

The Mighty Dragons Are Dead

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Chapter 81: Groom One-Eyed Barton

The Li Dragon Horse is a dragon breed horse, and to develop a Li Dragon Horse herd, the quality of the mares cannot be too poor.

The Fire Dragon Horse is the most suitable mating partner, but as there is only one fire Dragon Horse, any battle-ready horse can be brought in for breeding.

Marcus's mount, the dun horse, is one such battle-ready breed, though it is a stallion.

The horses of Goltai, Isaiah, and Blair are all capable of battle and, moreover, are mares—mares are usually not easily sent into battle, are more docile, and suitable for the kind of nobility or noble descendants who are not very fond of entering battle.

"I think we will be out of horses to ride very soon," Goltai looked at his mount, which was being passionately whipped by the Li Dragon Horse, with an indescribable expression on his face.

The most crucial point was that this mare was clearly not in heat, and it was being forcibly mounted by the overpowering Li Dragon Horse.

This was Liszt's perverse taste; his mount, the Fire Dragon Horse, had already been despoiled by the Li Dragon Horse, so the mounts of others were naturally not spared.

Marcus had a smile on his face.

It was unclear if he was taking pleasure in Goltai's mount being overpowered or if he was looking forward to a future with herds of horses in Fresh Flower Town.

He simply said, “Even pregnant mares can be ridden, with about 11 months of gestation. They can be ridden for the first seven months, but after that, riding should be reduced. Also, avoid intense, long-distance sprinting, which could increase the risk of miscarriage for the mare.”

Marcus was quite knowledgeable about horses, but he was not the most knowledgeable person about horses in Fresh Flower Town.

The most knowledgeable about horses was One-Eyed Barton, a serf who had drifted from Little Papa Island; he had once transported horses for the Pa Pa Family, traveled to the south, ventured into the north, drunk water behind toilets, and encountered many kinds of horses.

“Lord Landlord, I have never seen a more magnificent horse than the Li Dragon Horse. It must possess extraordinary lineage,” One-Eyed Barton was around forty-five years old, with a bushy beard and one blind eye while the other squinted into a slit.

To test his expertise,

Liszt had him inspect the Li Dragon Horse.

“So, what lineage do you think it has?”

“I’ve seen horses with low-level magical beast lineage, like the Fire Dragon Horse the Lord Landlord often rides, which is of a low-level magical beast lineage. I’ve also seen crossbred horses resulting from the mating of an intermediate magical beast, the Black Nightmare Horse, with ordinary horses, a new breed cultivated in the horse fields of the Blast Furnace Fortress Kingdom.”

As Barton spoke, he shook his head: “But that breed does not possess the spirit and majesty of the Li Dragon Horse... It is taller than the Li Dragon Horse, but it lacks the look and vitality. So I speculate that its mixed lineage must be higher than that of an intermediate magical beast... Perhaps it is from an advanced magical beast, but I cannot be certain.”

His high estimation of the Li Dragon Horse’s lineage was still not close enough, for this was a dragon breed horse.

Liszt, with plans he did not intend to reveal, remained low-key and asked One-Eyed Barton several more questions about horses, to which Barton responded very competently.

So he directly said, “Barton, tell me your surname.”

One-Eyed Barton’s face darkened: “Lord Landlord, Barton was once an orphan without a surname, raised by a horse merchant. Later, Lord Little Papa bought Barton from the Blast Furnace Fortress Kingdom, and I have been trafficking horses for Lord Little Papa ever since.”

“Is that so.” Liszt nodded, “Have you ever been married?”

“No.”

Not being married implied that having a surname was rather irrelevant—had he been married and had descendants, some legacy would be needed, and perhaps at that time, Barton might change his name to Barton the Cyclops?

“In that case, you will no longer need to till the fields. I hire you as the castle’s stableman, specifically responsible for managing the stables and caring for the castle’s horses.”

Barton happily kowtowed: “Barton will take good care of your lordship’s stables!”

A stableman’s role was not simply that of a horse caretaker, but also a servant belonging to the castle, who would not need to worry about food and clothing as long as they did not make any missteps.

In the aristocratic system, servants play a crucial role, bearing the burden of all the work in the castle and maintaining its internal operations.

Essentially,

servants can be divided into five categories: upstairs servants, Retainer Knights, downstairs servants, kitchen servants, and outdoor servants.

Upstairs servants include tutors, family doctors, and companions for the elderly nobles; they generally do not reside in the castle but are allowed to dine with the nobles upstairs.

Retainer Knights involve those retainers who carry out menial tasks on the battlefield and those who accompany in combat, with their own families.

Downstairs servants encompass the butler, male servants, and maids, who are the main workforce of the castle and live downstairs.

Kitchen servants are servants who work in the kitchen.

Beyond that are the outdoor servants; this is a general term because it includes coachmen, foresters, gamekeepers, doorkeepers, gardeners, etc. They usually reside in separate houses outside the castle and do not work in the castle on a daily basis but maintain horses, grow flowers, and hunt for the castle.

If it is a Noble, the servants will be further subdivided.

The hall greeters, meal servers, wine stewards, laundry attendants, chief house officers, personal valets, secretaries, wardrobe attendants, Horse Tamers, Dog Trainers, jesters, harpists, drummers, flutists, and so on—in short, nobles can hire a specific servant for any task they need.

For commoners, becoming a servant is a matter worth mentioning.

In comparison to serfs, servants clearly enjoy a more comfortable life and lighter work. And among nobles, it is common for lesser nobles to serve as servants to the greater ones. For instance, Goltai, a downtrodden Honored Knight, serves as a tutor in the Liszt household.

Even the Earl of Coral Island, a Sky Knight who holds the power of life and death over the island, takes pride in serving as a stable hand for the Sapphire Duke.

The longer Liszt lived in the countryside castle, the more he felt that there was no equality among people.

“First, take good care of the Li Dragon Horse, Barton; it has worked hard lately, and I do not wish to see it collapse one day under some mare,” Liszt said gravely, looking at the tirelessly working Li Dragon Horse.

Barton inspected the horse’s mouth through the gap as it opened its mouth: “This is still a young stallion, a bit of restlessness is normal, and as the

weather gets hotter, its rut will gradually subside over time. However, we must regulate the number of times it mates with each mare.”

“The top priority is to ensure the Fire Dragon Horse is impregnated.”

“Understood, Lord,” Barton quickly fell into the role of a horseman, addressing Liszt as Lord.

In order for the Fire Dragon Horse to become pregnant as soon as possible, Liszt had decided against riding the Li Dragon Horse and the Fire Dragon Horse; he switched to a nag and continued practicing archery.

By mid-July, when he could move swiftly on the nag and hit all the targets, never straying too far from the bullseye, Marcus announced that his “Basic Archery” training was complete and he could begin studying “Multi-Arrow”. All in all, it had only taken him a week.

Therefore, he was very confident about learning “Multi-Arrow”, hoping to have it mastered by the time August arrived.

“Lord, your ice cream,” Thomas presented a cup of fragrant ice cream.

Liszt, diligently practicing archery even in the scorching heat, took the ice cream and ate it voraciously. A refreshing chillness spread from his head to his toe, an indescribably delightful sensation. Without the aid of ice cream, cold beer, or chilled juice, he would never practice archery in the sweltering summer heat.

Fortunately, the Miniature Saltpeter Mine mining had concluded, yielding a total of three hundred catties of saltpeter, enough to produce ample daily ice for the castle.

At night, blocks of ice would also be placed in Liszt’s study and bedroom to cool the temperature.

With ice, this summer was not too hard to bear.

Chapter 82: The Most Difficult Task

“Multi-Arrow” contains no content about Dou Qi cultivation and does not belong to Dou Qi Manuscripts, but it does belong to Dou Qi techniques. Any knight of any attribute of Dou Qi can practice it.

It’s divided into three levels: Double Arrow, Triple Arrow, and Multiple Arrow, plus one Ultimate Mystery Technique? the Multi Shadow Arrow.

Riding on a yellowish-gray horse, Marcus meticulously demonstrated the “Multi-Arrow” he had practiced on the horse track and then explained each shot in detail.

“There are five ways to use the Double Arrow, but the one I use most often is to shoot two arrows at once, which simply means releasing two arrows to hit a single target. The next is the crossing of the two arrows, which involves firing two arrows side by side and using magic power to guide them to collide mid-air, thereby changing their course. The remaining Double Spiral Arrow, Double Chain Arrow, and Double Speed Variation Arrow are not very practical.”

Riding on a horse, controlling the horse and controlling the double arrows, is indeed difficult.

Therefore, Marcus meant that as long as one masters both the Double Arrow Released Together and the Double Arrow Crossing, one can be called a Divine Archer, undefeated on the battlefield.

The other types of archery can only be effective when carefully considered on the ground.

He continued, “The Triple Arrow is essentially an advancement of the Double Arrow, with the principles of Three Arrows Released Together, Triple Spiral Arrow, Triple Chain Arrow, Triple Speed Variation Arrow, and Triple Random Shot being the same, but with higher control requirements. The Multiple Arrow is the same, with Multiple Arrows Released Together, Spiral Shadow Arrow, Multiple Chain Arrows, Multiple Random Shots, and Multiple Arrow Crossing requiring even stronger control.”

