

The Mighty Dragons Are Dead

#Chapter 1: The Dragon, the Elf, and Fresh Flower Town - Read The Mighty Dragons Are Dead Chapter 1: The Dragon, the Elf, and Fresh Flower Town

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He had spent a week recuperating from wild fruit poisoning and was also making an effort to adapt to his new identity after transmigration. Liszt often felt incredulous.

The overworked self who died suddenly at work has actually been reborn as a noble.

Moreover, a noble in a different world.

This different world was somewhat similar to medieval Europe, a place where castles and knights ruled everything. However, it was a magical fantasy world with the existence of dragons and elves. Knights could cultivate Dou Qi, and there were mysterious magicians. Even he himself had cultivated "Basic Dou Qi" to become an Apprentice Knight.

"Primary Dou Qi, huh."

A stream of energy flowed endlessly through his body and, guided by his will towards his hands, he instantly felt his palms heating up, filled with immense power.

That slightly tingling swelling sensation made him feel as though he could tear tigers and leopards apart with his bare hands.

It was Dou Qi, which symbolized power, that allowed knights to rule the vast lands.

Dou Qi cultivation.

An “Apprentice Knight” would master Primary Dou Qi, an “Earth Knight” would master Intermediate Dou Qi, and a “Sky Knight” would master Advanced Dou Qi.

Liszt’s father, Hereditary “Coral Island’s Count,” Li Weiliam Tulip, was a Sky Knight who had mastered Advanced Dou Qi. He possessed absolute power over life and death on his territory, Coral Island, which was as large as a prefecture-level city, and only needed to swear allegiance to the Sapphire Duke.

Regrettably.

As the third son of the Earl, he had not inherited the Tulip Family’s talent for Dou Qi. Even though he had already reached the age of sixteen, he was still an Apprentice Knight.

His elder brother, Levis Tulip, became an Earth Knight at thirteen and was now an elite among Earth Knights, capable of challenging three Earth Knights single-handedly.

His sister, Lvera Tulip, also became an Earth Knight before reaching adulthood.

He also had a half-brother, Lytton Tulip, who was twelve years old and was said to be on the verge of becoming an Earth Knight.

Liszt inherited more of his mother’s appearance, the late Countess. His light golden, slightly curly short hair, deep sapphire-like eyes, handsome features, fair skin, and slender figure all gave him the air of a naturally elegant nobleman. However, his aptitude was unfortunately poor.

Perhaps because he looked so much like his mother, the Earl once had high hopes for him.

The greater the expectation, the greater the disappointment.

As he grew older, his father became completely disillusioned with him, even displaying indifference.

His brother Levis was temporarily ennobled as a “Hereditary Viscount” and was destined to inherit the title of “Hereditary Earl.” His sister Lvera also received the title of Baron of Falcon Town, becoming a rare “Hereditary

Baroness” with her own territory in the Grand Duchy of Sapphire, rather than a life peer without land.

As for him, he was merely ennobled as a Baron, just like his sister, but of Fresh Flower Town, the most remote place on Coral Island.

Liszt, who had a personality like his mother’s, was always soft and weak, constantly bullied by his brother and sister. As he grew older, his communication with the Earl diminished even further, to the point where he would rather live in the Knight Academy than return home.

“Thankfully he was an unnoticed incompetent; by taking his place, no one would realize the difference... And having my territory, with hereditary and unquestionable rights over life and death, is wonderful,” Liszt had already gotten past the initial panic and was making efforts to blend into this world.

And he had to blend in, to live like a native.

Because in this world, transmigrators didn’t have much of an advantage—magic and Dou Qi surpassed technology—he couldn’t simply make nuclear weapons and spread destruction, so the idea of competing with magic and Dou Qi using technology had to be put aside.

Even more so after understanding some of the situation, he felt the need to keep a low profile—metal resources were entirely provided by dragons, while lush vegetation couldn’t exist without elves!

Without dragons, without elves.

The idea of farming or having an industrial revolution was something completely out of reach!

But dragons and elves are rare essences in this world, and the Duchy of Sapphire has only one dragon—the Sapphire Dragon, which was the mount of the Sapphire Duke 150 years ago, and the entire Sapphire Family was established on the back of this dragon.

It is said that a dragon can live for a thousand years, which means that the Duchy of Sapphire can enjoy its national fortune for hundreds of years to come.

Elves are more numerous than dragons, but their ranks are clearly defined.

Liszt's father, Li Weiliam Tulip, possesses a "Tulip Great Elf," which helps the family cultivate a large number of tulips, thereby establishing the family, and even changing their surname to "Tulip." The Great Elf can live for two hundred years and, barring accidents, the Tulip Family can still enjoy fortune for over one hundred and fifty more years.

Beneath the Great Elf are the Minor Elves, who can live for one hundred years.

The Tulip Family owns twelve Minor Elves, which help the family cultivate various plants.

Beneath the Minor Elves are the Elf Bugs, beings birthed from within plants with a lifespan of ten years, capable of affecting plant growth. If they encounter a stroke of fortune within those ten years, they can evolve into Minor Elves. As for the Elf Bugs themselves, it is only by a lucky chance that one might be birthed from a plant.

The Tulip Family has cultivated Coral Island for over twenty years, reaping more than a hundred Elf Bugs, and considering those that have died, there have only been a little over one hundred and fifty in total. Among them, only twelve have evolved into Minor Elves.

"Elves... It's a pity that the previous soul indeed displeased the Earl, even Li Vera has obtained a Minor Elf, whereas I, have only four Elf Bugs!"

At Liszt's coming-of-age ceremony, the Earl of Coral Island announced his ennoblement as the Baron of Fresh Flower Town and gifted him four Elf Bugs.

That was all.

"My lord, dinner time has arrived, shall we dine now?" Butler Carter knocked on the door and came in, bowing slightly.

"It's already dinner time, eh? Very well, please invite the two teachers to join us," Liszt said, not so elegantly stretching his back. His time spent nurturing his health had bored him terribly.

Soon, the two teachers arrived together.

The one with blond hair and tailed coat was Goltai, the family tutor, already forty-five years old. He was a down-on-his-luck Honored Knight who

depended on the Tulip Family, mainly responsible for Liszt's scholarly education. Of course, his primary job was as the Administrative Officer of Fresh Flower Town, helping Liszt manage the whole town.

"Liszt, you look much better. Thank heavens; it's good to see you healthy and lively again," Goltai said with playful ease, quite casually.

The other with a serious expression and meticulous movements was Liszt's knight teacher, Marcus.

His strength had reached that of an Earth Knight, but he had not yet gained a noble title. His family had been Retainer Knights for the Tulip Family for several generations, and in his generation, he was the first to become an Earth Knight.

Liszt smiled slightly, "Now that both teachers have arrived, Mr. Carter, please proceed with the meal."

"As you wish, my lord," the old butler Carter left the parlor gracefully to inform the kitchen downstairs to serve the meal.

"Teacher Marcus, my health has mostly recovered, and I hope to continue my knight training classes from tomorrow," Liszt said.

Marcus's square face was expressionless: "Possible."

Seeing this, Liszt smiled faintly, knowing in his heart that this Earth Knight harbored some resentment. He had hoped to earn distinction on the battlefield, win the title of Honored Knight, and join the ranks of high society as a noble member. Instead, he was dispatched here to serve as Liszt's knight teacher, trapped in the backwater of Fresh Flower Town.

And within the Tulip Family, Liszt was notoriously inept, which meant, following Liszt, the chances of becoming a noble were almost nonexistent.

Soon, the old butler arrived with the maids and manservants, bringing the plated meals.

The meal was not elaborate. The quality of life in Fresh Flower Town was low, and production was limited. Liszt, being a son not favored by the Earl, had meager resources and could not support a lavish lifestyle.

Still, Liszt ate with great seriousness.

Transmigration is a technical affair, and becoming a noble was already a great fortune. One should know that in this world, aside from the nobles, most commoners are but sheep to be slaughtered at will.

His two teachers included, were in fact his servants, and he could decide their life or death with a single word.

Chapter 0002: Serpent Script Composed of Smoke

Grilled goat meat, boiled seven-gill eels, a small portion of apple puree and pear slices, hop-flavored barley beer, and white bread made from fine wheat flour.

This was Liszt's dinner.

The slightly Western-style meal did not suit his taste, but he was incapable of cooking and could not prepare the home-cooked dishes he liked. Moreover, in this world, nobles are strictly forbidden from entering kitchens, storehouses, or any other places meant for servants, as doing so would be a breach of noble etiquette and subject to ridicule.

Of course, the court was an exception.

The chefs and servants of the court were all attended to by aristocrats from the various small fiefs. Liszt's father, the Earl of Coral Island, had once served as a stablemaster for the new generation of the Sapphire Duke, responsible for caring for the Duke's beloved steed—a horse with a mix of dragon blood in its lineage.

To this day, the Earl of Coral Island would occasionally enter the court to fulfill the role of stablemaster.

He relished this task, fearing that another noble might replace him as stablemaster and impede his close relationship with the Grand Duke.

In the same vein, the Sapphire Duke also served as a personal valet to the lord of his sovereign state, the Steel Ridge Kingdom, attending to His Majesty the King's every need.

Essentially, commoners are the servants of the nobility, and the lesser nobility serve the greater nobility.

Only by becoming king of a country does one become a true master.

