

The Mighty Dragons Are Dead

#Chapter 16 - 0016: The Rising and Falling of Dog Barks - Read The Mighty Dragons Are Dead Chapter 16 - 0016: The Rising and Falling of Dog Barks

Chapter 0016: The Rising and Falling of Dog Barks

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“Fierce Earth Dog!”

Marcus’s heart lurched, and his Knight Spear trembled.

But in the next moment, he suddenly found that his Knight Spear had precisely pierced a small bloody hole in the Fierce Earth Dog’s body. The ferocious lunge of the Fierce Earth Dog was halted by his spear, and it fell heavily to the ground.

The Fierce Earth Dog on the ground tried to turn and pounce again.

But Marcus gave it no chance, discarding the Knight Spear unsuited for close combat, he drew the One-Handed Sword hanging on his horse and hacked wildly at the Fierce Earth Dog.

The strength of an Earth Knight was astonishing, and even his One-Handed Sword had undergone systematic training.

For a time, he chopped at the Fierce Earth Dog, even larger than the Wind Blade Wolf, making it howl in chaos, its scattered retaliations completely lacking in technique. And from beginning to end, the Fierce Earth Dog did not use any magic but simply engaged in a melee with Marcus.

“Why is the most powerful Magical Beast of Thorn Ridge, the Fierce Earth Dog, no different from a common wild beast, so weak?” he wondered with a million doubts in his mind.

But his Longsword did not cease for a moment, and shortly after, the Fierce Earth Dog was severely injured and lay bleeding on the ground.

Barely hanging on to life.

Marcus dared not relax, picking up the Knight Spear from the ground and thrusting it toward the throat of the Fierce Earth Dog.

Pu-chi!

“Whimper...”

The Fierce Earth Dog’s gaze scattered and it breathed its last.

Pulling out the rope he carried, Marcus skillfully tied it around the Fierce Earth Dog’s tail, then mounted his dun horse, speeding back the way he had come. He dared not linger in Thorn Ridge, especially since the blood scent of the Fierce Earth Dog might attract wild beasts, even Magical Beasts.

According to the laws of the nobles, all produce from the territory belonged to the landlord.

Therefore, even though Marcus had killed the Fierce Earth Dog, it belonged to Liszt’s property. He sped along and quickly returned to the two-story castle.

“Teacher Marcus.” Karl Ironhammer was on duty; their Retainer Knights needed to guard the castle’s safety.

“Quick, go inform the Baron, I’ve killed a Magical Beast!”

“What, a Magical Beast!”

Swiftly, the entire castle was stirred, whether Retainer Knights, manservants, maidservants, the butler, or the cook, all followed Liszt to come and see the Magical Beast. Magical Beasts were actually not uncommon, for Tulip Castle had them bred, but in this small place, a Magical Beast was still a rarity.

Moreover, Magical Beasts were valuable, treasures from head to toe!

“Teacher Marcus, is this the King of Thorn Ridge, the powerful low-level Magical Beast called the Fierce Earth Dog?” asked Liszt, his eyes gleaming with deep thought.

“It is indeed a Fierce Earth Dog, under normal circumstances, even two of me might not be able to defeat a Fierce Earth Dog, as it can release Earth Attribute magic—Rock Spike, which is very difficult to defend against, and upon encountering it one can only flee. But the one I have hunted only used wild beast pounce, it did not use magic even once.”

“It didn’t use magic, what do you think is the reason?”

Marcus had clearly pondered during his wait: “I think, I might have encountered a Female Tyrant Earth Hound that had recently given birth. Looking at its abdomen, shriveled and slack, these are postnatal traits, and it is still in the lactation period. Also, I found many bite marks on its body.”

“Lactation period? Bite marks?”

“Here, here, and here, these are all tooth marks; Baron, do you remember the Wind Blade Wolf we encountered earlier? These tooth marks are starting to heal, they are not very clear, but I think they are from the Wind Blade Wolf.”

“So you’re suggesting...” Liszt felt suddenly assured, “This Fierce Earth Dog was attacked by Wind Blade Wolves during its pregnancy, it might have won and given birth to its offspring, but the battle drained its strength and magic power, forcing it to rely on its animal instincts to hunt, and then it encountered you, Teacher Marcus?”

“Very likely.”

Liszt suppressed his excitement and calmly said, “In that case, Teacher Marcus, compared to the valuable corpse of the Fierce Earth Dog, I think its offspring are the real treasure. Are you still able to fight? Join me in searching Thorn Ridge to find the Fierce Earth Dog’s offspring.”

“I am always ready to fight,” Marcus puffed out his chest, then added, “but Thorn Ridge is very dangerous, I alone should go in to search.”

“Together, I am also an Earth Knight.”

“Baron...”

“Don’t forget, nobles, too, need to fight. Just treat this as a practical knight lesson for me,” Liszt declared with righteous fervor.