Only after dismounting was Marcus able to perform the Triple Arrow and Multiple Arrow one by one.

After emptying the arrows in the quiver, he shook his head, unsatisfied with his archery, “The Triple Arrow can be mastered while stationary, but the

Multiple Arrow can't be. It's too difficult. And that last Ultimate Mystery Technique, the Multi-Shadow Arrow, takes me at least a quarter of an hour to prepare before I dare to shoot it."

A person's hand.

One arrow is stable to hold; two arrows are not bad; three arrows can be managed, fitting exactly between three fingers, one arrow per gap.

But more arrows are problematic, requiring two arrows to be held in each finger gap, a tremendous difficulty, let alone needing to distribute magic power to guide each one.

Earth Knights don't have such delicate control over Dou Qi yet.

The retainer plucked each arrow from the target and handed them back to Marcus.

Marcus let out a long breath, easing his tense emotions, "My lord, I'm not so good at controlling more than three arrows at a time, and now the Ultimate Mystery Technique is even harder to master. That's why I split it into two shots, one with three arrows, which can just about achieve the effect described in "Multi-Arrow"."

He pulled three arrows from the quiver, "The first three arrows are shot with a gentle force, allowing them to be lobbed at a low speed. The next three arrows are shot with a swift force, to shoot them at high speed in a flat trajectory, striking the first three arrows, thus uniting the speed of all six arrows and confusing their flight path, creating an illusion-like effect."

Having said that.

He bit the three arrows in his mouth and then pulled out three more arrows to shoot immediately. The instant he released them, the three arrows soared diagonally upwards.

With a very quick motion, he placed the three arrows from his mouth into his hand, drew his bow again immediately, and this time, he stretched the bowstring almost to a full moon. As the arrows were shot, they made a sharp hissing sound as they broke through the air.

"Whiz!"

“Whiz!”

“Whiz!”

In midair, the three fast arrows flew on a flat trajectory, hitting the arrows thrown in front of them just right. In an instant, the six arrows began spinning in the air.

To the naked eye, it seemed as if dozens more arrows suddenly appeared, shooting chaotically at three targets.

It happened in a blink of an eye. Before Liszt could even blink, the illusions scattered, leaving only the six arrows that hit the center of the targets. Five of them were embedded straight in the targets, but one arrow flew past.

“Still can’t fully control the trajectory of all six arrows,” Marcus said somewhat disappointedly.

But Liszt applauded, “Teacher Marcus, your archery skills are already amazing. Let’s start practicing quickly. I can’t wait to perform the Multi-Shadow Arrow.” In truth, his heart was a bit bitter; Marcus’s archery skills were profound.

He had thought it was just a routine of two or three arrows, something to casually learn without seeking deep expertise, learning it was enough.

But now he realized that without mastering Double Arrow or Triple Arrow, it was probably impossible to learn Multi-Arrow, let alone the Ultimate Mystery Multi-Shadow Arrow.

“This is probably the most difficult Smoke Mission I’ve ever encountered…”

It’s already past mid-July, and he sincerely doubted he would be able to learn “Multi-Arrow” by the time August arrived. Though it felt very challenging, he decided to set aside his mental burden and focus on learning archery. One day, he would master the intricate “Multi-Arrow”.

Just as the Earl had said during the Sea Festival, “Don’t be impatient, time is on your side.”

He was only sixteen years old.

There were decades of long life ahead of him.

Fresh Flower Town was thriving every day, with no crisis too big to handle, allowing for a lifestyle of ease and pleasure. The dream of Dragon Riding couldn't be achieved in haste.

In the blink of an eye.

August had arrived.

During this past half-month, Liszt had been furiously practicing archery and had successfully mastered Triple Arrow, now beginning to move towards Multi-Arrow. The mares in the horse pasture were mostly pregnant now, and the Li Dragon Horse had grown significantly thinner, tirelessly toiling day and night. Even with dragon blood, it couldn't endure endlessly.

"Sir, the alfalfa in the horse pasture has reached its support limit. Currently, the town has a total of fifteen horses, all grazing in the pasture, with five stallions and ten mares. Apart from the three elderly mares that have lost their reproductive ability, the other seven, including the Fire Dragon Horse, are pregnant,"

One-Eyed Barton said, "With so many pregnant mares, the Li Dragon Horse is about to strain itself, so they need a lot of nutrition. Relying solely on the pasture's grass is definitely not enough."

"As long as the horses are well cared for, say whatever you need," Liszt was very concerned about the horses' welfare.

"For their health and nutrition, they need better concentrated feed such as oats, barley, and wheat bran. If we could also have peanuts and peas, that would be excellent,"

These foods were not inferior to what commoners ate, and even exceeded them—in quantity, at least, as one horse's daily ration was equivalent to that of three adults.

Liszt did not refuse at all; he readily agreed to One-Eyed Barton's request, "Okay."

He also had the confidence to agree, because since the road through Thorn Ridge had been cleared, Fresh Flower Town's merchant teams could now travel unimpeded for business.

Currently, their main trade was in seafood, which had started to open up the market. Tulip Castle was the main purchaser, buying seafood worth half a Gold Coin every three days. The citizens of Coral City had also begun to enjoy the taste of seafood, purchasing similarly every three days, generating another half a Gold Coin in sales.

Then there were the numerous lesser Nobles residing in Coral City, as well as those nearest to Fresh Flower Town in North Valley City and its citizens, adding up to one Gold Coin worth of seafood every three days.

This meant that Fresh Flower Town's merchant teams could earn two Gold Coins every three days.

An average of 67 Silver Coins a day, with the cost of seafood and travel being almost negligible, this was pure profit. Of course, Liszt had not seen any Gold or Silver Coins himself, as the merchant teams had earned a little, he would order the purchase of items needed for the Castle—salt, sugar lumps, fabric, spices, soap, beer, and so forth.

And specially ordered pork pancreas.

He even had the merchant teams buy ten piglets, delivering them to the Serfs of Barley Hamlet to raise for slaughtering during New Year. Chick and ducklings were not in season to buy; colts, calves, and lambs were too expensive to afford; for now, the livestock business had to rely on the town's own produce.

"This time the merchant team brought back..." After finishing the transaction with Old Geronte, Carter returned to the Castle to report to Liszt.

"Mr. Carter, I have a question," Liszt, who had little interest in such intricate accounts, held his teacup, his brows furrowed in thought, "Why does Mrs. Morson manage to give me—a feeling that the milk tea tastes better than yesterday, every single day?"

Chapter 83: The Chance to Change Destiny

Why does the milk tea taste better day after day?

Liszt had noticed this for over half a month now, initially thinking that it was the improved skill of Mrs. Morson from Morson Paddy Field, but it was not possible for the skill to improve noticeable every single day.

“In fact, my lord,” Carter said, “the desserts made with cream lately have also tasted better. Mrs. Morson and Mrs. Abbie think it might have something to do with the dairy cows on the farm. Both Dahei and Dahuang are pregnant with calves, and the quantity and quality of the milk have been on the rise.”

“Pregnancy can improve the quality of milk?”

“It’s probably because the dairy farm has started to cultivate alfalfa. Compared to the previous two-leaf clover, alfalfa is more nutritious. I have visited the dairy farm, and the condition of the eight cows is very good, especially the three younger ones who have grown quickly and are nearing milking age.”

“Good, once the calves grow up, the castle won’t be short of milk.” Liszt emptied his cup of milk tea in one gulp, “This time, we must keep the calves that are in the cows’ bellies alive.”

The gestation period for dairy cows is about nine months, and to maintain milk production, they must become pregnant again soon after giving birth.

So, a dairy cow can basically give birth to one calf per year.

But due to limitations in nutrition, sanitation, disease, etc., not all calves can grow into dairy cows, and there’s a high probability of them dying young. In this era, even human childbirth carried a substantial risk of infant mortality. Even if nobles had robust health and access to doctors for treatment, it was impossible to ensure a hundred percent survival rate for infants.

In more than a decade of breeding at the dairy farm, they had managed to raise only ten cows.

Now that two older cows had been eaten by the Formless Dragon, only eight remained, but the pasture was sufficient to support a few more. Milk was an essential food for nobles, just as important as bread and beer.

Liszt couldn’t do without milk.

He loved drinking milk tea. A cup of fresh milk in the morning and one cup of brewed milk for lunch and dinner, topped off with another cup of milk tea

before bed. The nutrition from four cups of milk compensated for the energy he expended practicing Dou Qi every day—knight's Dou Qi originated from the body; without nutrition, where would the Dou Qi come from?

He wiped the milk tea foam from his lips with a handkerchief.

Suddenly, Liszt really wanted to invent pearl milk tea.

However, there were no purple sweet potatoes or pumpkins on Coral Island, so he couldn't produce "pearls." Therefore, he could only continue to drink milk tea without any additives—when he first came to the castle, the milk tea brewed by Mrs. Morson was not just a mix of milk and tea, it also contained minced meat, eggs, salt, sugar cubes, salad, and more, which Liszt later forcefully eliminated.

