

The Mighty 451

Chapter 451 Collapsed Sinkhole at the Burial Ground

September 21.

It had been nine days since Levis's wedding.

After extracting all the Fire Dragon Magic Power on Black Horse Island, Liszt took a ship back to Fresh Flower Town, preparing to spend a leisurely life in Fresh Flower Town.

It was mostly to prepare for the upcoming Pioneer Mandate—soon after the Earl's birthday, he would head to The Court to attend the Grand Duke's followers meeting to officially discuss this year's Pioneer Mandate.

The footsteps of war were approaching.

Liszt, who had already decided to go to battle for the second time, was not nervous, only excited. He was excited for the impending military achievements, for setting foot in new lands, and for the plunder of population and resources. It was hard to imagine that he, who once loved peace, would become someone yearning for war.

Perhaps he was also scared of poverty.

Not long after returning to Fresh Flower Town, a knight from Tulip Castle galloped over and delivered a package. The package, which had been sent from Red Crab Island, contained several piano scores—Meioubao had indeed sent his treasured piano scores that he had collected over the years to Liszt, along with a book on his own experience of playing the piano.

When he received the piano scores,

the Smoke Mission also immediately changed.

"The mission has changed."

As expected, after receiving the reward in advance, the Smoke Mission automatically changed.

The new Serpent Script quickly coalesced, "Mission: The craftsman Atest from the Fire Dragon Brick Factory has revealed clues to quartz mines, showing you a glimmer of hope in glassmaking. Please explore how quartz mines can be used to make glass, and successfully craft an ordinary glass product. Reward: Collapsed Sinkhole."

"Collapsed Sinkhole?"

"What kind of reward is this?"

Liszt looked at the Smoke Serpent Script's reward content, puzzled. It seemed that a sinkhole was about to collapse and reveal itself in a corner of his domain.

Speaking of sinkholes.

There are many sinkholes on Earth, often appearing very mysterious. Liszt had watched a documentary where they talked about the formation of sinkholes, usually related to underground rivers. In karst areas, the underground rivers continuously erode the surface to form caves, and after multiple collapses of the cave ceiling, sinkholes form.

"It seems that Fresh Flower Town has no connection to karst landforms, and Black Horse Island is irrelevant to karst landforms as well..." Liszt's geographic knowledge was not good—he only knew that karst landforms, also known as karst topography, are related to caves, underground rivers, stalactites, and sinkholes.

But these landforms were not present on Coral Island or Black Horse Island.

So he couldn't figure out how this Collapsed Sinkhole was going to appear on his land, and he could only wait. Fortunately, the wait was not long. The Thorn Caravan had already brought in a large number of yellow-white stones—these stones came from the Viscount Jonas's territory of Serpent Spear City.

There was a low hill around Serpent Spear City, all made of this kind of stone.

Whether or not it was quartz, a test would tell.

Liszt, having nothing else to do at the time, went back to Black Horse Island by ship and observed the workers at the Fire Dragon Brick Factory burning these stones. Through the Eye of Magic's vision, the Magic Little Fire Dragon continuously blasted onto the stones, quickly burning away the impurities within them.

Then the remaining part began to soften and melt, eventually forming blobs of liquid resembling sunlight.

Calling it a liquid wasn't quite accurate; it was a soft semi-fluid, like a piece of play-dough.

"When the temperature is not too high, this kind of stone only softens, then melts, and finally becomes a true liquid," Atest explained. "However, liquid isn't suitable for blowing glass objects, so we start blowing them when they become soft."

They had already been using volcanic glass, painstakingly forging the craft of glassblowing.

Seeing the stones melt into a fiery mass, they immediately scooped out this semi-fluid, inserted it into an iron pipe, and began to blow air into it. They even used special high-temperature-resistant beast skin gloves to knead the glowing mass of molten glass—a world filled with magic power often imparted unique properties to many materials.

The gloves that Liszt distributed to the craftsmen were made from the hide of a magical beast, able to withstand temperatures of several hundred degrees.

Originally they were intended to prevent burns during brick firing, but now they were being used to make glass.

As the craftsmen kneaded and worked the material, the blob that had initially been blown into a ball gradually turned into a cylindrical jar. With the help of a bellows to blow and cool it down, a glass jar with some colorful patterns quickly came into being—not entirely pure, but very clear.

"Indeed, this ore is quartz, capable of being made into glass... The quality isn't very high; both the craftsmanship and the raw materials need to be improved."

The glass jars were uneven in thickness, asymmetrical in shape, and their colors were messy, and even their hardness could not be guaranteed.

Liszt only played with a glass jar for a little while before accidentally breaking it, probably due to uneven stress distribution during cooling.

Regardless.

Glass had been born in his hands, and that exquisite clarity was sure to set off a trend in this world, bringing a steady stream of wealth to the territory—but before selling glass products abroad, they would need further improvements in the process and mass training of the workers.

The process of making a finished glass product was complicated, and relying on just the few craftsmen from the Fire Dragon Brick Factory was severely insufficient.

Just as he was about to personally blow a presentable glass piece, a Retainer Knight hurried over to report, "My lord, an accident has occurred at the Burial Ground; serfs were stacking volcanic glass ore when the ground in the centre of those five large bones suddenly collapsed, revealing a huge pit. Four serfs have fallen into the hole."

"A pit?"

Liszt had to interrupt his plan to blow glass himself and head to the Burial Ground. He had already understood that this was a reward from the Smoke Mission—the Collapsed Sinkhole.

On the way, he summoned the Smoke Mission: "Complete the mission, reward Collapsed Sinkhole."

Then, a new mission was released.

"Mission: The Collapsed Sinkhole has exposed the bases of five reviving Dragon Bones, and something seems to be brewing. As a member of the Magic Goat Family, Virginia Truth may have the clues you need. Reward: A fire seed composed of magic power."

"The Collapsed Sinkhole exposes the bases of five Dragon Bones, it seems that this is another part of a series of connected missions about Fire Dragons. Virginia Truth... I'll ask her later. But what is this reward, a fire seed composed of magic power? What does it mean, or what is it?"

In the midst of his thoughts.

He had arrived at the Burial Ground.

Many people were gathered around the five Fire Dragon Bones, discussing animatedly. When they saw Liszt arrive, the official overseeing the work immediately dispersed the serfs and welcomed Liszt.

"What happened, what's down in the pit? Have the fallen serfs been rescued?" Liszt asked as he walked.

"My lord, four serfs fell down; three are dead, only Sean is still alive. But his leg is broken, and he lies on a pile of stones at the bottom of the pit. We are looking for ropes to get him out. As for what's down there, we're not yet sure, the pit is very dark."

Soon.

Approaching the edge of the Collapsed Sinkhole, Liszt looked carefully—the opening was not very large, at most a hundred square meters in a circle.

Standing at the edge of the hole and peering down, it was pitch black and hard to see, but he could hear the serfs' cries and Sean's moaning from below.

Chapter 452 Dragon Bone Magic Array

While waiting for the rope, Liszt carefully inquired about the situation at the bottom of the collapsed sinkhole from the serf Sean.

Serf Sean had already grown accustomed to the dark environment, claiming that the bottom of the pit was spacious without any underground rivers and seemed to have large pillars around it.

There were no wild beasts or poisonous gases.

From Liszt's visual estimate, the bottom of the pit was about thirty meters deep; because the sun could not shine directly, the light was very dim. It didn't take long for someone to bring the rope, and after piecing it together, it was finally long enough to reach the bottom of the pit. Two retainer knights were sent down first, carrying crystal lamps.

By the time they hauled up the serf Sean, tethered to the rope, the two retainer knights had already reported back about the bottom of the pit, "My lord, the pit is strange, with many passages that lead outward in all directions. At the bottom of this hole, there seem to be the lower halves of five big bones, sticking into the hole."

Danger ruled out.

Unable to hear the retainer knights' description clearly, Liszt personally went down to investigate.

Upon reaching the sinkhole's bottom, with the aid of the light from the crystal lamps, he finally saw the pit's structure—a typical lava cave and tunnel formation, with a massive cavern at the bottom surrounded by countless tunnels leading deeper underground. At the top of the cavern, five fire dragon bones were embedded.

These five fire dragon bones formed an irregular bladed shape on the surface above.

Liszt had thought that dragon bones were straight, but the bones piercing into the cavern delineated the complete shape of the dragon skeleton—the structure of curved ribs.

"These five dragon bones must be the ribs of a fire dragon, and the tips of the ribs seem to point towards a central point, the distance between them is more or less the same, about ten meters apart on average," he surmised.

He moved around the cavern, walking to the middle of where the tips of the five dragon bones converged.

The Eye of Magic revealed no trace of magic power, "Where went the fire dragon magic power I infused before? Could it be stored within the dragon bones?"

He touched the dragon bone.

The dragon bones in the cavern seemed "fresher" than those on the surface, more like bone than rock. With no clear idea in hand, he began to explore the surrounding lava tunnels. However, these tunnels were impassable, becoming narrower and narrower until they closed off.

"It feels as if Black Horse Island's original volcano specifically created this cavern during an eruption of magma."

