

The Mighty Dragons Are Dead

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Chapter 0011: The Revival of the Peanut and the Gestating Bud

“Teacher Goltai, how is the progress of finding a suitable location to settle the Elf Bugs? They have been asleep for a month, and I hope to revive them soon, rather than let them waste their potential.”

Elf Bugs are a kind of magical creature.

They can recognize an owner; just a bite on a finger and a drop of blood as an inducement are needed to form a magic contract—they are the spirits of nature, the essence of plants, and the messengers of magic.

Planting their Cordyceps would affect the growth of the surrounding plants.

Cordyceps are the plant body that nurtures Elf Bugs and can be considered an essential magic treasure belonging to the Elf Bugs. They can store and release energy. They can be planted as well as enter dormancy.

The growth of Cordyceps is the growth of the Elf Bugs.

If the Cordyceps die, the Elf Bugs will also die.

Now, the Cordyceps is inside the stomachs of four Elf Bugs, lacking nutrient supply, the Elf Bugs can only sleep soundly. This not only wastes productivity but also delays the possibility of the Elf Bugs’ evolution—without absorbing any nutrients and without influencing the growth of crops, none of the Elf Bugs can evolve into Little Minor Elves just by sleeping.

Although the hope is slight.

Liszt still wanted to try and see if his Elf Bugs could evolve into Little Minor Elves.

Goltai answered, "Alfalfa Bugs are suitable for planting on the dairy farm, where there's a large pasture. Replacing the grass with alfalfa should work; Millet Bugs are hard to find a suitable place for, as Fresh Flower Town primarily grows wheat and no one plants millet; Tulip Bugs should, of course, be planted at Fresh Flower Farm, even though the place is nearly abandoned... As for Thorn Bugs, Liszt, you know they're of little value."

"I don't care whether they have value, what I need is for them to have a field of their own, to grow!"

"I can start planting alfalfa and tulips first. The lazy serfs should get to work, but Liszt, I need more hands. The clerks are all lazy fellows, they simply can't get anything done!"

"You may conscript the townspeople at will and have the castle pay their wages."

"Good heavens, the castle is paying wages? You really are a generous Lord Landlord. But there's hardly anyone in Fresh Flower Town who can read, and you still want me to organize a census. They can't even write their own names, I can assure you, they won't get anything done, you can't expect much from the commoners."

This was a problem.

Fresh Flower Town had no school, there was no education here, and illiterate people serving as officials was truly unreliable.

"So, Teacher Goltai, do you know any literate people willing to settle in Fresh Flower Town? So long as they're willing to serve as officials, I can pay them wages, at least twice that of officials in other towns... My castle should still have quite a few Gold Coins."

No matter how unpopular, Liszt was the son of an Earl, and he had received a substantial amount of Gold Coins when he came of age and was granted his inheritance.

Goltai fell silent for a moment, seemingly weighing his words: "Liszt, I can see you have big ambitions for Fresh Flower Town. I also do know some

unrecognized but educated individuals. However, as your family tutor, I must remind you, Fresh Flower Town is already struggling to support one Landlord, and bringing in more people might be too much to bear.”

“I understand that, don’t worry, I’ll take care of it; feel free to invite them all,” Liszt said easily. With the right talent, he could create wealth.

In his view, Fresh Flower Town was an unexploited virgin land.

Although it was difficult to become wealthy through farming without Elves, means to create wealth weren’t limited to just farming.

At the same time, a voice in his heart said, “I have the Smoke Mission, my personal golden finger; maybe it could bring me even more wealth!”

As they were discussing these matters,

Butler Carter knocked and entered, “Sir, Old George from Peanut Hamlet seeks an audience with you.”

“Oh, what’s the matter?”

“He said, the peanuts in Peanut Hamlet magically revived to lush green overnight. The central field that you specifically instructed to look after even has a peanut plant with a very large bud,”

“Really, let him come in,” Liszt was very surprised.

He had just fertilized the fields, and he had not expected the Peanut Fields to recover so quickly. The urge to find a place to be alone and check if the Smoke Mission had been updated was nearly overwhelming.

By the time Old George entered the castle with anxious, tiptoe steps, Liszt had already regained his composure, “Old George, tell me in detail about Peanut Hamlet.”

“Yes... Lord Landlord... Your great radiance... shines upon every corner of Peanut Hamlet...”

Just as Carter reported, Peanut Hamlet turned lush green overnight, and one of the peanut plants underwent a mutation, sprouting a very large bud. The serfs could not contain their joy. Ignoring his limp, Old George ran like the

wind, panting heavily as he sought an audience with the landlord. His formerly numb and desperate gaze had been replaced by hope.