Restoring the original flavor of milk tea.

After finishing his milk tea, he cheerfully said, "When the castle's income improves, I plan to raise more dairy cows. I aim to give every servant and retainer in the castle a cup of fresh milk every day."

Carter responded with a smile, "You are always so generous."

A little kindness can ensure the enduring loyalty of servants, but the main reason was that he wanted to improve the nutritional treatment of the Knight Squad.

The next morning.

He continued practicing "Multi-Arrow" at the horse track, no longer requiring Marcus's guidance. Marcus was training the Knight Squad not far away; Rom Barrel, Gray Scythe, and Auden Insole, three Retainer Knights, were also training with the squad.

Only Karl Ironhammer was no longer training with the squad but had returned to Liszt's side—he had successfully practiced Dou Qi and become an Apprentice Knight.

The Dou Qi was very weak, and Marcus had judged that there was no potential left to tap into.

But Karl was already more than satisfied, grinning ear to ear these past few days. Having Dou Qi meant being strong and healthy, it also meant being of great use.

“Karl, your Dou Qi talent was developed too late, and this is as far as you go. Once the Knight Squad training is up to standard, and you stay to be my Retainer Knight, it’s hard to get a chance to improve. Therefore, I plan to have you work in town,” Liszt said while practicing archery and talking with Karl.

Karl was not young anymore and had already taken a wife and had children in Coral City.

He said solemnly, “My lord, Karl is willing to follow you forever!”

“I know your loyalty, but the position of retainer is not suitable for you. With your strength, competing with the young men of the knight squad would be very disadvantageous.”

“My lord, I...” Karl also understood that he was no match for the young men of the knight squad.

Among them were two youths, Philip Wool and Zavier Bull Dung, who had cultivated Dou Qi earlier than him, and both the abundance and recovery speed of their Dou Qi surpassed his; the remaining ten youths had all developed a sense of Qi and were close to obtaining Dou Qi, with ample time to strive towards becoming Earth Knights.

He felt a bit panicked.

Not being a particularly clever person, he became bewildered about his future for a moment.

Liszt sighed inwardly. He wasn’t unkind or hard-hearted, but the position of Retainer Knights wasn’t a place for sentimentality—they needed to protect their own safety and could not afford to be careless: “Go to the Patrol Team. The Patrol Team is made up of common people, and they need an Apprentice Knight to oversee their security work.”

“Yes, my lord.” Karl felt somewhat disheartened.

The Patrol Team was nowhere as glorious as the retainer knights of a landlord.

Liszt noticed Karl's disappointment and said indifferently, "I will bestow upon you the status of a freeman and appoint you as the Defense Officer of Fresh Flower Town, assisting Goltai in managing the town's security, with the Patrol Team under your direct command. This position is important, do not let me down, Karl."

His expression shifted from disappointment to surprise in an instant.

Karl bowed deeply, "Thank you for the promotion, my lord. Karl is willing to serve you for life!"

In the afternoon, the news that Karl had been promoted to a freeman and appointed as the Defense Officer of Fresh Flower Town spread throughout the entire stableyard. During a break in the knight squad's training, Marcus came over to give Liszt archery guidance.

They chatted casually as well.

"My lord, Karl's story has made the knight squad train even harder, especially Rom, Gray, and Auden who are pushing themselves to the limit."

"Dou Qi changes fate; it used to sound more like a slogan. But giving them a living example will make them realize that this is not just a slogan, but a tangible opportunity," Liszt said as he shook his sore wrist. Even he himself was striving to become stronger.

Marcus, however, remarked, "It is you, my lord, who bestows upon them the opportunity to change their fate."

The statement was irrefutable; Liszt acknowledged it.

Then changing the subject, he drew four arrows and practiced the "Spiral Shadow Arrow" from the Multiple Arrow technique, making the four arrows follow a spiral trajectory—this was a preliminary skill for the Ultimate Mystery Multi-Shadow Arrow, with a key technique of how to create the illusion effect of the arrows.

Two arrows were clamped between his index finger, and two between his middle finger.

Drawing the stiff bow to its full arc,

he aimed at a target not far in front of him. Suddenly, he released his grip, and the four arrows shot out one after another with magic power spreading out around them, driving the arrows to spin in the air.

Regrettably,

the magic power dispersing one of the arrows was directed incorrectly, breaking the formation of the arrows. The airflow shattered, affecting the other three arrows, leading all four to miss the target.

“Still lacking a bit,” Liszt put down the bow and arrows, recalling where he had gone wrong—the study of archery was vast, involving control over the bowstring’s force, direction of the arrows, balancing magic power, as well as accounting for wind resistance and gravity.

Marcus watched the landing trajectory of the arrows, his eyes shining.

“My lord, your archery talent has already surpassed many. I started learning archery at your age, but it took me three whole years just to get started in ‘Basic Archery.’ After becoming an Earth Knight and nearly fifteen years of practice, I reached my current level of archery, and you are quickly catching up.”

Chapter 84: When will the task be completed?

This isn’t flattery.

Liszt himself felt that his talent was extraordinarily potent.

Perhaps his body, by nature, had strong lineage, superior genes, far surpassing those of ordinary people. Now with a soul that surpassed the era’s thinking, his grasp of principles allowed him a clearer touch on the essence of cultivation.

Others learned archery, perhaps solely through practice and experience.

In their minds, there was no conception of air resistance, parabolic trajectories, inertia, or Newton’s three laws of motion.

Yet he could, through some simple laws of physics, discern the trajectory of an arrow's flight and thus more quickly master how to shape muscle memory to rapidly learn archery skills.

What he lacked was just control over technical details.

Analyze failure.

Improve technique.

Bend the bow and shoot arrows again.

Liszt felt that such pure cultivation, once one delved into it, was also a kind of painful yet joyful indulgence.

"My lord, I'm planning to take a day off to buy my family out of serfdom and bring them to live in Fresh Flower Town," Karl said, having successfully handed over the position of defense officer, and following the afternoon's briefing for the patrol team, attended the evening's banquet in the castle for the first time.

He was nervously fidgety with excitement.

Liszt, biting into a piece of bread, replied, "I approve your leave. Go ahead and bring your family to live here, Goltai will ensure your work is managed well... By the way, do you have enough money to buy their freedom?"

"I've saved up enough, Rom and the others lent me some. There are only four people in my family, my parents and younger brother and sister, and the money I have is just enough to buy out their serf status."

"If it's not enough, don't hesitate to speak to me, whether you need an advance on your salary or a low-interest loan."

Karl, formerly a retainer knight, had family members who were serfs of the Tulip family. Now that he had obtained freeman status, he wanted to free his family from serfdom.

As a follower of a noble, he now had enough power to protect his family.

Goltai raised his glass to Karl in celebration, "Blair and Marcus' families have settled into their new lives and are doing very well; your family will do the same."

Karl downed his beer in one go, excitedly saying, “Fresh Flower Town will only get better, the glory of the knights shines upon this place, shines upon the lord!”

“I agree!” Marcus, too, raised his glass and drained his beer.

Blair and Isaiah also raised their glasses to drink heartily.

Goltai, who had a taste for good wine, finished his glass, eagerly waited for the servant to refill it, and then promptly raised his glass again, “In that case, let’s drink another round to Fresh Flower Town, to our lord!”

One glass of wine was downed.

Then Goltai added, “Karl, come back soon. In three days, a caravan from North Valley City will come to Fresh Flower Town. The patrol team needs to supervise the entire process and promote the rules of Fresh Flower Town to them.”

“I’ll return as quickly as I can, without delay to the work,” Karl assured.

“Douson, release the magic!”

Outside the castle, Liszt held Douson’s leash, issuing the command.

Douson immediately followed the direction of his pointing finger, opened his mouth to roar, and in an instant, a rock spike emerged from the ground. After Liszt led Douson away, a male servant immediately came over, shovel in hand, to dig the rock spike out of the ground.

This kind of rock spike was created by the earth attribute magic power solidifying the soil into a hard stone compound.

It was extremely hard, with the toughness of granite.

Every day Douson could produce many such rock spikes, then the male servants would collect them and use them for paving roads. Liszt had requested the construction of a stone road between the castle and the town’s main street, passable even on rainy days; otherwise, it was impossible to go out when it rained.

At the moment, this road was already forty meters long.

“Douson, up!” Liszt continued to train Douson. He had specifically bought all the wild rabbits caught by hunters, and these rabbits were materials for Douson’s training.

The wild rabbits ran rapidly on the ground, making various abrupt stops and changes in direction.

Even if Douson was a magical beast, hailed as the King of Thorn Ridge, catching up to a wild rabbit still took considerable effort. It chased the rabbit around the riding ground for about a kilometer before finally pinning the rabbit to the ground and biting down on its neck.

It killed the rabbit.

Douson flung the rabbit carcass to one side.

It no longer ate raw food, its mouth spoiled by Liszt, only consuming cooked meals.

“Ga ji!”

On Liszt’s left hand, which was cloaked in a leather glove, perched a fluffy big bird, Juan Fu, a young Wind Falcon. Still unable to fly, it had quite a loud voice, squawking “ga ji,” “ga ji” all day long, and had a huge appetite too, consuming several fish in one meal.