He returned to the center of the cavern and instructed the two retainer knights to leave, "Return to the surface and disperse all the onlookers around here, seal off the Burial Ground. I want to continue my research down here for a while."

"Yes, my lord!"

The retainer knights left.

Liszt quickly took out the soul storage vessel and poured out the soul state of Virginia Truth.

"Ah, I've had a long nap... Hello, Viscount Liszt, I am pleased to meet you again," Virginia stretched and greeted before realizing she wasn't in the library, "Huh, where is this, a cavern underground? And what are those five pillars?"

She squinted her eyes.

In his heart, Liszt was weighing his options. Following the instructions of the Smoke Mission, Virginia seemed to hold clues about the dragon, and he didn't know whether he should share the secrets of the fire dragon bones with her.

After a moment, he decided to reveal the truth.

After all, Virginia was completely under his control, "Virginia, what you see are not mere stone pillars, but the remnants of fire dragon bones."

"Ah!"

Virginia exclaimed in surprise, "The remnants of fire dragon bones?"

"Yes, this is a secret I have discovered. Countless years ago, a fire dragon fell here, and its carcass decayed, leaving only these five bones. They form a formation that seems to contain a special power. Do you have any insights or ideas on this?"

"I have too little information, Viscount Liszt. Would you be able to help me examine these dragon bones closely?"

"What do you wish to observe?"

Virginia, in the form of smoke and light, slowly entwined one of the dragon bones, trying to touch it, but was unable to: "I want to know if these dragon bones still retain the Fire Dragon's magic power. My family's generations of magicians all like to study dragons and dragon beasts, and they believe that dragons do not decay."

"But this Fire Dragon has clearly decayed, leaving only five bones behind, probably five ribs that still exist."

"I don't know, maybe, the dragon has laid down the secret of reincarnation?" Virginia shook her head and said, "Some believe that the Valley of Dragons is where dragons die and become reborn, where they complete a cycle of reincarnation... But I don't know what dragons that die outside of the Valley of Dragons are like."

Reincarnation...

Liszt wanted to reject this notion, but in his heart, he was very eager—wouldn't it be wonderful for the Fire Dragon to reincarnate as a Little Fire Dragon after its death?

"So, do you think these five dragon bones are the...props for the Fire Dragon's prepared reincarnation?"

"I don't know, it's just speculation."

"Wait a moment."

Liszt turned and walked to the entrance of the pit, calling out, "Philip, has the Burial Ground been cleared of all unrelated personnel?"

"They have all been expelled, sir."

"If there's any commotion next, you don't need to be alarmed."

"Yes, sir."

After giving instructions to his Retainer Knights, he took out a Bone Hammer and began to strike the dragon bone. With the rhythm of the hammering, blood-red magic power patterns quickly flashed across the surface of the dragon bone as seen through the Eye of Magic. In normal vision, the dragon bones didn't change much, but any Knight or Magician would likely sense the magic power rippling over them.

Although Virginia was in a soul state, she could still feel the presence of magic power. She looked at the dragon bones in amazement, closely examining the position of the five dragon bones.

Something seemed to stir in her gaze.

"How about it, Virginia, do you see anything?" Liszt had been watching her expression and asked at the first moment.

"Viscount Liszt, I don't know if my speculation is correct, but I feel that these five dragon bones seem to be arranged into a magic array."

"Magic array?"

"Magicians need great talent to practice, and our Magic Goat Family cannot produce a genius every generation. But the reason we can pass on the magic through generations relies more on using a special magic power convergence magic array to assist mediocre apprentices in learning magic... I became a magician by relying on this convergence of magic power."

In her life, Virginia was just an ordinary magician.

Her talent was average, understandable.

Liszt asked, "Then, what kind of magic array are these five dragon bones arranged into?"

"It's the magic power convergence magic array I mentioned. Its principle is somewhat similar, but I don't know the specific situation as I can no longer observe the arrangement of runes within the magic array. I speculate that the part of the dragon bone exposed on the ground surface can absorb free-floating magic power, and then converge it together through the dragon bones inside the pit."

"Can it be started again?"

"Based on the information you've provided, the dragon bones have existed for thousands or tens of thousands of years, and they probably lost the possibility of starting long ago. However, the emergence of magic power on the surface of the dragon bone just now proves that it still has a trace of vitality. Perhaps one day, it can indeed gather enough magic power to once again coalesce into a Fire Dragon."

Can dragons reincarnate? It's hard to say.

Are dragons made of magic power? Difficult to ascertain.

Can the dragon bone magic array still be used? There's no guarantee.

But Liszt, trusting his belief in the Smoke Mission, felt he should try once more: "I have collected a great deal of Fire Dragon Magic Power; perhaps, I should pour it all into the dragon bones, allowing them to converge and incubate... In case of failure, I shall find a way to shatter the dragon bones and reclaim the Fire Dragon Magic Power!"

Chapter 453 The Burning Heart

Many times, Liszt was an ordinary person who liked to dream about the future but had no long-term plan. He was a bit like the monkey in primary school language textbooks, picking up sesame seeds while losing the watermelon.

Of course.

He wouldn't actually do something as foolish as losing a watermelon, but he continuously picked up things along the way, wanting to collect everything. The number of projects underway in his

territory was incredibly large, almost more than those of the Earl's Coral Island domain, but the problem was that none of the industries were seriously developed.

They all started off well but were then left to the side, maintaining a state just above decline.

Admittedly, this was because he was poor and didn't have the manpower to develop them, and it also had to do with his lack of long-term planning and not knowing how to prioritize the distribution of industries. Plus, he liked to find new projects but lacked the patience to perfect them, leading to the current situation. Despite holding good cards in his hand, he couldn't put together a winning combination.

However.

Liszt also had virtues in his character—being content with his lot and able to quickly adapt to new environments; diligent and hardworking, mainly when it came to practicing Dou Qi and taking medicine; standing by his convictions, never turning back until he hit a wall; and bravely moving forward, immediately acting once he'd made up his mind.

For instance, right now, he fully exhibited his character of bravely moving forward and standing by his convictions.

He released all of the recently extracted large quantity of Fire Dragon Magic Power, watching them being continuously devoured by the Fire Dragon Bones. Even though his heart was bleeding, there was no hesitation in his actions.

"Just do it, I refuse to believe I can't conjure a Little Fire Dragon!"

With each jar of Fire Dragon Magic Power poured out, the Fire Dragon Bones seemed to be bottomless pits, endlessly consuming the Fire Dragon Magic Power. On the ground, the Retainer Knights broke open bubbles in the newly mined Volcanic Glass, also releasing Fire Dragon Magic Power, allowing the five Dragon Bones to greedily absorb it.

The collection took nearly a week.

The release took only a short two hours.

All the Fire Dragon Magic Power was depleted.

The so-called Dragon Bone Magic Array still had not condensed the "seed of magic" that he had imagined. This was part of the Smoke Mission reward content, and Liszt believed it had a significant connection to the Little Fire Dragon, likely being the "seed" that nurtured the Little Fire Dragon. The function of the Dragon Bone Magic Array was probably to condense such a kind of fire seed.

"The Smoke Mission is not yet complete, which indicates the Fire Dragon Magic Power is still insufficient," Liszt said, taking out a Bone Hammer and forcefully striking the Fire Dragon Bones.

Nearly every hit made the crimson magical filaments densely appear.

The Fire Dragon Bones seemed to catch fire, becoming five towering pillars of flames, a magnificent sight. However, the flame never rose, and the magic filaments remained just that.

"But, it's still missing something!"

"Keep mining the Volcanic Glass!"

Liszt, while commanding his subordinates to continue mining the Volcanic Glass, called upon Virginia Truth and explained his actions in detail—handing over almost all the Fire Dragon Magic Power in hopes of getting useful clues—since the Smoke Mission hinted that Virginia held the clues.

Virginia walked around the Dragon Bones, pondering deeply, and she too could not come up with any explanations, "Viscount Liszt, when I was alive, I was just an ordinary magician, working in the family on Dragonbone Stabilizers, mainly following the orders of the Grand Magician."

Liszt was not satisfied, "Think harder."

She sighed, "I don't want to bring it up, but if my sister, Curtis Truth, were still here, she would definitely know what's going on with these five Dragon Bones, as she was most passionate about researching dragons."

Curtis?

An idea flashed sharply through Liszt's mind, "Curtis has passed away, but she left behind a relic! Yes, she left behind a book—"To Prince Annuette—Curtis Truth"."

He dismissed Virginia.

Quickly, he took out this book of Magic Notes and began flipping through it, trying to find useful information.

However, the entire book documented a large number of experiments for creating Liches and researching Ghost Ships, but did not mention any information about dragons.

He closed the notebook.

Liszt furrowed his brow, "There is no information about dragons in the book, and Virginia has no further clues. Is there really no other way than to keep adding Fire Dragon Magic Power? I always feel that there's already enough magic power within the Fire Dragon Bones; it just lacks a little something."

What was missing?

As his gaze swept over the cover of the Magic Notes, suddenly, a flash of insight struck him, a realization dawned on him, "I know! What's missing is a soul!"

The Magic Array can no doubt gather Fire Dragon Magic Power and use it as fuel to condense the Magic Fire Seed, even nurture a Little Fire Dragon.

But it lacked a soul.