"Thankfully, here in Fresh Flower Town, I am the sole master and need not attend to anyone," Liszt thought contentedly while eating his less-than-satisfactory dinner.

The Earl was his father who didn't care for him and would hardly bother him.

After dinner, Butler Carter would direct the maids to clean up the dishes, and a personal valet would bring water for washing and assist Liszt with rinsing out his mouth.

When the routine was done, Carter left with the other servants, "I will be just outside the door, Master and the two gentlemen, please call upon me if you need anything."

"Thank you, Mr. Carter," Liszt said, smiling with a gentleman's grace. In terms of noble etiquette, he was influenced by his predecessor and didn't need to learn it actively; it came naturally to him.

Even towards the lowliest servants, one must maintain politeness and respect—in private, it mattered not whether they were beaten or killed or subjected to any sort of mistreatment, but publicly, one must maintain noble demeanor.

"It is my honor to serve you," Carter said as he smoothly closed the door.

"Liszt," Goltai said, taking a sip of tea sweetened with honey, "we must quickly make use of the Elf Bug, but the town's finances are in terrible shape. The previous administrative officer was a fool who did nothing but oppress serfs and left us with a mess!"

"I know, Teacher, please investigate as soon as possible to see which areas are suitable for the Elf Bug placements."

“Of course, it’s my duty.”

Liszt then turned to Marcus, “Will it be difficult to investigate the magical beasts near Thorn Ridge that are close to Fresh Flower Town? As the landlord, I must take seriously the matter of these beasts frequently harassing the farmers.”

Marcus replied, “Thorn Ridge is vast, and the magical beasts don’t have a fixed pattern of activity. With only four Retainer Knights at your disposal, even if I learn all about the magical beasts, we still won’t be able to defend against them. The Patrol Team is absolutely unreliable; they are a bunch of ruffians and scoundrels who would wet their pants at the sight of a magical beast.”

Fresh Flower Town is located at the northeastern extremity of Coral Island and is surrounded by Thorn Ridge—a place teeming with magical beasts, which is why few merchant caravans are willing to trade here.

The town can only produce and consume its goods; without the help of elves, the farmers struggle to support themselves, yet they still must pay taxes to the Tulip Family, who rule over Coral Island.

And the nobility is only concerned with how much tax they can collect, paying no mind to the farmers’ survival.

The Tulip Family is no exception.

However, the present Liszt could no longer remain indifferent. As a youth bathed in the glorious banner of mutual ownership, having become the lord of a region, he was compelled to rescue the people from dire straits—it was his duty. Only with the prosperity of Fresh Flower Town could he, as the landlord, enjoy better comforts.

For both public and private reasons, he had to develop Fresh Flower Town.

“There must be a way to cope with it. Teacher Marcus, after tomorrow’s knight class, I’d like you to accompany me for a walkthrough of Thorn Ridge. As the landlord, I have yet to really see what Fresh Flower Town looks like.”

“Liszt, this is not a good idea. It’s better to just stroll around the town. Thorn Ridge is not a place to go. Don’t forget, you nearly died in Thorn Ridge,” Goltai immediately objected.

Liszt shook his head, “Last time I carelessly ate poisonous berries; this time I will be careful.”

Marcus simply said, “I will notify your four retainer knights tonight and arrange the patrol route through Thorn Ridge to ensure your safety.”

“Thanks for the trouble.”

“You should be careful and cautious,” Goltai said helplessly.

Liszt didn’t say much more, for the two teachers didn’t know his real plans; his body had not completely recovered and, given his nature, he would definitely prefer to fully recover before venturing out—But as a noble travels, he either goes by carriage or on horseback, and unfortunately, he had no carriage.

Riding a horse wasn’t an easy task either, for there were no saddles or stirrups here—knights with Dou Qi didn’t need such equipment to ride horses, or any mount for that matter.

“On the contrary, a saddle would restrict the fusion of a knight’s Dou Qi with his steed... But without a saddle, it always chafes the behind...” Liszt thought after seeing off the two teachers.

“My lord, at what time do you plan to retire?” his personal attendant came in to ask.

“After ten o’clock, Thomas. Add another candle to my study for now; I wish to read,” Liszt directed his personal attendant.

Disappointment flashed across Thomas’s face; for several consecutive days, he hadn’t had the chance to prove himself. Liszt always sent him away rather than requiring his personal attendance.

As a personal attendant, he felt he hadn’t earned the baron’s favor and worried about his job.

The truth was, Liszt didn’t like having a personal attendant; every time Thomas helped him dress, it made Liszt’s skin crawl—The abominable nobility system!

Why couldn’t a male noble have female personal attendants?

As Thomas brought in a candle and then left, the study became brightly lit. Liszt got up, pulled the curtains apart, and through the castle window, he could see a few faint lights from the town nearby.

Quite dim.

A town where the people couldn't even get a full meal had no nightlife, only endless silence.

"This is my territory, isn't it? Poor and backward, yet it belongs completely to me, an entire town that's my own independent kingdom... I will turn it into an utopia!" he mused.

In a trance.

Faint smoke appeared before Liszt, the mist twisting into abstract characters, formed like countless little serpents entwining each other. This was the standardized script of the Steel Ridge Kingdom—Serpent Script, with origins so ancient, no records of its inception remained; chronicling history was not customary here.

As a transmigrator inheriting all previous memories, Liszt could read the Serpent Script.

A message that had baffled him for a week.

"Mission: As the landlord, you need to understand everything about your domain. Please make a round through Fresh Flower Town to grasp the crises within your land and prepare for future development. Reward: The sublimation of Dou Qi."

The content was brief and not complicated.

But what Liszt couldn't understand was why he could see the Smoke Serpent Script; searching through the memories of his predecessor, it had always appeared since he was a child. However, back then, the smoke was so thin and blurred that he couldn't make out the Serpent Script at all, thinking it was a mere illusion.

It wasn't until after the soul transmigration that Liszt could clearly see the text.

Startled for a moment, he reached out to touch the smoke, but it disappeared immediately, which supported the notion of it being a hallucination.

Now, Liszt didn't think it was an illusion; perhaps this was a transmigrator's perk, a manifestation of some system? Unclear, he decided to verify it.

As long as he patrolled the territory, the mission would be complete, and whether he could receive the reward would be proof.

If there was no reward, it would mean it was just a hallucination.

If there was one, it would mean it was a perk.

The transmigrator's ace in the hole—Before the transmigrator made a move, did the ace go first?

Chapter 0003 The Servants in the Castle

Thomas left the study with a heavy heart. As he descended the stairs, he paused at the landing, intending to light a cigarette, but then he realized he had hidden his tobacco under his pillow.

Mr. Carter, the butler, strictly forbid the servants from smoking within the castle.

"Thomas, what are you loitering here for?" A maid in her thirties, dressed in a black and white uniform and carrying a mop and bucket, ascended the stairs from below.

"Nothing."

"Has the master still not allowed you to attend him personally?"

Thomas, annoyed, slapped the wall, "Maisie, tell me, why doesn't the master like me? Although I've never been a personal valet before, I've served as the first manservant for Viscount Roosevelt. I'm capable of doing the job."

“How would I know? I’m not a maid from Tulip Castle. I’ve never met the master before.”

“I’m just asking if there’s anything I’m not doing well enough.”

“You should be asking Mr. Carter or Mrs. Morson about that... And I don’t think you have anything to worry about. The master only has three manservants, Jessie is an assistant, Tom is clumsy, and honestly can’t attend to the master. Maybe that’s just how the master is. There’s no one in this town better suited to be a personal valet than you.”

Thomas felt a bit heartened, “Yeah, I heard that the master isn’t highly regarded at Tulip Castle and might remain the Baron of Fresh Flower Town, living in this poor countryside for the rest of his life.”

“Perhaps.”

“Maisie, do you regret following the master here?”

“I don’t care. Life in the castle, no matter how bad, is still better than going back to the farm to starve to death. I’ve already sold myself to the master. There’s no use in having regrets.”

Just as Thomas was about to respond, he was abruptly interrupted, “Don’t you both have work to do? Thomas, Maisie, mind your behavior. No whispering outside your chambers and the kitchen!” Coming up the stairs, it was Butler Carter who managed this humble little castle.

He was carrying a string of keys and a bottle of red wine, inspecting the entire castle.

“Right away, Mr. Carter. I’ll get back to work,” Thomas and Maisie scurried off, each to their own tasks.

If small nobility serves the higher nobility, then manservants and maids are indeed the servants of butlers. The system of nobility has always had such distinct stratification.

The castle might be small, but there was no shortage of work.

Even with only one noble like Baron Liszt to serve, the daily workload was immense. Take cleaning, for instance: every morning and evening the whole

place needed to be scrubbed down. And there were clothes to wash, hot water to heat, food to prepare, toilets to clean—a majority of these tasks fell on the manservants and maids.

But this didn't mean Carter was without work. On the contrary, in addition to managing the servants, he was also responsible for greeting guests, pouring wine, supervising the serving of meals, receiving and sending correspondence, safeguarding high-end tableware, managing the wine cellar, and looking after the most important guests.

Old Carter was fifty years old this year. In an era where the average lifespan was barely fifty-five, he was already well advanced in years.

Dong dong dong.

He knocked on the door of the study.

