

The Mighty Dragons Are Dead

#Chapter 21 - 0021: Wild Corn is Delicious - Read The Mighty Dragons Are Dead Chapter 21 - 0021: Wild Corn is Delicious

Chapter 0021: Wild Corn is Delicious

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A set of Dou Qi operation methods, which include how to refine Dou Qi, strengthen Dou Qi, condense Dou Qi, release Dou Qi, and attach Dou Qi. A set of combat techniques comprising sixteen moves.

Five movements related to body methods: Dragon Charge, Dragon Leap, Dragon Jump, Dragon Flight, Dragon Dive.

Five basic moves: Fire Dragon Stab, Fire Dragon Crash, Fire Dragon Smash, Fire Dragon Twist, Fire Dragon Drill.

Five fierce moves: Fire Dragon Tail Swing, Fire Dragon Sweep, Fire Dragon Gust, Fire Dragon Roll, Fire Dragon Assault.

One ultimate mystery technique: Heart of the Fire Dragon Drill.

This is the entirety of “Fire Dragon Drill”, each move’s name is quite intriguing, as if it’s part of a series with his Fire Dragon Horse mount.

At this moment.

Liszt was riding on the back of the Fire Dragon Horse. As the Fire Dragon Horse galloped, his body slightly rose and fell, almost as if he and the horse were one. In his left hand, he held a shield made of fine steel in front of him, partially covering the Fire Dragon Horse. His right hand was stretched out with an over-three-meter-long Knight Spear.

Near the castle, the grass had been cut away, revealing the yellow soil—the barren loess land.

The hooves of the Fire Dragon Horse stepped on the somewhat moist ground, leaving uneven hoofprints, its body turning into a red fiery mass as it rapidly dashed into the distance. On the horse's back, Liszt, with Dou Qi radiating all around him, attached it to the shield and the Knight Spear, as well as the Fire Dragon Horse.

Soon, the rider and horse were completely enveloped in flames.

Accompanied by a loud shout from Liszt, "Heart of the Fire Dragon Drill!"

The Fire Dragon Horse leapt high, the Knight Spear thrust forward fiercely. In an instant, countless merged shadows of the rider and the horse followed the attack, swiftly passing by and striking directly at a huge boulder ahead.

Earth-shattering blow!

Boom!

A man-high boulder was instantly shattered into dust. Flames wildly scattered everywhere, mingling with the debris to fall like raindrops. Once the dust had settled, Liszt, still on the Fire Dragon Horse, had already moved beyond the explosion's radius. He was ensconced in full body armor, as was the Fire Dragon Horse.

The full body armor was silver-white, with numerous scratches and black marks on it.

Lifting the faceplate off his helmet, Liszt's handsome face emerged, his corners of the mouth slightly curled in a smile as usual, "Not bad for the impact, this move, if it hits, should be able to severely cripple a Fierce Earth Dog or some such Magical Beast."

Clop, clop, clop, clop, clop.

The sound of horse hooves grew louder as they approached. Marcus and Goltai, each riding a horse, came galloping over, followed by Liszt's four Retainer Knights.

“Oh, God, Liszt, you are truly a genius. I have seen it, is that the ultimate mystery technique of the “Fire Dragon Drill”, Heart of the Fire Dragon Drill? You’ve learned this entire manuscript in less than a week?” Goltai always spoke with a tone of astonishment.

Marcus circled the scattered debris of rocks, equally amazed, “The impact was very even, not a single piece of debris is larger than a fist, proving you’ve mastered this move. Most Earth Knights would find that very hard to do.”

Having said that, he took a disbelieving look at Liszt.

In the past, the third son of the Earl’s family was considered an utter waste. He had been well-fed with chicken, fish, meat, eggs, milk, and even tasted Magical Beast Meat, yet his Dou Qi cultivation was inferior even to that of commoner Knights. Unbelievably, after advancing to Earth Knight, in less than a week, he had fully mastered an Intermediate Dou Qi Manuscript.

It made him recall his own time training with the Gale Breaker, which took him a whole month and a half just to master the final ultimate mystery technique.

His heart was filled with mixed feelings, “Could this be the real difference between commoners and Nobles?”

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Liszt handed the shield and the Knight Spear to the Retainer Knights, and while he was at it, he also took off his helmet, breathing in the fresh air, his excitement hadn’t subsided yet, “I originally thought it would take me several months to master “Fire Dragon Drill”, but it turned out to be not that difficult. It looks like I can find time to learn “Flaming Wave” as well, the more skills, the better.”

“With your talent, you should indeed learn a few more secret tomes, Liszt. I’ve always said that you have your father’s flair, and you will surely bring glory to the Tulip Family in the future.”

“Let’s hope your words come true, Teacher Goltai.”

On the way back, Goltai engaged in spirited conversation with Liszt, which was his forte. Marcus, on the other hand, seemed to have his mind wander off, lost in thought.

It wasn't until he entered the Castle for dinner and distractedly finished his meal that Liszt saw him out, and he finally snapped back to reality.

Waiting for Goltai to ride away, humming a tune.

He looked at Liszt, who still stood at the Castle's entrance, as if waiting for him to speak, and said in a solemn tone, "Baron, may I know where your sights are set?"

"My sights, you ask..."

Liszt thought to himself that Marcus was inquiring whether he had any ambition for achievements. Marcus, who aspired to be a Noble, would naturally not be content to stay coiled up in a small town, following a Baron without great ambitions.

But Liszt did not answer directly, "Teacher Marcus, for a person, do not listen to what he says, watch what he does. Words spoken can be true or false, but the deeds done are crystal clear, aren't they?"

"I understand!"

All of a sudden, Marcus knelt on one knee, placed his right hand on his chest, and gave a salute of loyalty, "I pledge my service as your vanguard!"

"Please rise, Teacher Marcus. The territory is still fragile; I need you to help me build it up." Liszt calmly helped Marcus to his feet, feeling a great sense of achievement within. To win the loyalty of an Earth Knight, that was personal charisma.

Back in the Castle.

After taking a bath.

He saw the Smoke Serpent Script again, "Task completed, reward one horse with a trace of Dragon Breed lineage."

Shortly, the smoke twisted, and a new task was issued, "Task: The fresh and tender Alfalfa is favored not only by dairy cows but also by horses. It is the foundation for starting a horse farm and the first step toward building achievements. Please arrange for Cordyceps for the Alfalfa Bug. Reward: Three wild corn plants."

Upon reading the Serpent Script, Liszt was quite excited.

The Dragon Breed Horse had already arrived, though he did not yet know where or who had discovered it; he planned to go find it the very next morning. However, right now, he was thrilled not by the Dragon Breed Horse but by the reward of corn for the new task.

This world did not have corn as a crop, at least not on Coral Island, and there was no memory of any corn-related plants in his predecessor's recollections.

“Corn, such a high-yield crop, said to have the highest per-acre yield in the world, right? And it doesn't need much tending; just plant it, and it grows by itself. It is even said to be a divine plant, naturally C4 with easy male sterility, and in the future, corn will dominate the world of grains. In “Interstellar”, the nearly extinct human race grew only corn.”

Having farmed in his childhood, Liszt knew corn had a high yield, though its taste wasn't as good as wheat or rice.

But here, it didn't need to taste the best, as long as it could fill stomachs, it would be the best crop. The wheat yield in Fresh Flower Town was only a couple of hundred pounds per acre. Once corn was planted, even if it didn't produce thousands of pounds per acre, as long as the yield exceeded five hundred pounds, it could sustain a larger population, ensuring no worries about food and clothing.

When that time comes.

Widely planting corn to provide rough cornmeal for the common folk. Planting a small amount of wheat to provide fine wheat flour for oneself, wouldn't that be delightful?

Chapter 0022: The Nearly Castrated Li Dragon Horse

Before Liszt could give the order to search for the dragon breed horse, Goltai, who was responsible for changing the alfalfa on the dairy farm, hurried to the castle early in the morning.

“Liszt, great news has arrived! The newly planted alfalfa has sprouted and is growing quite nicely. Most importantly, a wild horse has somehow been attracted by it and is eating the alfalfa. That wild horse is extremely majestic, oh, even more robust and tall than your Fire Dragon Horse!”

“Summon Teacher Marcus, and let’s head over to the dairy farm together to have a look at this wild horse. Having eaten the alfalfa grass, it should be ready to trade itself for its board, right?”

“Exactly, its board fee will be itself, haha.”

Everything on the estate belongs to the landlord; without a doubt, this wild horse is Liszt’s private property.

The group quickly arrived at the dairy farm, and indeed, there was a black wild horse leisurely eating the newly sprouted alfalfa in the pasture that should have belonged to the dairy cows. The wild horse was tall and shiny with a majestic form, and its muscles were visibly striated.

“Teacher Marcus, you are an expert in judging horses, what do you think of this wild horse?”

The wild horse had already spotted Liszt and the others but seemed to be quite bold; seeing that they did not approach, it lowered its head again and continued to graze leisurely.