Hearing Juan Fu’s squawk,

the cheerful Douson immediately turned around, then rushed beside Liszt, drooling at Juan Fu—it certainly wanted to eat a bird, to taste its flavor.

“Ga ji!”

“Ga ji!”

Juan Fu flapped its wings, seemingly eager to attempt flying. Once this layer of down fell out, replaced by flight feathers, it would probably be ready for its first flight.

Liszt felt slightly troubled, as birds yearn for the sky and are hard to keep grounded.

Yet without any sign of recognizing an owner, and with nobody on Coral Island adept at taming birds,

“Stop squawking, or I’ll make you into a red-cooked dish,” said Liszt nonchalantly as he passed Juan Fu to Thomas, who hastily caught it with his gloved hand, fearing it might fall and become prey to Douson.

Now roughly the size and weight of a sausage, Juan Fu was somewhat heavy for Thomas to hold with one hand.

Liszt, sympathetic to his struggle, said, “Take it back to the nest.”

“Yes, Master.”

By the time Thomas returned after delivering Juan Fu, Liszt had already exhausted Douson with training: “Lead Douson back and tie it up, I’m going to start practicing archery.”

“Yes, Master.”

Seeing this, two robust youths rushed over to pass Liszt his bow and arrows: “My lord, your bow and arrows.”

They were Philip Wool and Zavier Bull Dung, members of the Knight Squad who had cultivated Dou Qi and were no longer required to train daily with the squad, beginning their duties as Retainer Knights.

Accepting the bow and arrows,

Liszt quickly entered his zone, practicing Multiple Arrow. Now, he only lacked mastery of Spiral Shadow Arrow; he had successfully learned the other four techniques but wasn’t very proficient yet.

“Today, I aim to master Spiral Shadow Arrow, and I’ll start practicing Multiple Phantom Arrow tomorrow!”

From morning until afternoon.

Sweat streamed down time and again.

Finally, as the sun set in the west, he successfully executed Spiral Shadow Arrow. Four arrows spiraled through the air, instantly creating layers of illusions, eventually all striking the target.

“Phew!”

He breathed a sigh of relief.

Rubbing his wrist, he decided to call it a day with archery: “In another week, I should be able to master Multiple Phantom Arrow.” Thinking this, he summoned the Smoke Mission and habitually glanced over it.

But this glance revealed that the Serpent Script had transformed.

“Mission complete, reward: Black Pearl of the Deep Sea.”

“Mission: A trade caravan is soon to arrive at Fresh Flower Town, the first since the Landlord’s commencement. Ensure the trade’s total proceeds reach at least 3 Gold Coins to attract the caravan for future visits. Reward: Drifting Bottle.”

“Hmm?”

Liszt was puzzled, “When did I actually complete the mission? I clearly haven’t mastered the Ultimate Mystery Multi-Shadow Arrow?”

Suddenly, it dawned on him.

That time when practicing “Multi-Arrow”, Marcus’s Multiple Phantom Arrow had one stray from the target.

“Does this mean that Marcus hasn’t mastered the Ultimate Mystery Technique either? He shot in two sequences and still missed one, so he doesn’t qualify as having mastery? So, do I only need to learn the earlier Double Arrow, Triple Arrow, and Multiple Arrow to complete the mission?”

Without a doubt, that had to be the case.

It was an unexpected blessing, which Liszt gladly accepted, then shifted his focus to the rewards and new mission: “The Black Pearl of the Deep Sea? The Drifting Bottle? Is there any connection between them?”

Chapter 85: The Self-Recommended Captain

The task was easy to accomplish.

He didn't need to pay attention to how much the residents of the town traded, as he had already decided that the castle would directly purchase any goods above three Gold Coins.

Recently, seafood had started to turn a profit, and the East Coast had become a constant stream of Gold Coins for the castle.

His money pouch had successfully stopped deflating and was slightly recovering; he now had about five Gold Coins saved.

"Old Geronte, I've called you here because I have a task for you. Tomorrow, a merchant convoy from North Valley City will come to Fresh Flower Town. I'm giving you three Gold Coins, and you must spend them all, purchasing anything you can."

Old Geronte was astute, "Lord Landlord, are you using the allure of Gold Coins to entice the merchant convoy to come again next time?"

"Exactly."

"Old Geronte understands, I will see to it that it's done."

"Good, you may go now."

"Yes, Lord Landlord, I wish you a good night."

As Old Geronte turned to leave, he saw Bunier at the castle gate and greeted him, "Bunier, has the Lord Landlord also summoned you?"

"Oh, no, I made some soap and brought it to the castle specially." Bunier shook the bag he was holding, "Did the Lord Landlord call for you about the merchant convoy's matter for tomorrow?"

Old Geronte said with a hint of pride, "Of course, I'm the leader of the castle's merchant convoy, and the Lord Landlord trusts me."

"I'm envious of you, but I must be going now." Bunier passed Old Geronte and, led by a servant, entered the castle to see Liszt.

He bowed respectfully and handed the soap to the servant.

“Finally, the soap is made, and we no longer have to buy those soaps from Coral City, where they charge two silver coins for materials that plainly cost a copper coin.” Liszt picked up a bar of soap, feeling that Bunier’s craftsmanship was decent and not much worse than the soaps bought from Coral City, “You’ve worked hard, Bunier.”

“It’s Bunier’s fortune to work for Lord Landlord.”

“I have another task for you.”

“Lord Landlord, please command me.”

Liszt said, “I’ve heard of a formula, mixing pig pancreas and wood ash— basically these two materials—to create a soap that is more potent in cleaning than soapberry. It’s called ‘fat soap.’” The term ‘pancreas’ didn’t sound pleasant, so Liszt simply described it as ‘fat soap,’ since it was a new concept with no contention over naming rights.

“There is something better than soapberry? Lord Landlord, can pig pancreas also clean and remove stains?” asked Bunier, surprised.

“That’s the case, but I can’t remember exactly how to mix them. Therefore, I’m handing over the task of making fat soap to you, hoping that you can quickly figure out how to create a bath soap using pig pancreas and wood ash. Once you’ve succeeded, I will reward you handsomely.”

Bunier quickly replied, “It is Bunier’s fortune to work for Lord Landlord. Please be assured, Lord Landlord, that Bunier will make the fat soap as soon as possible.”

“Hm, don’t forget to keep making the regular soap as well; we cannot run out of soap in the castle.”

“Rest assured, Lord Landlord.”

The rewards for the Smoke Mission arrived quickly.

The next morning, Liszt received a report that the fishermen from Oyster Village had found a stranded giant sea creature on the East Coast. A sea monster, the Black Pearl of the Deep Sea, Liszt immediately realized and set off for the East Coast.

By the seaside, he saw the stranded sea monster, accompanied by a putrid smell.

“Lord, do you recognize this kind of sea monster?” Goltai and the others had rushed over early, but they did not recognize what species the stranded sea monster was.

Liszt looked closely and saw that the sea monster was some kind of mollusk, extremely large, at least over ten meters long. It had tentacles, soft and entwined together, and upon examining its body, which resembled a squid and lay spread out on the sand, he noticed signs of decay that made it hard to discern what it looked like alive.

He used the Eye of Magic and discovered that there was no flow of magic power in the body of the sea monster.

Strictly speaking, this was just some sort of marine animal, not a sea monster.

“It might be a type of large squid, not a sea monster,” Liszt fanned away the air in front of his nose, as the putrid smell of the decaying squid was extremely foul.

“I wonder if it’s edible?” Blair suddenly asked.

Goltai made a face of aversion, “I can hardly stand the smell, let alone eat it. I think it’s not seafood; it’s a monster! Maybe it’s poisonous, or it might even have eaten people in the sea. I’ve heard of a kind of sea monster that entangles ships, and this squid has ‘hands,’ so it definitely could entangle ships as well.”

Whether or not it was poisonous or had eaten people, Liszt would not consider it seafood.

Something rotten should just be thrown away.

But thinking of the Black Pearl of the Deep Sea, which might be related to this large squid, he ordered, “Teacher Goltai, find some people to dissect this large squid to see if there’s anything interesting inside. If there’s nothing, chop it up and throw it into the sea to avoid creating a stench.”

Goltai began organizing fishermen to come and dissect the large squid.

Liszt then rode his horse towards the beached sailboat not far from the beach; this damaged sailboat, with a few holes, had already been repaired by carpenters. When the tide went out, they would move it back into the sea, and after the tide rose again, it could basically sail back out... It's just that, while they had a captain who could steer, they lacked qualified sailors.

"Lord Landlord, Kostor sends his regards to you."

While Liszt was admiring the sailboat, his Retainer Knights Philip and Zavier stopped a fisherman. The fisherman knelt on the ground in a hurry, shouting loudly.

Kostor?

Liszt remembered the name, turned his horse around, and said to Thomas following behind, "Let him come here."

Kostor was a tall, middle-aged man with a sun-baked, weather-beaten face: "Lord Landlord, Kostor sends his regards to you."

"You've already said that once," Liszt looked at him with a critical eye, "Stand up to talk. If I'm not mistaken, you are the captain of this ship, aren't you?"