Goltai had already figured it out, his mouth agape, “Oh my, Liszt, this... could it be that a... a Peanut Bug has been bred in the Peanut Fields?”

Liszt smiled faintly, “Quite possibly.”

“Oh my, Liszt, you truly are a noble blessed by heaven! Who would have thought that such a remote and small town like Fresh Flower Town could breed an Elf Bug; it’s simply incredible!”

“Whether it’s unbelievable or not, we’ll know once we see it. Mr. Carter, prepare a horse for me, I’m going to Peanut Hamlet.”

“As you wish, my lord.”

At the castle gates.

Liszt and Goltai each mounted their steeds, while Carter inquired, “My lord, your Retainer Knights have not yet arrived. Shall we wait a bit?”

Thomas stepped forward, as if wanting to say something, but didn’t dare to speak out.

Liszt noticed and glanced over at Thomas and Old George, then said, “Thomas will ride with me, and yes, take Old George along too.”

Like hearing celestial music, Thomas trembled with excitement, “Thomas is at your service, my lord!”

This was the first time Thomas was allowed to attend to his lord closely on an outing. A personal valet’s closeness, synonymous with being a constant companion, is the heart and soul of a noble’s entourage. Many valets to the great Nobles were indeed Knights who had fought shoulder to shoulder with them on the battlefield.

Four men, three horses.

The Fire Dragon Horse took the lead, galloping swiftly to Peanut Hamlet.

Looking out, the Peanut Fields that were yellow and wilted the day before were now a lush green, all the peanut sprouts stretching out their leaves.

It was spring, and it was not yet the blooming season.

Yet, in the middle of the field, the largest peanut plant had a fist-sized bud on its stem above the root, about to bloom. Its tender lush green was extraordinarily heartwarming.

“This truly is the bud of an Elf Bug, heaven’s blessing, Liszt, Fresh Flower Town is a land favored by heaven!” Goltai exclaimed, somewhat exaggeratedly.

Liszt was actually very excited inside, but his face still bore the noble’s composure and a gentle smile, “The Elf Bug plays a crucial role in the agriculture of Fresh Flower Town, which is why this Peanut Field must be protected. Old George, you and the farmers must assign someone to guard it every day.”

“Lord Landlord, Old George would guard it even without eating or drinking!”

“There’s no need to go without food and drink; take turns standing guard,” Liszt said to Thomas behind him, “Tell my Retainer Knights on your way back that I need one of them to be stationed in Peanut Hamlet every day to guard the Elf Bug.”

“Yes, my lord!”

Chapter 0012: Census in Fresh Flower Town

The Elf Bug had not yet been bred, and Liszt couldn’t possibly wait here foolishly. After arranging for people to stand guard, he returned to the castle. Fresh Flower Town’s only contact with the outside world was a road that traversed Thorn Ridge, and there were few travelers.

Only when the Earl came to collect taxes would caravans accompany the Knight Squad.

Now that Fresh Flower Town had become Liszt’s territory, no one came to collect taxes, and caravans were probably reluctant to come. Therefore, there would be no one coveting the Elf Bug.

As for the residents of Fresh Flower Town, even less so dared to entertain the thought.

The Elf Bug was a darling of nature; it would only enter into a master-servant pact with humans possessing magic power—perhaps Magical Beasts could as well, but they had no such intentions.

Magic power referred to Dou Qi and magic; they appeared different but were essentially the same.

In Fresh Flower Town, only three people possessed magic power: Liszt, Marcus, and Goltai. Both Marcus and Goltai were well-known figures on Coral Island; even if they stole the Elf Bug, they couldn't escape. On Coral Island, nobody dared to touch anything belonging to the Tulip Family, and Liszt was a member of the Tulip Family.

Therefore, there was no need to worry about the safety of the Peanut Elf Bug.

He arrived at his study, closed the door, and concentrated for a moment, waiting for the smoke to appear. After repeated probing, he had completely mastered the pattern of the smoke's appearance; he just needed to calm his mind, and then he would see it.

Sure enough.

One minute later.

Twisted Serpent Script appeared before his eyes.

“Complete the mission, and be rewarded with one Peanut Elf Bug.”

“Just as I thought, the Peanut Little Minor Elf is the reward for a previous mission... This Smoke Mission that appeared out of nowhere seems unable to conjure rewards from nothing; the rewards are things that exist in reality or are about to happen... The sublimation of Dou Qi must be due to my own accumulated efforts, and the Peanut Bug is something that should emerge naturally.”

However, without the Smoke Mission, those rewards would probably be wasted.

He estimated he would still be an Apprentice Knight, and the Peanut Bug would also quietly die.

At this moment, the twisted Smoke Serpent Script showed new content.