Matter, spirit, magic power—these are the three foundations that make up the world in the magician's cognition. Now the Dragon Bone Magic Array had magic power and the Dragon Bones as a material basis, only lacking spiritual support. Legend has it that a dragon's soul resides in its teeth, but Liszt couldn't find any Fire Dragon's teeth.

But he remembered.

In his Gemstone Space, he had several items related to souls—the Sapphire Dragon Ship Figurehead, the Goat Head Flag, and the Soul Submerged Wood.

All existed between reality and illusion.

"Can these things, through the Dragon Bone Magic Array, condense out a soul?" He decided to give it a try, taking out a piece of Soul Submerged Wood first.

The Soul Submerged Wood was intact in the Gemstone Space.

As soon as it was taken out, it immediately began to tremble and collapse as though it had never existed. However, after Liszt activated his Eye of Magic, he noticed a faint stream of magic power flowing through the air into the Fire Dragon Bones.

"It really works! The Dragon Bone Magic Array can absorb this kind of material. The Soul Submerged Wood is a material made from the souls of an entire ship's crew sacrificed by Curtis the Truth, and it is closely related to the soul."

Next.

He kept taking out Soul Submerged Wood. All materials were devoured by the Fire Dragon Bones. When he hammered the bones again, he felt clearly that when the magic silk threads appeared, they seemed to have an added liveliness, but they were still not at their limit. They couldn't converge into a magical fire seed.

At this point, only the Goat Head Flag and the Sapphire Dragon Ship Figurehead remained. He took out the Goat Head Flag first, which quickly collapsed and was absorbed.

Still not enough, but it felt like it had reached a critical point.

Finally.

He took out the Sapphire Dragon Ship Figurehead, and as it collapsed, the Dragon Bone absorbed it. Liszt took a deep breath, raised the Bone Hammer, and struck hard on the Dragon Bone.

With each hammer blow.

With each strike, the magic became more spirited, no longer fleeting, but remaining on the surface of the Fire Dragon Bones, forming complicated fiery red patterns. This change filled Liszt with great joy, and as he continued to hammer, the fiery red patterns kept accumulating on the surface of the Dragon Bone.

Eventually.

On the twenty-fourth hammer stroke,

Boom! A loud explosion!

The Fire Dragon Bones blazed up in a fierce inferno, with the flames from the tips of the five bones quickly converging to form a bright little fireball.

Then, the flames on the Dragon Bones all moved toward the small fireball.

Below the Collapsed Sinkhole, the temperature of the cavern shot up suddenly.

Liszt had to dodge to the side.

He then saw the originally thick Dragon Bone shrink as if scorched, as though it had turned into flame and burned away, ultimately converging into the small fireball.

The flame came quickly.

And it dissipated just as quickly.

In less than half a minute, the roaring fire was extinguished. The five Dragon Bones had vanished, leaving only five barely visible light passages leading straight to the ground. At where the tips of the Dragon Bones once were, a small Magic Fire Seed hovered, emitting a flame about the size of a candle flame.

"Is this a Magic Fire Seed made of magic power?" Liszt approached cautiously.

He couldn't feel any heat, and the temperature from the previous burning had also rapidly decreased; the cavern quickly returned to its normal temperature. He wasn't concerned about where the Dragon Bones had gone but circled around the tiny Magic Fire Seed, observing it continuously.

From every angle, it looked like an ordinary flame.

Bright inside like sunlight, fiery red outside like fresh blood.

"Is it really nurturing a Little Fire Dragon?" wondered Liszt, increasingly curious. He knew this Magic Fire Seed was extraordinary, but it looked the same even when he used the Eye of Magic, just a simple flame resembling that of a candle.

He cautiously extended the handle of the Bone Hammer to let the fire seed scorch it.

But.

After the flame's scorching, the handle of the Bone Hammer remained undamaged as if the flame had no power at all. Liszt also tested other concentrated materials, likewise bringing no harm, not even singeing thick parchment. He even touched the flame with Volcanic Glass, and saw it wasn't dispersed.

This was utterly different from the previous Fire Dragon Magic Power.

"With no temperature and no ability to scorch, what exactly is it?" After repeated experimentation and confirming it was almost harmless, Liszt couldn't suppress the impulse to touch it himself.

He really couldn't control his curiosity.

So he carefully extended his finger, and just as the fingertip touched the fire, his vision blurred for a moment, and the Magic Fire Seed had already penetrated his finger.

Frightened, Liszt hurriedly shook his hand, trying to throw the fire seed out.

But the fire seed moved rapidly through the channels of Dou Qi within his body and in the blink of an eye, he could feel it in his heart.

Then, searing pain struck him as if his heart was ablaze.

His head buzzed... and he lost consciousness.

Before passing out, his mind lingered on a single thought, "It's over, I'm finished, my heart has been burned away!"

Chapter 454 Facing the Fire Dragon's Head

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The flames blazed furiously.

Liszt awoke from a coma and shockingly found himself in an underground lava cave, standing on a stone floating in the magma.

The scorching temperature made him sweat profusely.

The bubbling magma combined with the endless flames gave him a sense of falling into the abyss of hell. He tried to circulate his Dou Qi within his body to resist the hot air, but he couldn't muster any strength. Even the Sky-Cleaving Greatsword on his back couldn't be drawn.

"What... What's going on?"

Liszt's heart raced with panic, his head buzzing and blank.

Just then, the flames in front of him parted, and a huge head emerged from the fire.

It was as big as a room, with reddish-brown skin stained with clumps of flames, shaped like a triangle and sporting five curved horns. The scales were clearly visible, and there were a pair of eyes flickering with golden flames, along with a slightly open mouth gaping wide.

Sharp teeth lined up in rows, and although the tongue couldn't be seen, flames could be observed flickering within.

This head remained less than ten meters in front of Liszt, the golden flames in its eyes almost humanely sizing him up.

The neck and everything below it were engulfed in flames, obscuring them from sight.

But Liszt recognized it at a glance; it was a dragon's head — the head of a Fire Dragon.

At first glance it was ugly and fierce, but a closer look revealed rhythm in every line, filled with an unusual beauty of power that no other creature possessed.

It could only be found on a dragon.

Shivering was not enough to describe Liszt's emotion at that moment. Facing the Fire Dragon's head, all he wanted was to turn around and escape, far from his usual ambitions of Dragon Riding. But at the critical moment, his legs weakened, unable to move as if he'd been hit with a paralyzing spell, or as though his legs weren't his own.

"I..."

He was extremely frightened.

Apart from the Dragon Knights and Archmages, perhaps nobody could overcome fear when facing a dragon. However, apart from fear, his mind was more blank, and his thoughts weren't working flexibly. He didn't feel the pressure of the Dragon Might, but his body reacted just like those animals paralyzed by fear.

The dragon's head just stared at him.

And he just stood there on the stone, too scared to move.

The surrounding flames continued to burn, and the magma still bubbled.

But soon.

Liszt's mind gradually cleared, and he began to remember he had woken up from a coma. But the place he had passed out was not here; it was in a... Collapsed Sinkhole.

"That's it!"

"I activated the Dragon Bone Magic Array, condensed a Magic Fire Seed made of magic power, and then... then the fire seed burrowed into my body, went to the position of my heart... It seemed to have burned away my heart. That's not right, am I dead or alive right now?"

His thoughts were still a bit chaotic.

But as he took a few deep breaths and carefully sorted through the fleeting thoughts, he finally pieced together the current situation, "Either I'm dead, and this is a posthumous scene from hell; or the Magic Fire Seed triggered a volcanic eruption, filling up the Collapsed Sinkhole; or... all of this is just a hallucination while I'm in a coma, affected by the Magic Fire Seed!"

After death.

Without surprises, one would probably be left with nothing, only in rare cases might one become a soul. This world doesn't have the concept of hell; a soul either exists as Virginia does or goes to the Exiled Lands.

Therefore, the current scene doesn't match any posthumous visuals.

As for a Magic Fire Seed triggering a volcanic eruption and even bringing forth a Fire Dragon, it's even more illogical. Black Horse Island is indeed a volcanic island, but the volcano has been dead for who knows how many years, and the Fire Dragon has long been reduced to a few remains. It makes no sense for such a massive Fire Dragon to be reborn.

"So the current scene is just a dream sequence while I'm in a coma?" With this thought, Liszt suddenly felt the fear that had been binding him dissipate abruptly.

He regained control over his body.

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He stood up straight.

He drew out the Sky-Cleaving Greatsword, and with a piercing voice, said to the still glaring Fire Dragon's head, "So you are the projection of the Magic Fire Seed! It's a strange state; my body is still unconscious, yet my mind exists in such a vivid environment. Even this phantom body feels so real."

The Fire Dragon's head swayed slightly, its golden fiery eyes flickering with a dangerous light.

Its mouth gradually opened, revealing flames as hot as the sun brewing within, seemingly ready at any moment to unleash the Dragon Breath and reduce Liszt to ashes.

But Liszt felt no fear.

From another aspect, he confirmed his speculation—the Fire Dragon lacked any Dragon Might; it was merely a facade. He had personally experienced the Dragon Might of the Formless Dragon, that overwhelming force that made his scalp tingle and left him breathless, an unforgettable memory. The Fire Dragon before him, however, lacked this trait.