"Lord Landlord still remembers Kostor, I am honored," Kostor stood up and respectfully said, "I used to work for Lord Little Papa as the captain of the Flying Number, a three-masted sailing ship that could reach 3 knots speed with the wind. This sailboat is even more outstanding than the Flying Number; it can reach 5 knots with the wind."

Knot was a unit of speed, and Liszt wasn't quite sure how fast a knot really was.

But he knew that the fastest ship in the Tulip Fleet could reach 7 knots. It was said that the fastest sailing ships in the Court Fleet could reach a speed of 10 knots.

Kostor looked up at the sailboat, his eyes filled with inexplicable emotion. "Lord Landlord, don't you wish to see it return to the sea?"

"Do you want to captain this ship again?" Liszt looked with interest at Kostor, who clearly seemed ready to offer himself for the role. "But Fresh Flower Town doesn't have a single sailor."

“They can be trained. I started out as a sailor, traversing the seas year-round. I know how to train qualified sailors. If Lord Landlord trusts me, you only need to give me twenty people; within three months, I can train them into qualified coastal crew members, and within a year, they should be able to sail in distant waters!”

Liszt looked at him, “Fresh Flower Town doesn’t have an appropriate seaport; how will you train the sailors?”

“We do, Lord Landlord, Fresh Flower Town has a place that is very suitable for building a seaport! The terrain is flat, the water is deep, and it can accommodate medium-sized ships and below!”

Chapter 86: The Unopenable Tridacna

Kostor crouched on the sand, tracing a rough outline of the East Coast shoreline with his finger, and then circled a spot at one end of the coastline, “Lord Landlord, this here is a suitable place for the construction of a harbor.”

Liszt understood this crude map.

Strictly speaking, the location of the harbor was no longer within the boundaries of Fresh Flower Town. The cow farm marked the northernmost boundary of Fresh Flower Town, while further north lay the section of Thorn Ridge that extended to the sea.

And the site Kostor mentioned was where Thorn Ridge met the sea.

“Thorn Ridge is made up of low hills with flat roads running through it, and in recent times, I’ve scouted the entire East Coast. I found that from this position, Thorn Ridge begins to fork, forming a flat valley. Right by the sea is a deep-water harbor, which I’ve personally dived to explore. The terrain and roads are both suitable for the construction of docks.”

“You dared to go deep into Thorn Ridge?” Liszt was somewhat surprised.

Kostor’s tone was somewhat fervent, “Since taking refuge in Fresh Flower Town, I have always wanted to set sail again. But without a harbor or docks in

Fresh Flower Town, I couldn't settle. So, I explored farther... I was lucky, encountering no Magical Beasts, only some wild beasts, and I found some Smoked Grass."

As he spoke,

he suddenly knelt down again, "I'm sorry, Lord Landlord, I went to the Smoked Grass field and picked up leaves that had fallen to the ground. Please penalize me."

Smoked Grass belonged to Liszt. Even naturally fallen leaves were his property, and picking them up was considered theft by anyone, let alone a serf.

"Stand up first, we'll talk about your actions later."

Liszt indicated for him to stand again and speak, "You're quite bold, not only daring to enter Thorn Ridge but also to venture into the sea alone. It seems that neither Magical Beasts nor Sea Monsters can stop the love for the sea in your heart."

"I love the sea!"

Kostor took a deep breath, gazing toward the Sea Waves.

"I grew up by the sea, and as a youth, I sailed with ships. I've spent more time at sea than on land. I've seen the long horn of the narwhal piercing the surface, which is a tooth growing from its mouth; I've witnessed mirages of wealthy cities at sea, unattainable however I chased; I've heard enchanting songs from within the fog, the singing of Sea Serpents..."

After a pause, he swallowed hard and spoke earnestly, "I love sailing, I love moving across the sea, Lord Landlord, Kostor hopes to steer your sailboat and engage in maritime trade for you."

A brief exchange.

Liszt could tell that Kostor was a person of insight, intelligence, action, and adventurous spirit. If he had been in the era of great European voyages, such a man might have become an explorer like "Columbus". Clearly, those who harbor dreams are worthy of respect.

His talents were wasted in Fresh Flower Town.

“Kostor, I hereby appoint you Captain of the Fresh Flower Vessel.” He looked down at him from his position of authority. “You may recruit your own Sailor Apprentices and train them in sailing skills along the East Coast.”

“Fresh Flower Vessel?”

“That’s the name of the sailboat; I named it the Fresh Flower Vessel. It’ll be the first ship of Fresh Flower Town!”

Kostor was overjoyed, “Lord Landlord, when do you plan on constructing the harbor, and when do you plan to set out for maritime trade? Just give me one year, and I will train a crew of qualified sailors!”

“You are not to enter Thorn Forest again until I have cleared all the trees of Thorn Ridge. There’s no need for you to worry about the harbor; I will build the docks when the time comes. There is no salary for the position of Captain at the moment; you need to be self-reliant, perhaps by charging tuition fees... Of course, you can choose to apply to be a teacher, teaching my Knight Squad about sailing.”

Marcus teaches Dou Qi, Isaiah teaches literacy, and now with Kostor teaching sailing, Liszt highly values the education of the Knight Squad.

Even if only a few of this group turn out to be exceptional, they can become qualified instructors for Liszt to train the next batch of Knight candidates.

The outcome couldn’t have been better. Kostor knelt on both knees and paid his respects, “Lord Landlord, I am willing to apply for the teacher position!”

“Then, Captain, introduce me to the Fresh Flower Vessel.”

The Fresh Flower Vessel was a two-masted schooner evidently much smaller than a three-masted one. It could barely be used for oceanic trade. Within the Tulip Fleet, there were quite a few two-masted schooners. They were most suited for sailing within the archipelago, where they would not encounter severe ocean storms, greatly increasing their safety.

It had no cannons.

If it encountered a Sea Monster, fleeing was the only option; however, while there were often stories of Sea Monsters attacking ships, in reality, such attacks were rare.

While they were admiring the Fresh Flower Vessel, the fishermen dissecting the large squid corpse suddenly shouted.

The news quickly reached Liszt. It turned out the fishermen had extracted a large shell creature from the squid's stomach. "A shell shaped like a wave" and "larger than a human" were the descriptions given by the Clerk relaying the message about this shell creature.

Liszt immediately disembarked from the Fresh Flower Vessel.

He understood, within this shell creature, there must be a Black Pearl of the Deep Sea.

When he saw the shell creature for himself, he realized in an instant, "This is a Tridacna!"

The huge shell, the wave-like design, and the colorfully splendid mantle all declared its identity—a Tridacna. In Liszt's homeland, the Tridacna was the world's largest shell creature. Its shell could be made into a gemstone and was extremely valuable; the flesh was also particularly delicious.

On the table at his former home, there was a vase made from the shell of a Tridacna.

Of course, that was a small Tridacna.

The enormous Tridacna before him had at least a two-meter diameter, estimated to weigh over five hundred kilograms. The shell was tightly closed, and it was unclear whether it was still alive; the splendid mantle appeared to have been digested by the squid, exhibiting spots and signs of peeling.

"Lord, what kind of shell creature is this, do you know?" Goltai circled the Tridacna incessantly.

"Tridacna, a kind of large shell creature." While speaking, he utilized his Eye of Magic to examine the Tridacna closely but did not detect traces of magic power. It seemed to be just an ordinary Tridacna, not a Sea Monster. "Open it, I want to see if there are any pearls inside the shell."

“Pearls? Can Tridacnas also produce pearls? I always thought that only the pearl oysters in Tranquil Lake could produce pearls.”

Tranquil Lake was a vast lake on Blue Dragon Island and a property of the Sapphire Family. One of its special products was pearl oysters bred in the lake. They were a type of small Sea Monster, or Water Monster, that lived only in freshwater and could produce pearls. The pearls had a hint of magic power with a mild Water Attribute that could calm the mind.

They were decorations favored by Nobles.

Many well-bred ladies wore a string of pearl necklaces around their necks.

Liszt pointed at the Tridacna, “Open it up and we’ll know if there are any inside.”

Goltai hurriedly organized the manpower, prepared to pry open the shell of the Tridacna, but the group struggled for a long time and still couldn’t open the hard shell of the Tridacna.

“My goodness, have you not eaten enough!” Goltai looked on incredulously, “A shell has exposed your true feeble nature?”

“Mr. Goltai, this thing is too sturdy, our levers have broken,” someone complained.

“I guarantee it’s like a stone, seamless, and simply impossible to open,” another assured.

“Maybe we should build a fire under it. When I eat oysters, I always roast them, and they open on their own.”

Chapter 87: Bring in a Princess Bed

The shell of the Tridacna was extremely difficult to pry open, and the fishermen were helpless without the right tools.

Liszt didn’t insist, as long as the Black Pearl was inside, it couldn’t escape. After the giant Squid was dismembered and its rotting body was thrown into

the sea, Liszt ordered that the Tridacna be carried back to the Castle to be studied slowly.

The immense Tridacna had a strange shape.

Along the way, it attracted the curious gazes of many townsfolk, and upon reaching the Castle, all the servants came out to observe, having never seen anything so peculiar.