“Mission: As the Landlord of the territory, how can you not know the population of your subjects? Please conduct a census to understand the basic situation of the residents. Reward: A new Tulip species.”

“A census? Isn’t that precisely what I plan to do? It seems the Smoke Mission updates content based on my actual situation... A new Tulip species, what does that mean? Is it going to give me a Magic Potion?” Liszt guessed.

The Tulip Family’s growth was due to the Tulip.

The Tulip was not merely a flower, it was also a Magic Potion—a magical ingredient. Magic Potions were crucial auxiliary materials for cultivating magic and Dou Qi. The Magic Potion from the Tulip, as Liszt recalled, the highest-priced one could sell for a hefty sum of ten Gold Coins.

A new variety of Tulip, if it produced a Magic Potion, would undoubtedly be a powerful tool for economic revitalization.

Even if it weren’t a Magic Potion, contributing it to Tulip Castle, allowing the Tulip Great Elf to assimilate it, would also enhance the Greater Elf’s potential for evolution and development.

“Well, then, next up is to push the census strongly! A small town with at most a couple thousand people—what’s so troublesome about it? Goltai is truly disappointing. If all else fails, I’ll supervise it myself.”

A couple thousand people were not much more than the size of a school in Liszt’s hometown. Having served as president of the student body in his school, Liszt had great trust in his own abilities.

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But for Goltai, it was an immensely difficult task.

He asked the previous administrative officer during the handover, a knight dispatched by the earl, about his duties in Fresh Flower Town. The knight had done only one thing—collected taxes.

The knight didn't concern himself with anything else, and hardly ever visited Fresh Flower Town himself; instead, he had one of his retainer knights manage on his behalf.

The retainer knight here did likewise only one thing—collected taxes and nothing more.

The taxes from Fresh Flower Town included peanuts, milk, wheat, barley, oats, tomatoes, and tulips. Coral Island's Count would collect taxes every three months, taking away the majority of the scant agricultural output from Fresh Flower Town. Once the knight finished collecting taxes, he wouldn't bother with Fresh Flower Town anymore.

Poor and remote, it lacked the prosperity and enjoyment of Coral City.

Thus, Goltai sat in the dilapidated administrative room of the small town, looking at his mere four clerks and six patrol members, and felt that completing a population census was an impossible task.

“None of you have ever read a book, recognized a single character? There's not a single literate person in the whole town?”

A clerk said embarrassedly, “Sir, there's no school in the town, and we've never left it...”

A patrol member with a bright red, wine-stained nose said, “Perhaps the old tanner can read. He came from another island. I saw a book in his house, so thick and large. I even flipped through it—it had pictures of little figures. But the old tanner gave me a beating. He's blind, stitches shoes very firmly, and is also tough at hitting people.”

A blind man, Goltai didn't even think about it and disregarded the old tanner.

Since there was no one who could read, all he could say was, “You must at least know how to count, so each of you go to a hamlet and bring me the number of households and people!”

This should have been a simple task, but after a day had passed and the clerks and patrol members returned to report, Goltai felt like going mad.

He scolded loudly, “What, Peanut Hamlet has 18 households and 56 people? Mr. Teacup, are you jesting with me!”

Mr. Teacup, whose full name was David Teacup, was one of the clerks, and his face twisted with dilemma, "Sir, I didn't, uh, I counted several times, not sure if it's correct, but each time the numbers were different."

Peanut Hamlet had 23 households and 92 people, a figure Goltai personally tallied when Liszt came to aid the Peanut Fields.

He really couldn't fathom how David Teacup could have counted 18 households and 56 people.

No need to think about it.

The numbers for the other hamlets were surely made up as well.

Realizing this, Goltai waved his hand in resignation, "Alright, no more reporting, keep the numbers for your own amusement. Bring over my Mare Qian, I need to see Baron Liszt at the castle."

Riding his horse to the castle, Goltai exaggeratedly complained to Liszt, "You have no idea. Those clerks and patrol members can't even properly count from one to ten! It's impossible to rely on them to complete the census. Liszt, I've already written the letter, just waiting to send it; maybe we can wait for them to arrive before conducting the population census."

"And when would that be?"

"No need to rush, Liszt, we have plenty of time, don't we?"

"I cannot wait," Liszt tapped his fingers on the table, "Mr. Carter, who in the castle can read and write?"

Mr. Carter bowed slightly and said, "My lord, I can write letters and read books, Thomas can as well, and I think Mrs. Morson should be able to."

"Then, please ask Mrs. Morson and Thomas to come over, and call over Teacher Marcus and my four retainer knights as well. I remember they all can write."

