jelly.

With a slight effort, it melted.

The taste was quite similar to double-skin milk.

Arthur smacked his lips, never really got to savor the flavor, and then fell back onto the deck, sinking into a deep sleep.

Arthur felt somewhat groggy.

He felt as though he was soaking in warm water.

The sensation was extremely comfortable.

It made him want to fall asleep again.

But his instincts told him that he couldn't sleep any further.

If he slept again, he would be facing death.

Fear of death made him begin to struggle fiercely.

Soon, he touched something hard.

Break through this!

Get out!

Live!

His body's instincts made him hit against it over and over again.

Finally—

Crack!

The hard substance shattered.

Light flooded in all at once.

He struggled to crawl out.

His blurry vision prevented him from seeing clearly where he was, let alone what was around him, but he knew he was hungry.

Without hesitation, he ate all of his eggshell and fluids.

But he was still hungry.

Because a rich fragrance had been enveloping him from the start.

Without hesitation, he crawled directly toward the source of the fragrance.

Meanwhile—

Gaze after gaze fell upon him.

Chapter 656: That Moment, The Little Snake Under the Tree!

When the first gaze appeared, Arthur felt as if there were thorns on his back.

When the second gaze appeared, Arthur's blood seemed to freeze.

When the third gaze appeared, Arthur's soul couldn't help but shudder.

And when the fourth gaze appeared, Arthur...

Was utterly composed!

He was now the snake.

He had no idea what had happened.

He was just hungry.

No!

It was hungry!

At this moment, the frequency at which the skill "Bluff" flickered had exceeded what the naked eye could detect; it was completely lit up.

Like a lamp.

An eternal lamp.

Moreover, at this moment, the XP that was needed to level up "Bluff" was completely unnecessary; in the field of view that only Arthur could see, it began to increase +1+1+1+1.

"Bluff Lv8"

"Bluff Lv9"

"Bluff Lv10"

...

The long-stagnant skill "Bluff" started to improve.

With every level increased, Arthur appeared more natural.

The fourth gaze that appeared lingered slightly on Arthur before shifting with the previous three gazes towards that area shrouded in brilliance.

Then came the fifth gaze, the sixth gaze.

The casting gazes kept increasing.

Each time a gaze was cast, it would subconsciously glance at Arthur first.

But Arthur was too inconspicuous.

Or rather...

Arthur really resembled a 'snake' too much.

Which led these beings to also consider Arthur a 'snake'.

And this perception caused Arthur's "Bluff" to start skyrocketing.

When the eleventh gaze came over, the numbers that were once just +1 had already turned into +99!

+99+99+99...

Layers upon layers, densely packed numbers, were increasing frantically.

"Bluff," which was just steadily improving, seemed to be on a rocket at this moment—

"Bluff Lv11"

"Bluff Lv12"

...

"Bluff Lv99"

...

When "Bluff" reached Lv99, the constant appearance of experience points suddenly halted.

Not because they were gone, nor was there any decrease.

The +99 numbers were still +99.

What changed was "Bluff" itself.

The disappearance of the required number to level up in "Bluff Lv99 (59499/-)," but the increasing numbers were still there.

However, it seemed to have reached a limit, and "Bluff" could no longer improve.

All of this, Arthur saw clearly.

It could also see the brilliance clearly—

A tree!

A colossal Golden Tree!

The endless brilliance bloomed from the branches and leaves.

And although its body could not have seen clearly before, bathing in such brilliance, its body grew rapidly.

In just thirty breaths, it grew from the size of a pinky to 10 meters long.

The growth in body size made it stronger and hungrier.

It quickened its pace towards the tree.

There, it was so fragrant.

So fragrant that, without needing to act, Arthur instinctively rushed there.

And this scene made those eleven gazes even more expectant.

These gazes watched Arthur.

The increasing numbers of "Bluff" suddenly started a new wave of explosive growth, changing from +99 to +999.

A tenfold change.

By the time Arthur had crawled halfway there, the numbers in "Bluff" Lv99 had already turned into "14489055/-".

And these numbers were still increasing.

Arthur's instincts told him that such numbers were greatly beneficial.

So, he felt no sorrow.

Instead, under the watch of those eleven gazes, he swiftly moved forward—with the appearance of a beast driven by instinct!

And by the time Arthur, crawling, reached the base of that colossal Golden Tree, the number in "Bluff" Lv99 had reached a terrifying "30028500/-".

At the same time, Arthur's serpentine body had reached 100 meters.

But even with such a body, under the Golden Tree, he was hardly noticeable; he couldn't even begin to describe the enormity of the Golden Tree.

Because when he was here, he looked up and saw...

Worlds.

Worlds within the leaves.

Each leaf represented a world.

A total of 129,600 leaves.

The cycle of life and death never rests.

Their number neither increases nor decreases.

Each time a leaf withers and falls, a new leaf grows in its place.

