

W. Secret 961

Chapter 961: Fourth-Form Shifter!

“Glug glug.”

The dark, inky water in the Nourishment Pond gave off an unpleasant stench that filled the entire basement. However, Merlin’s massive shifted form was thoroughly enjoying the nourishment provided by the various precious materials in the Nourishment Pond.

This was already the eighteenth portion of Nourishment Pond materials, but Merlin still had not achieved the fourth-form shifter. The amount of time consumed had exceeded Merlin’s expectations.

Nevertheless, since there were still materials remaining, Merlin continued to brew the formula. Currently, Merlin’s shifted form had grown once over, and two solid lumps were protruding from his back. The longer he soaked in the Nourishment Pond, the itchier the lumps behind his back became as if they would soon burst open.

Merlin knew that this was a unique characteristic of almost becoming a fourth-form shifter. Once he had achieved the fourth-form shift, the Blood-eye Dragon would be able to manifest its true “dragon” trait, which consisted of two wings. Once those two lumps on his back burst open, they would become wings.

Most importantly, the Blood-eye Dragon was ultimately still a Vipera Dragon, so it possessed some characteristics of dragons. Of course, the Blood-eye Dragon’s strongest ability was its “Blood-eye” but it would only appear upon achieving full-shift.

Regardless, just the manifestation of wings would be extremely beneficial to Merlin at this stage. It would also give him a conspicuous edge. In addition, a fourth-form shifter of the Blood-eye Dragon would possess terrifying abilities, worthy of challenging the full-shifters of low-tier almighty beasts.

The water in the Nourishment Pond was still bubbling frantically when Merlin resumed brewing.

“Boom.”

Suddenly, there was an explosion in the Nourishment Pond. Merlin's face revealed a look of agony. His massive body began to expand, to the point that he could hardly fit inside the Nourishment Pond.

However, what was more terrifying was that the two lumps on his back had burst open without warning. From inside the lumps, a pair of powerful wings emerged.

“Fourth-form shifter!”

Merlin was extremely excited. Finally, he had achieved fourth-form shifter. This would mark the beginning of his fight against the mighty existence in this world.

If he proceeded one step further and achieved a full-shifter, then he would become even more fearsome. Once a high-tier almighty beast bloodline had achieved full-shift, it could wield the true power of a high-tier beast and become an irrefutable “disastrous” existence – one enough to unleash a disaster upon an entire country!

Merlin gently flexed his hands. He felt tremendous power, belonged exclusively to him. As for the wings, despite the massive form of his body, the wings felt very sturdy. Even then, Merlin was slightly worried about whether they could carry his massive body.

After some thoughts, Merlin decided to give it a try outside.

So, Merlin left the basement and returned to the manor. Currently, the Count's Manor had been restored to its former glory. Even some details had been well-executed. It gave Merlin a sense of returning to Boulder City once again.

“Good job, who decorated this?” Read latest chapters at vipnovel.com

Merlin was very satisfied. This was the work of a very meticulous person who understood his thoughts.

“Sir Leon, I decorated it. I heard that Sir Leon used to be the old master of this manor, so I found someone to restore its original look. I hope that Sir Leon likes it.”

The person who answered was the beautiful woman who had knelt in front of the manor to welcome Merlin.

“Very well, you’re very meticulous. Let’s keep this look, then. Boulder City will not be invaded anymore. All of you here will be under my protection.”

Merlin looked at the woman before him as well as the other women in the vicinity. All of them looked delighted. Although they had been forcibly kidnapped by Blackbat, right now, all they wanted was a safe refuge. Since Merlin had killed Blackbat, he was the most suitable.

Merlin was not concerned about these women. He stepped out of the manor and instantly wielded his fourth-form shift. Then, he stretched out his wings. The wings were so huge that they blocked the sun.

“Swoosh.”

With a gentle flap of his wings, Merlin’s massive form took off and flew up into the air. Surprisingly, despite the smaller size of his wings compared to the rest of his body, they contained immense strength that allowed him to fly easily. Moreover, his speed was very fast, and his movement was very nimble.

According to legends, the real Great Dragon was the overlord of both the sky and the land. Other than the oceans, everywhere else was controlled by the Great Dragon. This was the reason the Great Dragon had left behind so many legends.

However, those legends remained as legends. The Great Dragon did not appear again, and those with the Great Dragon bloodline dwindled close to none. Even the Vipera Dragons became extremely scarce. After all, the Vipera Dragons were also high-tier almighty beasts.

Merlin continued to soar in the air, relishing the Blood-eye Dragon’s power. Suddenly, his gaze swept around and discovered a few suspicious-looking individuals around the castle.

“Hmph.”

Merlin knew that most likely, these were spies sent by some other rebel army. After all, Merlin had successively destroyed the Python Army and the Blackbat Militia. Even Orsato and the

full-shifter Blackbat died by Merlin's hands. Naturally, this made the other rebel armies anxious and they wanted to verify the situation.

"Swoosh."

Merlin flew down rapidly. The enormous shadow cast by his massive body immediately alerted these suspicious individuals that they had been discovered. Their faces turned as white as a sheet.

"It's Leon, quickly escape!"

However, even before they could wield their beast forms, Merlin flapped his wings and stirred up a violent gale that blew them into a crumpled heap.

"Boom."

Merlin's massive body was filled with authority as he affixed these three people with a stern glare. His wings were splayed wide open, blocking out the sun.

Merlin asked icily, "Go ahead, tell me who sent you?"

The men shrank timidly. They seemed afraid, dared not speak.

"Thud."

Merlin stepped forward and sank his feet onto one of them. The other two immediately blanched and said, "It's General Wellington!"

"Wellington? The rebel army leader who has a low-tier almighty beast bloodline, and similarly, achieved the level of full-shifter?"

Merlin still remembered some of the intelligence he had collected from the Investigation Team. Wellington was also once closely monitored by the royal family. After all, he was also a full-shifter and his influence had expanded quickly. Thus, he became a great concern to the royal family.

“Get lost. Go back and tell Wellington, I won’t give him any trouble. However, if he’s looking for trouble, I won’t mind paying him a visit.”

Merlin said harshly. He believed that his warning would be effective. After all, he had Blackbat as precedent.

Chapter 962: Ambush

After sparing Wellington’s men, Merlin began to consider, what should his next steps be?

At that point, the Holy Dragon Empire had spiraled out of control. Many places were filled with anarchy, and rebel armies were rampant. The Holy Dragon royal family was completely powerless outside of the Holy Dragon City. They were simply unable to control any other place.

Fortunately, despite the chaos in the Holy Dragon Empire, none of the rebel armies had dared to attack the Holy Dragon City. Therefore, theoretically speaking, the Holy Dragon royal family was still the strongest force. Given sufficient time to recuperate, perhaps the royal family could re-establish their rule over the Holy Dragon Empire.

From this vantage point, there might be merits in supporting the Holy Dragon royal family.

Thus, Merlin decided that his identity as a Phantom member should be retained after careful consideration. In fact, he should join the higher echelons of Phantom. After all, Phantom had been cultivated by the royal family for many years, and far exceeded the limits of Merlin’s imagination.

With his identity as a member of Phantom, Merlin would be able to accomplish many things in the Holy Dragon City.

Nevertheless, Merlin would not give up Boulder City easily. In such a chaotic world, what was most important? Undoubtedly, it was power and stronghold. Power, Merlin already possessed. Stronghold, his stronghold could not be in the Holy Dragon City, because it was already the royal family’s stronghold.

Thus, Merlin’s stronghold could only be established in Boulder City. Fortunately, this used to be the stronghold of the Hilderbrandt clan. Although it was briefly occupied by Blackbat, the

Hilderbrandt clan's force still remained. Since Merlin replaced Blackbat as the new ruler of Boulder City, he had received many visits from members of the Hilderbrandt clan.

“With Boulder City as my stronghold, I'll have to establish dominance among the surrounding rebel armies!”

Actually, Merlin had already shaken them to the core. Blackbat's murder was the best form of deterrence. Therefore, Merlin wanted to use his clan's reputation to establish Boulder City as his stronghold. He would rebuild Boulder City and make it his stronghold amidst this chaotic world.

In the future, even if the Holy Dragon Empire collapsed, Merlin would be able to make an objective decision. Moreover, having a stable stronghold was an essential component for the Blood-eye Dragon to achieve full-shift.

Hence, with the help of his clan, Merlin began to train soldiers and recruit those with almighty beast bloodlines. He formed a powerful army and reclaimed the entire city, as well as the places which were previously under Blackbat Militia's control. All of them became subjected under Merlin's personal sphere of influence.

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Inside a dimly-lit room, there was a man dressed in aristocratic costume. His movement appeared uncharacteristically graceful as he sat on a large chair, his gaze unequivocally calm.

In front of the aristocratic man was a very ordinary person bent on one knee. This was the Phantom investigator who had just rushed back from Boulder City. They had already collected the latest intelligence.

“Minister, Leon already has abilities comparable to a full-shifter. Blackbat died in his hands. He is now aggressively rebuilding Boulder City and expanding his force. It seems like he will be establishing his stronghold in Boulder City.”

This man dressed in aristocratic costume was the most powerful existence in Phantom, the mysterious Minister Farron.

Farron looked like a young aristocrat, but in reality, no one knew that he had lived for hundreds of years. He was older and most of the people in Phantom.