“Come in,” replied Baron Liszt from inside, his voice gentle and carrying the fashionable “Steel Ridge accent” so esteemed by countless nobles in the Kingdom of Steel Ridge and its client states.

Old Carter took a deep breath.

During his time at Tulip Castle, he had little to do with Baron Liszt, mainly looking after an earl's lodge. At the recent coming-of-age ceremony for Liszt, the earl assigned him to serve as Liszt's butler. It was a promotion in terms of position—after all, the role of butler is the ultimate goal for all servants.

But the benefits had certainly diminished.

However, Carter harbored no complaints. Since selling himself into the Tulip Family's service at fifteen, thirty-five years had passed without marriage or family—Carter had long since considered himself part of the Tulip Family.

If he could spend his final years with Baron Liszt, a descendant of the Tulip bloodline, it would be a happy ending indeed.

“My lord, reading at night is damaging to the eyes. Remember to take care. No amount of candlelight can compare to the sun's light during the day.”

Liszt gave a slight smile, his eyes shifting away from the thick parchment book on the table to look at the somewhat elderly butler, “Mr. Carter, have you checked all the rooms?”

“Except for the servants’ rooms that still need work, all other rooms have been locked.”

“Very well, then, let’s have a drink together.” Liszt had already noticed the red wine in Carter’s hand. Nobles were as fond of wine as life itself, creating an informal custom that the lord of a castle would have a few drinks with the butler before going to bed at night, discussing the matters of the castle.

Liszt didn’t like to drink, but his predecessor did, so much so that his body required alcohol.

However, the alcohol content here was very low; unless he drank it like beer, it was hard for him to get drunk.

One glass of red wine each.

They touched their glasses gently.

Swirling his glass, Liszt took a small sip, “Can the castle’s expenses last until this year’s taxes?”

“I’m afraid it’s going to be difficult. You didn’t bring much wine or flour from Tulip Castle, and Fresh Flower Town is very remote with no caravans willing to come here. Even if we have gold coins, it’s hard to buy wheat and wine. But the good news is, there’s plenty of wild fruit on Thorn Ridge, so we don’t have to worry about running out of fruit.”

Liszt wasn’t highly regarded by the Earl, and of course, he received very little when he became independent.

According to his memory, when his sister Li Vera became independent, her carriage was filled thirty times over, but he... didn’t even have a single carriage, just some horses and a group of porters with some luggage.

The difference in treatment was like heaven and earth.

His predecessor had harbored too much resentment, but for him, it wasn't much of an issue, since he wasn't the Earl's true son. At most, it would be awkward when meeting with his father and trying to express closeness.

"We can't do without wheat," Liszt put down his wine glass and declared with undeniable certainty, "Fresh Flower Town must develop quickly, the trade route has to be opened!"

Bread was the staple food here.

Without the wheat for white bread, they could only eat the rough and hard-to-swallow black bread made from rye and oats. Liszt already couldn't have his favorite hometown dishes; if he also couldn't have the soft white bread, he would starve to death.

"Opening trade routes is not an easy task. Thorn Ridge is too dangerous."

"Don't worry about that, I'll solve it. The future of Fresh Flower Town won't be limited by poverty, nor will the castle remain this crude, without even a name," Liszt said earnestly.

Only a magnificent castle could have a name. Given the simplicity of Liszt's castle, to call it a castle was an overstatement, and naming it would be subject to the ridicule of other nobles.

"Have the Elf Bugs been well taken care of?"

"Very well, milord."

"Good."

They finished their wine.

Old Carter, recognizing it was time to leave, took his leave, "Milord, please rest early, I wish you a good night."

"Good night to you too, Mr. Carter."

After Carter left, Liszt spent some time looking at the thick parchment book about the culture and customs of the Duchy of Sapphire; the book was as thick as a dictionary. Its content, however, was sparse—true to its name, the thickness of one page of parchment was almost that of pigskin.

“How was paper invented?” Liszt wondered. He was pleased to find his memory quite sharp, remembering the papermaking process he had seen online, “Once I have the time, I must also invent paper... An industrial revolution seems unlikely, but there are still many ways to get rich.”

In a trance, he zoned out again.

Sure enough, the Serpent Script formed by smoke appeared before him again.

“Quest: As a landlord, you need to understand everything about your land. Please inspect Fresh Flower Town to understand the crisis of your territory, and prepare for future development. Reward: The sublimation of Dou Qi.”

Chapter 0004: The Knight with Bursting Dou Qi

Early the next morning.

Marcus arrived at the castle early, but did not enter. Instead, he waited outside. Looking at the low, dilapidated castle, his heart was cold. Perhaps he was thinking that his future would be as bleak as this castle.

The castle was built on a mound in the southwestern corner of town.

There were no tall walls, no towering watchtowers, no battlements to stand upon, no broad moats, and no massive gatehouses.

It was just a slightly larger two-storey house.

The stone walls were beginning to show faint cracks. Gradually, several tiles fell off the roof, raising concerns about leaks when it rained.

It was said that this modest little castle was over a hundred years old. When Coral Island was not yet under the Earl’s dominion, nobles had lived here, but it had fallen into decay. After the Coral Island was conferred to the Earl, he had it renovated as an alternate residence for inspecting Fresh Flower Town, though he never once stayed there.

Until now, when Baron Liszt took up residence in the little castle.

And he, a former Earth Knight of the Coral Island Knights, who had been full of ambition to distinguish himself on the battlefield and be honored with an award, was going to be a frequent visitor to this little castle.

Together with Baron Liszt, staying in Fresh Flower Town that didn't even have a gravel path.

"Good morning, Mr. Marcus," greeted Servant Thomas respectfully, carrying an empty bucket and ready to fetch water from the town well.

Marcus responded indifferently, "Good morning."

He couldn't remember Thomas's first name, but he remembered his last name, which seemed to be "Pigpen," a typical commoner's surname. Even he himself did not have a noble-sounding surname; his was "Wheel," because his grandfather had been a coachman who constantly rolled wheels around.

Commoners were like that, taking whatever surname they could get.

He envied the nobles for their surnames, he envied the Earl's surname—Tulip, such a noble surname! How much effort would he need to put in to change his own surname to something similar? All the noble surnames were not to be used by commoners: Flowers, gemstones, metals... Nobles would definitely not allow commoners to degrade them!

Soon, four tall men clad in leather armor arrived behind Marcus.

"Teacher Marcus," they all greeted one after the other.

"Karl, Rom, Gray, Auden, you're here," Marcus acknowledged them one by one. These four men were Liszt's Retainer Knights.

Retainer Knights were not knights but merely attendants to knights. They were a kind of servant responsible for taking care of knights on the battlefield—carrying spears, leading horses, washing clothes, and cooking.

Essentially, Marcus was also a kind of Retainer Knight. It was just that he was a freeman, while Retainer Knights were bonded servants.

Shortly after, Baron Liszt, still not quite awake, walked out from the castle's drafty main door. In the morning, Liszt had changed into simple and neat

training attire—a modest white, which paired with his enviable face, tall figure, and distinguished temperament, made for an excellent appearance.

“Good morning, Teacher Marcus, Karl Ironhammer, Rom Barrel, Gray Scythe, Auden Insole, and ladies and gentlemen.”

Ladies were female servants and gentlemen were male servants—regardless of their marital status, nobles could address servants this way.

Just as a male butler, whether married or not, is addressed as “Mister,” and a female housekeeper, whether married or not, is addressed as “Madam.” The rigid system of the nobility—Liszt’s body had been accustomed to it for sixteen years and now instinctively greeted them this way.

“Baron, we shall begin the knight’s training class,” said Marcus.

“Alright.”

On the mound in front of the castle, Liszt began his knightly training. His four Retainer Knights, who had not learned Dou Qi, were merely toughening up their bodies on the side.

Dou Qi training emphasizes bloodline inheritance, and very few commoners are able to learn it.

Li Si Te actually felt that Dou Qi was related to nutrition. How could the commoners who couldn’t even get enough to eat refine power in their bodies into Dou Qi?

Among the nobles, as long as one was diligent, there was nobody who could not produce Dou Qi.

This was also the reason the nobility held on to their ruling positions so firmly. With money to eat well, they could cultivate Dou Qi, wield power, oppress the commoners, and then become richer, eat even better, have stronger Dou Qi, greater power, and oppress the commoners even more.

The morning milk paired with bread provided Liszt with a steady supply of nutrients.

Under Marcus’s guidance, he kept practicing “Basic Dou Qi” From the age of six, he had been cultivating using this secret manual. Unfortunately, the

effects were minimal. Dou Qi certainly made him stronger than the commoners, but compared to an Earth Knight, an Apprentice Knight appeared very weak, and Marcus could defeat him with just one hand.

“The mysterious aura, an experience I’ve never had before, the practice... I wonder what the elevation reward for Dou Qi will bring me after I complete the task—could it possibly turn me into an Earth Knight?”

Feeling the Dou Qi within his body, Liszt practiced diligently.

A whole hour passed before morning practice ended.

“Teacher Marcus, have some water. We’ll take a ten-minute break and then head out.” Liszt wiped the sweat from his forehead, finding the morning practice quite exhausting.

The old butler Carter had already brought the servants over with the nutrient-rich milk tea.

All four Retainer Knights each got a cup of milk tea with minced meat, milk, and eggs, savoring the delicious beverage in small sips, forgetting the hardship of the past hour.