Arthur watched the falling leaves, watched new life.

He struggled to rise, climbing towards the trunk of the tree.

He wanted to reach the top of the tree to look around.

But, as this thought surfaced, his "Death Intuition" issued unprecedented warnings, not just flickering but also buzzing in a way he had never experienced before. In his vision, he saw—

A humanoid with seven heads and nine arms, without a head, brandishing flames.

A bird-headed, fish-bodied monster churning up monstrous waves.

A one-eyed, bodiless monster spewing thunder and lightning.

A girl under a black veil weeping softly.

A gentleman holding a golden cup with a face full of haughty disdain.

An old man with a decaying body, ceaselessly making a loud racket.

These six instantly reduced him to ashes, leaving not even his soul behind.

And—

The one hidden in the fog, murmuring softly, whose face was unknown.

The one whose essence was scarlet, roaring viciously without pause.

The silent one filled with endless power, remaining quiet and unspoken.

The humanoid with three heads, a single arm and leg, giggling and laughing.

These four imprisoned his soul and made him experience pain.

Only—

The lady cloaked in a cape and concealing a serpentine body granted him a quick end.

Horror!

Great horror!

Once he truly climbed to the top of the tree, his "Bluff" would no longer be able to continue hiding his true self.

He would be completely exposed.

He,

changed his original idea.

He continued to let instinct drive him, climbing and searching on the Golden Tree.

Here, there was no concept of time.

But his body had still grown from 100 meters to 1,000 meters long.

Even then, he was still so insignificant, hardly worth mentioning.

At the same time...

A sense of twilight descended upon his body.

Arthur could clearly perceive that his body had reached its limit.

It wasn't just the limit of his body.

It seemed there were also limits set by 'destiny'.

'Destiny' constrained him.

His crawling pace became slower and slower.

Until he could no longer move at all, the trunk of the Golden Tree that he clung to trembled slightly, and a drop of sap oozed out from the bark, enveloping him within it.

In an instant, he felt reborn.

He instantaneously broke through 'destiny'!

He instantaneously shook off 'destiny'!

At this moment, he was cast away from the branches of the Golden Tree!

It was as if he had moved from one world to another!

Of course, this wasn't the most important part!

The most important thing was that the owners of the eleven gazes had made their move!

These eleven gazers did not 'crush' him.

Because...

They were wary of each other, guarding against each other.

They extracted the 'sap' that had merged into his body.

Splitting it eleven ways.

Taking their own shares, they left contentedly.

And him?

He kept falling downward.

Until...

He fell into a river.

Not a splash was made.

Pain!

An unimaginable agony!

He felt as though his soul had been torn apart!

He experienced death!

Or perhaps, he had already died.

His body drifted along the river's flow until—

"What a poor little snake."

In a pleasant voice, he was scooped up by a hand.

It was a remarkably comely old lady.

The old lady had a youthful face, but the endless sense of years made him call her 'old lady'.

The very comely old lady stroked his head.

He, lived again.

Chapter 657: The Conspiracy of Those Years!

It, which had come back to life, was still weak.

So, when the grandmother handed over the soup, it did not resist and drank a bowl straight away.

When half of the second bowl had been drunk, the attractive grandmother touched its head and sighed softly.

"Other creatures have followed your scent here."

It looked at the grandmother worriedly.

But the grandmother just smiled.

"It's nothing.

I just lacked some firewood for the soup, and their arrival is just perfect," she said.

With those words, the grandmother lifted it and placed it in the river on the other side of the bridge.

When it looked back, the grandmother was gently tapping the soup pot.

Into the void below, ninety-nine shadows of various forms were sucked and, instantly, the small firewood blazed fiercely.

The soup in the pot also began to bubble vigorously."

The attractive grandmother softly chanted:

"No grass, no leaves, no flowers, no trees, the yellow sands and the River of Forgetfulness beyond..."

Amid the trailing song, its vision suddenly blurred.

By the time it regained its senses, it was here.

It had become a drab little snake.

It had no idea why it had ended up here.

It had forgotten much.

All it remembered was that very attractive grandmother.

And then...

There was the drop of fresh blood before it.

It was very hungry.

Without any hesitation, it licked the drop of fresh blood.

Afterward, it fell into a deep sleep, and its body started to grow wildly.

Between the scales, fine fuzz began to form, eventually giving rise to a pair of wings on its body.

At the time, it had no idea about any of this.

Not until it woke up.

The soup was still having its effect; its memory of the attractive grandmother had completely vanished, and instead...

The Golden Tree!

The most delicious liquid in its memory was the sap of the Golden Tree.

It longed to taste it again.

As time passed, this obsession grew stronger.

It, 'God of the Inner Sea' Xitidar, was determined to return to its birthplace!

It would taste that wonderful liquid again.

For this, it was prepared to cooperate with the only human who could approach the 'Golden Tree'!