"Roar!"

The Fire Dragon did not release its Dragon Breath, instead, it let out a shrill, peculiar dragon roar that was indescribable.

Liszt did not cover his ears but raised the Sky-Cleaving Greatsword, ready for any impending danger.

Even having guessed that he was in a dream affected by the Magic Fire Seed, he remained cautious; to not leave meant danger could strike at any time.

Fortunately,

the danger did not materialize.

After the roar, the eyes of the Fire Dragon's head reflected a vibrant, indescribable meaning. Then, it slowly retracted back into the flames and vanished without a trace. Following that, the surrounding flames began to die down, the molten rock around him dulled, and everything suddenly plunged into darkness.

The high temperature disappeared.

Liszt felt waves of exhaustion wash over him, and he closed his eyes, dozing off.

...

Hunger.

An immense hunger.

There was an irresistible urge to eat anything, even himself, to relieve the hunger.

Liszt abruptly opened his eyes, awakened by the driving hunger, his mind foggy with nothing but thoughts of food. He resisted the growling protest from his stomach and looked around.

A Crystal Lamp cast a faint light, barely illuminating his surroundings.

He was still in the cavern of the Collapsed Sinkhole.

Only, the five Dragon Bones that had originally pierced through were now gone, leaving behind five passages leading up to the surface, with faint light seeping in.

"Sigh."

He let out a long breath of relief, "It was indeed just a dream, a dream influenced by the Magic Fire Seed... I'm so hungry, I can't stand it, I need to eat something!"

Unable to wait, he took out Magical Beast Meat and Dragon Breed Milk from the Gemstone Space and started devouring them wildly, both eating and drinking voraciously.

It took him about five pounds of Magical Beast Meat and three large cups of Dragon Breed Milk before the hunger finally started to recede and his mind became completely clear.

"What's happened to me? The amount I've just consumed is probably equivalent to my usual food intake for two meals." He rubbed his swollen stomach, surprised.

His appetite was naturally large; he usually ate in one meal what others did in two or three.

After all, the Dou Qi generated by a Knight required transformation from the food consumed. Even though his practice of the Dou Qi Secret Technique "Breath Decay" had some success in effectively controlling the loss of Dou Qi, his appetite remained large. However, he paid close attention to eating healthily and rarely overindulged.

He tried to increase the number of meals rather than eating too much at one time.

Rarely did he experience such pangs of hunger: "How many days have I been unconscious to be this hungry... Right, why haven't my Retainer Knights come to rescue me after being unconscious for so long? And what about that seed of Magic Fire that entered my body!"

Chapter 455 Fire Dragon Chain Quest

Thinking of the Magic Fire Seed.

His chest suddenly grew hot, and he could clearly feel that something had been added to the position of his heart. He exerted his inner Dou Qi to the fullest, attempting to guide this thing at his heart out, but after several attempts, all ended in failure.

The Magic Fire Seed just like that lodged itself in his heart and was not prepared to leave.

Liszt's expression was grave.

His body had been invaded by the Magic Fire Seed, and although he had regained consciousness from the coma, it obviously did not put his mind at ease, "What exactly have I smashed open? Can this Magic Fire Seed really hatch a Little Fire Dragon? It's in my heart, does it have any negative effects?"

Unable to drive it away, Liszt could only try to console himself.

He quickly summoned the Smoke Mission.

"Complete the mission, reward one Magic Fire Seed."

The mission was already completed, and the Magic Fire Seed indeed was the reward from the Smoke Mission, just that the method of reward was somewhat unexpected.

"If it is obtained through the guidance of the Smoke Mission, the Magic Fire Seed should not cause harm to my body, right?" Liszt pondered in his heart.

Thus far, the rewards from the Smoke Missions have all been beneficial, without any adverse effects.

It can be seen, then, that the Magic Fire Seed is also a benefit, it's just that how to utilize this benefit is something he currently cannot comprehend.

In a moment.

The smoke transformed into new Serpent Script.

"Mission: The Magic Fire Seed has been obtained, the most valuable existence on Black Horse Island has been acquired by you, the Collapsed Sinkhole has become a huge hidden danger on your territory, liable to collapse at any moment, and threatening the safety of your subjects, please resolve the safety hazard of the Collapsed Sinkhole. Reward: The restlessness of Rubber Bugs."

"Hmm!"

Upon seeing the new mission, Liszt's eyes brightened, "The Magic Fire Seed is the most valuable existence on Black Horse Island, so it could really be connected to the Fire Dragon. Just as Virginia said, it's the key to the Fire Dragon's cycle of reincarnation... Does that mean that inside my body, there might live a Fire Dragon that will one day come to be?"

The thought alone was very exciting.

But after the initial thrill had subsided.

He couldn't help but feel a headache, "Just to condense a Magic Fire Seed took such a great cost, nearly half of Black Horse Island's Volcanic Glass Ore had to be mined, just barely gathering enough Fire Dragon Magic Power required. Additionally, a special soul item from the Ghost Ship was used.

If he was to nurture the Fire Dragon to life.

He might have massive expenses awaiting him afterward.

"Strictly speaking, the Magic Fire Seed should only be one link in the 'Fire Dragon Chain Mission', let me calculate it." Standing in the pit, Liszt was not in a hurry to leave.

He began to tally the Smoke Missions he had completed.

Including the completed and changed ones, a total of eighty-three missions in one and a half years.

Among them, the missions related to the Fire Dragon, started with the thirty-sixth mission—relocating one hundred serfs to settle on Black Horse Island, reward five Decaying Dragon Bones.

Next was the thirty-eighth mission—raising over a thousand chickens in Fresh Flower Town, reward a Fire Attribute Condensation Core Vein, also known as Volcanic Glass.

Then came the seventy-first mission—waiting for the Iron Hoof Island battle to end, reward the revival of Decaying Dragon Bones.

After that, the seventy-seventh mission—mine 10 tons of Volcanic Glass, reward the restlessness of Rubber Bugs.

The seventy-eighth mission—infuse Fire Dragon Magic Power into Dragon Bones, reward Pink Pearls from Fen Hai Luo.

The eighty-second mission—produce glass products, reward the Collapsed Sinkhole.

The eighty-third mission—secure a clue from Virginia Truth, reward the Magic Fire Seed.

These seven missions are all related to the Fire Dragon, either in content or in rewards, and can generally be considered as part of the interconnected Fire Dragon quests.

If one were to seriously investigate,

further quests could probably be linked to the Fire Dragon, like the several related to Virginia.

The twenty-seventh quest — Discover the reason behind the coldness of the sunken wreck, reward: Dragonbone Stabilizer, which hid a 36D Ghost.

The fifty-seventh quest — Collect the Black Pearls of the Coral Reef, with the reward being a Soul Storage Vessel, allowing the 36D Ghost to successfully regain its memory, becoming Virginia Truth.

The sixty-fifth quest — Set foot on Iron Hoof Island, reward: the awakening of Virginia.

So many tasks, obviously not existing in isolation, with many interlinked with other chain quests, forming complex Threads of Destiny. If Liszt had not mastered the Smoke Mission, gaining the golden finger to manipulate the Threads of Destiny, he would have likely missed many rewards.

It was precisely the pull of the Threads of Destiny that made a reward, seemingly unrelated at first, gradually accumulate, eventually leading to a greater reward.

A Fire Dragon!

"I am definitely undertaking the interconnected Fire Dragon quests, it's just that there are many steps, and I can't complete them all in one go. Now, the eighty-fourth Smoke Mission, the reward has changed to the restlessness of the Rubber Bug... which means, this Magic Fire Seed will probably have to stay inside me a bit longer."

Calm contemplation,

helped him soothe his restless emotions.

Since it has come to this, as long as the Magic Fire Seed isn't causing harm, he would let it reside in his heart. In the future, he would slowly figure out how to interact with the Magic Fire Seed, or wait for a new Fire Dragon chain quest to emerge to resolve the issue with the Magic Fire Seed.

He pulled on the dangling rope.

And shouted upwards towards the Collapsed Sinkhole, "Philip, Xavier!"

"My lord, we are here!" the voices of the Retainer Knights came from the opening, they had been guarding the Burial Ground all this while.

"Pull me up."

Back on the surface, after making inquiries, he realized that he hadn't stayed too long in the pit, which meant he was unconscious for about a quarter of an hour.

A quarter of an hour, starving to the point of dizziness, even considering devouring himself.

Clearly, it was the doing of the Magic Fire Seed.

Fortunately, it was just hunger, with no other changes to the body, and his Dou Qi was functioning as usual.

"Lord, how is the situation at the Burial Ground?" Marcus, who had come from the training grounds, asked. The five iconic bones once at the Burial Ground had vanished, leading anyone to wonder.

"It seems that the bones have decayed, triggering a collapse of the surface, leaving nothing inside the sinkhole," Liszt said casually, "What needs to be done now is to fill the sinkhole to prevent further collapses that could endanger the safety of the citizens in the territory. Three deaths and one injury have already caused significant loss."

Every serf in the territory is an important labor force.

Apart from death due to age or illness—forces beyond control—Liszt hoped to minimize other casualties.