Marcus and Liszt got an extra dessert—cheese biscuits.

Once they had finished eating and changed their clothes, the personal servant Thomas had already brought Liszt’s horse, an adult chestnut who was almost pure in color. This was a gift from the Count of Coral Island when he turned twelve. It was still a foal at the time, but now it had grown particularly majestic.

Snort.

The chestnut horse blew a loud snort, then rubbed against Liszt’s arm affectionately.

“Fire Dragon, my old buddy, you must be bored stiff staying in the castle all the time.” Comforting his mount, Liszt smoothly mounted it with a swift leap.

Behind him, Marcus and the four Retainer Knights each mounted their own horses. Marcus’s was a yellowish-gray horse, also quite majestic—his personal mount. The Retainer Knights’ horses were all common yellow-maned

horses, belonging to Liszt's property but assigned to the Retainer Knights for rearing.

"My lord, may you have a safe journey," Carter wished him well.

"Thank you for your good words." Liszt lifted his horsewhip, and the Fire Dragon Horse let out a long neigh and broke into a run. "Let's go!"

Liszt, riding at the front, wore Magical Beast Leather Armor that only nobles could afford. It was lightweight and breathable, yet offered better protection than ordinary armor.

The black Magical Beast Leather Armor was girded at the waist with a One-Handed Sword. He also wore a black Magical Beast Leather Helmet, crowned with the magnificent feathers of a male pheasant, adding to his martial appearance.

His Retainer Knights, apart from their own weapons of one-handed swords and shields, also had to carry for Liszt a large-sized Knight Spear as well as backup weapons like a longsword, war hammer, and flail, along with their lunch and water for noon.

Marcus, apart from his favorite short spear, also carried a bow and arrows, for he was a Divine Archer. More than his identity as an Earth Knight, being a Divine Archer highlighted his worth. This was also the reason he was so ambitious and stood out among the Coral Island Knights filled with Earth Knights, hoping to earn the standing of an Honored Knight.

Clip-clop, clip-clop, clip-clop!

The sound of horses' hooves striking the solid earth rang out sharply, and before long, they had reached the small town. Liszt was to inspect his territory, and the town was a priority.

Chapter 0005: The Magical Beast of Thorn Ridge

The geographical location of Fresh Flower Town is at the northeast corner of Coral Island and the area is not small. However, how large it specifically is, Li Si Te (Liszt) was clueless. As a remote small town on Coral Island, it was only simply divided to the northeast side of Thorn Ridge, without any marked boundaries.

That meant, as long as Li Si Te (Liszt) didn't encroach on the towns to the southwest of Thorn Ridge, he could arbitrarily decide how large Fresh Flower Town was.

Even if he were to include all of Thorn Ridge, probably no one would blame him—after all, the ownership of Thorn Ridge on Coral Island was also undefined.

Over twenty years of cultivation by the Tulip Family, in fact, less than two-thirds of Coral Island had actually been converted into farmland with a settled population.

The remaining one-third was wilderness.

Thorn Ridge was such a wilderness where the landlord's knights needed to campaign abroad, and these wild lands must be opened up by serfs and commoners.

The land of Thorn Ridge was extremely barren and uneven, making it of low development value.

Moreover, facing magical beasts, ordinary people were just a delicious meal; even hunters dared not lightly test the waters of the magical beast's depth. Of course, there were some adventurers who would still go hunting magical beasts, and each beast, every piece of flesh, every inch of fur, could be exchanged for gold coins.

Li Si Te (Liszt), riding on his Fire Dragon Horse, was filled with enthusiasm for this inspection.

Enclosing land was an innate instinct of every noble; how large Fresh Flower Town was would depend on where his horse's hooves could reach. At this moment, the hooves were trotting along the town's streets, which were dirt roads, very dirty, with the feces of livestock and humans apparent everywhere—only the nobles would build toilets.

“Sanitation, it must be changed,” Li Si Te (Liszt) said as he turned to speak to Ma Ku Si (Marcus).

Ma Ku Si (Marcus) could not deny it; he was not an administrative officer and was not interested in these matters. What heated his blood was the authority of the nobility, especially the serfs and commoners constantly bowing to Li Si Te (Liszt) along both sides of the street. These people, with their sallow faces, harbored admiration and fear toward the nobility.

They would shiver all over.

The ones kneeling were serfs; those bowing were freemen.

Serfs made up the overwhelming majority, having sold themselves to the nobles, and were Li Si Te (Liszt)’s private property. Matters of marriage and burial were decided by Li Si Te (Liszt). Even if Li Si Te (Liszt) exercised his droit de seigneur, these serfs were obliged to comply and send their freshly bathed daughters and wives into the castle.

Freemen were rare; they were mostly craftsmen such as hunters, tailors, and the like.

The town was very small and rundown, not housing many residents. Even if all the town’s populace had gathered along both sides of the street to pay respect, there was still no trace of a warm atmosphere.

Gazing around, Li Si Te (Liszt) found that the town might only have a few hundred people... not even as many as the student population of a school.

The lowly hovels made of mud and thatched with straw stretched over a large area. The size of the town was mostly supported by these dilapidated houses—with two-story buildings being a rarity, with only three or four households visible.

This time, he truly felt the poverty of the commoners’ lives.

His heart was heavy with countless emotions.

And he felt even more fortunate that he was a noble, able to live in a castle and eat fine white bread made of refined wheat flour.

The Fire Dragon Horse quickly carried Li Si Te (Liszt) through the town's only north to south thoroughfare, and with a slightly heavy heart, he proceeded along the safe route planned by Ma Ku Si (Marcus) towards Thorn Ridge.

Throughout the ride, surrounding the town were patches of farmland, but Li Si Te (Liszt) could not name most of the crops. These crops didn't look promising; they were sickly and twisted, with many weeds growing alongside them, clearly lacking any scientific management.

This era certainly had incredible creatures like dragons and elves, as well as unimaginable divine forces like Dou Qi and Magic, but it was relatively underdeveloped.

Industrial revolution was out of the question, but introducing some scientific development methods was still very promising.

Liszt was full of confidence in managing his territory and leading the development of Fresh Flower Town.

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The journey was not long before the small town was far out of sight. Leaving the flat land, they entered a hilly area with sparse woods, which marked the edge of Thorn Ridge.

"Baron, magical beasts often appear around the edge of Thorn Ridge, so I hope you will follow me closely without being reckless," Marcus said, leading the way upon reaching the area, and he instructed the four Retainer Knights, "Protect the Baron at all costs. Unless you become corpses, do not let any magical beast advance a single step. Can you do that?"

"We can!" Karl and the others responded loudly.

They came from commoners, who did not have to go to war in this region, a burden borne only by nobles and knights. But although Retainer Knights were of commoner status, they also needed to go to war—serving as logistical soldiers, they had the responsibility to die for the noble if they were seeking better treatment.

To avoid magical beasts, the group of knights could only make their way along the edge of Thorn Ridge.

The trees were still lush and occasionally one could see wild animals, like rabbits and foxes; but the edge of the Thorn Ridge was not rich in food, so it was rare to come across large wild beasts.

“In spring, summer, and autumn, the food within Thorn Ridge is enough to meet the needs of magical beasts, so Fresh Flower Town does not often encounter them. But in winter, starving magical beasts will invade Fresh Flower Town, and every year a few unfortunate souls become food to satisfy the beasts’ hunger,” Marcus explained without mincing words despite his poor mood.

“Ah, magical beasts, I wonder if we could encounter one today,” Liszt thought, recalling from the predecessor’s memories having seen several types of magical beasts. The biggest difference between them and ordinary wild beasts was their magic power, enabling them to release some greatly powerful magic spells.

At Tulip Castle, they had also raised a small magical beast—the Fire Rabbit.

The Fire Rabbit, capable of casting small fireballs, was delicious, with glossy fur preferred by nobles for its meat, and noblewomen for its fur to make coats.

He had also seen the fur of a powerful magical beast—the Giant Barbarian Bear, which Coral Island’s Count’s favorite chair was upholstered with, the terrifying bear’s face fully tanned, exuding an intimidating and ferocious aura.

To hunt down the Giant Barbarian Bear, the Coral Island Knights had lost eight Earth Knights.

The death of eight Earth Knights amounted to a severe blow to the Knight Order, even more casualties than a territorial battle might cost.

Moreover, many more Apprentice Knights had perished.

All the way, Liszt kept recording the terrain of Thorn Ridge, including places suitable for building defensive fortifications, places fit for water conservancy projects, locations where fortresses could be erected, and areas appropriate for opening farmlands. These were all duties for a landlord noble invested with land to fulfill.

“It must be time for lunch, Auden. Let’s prepare lunch right here.”

“Yes, my lord!” Auden Insole immediately dismounted, found a flat area to spread out a carpet, and then arranged the dry rations on it.

The simple lunch included bread, caviar, fruit salad, and milk tea.

And specially prepared for Liszt, dried goat meat.

Just as they thought it was going to be a simple lunch, Marcus’s expression changed abruptly after swallowing a piece of bread, “Baron, there is a situation. It’s the scent of a magical beast!”

Chapter 0006 Earth Knight and Wind Blade Wolf

As an Earth Knight, Marcus’s Dou Qi was keenly perceptive to things like magic power and Dou Qi. If he said there were magical beasts, he was certainly not wrong.