“Oh? Leon from the Logistics Team? Interesting. Heroult recommended a talented individual worthy of nurturing. Don’t worry, he will come back. With his intelligence, he surely knows that during such tumultuous times, his life would be much better with the support of the royal family. As for Boulder City, it was originally Count Stanwin’s territory. Now that Count Stanwin has died, Leon should inherit the title of Count. Boulder City should have belonged to Leon in the first place, so it’s not a big deal.”

Farron spoke with squinted eyes. His tone was calm, but his expression was indecipherable.

“You may leave. Continue to observe Boulder City.”

With that, Farron closed his eyes and relaxed like a true aristocrat.

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Merlin had just finished soaking in the Nourishment Pond inside the Count’s manor in Boulder City.

He had stayed in Boulder City for three months. In the past three months, he guarded Boulder City and personally dealt with a few spies sent by other rebel armies. Since then, none of the rebel army spies dared to enter Boulder City.

Taking advantage of this period, Boulder City also expanded swiftly and eventually gained control over the Blackbat Militia’s former territories. With Boulder City at the center, coupled with Merlin’s infamous massacre of Blackbat, they soon became a powerful force.

Leveraging on the strength of this force, Merlin also managed to locate many Nourishment Pond materials. Unfortunately, despite using more than a dozen batches of the Nourishment Pond in succession, Merlin still did not manage to achieve the level of a peak Fourth-form shifter.

Ever since Merlin’s shifting capabilities achieved Fourth-form, it seemed like the Nourishment Pond formulas ceased to be useful to Merlin. He most probably would not be able to depend solely on these Nourishment Pond formulas to become a full-shifter.

However, in order to achieve peak Fourth-form within a short time, these Nourishment Pond formulas were still somewhat useful. The only drawbacks were the limitations of Boulder City's forces as well as the scarcity of resources. The only reason there were so many Nourishment Pond formulas was due to Blackbat's zealous compilation.

"Time to return to the Holy Dragon City."

Merlin saw that Boulder City was gradually coming under control and was overseen by trusted members of the clan. Furthermore, with Merlin's well-established 'notorious' reputation, no self-preserving rebel army would dare to attack Boulder City. Therefore, it was the right time for Merlin to leave.

However, he made some arrangements before leaving. First was the issue of the women living inside his manor. In order to ensure their safety, Merlin publicly declared the meticulous woman as the butler of his manor.

Second was the clan's affairs. Now that Merlin was the head of the entire Hilderbrandt clan, he would have to select a few trustworthy and influential clan members to manage Boulder City.

Once everything was settled, Merlin quietly departed from Boulder City and headed back to the Holy Dragon City.

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When Merlin returned to the Holy Dragon City, he sensed that the atmosphere had gotten tenser. There were rumors that an elite army of the Holy Dragon royal family had been dispatched to quell a rebellion, but was instead besieged by rebel armies. Allegedly, the army was still holding on, but the outlook was grim.

With such rumors circulating around, the atmosphere within the city was naturally very tense.

Merlin did not pay much attention to the rumors. If something indeed happened, Phantom would know at once. Nonetheless, the existence of such rumors was a clear indication of the anarchic situation in the Holy Dragon Empire.

At Phantom Headquarters, Merlin was extremely familiar with the place, so he quickly entered. Just as he was preparing to return to the Logistics Team, there was a loud bellow behind him. “Leon!”

“Roar...”

Following the shout, a terrifying dragon roar burst out of Merlin’s mouth. His body shifted in an instant and achieved a Fourth-form shift.

His fearsome wings flapped backward fiercely. The power contained in his wings was quite formidable.

“Bang.”

There was a muffled sound. Merlin’s wings had obviously knocked his opponent into the air. Merlin’s face was incredibly thunderous. He was in Phantom Headquarters, yet someone dared to ambush him.

“You’re the one who ambushed me?”

Merlin was slightly infuriated. His gaze was incomparably cold as he glared at a voluptuous womanly figure dressed in a bright red bodysuit.

Chapter 963: Unsolicited Encounters

This was Phantom Headquarters, but someone had ambushed him without any rhyme or reason. Furthermore, Merlin could clearly sense that his opponent intended to kill him. There was no mercy in her attacks and they were intended to kill.

Fortunately, Merlin had already achieved a Fourth-form shift. This woman who had ambushed him was definitely of a mid-tier almighty beast bloodline and was also a Fourth-form shifter. Such abilities were definitely distinctive of a strong contender in every sense.

“Who are you? Why did you ambush me?”

Merlin turned around and glared icily at this woman.

“A Fourth-form shifter... Not bad, now I’ll admit that you’ve killed Orsato and Blackbat. A high-tier almighty beast, you’re indeed formidable. You’re somewhat qualified to be our deputy team leader. My name is Iza, I’m sure we’ll meet again soon, hehe...”

Iza actually stood up. At first, she had been grievously injured, but now she looked completely unharmed. In the blink of an eye, she disappeared from Merlin’s view.

“Deputy team leader? Iza?”

Merlin was overwhelmed with incomprehension. Regardless, that woman was quite surprising. While that attack was not Merlin’s strongest one, he was a Fourth-form shifter who was similar to full-shifters of low-tier almighty beast bloodlines. That meant that a single hit from him contained indescribable power. That woman should have been grievously injured, yet she was able to stand up and walk away as if nothing happened. It was utterly perplexing.

However, since this was Phantom Headquarters, unbelievable things could happen at any time. For example, Merlin was able to kill the full-shifter, Blackbat despite only being a Third-form shifter back then. In the eyes of others, was his feat inconceivable?

Merlin did not waste any time and walked directly towards Mission Hall. He had completed his mission, so there were a lot of contribution points to redeem.

Upon arriving at Mission Hall, Merlin noticed that the place was quite packed. Many members from the Investigation Team and the Combat Team had returned to submit their missions. Most of them wore joyful expressions. It seemed like they received a substantial reward.

“Submitting the Python Army mission!”

Merlin walked up to the few people who were in charge of assigning and redeeming missions. One of the middle-age men slowly raised his head and uttered, “Name.”

“Leon, Logistics Team!”

As the man checked through the records, a look of astonishment appeared on his face.

“Leon; killed Orsato and disbanded the Python Army. Then, in Boulder City, killed the full-shifter Blackbat, defeated the Blackbat Militia and occupied Boulder City.”

Everything Merlin did was detailed in these records. This also indirectly demonstrated the prowess of Phantom’s intelligence. Within the borders of the Holy Dragon mainland, nothing could escape Phantom’s attention.

If that was the case, why would the royal family allow chaos on such large-scale to erupt across the Great Holy Dragon Land? With Phantom’s extensive intelligence, it should have been child’s play to nip the uprising right at the beginning, yet the royal family remained impassive.

Merlin did not know the reason why, but according to his theory, there must be some secret agenda involved. It was not something privy to a low-level person like him.

“So, how is it? Am I considered to have completed my mission?” Merlin asked calmly.

“Of course you’ve completed your mission. You disbanded the Python Army, the reward for that mission is five hundred contribution points. Although you did not accept the mission relating to the Blackbat Militia, the royal family has issued specific instructions, so that anyone who manages to destroy any rebel army forces, with or without accepting a mission, will be rewarded accordingly. Since you’ve destroyed the Blackbat Militia, which was led by a full-shifter, your reward is one thousand contribution points. The total contribution points you receive today is one thousand five hundred contribution points!”

“Boom”.

As soon as the man finished speaking, the entire Mission Hall descended into pin-drop silence. Merlin could even sense multiple looks of greed assessing his abilities.

A thousand five hundred contribution points. This was a huge fortune that even the death-defying Combat Team could never hope to receive, yet Merlin was able to earn it so easily.

Of course, it was not actually easy. After all, his opponent was still a full-shifter and a strong contender. How would someone like that be easy to kill?

“A thousand five hundred contribution points, what did he do?”

“What kind of mission can earn you one thousand five hundred contribution points?”

Many people exchanged looks but no one recognized Merlin.

Suddenly, a burly man with a bald head and a fierce look walked up to Merlin.

“Hey, kid, tell me, what mission did you complete to earn one thousand five hundred points?”

This bald, burly man clearly had an arrogant tone of voice. His origin was of a mid-tier almighty beast bloodline, among one of the more powerful types, and he had achieved Fourth-form shift. His hand had shed the blood of numerous strong contenders, so naturally, he did not hold this unassuming-looking Merlin in high regard.

Merlin turned around. He could sense the aura of bloodshed around this bald man. This was an aura that could only be displayed after killing countless people.

“Scram.”

Merlin’s single word resounded clearly. With that, he ignored the bald man.

“Transfer the contribution points to my identity card.”

Everyone in Phantom carried an identity card, which they could use to redeem some precious materials. After all, the main reason that Phantom members worked so hard was because of the vast resources provided by the royal family. Such a benefit was unavailable anywhere else.

For example, how many precious items did Merlin obtain from killing Orsato and Blackbat? Although there were some gold coins and the like, they could not buy the things Merlin wanted.

On the other hand, the contribution points Merlin received from killing them would allow him to redeem the resources he wanted in Phantom Headquarters. This was Phantom’s advantage.

“Kid, killing might be prohibited in Phantom Headquarters, but there’s no rule against teaching someone a lesson. At most, I’ll just lose some contribution points!”

The bald man was furious at the fact that he was ignored by Merlin. With a malicious laugh, his arm shapeshifted and grabbed Merlin.

Merlin was a little annoyed. He even wondered whether he had already been fixated upon by the will of this world, just like when he was rejected by the Void Zone’s will. Everything he did was met with obstacles and misfortune.