Once everyone had arrived, Liszt announced publicly, "Now, let's set aside whatever we're working on and help me with the population census of Fresh Flower Town. Each person will be responsible for one hamlet: the town,

Mushroom Hamlet, Peanut Hamlet, Tomato Hamlet, Barley Hamlet, Little Wheat Village, Fresh Flower Farm, and the dairy farm.”

Chapter 0013 Black Tulip

“Hurry up, hurry up, damn fool, dilly-dallying, are you looking to die! The Lord Landlord wants to take a census of your family, quick, put on your clothes, and bring your wife and children with you, assemble in the clearing ahead, if one person is missing, mind I break your legs!”

The patrolling member slapped the thatched cottage door, brandishing his authority as he bellowed into the house.

Soon, the entire population of Barley Hamlet emerged from their houses, assembling in the clearing amid the scolding of the patrol members.

They whispered to each other in twos and threes.

They occasionally looked up at the table in the middle of the clearing, where a forty-year-old woman in a tidy dark green dress was sorting through a stack of thick parchment. Behind the woman was a young maid, helping to dissolve the ink in the tea canister.

“Who is that?”

“Never seen her before.”

“Idiot, she must be a maid from the castle!”

“That’s right, that’s right, look at her clothes, they are definitely pressed, only the Lord Landlord’s maids wear such tidy and clean outfits, unlike us, stinking and wrinkled.”

“What does the Lord Landlord want to do? I heard the lapdog say, a census... What was it?”

“It’s a population census.” An elderly serf chewed on some kind of plant root, “Ten years ago, the Earl sent someone to conduct a census, back then our Barley Hamlet had... had... had so many serf families, many more people than now, oh dear, the big snow seven years ago starved many people to death.”

In front of the table.

The patrol members, who were previously brimming with bravado, were now nodding and bowing as they said to the two maids, “Mrs. Morson, Miss Midgeon, all the serfs of Barley Hamlet are assembled.”

“I am not a miss, I am just a maid in the castle.” Actually, Midgeon Bull Tail was pleased with the title of miss. She smiled and asked, “Is everyone here? Make sure not to miss anyone, otherwise the Lord Landlord will punish us, you included.”

“Of course, of course, I can guarantee, they would not dare to hide.”

Mrs. Morson nodded, “Then go on, have them come one household at a time, once their census is done they can go straight home, no need to come back to register.”

“All right.”

The patrol member then started leading the serf households one by one to the table.

Mrs. Morson asked according to the items Liszt had prepared beforehand, “Are you the head of the household? What’s your name?”

“Ho... Hope, ma’am.”

“Don’t be nervous, your full name, including your surname, Mr. Hope.”

“Oh, okay... okay, my name is Hope Sourwater.”

“So Mr. Sourwater, is your whole family here, all five of you? What is your wife’s name, and what are the names of your two sons and daughter... How old are you, and what is your occupation, what do you do? Is your wife the same? Is your eldest son working yet?”

Quickly, Mrs. Morson finished her questioning and began to record the information on the thick parchment.

Head of serf household – Hope Sourwater, age 37, barley cultivation, limbs intact; wife – Simon Sourwater, age 34, barley cultivation, limbs intact; eldest son – Rob Sourwater, age 20, oat cultivation, limping; second son – Peter Sourwater, age 17, barley cultivation, limbs intact; daughter – Lily Sourwater, age 15, chicken raising at home, limbs intact.

Having recorded the information, Mrs. Morson checked it over once more.

Once certain everything was correct, she said gently, “Mr. Sourwater, ma’am, your family can go back now.”

“Oh, okay... okay.”

This scenario continued for one day, and then stack after stack of thick parchment was delivered to the castle, to Liszt’s desk. With that, the census operation for Fresh Flower Town was declared complete.

“Liszt, this is truly incredible. Such a difficult task, in your hands, seems so easily resolved. You will make a competent Lord Landlord, for sure,” Goltai praised.

“Teacher Goltai, let’s hold off on the praise for now, compile the numbers from each hamlet and summarize them for me.”

“At your service.”

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Perhaps it was Liszt’s decisive actions that put pressure on Goltai, prompting this would-be advisor and follower to uncharacteristically burn the midnight oil, working late into the night by candlelight.

Early the next morning.

The compiled statistics had already been laid before Liszt after he finished breakfast and completed his knightly training.

“My lord, Lord Goltai stayed up all night. His eyes were full of red veins when he delivered the documents,” Carter said, holding the thick parchment.

“Make sure to treat him with good food and drink. A token of appreciation is always necessary. I want Fresh Flower Town to thrive. I don’t want my territory to remain as lifeless as it was in the past.”