It would succeed!

Everything...

Was destined!

It vanished!

He came back!

In the flicker of Level 99 "Bluff," Arthur fully recovered from his role-playing as Xitidar, his eyes still showing shock.

His bloodline, meanwhile, had started to heat up.

Almost instinctively, Arthur concealed that trace of shock.

He picked up the orange tea before him and drank calmly.

The recent experience felt so real and yet surreal that even Arthur couldn't tell whether it was true or false.

But the Level 99 "Bluff" did exist.

The variation of the "Serpent of Death" bloodline did exist.

Even his intuition warned him not to think about those existences, neither the tree nor those eleven beings, as it would bring vast troubles.

As for the attractive grandmother?

Not even a thought should be raised about her.

Otherwise, what comes would not just be trouble.

"Phew, I always feel like I've been drawn into some kind of grand conspiracy!" Arthur exclaimed inwardly.

It was a conspiracy!

It's not trouble!

Of this, Arthur was absolutely certain.

The simplest point, Xitidar...no, to be precise, how did the snake egg containing Xitidar appear near the Golden Tree?

Naturally laid and then appeared?

Impossible!

Even those exaggerated beings couldn't get near the Golden Tree, let alone Xitidar's parents.

So there was only one possibility left...

Humans!

The Golden Tree refused any being to get close.

But humans cursed by the Golden Tree could approach it.

'Who could it be?'

Arthur wondered, but the next moment, the young 'Spirit Medium' picked up Pendragon.

"Pan, come!

Let's play the 'Flying Cat' game!"

With those words, the young 'Spirit Medium' outright threw Pendragon out.

Pendragon, flying mid-air, looked utterly baffled.

The young kitten had no idea what was happening.

Meow! Meow!

Pendragon protested frantically while suspended in the air.

And Arthur was laughing heartlessly.

"Hahaha!

Isn't it fun?

Let's do it again!"

While Arthur spoke, he glanced out of the corner of his eye at the now non-flashing 'Death Intuition'.

Just now, as he contemplated, the 'Death Intuition' began to flash wildly.

Without any hesitation, Arthur started using Pendragon as a shield.

After all, one raises a cat for a thousand days, to use it in a moment of need.

Using one's own cat to divert attention was only natural, wasn't it?

And when everything settled down,

Arthur Bluffed himself into temporarily ignoring those memories, and only then did he begin to look at the text that had been flashing since the beginning—

[Serpent of Death - Remnant: An unexpected Devour, Peeping back to the origin, you have truly obtained the qualification for 'God Ascension Steps'. The bit of power remaining under the Golden Tree sap in the scales was completely absorbed by your Talent 'Breath of Death', which started to purify your Bloodline in a unique way. When this purification is complete, it would be the time for you to ascend the 'God Ascension Steps'—Death intertwined with the Serpent, Death chasing the Serpent's tail, the Serpent chasing the start of Death, in a repetitive cycle, another Special Promotion occurred. Even though your Bloodline is still Fragmentary, the Special in your Bloodline is enough to make most God-born and Demon Offspring take notice, make those Ascend Steppers envious, and even instill fear in dark, shadowy, and Death-related entities. Because they, them, and They all know, your unearthly Talent will eventually complete your Bloodline...]

[Effect: 1, Awakening; 2, Shadow Concealment; 3, Serpentine Body; 4, Serpent's Gaze; 5, Serpent Speak; 6, Devour; 7, Serpent's Breath; 8, Serpent Shadow; 9, Authority, Crippled]

[Awakening: You have awakened a Special Bloodline, at this moment you become different from others; Physique +10 (3+2+5), Spirituality +10 (3+2+5)]

[Shadow Concealment: When you are in the shadows or darkness, you will receive a Stealth +7 modification]

[Serpentine Body: Your Body joints and muscles can not only move flexibly like a snake, but your entire Body can also coil and wriggle like a snake. Meanwhile, against swords, Firearms, Explosions, Blaze, your Defense Level increases by +4, against acid and toxins, Defense Level +5, against Thunder, Defense Level +16; and when there is sufficient Food, your Body will grow rapidly in a boundary-breaking manner and will be endowed with matching Physique, Defense, and lifespan. You can also freely control the size of your Body, but in winter, you will still instinctively feel drowsy. If you choose to hibernate, your Body will grow faster; if you refuse hibernation, the growth rate will remain the same, and 'Food' will become a very important resource for you. You will need more 'Food' to promote the purification of your Bloodline; 0/1000]

[Serpent's Gaze: By making eye contact with others through Serpent's Gaze, creatures below the Entry Level will be instantly Deterred. If the opponent becomes panicked during Deterrence, they will also fall into Illusions and be pulled into the realm of Death! Creatures of Entry-level or above must make a will check, but if the will check fails, they will be Deterred, panicked, fall into Illusions, and be pulled into the realm of Death!]