“Teacher Marcus, what do you think is the best way to open it?”

Marcus pondered for a moment and said, “Its strength is formidable, the two shells are tightly fixed together, but since its outer shell is irregular with many crevices, we could insert a stick to pry it open. A regular wooden stick won’t do; we need a thick iron bar, although, we probably don’t have such an iron bar.”

Iron was precious, no one would forge a thick iron bar specifically for prying open the shell of a Tridacna.

“Perhaps we could use fire to burn it,” Carter suggested.

“The shell is too thick, fire would hardly damage it,” Liszt refuted, and besides, there was a Black Pearl inside. The last thing he wanted was for it to be overheated...

“Use hooks. We can hook one on each shell and then use horses to pull them apart, thus opening its shell,” Marcus finally thought of a crude method.

However, it proved effective.

When two horses pulled on their respective ropes, almost snapping them, they eventually managed to pry apart the shell of the Tridacna. The now vertical Tridacna looked like a blossoming flower, not widely open, but enough to locate its “bands,” the muscles used to close its shell.

Marcus gripped his greatsword, his strength surging forth as he cut through one of the bands.

Snap!

The horses straining against the shell prompted the Tridacna to split into two halves, no longer able to close. Liszt’s gaze was already on a group of

protrusions on the inner wall of the Tridacna, where the pearls were nestled, round and plump.

“Cut it open, but be careful. The pearls inside are wrapped in it, don’t scratch them.”

“Yes, my lord!”

Marcus personally wielded the knife, cautiously slicing through the membrane of the protrusion, and when he cut open the largest one, a shiny Black Pearl was revealed, as large as a washbasin.

“There are more beside it, cut them all open and extract them,” Liszt said excitedly.

He hadn’t figured out what these Black Pearls were for yet, but finding such large Black Pearls was unimaginable. If these were auctioned in his homeland, they would certainly fetch an astonishingly high price.

After Marcus completed the cutting, a total of sixteen Black Pearls of varying sizes were extracted.

The largest was the one the size of a washbasin.

Following that were two nearly the size of basketballs; then three about the size of a sea bowl; and finally, a bunch of smaller Black Pearls the size of apples, oranges, and ping-pong balls.

After cleaning them, Liszt cradled the largest Black Pearl and suddenly felt traces of Magic Power flowing within it. He quickly used his Eye of Magic, and then, he saw a whirlpool-like profound Magic Power inside the Black Pearl. It was a light blue in color, indicative of Water-Attribute Magic Power.

“It actually has Magic Power?”

Before, when he had used the Eye of Magic to observe the Tridacna, he hadn’t detected the slightest trace of Magic Power. Little did he know, the Black Pearls themselves possessed Magic Power.

“My lord, these Black Pearls, they seem to have Magic Power?” Marcus also noticed something was amiss, but lacking the Eye of Magic, he wasn’t certain.

“There is indeed magic power here.”

Li Si Te became lost in thought as he handled the black pearl, recalling a knight's novel he had read. In one of these novels, it was mentioned that the song of a sea serpent could calm a raging storm, and there was a great knight who captured a sea serpent and turned it into a piece of magic equipment.

This equipment allowed ships to sail steadily through storms without being affected.

What exactly a sea serpent was, no one could say for sure. Some swore they had heard the song of a sea serpent—Kostor had just mentioned he once heard a sea serpent sing—but there were no records of what a sea serpent truly was. Most people believed that sea serpents were nothing more than tales spun by sailors.

This story had no connection to the black pearls.

What sparked Li Si Te's imagination was the idea of a sea serpent transformed into equipment that sheltered ships from storms.

“Could these black pearls also be turned into magic equipment to withstand storms? After all, they are magic items with water-attribute magic power, and the magic power is very rich, nearly rivaling that of gemstones produced by dragons. Suppressing sea storms might be uncertain, but making magic equipment should be feasible.”

Without a magician, it was impossible to study the black pearls.

Li Si Te thought there might be other uses—for example, as an air conditioner.

“Teacher Marcus, Mr. Carter, everyone, do you feel the air has gotten much cooler?”

Marcus took a moment to feel it: “I don't feel the coolness, but there seems to be more moisture in the air. It must be the black pearls condensing the water vapor around us.”

“Regardless, they are valuable items. How much do you think they could sell for if we put them on the market?”

“I've seen a fist-sized white pearl before, and I heard that one could go for at least five gold coins. I guess black pearls of the same size should fetch about

ten gold coins? As for the largest black pearl, my lord, I cannot estimate its value; it's completely new."

"It has a very rich magic power, definitely worth more than white pearls, but the castle isn't in need of money at the moment. We'll have to think more carefully about its price," Li Si Te was not very satisfied with Marcus's valuation.

He felt that even if the black pearls were priced at twice the value of white pearls, they would still be undervalued; their worth was probably far greater than imagined.

So he said to Carter, "Mr. Carter, please move them to my study." He himself kept a black pearl the size of a ping-pong ball in his hand, carefully playing with it.

"Yes, master," replied Carter.

A moment later, Carter came back to ask, "Master, what about the opened Tridacna shell? Can we eat its flesh?"

"I think so... Well, let Douson try it first. If it's poisonous, we'll just throw it away."

"And the two shells?"

"Clean the inner walls of the shells thoroughly. I want to see if there's any jadeite formation."

Jadeite Tridacna is a prized jewel in Li Si Te's homeland, one of the seven treasures of Buddhism. In the West, Tridacna, pearls, coral, and amber are considered the four major organic gemstones. Jadeite Tridacna, the whitest substance in the world, is formed through the jade-like transformation of the inner walls of a Tridacna shell.

"Such a large Tridacna should have some jadeite parts, shouldn't it?"

But Li Si Te soon realized his mistake, as the tremendous Tridacna shell had no signs of jadeite on its inner walls. It was only then that he remembered; a living Tridacna couldn't undergo jadeite formation. Jadeite formation required time, much like the gestation of jade—it was the product of millions of years of accumulation and sculpting.

Jadeite Tridacna formed when a dead Tridacna was buried in sand, slowly turning into jade over millions of years.

Without jadeite formation, the shells could not be crafted into gemstones, yet Li Si Te had a wildly imaginative idea: “Mr. Carter, what do you think would happen if we made it into a bed?”

As he spoke, he imagined the animated films from his childhood—the Disney animations where the mermaid princess always slept inside a shell.

Chapter 88: What is the Value of the Black Pearl?

The Tridacna shell was huge, over two meters long and almost as wide, and while Liszt was still growing and now nearly reached a height of one meter eighty-five, he could still fit inside the clean Tridacna shell to sleep if he wished.

Of course, that suggestion was just a casual remark.

The shape of the Tridacna shell was too peculiar, its form like that of a great wave, not suited to be crafted into a bed. He had the Tridacna shell placed at the castle’s entrance as a giant sculpture. It had to be said, the hollowed-out, cleaned Tridacna shell had quite an aesthetic appeal.

Having dealt with the Tridacna, Liszt returned to the study to examine the Black Pearls.

Carter had moved all the Black Pearls into the study, but now, apart from the small Black Pearl in Liszt’s hand, the other Black Pearls were invisible—they had been stashed away by Liszt in a Space Gem near his chest, as he chose to keep valuable items close to his person.

So when Carter brought in a glass of juice, he exclaimed in surprise, “My lord, I clearly placed the Black Pearls on the shelf over there, where have they gone?”

“I’ve hidden them, no need to be astonished,” Liszt replied.

“Alright then.” Carter did not probe further about where Liszt had hidden the Black Pearls. As the butler, he didn’t need to know. His role was simply to serve the lord well and manage the daily affairs of the castle.

Sipping the juice.

After exploring for half a day.

Liszt gradually gained a basic understanding of the Black Pearls, “They are rich in Magic Power, nearly as much as the gemstones produced by dragons. However, unlike gemstones that provide a continuous supply of Magic Power, the Magic Power of the Black Pearls seems to require manual replenishment. I don’t have Water-Attribute Magic Power, so I can’t replenish them.”

The ping-pong ball-sized Black Pearl he was toying with in his hand constantly emitted ripples of Magic Power.

This ripple was utterly different from that of a Dragon Gem.

He distinguished between the two using terms he could understand: “Dragon Gems are more akin to forming a stable magnetic field with Magic Power, which does not dissipate. Black Pearls, on the other hand, are like a radioactive element, continuously emitting Magic Power, and over time, you can feel the loss of their Power.”

So, in essence, Black Pearls were many levels inferior to Dragon Gems.

A Dragon Gem could easily fetch seven to eight hundred Gold Coins, while as Marcus had said, a Black Pearl might only sell for a dozen or so Gold Coins.

“However, who knows what exorbitant price a basin-sized Black Pearl could fetch! I believe those nobles, as insane about collecting treasures and antiques as they are, would be willing to pay with Dragon Coins,” Liszt mused. A Dragon Coin was worth ten thousand Gold Coins, and only particularly wealthy nobles could afford them.

With that thought.

He became unsettled, “I always feel that the reward for the Smoke Mission this time is the most substantial... The content of the reward isn’t particularly rich, but it’s akin to being given money, tangible and real.”