Carter looked a bit dazed and took a few seconds to respond, “My lord, I feel as though I am seeing the young and spirited viscount that the Earl was in his youth. In five years, he rose to the rank of earl and established the Tulip Family’s rule over Coral Island. Having you as the landlord is fortunate for all the residents of Fresh Flower Town.”

“Perhaps,” Liszt replied without modesty.

Quietly flipping through the thick parchment—although there were many pages, there wasn’t much content. Even written in minute script with a goose quill, there wasn’t much text to record.

“Thick parchment is indeed backward.”

“My lord, we don’t have much thick parchment left. This has already used up four-fifths of our stock,” Carter informed him.

“I know, I’ll find a way to solve this.” Papermaking had long been on Liszt’s agenda, just waiting for the right time to tackle it.

After half an hour, Liszt had fully comprehended all the data from Fresh Flower Town.

There were a total of eight hamlets.

In the town’s hamlets, 257 households, 907 people, of which 41 households, 125 people were freemen; the rest were serfs.

Peanut Hamlet, 23 households, 92 people, all serfs.

Mushroom Hamlet, 68 households, 211 people, all serfs.

Tomato Hamlet, 30 households, 152 people, of which 10 households, 28 people were freemen; the rest were serfs.

Barley Hamlet, 48 households, 155 people, all serfs.

Little Wheat Village, 101 households, 342 people, all serfs.

Fresh Flower Farm, 21 households, 54 people, all serfs.

There was also a dairy farm, 18 households, 60 people, all serfs.

In total, Fresh Flower Town had 584 households, 1973 people, with just 51 households, 153 people being freemen; the remainder were serfs. At the castle, there were 10 servants, 4 retainer knights, as well as two followers—Goltai, Marcus—and including Liszt himself, 17 people.

Goltai and Marcus still had families back in Coral City, yet had not brought them over. It could be they were reluctant to come, or they were waiting for some time before making the move.

Therefore, the total population of Fresh Flower Town was 1990 people.

The vast majority were engaged in agriculture, growing barley, wheat, oats, tomatoes, mushrooms, peanuts, tulips, and raising dairy cows, as well as a small number of chickens, ducks, geese, pigs, dogs, and sheep.

Only seven percent of the population was involved in handicraft industries.

There were tailors' shops, smithies, carpenters' shops, bakeries, mills, grocery stores, tanners' shops, barbershops, and locksmith stores—one of each.

"The census is detailed enough; this should complete the task," Liszt thought to himself as he pushed away the parchment that emitted a faint stench.

Just then, old Butler Carter approached: "My lord, great news! The steward from Fresh Flower Farm has come to report a joyous event to you."

Upon hearing the words "Fresh Flower Farm," Liszt's eyes lit up, and he knew it was probably the reward for the task, "Where is he? Bring him here... What's the good news?"

"It's a previously unseen Black Tulip, my lord. I'll bring him over right away."

“

Chapter 0014 The New Home of the Tulip Spirit Bug

Fresh Flower Farm, with a history even longer than Fresh Flower Town.

It began eighteen years ago, shortly after Li Weiliam Tulip was granted Coral Island, and he led his Knight Order to survey the entire island, discovering a wildflower field here.

Among the flowers, two new varieties of tulips thrived.

For the Tulip Family, tulips were their lifeline, so the Earl moved his subjects here to cultivate the tulips. However, due to inconvenient transportation, within a few years, the Earl transplanted the new varieties of tulips to Coral City, and Fresh Flower Farm gradually fell into neglect.

Today, besides a few tulips, most of the flowers at Fresh Flower Farm had been cleared away to make space for other crops like barley and wheat.

Therefore, when Liszt arrived, he didn't see a field of colorful flowers, only lush green wheat seedlings.

"Lord Landlord, only twenty acres of tulips are left here. The red ones are Saint Dance Tulips, to commemorate your ancestor; the yellow ones are William I Tulips, to honor your supreme glory," said Steward Victor, his hair flecked with white, sighing repeatedly.

At its zenith, Fresh Flower Farm spanned a vast 800 acres, but now only 200 remained, with 180 of them planted with wheat.

"They're not magic potions?"

"Regrettably, they are indeed not magic potions, which is why the Earl seldom harvested the tulips here afterward. But now, they are about to be revitalized. Look there, Lord, right in the tulip field—that Black Tulip, with its purple-black petals. I've never seen it before!"

Liszt looked over, and indeed, that tulip stood out amongst the yellow and red tulips around it, its purple-black color striking.

It was like a proud black swan, serenely preening its feathers amidst a flock of geese.

"Is it a magic potion?"

"I do not know, Lord Landlord."