[Serpent Speak: You can communicate with serpent species using a Serpent's hiss, command ordinary and Arcane Level serpent species, even Entry-level serpent species will be Deterred by you, even if you don't communicate with them with a hiss, serpent species will still revere you, wanting to follow you]

[Devour: You can open your mouth to a degree that surpasses your own limits, and you can swallow anything smaller than your mouth. Moreover, you can ignore the toxins, acid rot, Dark Energy, etc., contained in the swallowed Food. Even stones can be digested and absorbed by your stomach, transformed into the purest nutrients to nourish your Body]

[Serpent's Breath: The gas you exhale from your mouth can at any moment turn into an Entry-level deadly miasma; your saliva will corrode the earth. When you wish, a single hibernation could turn South Los into a swamp of poisonous miasma. But when you are unwilling, you remain typically human. You can kiss your beloved girl anytime]

[Serpent Shadow: The Resonance between the Breath of Death and your Bloodline has completely transformed your shadow, which can become 77 Serpent Shadows, silently attacking whoever you wish in your sight. Once the attacked person dies, they will become the purest 'Aura of Death' and be brought back]

[Authority, Crippled: Unlike the 'Snake Wing' ignited by swordsmanship, Xitidar holds the 'Authority of the God of the Inner Sea'. Although it is incomplete, you can still control water on a small scale, and when standing on the Inner Sea, you can manipulate water on a large scale]

(Note 1: The Physique and Spirituality brought on by Awakening are absolutely safe. As you eat more Food and hibernate, they will slowly increase)

(Note 2: When using "Shadow Concealment," rapid running will not affect the "Stealth Level," and you will receive a +2 stealth bonus even in bright light or when fully exposed.)

(Note 3: The "Serpentine Body" can currently reach 7 meters, with a natural lifespan of 666 years. When maintaining a normal human appearance, the "Defense Level" naturally increases by +2. When you release your constraints and reach 7 meters, the natural "Defense Level" further increases by +6, and specifically, the "Thunder Defense Level" increases by an additional +33. Moreover, to purify your "Bloodline," you will need more Gold, "Mystic Side Items," and "Misfortune Items" as 'Food.')

(Note 4: Each "Defense Level" is roughly equivalent to the explosive power of a single high-explosive grenade.)

(Note 5: When you complete a deep sleep, you can effectively alleviate the state of drowsiness.)

(Note 6: Each "Serpent Shadow's" initial "Attack Level" is equivalent to the firepower of a heavy firearm projectile. Serpent Shadows can turn corners and track targets. Each time a Serpent Shadow completes an attack, if it consumes enough "Aura of Death," it can continue attacking and increase its own "Attack Level," up to the strength of a 12-pound "Little Emperor Cannon." It will also consume "Aura of Death." When "Aura of Death" is insufficient, it needs to return to your shadow to replenish "Aura of Death." However, the next time it attacks, it will still strike with the power of a heavy firearm projectile. Moreover, after a successful attack, it can also cease attacking and bring back the collected "Aura of Death" for you. When all Serpent Shadows strike, your shadow will become fainter but will not disappear.)

(Note 7: The ritual "Orange Cat," "Great Orange," under your "Talent" harmony, has no conflict with your "Bloodline," but rather complements it.)

(Note 8: In a small area within a radius of 200 meters, the power to control water cannot exceed the "Entry Level." When controlling water over a larger area, the power within a radius of 1500 meters is currently at "Ascend Step 3.")

...

Crack, crack!

Even now, Arthur, facing a "Physique" and "Spirituality" increase of +5, was truly formidable.

Arthur's body uncontrollably grew, adding over a meter to his original height, and then, under the control of "Serpentine Body," he reverted to his original height.

And this was just the beginning!

The next moment, before Arthur could further sense the changes in his body, more text appeared!

Chapter 658: Chain Reaction!

Immediately following the Bloodline "Serpent of Death" was "Swift Bird Swordsmanship"—

"Swift Bird Swordsmanship Breaks Through Limits!"

"Swift Bird Swordsmanship Lv5→Lv6"

"Swift Bird Swordsmanship Lv6: Swordsmanship initially stems from imitation. An ancestor of the nobles in South County had seen a divine bird by the name of 'Swift Bird' during the Empire Era. Witnessing how the 'Swift Bird' flew unfettered through the shadows, he was shocked and exclaimed in disbelief. Inspired by the 'Swift Bird,' he began to mimic its movements and created the nascent form of this swordsmanship."

As time passed, this sword technique was continuously perfected, yet also continuously questioned.

No one doubted the assistance it provided to one's Bloodline.

But everyone questioned the 'Swift Bird' it's originally depicted.

No one recognized the existence of this divine bird.

Except for you!

With your diligence and hardship, you've honed it to an incredibly high degree. Your Bloodline is starting to bring out its unique effects. You are aware of the skills you possess, and after devouring the scales of Xitidar, you have finally caught a glimpse of its true essence!