The current situation was similar. The moment he returned to Phantom Headquarters, he inexplicably encountered the ambush of a woman. Then, when he came to Mission Hall, he was unwittingly harassed by this bald man, which resulted in a confrontation.

If not for the fact that Merlin had been extra cautious, and did not reveal the Illusory World at all, he would really have thought that he had been targeted by the will of the Almighty Beast world.

Merlin, who was extremely annoyed, naturally did not hold back. His arm also shapeshifted in an instant and swung.

“Bang.”

There was a dull thud. This was the impact between two raw powers. The bald man suddenly revealed a look of agony. Distinct ‘snap, crackle, pop’ sounds could be heard from his arm. It appeared that his bones had shattered.

“How is this possible? You’re stronger than me?”

The bald man was most probably of a pure strength-type almighty beast bloodline. When he saw that Merlin was also a Fourth-form shifter, but was much stronger than him, his face was filled with incomprehension.

Chapter 964: Deputy Team Leader I

“Get lost.”

Merlin knocked the bald man into the air. Then, without turning his head, he left Mission Hall.

“Hehe, do you understand his abilities now? Do you dare to provoke someone like him? He’s a formidable individual who just killed Blackbat. How unexpected for such a formidable individual to emerge from the Logistics Team.”

A sneer rang out amongst the crowd which revealed Merlin’s true identity.

“He killed Blackbat? No wonder he’s so intimidating. In that case, I don’t resent my defeat!”

The bald man was surprisingly willing to accept defeat. His opponent was a powerful existence who was capable of vanquishing a full-shifter, so his defeat was to be expected.

However, based on the formidable abilities wielded by Merlin, he was most probably of a high-tier almighty beast bloodline.

Merlin did not concern himself. Instead, he headed straight to the Logistics Team. After all, he was technically still a member of the Logistics Team.

The moment he arrived at the Logistics Team, Belle stood up with a smile. She spoke to Merlin, “Wow, here comes our hero. Leon, you really kept your abilities well-hidden. I can’t believe you killed both Orsato and Blackbat. Tsk, someone of your caliber shouldn’t stay in the Logistics Team. The Minister has issued orders for you to join the Combat Team with immediate effect, as Deputy Team Leader!”

“The Minister?”

Although Merlin knew that the person-in-charge of Phantom was a highly mysterious Minister, the Minister had never made an appearance, nor did Merlin ever met him throughout his time in Phantom.

The Minister of Phantom was one of the prominent figureheads of the entire Holy Dragon City and was extremely respected by the royal family. Anyone who was not yet a full-shifter did not qualify to even speak to him.

However this time, Merlin's defeat over Blackbat had proven his abilities. Thus, Merlin was now qualified to be assessed by the Minister.

"The Deputy Team Leader of the Combat Team? What is that about?"

Merlin frowned. How did this position of deputy team leader suddenly come about?

"It's the Minister's orders. He transferred you to the Combat Team as their Deputy Team Leader."

Suddenly, the long-absent Lotus appeared. Her face was still unfriendly, though there was a subtle reaction when she saw Merlin.

After all, Merlin's battle outcome had been absolutely astonishing. Orsato was of a mid-tier almighty beast bloodline and a Fourth-form shifter, whereas Blackbat was an even more impressive full-shifter.

Upon becoming a full-shifter, wherever the individual went, he or she would be considered a leader or an overlord. Even within Phantom, the full-shifters were prominent leaders.

Even though Lotus was the Team Leader of the Logistics Team, she had not achieved a full-shift. Of course, it was also because the Logistics Team did not engage in combat, so they did not require any powerful abilities.

However, the Team Leaders of the Investigation Team, Combat Team, and even the Research Team were all full-shifter existences. They were the most prominent existences beneath the Minister. On the contrary, positions such as Deputy Commander sounded more patronizing.

As for the Minister, he was the figurehead of the entire Holy Dragon City. He controlled a colossal force, which was Phantom. His position was highly envied.

It was a positive development now that Merlin had been noticed by the mysterious Minister. Moreover, he designated Merlin to helm the position as Deputy Team Leader of the Combat Team. This position was not easily achievable by ordinary people. The number of resources available to Merlin would be unimaginable.

Most of the team members in the Combat Team were crazily passionate and remarkably powerful. All of them possessed fearsome combat skills. So, this opportunity represented the mysterious Minister's high opinion of Merlin.

"Team Leader Lotus, should I go to the Combat Team now then?"

"Yes, go now. Those guys in the Combat Team are no saints."

With that, Lotus left. She had only taken care of Merlin for a while on Heroult's behalf, but unexpectedly, Merlin was powerful beyond her imagination.

"Belle, has there been any news about Deputy Commander Heroult?"

Merlin looked at Lotus' mannerisms and formed an educated guess in his heart. Most probably, something bad had happened to Heroult.

Sure enough, Belle shook her head. "A while ago, we received news about the Deputy Commander. Deputy Commander Heroult's mission failed, and the entire squad perished..."

Merlin fell silent. He finally understood why Lotus appeared so lethargic and dispassionate. It turned out that Heroult had met with a catastrophe.

Regarding Heroult, Merlin owed him some gratitude. Without Heroult's help, Merlin would not have succeeded in parasitism, and would not have been able to proceed smoothly in this world. Additionally, Heroult also recruited him into Phantom.

If he ever found out who killed Heroult, Merlin was willing to avenge his death.

"Very well, I'll report to the Combat Team."

Merlin did not rush to redeem his Nourishment Pond materials but instead headed to the Combat Team first. The Combat Team had always been the strongest department in Phantom. It consisted of very fierce individuals.

Since Merlin had never really met these people, he made his way to the Combat Team.

The Combat Team was situated very far apart from the Logistics Team. Merlin asked for directions along the way and finally arrived at the Combat Team. Inside the room, there was a huge platform. Two Fourth-form shifters were engaged in an intense fight.

However, both of them were of low-tier almighty beast bloodlines. While the sparring was intense, their abilities were not very strong. Merlin lost interest after a while.

Following that, Merlin continued to move. There were a few other platforms. The contenders on these platforms were much stronger. They were mostly of mid-tier almighty beast bloodlines. Some of them were Third-form shifters, and some were Fourth-form shifters.

Once a person possessing a mid-tier almighty beast bloodline achieved Fourth-form shifter, he or she was considered a strong contender. Even in the Combat Team, they constituted the backbone strength.

Nonetheless, Merlin was not very interested. Despite walking around for a long time now, no one bothered to question him. It seemed like everyone was just wildly engrossed with sparring.

“I guess this is truly the Combat Team. The atmosphere is vastly different.”

Merlin looked around. On most of the platforms, there were only skirmishes. Very few people were sitting idly. Even those on the platform who saw Merlin only took a casual glance at him and continued their sparring.

Therefore, after entering this place for such a long time, no one had yet to greet Merlin.

“What do you think? The members of the Combat Team are quite good, right? But I guess you won’t be too interested in this bunch.”

Suddenly, an unfamiliar voice spoke behind Merlin. Merlin jumped slightly. There was someone who snuck up to him unnoticed.

Quickly, he turned around and saw a plain-looking but very fair-skinned man. His skin was so fair that he resembled a woman.

“Who are you?” Merlin asked grudgingly, keeping his vigilance against the person who appeared out of nowhere.

The fair-skinned man crooked into a smile, revealing pearly white teeth. “Deputy Team Leader Leon, would you like to practice? I’ve not practiced for a very long time. Even in the Combat Team, it’s not easy to come across a strong contender who is comparable to a full-shifter.”

The moment this man’s lips parted into a grin, a sign of danger rose in Merlin’s heart.

Chapter 965: Deputy Team Leader II

“Why? You scared?”

The man acted disrespectfully but his gaze turned incredibly piercing.

By this time, Merlin had a good guess of his opponent’s identity. There was only one person similar to a full-shifter in the Combat Team. It was Blackbear Hert, the Team Leader.

“Hehe, why, are you afraid? You managed to kill Blackbat after all. Come on, you were appointed as Deputy Team Leader out of nowhere. Unless you spar with me, your subordinates won’t respect you properly.”

Merlin did not know the rules of the Combat Team, but he knew that they were a group of unruly people. These people faced death on a daily basis, so naturally, they would be harder to defeat.

It seemed like a spar with Hert was his entrance exam for the Combat Team.

After pondering on it, Merlin did not refuse and nodded in acceptance. “Then, I will witness Team Leader’s Ursus King almighty beast!”

Hert’s almighty beast bloodline was from the famous Ursus King. It was considered one of the top bloodlines among the mid-tier almighty beast bloodlines. It was more fearsome than Count Stanwin’s Deinosuchus bloodline, and also far beyond Blackbat’s capabilities.

No matter where it was, the Ursus King was a monstrous existence. Therefore, Merlin was curious to find out the true extent of combat power in this world too.

Therefore, Merlin stepped onto the platform and faced Hert. This platform was constructed out of special materials, so it was able to withstand a gigantic impact. However, none of them moved. They simply stared at one another.

Unconsciously, many people began to gather around the platform. Even those who were sparring on the other platforms stopped and looked with a hint of excitement in their eyes.

“Team Leader is throwing his moves again. I wonder who the unfortunate victim is this time?”

“I’ve never seen this person, is he a newcomer?”

“He doesn’t look like it. This person may seem young, but his aura is quite impressive. However, he’s unlucky that he has to go against the Team Leader.”

In the crowd, there was one person whom Merlin was rather familiar with. It was the bewildering woman, Iza.

“Iza, you’ve engaged this Leon before, what do you think about him?”