“Let me have a look.” Liszt parted the ordinary tulips and walked up to the Black Tulip, his fingers touching the purple-black petals. Suddenly, a familiar yet strange scent was perceived by him.

His eyes suddenly sparkled.

Liszt showed a satisfied smile, “It is a magic potion!”

Magic potions, magical herbal materials.

Mysterious magicians casting spells cannot do without the assistance of magic potions; knights practicing Dou Qi cultivation also rely on magic potions for support, as do various magical treasures, which all need magic potions as auxiliary materials to some extent.

Even though the price of magic potions fluctuates greatly depending on their effects, the cheapest one is worth at least more than one silver coin.

Liszt had never heard of a magic potion cheaper than a silver coin.

To possess a kind of magic potion is to possess a vast fortune.

Now, the Black Tulip grew on Liszt’s territory. Undoubtedly, this wealth belonged to him. According to noble customs and the law, even an Earl had no right to seize a lesser lord’s profits. Loyalty is one thing, interests another; when a lord enfeoffs a vassal, the vassal owns everything in the territory.

“It seems I have gained not only a fortune but also found a new home for my Tulip Spirit Bug,” Liszt took a deep breath, “The Fresh Flower Farm truly should be revitalized!”

He gestured to Victor, the steward, and his own retainer knights, to leave the tulip field.

He crouched beside the Black Tulip alone.

Focusing his mind and calming his breath.

Soon, a faint mist appeared before him, twisting into words.

“Complete the task, reward a new variety of tulip.”

Then.

The mist twisted, and the words changed.

“Task: The decaying Fresh Flower Farm seems to have encountered a turn of fate, the new variety of Black Tulip should take on the duty of revival in conjunction with the Tulip Spirit Bug. Please arrange cordyceps for the Tulip Spirit Bug. Reward: A magical beast cub.”

The task was updated.

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Easy as pie, it was like receiving a bounty of welfare.

What caught Liszt’s eye was the reward of a magical beast cub.

Even the most ordinary low-level magical beast was more powerful than an apprentice knight, capable of challenging an Earth Knight. The Wind Blade Wolf Liszt had encountered before was a low-level magical beast, slightly weaker than Earth Knight Marcus. Some low-level magical beasts could even take on a Sky Knight.

“I wonder what kind of magical beast cub it will be—will it be raised or slaughtered?” Liszt was full of anticipation.

...

“My lord, the Tulip Spirit Bug has been brought.” Butler Carter, escorted by the retainer knights, arrived at the Fresh Flower Farm and handed a jade box to Liszt with great care.

Taking the jade box, Liszt could feel a vibrant little life inside, connected by blood to himself.

He opened the lid of the box.

Immediately, he saw a “silkworm baby” inside, thicker than a thumb but shorter than an index finger, with pale yellow on its back and green stripes. Compared to a silkworm baby, the Elf Bug was coated in a jade-like sheen that made it look like a wriggling long jade strip, stunningly beautiful.

At the moment, the Elf Bug lay lazily on the powdered ground jade.

During the transplant period, the cordyceps inside its stomach could not provide nutrients, so it relied on nibbling jade powder to maintain its vitality. Jade, also known as Magic Jade, was a stone imbued with magic power. Much cheaper than the gemstones produced by dragons but still a rare and precious mineral.

“Little guy, have you rested enough? It’s time to check out your new home.” Liszt extended his index finger.

Sensing his thoughts, the lazy Tulip Spirit Bug slowly crawled onto his finger and settled in his palm. Its bright black eyes, the size of sesame seeds, looked around restlessly, as if sizing up the new home environment.

“What a beautiful life indeed; no matter how many times one sees it, it’s never enough.” Goltai, who had come to greet them, stared at the Elf Bug and exclaimed loudly.

As a down-and-out Honored Knight, he had no Elf Bug.

As a Honored Knight, the lowest tier in the noble hierarchy, one often had land and the more affluent could possibly afford an Elf Bug. But Goltai’s land had long since declined and had been sold by him. Now a knight without a fief, he naturally couldn’t afford an Elf Bug.

Liszt walked to the center of the Tulip field and gently said, pointing at the Black Tulip, “Little guy, make your home here and plant your cordyceps.”

With their established contract connection, the Elf Bug understood Liszt’s intentions.

Slowly opening its mouth, it emitted a green light that fell next to the empty space beside the Black Tulip. Following that, a cordyceps took root and sprouted, growing branches and leaves. The green branch tips produced a pale yellow tulip—that was its cordyceps, capable of affecting the growth of dozens of acres of tulips nearby.

As an Elf Bug, it could potentially make a tulip season yield twice over.

And also enhance the quality of the Tulips.