"Effects: 1. Extreme Speed; 2. Quick Strike; 3. Blood Enhancement; 4. Bird-Snake Sword Intent"

"Extreme Speed: When you use Swift Bird Sword Posture, the speed of your sword thrusts will be +6 on top of your existing Physique."

"Quick Strike: When you use Swift Bird Sword Posture, the speed of the next sword thrust is increased by +2.5, which can stack up to 3 times consecutively."

"Blood Enhancement: The power contained within your Bloodline is being gradually stimulated. It will slowly become purer. It's a long process, but your pursuit of the 'Swordsmanship Truth' has sped it up. However, during this time, your appetite will significantly increase, and your sleep quality will become enviable. The trace of Golden Tree sap remaining on the integrated Xitidar scale within your Body enhances the 'Blood Enhancement' effect, purifying your Bloodline faster, but correspondingly, your appetite grows larger, and you need to maintain enough sleep. Under the influence of 'Blood Enhancement,' you can use ordinary Food to slowly perfect your Bloodline."

"Bird-Snake Sword Intent: 'Swift Bird' Sword Intent makes you faster, 'Dark Serpent' Sword Intent makes your attacks unpredictable. When you execute Sword Intent, corresponding reference objects will automatically appear behind you, bringing a +1 Intimidation Level. When you deploy both Sword Intents at the same time, your physical strength will be significantly consumed, but it will grant a +3 Intimidation Level, leading to faster and more Bizarre attack methods. At the same time, you've also gained a trace of 'Divine Might.' When facing the 'Spiritual Manifestation' of other Entrants, you can crush theirs with this trace of 'Divine Might.' However, each invocation demands a tremendous amount of physical strength and will leave your spirit feeling exhausted, requiring a longer time to recover; once per week."

...

"Physique, Spirituality +3.0 ($0.3 \times 5 + Lv6 + 1.5$)"

...

(Note: You have reached this Skill's limit.)

Once again, a limit of "Swift Bird Swordsmanship."

But just like before, Arthur paid it no mind.

He knew that his "Swift Bird Swordsmanship" still hadn't reached its limits.

The current limit was just his own limit.

And as his power increased, so did his limits.

It was like the most fundamental Physique and Spirituality.

After "Swift Bird Swordsmanship" Lv6 added another 1.5 to Arthur, his current Physique had reached an astonishing 22.2, and Spirituality was at 19.1.

Even without any comparison.

Arthur felt like he was irrevocably walking down the path of a stats freak.

About that, Arthur said...

I can be even stronger!

After all, according to high-level scrolls like 'Touch of Death,' a Physique of 10 should be a watershed, while 18 should be a major threshold.

Combining this with the everyday reading of books on the Mystic Side.

A Physique of 10 signifies Entry.

And 18 points?

That is 'Ascend Step'!

Of course, there might be slight variations, but the difference is negligible.

What lies beyond 'Ascend Step'?

Arthur cannot yet speculate.

Although he is capable of reaching the 'Ascend Step' level under specific conditions, that is due to the Effect of a secret technique brought about by his Bloodline, not by his Physique, Spirituality.

But with a Physique of 22.2 and Spirituality of 19.1, Arthur could proudly say—

I, Arthur, am gifted with exceptional Talent!

And moreover...

I'm a peerless genius in the realm of swordsmanship!

Arthur looked at "Swift Bird Swordsmanship"'s "Extreme Speed" and "Quick Strike," subconsciously picked up the dinner knife from the table, and thrust forward.

After a fleeting shadow flashed by, the sound of cutting through the air followed.

Whoosh!

In the sharp sound of cleaving air, the hairs on Pendragon's back all stood on end, and his moving steps trembled.

Arthur looked at his cat's cowardly demeanor and couldn't help but shake his index finger.

Then, a series of stabs followed.

Each one faster than the last.

Each one more ruthless than the last.

At first, there were afterimages; by the third stab, Arthur's arm was completely hidden within the previous afterimage, and the dinner knife seemed to have turned into a shooting star, passing with a cold gleam.

Meow!

Pendragon let out a sharp cry.

The little cat soared to the top of the cabin, subconsciously touching its neck.

Arthur certainly wouldn't aim at his own kitten with that strike.

Although their days were filled with incessant jokes, this clearly went beyond the scope of jest, and Arthur could not possibly do it.

However, Pendragon felt as though its neck had been pierced through.

It was really scared to death!

Meow meow meow!

Pendragon protested.

But Arthur paid no attention.

At that moment, Arthur gazed at the dinner knife in his hand and unconsciously thought of the old woman's treatment of 'it'.

That moment was a matter of life and death!

Following that, 'it' unwittingly thought of the old woman's aura, filled with the traces of years gone by.

That moment seemed eternal!

And all these were silently influencing Arthur!