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In his heart, however, he thought that with the mission reward lying just over there, how could he be content without claiming it.

Moreover, the fact that the weakened Fierce Earth Dog survived and attacked Marcus suggested that there were no Magical Beasts over there threatening its life; otherwise, it would have already become a pile of dung.

No one could stop Liszt's determination.

Marcus placed one hand over his chest and respectfully performed a Knight's salute, expressing his respect for Liszt's courage.

The butler, Old Carter, bent at the waist to bow, "My lord, your courage is armored and sharp, and glory shall surely be with you!"

"Of course."

Liszt donned the Magical Beast Leather Armor and mounted his horse with a heroic bearing, "Let's set out!"

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Two Earth Knights followed by four Retainer Knights galloped off, quickly entering the territory of Thorn Ridge. Guided by Marcus, they reached the spot where he first sensed the Fierce Earth Dog's presence.

"Baron, this is the spot where I felt its presence. The Fierce Earth Dog followed me for about a mile from here before it ambushed me."

"Then, its den must be nearby. Let's start searching."

The mounds of earth rose and fell unevenly, and the woods were in disarray.

The group of six searched for half an hour without finding the den of the Fierce Earth Dog, growing somewhat irritable and disappointed.

"My lord, perhaps the Fierce Earth Dog only passed through here, its den might not be near here, or it might not even have a den," Karl said.

But Liszt firmly stated, "I believe its den is around here."

The confidence in the reward from the Smoke Mission was unyielding; it was his backbone.

After thinking for a moment, he asked, “Does anyone know what a Fierce Earth Dog sounds like?”

“Fierce Earth Dogs are still dogs; their barks are no different than those of ordinary dogs,” Marcus provided the answer.

“Then, Karl, Rom, Gray, Auden, you four must keep imitating the barking of dogs. If there are any young cubs of the Fierce Earth Dog here, they will definitely respond—they probably won’t understand what the imitated barks mean and will think it’s their mother calling for them.”

“Good idea.” Marcus agreed.

So, along with the four Retainer Knights, he imitated a variety of dog barks as they continued to search the area.

A quarter of an hour later.

Marcus suddenly raised his hand, “Silence!”

After everyone fell quiet, he made a gesture of listening intently and whispered, “Baron, listen.”

Liszt concentrated his listening, and after a few seconds, he heard a faint “awoo” sound amid the unknown bird calls. It was unmistakably a dog’s bark.

“It’s over there.”

“Yes, just over there.” Marcus signaled to Karl, “Your imitation is the most realistic, now you keep doing it.”

Karl did as instructed.

Each time he barked, a faint “awoo” would respond from not too far away. Following this puzzling conversation, Liszt and the others finally found the Fierce Earth Dog’s den, concealed within a thicket of bushes.

Pushing aside the entrance’s thatch, Marcus carefully pulled out a very small puppy that had not yet opened its eyes.

He carefully handed the young pup to Liszt, “My lord, this is a young Fierce Earth Dog, a priceless treasure! It hasn’t opened its eyes, and when it does, it will recognize its owner.” Not all Magical Beasts recognize an owner, but canine Magical Beasts do exhibit this behavior trait.

The first thing they see is what they recognize.

Most of the time, what they see is their mother—perhaps recognizing an owner is in essence identifying a mother.

Shivering in Liszt’s arms, the puppy occasionally let out a fearful “awoo,” evidently frightened by the unfamiliar scent on Liszt, which was not the smell of its mother’s milk.

“Just hang in there; soon you’ll be able to drink milk again.” Liszt smoothed the fuzzy fur of the little milk dog and mounted his horse once more, “Let’s return!”

Chapter 0017: Douson and the Dragon Breed Horse

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Because of the Fierce Earth Dog incident, Marcus decided to postpone his departure by one day.

While resting, he told Liszt some precautions about rearing Magical Beasts.

“Magical Beasts, even if they can recognize an owner, are full of danger. They lack concepts of good and evil, right and wrong, and are prone to unpredictable temperaments. Once they master the use of Magic Power, they might inadvertently harm people. Therefore, Baron, in raising the Fierce Earth Dog cub, you need to actively guide and train it.”

“Like the pack of hunting dogs raised in Tulip Castle?”

“Yes, you must train its obedience from a young age, ensuring that it follows your commands. You also need to constantly deplete its Magic Power so that

it expends this energy in training sessions, preventing it from using magic to harm people in normal circumstances. The Fierce Earth Dog's Rock Spike is a very deadly magic."

"How long before it can cast magic?"

"I'm not quite sure. However, the magic of Magical Beasts is generally weak before they reach adulthood. The Fierce Earth Dog can probably mature in about a year and a half, which means you have a year and a half to tame it."

"Very well, I will treat this as a matter of cultivation and persistently train it."