"We could transport rocks produced by the Blizzard Beast to fill in this sinkhole," Administrative Officer Blair suggested.

Training the Blizzard Beast was also taking place nearby, where every session ended with a large number of rocks left behind from the unleashed Rock Spikes.

After some thought, Liszt said, "The terrain of the Burial Ground isn't high, it's quite low-lying, and the absence of accumulated water in the past was actually a bit abnormal. You can fill it halfway with rocks and sand, then the other half should be somehow filled with fresh water, for farming or grazing, we'll need fresh water."

He guessed the absence of water in the sinkhole was probably related to the Fire Dragon Bones, which had evaporated all accumulated water.

Now that the bones had decayed, it might be possible to retain water.

Blair nodded, "Lord, there isn't an abundance of fresh water on the island, perhaps we can hope for a heavy rain."

Chapter 456 Eating a Fire Dragon

...

The rain came faster than expected.

The climate on the island is like this, with clear skies in the morning possibly turning into a storm in the afternoon. The collapsed sinkhole had barely been filled with a layer of rocks and sea sand at the bottom when the sudden downpour came pouring down.

The time was around three o'clock in the afternoon.

Meanwhile.

Liszt was in his room in the port town, feasting on his meal. The roasted magical beast meat sprinkled with seasoning, no need for drink accompaniments, was still delicious.

This was already his fourth meal of the day.

One in the morning, one mid-morning, one at noon, and one in the afternoon. And he would still need one in the evening, another at night, and yet another in the middle of the night.

Seven meals a day, each more than he used to eat.

He also had to visit the bathroom twice, to expel the residues of the digested food.

"So now, am I sharing a mouth with a dragon just to eat?" Liszt pondered after finishing the roasted meat and taking out a cup of dragon breed milk, drinking it down in one gulp.

A complex look of worry appeared between his brows.

Despite eating seven meals a day, not only did he show no signs of obesity, he even felt a bit leaner day by day: "The magic fire seed's need for nutrient absorption compels me to shoulder the burden of more magical beast meat and dragon breed milk, rich in nutrients... The amount I'm spending on eating now probably rivals Douson's."

Douson and other blizzard beasts are intermediate magical beasts that consume a massive amount of food every day.

Liszt had caught up and even showed signs of surpassing them, and judging by the value of the food, what he consumed was more costly—since he couldn't go without magical beast meat or dragon breed milk. Skipping one meal of magical beast meat or not drinking dragon breed milk for one meal made him feel weak.

"This magic fire seed, I don't know how long I'll need to nourish it, but if this goes on, I will eventually be eaten out of house and home. The only consolation is that the magic fire seed doesn't require expending magic power; otherwise, I really couldn't even afford to take potions."

He had been eating ravenously for the past two days.

Yet, he did not feel the slightest change at the location of his heart, where the magic fire seed occasionally emitted a warm sensation but showed no other signs of activity.

No matter how Liszt operated his Dou Qi, he couldn't draw it out or stimulate it.

He couldn't even utilize the magic power of the magic fire seed itself—his guess was that the magic power constituting the magic fire seed was highly concentrated dragon magic power; otherwise, he couldn't explain where all the fire dragon magic power went after being transformed through the dragon bone magic array.

Now the territory continued to mine volcanic glass.

About ten or so more tons of volcanic glass could be mined from the surface. Shallow volcanic glass was very easy to mine as the soil was quite loose. But when it comes to the deep volcanic glass, it becomes hard to mine. Due to the lack of serfs at the moment, they were only choosing to mine shallow deposits.

Based on the size of Black Horse Island, the total reserve of volcanic glass is estimated to exceed fifty tons.

He used about twenty tons of volcanic glass's fire dragon magic power to condense into the tiny magic fire seed he now possessed: "With such a compression ratio, able to compress gas into liquid, why did the transformation of fire dragon magic power only condense into a flame slightly bigger than a candle flame?"

The transformation of magic power is hard to guess.

Liszt did not know how much resources it took to raise a dragon, but nurturing a magic fire seed was already accelerating the financial strain on his hands.

"I must speed up the cultivation of 'Breath Decay'. At present, utilizing this Dou Qi secret technique only slows down one-third of my body's Dou Qi loss rate. According to Steve Vulture's introduction to Dou Qi secret techniques, at the Elite Earth Knight level, it can slow down three-quarters of the Dou Qi loss rate."

Slowing down the Dou Qi loss rate means increasing the efficiency of nutrient utilization, which means less food intake.

When 'Breath Decay' is mastered, the three-quarters rate of deceleration will at least allow me to save two meals, and eating only five meals a day will probably be enough.

Moreover.

After mastering 'Breath Decay', the consumption when taking potions will also decrease, undoubtedly a very cost-effective Dou Qi secret technique: "I must master it as quickly as possible."

Just after eating, he entered a state of cultivation, striving to operate Dou Qi in the way taught by 'Breath Decay'. With the pressure provided by the magic fire seed, he cultivated with utmost focus, fully concentrating on the details of the Dou Qi secret technique. Hoping to master it soon and save some money on food.

Suddenly.

His heart skipped a beat, and he felt a connection to the rubber elf bug, receiving a blur of restless sensations.

Immediately his eyebrows raised, understanding dawned, and he called forth the Smoke Mission: "Mission completed, reward is the restlessness of the rubber bug."

...

Task completed, which meant the collapsed sinkhole had been filled with rain, turning into a lake and five tunnel openings. With water to support the pressure on the surface, the rocks around the sinkhole should not collapse easily. However, fences would need to be set up around it in the future to prevent falling in.

That was a nearly thirty-meter deep lake in the sinkhole.

He stood up, ready to take the Rubber Elf Bug to plant new Cordyceps—without saying much, he already sensed the restless Rubber Elf Bug, knowing what it wanted to do—just like the previous Rubber Elf Bug, it wanted to spit out the new Cordyceps it had nurtured inside its body.

By the way.

Pay attention to the new Smoke Mission.

"Mission: The new season of autumn harvest is about to begin. Fresh Flower Town and Black Horse Island have opened up many farms, yet the food grown is still hard to meet the consumption of the territory's population, and there is also a need to support even more people in the future. Please store enough food for ten thousand people to survive the winter. Reward: One Little Minor Elf."

"Hmm?"

Seeing the reward, Liszt suddenly froze, "Another Little Minor Elf?"

The surprise came so unexpectedly that he did not know how to express his emotions for a moment, finding it hard to think clearly, probably because of the recent troubles with the Fire Dragon, causing his brain to be somewhat overloaded.

It took a while for his thoughts to start moving again: "Is it a wild Little Minor Elf similar to Nami, or is it a breakthrough of a domesticated Elf Bug like Jela? If it's a domestic Elf Bug breakthrough, which one could it be, the Corn Grass Elf Bug, or the Rubber Elf Bug triplets? It probably isn't the Rubber Elf Bug triplets; their evolution should yield three Little Minor Elves."

Therefore.

His thoughts shifted to the Corn Grass Bug, which he did not carry with him, still in the castle of Fresh Flower Town. As for whether it was quietly accumulating power, Liszt was not sure, and he also couldn't be certain that the Corn Grass Bug was about to evolve into a Little Minor Elf.

However, during this period, the only Elf Bug that had been active, apart from the Rubber Elf Bug triplets, was the Corn Grass Bug.

He shook his head.

He pressed down the pointless guesswork.

Instead, he started thinking about the content of the mission: "Storing enough food for ten thousand people to survive the winter, according to the traditional winter, is from November to February of the following year. However, in Fresh Flower Town, the so-called 'surviving the winter' usually refers to the snowy season from mid-December to mid-February."

Fresh Flower Town was located at the northeastern corner of Coral Island, with Black Horse Island to the northeast of Fresh Flower Town.

Every year, starting in mid-December, they would be covered by a long ice snow season, during which time the serfs would usually stay at home and try to move as little as possible, to reduce heat consumption and decrease the number of meals required.

"Food for over ten thousand people for two months is no small sum. Relying on grains alone is definitely not enough. Seafood and meats must be stockpiled in large quantities, and it would be best to have a lot of salted meat and pickled vegetables... However, the Smoke Mission's requirement to store winter food for ten thousand people is very interesting."

The Smoke Mission was closely related to his own thoughts.

Sometimes Liszt would think that many of the missions are driven by his own "imagination."

For example, the bizarre mission to help Meioubao and Angela improve their marital relationship might have come about because he often deliberately thought about Angela Sapphire's promiscuous lifestyle and projected it through the Smoke Mission.

And recently, he had always been concerned about how to buy serfs when executing the Pioneer Mandate and transport them back to the territory.

Therefore.

The Smoke Mission had issued the task of winter food storage for ten thousand people.

"Perhaps I can attempt in future Smoke Missions to proactively guide the Smoke Mission by continually suggesting to myself," he mused.

"It feels a bit unreliable, probably affecting only the content of the mission, and it seems not to influence the reward."

"But trying it out isn't a bad thing."

He had always relied on the rewards of the Smoke Mission to achieve leapfrog development for both his territory and himself. But deep down, he also had a strong desire for control, hoping to firmly grasp the Smoke Mission in his hands, rather than triggering it passively. Moreover, this might relate to the existence of a Sacred Dragon.