Standing beside Iza was a beefy man who looked like a barbarian. He exuded a ruthless aura. No one was willing to stand near him.

Iza glanced at Merlin on top of the platform. A serious look appeared on her face as she replied calmly, “He’s very strong, but Team Leader should be able to handle him just fine!”

“Oh? If even Iza acknowledges him to be strong, he must be something. It looks like he didn’t just kill Blackbat with sheer luck. Hehe. Anyway, he will suffer at the hands of the Team Leader.”

This ruthless man grinned.

“Boom”.

While the crowd was still trying to guess his identity, Merlin made the first move. He wielded the Fourth-form instantaneously and shifted into a terrifying ancient almighty beast. His fierce aura rolled in every direction of the room.

However, it was the wings behind Merlin’s back that was truly astounding. A rare and ancient aura leaked into the air, causing those with lower-tier bloodlines to feel slightly suppressed.

“Bloodline suppression? Looks like it’s a high-tier almighty beast bloodline... No, you’re a Host, so it must be a high-tier almighty beast will!”

Hert licked his lips and revealed a malicious smile. Then, his body also expanded and a more terrifying aura appeared.

Hert transformed into a vicious black bear. This was an Ursus King, the king of bears, the top existence among the mid-tier almighty beasts. Since Hert was a full-shifter, his head had shifted, so he could wield a hundred percent of the King Ursus’ abilities.

Merlin did not show any sign of weakness. He let out a huge dragon roar that could almost tear a person apart. Subsequently, he attacked. With a flap of his wings, his speed was enhanced.

“Haha, good!” Hert laughed. With a thunderous clap of his bear paws, his body grew even taller than before. He then rushed towards Merlin with massive strides.

“Bang”.

This was a hard impact. Merlin was an existence similar to a full-shifter, but he was only comparable to a low-tier almighty beast bloodline full-shifter. Compared to Hert’s Ursus King, Merlin was still lacking.

Therefore, this impact affected Merlin greatly. His entire body trembled, as though he would fall apart at any time. Even the Blood-eyed Dragon's will inside his Awareness stopped roaring. It had obviously sensed the formidableness of its foe.

“Crack.”

The platform, which was supposed to be exceptionally sturdy and could not be damaged no matter how much the Fourth-form shifters attacked it, actually snapped upon the first direct impact between Merlin and Hert. It looked like the platform would not be able to withstand a second hit, which testified to the power of both men.

Meanwhile, the people gathered around the platform had been stunned into silence upon witnessing the direct impact. This was the true prowess of full-shifters. It made them feel a sense of powerlessness.

At this moment, no one was smiling and no one dared to underestimate Merlin, because none of them could have withstood Hert's attack.

“Haha, yes, that felt good! It has been a long time since anyone could block my attack. I'm eager for you to achieve the level of a full-shifter. Seeing as you have the will of a high-tier almighty beast, if you become a full-shifter, I most likely won't be the one who would be able to compete against you. Leon, welcome to the Combat Team as Deputy Team Leader!”

Hert seemed to have given Merlin his stamp of approval. Both of them resumed their original appearances and leaped down from the platform. Most of the crowd dispersed, seemingly afraid of Hert. Only a few people remained, including the ruthless-looking man and the petite woman.

“It's you? Iza?”

Of course, Merlin was able to recognize her with a single glance. This was the woman who had ambushed him for no reason, and after being injured by him, managed to recover quickly and escaped. That had astonished Merlin to no end.

Now, he finally met Iza again. He gazed at her in an assessing manner, but she looked completely unscathed and there were no signs of injuries.

“What, Leon, you’ve already met Iza?”

Hert raised an eyebrow.

“Nothing, there was some misunderstanding before this,” Merlin replied casually.

“Haha, Iza went to cause trouble with you? I’m sure she did. You were suddenly named as our Deputy Team Leader out of thin air, many of them were disgruntled. Iza probably went to test your abilities on behalf of someone else. Firstly, her abilities are quite strong, and secondly, due to her natural talent, she’s not afraid of getting hurt.”

“Not afraid of getting hurt?”

Merlin was curious. He looked at Iza and looked back at Hert uncomprehendingly.

“Iza’s almighty beast bloodline is the rare Snow Rabbit. This type of almighty beast does not possess strong attacking powers, but their life source is extremely tenacious and they heal at an accelerated rate. Therefore, as long as they don’t die, they can recover in the shortest possible time. She has completed many missions, and most of the time, she uses this talent to escape alive.” Hert explained to Merlin.

“I see, no wonder when I injured her, she was able to recover so quickly...”

Merlin stared at Iza with amazement. He did not expect that her almighty beast bloodline was so unique and possessed such a tenacious life source. In addition, her rate of recovery was incredible. As long as she was not killed with a single hit, she was able to recover in the shortest possible time. Such a natural talent was indeed powerful.

“Deputy Team Leader is impressive as well. If you had unleashed the full extent of your power before this, I might not have been able to withstand that hit. I, Iza, will be your first supporter when you take up the position as Deputy Team Leader!”

Iza smiled sweetly. She might look like a sweet and innocent girl, but in the Combat Team, no one dared to provoke this fearsome woman.

Chapter 966: The Royal Family's Strength!

The Ursus Hert came to Merlin and said with a big smile, "Leon, the Minister personally appointed you deputy team leader and transferred you to the Combat Team. You should know that in all these years, I've never had a deputy, and no deputy had been assigned to me. However, you aren't bad. If I'm not mistaken, you're a Host, right? You're the Host of a high-tier almighty beast, the Blood-eye Dragon!"

Hert's observation was very detailed and he saw through Merlin at a glance. As expected of a mid-tier almighty beast bloodline full shifter. He was several times stronger than Blackbat.

"What? Deputy team leader is a Host and the Host of a high-tier almighty beast at that? How did he resist the backlash from the Blood-eye Dragon's will."

Others would not be as surprised even if they saw Merlin being able to compete with Hert. However, Merlin could actually compete with the will of a high-tier almighty beast, the Blood-eye Dragon.

After all, Hosts were not small in number. However, Hosts that had high-tier almighty beasts and reached the fourth-form without dying from the backlash were very rare.

As for Hosts who became full-shifters, they were even rarer.

Therefore, Iza and the others were astonished.

"Alright, let the deputy team leader get familiar with our Combat Team's situation."

Hert seemed to be very welcoming of Merlin. Of course, this was respect that Merlin earned due to his strength. After all, Merlin, a fourth-form shifter of a high-tier almighty beast, was completely comparable to full-shifters of low-tier almighty beasts. Therefore, he would be considered a big shot no matter where he was and it was terrifying being second to none even in the Combat Team.

"Haha, team leader, let me familiarize the deputy team leader on our Combat Team's situation."

Iza volunteered and Hert nodded before leaving. As the team leader of the Combat Team, he was very busy. However, he still took time to meet with deputy team leader Merlin that 'dropped' out of nowhere,

Iza looked at Merlin and said, "Deputy team leader, this is the second time we've met."

Merlin felt very helpless towards Iza. Her talent was really frightful. The terrifying life force coupled with terrifying regenerative strength made it very difficult to kill her.

However, it was very good to have such a member on the team. She could be used as a meat shield in a critical moment. However, her character of being unable to accept losses was somewhat difficult to control.

"Iza, we didn't get off on the right foot."

"Haha, I just wanted to see what the new deputy team leader was like. After all, in the Combat Team, we only follow the people stronger than us. Still, if I had known that the deputy team leader was the Host of a high-tier almighty beast, I wouldn't have dared to provoke you even if you weren't that strong."

Iza spoke the truth. Someone who chose to parasitize a high-tier almighty beast and not suffer from the backlash must have an extremely terrifying will.

Merlin did not answer but followed behind Iza to visit the Combat Team. The Combat Team was very different from the Logistics Team. First of all, the Combat Team was the most powerful department in the entire Phantom organization. Their influence was immense, and their strength was also terrifying.

Even the Team Leader Hert was the strongest in Phantom after the Minister. Of course, the Combat Team also enjoyed the most resources.

The Investigation Team was not weak, but they only specialized in reconnaissance, so they were very mysterious and it was very hard for outsiders to know about the Investigation Team's situation.

“Iza, how many people are there in the Combat Team?” Merlin asked.

Iza pondered and said, “Deputy team leader, if you want to ask about the core personnel, then there are only a hundred or so. These core personnel are considered official members of Phantom and can exchange many resources by using contribution points. Their identities were also examined stringently before they entered Phantom. In fact, we’ve already obtained information about the deputy team leader’s identity a long time ago. The deputy team leader was recommended by Deputy Commander Heroult and is the son of Count Stanwin, the lord of Boulder City. Since the Blackbat Militia occupied Boulder City, you escaped to the Holy Dragon City. We all know this information. It was precisely because of the deputy team leader’s identity which was very reliable that you were allowed to enter Phantom. Otherwise, you would not be able to join Phantom easily even if you were recommended by Deputy Commander Heroult.”

Merlin was not surprised. Phantom was the most powerful force in the royal family’s hands. Naturally, it would be firmly held in their hands, and could not be infiltrated by others.

“In addition to core personnel, are there associate members as well?” Merlin asked.

“Of course there are. Associate members are much more complicated. A large portion of them are incorporated in our core personnel. They gather information as subordinates and we give them some benefits. Although we all seem like ordinary people in Phantom, outside of Phantom, hehe, we’re all leaders of small forces or even leaders of major organizations,” Iza said mysteriously.