Marcus was evidently in a good mood. After explaining the precautions, he rarely offered some compliments, "Peanut worms, Magic Potion, Magical Beasts—Baron, you're going to give everyone on Coral Island quite a surprise."

Liszt smiled.

The real surprise was still to come.

He asked, "How should I deal with the corpse of the Female Tyrant Earth Hound?"

"Perhaps you should ask Lord Goltai, who once managed the market trade for Earl, about the value of Magical Beasts. He is the most knowledgeable."

"Mr. Carter, please invite Teacher Goltai."

"As you wish, my lord."

Goltai hurried over and upon seeing the Fierce Earth Dog's corpse, he exclaimed loudly, "Wow, what do I see here? Is this the King of Thorn Ridge's Fierce Earth Dog? My goodness, it's a Low-Level Magical Beast, but I feel it emits an aura terrifying like an Intermediate Magical Beast. Marcus, I must admit, you're one of the top Knights on Coral Island."

The most powerful knight on Coral Island was doubtlessly Liszt's father, the Sky Knight, Earl William Lee Tulip, who was also the only knight with Advanced Dou Qi.

The rest were Earth Knights.

As for Magical Beasts on Coral Island, it seems that only the southern shallow water beaches are home to an Intermediate Magical Beast—the Purple Sand Crocodile. The Magical Beasts in other mountains are all Low-Level. The Fierce Earth Dog here in Thorn Ridge is the most powerful among the Low-Level Magical Beasts.

“Teacher Goltai, how should this beast be dealt with?” asked Liszt.

Goltai prodded the Fierce Earth Dog’s corpse with his cane. The calf-sized Fierce Earth Dog, with congealed bloodstains all over, looked quite dreadful, “The fur is ruined; otherwise, the Fierce Earth Dog’s fur is the most precious, worth at least twenty Gold Coins.”

A Gold Coin is the currency of the Duchy of Sapphire, named in honor of the father by the first Sapphire Duke.

“It should still be worth some Gold Coins, right?”

“Only as scraps sold as leather. I guess, perhaps a dishonest merchant might be willing to pay five Gold Coins, or a conscientious merchant might offer ten Gold Coins.”

Goltai continued his analysis, “Its meat, I reckon there’s about six hundred pounds. Market price for Magical Beast meat is typically one silver coin per pound. Fierce Earth Dog meat could likely go for two silver coins per pound, totaling twelve Gold Coins. However, Liszt, you should keep it for yourself to eat, as you need to stabilize your own Dou Qi now.”

“Mr. Goltai is quite right. Selling its meat is not profitable; the Castle usually needs to purchase meat from outside anyway,” Carter interjected, serving as the trusted Butler, he could participate in such discussions.

“Aside from the fur and meat, all that remains are the bones and internal organs. The organs of Magical Beasts can be sold to those stealthy magicians. I know where to find some magicians; they always like to acquire Magical Beast organs and all sorts of mysterious herbs and plants, difficult to say how many Gold Coins. As for the bones, they make good soup.”

At this point, Goltai chuckled, “It’s a pity it’s a bitch. If it had been a male dog, wow, that would have been a great tonic.”

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The difference between a male dog and a female dog is whether it has a penis or not.

Liszt said, "Then let's skin the Fierce Earth Dog, tan the hide, and find time to sell it. Clean the innards as well, pickle them, Teacher Goltai, are there any magicians on Coral Island?"

"It seems there aren't."

"Then let's keep the innards for ourselves to eat in the castle."

"Haha, we're all in for a treat then, praise the generous Baron Liszt!"

...

Night fell.

A small barbecue party was held in the castle.

The servants, Retainer Knights, together with the host Liszt, and two teachers enjoyed the delicious barbecued meat and chatted about the finer things in life.

Liszt actually didn't like such lively occasions very much; he was intrinsically a quiet person.

However, life in the castle was such that most castles were gloomy and living there for a long time could become very oppressive, so it was necessary to find opportunities for release, and parties were the best chance for that.

After having their fill of food and drink.

The servants began cleaning up the messy knives, forks, cutlery, and wine glasses, while Liszt went upstairs, heading straight for the originally vacant entertainment room. The entertainment room had been turned into a den for the young Fierce Earth Dog pup. The little puppy was being raised there until it opened its eyes, to ensure that the first person it saw was Liszt.

So feeding and bathing had to be done by Liszt himself.

The little puppy shivered, so Liszt named it "Douson."

“Hello, Douson, time for milk.” Liszt brought the cowhide bag filled with cow’s milk to Douson’s mouth, its mouth was specially cut in a certain shape.

Smelling the milk, the desire to feed overcame the fear of the unfamiliar scent, and Douson quickly crawled over, fumbled for the mouth of the bag, and then gulped it down.

Despite being only as big as a Teddy dog, it ate with the vigor characteristic of a Magical Beast, gobbling down its food.