The Smoke Dragon!

So he never stopped pondering over the Smoke Mission.

...

Having mentally prepared to guide the Smoke Mission, he took the Rubber Elf Bug triplets. Mounting the Landwalker Bird, which was reluctant to leave its nest, he set out in the heavy rain towards the rubber plantation.

Chapter 457 The Secret of the Seed

"Spit it out, little guy."

Liszt held a restless rubber bug in his palm and stepped through the muddy water to reach a pre-planned vacant rubber garden area—the rubber gardens were to be cultivated on tens of thousands of acres, so the layout of the area had all been determined in advance.

As the rubber bug opened its mouth, a faint green light flew out.

It was a tiny seed that took root immediately upon landing and then grew at a rate visible to the naked eye, sprouting stalks, branching out, and producing leaves, eventually becoming a huge cordyceps tree.

This dynamic scene of plant growth stirred something in Liszt: "A seed can grow into a towering tree, elf bugs nurture life in this way... then what is the magic fire seed within me, and does it have any connection with the seeds of the elf cordyceps?"

Elves could be seen as being nurtured from seeds.

If his guess wasn't wrong, fire dragons would also be nurtured from magic fire seeds.

Thus, elves and dragons are both nurtured from seeds, and their seeds are clearly not ordinary—they are condensed from magic power. The seeds of the elf cordyceps possess the functions of ordinary plant seeds as well, but it's unlikely the magic fire seeds could be planted in the ground to sprout.

"I hope it doesn't sprout in my heart and consider me the soil from which it draws nutrients, draining my Dou Qi to nurture itself into a fire dragon."

As the new rubber tree cordyceps grew, his thoughts were active.

One moment he compared the similarities and differences between the elf seeds and the magic fire seeds; the next moment, he thought of humans developing from fertilized eggs, which could also be considered seeds; he concluded that perhaps all life originated from seeds, yet he inexplicably thought of Sea Sprite Ake, who seemed not to have developed from a seed.

When she was born, she was already inside a shell, complete in body parts except for legs below the knees.

"Perhaps, Ake was originally just a shell?"

It was like elf bugs, which did not exist initially; sudden mutations in ordinary plants then nurtured elf bugs. Maybe sea sprites also did not exist, and a sudden mutation in a shell brought forth a sea sprite.

Such thoughts were a bit strange.

He didn't believe Ake was transformed from a shell—there's hardly any aesthetic in the flesh of a shell: "The only thing is, how was Ake's shell formed, and where did she come from? If I can solve this mystery, perhaps I could mass-cultivate new sea sprites."

Although Ake was still underage and under cultivation, her role was clearly significant.

Nami was discovered by her, kelp bugs were found by her, the coral reef, Pearl Lake, and the tridacna were located by her, the fen hai luo was also found by her, Chris Truth was rescued by her, green caterpillars, green-headed ducks were discovered by her, and even the Six-Headed King Serpent was lured by her.

Basically, all the rewards from the ocean-related smoke missions were inseparable from Ake's shadow—after all, Liszt was not an aquatic creature.

Knights could conquer the land, and in the future, the skies as well, but the ocean was perhaps beyond the reach of even dragon knights—except for those riding water dragons, for water dragons could definitely roam the sea at will.

He did not drift long in the sea of thoughts.

The cordyceps had been successfully placed.

Liszt put away the rubber bug that had calmed down and began to examine the new rubber tree cordyceps. He noticed that this cordyceps was completely different from the previous two; it was much larger, with a thicker trunk and more branches. Especially its leaves were extremely exaggerated, larger even than those of a banana plant.

It had not borne fruit.

Perhaps like a common rubber tree, rubber could be extracted from the trunk.

"The biggest difference with this new Cordyceps might be its leaves, I'll pick one to study first." Liszt carefully plucked a leaf imbued with magic power.

The magic power quickly dissipated, turning into an ordinary leaf.

From the cut at the base of the leaf, a small amount of rubber was seen to seep out, proving that the new rubber tree could still produce rubber and had not lost this ability—in Liszt's view, the value of rubber can be compared to that of magic potions; losing the ability to produce rubber would be an absolute failure of a mutation.

"Such a large leaf, and quite sturdy, too." He tugged at the leaf, but it didn't tear, "It could be made into a fan, or maybe... packaging bags? Like wrapping zongzi, using its leaves to wrap delicacies? I always feel that this function doesn't quite match the worth of a rubber tree."

...

After settling the new Cordyceps rubber tree.

Liszt's next priority was to complete the new Smoke Mission—stockpiling enough food for ten thousand people to get through the winter.

But he soon discovered a serious problem: "It's not even October yet, winter is from mid-December to mid-February, so when should I stockpile enough food to consider the task completed? Should I start stockpiling now?" He was unsure whether the food stockpiled now would count as winter food.

Nevertheless, he had to start somewhere, and there was no way to stockpile enough food in a hurry.

Under the condition of ensuring basic food and clothing, a young adult male would consume about 600 jin (approximately 300 kg) of grain per year. After deducting the consumption of the old, young, women, and children, and taking into account the extra consumption of knights, it was estimated that each servant needed 2 jin (approximately 1 kg) of food per day.

Ten thousand people would need 20,000 jin (approximately 10 tonnes) of food per day.

The food required by ten thousand people for two months would be 600 tonnes.

"Starting now, I need to find a way to buy grain from all over Coral Island every day, storing 3 tonnes a day, so by December, I should be able to store about 100 tonnes; plus the grain produced from my own territory minus the consumption for eating, should allow storing another 100 tonnes; with the addition of preserved meats and seafood, another 100 tonnes shouldn't be an issue... But there is still a shortfall of 300 tonnes."

This 300 tonnes had to be purchased from other islands.

The cost would definitely not be small.

As of now, Fresh Flower Brew's profits have been mortgaged until next year, and the revenue from Black Tulips, Fresh Flower Soap, and rubber can barely support the development of the territory.

To buy additional food, I must find a way to raise new Gold Coins.

"If there's no other way, start selling Black Pearls and see if the market is indeed eager for Black Pearls smaller than a sea bowl." He had previously sold a fist-sized one to Levis for several hundred Gold Coins.

Now, with Black Pearls becoming more plentiful.

The price will surely fall, but no matter to what extent it falls, it will definitely be more valuable than the White Pearls produced by the Grand Duke's Pearl Oyster farming at Tranquil Lake—White Pearls can only calm and soothe, while Black Pearls not only have that effect but can also disperse Wind Attribute Magic Power.

Moreover, they are larger and contain more abundant magic power.

"At ten times the price, they'll definitely sell! Now, large Tridacna in Pearl Lake are hard to come by, but there is still an abundance of small ones, just by catching a batch, I can make Gold Coins... I don't need to worry about the territory's finances at all, I may be out of money but I have special products!"

So, after returning to Fresh Flower Town, he immediately took a few samples of Black Pearls and rushed to Tulip Castle to discuss the trade of Black Pearls with the Levis couple.

If there's no market on Coral Island, my sister-in-law Loria can take them to Golden Island to sell.

I believe the ladies of Golden Island will pay a handsome price for Black Pearls.

Chapter 458: Issuance of the Pioneer Mandate

"Black pearls can now be mass-produced, so you mean they can continuously produce white pearls like the ones from the Sapphire Family's pearl oysters?"

Liszt asked, astonished.

Sitting beside him, Loria was playfully examining several black pearls smaller than table tennis balls that Liszt had taken out: "Liszt, the black pearl pendant you once gave me for protection, it was made from these kinds of black pearls, wasn't it? And that huge black pearl as well, is it the same variety?"

Liszt nodded: "That's right, Loria."

Liszt carried a faint smile on his face: "The wedding gift I gave you, that black pearl which can strongly disperse the wind attribute magic power in a two to three hundred meter radius, and the one Liszt gave you before, as well as these black pearls, are all the same variety, produced by the Sea Monster Chequed Venus Clam."

Liszt couldn't help but complain: "But when you sold me the black pearls originally, you said they couldn't be mass-produced, that they were a rare commodity!"

"At that time, they indeed were a rare commodity. However, after my continuous exploration of the sea, I finally discovered a habitat thriving with Hei Chequ, hence black pearls have become the specialty of my territory."

"Now, if you try to sell black pearls to me again, you're not planning to use the original price, are you?"

"Brother, it's true that the high price of the two original black pearls was based on rarity, but you can't deny that their inherent value is extremely high. Moreover, even if the Hei Chequ become a territorial specialty, the production is still very limited; they are still scarce commodities."

"What's your proposed price?"

"Actually, I am not planning to sell them to you. Of course, if you are willing to buy, as long as the price is right, I can certainly offer a discount." Liszt casually courted business and continued, "In fact, I am planning to delegate the sales of black pearls to Loria. Are you interested by any chance?"

"Sales agency?" Loria's eyes lit up.

Nobles, despite despising merchants, were not ashamed to do business.

"Yes, according to the different sizes of the black pearls, we will set different prices, and I can give Loria a certain commission. For example, this black pearl in your hand, I price at fifty Gold Coins. If you can sell it on Golden Island, I will give you a direct commission of ten percent, that is, five Gold Coins."