Marcus’s eyes shone with excitement as he said, “My lord, what an excellent steed! Its bones are fine but the frame is large, and its muscles are beautifully bulging. Its limbs are long, and so are its tendons. The neck is straight and leans forward, and its rump is shapely. Its coat is also very shiny, indicating it has no ailments. Most importantly, its gaze is sharp!”

“How does it compare to the Blue Blood Treasure Horse?”

“I apologize, my lord, I have not seen a Blue Blood Treasure Horse. The best horse I have seen is the Earl’s Panther, which is said to have a blend of the Magical Beast, the dry tinder leopard’s bloodline. But the Panther is nowhere near as majestic as this wild horse.”

A horse with a white forehead is called a Panther (dí).

Liszt was certainly familiar with the Panther, the mount of Coral Island's Count.

The black wild horse before him had an air that far surpassed the Panther's; after all, dragons were the most sacred of creatures, and a dragon breed horse was the most respected among horses.

"How can we capture it?"

Marcus said, "I could flip it with my bare hands, after all, it's just a horse. However, my lord wishes it to be his mount, so you should subdue it personally. A wild horse only submits to someone who can master it."

Liszt didn't plan to tame the dragon breed horse for himself, he was more eager for the dragon breed horse to become a true stud and breed a herd of dragon breed horses for him.

But taming a dragon breed wild horse was an interesting thing, and Liszt did not let Marcus do the job for him.

He approached the wild horse himself.

As he drew closer, the grazing wild horse immediately became alert, turned around, and glared fiercely at Liszt as if warning him not to cross the line.

As Liszt kept getting closer, the wild horse finally lost its patience and directly tried to bite him.

With a twist of his body and good horsemanship, Liszt instantly flipped onto the back of the wild horse. The wild horse, feeling the immense shame of being ridden, frantically thrashed, hopping and jumping around trying to throw Liszt off. But Liszt, holding its neck and with his Dou Qi bursting forth, was not swayed in the least.

An Earth Knight could withstand a real Magical Beast; let alone a horse.

Half an hour later, the tired wild horse finally stopped struggling, panting and standing still, allowing Liszt to ride it and command it to move left and right.

Wiping the sweat from his forehead, Liszt laughed heartily, "A very stubborn fellow, pure black in color, truly not a single hair of a different shade. Let's just call you Li Dragon."

A pure black horse is called a Li (lí).

And with its thin dragon bloodline, being named Li Dragon is quite fitting.

"Karl, bring some bran cakes." Liszt dismounted; though taming a wild horse was not too challenging, it was indeed very taxing, and he was covered in sweat.

At that moment, the Fire Dragon Horse also came over; it was a young female.

While rubbing Li Si Te's shoulder and with wide-open eyes, he observed the towering Li Dragon Horse next to him. The Li Dragon Horse, however, didn't even deign to look at the Fire Dragon Horse; it continued to hold its head high, refusing to ingratiate itself with Li Si Te, and still retained a hint of haughtiness.

Even when Li Si Te took a bran biscuit and fed it to the horse, it did not show any affection.

"My Lord, the Li Dragon Horse is an adult, and if it is to be raised as a war horse, it would be best to geld him to prevent him from becoming thin during the mating season," said Marcus.

"Geld him?" Li Si Te waved his hand, "That won't do. I've decided the Li Dragon Horse shall serve as a stud to breed a herd for Fresh Flower Town. Such a magnificent steed should not be prevented from propagating its lineage; that would be a tremendous loss."

"To be a stud horse?" Marcus nodded, agreeing with the decision.

Even though he didn't know that the Li Dragon Horse was a Dragon Breed Horse, he could still recognize its exceptional qualities. Indeed, it would have been a pity to geld such a horse.

The Li Dragon Horse, oblivious to the fate it had just avoided, contentedly nibbled on the bran biscuit, returning to its original leisure.

From time to time, it would graze on the alfalfa grass on the ground.

Goltai wanted to step forward and touch it but was startled by the Li Dragon Horse's snort and had to awkwardly change the subject: "Where did the Li Dragon Horse come from, did it walk over from Thorn Ridge?"

"Perhaps there are more Li Dragon Horses in Thorn Ridge... It's strange to think that there are wild horses on the island," Marcus speculated.

Horses typically live in vast grasslands.

With insufficient grasslands on Coral Island for wild horses to live, the natural breeding of wild horses seemed impractical.

"Maybe they drifted here from another place, or perhaps the horses previously raised by the islanders have gone wild. In any case, it couldn't have just appeared out of nowhere. Moreover, Li Si Te, I think that perhaps in a few days, more Li Dragon Horses might emerge from Thorn Ridge, and by then, we might truly have a Li Dragon Horse Herd."

"That would be for the best."

Li Si Te also had his doubts.

He didn't know whether to believe that the Li Dragon Horse naturally lived in this land or if some entity behind the Smoke Mission had conjured up a Li Dragon Horse—he was inclined to think the Li Dragon Horse had always lived here, and the Smoke Mission was merely a trigger rather than a clumsy creation.

As for what the Smoke Mission truly was, there was no way to unravel it for the time being.

He had to suppress his curiosity and leave it for a future resolution.

Looking at the fresh and tender alfalfa grass forming a beautiful pasture, he suddenly thought of the wasteland outside the castle: "Teacher Goltai, what do you think about planting alfalfa on the wastelands around the castle? We could build a track outside the castle and raise a Li Dragon Horse Herd."

"Hmm, that should be feasible. Why not give it a try?"

"Then I'll leave it to Teacher Goltai."

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Li Si Te rode the Li Dragon Horse back to the castle.

Goltai and Marcus also prepared to return on their own. Along the way, Goltai suddenly asked, "Marcus, you're now addressing Li Si Te as 'My Lord'?"

"Yes."

"That doesn't seem like your character, making a decision so quickly."

"I don't have many choices, Mr. Goltai," Marcus said, looking into the distance where the small castle shone brilliantly in the sunlight, "Besides, don't you always say that he has the air of an Earl about him? I believe he won't stay hidden away in Fresh Flower Town, this remote place, forever."

"Perhaps," Goltai said noncommittally.

Chapter 0023: The Arriving Convoy

The farmers who were idle at the dairy farm were summoned by Liszt to reclaim the wasteland surrounding the castle and to grow alfalfa.

Originally, according to Goltai's opinion, the serfs as landlords, should come to work unconditionally.

Liszt was not that exploitative, he decided to provide the farmers with three meals a day, whereas commoners usually only had two, hence, people scrambled to come and work.

He allotted a portion of the surplus wheat bran from the castle, distributing it to the working farmers. Wheat bran is the husk separated from the wheat and in Liszt's position, only the fine wheat flour was consumed while the bran was typically used to feed horses, yet it was consumed by the commoners. The bran cakes he previously used to feed horses were in fact the food eaten by many farmer families.

"It's said that the nutritional value of wheat bran is higher than that of wheat flour," Liszt recalled in his previous life he had bought bran cakes, and the

sellers claimed that the bran contained a wealth of dietary fiber and B vitamins that could improve constipation and reduce cholesterol, “but the bran is indeed hard to eat and to digest.”

As a noble, he was not lacking in nutrition, so there was no need to force himself to eat the coarse bran.

Naturally, nobles ate white bread.

Here, bread was the absolute staple, and according to different materials and textures, it could be divided into nine grades. Four grades of white bread and five grades of brown bread.

The highest-quality white bread, made from finely sifted and selected wheat flour, was only something great nobles could afford the wealth, materials, and labor to produce. The price of such white bread was astonishing as well, costing at least several silver coins for one loaf.

The slightly inferior white bread was made from sifted fine wheat flour, which, due to the removal of coarse particles, had a very fine texture. It usually sold for one silver coin per loaf.

The next level of white bread was made from unsifted fine wheat flour. The texture was slightly worse, and one silver coin could buy two or three loaves.

The lowest grade white bread was made from coarse wheat flour; it was simply processed flour that tasted a bit worse, and ten copper coins could buy one loaf. The white bread that Liszt currently ate was of this grade, while the bread eaten in Tulip Castle was of the level above.

Commoners all ate brown bread.

The somewhat richer freemen among the commoners could afford the few-copper-coins “bran-removed whole wheat bread”; the “whole-wheat bread with bran” that sold for one copper coin was probably affordable for ordinary freemen; the serfs ate “mixed brown bread” made from wheat flour with the bran unremoved, mixed with other flours, which could buy four large pieces for one copper coin.

The poorer serfs would either eat “grain brown bread” made from ground legumes and other grains, or consume bran cakes made entirely of bran.

Additionally, Liszt was also aware of another type of brown bread that was commonly made by commoners.

This brown bread, after fermentation, became extremely hard. Commoners would slice it and use it as plates, or as wedges to stabilize wobbly tables.

It was said that some of these bread plates could be used for several months.

“Oh, the wicked feudal society,” Liszt lamented with feigned seriousness, pulling back his thoughts, with no intention of overthrowing the nobility system. The ass determines the head; being a noble, enjoying the status granted by the era, it would be absurd to pull oneself off the noble seat.

Besides, it would be hard to overthrow. Without dragons, without elves, what could be used to break it?