Liszt placed the Tulip Bug within the flower of its cordyceps; that was its home. It seemed that having spat out the cordyceps and replanted it took a

toll on its energy, resting lazily in the flower without moving. Liszt couldn't help urging it, "Little guy, there are new Black Tulips next door, aren't you going to taste them?"

Enticed, the Tulip Bug finally crawled out of the flower, along the stem, and continuously climbed upwards until it reached the tip of the leaf.

Just when it looked about to fall, it raised its head and moved towards the air.

A faint glow emitted from its underside as if crawling on something transparent, it "climbed" toward the cluster of Black Tulip flowers nearby.

It wriggled its plump body.

The Tulip Bug sent Liszt a feeling of "excitement" and then started rolling around within the purple-black flowers—this was assimilation.

It signified the Tulip Bug beginning to gather the "pheromones" of the Black Tulip, exerting its abilities on the Black Tulip.

Of course, Liszt preferred to think that the Tulip Bug was collecting different genes to perfect itself.

Once it had gathered enough, it would have the chance to evolve.

At Tulip Castle, there were three Tulip Bugs that evolved into Tulip Lesser Spirits by this method. One was given to Liszt's sister, Li Vera. In Liszt's memory, he envied, resented, and felt jealous of her, and even more so when he was conferred the title of Baron—because he didn't receive a Lesser Spirit.

Chapter 0015: Marcus and the Sneak Attacking Wild Dog

Once the Tulip Spirit Bug completes its assimilation, it can be returned to the Jade Box and kept inside the Castle—what's more, there's no need to feed it Jade Powder anymore; the Cordyceps can absorb nutrients on its own to sustain the Spirit Bug.

The process should take about a day.

Back at the Castle.

Liszt began to write letters.

He unfolded a thick piece of parchment and, dipping the quill in ink, began to trace Serpent Script. With no telephone and no fax, he could only use the most primitive method of letter-writing to communicate.

He planned to write to the Coral Island's Count and the Falcon Town Baron, his father and sister respectively.

The Earl had one Tulip Greater Elf and one Tulip Lesser Spirit, as well as several Tulip Spirit Bugs, while the Baron had a Tulip Lesser Spirit. This meant that the Black Tulips on Liszt's land were vitally important to the Elves, and both the Earl and the Baron would be willing to pay a price to assimilate this new variety.

Here, let alone brothers settling accounts, even fathers and sons must do the same.

"By taking advantage of this assimilation opportunity, perhaps I could obtain a Spirit Bug from the Earl; from the Baron's side, a batch of living supplies." He had already decided what he wanted to trade for.

Elves were the primary source of productivity, and he must not let slip any opportunity to obtain them.

Next came the shortage of living supplies— in reality, the Castle was lacking in everything. Liszt was not a person who lived an ascetic life; he enjoyed his comforts.

"Additionally, I can speak with the Earl about the cultivation and sale of Black Tulips as a specialty item. Black Tulips can only be grown on my land. However, I can entrust the Earl with the selling rights. Hmm, as for the profits, taking a twenty percent share should be no problem... But to fully propagate the Black Tulips, it will still take a year or two before they can be mass-produced."

He paused his writing, pondered for a moment, and continued the letter.

“Maybe I could ask for an advance, no, collect the Earl’s sales agency deposit upfront. I must secure more Gold Coins; it would be hard to develop Fresh Flower Town without start-up capital. Especially the road through Thorn Ridge, a safe and broad path must be cleared; if you want wealth, build the roads first.”

Basically, that was the content.

Once the two letters were written, Marcus had already arrived. The only person fit to deliver the letters, being an Earth Knight, was Marcus—Liszt had not yet studied the Intermediate Dou Qi Manuscript, which left him relatively weak in combat.

“Teacher Marcus, I have two letters here that I need you to deliver for me.”

“At your service,” Marcus replied, his tone slightly different. Before Liszt was promoted to Earth Knight, Marcus would probably have just said “Yes,” but now it was “At your service.”

Liszt noticed this subtle change, but made no particular response: “Also, I need a copy of an Intermediate Dou Qi Manuscript. The ‘Thousand Waves’ at Tulip Castle is not suitable for me. Please bring me the ‘Flaming Wave’ from the Knight Academy, and, uh, ask Butler Louis whether Tulip Castle has any other Fire Attribute Dou Qi Manuscripts.”

“No problem.”

“Rest well tonight, and set off tomorrow. Be careful when crossing Thorn Ridge.” Liszt paused, “Your dappled gray horse isn’t outstanding enough; ride my Fire Dragon Horse instead.”

Marcus bowed in gratitude: “Thank you for the offer, but the dappled gray horse has been through battles with me; it’s an old friend with whom I share a mutual understanding. It’s more fitting for a poor knight like me to ride it.”