He wanted to integrate these into his swordplay!

But it wasn't long before Arthur chose to give up.

Because, 'it' involuntarily conjured the image of the Golden Tree in his mind, and when that sense of 'destiny' arose in his heart, [Death Intuition] flashed again.

Snap!

Arthur suddenly slapped his forehead.

In the crisp sound, this young 'Spirit Medium' set down the deformed dinner knife from the rapid swordplay and leaped out of his chair, embracing Pendragon in one go.

"Pan, do you fancy a swim?"

Arthur asked this while hooking something with his hand.

[Hand of Void] brought his underwear flying over.

Just before, in his promotion and bloodline completion, Arthur had stripped completely.

Now?

He had underwear for shielding.

Meow meow meow!

Pendragon protested.

This time, the protest was effective.

Not because Arthur's heart had softened, but because his focus, Yula, had once again shown unusual activity—

Yula made Lucius 'spill the beans' again.

The lady listened intently.

Then, she couldn't help but nod.

The lady agreed with Arthur's words and then reached for the Messenger Stone, preparing to contact the high echelons of the Pain Church, but just at that moment...

An unexpected change occurred!

Chapter 659: Subtle Changes!

Above the Inland River, the 'Oriental' was moving slowly.

In the dining room, servants shuttled back and forth in an orderly fashion, replacing the oil-stained plates and leftover food with freshly served meals for some guests who had specifically requested them.

Those guests who did not come to the dining room would have their food personally delivered by a servant.

Of course, only the first-class suites offered such service.

Ms. Yula, Lucius, and Joe were in one such first-class suite.

Two restaurant servants dressed in white shirts and vests followed behind a butler clad in a black tailcoat and a red bow tie, standing in front of the suite.

Knock, knock, knock!

The suite's butler gently tapped on the door, his voice soft yet respectful as he said,

"Mr. Joe, as per your instruction, three standard meals.

Also, two servings of 'Holy Cysteine Drink' that you specially ordered."

The Holy Cysteine Drink, a beverage mixed with alcohol, had a base of copious fresh lemon juice and honey, supplemented by large square ice cubes just small enough to fit into a glass. With two ice cubes and approximately 30ml of liquor poured from a height, the concoction wouldn't be stirred until the lemon juice and honey reached the top of the first ice cube. Then, using a soup spoon, one would stir continuously, allowing the ice to dilute into water, diluting the liquor until its level was flush with the rim of the glass.

The taste was passable, but it was labor-intensive, so ordinary taverns wouldn't bother with it.

And where it was available, it was always pricey.

After all, this drink was said to be one that a bartender could only make one of per day.

More than that?

The bartender would meet Death.

Therefore, the Holy Cysteine Drink was also known as 'The Death of the Bartender.'

But it was a favorite among the rich and the Nobles.

Because—

it set them apart from the rest.

Especially on the 'Oriental,' it further highlighted their distinction.

Because, there was an extra charge!

Having made some 'gains' last night, Joe excitedly shared the unique features of this drink with Ms. Yula before breakfast, but unfortunately, Ms. Yula left midway due to discomfort.

Without Ms. Yula, Joe naturally returned to his room with regrets.

He had intended to let Ms. Yula experience the extraordinary attention.

Or perhaps...

he wanted to share this joy with Ms. Yula.

After yesterday, his attitude towards Ms. Yula had changed significantly.

However, Ms. Yula remained the same.

This lady still used 'little tricks' to keep Joe happy in the washroom.

Similarly, a slight torment and inquisition of Lucius brought this lady joy as well.

Originally, this lady could have inquired in a more straightforward manner.

But she still chose to trample on Lucius with her foot incessantly.

The pleasure rising from the depths of her heart made this lady's lips curl up and excitement flicker in her eyes. Even when it was time to report to the High Priest, the excitement did not dissipate.

It was not just physical, but more so spiritual.

She knew she had achieved a great feat.

Her future was promising.

With anticipation for the future bubbling up within her, the lady's body trembled, and then...

Her eyes rolled back!

Not the eyes rolling upwards kind of white!

But a twisting of the eyeballs, entwined with nerves and blood vessels.

That tiny tentacle once again wriggled out from the lady's ear, resembling a maggot, ceaselessly squirming its Body.

With such writhing, Ms. Yula's eyes detached completely from their sockets, as if they were springs compressed and suddenly released, and with a pop, the two eyeballs erupted forth.

Suddenly, the two eyeballs lit up.

Almost simultaneously, a voice emanated from within the eyeballs—

"Your Crown!"

"Your Crown!"

Both were the voices of women, the former slightly hoarse, the latter exceptionally clear.

Each voice interwove with the other, yet neither was aware of the other.

What they heard was merely the transformed sound, echoing through the tentacle utilizing Ms. Yula's vocal cords.

"Blessed Yula seized her destiny!"

"In collaboration with Arthur Kredos!"