Liszt immediately became tense.

The four retainer knights hastily packed up the tableware. They were ordinary people who hadn’t even cultivated Dou Qi, so facing magical beasts meant certain death for them.

Marcus had already mounted his horse, “Don’t bother packing up the tableware, protect the Baron and get him on his horse, and prepare for combat!”

The retainer knights hurried over to assist Liszt.

But Liszt, an Apprentice Knight with Primary Dou Qi, was much stronger than ordinary people. Suppressing the nervousness in his heart, he had already mounted his horse. The Fire Dragon Horse, majestic though it might be, was a young horse who had never faced battle and was equally nervous. Liszt had to reach out and stroke his mane to calm its nerves.

Snort!

The Fire Dragon Horse, encouraged by its master, relaxed its tense body. As a birthday present from the Earl to his son, its bloodline was not inferior, inheriting from the magical beast, the Blazing Steed, and it had a strong adaptability.

In a few breaths' time.

The magical beast that Marcus sensed had poked its body out from the depths of the dense forest; it was a massive gray wolf with two pale cyan patterns on its body.

"It's a Wind Blade Wolf! A low-level magical beast! Step back, I'll handle it!" Marcus raised his short spear, and while it was called a short spear, it was actually a Knight Spear meant for close combat and was longer than a person.

Speaking of which.

Marcus suddenly let out a mighty roar, "Hah!"

Intermediate Dou Qi resonated and vibrated in his mouth, like a bomb exploding, the tremendous roar made the surrounding leaves rustle.

He hoped to scare off the Wind Blade Wolf.

The Wind Blade Wolf crouched down a bit and seemed to back away, as if it was going to retreat, but that was just a prelude to its attack. But as soon as Marcus squeezed his horse's sides, he rode his dusky-yellow horse and charged forward with his spear for a strong attack.

The Wind Blade Wolf also leaped forward, dashing toward Marcus, while several pale cyan Wind Blades abruptly appeared in front of it, spinning and slicing towards Marcus.

The tip of the Knight Spear trembled, a faint milky white light attached to it, swiftly striking and shattering each Wind Blade. Then, with a swing of his spear behind him, Marcus drew an oval trajectory with his Knight Spear, charging from the other side and hitting the leaping Wind Blade Wolf precisely.

In a moment of crisis, the Wind Blade Wolf twisted its body, dodging the Knight Spear, but the milky white light on the spear inflicted a wound, causing blood to flow continuously.

Once it landed, it sent out several Wind Blades chaotically.

Marcus moved as one with his horse, narrowly dodging the Wind Blades. By now, he had put some distance between himself and the Wind Blade Wolf and attempted several charges to engage in close combat. However, the Wind Blade Wolf was intelligent, always maintaining its distance and launching Wind Blades to wear him down—another difference between magical beasts and ordinary wild beasts was their intelligence.

In such a war of attrition, and with the magical beast's rapid magic power recovery, it was hardly an issue.

However, a knight's Dou Qi couldn't last.

But Marcus proved his strength and why he was confident in winning honors and the noble title of Honored Knight on the battlefield. He sheathed his Knight Spear and swiftly drew his bow from behind, instantly letting loose two arrows in tandem, the arrows infused with Dou Qi shot out like beams of light.

The Wind Blade Wolf's eyes flashed with disdain, as it could easily dodge the arrows' attack range with just a light twist of its hips.

But the next moment, the Wind Blade Wolf's expression changed from disdain to fear.

Two arrows collided in mid-air, rapidly changing direction and sinking fiercely into the back of the Wind Blade Wolf.

"Such profound archery, truly worthy of being the Knight Order's Divine Archer!" Liszt, who was watching the battle, was genuinely astonished, and his nervousness had faded away.

With such an Earth Knight for protection, he could conveniently paddle leisurely by the side.

It's good to live as a Landlord, always avoiding exertions in situations that don't require effort. Servants waited on him in life, while knights risked their lives on the battlefield.

As the saying goes, things can happen in the blink of an eye.

Watching Marcus draw another two arrows, the Wind Blade Wolf, bleeding nonstop on its back, flashed a hint of resentment in its eyes and twisted its body to flee into the dense woods, disappearing from everyone's sight in the blink of an eye.

Marcus watched the direction in which the Wind Blade Wolf vanished and slowly lowered his bow and arrows.

Karl Ironhammer, who had been watching excitedly, couldn't help but say, "Teacher Marcus, why not pursue it? Two more arrows and the Wind Blade Wolf would surely be dead. That's a magical beast more valuable than pearls."

"There isn't just one magical beast like the Wind Blade Wolf in Thorn Ridge, and it wasn't as seriously injured as it appeared. It was just a ruse to lure us in... It definitely has companions waiting in the woods. If you aren't afraid of dying, feel free to chase it," Marcus responded coolly.

Karl Ironhammer scratched his head and fell silent, not daring to speak.

Marcus ignored him and turned to Liszt, "Baron, this place is dangerous, let's hit the road."

"Sure!"

Liszt readily agreed, touring his territory only for the mission; he wasn't willing to face danger—an old saying goes, a gentleman does not stand under a collapsing wall.

Perhaps encountering a magical beast on the edge of Thorn Ridge in spring made Marcus a bit anxious, so he quickened the pace of the inspection thereafter.

On the way, Liszt asked curiously, "Teacher Marcus, your archery skills are impressive, even capable of deflecting arrows. What kind of archery is that?"

"Double Arrow Intersect, an advanced technique of standard archery skills, requiring the guidance of Dou Qi to perform."

“That archery technique is both cool and practical. Teacher Marcus, when will you hold an archery class to teach me?” Liszt was very eager.

Marcus responded without much enthusiasm, “Advanced archery techniques require the exterior release of Dou Qi to study. Before becoming an Earth Knight, Baron, what you first need to do is to strengthen and enhance your own Dou Qi and learn the knight’s combat skills, not flashy archery.”

“Okay, I’ll learn archery after I advance to Earth Knight,” said Liszt.

After completing the mission and receiving the Dou Qi Sublimation reward, perhaps that would be the moment he advanced to Earth Knight.

In the next three hours, they did not encounter any more magical beasts. After inspecting Thorn Ridge, they arrived at the other side of Fresh Flower Town—the Sea of Azure Waves.

The Duchy of Sapphire was situated in the northeastern corner of the continent, formed by the Sapphire Archipelago.

Coral Island was in the northeastern corner of the Sapphire Archipelago.

Fresh Flower Town was in the northeastern corner of Coral Island.

Therefore, the vast blue sea Liszt saw at that moment was the border of the Duchy of Sapphire, the Sea of Azure Waves stretching into the unknown.

“Teacher Marcus, what’s beyond the sea? Are there other islands, or continents, or perhaps other countries?”

“I don’t know. The fleet of Earl has never ventured into farther seas. However, legend has it that, beyond the Sea of Azure Waves, lies the Devil’s Sea haunted by devils, where no one can navigate.”

“Not even with dragon riding?”

“Dragons are the pillars of a nation; no Dragon Knight wishes to ride dragons and take risks everywhere. The continent has countless lands waiting to be developed. Baron, why care about the seawater that holds nothing? Not to offend you, but you should learn from the Earl and seize more land.”

His words carried a hint of seduction—only through war could new Nobles be created.

Chapter 007: The Sublimation of Dou Qi

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Seawater with nothing in it?

Liszt would never agree with that.

In his homeland, the struggle for the ocean was no less than that for land, and a bluewater navy was the ambition of every country.

While maritime resources were indeed difficult to exploit, they were in no way less abundant than those on land; in this world, he dared not conclude whether there were any mineral deposits beneath the sea—after all, according to the information currently available, only dragons could produce gemstones and metals.

But the fishing resources in the sea were absolutely incalculable in their enormity.

In the Duchy of Sapphire, there were many wastelands, and a severe shortage of labor, not even enough to farm the lands, let alone develop fisheries. Yet a critical issue arose: elves were held in the hands of nobles who could not affect so much of the arable land, resulting in very low agricultural yields.

Just like Fresh Flower Town, the farmland area was definitely not small, but the population it could support was minimal.

The fewer the people, the more they were bound by the nobility and the feudal system to the land, helping the nobility to farm, paying large amounts of tax, and supporting the noble's luxurious life.

“The development direction of Fresh Flower Town lies in this vast expanse of azure Sea of Azure Waves!” Liszt's heart blazed with fervor.

As long as there was a nearby fishery, food could be supplied continuously; only when the commoners were well-fed could they work hard to increase the population, and with a larger population, more taxes could be collected.

With more taxes, his own life could improve!

Of course, these were not the urgent matters at hand; the development of fisheries could not be separated from ships, and Fresh Flower Town was still some distance away from shipbuilding, not to mention his savings could not buy many ships.

“Let’s go, after inspecting the final stretch of the border, we’ll head back.” He flicked his riding whip and the Fire Dragon Horse neighed loudly as it galloped along the sandy beach of the Sea of Azure Waves.

The sand was a light yellow, clean and clear, with occasional large trees similar to coconut trees growing. The afternoon sun was blocked by them, casting shadows in place after place.

With a bit of development, it would be a perfect summer resort.

The beach inspection over, returning to the starting point at the edge of Thorn Ridge, Liszt officially finished his inspection mission of Fresh Flower Town’s territory. The entourage sped along the road back to the castle, where Marcus and the four Retainer Knights paid their respects before taking their leave to their homes in the town.