“My lord, do you need the Fire Dragon Horse brought over?” Thomas asked cautiously, always so meticulous in front of Liszt.

“No need. By the way, Thomas, how is the Li Dragon Horse in the stable, any temper tantrums?”

“The big guy you just tamed, my lord, had been bullying the Fire Dragon Horse all night long, but by this morning, the Fire Dragon Horse could peacefully graze next to it,” Thomas reported.

Liszt nodded, unsurprised.

Two tigers cannot share one mountain, unless one is male and the other female.

The Li Dragon Horse was a stallion and the Fire Dragon Horse was a mare; getting along peacefully was only natural. Moreover, it was very likely, the first offspring of the Li Dragon Horses would be born to the Fire Dragon Horse—Liszt had no objections, as the Fire Dragon Horse was also a fine breed, with a blend of the low-level magical beast, the Blazing Steed lineage; the combination of strengths would produce even better offspring.

No longer paying attention,

Liszt began to practice the moves from “Flaming Wave”.

Generally, Earth Knights wouldn't train with a new Dou Qi Manuscript before they had mastered the one that suited them best. Liszt was blessed with quick comprehension; even though he still had a good grasp on "Fire Dragon Drill", he was able to simultaneously practice "Flaming Wave". Unlike the one-on-one combat focus of "Fire Dragon Drill", "Flaming Wave" emphasized battle against multiple opponents.

The moves often involved sweeping the sword across a large area or thrusting the spear into a group.

Unbeknownst to him, he had become engrossed in his training, his Fire Attribute Dou Qi constantly released, heating the surrounding air to an intense warmth. The power was yet unknown, but at the very least, it looked impressively powerful.

"Great Fire Wave!"

With one slash of his sword, flames burst forth again.

He saw Butler Carter approaching him at a brisk pace.

He involuntarily reined in his Dou Qi and asked, "Mr. Carter, what's the matter?"

"My lord, Jessie just came back from cutting grass for the horses and reported seeing a merchant caravan. I suspect it might be the Earl and the Baron's entourage arriving," Carter said.

Liszt's spirits lifted, "They've finally arrived? Please notify the two teachers to join me in welcoming the caravan. I'll go take a bath and change my clothes first."

Hurrying upstairs to bathe.

Before long, Marcus and Goltai had already arrived.

Located on a slope, the castle provided a good vantage point, from where they could already see the slowly moving caravan approaching from the direction of Thorn Ridge.

“Teacher Goltai, remember to remind me to reorganize the Patrol Team. The caravan arrived without any notice, and I only found out through my servant. This shouldn’t happen,” Liszt remarked.

“The Patrol Team is full of bastards; you need to lend me some Retainer Knights to train them properly,” Goltai replied.

“No problem,” said Liszt as he mounted his horse. He didn’t ride a Fire Dragon Horse but instead his newly tamed Li Dragon Horse, a means of self-display. “Let’s go meet the caravan together. My father probably won’t come in person; it might be one of my brothers following the Tulip Great Elf.”

The three of them rode off to meet the caravan.

Meanwhile, Carter was busy instructing all the servants, “Pull yourselves together and tidy up your clothes; don’t look dirty and disgrace the master! Jessie, I’m talking about you—oh my heavens, your trousers are still muddy. Do you want to embarrass us all? Go and change them immediately!”

“Yes, yes, Mr. Carter,” the assistant manservant, Jessie Asanobu, with his flaxen hair, hurried back to his room to change his trousers.

Carter called out again, “Mrs. Morson, inform Mrs. Abbie to get the desserts, teas, and snacks ready. Also, make sure to prepare the ingredients for a lavish banquet as we might have guests whom the master will need to attend to personally.”

“Are you saying there will be Nobles coming?”

“Of course, there will be. As you know, the Black Tulip is very important, and the family’s Elves will come to assimilate. It might be Young Master Levis escorting them, or perhaps Young Master Lidun. Regardless, they are all important people. We can’t let the master lose face, not to mention Thomas’s colleagues.”

Thomas’s colleagues—as in the personal retinues of various Nobles.

After a flurry of activity, the castle’s entrance soon saw male and female servants lined up under Butler Carter’s supervision, standing on the left and right sides of the gate respectively, waiting to welcome the esteemed guests.

Chapter 0024: The Three Siblings Reunite

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One, two, three, four, five, six, seven...eight, nine, ten, a total of ten carriages, escorted by a troop of knights, made their way along the loess road to the foot of the castle's hill.

“Baron!”, the leading knight, galloping ahead to Liszt, performed a knight's salute, “I am escorting the caravan that departed from Tulip Castle, here to trade in Fresh Flower Town.”

“So it's you, Lord Layden. The journey must have been taxing. Who has come this time?” Liszt returned the salute.

Sir Layden spoke, “The Viscount and the Baron of Falcon Town have both come together.”

“Is that so? My sister came as well.”

In the midst of their exchange, a luxurious carriage climbed up the slope and stopped in front of Liszt and the others. The attending footmen opened the carriage doors on both sides, and a young man and woman, both dressed in noble attire, stepped down.

The male youth bore a resemblance to Liszt, though he was a bit plainer, with similarly light golden hair and sapphire-colored eyes.

The female youth also resembled Liszt to a degree, but she was not as fair as Liszt, with light golden hair and sapphire eyes. She was not dressed in noble ladies' attire but, like the male youth, wore male noble clothing—essential riding attire for going out, similar to a tailcoat but more ornate.

“My dear brother, lord of Fresh Flower Town, Baron Liszt, look who has come,” the young man, who was Levis Tulip, laughed heartily.

Liszt dismounted and approached Levis, “Brother, I did not expect you to come in person. And my sister, how is the life in Falcon Town?”

Li Vera Tulip raised her slender eyebrows slightly, “Liszt, I can sense it, you’ve become an Earth Knight?”

“Yes, I was fortunate to have made the breakthrough, although it was somewhat late.”

“It seems that breaking free from the constraints of Tulip Castle and being in the free Fresh Flower Town, you’ve found liberation. Advancing to Earth Knight, discovering new Tulip Magic Potions, I’ve heard that the town has also nurtured an Elf Bug... Your luck is so good it even makes me envious,” Levis said, patting Liszt’s shoulder with a smile.

In reality, the relationship among the siblings was not very good.

Behind their warm gestures lay the formalities common among nobles—regardless, the three siblings had all become true Noble Sirs and Ladies.

At that moment, the Li Dragon Horse Liszt was leading suddenly snorted loudly, then bared its teeth and roared at several horses pulling the carriages. Startled, the tall steeds retreated continuously, almost bolting away with the carriages.

“Hmm?”

Only then did Levis and Li Vera notice the shiny black Li Dragon Horse.

Li Vera’s eyes sparkled, “What a magnificent steed, Liszt. Wasn’t your mount a bay mare, a birthday gift from father? From whence comes this fine horse, and might you part with it for your sister?”

“Tamed from Thorn Ridge, I’m sorry, my sister, but I have no intention of selling it.”

“I’m not surprised to be refused, but you rejected so directly, Liszt. You’ve improved since you were a child,” Li Vera said, slightly surprised. The Liszt of her childhood had been quite meek and timid before her.

“People are always changing; I’ve come of age, it’s only natural to make some changes,” Liszt beckoned, “It’s too dazzling in the sun outside, please come into the Castle to rest after your long journey. Mr. Carter must have prepared tea and pastries; we can relax and chat over them.”

“Then, Mr. Layden, would you please bring over the Greater Elf and the Little Minor Elves?” Levis turned around.

Quickly Sir Layden approached the carriage, directing several other knights to carry out from within the carriage three exquisitely crafted “boxes”—one large and two small.

The boxes weren’t very large; the biggest one was just the size of a cradle, within which lay a creature as large as a baby. It looked somewhat human, but its body was translucent and shiny, like a colorful, glowing gemstone, with folded wings on its back—this was the Tulip Family’s most precious possession, the Tulip Great Elf.

The two smaller boxes each held a Little Minor Elf the size of an adult’s foot, equally beautiful but not as radiant as the Greater Elf.

The Tulip Greater Elf seemed to be awoken by the knights’ movements, stretched in the box, and then rubbed its eyes as it woke up.

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Flapping its wings and flying into midair, it had no gender and naturally needed no clothes. Its bright eyes scanned around, and quickly locked onto Levis, “Levis, have we arrived? Where is the Black Tulip?” Its voice was sweet, like a little girl speaking.

“We have arrived, Xiangxiang. This is Fresh Flower Town, and you’ll be able to see the Black Tulip very soon,” Levis responded.

At that moment, the Tulip Great Elf turned to look at Liszt: “Wow, Liszt, long time no see.”

Liszt nodded with a smile, “It’s been almost two months since we last met, Xiangxiang.”

Before he could finish, two Tulip Lesser Spirits also awoke and flew out of the box, circling around the Great Elf while occasionally making “wow” sounds—they had awoken their spiritual intelligence but, being of limited intelligence, they couldn’t speak.

Leading the elves, they entered the castle.

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The castle's living room.

The nobles were seated around the table, while the knight order members without titles were entertained downstairs by Marcus.