Merlin was slightly surprised. He slowly understood what Iza meant. By relying on Phantom Headquarters and the unique and tremendous resources provided by the royal family, they could establish forces themselves without explicit permission. The royal family allowed this tacitly and even adopted an encouraging attitude. By controlling the resources, they were also controlling the members of Phantom which made them inseparable from the royal family as well as Phantom.

Like Merlin who was controlling Boulder City, it was also considered a force. There were over a hundred members in Phantom’s Combat Team, which was equivalent to over one hundred core personnel. How many forces would that add up to? It was frightening!

Merlin was somewhat overwhelmed. The Holy Dragon Empire seemed to be in chaos, and many people thought the royal family was approaching their end but Phantom held such a huge power. If all the forces of all the members of Phantom mobilized, then they would be

able to stabilize the situation for a period of time, much less pacify the rebellion that was occurring in the Holy Dragon Empire.

Furthermore, the Holy Dragon royal family had other secret forces. The royal family had not exposed everything yet. What was the royal family's objective?

"Haha, do you think the Holy Dragon royal family is declining and coming to an end? Deputy team leader, ordinary people have no way of knowing what's going on with the royal family. Even if they're declining slightly, is it to the point that the rebels imagine it to be? The reason why the royal family hasn't moved is because there are more important things to deal with."

"More important things?"

Merlin grew alert. It seemed to be the cause of the chaos in the Holy Dragon Empire.

"Of course, but I don't know what this important thing is either. The team leader might know, but he won't say either. If the deputy team leader wants to know, then you have to ask the Minister personally. However, all of us in Phantom knows that the royal family will not fall that easily. The force in our hands alone is already very terrifying, and the royal family clearly knows of our strength. The royal family even increased the resources for Phantom in this chaotic moment. What reason would it be besides to let us vigorously expand our power?"

Iza's words let Merlin know the true secret of Phantom. When he was in the Logistics Team, he did not have access to even the most basic information.

"By the way, deputy team leader, there's someone who's very unhappy that you became the deputy team leader. You'd better not provoke him."

"Who is it?"

Merlin thought that Iza was most unhappy because she ambushed him before he even took the position.

Iza's expression became solemn as she said, "It's Tolman. He had already reached the peak of the fourth-form, and it's very likely that he'll have a breakthrough to a full-shifter in the near future. He also has a mid-tier almighty beast bloodline. Although it's not as terrifying as the

team leader's King Ursus, it's still very good. He was originally the strongest candidate for the position of deputy team leader, but you came first, so he's naturally unhappy about it."

"Tolman? Alright."

Merlin was very calm. He had experienced such things back in the Void Zone. Jealousy could make someone mad, but if the other party caused trouble despite not having the strength to, then he would not be soft-hearted.

However, Iza continued, "Tolman isn't the problem. Although he's unhappy and will reject you, he won't take any action. It's his woman that's troublesome. Tolman has a woman called Lilia who likes him very much. You must stay away from that woman in the future. She's a madwoman. Although her strength isn't that strong, her almighty beast bloodline is the terrifying Nightmare Deathstalker, which is extremely toxic. It can poison people unknowingly, and they'll die in their nightmares. It's terrifying. None of us in the Combat Team wants to provoke that woman."

"The Nightmare Deathstalker?"

Merlin seemed to be deep in thought.

"Damn it, it's Tolman's madwoman. Deputy team leader, we're really unlucky. We were just talking about them, but we're actually encountering them now."

Iza's expression changed. Merlin raised his head and found a man and a woman walking towards them. They did not seem old and looked to be very ordinary, like an average couple.

Chapter 967: The Ultimate Reward!

"Iza, this is the deputy team leader?"

From a distance, the Nightmare Deathstalker took the initiative to greet Iza. Merlin looked at the Nightmare Deathstalker. She seemed very normal and not as scary as Iza described.

However, this was the Combat Team and there were all kinds of people. Merlin naturally would not judge a person by their appearance.

Iza forced a smile and said, “Yes, the team leader told me to accompany the deputy team leader in familiarizing himself with the Combat Team.”

“Is that so? For the team leader to appear personally, it seems the deputy team leader is extraordinary as well. It’s a shame that my Tolman isn’t favored by the team leader nor the Minister, so he couldn’t become the deputy team leader...”

The Nightmare Deathstalker’s tone suddenly changed and became dark, making others feel a chill.

“Hm?”

Merlin frowned slightly. This Nightmare Deathstalker was really temperamental. She was calm earlier but her expression changed suddenly.

“Deputy team leader, don’t be nervous. We just wanted to meet you.”

The Nightmare Deathstalker held out a pale hand and lightly patted Merlin.

“Hum.”

Merlin immediately felt the imperceptible power fall quickly and penetrated his body which in turn made him feel sluggish.

“How dare you!”

Merlin was furious. He never thought that the Nightmare Deathstalker would dare to act while in the Combat Team. He no longer hesitated and instantly used his fourth-form, and swept the Nightmare Deathstalker away with his tail.

“Bang.”

Beside her, Tolman roared in anger and also shapeshifted into his fourth-form. It was a huge elephant and also a power type. However, compared to Merlin's top-tier almighty beast bloodline, there was a large difference. With just a simple swipe from Merlin, blood spurt from his mouth.

The Nightmare Deathstalker did not expect Merlin to be this terrifying. She waved her hand, and fog seemed to cover the entire sky which plunged Merlin into a layer of illusion.

The Nightmare Deathstalker was extremely dangerous because it could cause a person to hallucinate without them noticing. However, she picked the wrong target today. Merlin was a Mind Power Master and had reached the peak on the path of illusions.

Although the Mind Power could not be displayed, it was impossible for a mere illusion to sway his will. Therefore, despite the poisonous fog, it had no effect on Merlin. Beside him, Iza quickly stepped back in shock.

"Haha, to be the deputy team leader, you must be at least this strong!"

Merlin could still hear the Nightmare Deathstalker's cold laughter.

"Is that so? Nightmare Deathstalker? It's a shame that I don't find the nightmare scary at all!"

Merlin took a step forward, his huge body exerting pressure. He slammed the Nightmare Deathstalker to the ground, who instantly died without any resistance.

When Tolman saw this, he went mad from anger and lunged towards Merlin.

"Die!"

Merlin was not courteous at all. He had been oppressed ever since coming to this world. Killing Blackbat had released some of the stiflings in his heart, but he never expected that he would be suppressed by Hert after joining Phantom's Combat Team. His heart had already been suppressed. Since the Nightmare Deathstalker and Tolman came looking for a fight, Merlin simply did not hold back.

"Bang bang."

Merlin's hands crushed down and smashed Tolman into a puddle of flesh, filling the air with the disgusting smell of blood. At this time, a trace of fear seemed to appear in Iza's eyes. She did not think that this gentle-looking deputy team leader would be so vicious and merciless.

"Are there any effects for killing in the Combat Team?" Merlin knew that this was the Combat Team, and asked calmly.

"There are some troubles, but since you're the deputy team leader, you can just tag a charge on them. For example, they wanted to assassinate the deputy team leader. How's that? That way, their forces will also belong to the deputy team leader."

"Oh? There's such a benefit? Doesn't that mean that I can kill anyone in the Combat Team?"

Merlin did not expect such a benefit. In Phantom, it seemed like rules were the greatest, and no one dared to violate them. However, now that he reached a higher level, he realized that these so-called rules only restricted the weak."

"Haha, deputy team leader, only now you've realized? Full-shifters gave special privileges no matter where. Even if dozens of people like us banded together, we still won't be similar to a full-shifter, so what's the point of special privileges? Of course, if the deputy team leader kills indiscriminately, the team leader or even the Minister would stop the deputy team leader."

Merlin nodded. The reality was that both Phantom and the royal family gave special privileges to full-shifters. They were above the rules and regulations.

Perhaps this might cause some damage but when a person's strength reached a certain level, rules and regulations would have no effect. A strong person could only be restricted by another strong person.

For example, the team leader of the Combat Team, Hert, was stronger than Merlin now. Therefore, he could stop Merlin from killing indiscriminately.

After Iza took Merlin around the Combat Team, he gradually learned the terror of the Combat Team. Now, that he was number two in the team, second only to the team leader, Hert.

However, Hert was not concerned about anything.

“How does the Combat Team usually get missions?” Merlin asked Iza.

“The members of the Combat Team usually receive their own missions, but there are also special ones. For example, if the royal family issued a certain order that requires the Combat Team to remove someone or a certain force. At that point, the team leader would arrange for someone. Of course, the remuneration for appointed missions is very high, and many people like to do such missions.”

Merlin nodded. Although he did not know why the royal family did not make any moves and left the Holy Dragon Empire in such a chaotic state, he knew the royal family’s strength and was at ease.

If the royal family was willing, they could immediately stabilize more than half of the Holy Dragon Empire. They merely seemed to be worrying about something else, or was waiting for something.

In short, the royal family would not be done for as Merlin had predicted. Merlin was relieved that he could stay in the Holy Dragon City without worries.

After visiting the Combat Team, Merlin went to the Logistics Team. He had a full 1,500 contribution points which were an unimaginable amount and needed to be used well.

Thus, he went to the Logistics Team and found Belle immediately. After all, Merlin was more familiar with Belle in the Logistics Team.

As soon as Belle saw Merlin, a smile appeared on her face as she said, “Leon, how are you? You’re a big shot in the Combat Team now. Deputy team leader, you’re number two in the whole Combat Team!”