So far, he had completed eighteen missions, without fathoming the pattern for their appearance, nor the rules governing the rewards.

But most of the mission rewards were very valuable.

If one were to gauge, magical beast rewards like Douson and Juan Fu were probably worth over a hundred Gold Coins; productivity rewards like Elf Bug might be valued at a thousand or two thousand Gold Coins, as the Elf Bug was indeed magical and rare, but its ten-year lifespan was a significant limitation.

As for Black Tulips, Flame Mushrooms, Dragon Breed Horses, they would probably fetch around a Dragon Coin in value; for a Dou Qi Secret Technique like "The Eye of Magic", it was definitely worth three thousand Gold Coins; and as for items like Corn Grass, Smoked Grass, a Miniature Saltpeter Mine, or fifty serfs, while challenging to quantify, were also very valuable.

As for the information about the Formless Dragon, that was in a class of its own.

The most valuable were the gems of the Formless Dragon, gems that contained their own space, priceless treasures.

However, these rewards either needed a long time to fully display their value or due to various constraints, couldn't demonstrate their worth, or were simply so valuable that possessing them was a crime, such as Space Gems, which could not be revealed for fear of attracting disaster.

But the current Black Pearls were different.

They were highly valuable; the sixteen Black Pearls of varying sizes could fetch at least tens of thousands of Gold Coins combined. Crucially, they could be sold separately, as they were not a set but individual entities.

"Should I sell it, sell it, or sell it?" Liszt pondered for a moment before deciding to take out a black pearl the size of a sea bowl to test the waters of the market.

Yesterday, Carter mentioned to him that August 19th was Levis's birthday and asked what gift was needed.

He was to attend the birthday party at Tulip Castle.

“Just get some high-grade seafood as a gift. It would be a good opportunity to ask if he has any intention of buying black pearls. The Tulip Family all have Water-Attribute Dou Qi, so they should be interested in black pearls... They could get a magician to help forge a magic equipment. By then, they could also help me understand how exactly black pearls can be used.”

No one is better than a magician at studying magic items.

It's uncertain if there are any magicians on Coral Island, but the Tulip Family can definitely make contact with one.

If the price is right, Liszt is prepared to sell a few black pearls first and gather some gold coins, then hand them over to Levis to continue purchasing serfs for him.

He also plans to buy more pig iron and wrought iron and give them to the smithy to make farming tools.

He was not satisfied with the efficiency of the serfs farming in the town. Since he couldn't get oxen for plowing and the research on plows needed time, his only option was to make more shovels and hoes so all the serfs could turn the soil and farm more efficiently. This way, some could be freed to work in other trades.

“If a good price is gained, buy some calves, foals, lambs, and higher quality feed for the pregnant mares.”

“If convenient, the castle could be refurbished a bit, preferably with a heated kang, as winter is on its way. In an era without central heating, you have to rely on a heated bed for warmth.”

Deep planning is probably what describes Liszt.

Summer had just started not long ago, and he was already considering the challenges of living in winter.

The merchant caravan from North Valley City arrived at Fresh Flower Town before eight o'clock in the morning. After more than eight months, a merchant caravan had once again entered Fresh Flower Town. Usually, caravans followed the Tax Knight, visiting once every quarter except for winter, which meant three times a year.

Each time a caravan arrived, the town celebrated as if it were the New Year.

This time was no exception. The grand caravan quickly attracted all the residents of the town, who almost all stopped their work to watch.

After finishing his morning exercises and not touching his bow and arrows again, Liszt took a bath and returned to the castle. Standing at the window, he could see the bustling crowd in the town.

Especially the jesters who had set up a stage and started performing farces, attracting the majority of the town's residents.

The sound of their laughter and cheers could even be heard from the castle.

"Maisie, go call for Mr. Carter," he said to the maid Maisie, who was cleaning.

"Yes, my lord."

Soon, Carter hurried over, "My lord, you called for me?"

"The town is very lively today. Tell everyone in the castle that if they want to take the day off, they can go ahead. There's no need to stay in the castle. Go to the town to watch the farce or buy some snacks to relax."

"You are truly a generous noble. I will pass on your message to the servants."

"That includes you, Mr. Carter."

Carter chuckled, "I don't need to, my lord. Let the younger servants enjoy your generosity. The castle needs someone to watch over it, and you should not be without the attendance of your servants."

Chapter 89: Able to Raise a Pony

"Mrs. Abbie, Little Lily and I are planning to go to town to see the clown show, would you like to join us?" Eileen moved the large chunk of tridacna meat out of the basket to dry outside the castle.

Douson ate a large piece of tridacna meat yesterday and not only was he fine, but he was also full of energy and vigor.

So, tridacna meat is edible.

“Oh, heavens! Why would the master be so generous to give you a day off?” Mrs. Abbie busily arranged various seasonings on the stove, “If you like your job as maids, you should stay in the kitchen obediently; there is a big pile of work to do every day.”

“Mr. Carter said that the master instructed that only a fried steak is needed for lunch and that we servants may eat beans and bread. It does not require much work,” Little Lily said while moving the tridacna meat as well.

A single tridacna weighs over five hundred pounds; after removing three hundred pounds of the shell, there is still over two hundred pounds of meat.

“Mr. Carter, like the master, always indulges you young servants who are not earnest in your work. This is not the kind of benevolence that befits a qualified butler. Back in my younger days, the kitchen was busy all day long, and not a moment was spared idle — that’s the proper work attitude for a kitchen maid.”

“Cough, cough.”

The sound of Carter’s cough came from the doorway; unbeknownst to them, he had already arrived: “Although I can understand your dedication to work, Mrs. Abbie, don’t always tense up. Go and take a stroll in town with the young ones; it’s a rare occasion when the merchant caravan comes.”

“Sorry, Mr. Carter, I didn’t mean to offend you,” Mrs. Abbie felt a bit embarrassed, having been caught speaking ill behind someone’s back.

“No problem, in fact I take your calling me kind as a compliment. Go on, join Eileen and Little Lily to see the clown show in town. The thought of those clowns makes even me laugh.”

“That won’t do, I have to prepare the master’s lunch.”

“Then make sure to return before eleven o’clock, it’s nine now, you still have two hours to roam around the town.”

“I...”

Before Mrs. Abbie could refuse, Carter cut her off: "Consider it a work task I've assigned to you, have a good two hours of fun."

"Haha, good on you, Mr. Carter," Eileen happily took Mrs. Abbie's arm, "Come on, Mrs. Abbie, I can't wait to see the clowns."

Little Lily took Mrs. Abbie's other arm: "Yeah, yeah, let's go!"

Mrs. Abbie reluctantly began to walk out: "I don't want to go shopping, but it's best I keep an eye on you two, to prevent you from getting carried away and forgetting to come back to work... Also, wait a moment, I need to change into a new set of clothes; I can't go out looking like this, it would be unseemly for the castle."

Carter watched with a slight smile as the large and the two small ones made a commotion.

Compared to working in the Earl's country estate castle, life in this small-town castle was a bit busier, but so much more lively. The youthful exuberance of the young people gave him an inexplicable surge in energy, making him feel as if he were growing younger instead of older with the passing year.

He heard footsteps.

Turning his head, he saw Mrs. Morson: "Have Maisie and the others already gone to town to shop?"

"Yes, and Tom and Thomas went together as well. Mr. Carter, aren't you going with them?"

"Mrs. Abbie, Eileen, and Little Lily are changing into their clothes; they'll soon head to town to see the clown show, and I think you should join them. As for the castle, I'll stay to serve the master. You know, with even Thomas gone, there must be a manservant to attend to him when he requests water."

"Then I'll stay as well, you can call me if you need anything."

"Are you sure you don't want to join in the fun?"

"At my age, I should be avoiding crowds, not seeking them out."

"Don't say that, Mrs. Morson, I feel as if I'm getting younger the more I live," Carter declared, puffing out his chest to seem more spirited.

“Yes, young Carter.”

“Annie, have we already sold more than half of the tomatoes?” John Bian Dan walked up to his family’s stall.

The stall was situated on the southwest side of the small town, where a large, flat area had been cleared out for visiting caravans to set up and conduct their business and trade.

There were also a few wooden outhouses placed around the area.

The Patrol Team and the town clerks repeated the announcement over and over, “Lord Landlord has decreed that no one is allowed to relieve themselves in public, violators will be fined and whipped! If you need to use the facilities, follow the arrows to the outhouses outside. The symbol with a circle on the bottom and an arrow pointing up () indicates the men’s toilets, while the symbol with a circle on top and a cross beneath () is for the women’s toilets—don’t mix them up!”

John had long since become accustomed to this rule.

It had been a long time since he had defecated in the street; at home, they had prepared a chamber pot, storing up the collected waste. Once composted, it was used directly as fertilizer for the tomato fields—this was the agricultural magic taught by Lord Landlord. Farms that used this magic fertilizer saw a harvest increase of twenty to thirty percent!

There used to be town officials who organized the purchase of human waste.

Now they could no longer collect it, as every household kept their waste to fertilize their own farmland. After the harvest, the kind and generous noble Lord Landlord took taxes proportionally, rather than the Tax Knights of the past, who seemed to want to take all of a serf’s harvest for themselves.