Liszt, Levis, Li Vera, Goltai, Layden, and another Honored Knight named Bruce—six people in total—took their seats. Carter directed the servants to continuously serve tea and pastries.

The cook, Abbie-Spoon, pulled out all the stops; one exquisitely crafted pastry at a time was presented without cease.

The Tulip Great Elf sat on Levis's shoulder, swinging its chubby little feet and beginning to squint and doze off again. One Tulip Lesser Spirit lay atop Levis's head, while another rested on Li Vera's shoulder. There were also several small jade boxes containing Tulip Spirit Bugs.

Seeing this scene, Liszt realized, "The Earl must have transferred the care of Great and Lesser Spirits to Levis, or else they would not be so affectionate."

He felt a great deal of envy.

No matter how many times he saw them, the elves were so beautiful; it was hard to endure that such beautiful things belonged to someone else!

But it was inevitable after all, Levis was bound to be the next Earl of Coral Island.

"I didn't expect the castle of Fresh Flower Town to be so rudimentary. Liszt, you really should refurbish it properly," Levis casually remarked while sipping his tea.

Compared to Tulip Castle, this small castle was no different from a commoner's thatched cottage.

"I would like to but lack money, manpower, and materials."

"I didn't bring building materials for constructing a castle, but the carriage is loaded with food, drink, and many seeds. After the enfeoffment ceremony, father gave you a lot of food, why do you still need so much nourishment?"

“Fresh Flower Town is even more desolate than I imagined. I need to stockpile some food, otherwise, there may come a day when I’ll truly go hungry,” Liszt offered a simple explanation.

Stockpiling food is always the right decision—he who gathers food and builds high walls can become a king at leisure, this has been the strategy since ancient times.

He wanted to develop Fresh Flower Town; without resolving the food issue, there was no point in talking about development.

“Alright, I think we can discuss these boring topics over dinner. The most important thing now is to see the Black Tulip, my Little Minor Elves can’t wait any longer,” Li Vera interrupted.

Liszt nodded in agreement; he really didn’t want to pretend to be extra cordial.

Levis and Li Vera probably didn’t have much affection for him, and he felt that they were no different from strangers, “Since sister is in a hurry, let’s go to the Fresh Flower Farm first to assimilate the Black Tulip.”

Chapter 0025: What is the Quality of a Knight

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In the center of Fresh Flower Farm, the Tulip Great Elf, together with a Tulip Lesser Spirit and six Tulip Spirit Bugs, surrounded the Black Tulip to absorb its aura and undergo assimilation.

Li Si Te (Liszt) stood by, watching the Tulip Great Elf intently.

In the memories of his previous life, the Great Elf named Xiangxiang was estimated to be over sixty years old; it was just a Little Minor Elf more than two decades ago and had evolved into a Greater Elf during his father’s generation. With Xiangxiang’s help, the Tulip Family rapidly developed, and a vast amount of tulips brought innumerable wealth.

With that wealth, they built a capable and battle-ready Knight Order, and it was not long before Li Weiliam was titled Earl for his military exploits.

Coral Island became the family's domain.

"Elves... Although I have the memories of my previous life and grew up watching Xiangxiang, no matter how many times I look, it's never enough. Elves are definitely wondrous things that shouldn't exist in this world... Unfortunately, it isn't mine. I have only five Elf Bugs, no, soon there will be six."

He wrote to the Earl, hoping to trade for an Elf Bug, and the Earl clearly agreed, as Levis brought with him an additional Little Wheat Elf Bug.

"My dear brother, the Little Wheat Bug Father asked me to pass on to you as a reward for discovering the Tulip Magic Potion," Levis said, taking out a Jade Box and handing it to Liszt.

"Is this a reward outside of our trade, or within it?"

"Outside of it, haha, Liszt, don't view us as outsiders." Levis smiled gently, his noble demeanor not much inferior to Liszt's, "No matter what, we share the Tulip Family's blood, and whether it's a Magic Potion or the importance of Tulips, the benefit to the family is immense. Father was very pleased when he heard about it."

"Then I will accept it, and thank Father for me."

"Why not thank him in person?"

"Hmm?"

Li Vera (Li Weiliam) approached, "Grandfather is ill and has been confined to bed. Father is preparing for all three of us siblings to visit him. So, once things are settled here, you will need to go back to Coral City with us tomorrow."

"Is that so," Liszt nodded, with no reason to refuse.

"Let's save our catch-up for lunch then. We should finish the formal business first. Li Vera, you start the negotiation with Liszt. I'm going to take in the scene of Fresh Flower Town... it's my first visit to this small town," said Levis, as he

mounted his steed, accompanied by his Retainer Knights and Layden, who was there to ensure his safety, and rode off.

They watched Levis leave.

Suddenly, Li Vera said, “Are you really unwilling to part with that black horse?”

“I’m very sorry, sister.”

“It is quite extraordinary; have you noticed?”

“Yes.”

“Absolutely not selling?”

“Not selling.”

“Alright, it seems not only has your luck improved but so has your temper,” Li Vera narrowed her eyes; she used to beat Liszt quite a bit when they were young—the previous Liszt was a failure, often beaten by his brother and sister over toys.

Liszt didn’t want to reminisce about past events; they weren’t his experiences: “What have you brought for me, sister? Business is business; you can’t hoodwink me.”

“I won’t intervene in the sale of the Tulip Magic Potion; I’m just here to assimilate once, with one Little Minor Elf and two Elf Bugs. The payment I’m offering is five hundred jin of wheat, eight hundred jin of millet, one hundred jin of pig iron, and fifty jin of wrought iron, along with a packet of Falcon Town’s specialty, sweetheart cabbage seeds... No sweetheart bugs, whether you can cultivate it or not, that’s not my concern.”

“It’s less than I expected, but it will do.”

“Don’t be greedy; I would only be willing to offer half if it were Lidun.”

Lidun is the youngest son of the Earl, and his mother is the current Earless, who comes from a small noble family. A child’s status is dependent on the mother’s nobility; Liszt and his siblings’ mother is the daughter of a Marquis, far exceeding what Lidun could compare to—in assessing a noble’s status, the rank and connections of both the paternal and maternal houses are key.

It seems dissatisfied with Liszt's current attitude, once the deal was settled, Li Vera challenged him to a competition.

"What is your Dou Qi attribute?"

"Fire."

"^"

"What secret book did you practice?"

"Fire Dragon Drill".

"Let's have a fight, let me see your current strength," Li Vera took the spear carried by the Retainer Knight, "It's been a long time since I sparred with you after advancing to an Earth Knight."

Sparring was just an excuse.

The real purpose was to teach Liszt a lesson.

But the Liszt of today was no longer the nodding Liszt of old; he simply smiled, "Sorry, I haven't completed the training of my secret book yet, let's have a match another day."

Li Vera's eyes were sharp, "Are you avoiding it? That's not a quality a knight should have."

"A knight's quality includes fairness. Sister, why not wait until I've finished training the 'Fire Dragon Drill'?" Liszt gently defused the verbal joust.

Raising her eyebrows slightly, Li Vera put down the spear, "You are as cowardly as you've always been."

"This is called being prudent."

"You really know how to flatter yourself."

Li Vera was nineteen and had not yet married, still a vibrant young adult. Liszt's mental age had long passed the adolescent phase, and he wouldn't get angry over a word or two.

He dealt with the boredom with a few perfunctory remarks.

Levis had already strolled around and come back.

“Dirty, messy, and poor,” he shook his head incessantly, “Liszt, I’ve come to understand your need for food – Fresh Flower Town is more hard-pressed than any other town I have seen.”

“Indeed, but I will make it prosperous,” Liszt affirmed.

“With the Black Tulip? Then let’s talk about that... starting with assimilation. Greater Elf, Little Minor Elf, and the six Elf Bugs. Tulip Castle will pay three thousand jin of wheat, two thousand jin of barley, five hundred jin of wheat flour, a thousand jin of pig iron, thirty barrels of beer, and seeds of various crops,” Levis laid out the deal.

After a thorough inventory, Liszt didn’t haggle and accepted the trade.

Load after load of supplies were carried into the castle’s warehouse, quickly filling up what had been a somewhat desolate space. The grain alone was enough to feed the castle for half a year, while the pig iron and wrought iron could be used to forge tools and armor. The seeds were specifically requested by Liszt for planting in Fresh Flower Town.

Without Elf Bugs, the barren land could only be fertilized with manure, hoping it would be effective.

As for now, the small town was actually not that dirty anymore – feces were collected daily and then sold to the castle. Liszt had the manure distributed to the hamlets for fertilizing the fields. With little time and quantity, besides Peanut Hamlet, other places had not seen any noticeable effects yet.

...

The atmosphere at lunch was good, with Goltai providing an excellent banquet mood, full of laughter and conversation.

After the meal, Levis and Liszt discussed the cultivation and sale of the Black Tulip, “Father’s intention is to buy out the cultivation and sale of the Black Tulip in one go. As a reward, you could receive a thousand Gold Coins. At the same time, you can also plant them in Fresh Flower Town and sell them to Tulip Castle.”