The deputy team leader of the Combat Team was far from what the Logistics Team could match. Even the team leader of the Logistics Team could not compare with the deputy team leader of the Combat Team. The status between the two was as large as heaven and earth.

“I want to exchange some materials,” Merlin said bluntly.

Belle readily knew that Merlin needed Nourishment Pond materials. However, she hesitated for a moment before she whispered, “Leon, you’re a peak fourth-form shifter now, right? Even if you’re not at the peak yet, you’re almost there. Your concern now is how to become a full-shifter, right?”

Merlin nodded. He was not at the peak of the fourth-form yet, but he would be able to reach that level by exchanging some Nourishment Pond materials.

Moreover, he was indeed paying attention to full-shifters. After all, only full-shifters could truly become strong and have a say in this chaotic world. Otherwise, even if Merlin was strong enough, he did not even know the royal family’s arrangement and remain in the dark.

Merlin was still not strong enough. If he could become a full-shifter with a high-tier almighty beast will, it would definitely shake the entire royal family, as well as the entire Holy Dragon Empire.

“Why? Do you have any good suggestions?”

Merlin knew that Belle had been in the Logistics Team for a long time and would probably be able to provide some good suggestions. After all, Merlin did not know much about becoming a full-shifter.

“Leon, in the Logistics Team, there’s the royal family’s greatest reward. Whoever is able to accumulate five thousand contribution points will be allowed to come close and get the chance of feeling the Sacred Lion Beast for 36 hours, which is three days. Although many people think that achieving five thousand contribution points is impossible, I know that the former Minister of Phantom once accumulated five thousand contribution points. He had the opportunity to stay beside the skull of the Sacred Lion Beast for 36 hours. Of course, the Minister was already a full-shifter at that point. After the visit, his strength became unfathomable, and even the powerful King Ursus Hert had to submit to the Minister. Therefore, I think you should try and accumulate enough contribution points to exchange for that.”

Belle hesitated but said everything she knew. She had a favorable opinion on Merlin and always felt that he had a unique aura. Belle had always been confident about her feelings, and this time was no exception.

“The Sacred Lion...” Merlin murmured in a low voice. The sacred beast was the ultimate power in this world. Merlin even suspected that the sacred beast was the embodiment of the Almighty Beast World’s will, or carried a part of the Almighty Beast World’s will.

In short, the sacred beast was extremely terrifying. Merely looking at it would give one infinite benefits, much less approach it. It was because the Holy Dragon royal family had the skull of the Sacred Lion Beast that their almighty beast bloodline reached the very top. It was an even higher tier than Merlin’s Blood-eye Dragon.

It served to show how frightening the Sacred Lion was. If there was a chance to get close to the Sacred Lion for three days, Merlin would not give it up.

However, five thousand contribution points was indeed a goal that seemed difficult to achieve.

Chapter 968: Sheepskin Scroll

“Alright, in that case, I won’t exchange it for the time being.”

At that moment, Merlin had 1,500 contribution points, which was a huge number. Although there was still a big gap to the 5,000 contribution points that were needed, it was still very good.

Merlin waved goodbye to Belle and left Phantom before returning to the manor in the Holy Dragon City.

The butler seemed to hesitate upon seeing Merlin and whispered after Merlin sat down in the chair, “Master Leon, how did the honorable Count’s business go?”

Merlin nodded and said, “It’s almost done. I took back Boulder City, and it’s currently my territory. However, it’s still not stable for now. For the time being, it’s safer for you all to stay in the Holy Dragon City,” Merlin said while he ate a delicious dinner at the table.

A trace of surprise flashed in the butler’s eyes. He took Boulder City back? Even when Count Stanwin was still alive, he was unable to retake Boulder City.

However, Count Stanwin died and Merlin, the only heir to the Count, had become the owner of the entire manor. Although the butler had some misgivings, he did not doubt Merlin's words.

"Butler, did anything happen recently? Did anyone come looking for me?"

Merlin knew that there were some things left unfinished since he had not been in the manor recently. After all, he was the owner of the manor now.

"Count Altadin came here some time ago, but the Master was not at home, so he asked me to leave a message for the Master. When you come back, please go to Altadin Manor as soon as possible."

Merlin nodded. Count Altadin mostly wanted to ask about the Bead of Infamy and the marriage between his daughter and Merlin.

"What else?" Merlin continued to ask.

"The royal family also sent someone. If the Master wishes to inherit the title of Count, you must go to the court to swear allegiance to the royal family and have it registered. Only then will you become a formal Count!"

A look flashed in Merlin's eyes. The royal family sent someone again, but this time for a legal procedure. Although the title could be hereditary, he would need to go to the palace in the Holy Dragon City and swear allegiance to the royal family to be eligible to inherit the title.

Although the royal family seemed unable to control the situation in the Holy Dragon Empire, Merlin knew the real strength of the royal family. He knew that the royal family was not as simple as they looked, and they still held large forces. Therefore, it was necessary for him to take the time to go there.

"Alright, I got it. Call Lady Reese down."

Merlin still thought of Lady Reese. She was the woman who was engaged to this body when he just arrived at the Almighty Beast World and followed him to the Holy Dragon City. During this period of time, Merlin had not seen Reese at all, so relatively speaking, Reese was the person who was truly alone.

The butler bowed slightly and left. In a short while, a neatly dressed Reese appeared before Merlin. Originally, while she was Merlin's fiancée, they could not have meals together, but since Merlin was the owner of the manor, he generally did not mind.

"Lady Reese, let's eat together. You've lost a lot of weight these days. Do you miss Boulder City?"

Merlin glanced at Reese. She seemed to be very unhappy recently and had lost a lot of weight.

Reese looked at Merlin and said in a low voice, "I do miss Boulder City a little. I'm not used to it here."

Merlin was silent for a moment before he said, "Butler, if Lady Reese wants to go out in the future, send some people to escort her. She can go anywhere she wants to. Don't stop her."

"Yes, Master!" The butler said respectfully. Reese's eyes brightened as if she could not believe it. There was an obvious smile on her face. She was still at an innocent age, so how would she enjoy staying in a boring manor all day? Furthermore, the Holy Dragon City was still very prosperous and big. She had wanted to go out long ago but was unable to due to the rules. However, with Merlin's words earlier, she could finally go out and about.

After dinner, Merlin went to his father's room. The furnishings in the room had not been touched, and there was not a single trace of dust. It was clear that someone was cleaning it.

Merlin took out a book on the history of the continent and read it carefully.

This book recorded the history of the entire Almighty Beast continent. However, most of it was purely imaginary and was associated with legends. At that time, there were no people, only terrifying almighty beasts.

Later, something happened which caused the almighty beasts to gradually decline, and human beings rose. The almighty beasts left then passed on as bloodlines inside the body of humans, surviving in another sense of the word. This led to the practices regarding almighty beast bloodlines to obtain strong power.

Merlin had little interest in these legends. He kept flipping until he reached the article on the founding of the Holy Dragon Empire.

The Holy Dragon Empire was jointly founded by two siblings of the Holy Dragon royal family. The elder brother had a powerful mid-tier almighty beast bloodline, but he was forced to desperate straits by an enemy and jumped off a cliff. However, he did not die and instead encountered the head of the Sacred Lion Beast. Through the Sacred Lion Beast, the brother soon purified the bloodline in his body, and finally achieved a top-tier almighty beast bloodline.

Then, he fought together with his younger sister and finally created the large Holy Dragon Empire. He placed the head of the Sacred Lion Beast in the Holy Dragon City to protect the Holy Dragon Empire forever!

Although this section was recorded, Merlin felt that it must have been embellished as it was too exaggerated. The entire book was the same way. History had been changed beyond recognition. The only things that could be referenced were the major events in it.

However, there was one thing about the Sacred Lion Beast that Merlin benefitted from.

As mentioned in the book, the founder of the Holy Dragon royal family was a pair of siblings. The elder brother obtained the head of the Sacred Lion, and through its purification, the mid-tier almighty beast bloodline in his body suddenly became a top-tier almighty beast bloodline. It had increased by two whole tiers.

“The ability to purify bloodlines?”

Merlin pondered carefully. Perhaps the head of the Sacred Lion Beast really had the ability to purify bloodlines. Otherwise, it would have been an extreme exaggeration.

After all, it was hard to imagine the limits of a sacred beast. According to Merlin’s theory, these sacred beasts were most likely the embodiment of the will of the Almighty Beast World, or contained a portion of the Almighty Beast World’s will. Naturally, mysterious things could happen.

Unfortunately, the head of the Sacred Lion Beast was the foundation of the royal family. No one apart from the core members of the royal family knew where it was. Merlin was unable to see it even if he wanted to.

It was better for him to try and gather 5,000 contribution points to see the legendary sacred beast. Perhaps at that time, he would find out the true secrets of this Latitude Cosmos.

...

Early the next morning, Merlin went to the Altadin Manor to visit Count Altadin.

After entering the manor, Merlin saw the healthy-looking Count Altadin riding a horse on the field. Riding was a little challenging at his age. After all, he was not like Count Stanwin, who had a powerful almighty beast bloodline and was physically much stronger.

“Count Altadin.”

Merlin bowed slightly to Count Altadin. Then, he suddenly looked up at the top of the castle, keenly aware that there was a gaze coming from the window of the castle. It was most likely Lady Baratha, the daughter of Count Altadin.

Merlin did not mind. A look of sadness appeared on Count Altadin’s face as he said softly, “Leon, I’m sorry for your loss. I already heard about Count Stanwin. It’s truly unfortunate.”