"Expel the 'Inland River Cult'!"

Voices undistinguished as either male or female informed the two of them.

Following that, more ambiguous voices vibrated from Yula's vocal cords.

With each syllable that emerged, the hoarse and clear voices grew increasingly excited.

"Thank you for Your Crown's gift!"

"Your Crown, you are really too kind!"

The twin voices appeared once more, but this time, the tentacle did not control Yula to respond. Instead, it actively severed the connection.

Yula's eyeballs returned to their sockets, and the tentacle retracted back into her earholes.

The next moment, there was a knock at the door—

Thump, thump-thump!

The gentle and unhurried knocking brought Yula to her senses.

The lady was completely unaware of the previous events.

In the lady's memory, she had been preparing to report the current situation, and then the knocking started.

With a smile, Yula opened the door.

The sunlight from outside instantly flooded in, bathing the pure wooden furniture in a rich vitality that provided an inner comfort.

The arrangement of the chandeliers and mirrors only enhanced this sense of life throughout the room.

These were some of Arthur's small touches.

Compared to simply piling on gold and silver, the young 'Spirit Medium' understood better how to make the room look luxurious while being cost-effective.

"Good morning, madam."

The suite housekeeper bowed slightly, allowing two servants to enter with the food.

At this time, Lucius had already been thrown into the washroom.

The only one left in the cabin, smiling, was Yula.

"Thank you for your service."

Ms. Yula drew out a one-Suo note and two five-Zeroes notes from Joe's wallet and handed them to the room housekeeper and two dining hall servants—many diners in the restaurant the previous evening had done the same, and then Joe had mentioned some etiquette aboard the 'Oriental' upon his return.

Tipping was one of these customs.

Yula didn't quite understand the meaning behind it, but the lady chose to follow the local customs.

For this, Arthur gave his silent approval.

How to make people efficient.

Pay them.

As long as the money was sufficient, everything could become efficient and orderly.

Arthur knew this.

But as a 'Spirit Medium' just above the breadline, naturally, he could not afford the wages for more staff. So, Arthur shifted this responsibility onto the guests of the 'Oriental'.

These now affluent guests surely wouldn't skimp on a little tip.

But who was the first to tip?

Arthur claimed not to know.

He was just a young, upright, simple, and kind 'Spirit Medium'.

How could he possibly know so many intricate details?

It must have been Marinda's arrangement.

His 'lover', his 'soulmate', enjoyed dwelling on such trifles.

And him?

He was focusing on the scene that had just unfolded.

When that tentacle appeared...

His "Death Intuition" did not flash again.

And just one day...

No, to be precise, just a few hours earlier, facing that tentacle, he still sensed the danger of death.

Clearly, the improvement in his bloodline and swordsmanship skills had provided him with the power to protect himself.

And this caused Arthur's brow to crease.

He had discovered a hint of something.

Chapter 660: Eighteen Contracts!

Before the enhancement of his bloodline and swordsmanship, Arthur, who possessed the "Mark of Thunder," could, in a sense, face 'Ascend Steppers'.

Moreover, with the trait of the "Mark of Thunder," as long as he wasn't instantly killed, Arthur could fight and, if not, escape.

However, the flickering of "Death Intuition" was signaling to Arthur that death was still a possibility.

That is to say, facing those tentacles, Arthur could very likely be killed instantaneously.

Therefore, the already cautious Arthur became even more careful.

Even while monitoring, he was extremely cautious.

But this time was different.

In the instant the abnormality occurred, Arthur's "Death Intuition" did not flicker.

Not just the "Death Intuition."

There was also...

"Spirituality"!

You must know, during the previous flickering of "Death Intuition," Arthur's "Spirituality" was almost boiling, making him feel uncomfortable.

But this time, his "Spirituality" was as calm as the everyday state of still water.

This gave Arthur a bit of confidence.

He tried to maintain his focus.

From the corner of his eye to direct gaze, there were no abnormalities.

This made Arthur subconsciously check his bloodline and swordsmanship that had just been enhanced.

Arthur's gaze moved back and forth over the annotations of the bloodline and swordsmanship.

Eventually, the young 'Spirit Medium's gaze locked onto this phrase—

"You now also possess a trace of 'Divine Might,' which can crush the 'Spiritual Manifestations' of other Entrants!"

Reading this phrase, Arthur thought not of himself crushing other 'Entrants' but of the time before when he was crushed by such methods by the tentacles.

Clearly, this trace of 'Divine Might' was key!

"This fellow... um, are these two fellows the same as Xitidar?"

Arthur subconsciously thought of Xitidar, who was revered as the 'God of the Inner Sea.'

"Miha, Yiluo?"

Shadow War!

Witch!"

Arthur looked at "Mikhail's Touch (Incomplete)," his mind whirling rapidly.