“That won’t do, the Black Tulip is the cornerstone of Fresh Flower Town’s development. I won’t give up a continuous source of revenue for a mere thousand Gold Coins.”

“It’s a thousand Gold Coins, not a small sum. I don’t know if Fresh Flower Town could make that much in fifty years of taxes.”

“If I mass-produce Magic Potions, perhaps in a few years, just with the Black Tulip, I could make over a thousand Gold Coins annually. Magic Potions are scarce, and there’s never a surplus in the market.”

“You should know, without the family’s channels, you couldn’t transport Black Tulip out of Thorn Ridge.”

“That’s why I want to talk to father, or to you, brother, about cultivation and sales... I can provide seeds for Tulip Castle, but I must take a certain percentage of the profits from all Black Tulips grown.”

“You mean, we do the planting and you sit in the castle counting Gold Coins?”

Liszt picked up the tea cup, responding at a leisurely pace, “Essentially, yes.”

Chapter 0026: The Big Business of 2000 Gold Coins a Year

“I suspect you’ve gone mad, asking for the moon,” Liszt raised his voice in dissatisfaction.

“Patience, big brother,”

“Fine, I’m all ears. Give me a reason to agree to such absurd terms. Liszt, my dear brother, you should understand that the Black Tulip is important to the Tulip Family, but it is not indispensable. We already have three types of tulip magic potions.”

“I’m well aware of that, and I’m also aware that the magic power held by the Black Tulip is superior to the potions of the other three varieties. It’s suitable to become the mainstay of our family.”

Magic potions are a magical but also highly troublesome matter—they need to be cultivated by elves in order to propagate. Without the elves' cultivation, their offspring will gradually lose magic power and degenerate into ordinary plants.

But this does not hinder their value.

Preparing magic potions, forging magic equipment, practicing magic and Dou Qi—all of these are inseparable from magic potions. The Coral Island Knight Academy has even established a special course on magic potions to study these magic elixirs. When an Earth Knight reaches a plateau in their training, they rely on magic potions to strengthen themselves and strive to become a Sky Knight.

Every Sky Knight is a potion guzzler, not knowing how many magic potions they have consumed before obtaining the Advanced Dou Qi.

Without the support of the family's tulip magic potions, Li Weiliam would have hardly been able to break through and become one of the few Sky Knights in the Duchy of Sapphire.”

So Liszt knew very well the incalculable value of magic potions—his brother, the exceptionally talented Earth Knight, wouldn't miss out on the Black Tulip.

Pausing for a moment, Liszt said leisurely, “My talents are poor; becoming a Sky Knight is almost too much to hope for, but you, big brother, have talents comparable to our father when he was young. I think, with a continuous supply of magic potions from the Black Tulip, your path to becoming a Sky Knight will be much smoother.”

He glanced at Li Vera once more, “It's the same for sister. I believe the Sky Knight title is far more valuable than a thousand gold coins, isn't it? I truly hope that both my brother and sister can become Sky Knights; the Tulip Family needs you to carry on its legacy. As for me, I just want to earn some money to improve my living conditions.”

Talking about Sky Knights made Liszt take a short, sharp breath.

He became an Earth Knight at thirteen, and at twenty-one, everyone said he could become another Tulip Sky Knight like his father. But he alone knew the enormous chasm that lay between an Earth Knight and a Sky Knight—pouring all the resources of the family into it might still not be enough to lift him there.

Moreover, there was another brother with equally exceptional talents, Lidun Tulip.

Lidun's maternal family was just a minor nobility, hardly worth mentioning, but one had to admit, his mother, the current Countess, definitely had influence over his father. As a result, nearly half of Tulip Castle's resources had been allocated to Lidun—causing Liszt indescribable pain and even resentment towards his father.

Shouldn't the family focus all its resources on helping him become a Sky Knight? Why waste resources!

Narrowing his eyes slightly, he said in a deep voice, "If you truly supported me, Liszt, you wouldn't have proposed such harsh terms."

"Then how about I put it another way, I'll only partner with my brother and sister in the business of the Black Tulip? Surely father won't mind one magic potion plant." The subtext of Liszt's words was to bypass Tulip Castle and thereby Lidun. In the future, the output of the Black Tulip would be shared only between the three siblings.

That half-brother Lidun, who was quite arrogant and looked down on Liszt, had not spared Liszt his disdain.

Liszt didn't hesitate to trick him.

After thinking for a moment, Liszt asked, "Is Li Vera also involved?"

"I hadn't planned on it before, but since Liszt has invited me, why not?" Even though Vera lacked the talents of Liszt, her desire for the Sky Knight title was just as strong, "and don't forget, I also have an elf."

"Fine, let's talk about how to split the profits."

...

After several probes and compromises, the three siblings successfully reached an agreement.

Once the seeds of the Black Tulip were harvested, they would be cultivated near Coral City with the help of the Tulip Great Elf. Once a new batch of

seeds was harvested, widespread planting would begin in Coral City, Falcon Town, and Fresh Flower Town.

For the first three years, all Black Tulip Magic Potions would be handled by Levis. Liszt would then take a share of the profits—at a rate of thirty percent in Coral City and twenty percent in Falcon Town—according to market prices.

After three years, the Black Tulips from Falcon Town would no longer be managed by Levis. Li Vera would handle them alone, giving Liszt a twenty-five percent share.

After ten years, Liszt would stop taking a share.

“Currently, the annual profit from the golden Tulip Magic Potion at Tulip Castle is about five thousand Gold Coins. The Black Tulip should be able to surpass that, assuming it’s seven thousand Gold Coins. My annual share could be around two thousand Gold Coins, which is far more worthwhile than a one-off payment of a thousand Gold Coins,” Liszt contemplated after signing the official agreement.

He had originally thought that taking a twenty percent share of the profits would suffice, but Levis, thinking Liszt naive due to his youth, planned to buy him out with a one-time payment of a thousand Gold Coins. So, out of retaliation, Liszt raised his share to thirty percent.

Accounts should be settled clearly among siblings, not to mention Liszt didn’t feel they were close siblings at all—beyond the blood in their veins, they had almost no connection.

With the agreement reached, there seemed to be a new understanding between the siblings.

Outside the Castle, the peasants were still busy reclaiming wasteland.

“What, you plan to plant crops all around the Castle? Wheat or barley?” Li Vera asked, standing by the Window and looking into the distance.

“I plan to plant alfalfa, preparing to raise horses here.”

Levis approached, “Raise horses? Are you planning to form your own Knight Order?”

“I hope to put together a Knight Squad. The Magical Beasts of Thorn Ridge are a significant threat, and people fall victim to them every winter. The town doesn’t even have anyone who knows Dou Qi... Brother, may I have a word?” Liszt suddenly had an idea.

The two men moved to a separate, quiet room.

“What’s the matter, all so secretive?”

“I remember that Coral Island didn’t have many people when I was a child, and they were all brought back by father’s fleet from other islands, right?”

“That’s correct. When father was ennobled as an Earl, Coral Island only had a few thousand natives, and the population was traded in from outside. What else did you think? Ninety percent of the people on Coral Island are the serfs of our family.”

“Then has brother considered continuing to trade in population?”

“Continue trading in population?” Levis scrutinized Liszt, “Can Fresh Flower Town even support more people? I’m doubtful this declining town can support us, let alone others. Or are you planning on trafficking people somewhere else?”

Trading in population was not a respectable affair, but nobles always needed people for land reclamation.

Essentially, many nobles would be involved in the trade of population to some extent.

“Fresh Flower Town is indeed small, so I’ve been preparing to develop Thorn Ridge, and that requires a lot of manpower. With the output of the Black Tulip, I believe we can sustain for a while, and by that time, Fresh Flower Town can be developed to at least not be inferior to sister’s Falcon Town,” Liszt said half-truthfully.

Gathering grain, building walls, and claiming kingship in due course—it was clear in his mind.

Chapter 27: A Barbecue Party

“Trafficking people isn’t out of the question, our family’s fleet sets out to trade by sea every year, but for just a few dozen or a hundred people, it’s not worth taking the risk,”

“Five thousand.”

“What?”

“I need five thousand people.”

“Five thousand people, you sure you can handle that?”

“Sure.”

Levis narrowed his eyes, “I’ll consider it when I get back.”

Returning to the living room, no one brought up the subject of human trafficking again, and the atmosphere at the afternoon tea was lively, thanks to Goltai’s enthusiasm.

The caravan would stay overnight at Fresh Flower Town, with most of the knights and retainers lodging in town. Levis and Li Vera, along with their personal servants, would stay in the castle.

Butler Old Carter was especially busy that day.

“Tom, where’s Jessie? I need his help!” His legs, not quite nimble, ached from climbing the stairs so many times; he wiped the sweat from his forehead and entered the kitchen, “Isn’t Jessie helping in the kitchen?”

“Jessie should be transporting the horse fodder. With dozens more horses in the castle, we don’t have enough fodder to feed them.” Tom carefully placed a sack of flour next to the stove.

“When he’s back, have him find me in the storehouse, I need manpower to move the food that arrived at the castle today into the cellar for storage.”

“Okay, Mr. Carter.”