“Count Altadin, I have already avenged my father. I should really thank your Bead of Infamy,” Merlin said casually. In reality, Merlin was not sad about the death of Count Stanwin. He had experienced losing people many times before, so he only felt some regret.

Altadin was clearly a well-informed person, and said with a smile, “I know. You’ve recaptured Boulder City, and hunted the mastermind, Orsato, for thousands of miles. Even Blackbat, a full-shifter, was killed by you. I believe that if Count Stanwin was still alive, he would be very proud of you!”

As a Count, Altadin clearly had many capabilities in the Holy Dragon City. Although Merlin’s matter was large, news about it basically only circulated in the upper circles. For Count Altadin to find out so quickly, it was not as simple as it appeared.

“Count Altadin is flattering me.”

“By the way, I had wanted to discuss your marriage with Baratha with your father, but your father met with an accident and it’s been delayed. This is a critical period, so I’ll make the decision. You two will be married in three months. What do you think?”

Merlin pondered. This was something that was decided between Count Stanwin and Count Altadin, so he could not oppose it. Furthermore, Count Stanwin had greatly wished for Merlin to pass on the bloodline for the clan.

“I’ll leave everything for Count Altadin to arrange.”

Merlin did not object either and left everything to Count Altadin.

“That’s right, when you obtained the Bead of Infamy back then, there was something else I didn’t give you. I wanted to give it to you after you got married because I was afraid that you might use it carelessly. However, now that you are strong enough to kill Blackbat, this thing would be nothing to you.”

Then, Count Altadin mysteriously took out a sheepskin scroll.

“What is this?”

Merlin frowned. Count Altadin was being very cryptic.

“My ancestor left this behind. You’ll know when you see it,” Count Altadin said with narrowed eyes.

“Ancestor?”

Merlin was shocked. Count Altadin’s ancestor was a powerful Host. What he left behind must be immensely useful to Hosts.

However, Merlin did not open it up in a hurry and bid Count Altadin farewell first.

“Count Altadin, I’ll leave for now and come see you another day.”

After returning to the carriage, Merlin finally opened the sheepskin scroll and looked at the contents.

Chapter 969: The Princess Royal

The sheepskin scroll had many small and cramped words scribbled on it along with a drawing of a map. Merlin did not care much about it at first, but upon carefully reading the contents, his expression slowly became solemn.

It turned out that it was a mysterious Nourishment Pond that Count Altadin's powerful ancestor had spent countless painstaking efforts to create by utilizing all the materials collected in his lifetime.

According to the ancestor, this Nourishment Pond contained terrifying power, and one could only use it if their almighty beast's will was at least peak mid-tier. Once it was used, it would increase the probability of the Host becoming a full-shifter.

The Nourishment Pond was to increase the probability of becoming a full-shifter. Merlin had not heard of anything like this before. After all, becoming a full-shifter depended almost entirely on luck.

After Merlin carefully studied the map, there seemed to be a hidden place outside the Holy Dragon City. However, it was almost entirely the rebels' territory outside of the Holy Dragon City. It would be difficult to enter those areas without notice.

"I'll put this aside first. I'll think about it after meeting the royal family."

Merlin had many things to deal with. He had to sort them out, but he was not in a rush. He felt that visiting the royal family had more to it than just the act of inheriting the title of Count.

Thus, after putting away the sheepskin scroll, Merlin returned to the manor.

...

On the second day, Merlin had breakfast as usual and dressed in a fine aristocratic cape. With the maid's help, he put on a pair of long riding boots. Only then did he leave the manor and got into the carriage.

The carriage rode on the limestone road, causing rattling noises. Merlin noticed that even the coachman seemed nervous. After all, they were going to the royal palace.

Although the royal family of the Holy Dragon Empire was declining day by day, to ordinary people, the royal family was still a colossus. Ordinary people would not even imagine entering the royal palace.

Merlin was not nervous. He would not be surprised even if the will of the Almighty Beast World appeared in front of him, much less the royal family. However, he wondered what the purpose was for the royal family to invite him to the palace other than inheriting the title of Count.

"Halt."

A palace guard stopped the carriage. Merlin handed him Count Stanwin's identification and the invitation letter sent by the royal family. Such treatment was not something that ordinary nobles could enjoy often.

Therefore, after seeing the invitation letter, the guard showed respect to Merlin and asked, "Is the honorable Count going to the main hall? Some nobles are waiting to register there."

"Then I'll go to the main hall."

Merlin was not very familiar with the royal palace either, so there were naturally guards leading the way. He sat quietly in the carriage since he was not interested in the scenery.

"Creak."

Suddenly, the carriage jerked lightly. The coachman's voice sounded, "Master Leon, we've arrived."

Merlin lifted the curtain of the carriage and walked out. Currently, the sun was shining brightly overhead, making him feel warm. The hall was very large, and there was a huge statue of a beast outside. However, Merlin did not know what beast this sculpture was.

“This is the Sacred Lion Beast.”

The guard standing by the side seemed to see Merlin’s surprise and could not help but explain.

“Is this the Sacred Lion Beast? Have you seen it before?”

Merlin was somewhat surprised and turned to the guard.

“The honorable Count is jesting. How would I have seen the Sacred Lion Beast? There are many such statues in the royal palace, and everyone says that those are the Sacred Lion Beast. Furthermore, many famous almighty beasts don’t look like that.”

Merlin nodded thoughtfully. A mere guard was indeed not qualified to see the real Sacred Lion Beast. Merlin could not help but look at the statue again. Ever since he entered the palace, he developed a strange feeling as if he was being watched.

After entering the main hall, Merlin found several people dressed in aristocratic attire talking in low voice. When Merlin came in, they looked at him curiously and continued talking with their heads down. They must be aristocrats who came to register and inherit noble titles for various reasons.

The hall seemed gloomy and cold. Merlin wrapped himself in his overcoat and closed his eyes. No matter how noisy the outside was, it had nothing to do with him.

“Leon!”

Suddenly, a cold voice sounded. Merlin opened his eyes and saw that everyone’s gazes were fixed on him.

“That’s me.”

Merlin glanced at the newly appeared man in the hall. He nodded slightly and took out a directory. Then, he began to recite what was written on the directory, “Lord Leon, you’ll be the Count of Boulder City, and inherit the title from Count Stanwin.”

Merlin nodded. Inheriting the title was just a formal procedure. Boulder City was recaptured thanks to his efforts. If he did not agree, then no one could take away the territory.

After completing the procedure, Merlin did not plan on staying either, so he went outside and return to the manor. However, the man from earlier hurriedly went after him.

“Do you need something from me?”

Merlin frowned and asked without any trace of politeness.

However, the man did not get angry but replied kindly, “Count Leon, the Princess Royal has asked to see you.”

“The Princess Royal?”

Merlin recalled carefully. He had never known any Princess Royal. He knew that there were princes and princesses in the royal family, but most of the actual power resides in the prince’s hands. Although Her Highness also held some power, it was far less than the prince’s. There were only a few princesses who could rival the prince, and among them was the Princess Royal, who had sworn in front of His Majesty the King that she would never marry. Therefore, she could continue to live in the palace and command part of the imperial army. She was a princess who held actual power.

“What does Her Highness want from me?”

Merlin asked in a low voice.

“I don’t know either. If Her Highness wants to see someone, I only need to notify the person. Count Leon, please follow me.”

Merlin was also secretly on guard against this strange man. He was not familiar with the royal palace. If anything happened, it would be troublesome, so Merlin was alert of strangers.

After all, he had not reached the point where he could walk alone in this world. There were still many others who were stronger than him and could threaten his safety.

Following the man, they walked through layers of corridors before arriving at a beautiful garden.

“Please wait a moment while I inform them of your arrival, Count Leon.”

Merlin’s eyes narrowed slightly. After the man had entered the room, Merlin looked at the garden around him. It truly was a beautiful garden. There were all kinds of rare and strange fauna that Merlin had never seen before. The air was also full of an extraordinary fragrance.

However, Merlin suddenly frowned as if he had sensed a hint of danger. It was as if a pair of eyes full of killing intent had locked onto him.

“Roar...”

Without hesitation, Merlin immediately unveiled his fourth-form. With a spread of his wings, the wind howled as his huge body quickly flew to the sky.

“Whoosh.”

However, a large net soon fell from the sky. It was a spider’s web that was tightly woven and covered in poison. Although the toxicity could not kill Merlin, if it touched his body, it would be enough to paralyze him for a while.

As a result, Merlin could not rush out. Instead, he immediately fell to the ground and stared at the palace in front of him. Then, he charged directly into the palace.

“Boom.”

The huge palace shook and crumbled as if it would collapse at any moment. Merlin’s gaze was fixed on a woman in the palace.

This woman was very beautiful. Her chest was puffed and she was dressed in chiffon that hid her fair skin. She was an extremely charming woman.

However, beside her was a ferocious and terrifying giant spider. It stared at Merlin as if it would attack the moment Merlin moved.

“Princess Royal, is this how you treat your guest?”

Merlin had already guessed that this charming woman was the Princess Royal who had invited him. As for the sense of danger before, it was most likely only a test or a warning.

This spider had made Merlin feel an unprecedented sense of threat. It was a peak mid-tier full-shifter and was much stronger than Merlin. It was enough to rival Hert the Ursus King and was perhaps even more powerful than Hert.

The Princess Royal said with a charming smile, “It was just a test. I’m relieved that Count Leon possesses great power. The royal family needs strong and loyal aristocrats like Count Leon to ensure the stability of the royal family and the empire.”