In the blink of an eye, Douson had finished a whole bag of milk.

And with that bag of milk.

Douson became familiar with Liszt’s scent, and now when Liszt stroked its fur, not only did Douson not hide, but it also rubbed its head against his palm, showing affection. To the unknowing, it really seemed like Liszt had just raised a common earth dog, not the King of Thorn Ridge, the Magical Beast Tyrant Earth Hound.

“When will you open your eyes?”

As if hearing Liszt’s words, Douson made a soft “wah” sound from its mouth.

Liszt was slightly lost in thought as a wisp of smoke again appeared before his eyes, quickly transforming into a piece of text: “Mission completed, reward: a Fierce Earth Dog pup.”

“Sure enough, Douson is the reward, I’ve already figured out the mechanism behind the Smoke Missions.” he thought to himself.

The Serpent Script in the smoke in front of him had already changed.

“Mission: As an Earth Knight, you are tasked with the heavy responsibility of leading a cavalry charge. Please train with an Intermediate Dou Qi Manuscript to become a true Knight fit for battle. Reward: one Dragon Breed Horse with a trace of dragon blood.”

“Dragon Breed Horse?” Liszt’s eyes lit up.

Dragon Breed Horse.

Liszt was by no means unfamiliar with it.

Because his biological father, Earl William Lee of Coral Island, currently served as the Court Equerry at the court, tending to the Sapphire Duke's beloved steeds, one of which was a divine horse mixed with the bloodline of a dragon.

This world had dragons.

Not the divine dragons of the East, nor the evil dragons of the West, but an unparalleled essence of heaven and earth. These dragons essentially had no gender differentiation and would not mate to produce offspring. However, just as they could produce gemstones and metals, they could also infect other species with the dragon bloodline.

Some enthusiasts, based on rarity, had classified dragons, elves, and magical beasts.

The most precious, of course, were dragons, a symbol of a country.

The next most precious were Dragon Elves, a sign of power for the great nobility.

The next most precious were Greater Elves, a sign of power for the medium nobility.

Then the precious ones were Dragon Breed Magic Beasts, magical beasts mixed with the dragon bloodline.

Then the precious ones were Little Minor Elves, a sign of power for the petty nobility.

Continuing precious were Dragon Breed Beasts, ordinary animals mixed with the dragon bloodline.

The last precious ones were Elf Bugs, representing the foundation of the productive capacity.

Actually, there was another type of elf, equally as precious as dragons—the Elf King, the legendary evolutionary endpoint of Dragon Elves. Its body, the cordyceps, was boundlessly large. A single tree could breed an entire forest, and numerous magical beasts, elves, and even dragons would live on its body of the cordyceps.

However, most people treated the Elf King as a legend.

An Elf Bug might evolve into a Little Minor Elf with one success among dozens; a Little Minor Elf might evolve into a Greater Elf with one success among hundreds; a Greater Elf might evolve into a Dragon Elf with one success among hundreds; as for a Dragon Elf evolving into an Elf King, that had never been heard of.

In his boredom, Liszt had done calculations on the probabilities.

He assumed the probability of an Elf Bug evolving upwards was $1/50$, for a Little Minor Elf it was $1/100$, for a Greater Elf it was $1/500$, and for a Dragon Elf it was $1/1,000$. Therefore, the probability of an Elf Bug evolving into an Elf King was $1/2,500,000,000$, one in two and a half billion.

A one in two and a half billion chance, nearly zero, no wonder no one had ever seen an Elf King.

Looking at the Smoke Serpent Script before him.

Liszt felt his heart igniting with excitement once again. A Dragon Breed Horse was theoretically even more precious than an Elf Bug. Perhaps in terms of prowess, a Dragon Breed Horse might not be able to defeat any magical beast, as it had no magic. But as a rare specimen of the dragon bloodline, its price would not be low.

In this world, anything related to dragons was highly sought after.

Moreover, the bloodline of dragons would enhance the capabilities of the species. A nag mixed with the dragon bloodline instantly became a steed of exceptional quality.

A Dragon Breed Horse was undoubtedly an excellent breed of warhorse.

Why did the Sapphire Duke treasure his Dragon Breed Horse so much, and even the Earl of Coral Island competed for the chance to look after it? It was

because that Dragon Breed Horse was none other than the Blue Blood Treasure Horse, the standard mount for the elite Blueblood Knight Order which boasted a history of two hundred and forty years.

The Blueblood Knight Order fought battles far and wide for the Sapphire Family, earning great military merits, thanks in no small part to their Blue Blood Treasure Horses.

Of course, the Sapphire Duke would ride a Blue Blood Treasure Horse, to draw the Knight Order closer to him, demonstrating solidarity with his knights.

“A Dragon Breed Horse, eh? If I had a Dragon Breed Horse and bred them, could I not also establish a Knight Order as elite as the Blueblood Knight Order?”