Kitchen maid Eileen, while washing the vegetables, looked up, “Mr. Carter, do you need my help?”

Before Carter could answer, Cook Abbie scolded, “You can’t even finish your work in the kitchen, still have time to help others, what about it, Eileen, you want to jump ship?”

Carter spread his hands, “Eileen, you probably can’t be of help.”

“I understand... God knows how long I have to stay in the kitchen today, it’s so hot and stuffy here, my clothes are soaked through, Mrs. Abbie has made the stove too hot.”

“Oh, is that so! Are you the chef or am I the chef, letting you cook dinner for the lord’s distinguished guests?”

“You are the chef.”

“Then shut your little mouth and work quietly!”

The murmuring in the kitchen didn’t stop for a moment. Carter had already walked out; the kitchen was too hot, and he felt oppressed in his chest, not sure if it was heatstroke – summer had not yet arrived, but the weather was getting hotter. He pulled out a handkerchief, wiped his face, and leaned against the wall to catch his breath.

Morson Paddy Field came towards him, carrying a bucket of water. Seeing Carter’s state, he asked with concern, “Are you feeling unwell, Mr. Carter?”

“How could I be unwell, it’s just a bit hot, that’s all.”

“Is it, but you look pale, maybe you’re too stressed. Today, the castle is full of guests, and you’ve been working hard everywhere.”

“How could I be stressed, Mrs. Morson? I have seen livelier occasions at the Earl’s villa. I can handle this,” Carter tucked away the handkerchief, “Are Young Master Levis and Miss Li Vera’s rooms ready?”

“Miss Li Vera’s personal maid has kept complaining about the falling dust from the walls or the worn-out bedsheets.”

“We can’t decide the quality of the utensils, let’s not be rude in the details of our work, besides, real nobles won’t hold grudges because of this.”

“All of the Tulip Family are true nobles,” Mrs. Morson nodded, “Mr. Carter, are you sure you don’t need to rest a bit?”

“Don’t worry about me.”

“The Earl is a good man; he certainly wouldn’t want to see you overworked.”

“I’m not overworked. In fact, I’m enjoying this. It’s not often that we have guests at the castle; I rarely get a chance to show my worth. Alright, I’m off to organize the storehouse. Just yesterday I was complaining that the food was running low, and today we have so much that it won’t all fit in the storehouse.”

The castle was small, with little in the way of entertainment.

After finishing afternoon tea, a group of knights prepared to hunt at Thorn Ridge. Liszt gladly consented, and also invited Levis and Li Vera to join the hunt.

“With so many Earth Knights, it would be best to catch all the magical beasts in Thorn Ridge in one fell swoop,” he thought to himself. “Even if we can’t kill the magical beasts, familiarizing ourselves with the terrain of Thorn Ridge is also good.”

He donned his armor neatly.

Mounting his horse, this time he rode a Fire Dragon Horse, his coordination with the Li Dragon Horse was still not enough, affecting his strength.

He didn’t bring Thomas along, only Marcus and four Retainer Knights:
“Thomas, take good care of my Li Dragon and also, don’t forget to feed Douson on time; it’s growing, and can’t go hungry.”

“What is Douson?” Li Vera asked.

“A dog.”

“You have a dog now? What breed?”

“A Fierce Earth Dog.”

“Fierce Earth Dog? A magical beast?”

“Yes, a Fierce Earth Dog cub, captured by Teacher Marcus in Thorn Ridge,” Liszt casually said.

“An Earth Knight, a Black Tulip, peanut worms, a Fierce Earth Dog cub, and a wild horse with divine speed, Liszt, have you been blessed by the god of fortune? I’m a bit jealous of you.”

“I can only say, country life is colorful.”

“Falcon Town is also in the countryside, but it’s not as colorful as Fresh Flower Town.”

“That’s because you, sister, often stay in Tulip Castle and have neglected the countryside life.”

“If you want, you can continue to stay in Tulip Castle, father doesn’t intend to drive you away,” Levis said as he rode over and chipped in.

Liszt considered this mere courtesy: “I like Fresh Flower Town, it’s very free here, you can do whatever you want.”

“Including planting grass by the castle gates,” Levis pointed out the serfs who were tending alfalfa and joked, “In the future, your castle can be called ‘Steed’s Castle’.”

Such a small castle couldn’t possibly be named.

Liszt raised his whip: “Let’s go, the sun is already slanting west, if we can’t get deep into Thorn Ridge, we’ll probably have to turn back.” The Fire Dragon Horse ran in accordance with his will.

He wanted to lead the group of knights into Thorn Ridge, at least to hunt a few magical beasts—he was going to conquer Thorn Ridge sooner or later, incorporating this hill and forest into the territory of Fresh Flower Town. The more magical beasts they killed now, the less danger in the future.

Unfortunately.

This hunting trip, they only caught normal wild animals.

Magical beasts were much smarter than wild animals; sensing the surging Dou Qi inside the Earth Knights, they had hidden themselves early on.

Even so, the prey they caught was enough to hold a grand barbecue party. Nobles, knights, and servants gathered together, laughing incessantly amid beer and cream.

“Wow, Mr. Barbecue, give me another rabbit leg,” the Tulip Great Elf flew around cheerfully; elves can live without eating, but they can still digest food.

Thomas, who was busy barbecuing, quickly handed over a roasted rabbit leg, seasoned and ready to eat, to the Great Elf.

Next to him, two Little Minor Elves, without asking, snagged two slices of roast meat for themselves.

“Xiangxiang, you’re eating too fast, chew more to appreciate the taste of the food,” Liszt said, tearing at a rabbit head in his hand with a smile.

Elves were too adorable; just looking at them could lift one’s spirits.

Especially while eating his favorite barbecue—of all the foods in this world, probably only barbecue was to his taste.

“I like to eat in big bites.”

Xiangxiang was covered in grease as she ate, then gently shook her body like a little dog shaking off water, flinging all the grease away, leaving herself clean without a single stain.

Chapter 28: The Tulip Castle in Blood

The night had deepened, after the barbecue party ended, the knights headed to the town to rest.

Liszt and Li Vera each entered their rooms, and Old Butler Carter, instead of taking red wine, took a glass of apple juice and entered the study.

“My lord, you seem very sober and haven’t drunk to excess.”

“Thank you,” he accepted the apple juice, took a light sip, and savored its fresh fruit flavor. The alcohol content in beer could only upset one’s stomach, hardly enough to intoxicate.

Under the candlelight, Carter’s complexion looked unnatural.

Liszt had noticed this during the day, “Mr. Carter, are you feeling unwell?”

“I am quite alright, my lord.”

“You must speak up if there’s anything wrong. Don’t force yourself. Though the castle cannot do without a butler at the helm, your health is more important. Please take good care of yourself.”

“Thank you,” Old Carter was almost moved to tears.

“Tomorrow, once the Elf Bugs have completed their assimilation, I will accompany the caravan to Coral City. I may be away from Coral Island for a few days, so please see to the affairs of the castle in my absence.”

“Please rest assured, my lord.”

“Indeed, there’s nothing to be assured of. Aside from a few Elf Bugs, ensure that Douson and the Li Dragon are well taken care of. Also, visit the Black Tulip for me every day, and make sure the construction of the stables outside the castle does not halt. I hope to be able to settle the Alfalfa Bugs upon my return.”

Duty always came first.

After a brief chat, they returned to sleep, and the night passed just like that.

The next morning, the eight Tulip Spirit Bugs had completed the assimilation of the Black Tulip, and the caravan departed immediately. Liszt rode atop a Fire Dragon Horse, with Marcus and Thomas accompanying him. The castle was entrusted to Carter, the town to Goltai, and his four Retainer Knights were to cooperate with them.

“Teacher Goltai, upon my return, I expect to see the patrol team range from Thorn Ridge to the East Coast.”

“As you wish, I will train them well,” Goltai said with ease.

“Then, I’m off. Oh, and on my way back, I will bring some Juniper Wine.”

“Wow, that’s awesome!”

From atop his Fire Dragon Horse, Liszt looked back. At the castle gate, Butler Carter stood with a servant, silently watching them off. No longer hesitating,

Liszt gently kicked the horse's belly, and the Fire Dragon Horse immediately sprang forward, catching up with the caravan.

He was somewhat excited.

His predecessor was very familiar with Coral Island, but he, in the strictest sense, was leaving Fresh Flower Town for the first time to witness the outside world.

A medieval world wrapped in magic power, a nobility system ruled by knights.

After leaving Thorn Ridge, the land he stepped upon was mostly under the direct jurisdiction of an Earl, with only a few towns granted by the Earl to Barons, and a handful of even smaller villages and hamlets as fiefs of Honored Knights. The entire Coral Island had only one enfeoffed Viscount, who was a follower of the Earl since the beginning, Jonas Shattered Stone.

Beyond Coral Island, there was another small island, held by another of the Earl's Viscount followers, Trick Weed.

On Coral Island, there were six cities in total—one large and five small—Coral City at the foot of Tulip Castle was the largest. North Valley City, Birch City, Elm Forest City, and Serpent Spear City all belonged to the Earl. Shattered Stone Castle along with its affiliated Shattered Stone City belonged to Viscount Jonas.