Merlin smiled in his heart. Was the Holy Dragon Empire still considered stable?

However, since he knew that it was a test, he did not need to maintain his transformation, so he immediately changed back to his original state and sat down in front of the Princess Royal.

The giant spider had also turned into a doddering old woman and kept close behind the Princess Royal. Merlin was secretly on alert. The royal family’s strength was terrifying. Even a Princess Royal had such a powerful personal guardian.

Someone like the Ursus King Hert would be a hegemon no matter where he went. It would not be difficult to start up a small country. However, to willingly becoming the Princess Royal’s bodyguard had shown how deep the royal family’s methods ran.

That or perhaps the royal family provided enough benefits for this old woman to be a loyal bodyguard.

“Pray tell what the Princess Royal wants from me?”

Merlin looked at the Princess Royal and asked calmly.

Chapter 970: Bribe

From the beginning, the test was to find out Merlin's real strength. After seeing that Merlin was a strong person comparable to a full-shifter, she put aside her smile and said with a solemn expression, "Count Leon, what do you think about the current situation of the Holy Dragon Empire?"

If it were someone else asking, Merlin would have said that the Holy Dragon Empire was dying and would soon fall apart. However, since it was the Princess Royal who still held actual power, Merlin did not have to beat about the bush and bluntly said, "The current situation of the Holy Dragon Empire isn't very good but if the royal family is willing to work hard, it won't be difficult to set things right and reorganize the empire."

"Oh? Count Leon has such confidence in the royal family?"

The Princess Royal smile vaguely but did not seem to mind.

Merlin also smiled and said, "Your Highness seems to have forgotten where I came from."

The Princess Royal smiled. "I almost forgot. Count Leon is the Deputy Team Leader of Phantom's Combat Team, right?"

Merlin knew that he could not hide his identity from the Princess Royal, so he readily admitted it with a nod. "Yes, thank you for your kindness, Your Highness. I'm currently the Deputy Team Leader of Phantom's Combat Team!"

"How rare. Count Leon is still so young but you're already the Deputy Team Leader of Phantom's Combat Team. If possible, there's even a chance to compete for the position of Minister."

The Princess Royal's charming, beautiful eyes blinked at Merlin. She truly was an alluring woman who could charm people to their deaths.

However, this alluring woman could not move Merlin's heart. He said coldly, "I've never considered the position of Minister. Alright, the reason why the Princess Royal called me today isn't just to say all this nonsense, right?"

Merlin naturally knew that the words earlier were also a test.

"Very well. Since Count Leon wants to be blunt, then I'll tell you. I want Count Leon to become mine, and help me control a portion of the power in Phantom."

"Hm? What does the Princess Royal mean? Phantom has always been loyal to the royal family. As Your Highness is a Princess Royal from the royal family, Your Highness can naturally use Phantom. Why do you need the help of a mere Deputy Team Leader like me?"

Merlin knew the seriousness of the matter. It seemed as if he had been accidentally involved in a whirlpool of the royal family. If he did not pay attention, the whirlpool would shatter him to pieces.

The Princess Royal's beautiful eyes fluttered and said kindly, "Count Leon isn't unaware of this. Although I command part of the imperial guard, my power is still very weak. Compared with His Highness the second prince, it's insignificant. Phantom is the most powerful force of the royal family and whoever holds Phantom will hold the greatest power in the royal family. However, Phantom is only loyal to my father. I believe the Count already knows this."

Merlin understood. This whirlpool was indeed very large and would destroy him if he was careless. That was because it involved the king of the Holy Dragon Empire as well as the second prince, who held the most power.

However, Phantom, the sharpest sword in the royal family's hands, only belonged in the king's hands. Neither the second prince nor the influential Princess Royal could get their hands on Phantom.

Therefore, they were thinking about their methods. Perhaps besides the Princess Royal, even the second prince had taken a fancy to Merlin. The Princess Royal just happened to have taken the first step.

Countless thoughts flashed in Merlin's head. This was a huge whirlpool but it was also an opportunity. Merlin had never been afraid of any trouble. Only when he was in trouble would he gain many benefits.

"Why me and not Hert or that mysterious Minister? Compared with those two, I'm too insignificant."

Merlin asked in confusion.

"It's very simple. Those two are my father's men and are only loyal to my father. Unless Father dies... However, you're different. You just appeared and can be enticed by us. It's as simple as that. Moreover, Father wouldn't care about a Deputy Team Leader who's only as strong as a low-tier full-shifter. Even if he knows, he'll think that it's no big deal."

Merlin came to a realization. The Princess Royal took the first step ahead of the second prince and grasped the most important part of Phantom's forces.

"Tell me, what benefits do I get?"

Although it was very dangerous to take part in it, Merlin was already involved. It was impossible for the second prince to think that nothing happened between Merlin and the royal family. Ever since he met the Princess Royal, he was already involved in this huge whirlpool.

"Benefits? Let me see, do I count as one? If you become mine, you can ask for me."

The Princess Royal blinked, revealing an alluring attitude. Merlin did not believe that the Princess Royal would use this method.

Seeing the expressionless Merlin, the Princess Royal pouted. "Alright, how boring. I didn't think there'll be a time where my charm failed. I'm a little skeptical. Are you a man? I know what you need the most. You'll find it difficult to reject my proposal. If you promise to help me control a portion of Phantom, when it's over, I'll allow you to see our royal family's greatest secret – the Sacred Lion Beast! How about that? In Phantom, you'll have to accumulate five thousand contribution points for this. You may not be able to accumulate so much in your entire lifetime."

"Hiss."

Merlin sucked in a breath. Seeing the Sacred Lion Beast was a proposal that Merlin could not refuse. Merlin's gaze burned as he stared at the Princess Royal. He did not think that the Princess Royal had this right.

"Can Your Highness take me to the place where the Sacred Lion Beast is? After all, it's the core of the royal family. I'm afraid even ordinary princes and princesses aren't eligible to enter."

Merlin did not act rashly and said calmly.

"Of course. Only the most excellent princes and princesses can see the Sacred Lion Beast but I naturally have my ways to bring you there. All you need to do is agree. By the way, even if you don't agree, I don't believe the second prince would naively think that you didn't side with me."

The Princess Royal said cunningly.

Merlin closed his eyes and felt that the advantages still outweighed the disadvantages. As long as he could see the Sacred Lion Beast with his eyes and get into close contact, it would be worth the cost.

"Alright, I'll agree. However, what counts as gaining the support of a portion of people in Phantom?"

"It's very simple. You'll perform your duties well as a Deputy Team Leader and gain more subordinates. It's enough if they're loyal to you. As long as you support me, that's equivalent to their loyalty in me as well. I have high hopes for you, Count Leon. Don't let me down."

"That simple?"

Merlin always felt that things were not what they seem to be. After all, the Princess Royal would not believe Merlin for no reason as this had been their very first encounter.

"It's as simple as that. If you don't believe me, then next time when I think the time is right, I'll bring you to the Sacred Lion Beast first. Then, you'll know that I'm not lying to you."

Merlin considered for a moment. There was nothing wrong with that, so he nodded in agreement.

“Very good. Count Leon, I heard that you’re a Host, so here are some Nourishment Pond formulae and materials enough for ten portions worth. I’ll give them to you first. I’ll have to give you some benefits during our first meeting. Otherwise, how would you truly put in the effort to help me?”

Merlin looked at the Princess Royal. She seemed like a little girl who would not grow up. However, to be able to stand out from many princes and princesses and hold actual power, she was not a child.

Therefore, Merlin accepted the materials. He needed some Nourishment Pond materials to push himself to the peak of his fourth-form.

“Princess Royal, if there’s nothing else, then I’ll take my leave.”

The Princess Royal waved her hand, and Merlin turned and left.

Seeing Merlin’s disappearing back, a meaningful smile appeared between the corners of the Princess Royal’s mouth as she murmured, “Interesting. I’m afraid this chess piece won’t be completely at my mercy. However, when he sees the Sacred Lion Beast, it’ll be beyond his control...”

The smile on the corners of the Princess Royal’s mouth twisted faintly.

...

Back in the manor, after Merlin had dinner, he went to the basement alone.

Looking back at what happened in the royal family today, especially the Princess Royal, Merlin felt that something was off about her. Perhaps her “plot” was too childish, which was why she had completely trusted him.

If it were Merlin, he would not do things that way. In that case, the other party must have some follow-up measures of her own which would be unveiled during their next meeting.

“The next time we meet will be when she takes me to the Sacred Lion Beast. No matter what she does, my goal will be achieved when I see the Sacred Lion Beast!”

Merlin was not afraid of the Princess Royal. Even if she had that full-shifter spider, there would be no problem if he wanted to escape.

However, the most important thing now was to upgrade himself to the peak of the fourth-form. Only in this way would Merlin be qualified in various complicated situations. Whether it was in the Void Zone or the Almighty Beast World, strength was the only guarantee for his own safety!

“Crash.”

Merlin had prepared the Nourishment Pond with the materials given by the Princess Royal. Looking at the dark green Nourishment Pond, Merlin carefully checked every material for any problems. The Princess Royal would not have tampered with the materials as it would be too obvious.

“Plop.”

Since there was nothing wrong with the materials, Merlin no longer hesitated and immediately shapeshifted. His large body almost filled the entire Nourishment Pond.

“Rumble rumble.”

Bubbles began to appear on the surface of the Nourishment Pond. Huge energy rapidly entered Merlin’s body, constantly enhancing the level of the Blood-eye Dragon toward the peak of the fourth-form.