The castle was merely a residence for Liszt and his male and female servants.

“My lord, seeing you return safely puts my heart at ease,” Butler Carter greeted Liszt, leading the servants lined up to welcome his return.

“In my territory, even magical beasts need to behave,” Liszt joked, “Mr. Carter, is everything well in the castle?”

“Of course.”

“That’s good, Mrs. Morson, please arrange a bath for me, I need to take one.”

“Right away, my lord.” Mrs. Morson was almost forty, never married, and had worked at Tulip Castle her entire life, now responsible for all the female servants in Liszt’s castle.

Speaking of all the female servants, there were actually only three.

And in the castle, there were a total of only ten servants.

Butler Carter Taugaun, in charge of all the affairs in the castle, was considered Liszt’s confidant; Housekeeper Morson Paddy Field, in charge of all the female servants, assisted Carter in managing the daily affairs of the castle; Cook Abbie Spoon, responsible for everything in the kitchen.

There was the personal male servant Servant Thomas Jiandao, ordinary male servant Tom Pigsty, and male servant assistant Jessie Asanobu.

All the female servants were ordinary female servants, Maisie Xiantou, Debbie Window, and Midgeon Bull Tail.

There was also one kitchen assistant who was a female servant but was under Cook Abbie’s command, named Eileen Four Fingers.

Four Fingers, a very strange surname. Perhaps her ancestors had only four fingers, so when it came time to register a surname, that became it—don’t expect the common people who are illiterate, spend their entire lives in the countryside, and hardly ever travel far to come up with appealing surnames.

The nobles didn’t allow them to have nice surnames either.

Once Liszt took off his leather armor with the help of Thomas and went upstairs in casual dress, Butler Carter immediately called out loudly: “Jessie, lead the lord’s Fire Dragon Horse away, and remember to add extra beans when feeding it, it has been tired all day. Mrs. Abbie, head to the kitchen to prepare dinner; tonight, we should add an extra portion of roast meat for the lord. Mrs. Morson, remember to lead the female servants to prepare bath water for the lord; Tom still has to go to town to fetch water; Thomas, you must clean the lord’s leather armor.”

“Yes, Mr. Carter!” the servants responded.

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Carter nodded in satisfaction.

Although the castle was small, the servants were few, and life was slightly lacking, he was the steward here, managing all the everyday affairs of the castle and a capable assistant to the master.

He liked this sense of comfort and power.

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The temperature of the bathwater was just right. Although they were not as skilled as the maids in Tulip Castle, with Mrs. Morson directing them, these newly-indentured maids had already adapted well to their work.

Liszt lay in the bathtub, enjoying the sensation of the warm water soaking his body.

He had not been without thoughts of establishing equality for all, to let the people of this world feel the light of a civilized society's democracy. But he was soberly aware that these servants' survival depended on being subordinates to the nobility, sheltering under the nobility's wings to live on.

Without the job and status of a servant, returning to the fields, their lives would likely be even more miserable.

Serfs and freemen starved to death in no small numbers each year.

In the castle, as long as one didn't encounter a perverse landlord, at least one had no worries of food and shelter. Once one managed to strive to the level of steward, that was the highest status a commoner could aspire to.

"Who would have thought that one day, I, Liszt, would also have so many people depending on me for their lives."

His thoughts drifted.

He began to be lost in thought and soon, serpent script made of smoke appeared before his eyes.

The serpent script had changed, no longer displaying the previous passage, but new text: "Complete the quest, reward: sublimation of Dou Qi."

Liszt's heart was thrilled, ready to receive his reward, but then he suddenly discovered he did not know how to collect it. Just as he was about to investigate where to claim his reward from, the serpent script in front of him dispersed into a cloud of smoke and quickly formed a new piece of content.

“Quest: A serious crisis has occurred in Peanut Hamlet within the territory. A vast expanse of peanut fields has undergone an unknown mutation. The planters are at a loss and facing a reduction in yield. As a landlord, it's your duty to resolve the issue. Reward: An Elf Bug.”

“Hmm, a new quest, the reward is an Elf Bug, that's a good thing!” Liszt first rejoiced, then followed by frustration, “But what about the reward for the previous quest? Where is the sublimation of Dou Qi, who can tell me how to claim that reward?”

At that moment, Liszt was utterly fretful.

He sensed his own Dou Qi, which showed no change at all. He fussed over it until the bathwater cooled, yet he still hadn't received the quest reward.

He seriously began to suspect that he was truly having hallucinations.

The smoke did not exist at all.

Dressed, he stepped out of the bathroom with a dark expression, causing Servant Thomas, waiting outside, to begin to wildly speculate.

“Master, you don't look well, is it possible that...?”

“I'm fine, go attend to your tasks. I'm going to the study to read for a while.” Once in the study, Liszt wanted to calm himself and read a book.

But his mind was a mess, and he couldn't calm down at all.

He simply changed into another set of training clothes and began to practice in the castle's small garden. He was learning “Basic Dou Qi,” the most widely circulated Primary Dou Qi Manuscript. Aside from some tailored Dou Qi Manuscripts of big families, this was the best foundational manuscript.

Primary Dou Qi was but a breath, only for strengthening the body and health.

Having completed a set of movements and vented the frustrations he could not express elsewhere, he finally felt a bit better, and his emotions gradually

stabilized. Just then, a breeze blew by, and suddenly, Liszt's eyes shone brightly, as if an idea flashed through his mind that he managed to grasp.

Immediately after, he once again performed all the training movements of "Basic Dou Qi."

When this performance was over, all the Primary Dou Qi within his body seemed to reach a critical point, starting a transformation. It surged out from invisible channels and poured into every cell of his limbs and body.

"The sublimation of Dou Qi!"

"So it was here waiting for me!"

Chapter 0008: Earth Knight Liszt

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In his body, there seemed to occur a tumultuous storm, with boiling strength pulsating through his limbs and every part of him. The balanced and tranquil Primary Dou Qi had already surged into his cells.

It seemed to undergo metamorphosis within the cells, and when the new Dou Qi returned to the meridians, it had completely transformed.

The reborn Dou Qi had become Intermediate Dou Qi, possessing a unique attribute; Liszt stood quietly in the little garden, motionless. His heart felt as if flowers were in furious bloom; he tried hard to suppress his excitement and experience the nature of the freshly emerged Intermediate Dou Qi—his mission was indeed real and had brought about the sublimation of his Dou Qi.

He had now, truly become an Earth Knight!

For the cultivation of Dou Qi, this was a brand-new starting point; it was only as an Earth Knight that one represented truly extraordinary power.

“So my Dou Qi attribute is fire, huh? It’s a bit conflicting with the Water Attribute of ‘Thousand Waves’; it looks like I need to prepare a new Intermediate Dou Qi Manuscript... I thought I would awaken the same Water Attribute Dou Qi as the Tulip Family.”

Water, fire, earth, wind, lightning, ice, light, dark.

And gold, as represented by dragons, and wood, as represented by elves—all are natures of magical power.

There is no superiority among these attributes; they are merely different aspects of power. However, ever since before they had received the Earldom, the Tulip Family had been studying Water-Attribute Dou Qi. Their family’s ‘Thousand Waves’ is also a top-tier Water-Attribute Dou Qi Manuscript, containing vast insights and experiences from their cultivation.

Descendants who practice it could accomplish more with less effort.

But Liszt was not suited to cultivate ‘Thousand Waves’ now; forcing it would be counterproductive.

Fire Attribute Dou Qi would naturally be more fitting for the practice of fire attribute manuscripts.

“Teacher Marcus has a Wind Attribute and cultivates the ‘Gale Breaker’ manuscript, which also doesn’t match my attribute. Let me think, when I was at the Knight Academy, I came across a ‘Flaming Wave’... In a few days, I’ll arrange for Teacher Marcus to make a trip back to Coral City to fetch it for me.”

During this initial stage, the Intermediate Dou Qi needs to be nurtured and stabilized, so there’s no rush to cultivate from the manuscript.

In fact, Liszt is not eager for a boost in strength. Indeed, nobles have to go to battlefields, but Coral Island, far from the mainland, sees little strife. As the third son of an Earl, nobles on Coral Island wouldn’t dare to trouble him, thus he can develop in peace.

Besides, even if one cultivates to great strength, in a hundred years, it will all be but a handful of yellow soil.

To live as a stable landlord, enjoying the service of servants, is good. The dirty work of fighting and killing can be left to the subordinates.

“Of course, being promoted to an Earth Knight is still something to be excited about. This means I’m less likely to fall ill and my resistance to severe cold and scorching heat has greatly strengthened! In this world, what could be more fortunate than being healthy and living a long life?”

He exhaled a deep breath.

Liszt’s emotions, once stirred with excitement, now began to settle, and he turned to walk towards the castle.

His personal servant hurried over, looking for something to attend to: “Master, you have just finished your knight’s training, do you need fresh bathwater prepared?”

“Would that be too troublesome?”

“Of course not, serving you is our honor.”

“Okay, prepare another bath then.”

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Dinner time.

Marcus and Goltai arrived as promised.

“Liszt, you look even healthier now, it seems you have fully recovered, that’s worth a toast,” Goltai lifted his cup, deeply inhaling its scent, for he was as fond of drink as he was of life.