Ever since Lord Landlord arrived, John felt not just his own life, but also the lives of his neighbors and surrounding community, had improved dramatically.

Of course, he was the luckiest one.

Because Lord Landlord awarded him a Nalda for the tomato worms nurtured by the tomatoes he cared for!

“John, aren’t you going to work on the housing project today?” Annie asked curiously, as her husband usually worked there when there wasn’t much farm work, earning a copper coin a day.

“The housing crew is off today, nobody wants to work on this day; they’ve all come here... to the commercial district,” John said, pointing to a place not too far away. “Look, that’s Wenger, he’s also taking his son shopping.”

“Alright then, go and check out the comedy show. Once I’ve sold the tomatoes, I’ll come and watch the comedy too. It’s been a long time since I’ve seen one.”

John didn’t leave but said, “Oh, Annie, when I was coming over from there, I saw someone selling kittens. I want to buy one. You know, now that we have grain stored at home, rats are starting to become more frequent. These filthy thieves always nibble at our food!”

“Really, someone’s selling kittens? Then wait here for me, I’ll finish selling the tomatoes and we can go buy a kitten together. We have to choose one that’s really good at catching rats.”

After hesitating for a moment, John added, “Actually, I also want to buy a pony. I want little Jack to learn how to ride from an early age so he can join Lord Landlord’s Retainer Knights sooner.”

“Oh my, John, do you even know how much a pony costs!”

“Fifty silver coins, but, Annie, it’s a pony!” John explained eagerly, “If we miss this chance, who knows when we’ll be able to get a horse. I hope to grow tomatoes for Lord Landlord for a lifetime, but little Jack doesn’t like it; he wants to become a Retainer Knight.”

“But John, you have to understand, we can afford fifty silver coins, but a pony needs to eat a lot every day— a single horse would consume the food of several people. Can we afford to feed it?”

“I can!”

John said with conviction, “Our tomato field at home is the best and always brings us a steady income. I can also work. I asked the Steward of the construction crew, he’s assistant to Lord Isaiah. He told me there will be more and more work in the town in the future, as Lord Landlord has ambitious plans

to rejuvenate the town. As long as I keep working, we can afford to keep the pony!”

“Are you serious, John?”

“Of course, trust me, Annie.”

Annie, looking into her husband’s resolute eyes, ultimately didn’t have the heart to say no, “Alright, but you have to promise me that we won’t be dragged down by the pony, okay?”

“I promise!”

Chapter 90: Attitude Toward Life

Liszt had not intended to disturb the bustling atmosphere of the town, but in the end, he couldn’t help himself and made a trip to the commercial district, followed by watching a comedic performance.

It was nothing but clowns juggling on stage, breathing fire, or doing somersaults.

To him, none of this was fresh at all, yet the residents of Fresh Flower Town clapped joyously. It made Liszt so inclined that he wanted to get on stage and show them a trick from “Three Immortals Returning to the Cave,” to let these Different World inhabitants experience the charm of ancient Chinese cultural traditions.

Of course.

That was just a thought, as a noble could not afford to do something that would diminish his status.

Moreover, in a world where magicians exist, magic tricks don’t seem all that miraculous.

After watching one play, he left the commercial area and headed to the town’s administrative office, not wanting to make the townspeople uncomfortable—the presence of their landlord meant they couldn’t relax, they were even afraid to speak loudly.

Even though he had left, he continued to pay close attention to the matters of the caravan.

He was listening to Isaiah report the prices of goods brought by the caravan, especially those related to the production and daily necessities, which were all of concern to him.

“A pony costs at least fifty silver coins, isn’t this price too high?” he asked with a frown.

One should know, he and Levis traded slaves, and a serf cost only twenty silver coins.

“Indeed, it is expensive, Baron. Coral Island is far from the mainland and lacks appropriate grazing areas, so horse breeding is always limited, meaning the price of horses remains high. Even the horses from Blue Dragon Island are priced similarly. On the mainland, a pony might only cost a few silver coins.”

Island nations, all being islands, naturally do not suit for grazing and horse breeding.

Liszt understood this principle, but did not want to accept it at the moment—he had given Old Geronte three Gold Coins, originally thinking he could buy a large number of goods.

Now it seems, just six ponies would deplete the funds.

“How many young animals have the caravan brought?” he inquired, somewhat disappointed. He had wanted to acquire all the young livestock the caravan brought, but now that seemed an extravagant hope.

Apart from him being able to purchase, it was likely that the ordinary residents couldn’t afford to either.

“Five ponies, two calves, three lambs, eight piglets, six puppies, and five kittens. Plus, there are ten rabbits.”

“I gave Old Geronte three Gold Coins, and it looks like it’s no help, not enough to buy several animals.” At this moment, he desperately wanted to sell the Black Pearl, exchange it for money to buy livestock—meat was the most nutritious food, and he hoped to eat meat every day, excluding seafood.

If the territory doesn't raise livestock, where can he, the landlord, get meat to eat every day!

"Three Gold Coins may not buy many livestock, but they can buy many other goods, as the caravan has brought many specialties from other regions."

"But I had told Old Geronte to prioritize purchasing horses. Just five ponies would consume two Gold Coins and fifty silver coins, using up all the funds of the castle." Liszt thought of the two Gold Coins he still had. Perhaps, he would have to spend them today to secure some livestock.

Isaiah, however, said with a smile, "Baron, according to the trade records I checked, Old Geronte only bought two ponies. The other three were purchased by others."

"Who?"

"John Bian Dan bought one, and you must remember him."

"So it was the farmer who grows tomatoes. I awarded him a Gold Coin, and evidently he could afford it. The other two?"

"The Blair Family bought one, and Marcus also bought one, with Goltai lending him the money."

Liszt's mood brightened from gloom to sunshine, having bought all the horses. Although they were not owned by the castle, as long as they remained in Fresh Flower Town, that was good enough. He could requisition those horses at any time if needed.

But he soon laughed at himself again.

He realized his perspective had been too narrow, focusing only on the livestock brought by the caravan, whereas, after selling the Black Pearl for money, he could purchase animals in other cities—that had been his plan all along. With Gold Coins, was there anything he couldn't buy?

"Isaiah, how much do you think the caravan's transactions will amount to today?"

"I guess about six Gold Coins."

“With a transaction volume of six Gold Coins, I believe many of the merchants in the caravan are already planning their next visit.”

“Of course, merchants are like flies; wherever there’s money to be made, you will always see them swarming,” Isaiah said, with an inherent disdain in his voice. This was the unparalleled sense of superiority that the Noble class held toward commoners, coupled with a desire to keep the commoners in check.

Nobles did not allow any class to shake their ruling position.

Sometimes, merchants made Nobles feel they were being challenged—they sometimes even had more wealth than Nobles. Money talked, and it was not uncommon for near-bankrupt Nobles to marry off their daughters to merchants or to take merchants’ daughters as wives to retain their Noble status, a humiliating affair.

Liszt smiled. You can read short, touching, and romantic stories about couples, as well as children’s stories for free on sitetorys.com

His thoughts about the merchant class were consistent with those of the Nobility—both support and suppression were necessary.

Back at the Castle.

It was time for lunch. Although he had instructed the kitchen that he only needed a steak and nothing lavish, the meal presented was as usual—with meat, vegetables, mushrooms, seafood, milk, and white bread.

“Mrs. Abbie didn’t go out shopping?”

“Sir, Mrs. Abbie did go out, but she returned to the kitchen after half an hour. Perhaps she isn’t accustomed to the bustling town or can’t let go of her work in the kitchen. She is too dedicated, always busy,” replied the servant.

“You should tell her that I’m not considering a raise for now, so she doesn’t need to work herself to the bone. She should have her own life.”

Although he had adapted to his Noble status and had even grown to love it,

Liszt still held on to modern virtues; he hoped that even servants could have lives of their own, not dedicating every moment to their Landlord. Life should

be about more than just work; it should include joys and sorrows, laughter, and family.

Carter served Liszt throughout the meal,

and said, “For the Cook, the kitchen is life. For the servants, the Castle is life. Sir, you don’t always have to worry about us. The Sun climbs from east to west every day; servants hustle from morning to night—life is about everyone doing their part.”

His words carried a philosophical weight.

Liszt was left speechless.

His ideas were still at odds with the era; he pursued freedom at his core, yet the concept of class hierarchy was deeply ingrained in everyone in the Different World.

If servants didn’t work, would they still be servants?

If Nobles didn’t enjoy luxuries, would they still be Nobles?

Therefore, Liszt had no intention of arguing or correcting Carter’s words. On the contrary, he felt a twinge of guilt, yet deep down, he felt quite pleased—if everyone thought this way, the life of a Noble would be even more stable and comfortable—such good citizens!

Just after finishing lunch, ready to play with Douson and Juan Fu, then take a nap,

Goltai suddenly rode in from the town and handed a metal bottle shaped like a wine bottle directly to Liszt: “Baron, please look at this. The fishermen from Oyster Village found it by the seashore. They thought it was made of gold, but I have checked and it doesn’t seem to be gold.”