“As you wish.”

“If the Baron has no further need of me, I shall take my leave.”

“Please do.”

...

“Good afternoon, Mr. Marcus,” greeted Tom Pigsty, who was carrying buckets of water when he encountered Marcus leaving the Castle.

Marcus nodded slightly: “Good day to you.”

Tom was flattered by the acknowledgement. Normally, neither Marcus nor Goltai would say “Good day” to him. He was just a manservant who did the heavy chores in the Castle, with perhaps only the stable-boy Jessie Asanobu, who was responsible for feeding the horses, chopping wood, and sweeping dung, and kitchen maid Eileen Four Fingers beneath him in status.

He wanted to bow to Marcus, but forgot he had buckets on his shoulders. As he bent over, the carrying pole slipped, and half the water spilled from the buckets.

“Be careful.”

“Oh, yes, of course, Mr. Marcus.”

After Marcus rode off, Thomas emerged from somewhere and said, “You really are all thumbs, spilling half the water from both buckets, Mr. Tom Pigsty. Perhaps the lord should have you feed the pigs—that might suit you better.”

Tom picked up the bucket without looking at Thomas. “I’m going to fetch two more buckets of water.”

He was a head taller than Thomas, but always had the habit of lowering his head.

Thomas sneered, “Other than fetching water, what can you do? No, you can’t even fetch water properly. You are nothing but a laboring manservant for life! I am the master’s personal servant, and sooner or later, I’ll replace Old Carter and become the butler of the castle! When that time comes, you’ll be the first one I send to feed the pigs.”

“You won’t, Mr. Carter is the master’s confidant,” Tom murmured in defense.

“Hmph, the master has already allowed me to accompany him on outings and trusts me. I’m young, and I will replace Old Carter sooner or later!”

“You won’t.” Tom didn’t want to argue anymore and turned away.

After pouring the water from the bucket into the large tank, maid Debbie Window came over to fetch water. She glanced at Thomas, who was loitering outside the castle, “Tom, is Thomas giving you trouble again?”

“It’s nothing.”

“You shouldn’t be afraid of him; he’s nothing special. The master will see your hard work.”

“I know, I’m not afraid of him. The master is very very kind, he sees my hard work, and so does Mr. Carter,” said Tom as he wiped the sweat from his forehead. “But thank you, Debbie, do you need help carrying water upstairs?”

“Won’t it bother you?”

“Not at all, Mr. Carter has arranged light duties for me.”

“Tom, you really are a good person.”

...

Early in the morning, Marcus had his breakfast and fed his dapple-gray horse plenty of beans and hay.

He carefully checked the two letters from Liszt and the five from Goltai, and then glanced at the few words he had written on the thick paper.

These words were reminders to himself so he wouldn’t forget—Liszt needed the Fire Attribute Dou Qi Manuscript, Old Carter had entrusted him to purchase thick paper, Goltai wanted a box of cigars, Retainer Knight Auden Insole had asked him to buy ointment for scabies, and he needed bowstrings for himself.

His bowstring had snapped while struggling with Wind Blade Wolf, and he needed a new one.

Afterward, he cleaned his Knight Spear and One-Handed Sword, counted the feathered arrows in his quiver, and, with everything well prepared, he mounted his horse and left the town, heading towards Thorn Ridge.

Thorn Ridge was a series of rolling hills.

In fact, it should be two hills joined together, with one running north-south and the other east-west, and a little path in the middle being the essential route in and out of Fresh Flower Town.

Within the woods, Magical Beasts roamed.

However, they were not many, especially in this season when food was abundant, and rarely did the beasts venture out. Thus, the path between the hills was relatively safe, and as an Earth Knight, he did not dread common beasts.

He had traveled no more than a mile.

Suddenly, he sensed the presence of a Magical Beast.

“Why have I encountered a Magical Beast again? Last time it was a Wind Blade Wolf, I really am unlucky!” Marcus gripped his Knight Spear, nervously watching the direction from which the Magical Beast’s aura spread.

After waiting for a moment.

The Magical Beast did not show itself.

Marcus narrowed his eyes; a Magical Beast that concealed itself was more dangerous than one that showed itself openly. He patted his dapple-gray horse, pretending to leave to coax the beast into revealing itself.

He had gone about half a mile farther.

The Magical Beast trailing him finally grew impatient and took the initiative to attack. A large figure burst out from the woodland beside the path, launching a ferocious attack.

Marcus, who had been on guard all the way, naturally could not be taken by surprise. Almost simultaneously, he reined his horse around, thrusting his Knight Spear forward in response.

Then, he discerned the appearance of the Magical Beast—it was a gigantic wild dog.