The thought alone was very exciting.

However, in Fresh Flower Town, only Liszt, Marcus, and Goltai had Dou Qi. Even if he were given a whole group of Dragon Breed Horses, there would be no shadow of a Knight Order.

The journey is significant and the path is long.

A moment later, he came back to his senses, the smoke serpent script before his eyes had disappeared. Looking at Douson, who had returned to his nest to sleep, he suddenly felt that the Knight Order was too far away, but living a life where he could ride dragon breed horses, lead magical beast dogs, and go hunting everywhere was still easily attainable.

“Tomorrow, Marcus will return to Coral City, and he also needs to go to Falcon Town, so he’ll be back in about three days. Then, I will be able to cultivate with the Dou Qi Manuscript and complete the task.” Liszt stood up and left the entertainment room.

...

Marcus once again left Fresh Flower Town.

Liszt wouldn’t just wait around in the castle. Once he had fully recovered, he couldn’t sit still. First thing in the morning, he arrived at Fresh Flower Farm, where the tulip bugs on the black tulips were nearly finished with assimilation.

“It should take about two more hours.” After checking on the tulip bugs, Liszt mounted his horse and headed straight for Peanut Hamlet, where his peanut bugs were still breeding.

Karl Ironhammer was standing guard there: “My lord!”

“How are my peanut bugs doing?”

“They’re still sleeping. Old George brings people to water it with lots of manure every day, the peanut cordyceps are growing very well.”

“Strictly protect the peanut bugs, I don’t want anything to happen to them.”

“Rest assured, my lord!”

Leaving Peanut Hamlet and returning to Fresh Flower Farm, after waiting half an hour, the tulip bugs successfully completed assimilation. Retrieving the tulip bugs, Liszt could feel their joy and a new breath on them, which was the aura of the black tulips, indicating that the tulip bugs could now affect the black tulips.

From birth, Tulip Castle had arranged for all elf bugs to assimilate as many compatible varieties as possible to increase their strength.

Liszt’s own tulip bug had already assimilated all the varieties of tulips planted by the Tulip Family.

“Having assimilated the black tulip, why do I feel that the tulip bug is a bit ‘agitated’? Could it be thinking about evolving?” A bold thought crossed his mind.

He quickly dismissed it.

The tulip bug he obtained was one of the weaker ones among the Tulip Family’s tulip bugs, so the likelihood of it evolving was extremely low.

A new variety of magic potion was not enough to make it evolve.

Having retrieved the tulip bug, he handed it over to Butler Carter for care—the cordyceps had been planted, and elf bugs, even without eating or drinking, would not die; they were easy to take care of.

Liszt soon joined Goltai and went to the dairy farm.

“We have a lot of alfalfa seeds, and I plan to start here by gradually removing the two-leaf clovers and planting alfalfa. Once we scale up, we will be able to plant alfalfa cordyceps, the cows will also adapt to the new forage, and we can concentrate on leading the horses here for feeding.”

Cordyceps must be surrounded by the same variety of plants; otherwise, they cannot absorb nutrients and will wither.

The cultivation of alfalfa cordyceps was easy to solve, and Liszt had nothing to add: “Let’s implement Teacher Goltai’s plan, but how have you decided to arrange the millet bugs and thorn bugs?”

“For the millet bugs, I plan to first clear a piece of wasteland and plant millet to see if it can survive. As for the thorn bugs, we can only try to make it work in the thorn forest of Thorn Ridge. Liszt, I don’t think thorn bugs are very useful.”

Thorns are a small, spiky shrub.

They are often used for fences. Many nobles like to plant a circle of thorns around their estates as a green hedge. Liszt also felt that thorn bugs weren’t very useful; at most, they could cultivate a spiked hedge for the castle to protect the estate from small animals—As for magical beasts, a single wind blade from a Wind Blade Wolf could chop down a large swath of thorns.

The fire dragon horse leisurely ate the two-leaf clovers.

Liszt, looking at the few skinny cows not far away, said, “Regardless, elf bugs are a vital productive force, and we must find the right place for them to grow.”

Chapter 0019 The Long Taro Family of Red Crab Island

The milk produced by the dairy farm was a rare luxury in Fresh Flower Town. Originally, the milk from the dairy farm was used to produce milk powder, and every three months, it was given to Coral Island’s Count as a form of taxation.

After Liszt arrived, the milk was sent to the castle daily.

There were a total of ten dairy cows.

Among them, three were not yet two years old and had not started producing milk yet; two old dairy cows were no longer able to produce milk; one male dairy cow was also unable to produce milk; only four adult female dairy cows could produce some milk daily. It was unclear whether the breed of dairy cows was not up to par or if their diet wasn't good enough, but their milk production was very low.