This was a common malady among nobles.

Yet, Marcus’s gaze flickered: “Baron, have you... made a breakthrough?”

“Just an hour ago, inspired, I made new progress in my Dou Qi cultivation.” Liszt replied with restraint, for after all, making a breakthrough to become an Earth Knight after his sixteenth birthday was nothing to boast of.

“Congratulations, my lord!” Marcus spoke solemnly, his tone changing slightly. He used to address him with “Baron,” but now he directly called him “my lord,” a welcome change.

“Wow, this is tremendous news, no wonder when I left the house today, the magpies were bustling and chirping all over town. Liszt, you are truly worthy of being the Earl’s offspring, inheriting the fine lineage of the Tulip Family. You, will inevitably wield power!” Goltai burst out exuberantly.

“Compared to my brother and sister, my talents are not outstanding; I can only make up for it with more diligent cultivation.”

“The fact that you think this way proves that you are equally excellent. Historical figures aren’t always outstanding in their youth. A knight’s creed is to continuously catch up and progress. In you, I see such qualities.”

“Thank you for the praise, Teacher Goltai.”

“Therefore, tonight, we must celebrate properly and have a few more drinks.” Goltai chuckled, then turned to Butler Carter and said, “Mr. Carter, to celebrate Liszt’s advancement to an Earth Knight, shouldn’t you bring out some fine wine from the castle’s cellar to toast this glorious moment?”

Old Carter had a broad smile on his face, “I think so too, Mr. Goltai.”

But he did not move; to drink or not to drink wine, the decision had to be made by the master of the castle.

Liszt did not want to dampen the mood and nodded, “Mr. Carter, please bring out a bottle of Crescent Moon Wine and also prepare a pudding for each gentleman and lady.”

“As you wish, my lord,” Carter turned and left, descending to the wine cellar.

On his way, he passed the kitchen door and said, “Mrs. Abbie, the lord has granted us, each to have an extra pudding with dinner tonight.”

Abbie-Spoon was a plump woman, and upon hearing the news, she exclaimed loudly, “Butter pudding, oh my, the lord is too generous; there really is no need for this. The maidservants will eat anything, and besides, we don’t have much cream left.”

Kitchen maid Eileen, who was mopping the floor, looked up eagerly, “Mr. Carter, can the kitchen maids also get an extra pudding?”

“Of course, today is a joyous day, as the lord has advanced to an Earth Knight!”

“Oh, heavens, the lord is so great!” Abbie exclaimed loudly again, and then she turned and shouted, “Eileen, what are you still standing there for? Hurry up and finish mopping, then go to the storeroom and bring over the cream. It’s a big day for the lord; you get to eat the pudding that’s only available on festive days, so let’s get spirited and work hard!”

“Understood, Mrs. Abbie, praise be to the lord.”

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Crescent Moon Wine.

A specialty of Coral Island, harvested during the first new moon of each autumn to make wine.

Tulip Castle has a grape Minor Elf who grows a variety of grapes, one of which is specifically for winemaking. Although they don’t taste very good when eaten, the wine they produce is sweet and sharp, a top-quality wine that is well-known throughout the Duchy of Sapphire. The Court would purchase a batch every year.

When Liszt left Tulip Castle, he took a box with him.

“An aged bottle of Crescent Moon Wine is like an old story gracefully emerging from a deep tunnel of time, subtly telling you what true beauty is, what lasting flavor is,” Goltai swayed the crystal wine glass, watching the bright red liquid rise and fall against the crystal wall, speaking poetically.

Liszt took a small sip.

To be honest, he didn’t think there was anything particularly enjoyable about wine; he didn’t like any alcohol, preferring only to eat wine-soaked rice. His body, inherited from his previous life, had a certain ability to assess alcohols and could adapt to the taste of various types.

So, when in Rome, he would have a drink occasionally.

After all, without high-proof distilled spirits, it was hard to get drunk.

“By the way, Teacher Goltai, is there a problem with the peanuts from Peanut Hamlet?” He suddenly recalled his new mission. His Dou Qi had sublimated, and he was very eager for the new rewards.

“Hmm, indeed, it seems that this year’s climate hasn’t been very good, and Peanut Hamlet is likely facing a total crop failure. I’ve sent someone to look, and the Peanut Fields are extensively turning yellow. In a few days, they’ll probably die off... Poor serfs, they’ll go hungry before winter even arrives.” Goltai spoke pitifully but without a hint of sympathy in his expression.

Putting down his glass.

Liszt stated unequivocally, “Tomorrow, come with me to Peanut Hamlet for an on-site inspection, to research how to resolve the crisis.”

Chapter 009: The Barren Land of Peanut Hamlet

The date-red Fire Dragon Horse carried the Earth Knight Liszt, across the muddy land, to Peanut Hamlet. Peanut Hamlet was a residential area much smaller than a village, sparsely dotted with seven or eight thatched cottages.

“What are you dazed about? Seeing Lord Landlord has arrived, why aren’t you kneeling quickly to pay your respects!” A clerk from the town energetically knocked on the door of each farming household.

The residents here were all serfs.

Emerging from the leaky houses with expressions numbed by the pressures of life, they stood woodenly at their doors, not knowing what to do. Under the loud scolding of the clerk, they knelt one by one on the ground, bowing in the direction of Liszt.

The actions of the adults were all numb.

Only a few bare-bottomed children would occasionally lift their heads, observing Liszt with their dirty but bright eyes. Then, they too were slapped down by the heads of adults, kneeling on the ground with their foreheads nearly touching the soil.

“Who is in charge of Peanut Hamlet?” Liszt asked.

Goltai sat on his own horse, looking as if the matter did not concern him; he did not know who was in charge of Peanut Hamlet. A clerk spoke up: “Replying to the Lord, it is Old George with the limp.”

“Please have him come here.”

The clerk quickly dragged over an old man with a limp and shaky walk. The old man wore patched clothing, and his withered body seemed as if it could snuff out at any moment.

“Lord Landlord, Old George has arrived,” the clerk announced.

The clerk pushed the old man, seemingly trying to make him quickly pay his respects, but the old man just stood there nervously, woodenly, not knowing what to do.

Liszt waved his hand to dismiss the clerk and said warmly, “Old George, don’t be nervous. I am Baron Liszt Tulip, the Landlord of Fresh Flower Town. I heard that there’s a problem with the peanuts in Peanut Hamlet. Lead us to the fields to see if we can resolve this issue.”

“Ah, oh, Baron... Lord Landlord...” Old George stuttered nervously, “I will lead the way right away... thank heavens... Peanut Hamlet is saved... the Lord Landlord has come to save us!”

Stirred with excitement, Old George suddenly walked as if carried by the wind.

Liszt had inspected the farmland before, but he had only stood outside for a glance; now, he truly took a close look at the farmland. Since the fields belonged to serfs, there were no ridges, and the long-shaped fields were separated only by a trench as a boundary line, with different serfs tending to different crops.

Nearly ninety percent of the farmland’s yield belonged to the nobility, which is to say, Liszt’s.

The remaining ten percent was their ration.

At this moment.

The peanut fields, which should have been lush green, were patchy with blue and yellow; all the peanuts were withered, sprawled lifelessly on the ground. The land was damp, clearly showing the serfs had not skimmed on watering, but watering alone could not bring the peanuts back to life.

Wiping his tears, Old George said excitedly, “Lord Landlord, we haven’t slacked off at all, watering thrice daily, but the peanuts are still dying. Now, only the field that Archie tends to hasn’t withered, but it’s also struggling, with some leaves beginning to yellow.”

Following the direction Old George pointed, Liszt saw the long field in the center of Peanut Hamlet’s farmland.

In the middle of the long field was a green area, much healthier looking compared to the surrounding blue and yellow withered peanuts.

Liszt dismounted, walked into the field, bent over, and plucked a yellowing peanut sprout, ready to observe it closely when Goltai suddenly said, “Liszt, you shouldn’t touch these dirty tasks. These serfs should do whatever is needed.” Although a fallen Honored Knight, he still looked down on commoners more than the average noble.

Liszt paid no attention.

He continued examining the peanut sprout in his hands, trying to ascertain the cause.

He was not an agronomist, but he had farmed in his childhood and was not unfamiliar with agriculture. The peanuts of both worlds were similar in some aspects and foreign in others. But he could still discern that the peanut sprout in his hand was malnourished, which was the cause of its current condition.

“Have you used wood ash or manure to fertilize the fields?”

“What?” Old George was puzzled, “Lord Landlord, we water the crops, three times a day!”

Liszt asked, “Don’t you use fertilizer?”

Old George was taken aback and then asked in return, “What is fertilizer?”

Not even knowing what fertilizer is... Liszt was at a loss for words, “How do you all grow peanuts then?”

Old George rambled on about their methods, which essentially involved letting wild grasses grow in the fall and winter, burning them off the next year, and then planting peanuts. After planting, the tasks were watering and weeding. Generation after generation had done it this way, resulting in particularly low yields. Only the nobles could use elves to influence plant growth and achieve a bountiful harvest.

Understanding this, Liszt couldn't help shaking his head.

Without spreading fertilizer, even the best soil would become barren after a few plantings. The vast fields before him were almost turning into barren land, no wonder the peanuts were dying—they were “starving” to death.