Being very curious about the 'Shadow War,' Arthur naturally tried hard to collect related information, but during the 'Holy Empire' era, The Holy Court ordered the burning of the 'Empire' period books, effectively making the records incomplete, and even if there were any, they were fragmented.

Of course, there must be complete records within The Holy Court.

After all, the 'Holy Empire' had what was known as the 'Centennial War' in its early years.

And in some Mystic Side Person's writings, the 'Centennial War' is referred to as the continuation of the 'Shadow War,' albeit still with no records.

But it was precisely for this reason that some people became even more certain.

Arthur had similar doubts.

But, Arthur would not indulge in speculation.

A Spirit Medium also needs solid evidence.

However, as a Spirit Medium, Arthur also knew how to seize opportunities.

Just like now—

Even if his bloodline was still marked as incomplete, and his swordsmanship had once again reached its limit.

But what of it?

He now had the qualifications to confront those tentacles directly!

This was enough!

You must know, when the enemy is strong and I am weak, even if there's continuous struggle and leveraging of momentum, the gains are still limited.

Even so-called victories can only be described as self-consolation.

But if the enemy is weak and I am strong...

No!

There's no need for the enemy to be weak and I to be strong!

As long as both parties are evenly matched, Arthur was confident he could snatch even their underpants!

'Marquess of West Berlin, third damsel, fourth damsel...'

Arthur murmured his targets in his heart, perfecting his plan.

As for that tentacle?

Arthur took out the "Mikhail's Touch (Fragmentary)" and placed it in his right hand.

Then, he took out the "Blood of Doting" and placed it in his left hand.

After that, Arthur brought his hands close together.

Without truly touching, the fragmented Bloodsucking Ancestor Worm within the "Blood of Doting" began to grow desperate, like a wild dog starved for three days faced with a bone approaching, continuously wagging its tail and making whine after whine.

Arthur carefully sensed this change and kept his hands moving closer.

But just as the palms of his hands were about to touch, Arthur pulled them apart again.

Instantly, the fragmented Bloodsucking Ancestor Worm grew anxious, as if the tail that should have been wagging had stopped, the whines turning into deep moans, and even its fangs were bared.

Then it began to bark crazily, just like a rabid dog.

At this, Arthur smiled.

He smiled very happily.

Walking dogs was his favorite pastime.

In the time that followed, Arthur kept repeating the previous actions.

The fragmented Bloodsucking Ancestor Worm inside the "Blood of Doting" became even more frantic.

Even roars began to sound by Arthur's ears.

However, Arthur was indifferent, still playing his game of walking the dog.

A wild dog is always a wild dog.

To make better use of it, it must become a domestic dog.

As for whether it could succeed?

Arthur was not worried.

Even wolves can become dogs under the lure of an egg yolk pie.

Why couldn't the Bloodsucking Ancestor Worm?

If it couldn't, it would mean that your egg yolk pie wasn't tempting enough.

And Arthur believed that the "Mikhail's Touch (Fragmentary)" had enough allure for the fragmented Bloodsucking Ancestor Worm.

Otherwise...

It wouldn't have "actively" exposed itself.

After obtaining the "Blood of Doting," Arthur had a "brief" exchange with the fragmented Bloodsucking Ancestor Worm.

Arthur believed his first intuition, just as he believed what he had felt was the most real.

Therefore, Arthur didn't mind borrowing the power of the "Blood of Doting," but he also never let down his guard.

Even at this moment, Arthur was wondering whether the fragmented Bloodsucking Ancestor Worm was almost unable to hold on, and that's why it had "actively" exposed itself after seeing "Mikhail's Touch (Fragmentary)."

Clearly, if that were the case, the other party would be risking everything.

And Arthur, he appreciated this courage.

Out of appreciation, Arthur didn't mind giving the other party a chance—

After dozens of tests, the fragmented Bloodsucking Ancestor Worm let out a roar.

Enough!

Arthur understood this roar.

Arthur immediately smiled.

Without any hesitation, Arthur began to draft seventeen contracts.

Starting with the Blood Ancestor Worm's name, methods of serving, lifestyle, and loyalty that could not be betrayed, he covered everything he could think of.

Seemingly worried that it wasn't secure enough.

Arthur took out an eighteenth contract.

He clearly wrote on it: If additions are needed, they can be made at any time, everything subject to the will of Arthur Kredos.

Were these eighteen contracts?

This was practically eighteen layers of hell!

The fragmented Bloodsucking Ancestor Worm didn't know the concept of the eighteen layers of hell, but sensing Arthur's smiling expression allowed it to feel as though it was stepping into the abyss.

But...

What it needed was within that abyss.

If it wanted to live, it had to go there.

How should it choose between life and death?

The fragmented Bloodsucking Ancestor Worm didn't hesitate for a moment.

The nearly instinct-driven, fragmented Bloodsucking Ancestor Worm swiftly signed its name, with not much spirituality left—

Abel.