To get from Fresh Flower Town to Coral City, it was necessary to pass through North Valley City and Birch City.

However, the caravan did not stop in the two small cities. After a quick meal in the manor of North Valley City, it headed straight for Coral City. By three in the afternoon, when the hooves trod into a sea of flowers, Coral City was before them.

All the flowers were various kinds of tulips.

Most were for magic potions, while a few were ornamental plants—the tulips cultivated by the Tulip Family in the Duchy of Sapphire were famous far and wide.

The sea of flowers undulated with the slopes of the hill.

To the left of the road was Coral City, with its towering city walls, abutting the sea with its bustling docks. From a distance, Liszt could see that on the docks, several “advanced” two-masted sailing ships were moored.

This world had slowly transitioned from the age of oars to the age of sails.

It was with sailboats that the original conquerors of the Duchy of Sapphire came from the continent to these islands and established this island nation.

Only sailboats traversed the seas.

“What a pity, sails are probably the endpoint of ships, since there is not enough steel to foster an age of armored warships or even steamships.”

Liszt sighed lightly to himself and withdrew his distant gaze, turning to the right side of the road.

To the right were mountain ranges, with steep cliffs on the side facing the sea and gentle slopes on the other. Tulip Castle was built upon the cliff. A wide stone-paved road stretched from the gates of the castle all the way down to Coral City at the foot of the mountain. The tall castle stood like a banner, soaring at the highest point of Coral Island.

Sharp tower spires pierced the blue sky.

The thick rocks blended into the mountains, solemnly and majestically surrounded by flowers, displaying the robust grandeur of an impregnable fortress. In just ten years, the Tulip Family had built such a tall and sturdy Tulip Castle on Coral Island—during which several hundreds of serfs had died from overwork.

Even today, the castle was still expanding bit by bit.

Nobles’ glory was always built atop bloodshed—this was merely an earl’s castle, and it was said that the castle of the Sapphire Duke took a hundred years to build. Beneath the cliff of the duke’s castle lay piles of serf corpses, several tens of meters deep.

“It looks like it’s ashen gray, but in reality, it’s bloody red. I’d rather live in the small castle in Fresh Flower Town—there, at least my heart can rest easy.”

Liszt’s mood was heavy.

Following behind his brother and sister, he made his way to the familiar yet strange castle.

Halfway there, they encountered a group of knights exiting the castle. The leading knight respectfully greeted Levis, “Young Master Levis, I hope you had a smooth journey.”

“The journey went smoothly, Captain Mickey,” Levis replied, bowing in return.

Captain Mickey paid his respects to Li Vera as well, “Miss Li Vera, I hope you had a smooth journey.”

“A smooth journey, Captain Mickey.”

It was then that Captain Mickey turned to Liszt, with the same impeccable courtesy, “Young Master Liszt, welcome home.”

“It’s been a long time, Captain Mickey,” Liszt replied, bowing. The knight before him was the captain of the knight squad stationed at Tulip Castle, responsible for the security of the castle. Mickey himself was a baron, with his family managing his lands, while he served at Tulip Castle.

Escorted by the knights, they soon arrived at the main entrance of the castle.

Butler Louis stood at the entrance, eagerly welcoming the three siblings with a warm smile on his aged face, “Oh, what a joy it is to see the descendants of the lord return to the castle like weary birds to their nests.”

“Grandpa Louis, it has been too long. You’re still as robust as ever,” Liszt said as he handed off the reins of his Fire Dragon Horse to a servant and greeted Louis.

Louis must have been at least sixty years old by now, originally serving as a personal attendant to Liszt’s grandfather.

Now serving as the butler of Tulip Castle, even earls would show him utmost respect—this was a man who had dedicated his life to the Tulip Family, and he deserved such honor and status.

Chapter 29: The Conversation Between Liszt and the Earl

“Two months without seeing each other, Master Li Te, you seem even more spirited than before. How is everything in Fresh Flower Town?” Louis asked with a smile.

“All is well.”

“That’s good to hear. The Lord has mentioned you several times; he is also very concerned about your life now.”

Would Coral Island’s Count really be concerned about Liszt’s life? Liszt was skeptical. If the Count truly cared about Liszt, he wouldn’t have sent him off to a dilapidated town like Fresh Flower Town.

Returning to his family home, Liszt did not feel any trepidation at being near his hometown.

The soul within him came from a distant other world, and those memories of his predecessor were nothing more than scenes of a movie, unable to affect his current emotions. His connection with the Tulip Family lacked the deep bonds of kinship; everything felt more like a “game,” in which he was stepping into the role of Liszt.

The bustling servants in the castle, upon seeing the young masters and miss, all bowed and paid their respects.

The only members of the Tulip Family residing here were the Earl, the Earl’s wife, Levis, Lidun, and Li Vera, who often returned to live here; however, there were more than two hundred servants.

And the servants had almost no spare time, busy from morning till night.

Their actual job, in summary, was to maintain the luxurious life of the nobles.

“I need to take a bath; I can’t stand the smell on me,” said Li Vera as she entered the castle and turned to leave. “If father asks for me, tell him I’ll be there shortly.”

Levis acted as though he was the master of the castle: “Liszt, do you also need to take a bath first? Your room has been kept for you by father, including clothes you didn’t take with you, which servants meticulously manage.”

“I’m not as obsessive about cleanliness as my sister. I’ll wait here for father. Brother, if you have affairs to attend to, please go ahead; I don’t need to be entertained.”

“That’s true, the castle is also your home. Well then, I must discuss the Black Tulip matter with Teacher Frank – cultivation, sales, and medicine production, all of which he is managing for me. And also the Elves, they need to be properly settled; these delicate creatures can’t be neglected even the slightest bit,” Levis replied.

Levis left as well.

Marcus followed a male servant to take care of the horses, and now only Liszt and a few male servants who greeted guests were left in the living room. He stood with his hands clasped behind his back, admiring the crystal lamps on the stone columns— the quantity of crystals and gemstones in a castle represented the wealth of a noble family, as most gemstones came from dragons.

In Liszt’s homeland, the role of gemstones was probably to look pretty.

Here, gemstones are natural vessels of magic power, containing mystical forces, essential in the creation of magic items. The crystal lamp on the stone column in front of him was one such magic item, made from low-grade crystals, it could stay lit continuously until the magic within the crystal was depleted—then it could be recharged by a magician or knight.

This cycle would repeat until the crystal wore out, becoming a common stone.

“Is a crystal lamp without any carved patterns really worthy of such prolonged admiration?” Accompanied by the tap-tap of boot heels on the ground, someone spoke from behind Liszt.

Liszt turned around and saw, on the stairs leading to the second floor of the castle’s living room, the lord of Tulip Castle—a middle-aged man with pale gold hair, and a pair of not-so-pretty gray-green eyes, which contrasted starkly with the sapphire blue eyes of the three siblings.

An ordinary face, with nothing special about it.

Blending in with the crowd, Li Weiliam Tulip would probably not stand out at all. Yet he was the master of Coral Island, a Sky Knight who earned the title of Earl through his own efforts.

Levis and Li Vera resembled their father more than their mother, making them not particularly good-looking, with only their sapphire blue eyes inherited from their mother.

Liszt, however, had inherited his mother's looks, excessively handsome.

"Perhaps I'm just too accustomed to lighting candles, it takes some time to get used to the glow of a crystal lamp."

"What, are you complaining about life in Fresh Flower Town?" Li Weiliam stood on the stairs without continuing down.

"Life in Fresh Flower Town is exceptionally free, I am very satisfied, Father." Liszt bowed respectfully, performing a salute, "Your body remains as robust as ever, the surging Dou Qi is almost spilling out."

"Your Dou Qi has also increased, that is good, content with a humble life, without complaints, that is good as well." Li Weiliam nodded, "Where are your brother and sister?"

"They are busy, they will come later."

"Come with me to the study." Li Weiliam turned and climbed the stairs.

Liszt followed closely upstairs and entered the Count's study, a large room with one whole wall lined with bookshelves filled with many thick leather-bound books—all sprayed with deodorant and fragrance, devoid of the distinctive smell of leather paper. Opposite the bookshelf by the window, a mahogany desk was also piled with plenty of books.

Pop!

The Earl uncorked a bottle of last year's Crescent Moon Wine and poured into two tall crystal cups, the amber-red wine swirling in the glasses like blood, crystal clear.

He picked one up and handed it to his third son, the Earl seemed somewhat surprised, "Two months of independent living seems to have tempered your

disposition.” The Liszt of the past was not at ease in his presence, their relationship awkward, but the Liszt now seemed very calm.

“Thank you,” Liszt accepted the wine, “Understanding the responsibilities of a landlord, I needed to change.”

“A positive change.”

“I think so as well.”

After a few exchanges, both father and son found that there was little of familial warmth to discuss. So, the Earl raised his cup and took a sip of the wine, awkwardly changing the subject, “Is the matter of the Black Tulip settled? How much did Levis pay you?”