Loria was tempted.

However, she glanced at Liszt.

Liszt stroked his chin: "Black pearls are indeed nice, more valuable than white pearls; we can do this business. But a ten percent commission is too little, at least twenty percent."

"Twenty percent? You might as well rob me!" Liszt exclaimed in shock, "Brother, sister-in-law, the black pearls are produced by the Sea Monster Chequed Venus Clam. Hunting them costs me a lot, even the lives of fishermen. They look like black pearls, but really they are blood-stained pearls!"

When it came to storytelling, Liszt was never lacking.

He vividly depicted the difficulties of hunting for the Hei Chequ, portraying himself as driven mad with poverty, risking life-threatening battles with sea monsters to dredge up black pearls in exchange for some Gold Coins.

Perhaps.

Since his performance was too exaggerated, Liszt remained unmoved, "Black pearls obviously aren't something minor Nobles can afford; they are luxury items for the great Nobles, who need channels for purchase. Liszt, if you want us to use our channels to do business, we can't settle for less than twenty percent commission."

Liszt was also feeling the pinch, realising that he might have to bleed a little to make a deal.

But he quickly thought of a new way to cut his losses: "My pricing for the size and quality of black pearls is fixed, and the commission stays at ten percent, but... if you can sell them at a higher price, then any excess over the listed price is all your profit!"

"Really?"

"Of course."

"Agreed!" Levis and Loria looked at each other and immediately made their decision, "We'll take as many black pearls as you have. Though this deal is troublesome and requires Loria to use quite a few connections. But we should be able to earn a considerable amount of hard-earned money in a short time, enough to offset what I spent on my wedding."

"I don't have many black pearls collected, so I need to carefully check each one to agree on a satisfactory price. Plus, you'll need to pay me a deposit in advance as I am in dire need of funds for territorial development."

"There's not much liquid capital left in the castle. I could probably scrape together up to three thousand gold coins," said Levis.

Suddenly, Loria interjected, "Levis, I have some personal dowry left, which could amount to about five thousand gold coins."

"Three thousand plus five thousand, that's a total of eight thousand gold coins, fair enough to make the deposit!"

...

The black pearls that were put up for sale were not exceptionally large, the largest being only slightly bigger than a sea bowl, with all others being small black pearls.

The large black pearls that could be used to make Calming Wind Pearls were all retained for Liszt's future personal use.

The Levis couple were bold.

They were convinced that the black pearls could definitely be sold at a high price, so they took all the black pearl stock Liszt had in hand.

The pricing of these black pearls ranged from a high of 1,500 gold coins each to a low of 50 gold coins each, adding up to a total price of 24,550 gold coins. An initial deposit of eight thousand gold coins was paid, and the subsequent payment of 17,550 gold coins would be settled after the black pearls were sold out.

"Pleased to do business with you, Liszt."

"Pleased to do business with you, Levis and Loria."

After the inventory check was complete, all three were satisfied—Liszt was happy that he finally had enough funds on hand and wasn't so strapped for cash that he needed to borrow money.

As for how much profit the Levis couple could make by flipping these black pearls, that was their own skill. He had sold them for the price he wanted, and how much others could earn thanks to their channels was none of his concern, nor was there any reason for him to feel jealous or regretful. His mindset in this regard was quite positive.

After all, black pearls were not a one-time business.

If necessary, when the next batch had accumulated, the price could just be increased.

Sea Sprite Ake often went around Pearl Lake, collecting some black pearls. Her magic had become very skilled, allowing her to pry out the black pearls while the Chequed Venus clams were opening their shells. There was no need for killing, practically achieving sustainable development, and continuously harvesting black pearls.

Of course.

Currently, only small black pearls could be collected, as the large Chequed Venus clams didn't live in Pearl Lake.

With the smallest black pearls available, Liszt strung together a black pearl necklace as a gift for his sister Li Vera in advance. He also paid off his debt of eight hundred gold coins to Li Vera and the two thousand gold coins he owed Lady Penelope—He didn't like the feeling of owing money to others.

The rest of the money was mostly invested in the purchase of grain and production materials.

With the help of the Tulip Family's merchant fleet and the Beer Island's traders, they acquired a large quantity of wheat, barley, sorghum, beans, and other cereals, which were then stored in the warehouses on Black Horse Island.

Time passed in this manner.

Soon, it was October of the year 152 by the Sapphire Calendar, and the Earl finally returned from Blue Dragon Island, bringing this year's Pioneer Mandate—The Steel Ridge Kingdom and the Eagle Kingdom, these eternal rivals, inevitably continued their tradition of waging war against each other after the end of autumn each year, each trying to seize the accumulated resources of the other.

Chapter 459 Attacking Sardine Bay Serpent Fang City

Tulip Castle.

The meeting was held solemnly, with a huge thick paper map spread out on the wall. The black ink lines outlined a simple maritime map.

This map was quite interesting.

If one takes the top left corner and the bottom right corner as the central axis, the left is a yellow-brown base color, representing the continent; the right is a pale blue base color, representing the sea.

Above the sea, islands were scattered, symbolizing the Duchy of Sapphire, and the one closest to the map's central axis was Iron Hoof Island.

Taking the top right corner and the bottom left corner as the central axis, the continent is divided in two by red lines. The upper part of the continent's territory belongs to the Steel Ridge Kingdom, while the lower part of the continent is the territory of the Eagle Kingdom.

Following this central axis line, Iron Hoof Island was also divided in half, which means the island is equidistant from both kingdoms' mainland.

It's a six-day voyage either way.

Of course, if one insists on precise measurement, actually reaching Steel Ridge Kingdom takes six and a half days, as it is slightly off the central axis. Basically, it can be estimated that Iron Hoof Island is about 1,200+ kilometers away from the coast of the Eagle Kingdom, roughly the distance from Beijing to Shanghai.

It's about as wide as nine Taiwan Straits.

"In previous years, our attacks on the hinterlands of the Eagle Kingdom focused mainly on Sardine Bay, Yellow Mud Coast, Roaring River Mouth, and Dense Corridor—these four coastlines. This year, we will coordinate with the knight order of Steel Ridge Kingdom to attack the area around Sardine Bay. There are four major cities nearby—Serpent Fang City, Ambition City, Coldstream City, and Dragon Fall City," explained Captain Mickey, standing in front of the map.

"These four major cities each belong to the territory of four different marquises. Our knight order cannot conquer these large cities and castles, but the vast and flat surrounding lands are all grazing fields for battle horses. We should take away whatever resources we can."

"Which area is our Coral Island Knights focusing on?" asked Viscount Jonas.

"We're mainly targeting the area around Serpent Fang City. The development here is poor, and it has been frequently plundered in past years, making it difficult for those Eagle Kingdom nobles to develop their territories. As a result, resources are relatively sparse. However, the Grand Duke will compensate in terms of military achievements," the Earl explained from his seat.

The Duchy of Sapphire assaults the coastal hinterlands of the Eagle Kingdom year after year.

But the direction of attack changes every year. Sometimes it comes from Sardine Bay, sometimes from Roaring River Mouth, and sometimes it even lands on some unnamed coast.

As a feudal state,

the defense of these territories, of course, falls to the local landlords to bear. Without unified military action, they are easily raided by the knight orders of the Duchy of Sapphire.

The coastal lords are the poorest nobles in the Eagle Kingdom.

However, with constant warfare, each territory has a strong knight order, and they're not easily conquered. Their territories are larger and often enclaves, meaning that these landlords also have territories inland. Consequently, the development around the coastline lags behind.

Sardine Bay has not been plundered for several years.

This time, with the issuance of the Pioneer Mandate, the Duchy of Sapphire will start from Sardine Bay. The Coral Island Knights are assigned to focus on the area near Serpent Fang City. As for the specifics of the attack, it will be discussed upon arrival on the continent—war is not a play; there are no rehearsals here.

"There's equally good news and bad news, do you want to hear the good news or the bad news first?"

The Earl smiled and without waiting for his followers' response, he said, "Well, actually, the two pieces of news are related. Comb City will gather a group of knight orders, and they will join us in attacking the hinterlands of the Eagle Kingdom."

Comb City is a major city in the Steel Ridge Kingdom, the fiefdom of a marquis.

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With such a fresh force joining, the certainty of attacking the enemy's heartland increased, but the addition of a Marquis meant there were more sharers of the war achievements and resources.

Indeed, it's a mix of good news and bad news.

Liszt didn't mind this.

Looking at the map, he had already begun to imagine how he was going to plunder resources—unlike the previous knight orders, his strength wasn't in charging, but in dismantling castles at an incredibly fast pace. Former Pioneer Mandates mainly focused on raiding, seldom laying siege to cities, and only competed for mines.

However, with the Blizzard Beast's assistance, the interests of dismantling castles far exceeded the raids on mines.

His mission had been assigned: to lead a Coral Island Knights team, coordinate with the Earl, and focus on striking the major and minor castles around Serpent Fang City. The Earl also knew how to maximize benefits. With Douson and the Eight Tiny Ones—a batch of intermediate magical beasts—as a powerful new force, it would be foolish not to use them.

...

After the meeting.