However, Liszt soon had a doubt, “Why didn't they starve to death before, but the peanuts are starving to death now?”

According to Old George, they had been planting this way every year, and apart from droughts and floods, they hadn't experienced anything like this. Therefore, the nutrient deficiency in the peanut fields likely had another cause.

“What could it be?”

His gaze turned toward the green patch in the middle of the field, pondering seriously.

Suddenly, an idea flashed through his mind, recalling the reward for the quest—saving the peanut fields was the task, and the reward was an Elf Bug. Based on the reward he received for his first quest, Liszt felt that the Elf Bug wouldn't just appear out of nowhere; he would likely find it unexpectedly along the way.

“Rewarding me an Elf Bug... the peanut fields suffering from malnutrition...” Staying up, Liszt already had the answer, “Perhaps, the cause of the malnutrition in the peanut fields is the Elf Bug that I am to be rewarded with for the task. Elf Bugs are born from plants, and my Elf Bug should be the Peanut Elf Bug.”

With a wave of his hand, he summoned everyone, "Let's go and take a look in the center of the field."

The group tiptoed over to the center of the peanut fields, where the peanut seedlings were still fairly robust. Liszt searched his memory; as a child, he had seen Elf Bugs being collected. They were usually found inside a plant's flower or a new bud, resembling a jade-warm caterpillar.

Each type of Elf Bug had different patterns.

He currently owned four Elf Bugs, including a Tulip Spirit Bug, a Thorn Elf Bug, a Millet Elf Bug, and an Alfalfa Elf Bug. Breeding Elf Bugs required coordination with farming, and Goltai was still helping him find suitable fields for breeding the Elf Bugs.

After searching for a while, Liszt didn't find a peanut seedling that was gestating an Elf Bug.

"It's probably not the right time yet; if the nutrition can't keep up, this Peanut Bug will probably miscarry," Liszt couldn't help clenching his fist. Elf Bugs represented productivity, and he couldn't afford to fail this mission.

With that thought in mind.

He told everyone, "I think I understand the reason now, Old George; follow my instructions and let's save this peanut field."

"Praise to Lord Landlord!" Old George cried with joy.

Goltai asked in surprise, "Liszt, have you really found the problem? Do you even know how to grow peanuts? What caused the peanuts to die?"

"I can't say just yet; in a few days, we will know," Liszt cautiously refrained from stating the cause, worried that he might have guessed wrong. If there were no little elves, it would be a huge blunder.

So, the priority was to save the peanut seedlings.

Chapter 0010: The Great Fertilization Battle of the Peanut Fields

The fertility of Elf Bugs requires a significant amount of nutrients, and the barren Peanut Fields restricted the development of the Elf Bugs, resulting in all the peanut seedlings around the central part of the field nearly dying from concentrated nutrient deficiency.

The solution to cure this was simple, fertilizing the Peanut Fields was needed.

Liszt recalled his knowledge about farming and said to Old George.

“Old George, I’m entrusting you with a few tasks. First, mobilize the farmers to collect firewood and dead grass everywhere, burn them, and gather the remaining wood ash. Second, get able-bodied farmers to dig pond mud, just the layer at the bottom of the pond. Third, have the children collect feces, regardless of what kind, just pick it up.”

Old George had no questions regarding the orders from Lord Landlord, “Understood, Lord Landlord, Old George will surely carry out your commands.”

After Old George hobbled away.

Liszt turned to Goltai and said, “Teacher Goltai, I’m guessing the feces collected in Peanut Hamlet won’t be enough. Go to the town and organize it so that all farmers collect feces... Well, let’s do it this way, buy the feces in the name of the Administrative Officer, setting the price at one copper coin per basket.”

Copper coins, silver coins, Gold Coins, and Dragon coins are the universal currencies in this world.

However, different empires, kingdoms, and grand duchies issue their gold, silver, and copper coins, which all differ from one another. The copper coin mentioned by Liszt is the currency of the Duchy of Sapphire, with which one can buy roughly four loaves of bread, enough to feed an adult for several days.

A silver coin can exchange for one hundred copper coins, a Gold Coin for one hundred silver coins.

As for Dragon coins, formally known as Sapphire Dragon coins, they are gemstone coins imbued with the Magic Power of the Grand Duchy's unique Sapphire Dragon, worth ten thousand Gold Coins, and are magic items in themselves.

Upon hearing this, Goltai couldn't help but complain, "Wow, Liszt, why would you pay such a high price for dirty, lowly feces, which besides stinking and polluting our sense of smell, are worthless."

"No, feces are very useful. Just carry out the publication, and find a place to accumulate the feces, preferably an uncultivated land away from the upwind," Liszt understood the value of feces well. In the absence of chemical fertilizers and insufficient Elves, the best source of fertilizer for farming was feces.

As a major landlord who owned all the land in Fresh Flower Town, Liszt had many fields to cultivate, and he needed ample fertilizer. He also disliked the idea of his town's streets being littered with carelessly disposed of feces and urine, as such conditions were an affront to civility.

He planned to buy feces long-term for two purposes: to use as compost and for sanitation—promoting the usage of toilets was not feasible for the time being, so buying feces was the most cost-effective approach.

"But the price is too high. One copper coin should buy ten baskets, no, twenty baskets," Goltai suggested.

"Just do as I said, Teacher Goltai," Liszt's tone carried a hint of sternness.

With that, Goltai stopped his complaints, spread his hands and said, "As you wish."

...

In those days, the landlord was the authority.

When Liszt's orders were given, no one dared to shirk or evade them, so the clerks and farmers were very quick to act, and the pond mud, feces, and wood ash he required were already piled up in Peanut Hamlet.

"Very well, Old George, now lead the people to mix these materials together then dig a hole next to the root of each peanut seedling, sprinkle some of this

mixture in, and bury it. Then water the plants and weed diligently, I believe the peanut seedlings will recover soon.”

Mounted on his Fire Dragon Horse, Liszt cheerfully directed the farmers of Peanut Hamlet to fertilize the Peanut Fields.

As a landlord, he naturally wouldn't do the work himself—the noble system didn't allow it, and he personally had no desire to.

The total area of the Peanut Fields in Peanut Hamlet is about one hundred acres, roughly the size of ten soccer fields or seven or eight elementary schools. There are twenty-three farming households in Peanut Hamlet, comprising ninety-two people.

Ninety-two serfs, excluding children who can't work, plus the serfs brought in from the town, amounted to one hundred and twenty people, all busily working.

“Teacher Goltai, how many people are there in Fresh Flower Town?”

“Uh, sorry, Liszt, I haven't been in town long enough to sort that out clearly.” Goltai was unclear and turned to ask a clerk, “You've lived in the town for many years, do you know how many households there are and the population? Over a thousand people?”

“I don't know, Lord.” The clerk shook his head.

Goltai looked at another clerk.

This clerk shook his head as well.

Thus, not a single person in the whole of Fresh Flower Town knew exactly how many people there were. Liszt was speechless. Was Fresh Flower Town a forgotten place? Had the administrative officers of Coral Island never come to conduct a census before? Had the previous Administrative Officer never done a population survey either?

“We need a thorough census. A landlord who doesn't even know the population of his own territory is truly speechless.”

Thinking this, he had already ordered, “Teacher Goltai, organize manpower, hurry to arrange the census. I need to know how many households there are

in Fresh Flower Town, how many people, the names and family relationships of each person, as well as their occupations, ages, genders, and marital status.”

“This is going to be busy, Liszt. You know, there are too few officials in the town. We have no Finance Officer, no Defense Officer, no Legal Officer, no Diplomatic. In fact, we don’t even have an Administrative Officer. I should be serving as your advisor, not the town’s Administrative Officer.”

In a Noble’s territory, civil officials are basically led by the advisor, who oversees the Administrative Officer, Finance Officer, Defense Officer, Legal Officer, and the Diplomatic.

The military officer is the Knight Commander, who oversees the Knight Order.

There was no doubt, Goltai, as a down-and-out Honored Knight, low-level in the feudal system but still a Noble, had followed Liszt here with the intention of becoming an advisor. And the other knight teacher, Marcus, without a doubt, should serve as the Knight Commander... whether Fresh Flower Town could afford to maintain a Knight Order was another matter.

“Don’t rush, Teacher Goltai. Fresh Flower Town is awash with things to be done and my Castle awaits its rise. First manage the town’s affairs for me and complete the census.”

Liszt didn’t want to immediately delegate advisory powers to Goltai. It wasn’t for fear of being outmaneuvered, but rather because Goltai’s mind was filled with the feudal system and he wasn’t grounded enough to keep up with Liszt’s development plans.

“Alright then, Liszt. You’ve come of age and have the mindset of a qualified landlord. I heed your command,” Goltai saluted with one hand, displaying his Noble breeding, calm and composed.

...

For three days in a row, Peanut Hamlet was bustling with the fertilization process, which was a significant agricultural project. The one hundred acres were soon all fertilized with a mix of pond mud, manure, and ashes from plants and trees.

Especially the central plot of land, which received several times the fertilizer.

Liszt also came here to direct the operation for three days and when everything was done, all he could do was wait, wait for the Peanut Fields to be improved.

“I’ve done everything I can, hopefully the task will be completed soon.” He wasn’t one to dwell on matters, so once work here was over, he quickly moved on to other estate affairs.

The most important was the Elf Bug.