"Dahua, at her peak milk production, could be milked three times a day and produce 20 kilograms of fresh milk; Little Hua, during the off-peak period for milk, could only yield 4 kilograms per day; Dahei was also in the off-peak period, at 5 kilograms a day; Dahuang was currently in the dry period," the steward, an old man, said. He wasn't very old, but his back was bent, and he looked quite aged.

Liszt approached one of the dairy cows, which was very docile and eating grass slowly.

"Will you continue to raise the cows that can't produce milk?"

"Zhuangzhuang needs to ensure that all the female dairy cows can conceive, so we must keep it. Little Hua, Little Black, and Little Yellow are still young and won't be able to conceive and produce milk until next year. Old Hua and Old Black have already aged, and we have reported to Lord Landlord that they can be slaughtered for meat at any time," the old steward said respectfully.

Little Hua, Little Black, and Little Yellow are the names of the underage dairy cows.

Little Hua, Little Black are the names of the newly adult dairy cows.

Dahua, Dahei, Dahuang are the names of the adult dairy cows.

Old Hua, Old Black are the names of the elderly dairy cows.

Zhuangzhuang is the name of the male dairy cow.

Liszt recalled that Butler Carter had mentioned to him some time ago that there were two old dairy cows on the farm that could be slaughtered for meat at any time. Feeding a cow that could not produce milk for an extra day was

equivalent to wasting food for an extra day. Usually, they would be slaughtered immediately—it was ruthless to think that dairy cows that had produced milk their whole lives had to contribute their meat in old age.

Since the castle wasn't hosting any large banquets at the moment and the meat supplies brought in were still sufficient, the two old dairy cows continued to be raised on the dairy farm.

“Is the farm's pasture enough for the dairy cows to eat?”

“Yes, Lord Landlord, we only have ten dairy cows, but we have 150 acres of pasture.”

“Old Steward, how many acres of pasture do you think are enough to sustain ten dairy cows?”

“Reporting to Lord Landlord, a dairy cow needs ten acres of pasture to be sustained. However, we often take the dairy cows out to the wild fields to graze, so only eight acres of pasture are actually needed to sustain one.”

“Eight acres per cow, ten cows need eighty acres. Well then, Teacher Goltai, start by clearing seventy acres of two-leaf clover and replanting it with alfalfa,” Liszt said.

“No problem, leave it to me,” Goltai assured, patting his chest.

Goltai had started to feel some sense of crisis due to Liszt's decisive and swift approach during the population census project, and his work attitude had finally become more serious. He realized that Liszt was not the type of noble who was ostentatious and indulgent but rather one who was pragmatic and down to earth. To gain power, he would have to change his style.

...

Feed Douson.

Inspect for peanut worms.

Two days passed in the blink of an eye, and the third day was a rainy one.

It was deep into spring, and summer had not yet arrived. The rain was as precious as oil, and agricultural production in all the hamlets was busily moving forward. The seeds for the alfalfa grass had been sown, and

cornfields were marked out from the wilderness in preparation for cultivation. There was still no progress with Thorn Forest; they had to wait for Marcus to return from Thorn Ridge to search.

The fourth day.

After having lunch in the castle, Butler Carter hurried into the study, "Master, Mr. Marcus has returned and is waiting outside the castle for your summons."

"Please have him come in."

"Baron, Mr. Marcus sends his regards!" The travel-worn Marcus arrived with the two Intermediate Dou Qi Manuscripts Liszt had been expecting.

One was the familiar "Flaming Wave", and the other was the "Fire Dragon Drill" obtained from Tulip Castle.

After receiving the two manuscripts, Liszt turned to ask, "Teacher Marcus, what was the response from the Earl and Baron to my letters?"

"Here are the replies from the Earl and Baron, and also the ten Naldas exchanged for the Fierce Earth Dog pelts."

"Please take a seat, Teacher Marcus; I will read the letters first."

The first one he opened was the reply from Coral Island's Count. The letter was brief due to the thick papyrus not allowing for many words. Li Weiliam Tulip replied to Liszt, prepared to send someone soon to complete the assimilation of the Black Tulip and to discuss the sale of it as well.

He also promised to purchase a batch of scarce supplies for Liszt as a deposit for the transaction.

The other was the reply from the Baron of Falcon Town. Li Vera replied to Liszt, congratulating him on discovering a new variety of Tulips and would accompany the Earl to exchange supplies for the right of assimilation.

The replies were official and courteous.

Lacking the warmth of kinship, the relationship between the three siblings, who had lost their mother, the First Lady of the Earl, had gradually grown cold. The Earl, disheartened by Liszt's appearance, had become even more detached.

“But that’s also good, I can accept this kind of lukewarm emotion. Being too affectionate, on the other hand, I cannot stand,” Liszt reflected with slight emotion after reading the letters.

Putting down the letters.

Liszt spoke gently, “Thank you for your efforts, Teacher Marcus. Did you encounter anything new on your journey?”