“Tulip Castle is responsible for cultivation and sales, I have a share in the profits for the next ten years, thirty percent, just in cooperation between me, Levis, and Li Vera.”

The Earl pondered for a moment, “Just you three siblings in cooperation?”

“Yes.”

“You should not have left Lidun out, he is your brother too.”

“He’s still young, isn’t it good for him to be under Father’s wing? My brother, sister, and I are adults, cooperation is a natural thing.” Liszt smiled slightly, not trying to explain or clear his thoughts—Lidun looked down on him, and he hardly esteemed Lidun.

It seemed only now he remembered to ask, “What about the Earless and Lidun? I haven’t seen them.”

“The Earless took Lidun to Serpent Spear City. It’s Lidun’s uncle’s birthday today.” The Earless came from a Baron family on Coral Island, which resided in a small town near Serpent Spear City.

After that, another silence followed.

Liszt did not inherit the father-son affection with the Earl and could not chat like strangers, finding it hard to gauge the appropriate level of interaction, preferring to speak less.

The Earl was somewhat unaccustomed to Liszt's current demeanor, more like a conversation between equals than the previous compliance, missing the feeling of being able to scold.

It was only after a while that he said, "Dinner is some time away, you may walk around or go to Coral City to see your friends."

"No, thank you, I would like to stay in the study and read."

"You never seemed so fond of reading before." The Earl finished his wine and stood up to leave, "If you want to read, I'll have someone prepare a cartload for you, to take back when you return to Fresh Flower Town."

Chapter 30: Lady Penelope's Disfavor

History does not exist; it can only be speculated upon through various knight's novels, to understand the customs and social development of the past.

This is Liszt's recognition of the matter.

He also doesn't know the origin year of this world's humankind.

What is certain is that the Duchy of Sapphire has been established for one hundred and fifty years. Last year, a grand anniversary celebration was held, which left an impression on Liszt.

There are many knight's novels in the country about the Sapphire Family, and some of them record that the Sapphire Family has a thousand years of heritage.

As for the Tulip Family, there is no such thing as a family tree. What Liszt knows is about his great-great-grandfather, who was his grandfather's grandfather's father—at that time, there was neither a Tulip Great Elf nor a Tulip Lesser Spirit in the family, so the surname Tulip didn't exist either.

Their original surname was "Tile," indicating they were originally just commoners. According to the family history passed down from father to son, the great-great-grandfather possessed extraordinary strength and followed a

noble to serve the newly-founded Sapphire Family. He made achievements in war and was ennobled as an Honored Knight.

From then on, the family entered the ranks of the nobility.

In the generation of his great-grandfather, the family became Barons; in his great-grandfather's generation, they became Viscounts; and in his grandfather's generation, they obtained a Tulip Lesser Spirit.

It was after Li Weiliam inherited the title that the little minor elf evolved into a Greater Elf, and the family surname was changed to Tulip. A few years later, Li Weiliam became a Sky Knight with illustrious wartime achievements and was ennobled by the Sapphire Duke as Coral Island's Count.

To signify the family's rise to the upper ranks of nobility, the Serpent Script "Li (L)" in Li Weiliam's name became the prefix for the names of subsequent generations. Every descendant would carry the Serpent Script L to honor the founder of the family. They might be named "Li XX," "Li X," or even "Li XXX," "Li XXXX"... How many "X"s there could be depended on the mood of the person naming the child.

Liszt understood that this "Li L" probably amounted to a "clan" name outside of the surname.

His mother's family also had this tradition but used the character "Mei (M)" instead.

Therefore, the Tulip Family, when counting both past and present, only has a history of six generations, spanning around one hundred and fifty years.

Beyond that, no one knows who the ancestors were.

"Progenitor, distant ancestor, great ancestor, esteemed ancestor, great-great-grandfather, great-grandfather, grandfather, father... A noble Earl family that, rather than having eighteen generations of ancestors, only remembers six; truly, it is a barbarous age." Liszt dismissed this with disdain, for without history, how can one talk of heritage?

In his homeland, his own family can trace its ancestry with precise names back to the time of the Ming Dynasty.

As for tracing bloodlines, it can go back even further, to the time of the Yellow Emperor.

“And then there are these knight’s novels that boast about the Sapphire Family; they’re all nonsense. The family’s thousand-year heritage is told in a myriad of bizarre and fanciful origins. Some say it started in the southern part of the Steel Ridge Kingdom, some say it migrated from Blast Furnace Fortress Kingdom, and others from the faraway Blue Dragon Empire... If these novels are really self-congratulation of the Sapphire Family, then they’re not very conscientiously done.”

He would like to sort out a rough history of this world but feels there is little hope. The farthest back in history that any knight’s novel he has read goes is a book titled “Dull-headed Knight and the Red-tailed Fire Dragon.”

This novel tells a story taking place ten thousand years ago in the Neverfall Empire—but Liszt has verified that the Neverfall Empire has been in existence for no more than three thousand years.

The Neverfall Empire is also the country with the longest reign on the continent.

Many kingdoms were established with the friendship of dragons, and would decline with the dragons’ death or departure, or even vanish midway through a dragon-slaying war, which was considered normal.

At the beginning of the Duchy of Sapphire’s founding, there was such a dragon-slaying battle.

In that battle, the Sapphire Dragon almost got killed by the invaders from the Eagle Kingdom and was unable to gain a foothold on the vast continent. Fleeing, the dragon’s blood stained a mountain range blue, where countless sapphires formed, becoming an important mineral range for the Steel Ridge Kingdom—the Blue Blood Mountain.

Although the dragon survived, the first Sapphire Duke was severely injured and had to withdraw from the continent, founding his nation on an island far away.

Of course, this part of the history is Liszt’s own deduction.

In the knight's novels that worship the Sapphire Family, the origin of Blue Blood Mountain is due to the Sapphire Dragon wounding the White Maw Iron Dragon of the hostile Eagle Kingdom, and its blood dyed the mines.

As to why the blood of a White Maw Iron Dragon can create a mountain range with sapphires, that is a matter of opinion.

Fooling the common people is enough; there's no need to go into great detail.

...

Knock knock knock, the sound of knocking at the door.

"Come in," Liszt lifted his head from a book titled "Fire Attribute Dou Qi Development Guide."

The person who entered was the castle's deputy butler, Silva, a man just over forty. He was Louis's deputy and the predetermined successor as the family's steward.

"Young Master Liszt, your grandmother, Lady Penelope, has arrived. She's in the drawing room, chatting with Young Master Levis and Miss Li Vera," he said.

"Grandmother is here? I'll be there shortly."

Liszt rubbed his forehead, feeling somewhat annoyed—his grandmother, after all, did not look kindly upon him.

The disdain from his father was more about disappointment, but now, after returning with a changed demeanor, the Earl no longer showed any dislike, clearly pleased with his transformation. But his grandmother was different; she did not look kindly upon Liszt simply because he reminded her of Melissa, her daughter-in-law.

Penelope lived in a small castle in Coral City and chose not to live with her son due to one reason—her discord with her daughter-in-law, Melissa.

Liszt, who looked very much like his mother, became an outlet for Penelope's frustrations.

But no matter how annoyed he was, he still needed to go downstairs and pay his respects.

“Grandmother, you’re here. Seeing you in good health brings me great peace of mind.”

“Oh, look who it is!” The wrinkles on Penelope’s face were quite pronounced; she was approaching her sixtieth year. “Liszt, if you didn’t speak, I might have thought that Melissa had come to oppose me again. That beautiful face... Thank God, she’s gone to heaven to enjoy her peace, and this old woman dares to visit her son’s castle.”

Liszt sat down quietly, his face expressionless, saying nothing.

Why bother humoring someone who disdained him? They rarely saw each other anyway. It was best to just treat her as a stranger and maintain a superficial respect.

Li Vera laughed and said, “Liszt, when Grandma heard you were back, she rushed to the castle. Usually around this time, she spends hours praying for the family.”

Penelope turned her head away from Liszt, muttering under her breath, “I didn’t come just to see him.”

Could this be grudging respect after all?

Liszt thought to himself that Lady Penelope probably did love her grandson. It was just habit for her to attack Liszt, who bore a strong resemblance to Melissa—over a decade of habit. Whether it was love or disdain, it didn’t matter much to Liszt. He just wanted to be a quietly handsome man.

“Your sister said that Fresh Flower Town looks even more rudimentary than imagined, almost like a small village?” Lady Penelope inquired.

“It is indeed a bit rudimentary. However, it’s more suitable for grand development. I already have plans for developing Fresh Flower Town.”

“Look at that, such a grand manner of speaking. That’s a bit more like our Tulip Family’s temperament. Don’t always imitate Melissa’s calm, superior demeanor as if you’re born better than others. It’s bad enough you look so much like her; if you inherit her temperament as well, that would truly be the death of me, a cloud that I could never shake off.”

Liszt did not respond.

He didn't have many memories of his mother, as she passed away due to illness when he was very young.

Lady Penelope continued to ramble, lamenting Melissa's faults. Essentially, her message was the daughter of the Marquis looked down on me, opposed me at every turn, and you must not inherit her flaws.