The followers each returned to their respective territories from Tulip Castle to reorganize their military forces, waiting to depart for Bull Hoof City on October 6th—this major city in Iron Hoof Island continued to be the starting point for the Duchy of Sapphire's initiation of Pioneer Mandates and the expedition of knight orders.

In Fresh Flower Town.

Liszt spent an entire day laying out the construction plans for his territory. He then spent a night going over the various duties of the castle with Butler Carter and also ensuring enough food was packed.

The next day he entrusted Chris Truth to take over his trade with Elkerson.

Subsequently, he bid farewell to Ach, reminding her to oversee the mangrove afforestation, gathering Tridacna pearls, searching for elf bugs in the sea, and breeding little green-headed ducks, among other tasks.

"Brother, how long will you be gone for this war before you come back?" Ach was reluctant to part with Liszt; she had once lived alone at sea.

But now, she had grown fond of the times spent with company.

"Shortest, a month and a bit, longest, two to three months, but I think I will definitely rush back before the festival."

The Little Sea Monster clenched her fist: "Hmm, Ach will practice magic diligently, help brother with his work, and will rest at the Sea View Villa every day, waiting for brother to return. When brother comes back, Ach will surely be stronger. No sea monsters in the ocean will be Ach's match!"

"I believe that," Liszt said, hugging Ach, whose magical talent was beyond doubt.

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The morning of October 8th.

Liszt was already fully armed and ready, leading the Black Horse Island Knight Squad, preparing to set out from Fresh Flower Town.

He gave his final instructions to the parting Goltai: "Consultant Goltai, the construction of the territory is shared by Isaiah and Blair, but you must oversee and direct the overall strategy. Pay particular attention to stockpiling food; do not skimp on spending gold coins. I'll send over a large batch of serfs, at least ten thousand people, and there must be no shortage of food for them to get through the winter."

"Please rest assured, I shall keep this in mind at all times."

"The management and arrangement of the new serfs should also be planned ahead. If problems arise, you can directly seek help from Sir Levis at Tulip Castle."

"I understand, my lord."

That being the case.

Having made all his instructions clear and his arrangements set, Liszt no longer lingered. Accompanied by the farewells of territory officers and servants, he took off at the break of dawn, the dim light just beginning to brighten the east. The knight squad's galloping hooves kicked up dust as they rode swiftly into the distance.

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Chapter 460 Territory Cash Flow

The knights had already departed.

Fresh Flower Town had returned to the tranquility of its usual mornings, yet the town's administrative office was bustling with extraordinary activity. Officials from both the Port Town and Fresh Flower Town, as well as the Retainer Knights left behind, all gathered here for a meeting chaired by Consultant Goltai.

"Isaiah, Blair, you two go first and discuss the financial situation of the two towns so we can make reasonable arrangements for the subsidy of gold coins provided by Lord Landlord," Goltai said.

Isaiah spoke first, "The income of Fresh Flower Town is roughly as follows... The expenses of Fresh Flower Town are roughly as follows... All in all, the town has a very high turnover, but it has to bear the consumption of the castle and Black Horse Island, losing at least five gold coins a day. A minimum of one hundred and fifty gold coins in subsidies is needed each month."

The construction in Fresh Flower Town had slightly stalled, and its various industries were mostly making money. Unfortunately, the main projects were either mortgaged or had limited capacity and could not be used as cash cows for continuous extraction. Add to this the castle's daily consumption and the support of construction materials for Black Horse Island, and indeed operations were difficult.

Blair followed, "The current main income of Port Town relies solely on rubber produced from rubber trees and pottery and charcoal from the brick factory... The expenses of Port Town, which need to underpin the comprehensive construction of Black Horse Island, face shortages in manpower, materials, and funds... losing at least fifteen gold coins a day."

The rubber production was not yet high, and the brick factory had to meet the needs of the territory.

Black Horse Island was developing various industries in parallel; being able to maintain a loss of only fifteen gold coins a day was already a sign of healthy finances.

Both administrative officers reported on the situation of their respective territories.

Goltai cleared his throat and said, "Lord Landlord has allocated a total of two thousand three hundred gold coins to the territory's finances. I plan to allocate a total of five hundred gold coins to store food. According to his lordship's wishes, we need to store enough food for ten thousand new serfs on top of the territory's existing population, which means food for fifteen thousand people."

"Consultant, if we keep stockpiling food, the price is bound to increase significantly. I think we're lucky if we can stockpile enough food with one thousand gold coins," Blair countered Goltai's idea from another perspective.

Isaiah corroborated this, "I've talked with Captain Abagon of the Fresh Flower Caravan. It's indeed becoming more and more difficult to buy food. We can't expect those lords from other places to sell us food at fair prices, just like the lords of Coral Island."

Rebutted by both administrative officers.

Goltai was somewhat displeased, but he nodded, "Then let's set a budget of one thousand gold coins for storing food. With this issue settled, let's move on to the next topic, the allocation of funds for various industries."

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A meeting was in session at the town's administrative office.

There was also a small meeting in the castle involving Butler Carter, Mrs. Morson, Mrs. Abbie, and Chris Truth, as well as Captain Abagon, Charlotte, and other caravan leaders.

Carter was the first to speak, "Her Excellency Chris is busy with many matters, so let's start with the purchase of Magic Books. The master has allocated one thousand gold coins for book purchases, of which four hundred are for buying knight novels and six hundred for magic books. We will mainly deal with Mr. Elkerson, and Her Excellency Chris will preside over this."

Chris's demeanor stood out from that of the servants. She simply sat to the side and said lightly, "Mr. Carter, the Viscount has told me that when Mr. Elkerson comes to town for the trade, you just need to notify me, and I will handle the pricing for each Magic Book."

"That would be for the best."

"Then, if there is nothing else, I shall take my leave."

On her way back, she seemed somewhat preoccupied.

Her thoughts were a bit scattered, "I feel that I have recently touched upon cognitive barriers, and according to "Three-Phase Magic Array and Reality Interaction Theory", this is a sign of transitioning from a Static Magic Circle to a Dynamic Magic Array. Unfortunately, my accumulation is still insufficient, and I need more magic references."

She thought back to yesterday when Liszt came to get a Magic Potion.

What he had said to her, "Chris, I don't have the money to build you a Mage Tower yet, but whatever Magic Books you wish to buy, you may. Also, I will ask Elkerson to find a sufficient spellcasting scheme for your reference. I hope you can advance to Grand Magician soon."

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With these thoughts in mind, she couldn't help but breathe unevenly, "The value placed on magicians is too low. I cannot let Liszt down. I need to be promoted to Grand Magician to repay him for saving my life and for his daily smiles... I've dedicated my whole being to the Truth..."

Various images and smiles of Liszt flashed through her mind.

Gradually, her face revealed a hopeful expression, and her eyes warmed with affection, "But I still wish to see him smile every day."

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Out at sea.

A huge white seashell opened.

Ach held a small horn, gently blowing into it, his expression somewhat listless. Mangrove Minor Elf Nami held a peanut nougat candy, crunching it loudly.

At Nami's feet, a dark green Kelp Bug swam in circles around her, its gills opening and closing at the back of its neck in a lively fashion. The Kelp Bug's belly, rather than being bumpy like other Elf Bugs' legs, was more flattened, allowing it to swim swiftly.

Soon.

Ach put away the small horn, touched Nami, then the Kelp Bug, and took a deep breath, "Let's go, Nami, Kelp Bug. Let's catch more Elf Bugs so we can give big brother a huge surprise when he returns!"

Of course, Liszt didn't know that the little sea monster was preparing a surprise for him.

He was already at Coral City Port.

After checking his Knight Order members, he boarded the flagship Tulip of the Coral Island fleet. Once all the knights, Retainer Knights, and supplies had boarded their respective ships, the immense fleet set sail across the Sea of Azure Waves, heading for Iron Hoof Island once again.

Liszt was busy securing Douson and the Eight Tiny Ones in the cabin, preventing them from running amok; the landwalker bird Loki was also kept in the cabin, where it enjoyed living with grains and beans.

Afterward.

As per tradition.

All the nobles came to the Tulip to attend the meeting chaired by the Earl, where the agenda was the allocation of the battle loot.

The basic principle of military merit was to allocate according to work: more work gets more, less work gets less, no work gets nothing. The principle for materials was that whoever seized them kept them, but had to donate one-third to the Knight Order's death compensation.

It was also stipulated that seized mineral resources were forbidden to be sold to Mercenary Corps, but must be handed over to the treasury for the Grand Duke to allocate – the main purpose of each year's Pioneer Mandate was to snatch mineral resources.

After the battle loot allocation was clarified, the nobles dispersed and returned to their own ships.

Suddenly, Liszt thought of a question and asked the Earl, "Father, can those mercenary groups be trusted?"

"From my many years of experience in campaigning, it's not about trust. As long as they can help us trade, some losses are bearable."

"If I were the landlord of the Eagle Kingdom, I would never allow mercenary groups to develop unchecked."

"Heh," the Earl finally found a sense of superiority, "Liszt, you are still somewhat naive. Whether it's the mercenary groups of the Eagle Kingdom or the pirates of the Duchy of Sapphire, they exist for a reason. To summarize, it's all driven by interest."

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