“Coral Island is as tranquil as ever, and there’s no war in the Grand Duchy. However, there is something that might be considered news—it’s regarding the maternal clan of the Baron.”

“My maternal clan?”

Liszt had almost forgotten that his mother came from a family just as noble and inquired, “What happened at Long Taro Castle?”

“The Lord of Long Taro Castle, the Marquis of Red Crab Island, has resigned from his post as Captain of the Court Fleet due to illness and has returned to Red Crab Island. The Earl is preparing to send someone to visit, and it’s likely this will be discussed with the Baron when the envoy arrives to assimilate the Black Tulip.”

“Perhaps,” Liszt searched through the host’s memories, recalling Long Taro Castle in his mind.

The Grand Duchy of Sapphire was an archipelago with many Nobles distributed across its numerous islands, both large and small. Among them was a large island called Red Crab Island, the domain of the Long Taro Family, whose hereditary title was Marquis of Red Crab Island—Merlin Taro, Liszt’s grandfather.

The surname of the Long Taro family originated from the Greater Elf of Long Taro they possessed.

They lived in Long Taro Castle, a fortress far more grand and luxurious than Tulip Castle, splendid and magnificent, perched upon the mountains.

Marquis Merlin had one son and two daughters: his eldest son, Mesiro; his second daughter, Melinda; and his youngest daughter, Melissa Taro, who was Liszt’s mother.

When Li Weiliam Tulip was still a Viscount, Marquis Merlin foresaw his potential and married his youngest daughter, Melissa, to the Tulip Family. From this union came Levis, Li Vera, and Liszt. Up till now, Liszt had visited Long Taro Castle every year to celebrate his grandfather's birthday.

However, since Li Weiliam remarried to a new Countess, the relation between the Long Taro and Tulip families had gradually become distant.

But no matter what, Merlin Taro was still Liszt's grandfather.

As a descendant, it was proper to visit an ailing grandfather.

Chapter 0020 Peanut Worm and Fire Dragon Assault

After sending off the tired Marcus, Liszt pulled his thoughts from the past. While it was true that a noble's major responsibility was to expand their connections, and the Long Taro Family was an important resource for him, he was not one for diplomacy. He preferred staying on his land, amusing himself with self-sufficiency.

"I should first practice the Dou Qi Manuscript and complete the Smoke Mission," he said to himself.

He first opened "Flaming Wave", which detailed through numerous illustrations and descriptions how to strengthen Fire Attribute Dou Qi and how to channel it for executing powerful moves. "Flaming Wave" favored sweeping, expansive attacks, with most techniques radiating outwards like waves; it was a manuscript for area attacks.

"Area attacks, huh? Good for charging into battle, but isn't that what my Knight Order is for? I just need to command from the back," he mused.

With that thought, Liszt opened "Fire Dragon Drill".

This manual was for one-on-one combat, with powerful moves designed for single targets, and lacked a bit for charging into battle. However, Liszt quickly decided to train in "Fire Dragon Drill"; compared to going into battle, he was

more worried about assassin attacks, and the one-on-one “Fire Dragon Drill” suited him better than the area-focused “Flaming Wave”.

“That’s settled then... Once I have the time, I can look into “Flaming Wave” as well,” he concluded contentedly.

In this world, there were no divine martial arts secrets; when training in Dou Qi, there were no particularly poor manuals nor especially powerful ones. Everything depended on the individual’s talent and comprehension.

Extraordinary warriors could emerge from commoners, and descendants of powerful people could become mediocre.

...

In the following time, Liszt diligently trained in “Fire Dragon Drill” while waiting for the merchant caravan to arrive.

Time flew, and three days passed.

The rain had stopped.

Good news came one after another.

The Elf Bugs in Peanut Hamlet were nearly ripe. Retainer Knight Karl Ironhammer excitedly reported, “My lord, the husks of the peanuts have cracked open, revealing pink Elf Bugs inside, about to awaken. They’re starting to quiver.”

“Is that so? I’m on my way!” Liszt said.

By the time Liszt arrived on horseback, the husks had fully bloomed, revealing a chubby Elf Bug, its body glistening like jade, crawling curiously over the cordyceps, filled with boundless curiosity about the world.

The farmers of Peanut Hamlet gathered around, watching the Elf Bug with both curiosity and anxiety.

Liszt took out the Jade Powder he carried with him and sprinkled it before the Elf Bug. The bug sniffed at it and quickly began to munch. In no time, it finished the Jade Powder on the leaves and climbed up Liszt’s outstretched finger, following the scent, and nibbled on the powder coated there.

Then, with a slight pain, the Elf Bug bit through Liszt's finger.

In that moment, a spiritual bond formed between Liszt and the Elf Bug—a master-servant contract had been established. Elf Bugs, with their innate magic, naturally carried the ability to form master-servant contracts.

“Come with me, little guy.”

Liszt cradled the Elf Bug, placed it into the Jade Box, and prepared to take it back to the castle for raising, leaving the cordyceps in Peanut Hamlet.

“The fifth Elf Bug acquired. With the Elf Bug, a bountiful harvest for Peanut Hamlet is imminent,” Liszt thought with a buoyant heart. He couldn't help but instruct Old George, “Old George, take good care of the Elf Bug cordyceps. Remember to water and fertilize; the more fertilizer you use, the higher the peanut yield.”

“Rest assured, Lord Landlord, we'll do exactly as you've instructed—regularly watering, weeding, and fertilizing the peanuts!”

With the Elf Bug collected.

Another piece of good news knocked on the door: the Fierce Earth Dog puppies, raised in the castle, had finally opened their eyes on the seventh day under Liszt's care. Seeing Liszt at first sight, they yapped and rushed towards him, affectionately nuzzling his pant leg.

“Douson, from now on, you'll be living outside the castle,” Liszt told the puppy.

Holding the leash around Douson's neck, Liszt called for Thomas.

“My lord.”

“Thomas, I'm giving you a task, take care of Douson for me. By the way, has Douson's kennel been built yet?”

“It has been completed, my lord.” Thomas took the leash, ready to lead Douson to his kennel.

Though Douson had recognized Liszt as his master, it did not mean he would acknowledge anyone else. When Thomas led him, the barely a month old Fierce Earth Dog pup immediately bared its teeth and growled “woo woo,” fiercely pouncing to tear at Thomas's shoes with considerable wildness.

Yet, with nothing but little milk teeth, Douson could not bite through Thomas's shoes,

"Take good care of it."

"Please be assured, my lord, I have experience in raising hunting dogs."

"Fierce Earth Dogs are much more dangerous than hunting dogs. They have the bloodline of magical beasts. But it's okay; it shouldn't go mad. When it gets a little bigger, I will train it every day until it is exhausted."

After arranging a caretaker for Douson,

Liszt climbed to the castle's spire and surveyed the barren land several miles around the castle—he had always neglected that there was actually arable land around the castle but had merely turned a few acres next to the castle into a small garden, letting the rest grow wild with grass.

"Peanut Hamlet, Tomato Hamlet, Mushroom Hamlet, Barley Hamlet, Little Wheat Village, Dairy Farm, Fresh Flower Farm, as well as the town and the castle. In fact, Fresh Flower Town has nine hamlets, and each must be utilized... But without mechanization, and with less than two thousand people in Fresh Flower Town, it does seem impossible to cultivate so much land, doesn't it?"

Machines can tirelessly reclaim land, but human labor is very slow.

Less than two thousand people to cultivate tens of thousands of acres of land is indeed daunting. Many fields are merely sowed with seeds, left to survive or perish on their own.

"African agriculture must be like this, right? Population, oh population, only population is the most valuable resource! But where can I get enough people?"

"It's a bit difficult."

Despite the difficulty, Liszt still had confidence that Fresh Flower Town could grow and prosper. As a transmigrator with a golden finger, if he couldn't achieve even this, he might as well jump off a building and not disgrace other transmigrators.

...

“Fire Dragon Assault!”

In the small garden in front of the castle, Liszt, holding a one-handed sword, executed a move from “Fire Dragon Drill”. A flame suddenly ignited along the blade of the sword, roaring and expanding to a meter wide, like a fan stoking fires, with sparks flying and accompanied by the faint sound of crackling.

The flame did not truly exist, it was merely the effect of Dou Qi clinging to the one-handed sword.

Liszt’s fire attribute Dou Qi had an explosive nature.

Even within the same type of Dou Qi, different properties would be emphasized. Just as with fire attribute Dou Qi, his focused on explosiveness, while others’ might focus on high temperature, intensity of the flames, or refinement.

“Finally, I’ve mastered the Fire Dragon Assault. Now only the last move is left—Heart of the Fire Dragon Drill. Once mastered, I can claim the reward!”

He felt quite proud in his heart.

His talent was indeed strong. The “Fire Dragon Drill” was divided into two sets of skills, one that refined the method of circulating Dou Qi, and another consisted of sixteen attack moves. The method of circulating Dou Qi had come easily to Liszt, and now he was learning the sixteen attack moves.

“Others take at least half a month to learn a manuscript, but here I am, less than a week has passed, and I’m nearly finished.”

“It’s hard to imagine the predecessor did not break through to become an Earth Knight before adulthood. Could it be his comprehension was too poor?”

If the physical talent was not poor, then it could only be an issue of comprehension. The Liszt from before adulthood probably just hadn’t had his mental breakthrough. As for the current Liszt, he wouldn’t dare claim to be extraordinarily intelligent, but he was definitely not foolish.

“Keep studying and strive to master the Heart of the Fire Dragon Drill today.”