

Witch Monastery

#Chapter 95: Your posture - Read Witch Monastery Chapter 95: Your posture

Chapter 95: Chapter 95: Your posture

Afternoon.

Sephera returned from outside the monastery. As she predicted, last night's tragedy had spread through the slums like wildfire. Panic now gripped the residents, and even those who previously thought nothing of it now considered fleeing.

Under these circumstances—combined with the nuns' favorable reputation and generous offers—negotiating deals with the locals proved effortless.

At this rate, she estimated acquiring ten thousand square meters within a week.

Pleased with her progress, she headed toward the scriptorium to report to Charles.

Yet as she crossed the garden path and pushed open the door, a thick, musky scent assaulted her senses, freezing her in place.

What in the—?

Her eyes adjusted to reveal Sophia slumped over the desk, barely conscious, the chair beneath her bearing unmistakable traces of... fluids.

Sephera's mind buzzed—then went blank.

They... did it here?!

When?

Right after we left?

Damn it! Hattie called it!

She gritted her teeth, then shuddered with relief.

Thank the gods we were gone. If Hattie had witnessed this, her smugness would've been unbearable!

Wait—our bet wasn't about the location. Hattie wagered on the position!

There's still a chance to win!

Stepping forward, she cooed, "Sophia... still with us?"

Sophia lifted her head, face flushed, eyes glazed. "Ah... S-Sephera?"

Old habits surfaced. Sophia jolted upright, hastily straightening her robes before the Toxic Witch, her expression uneasy. "Y-You're back. Did you... need something?"

Sephera's smile turned saccharine. For once, her venomous tongue dripped honey: "Oh, nothing urgent. I simply worried about dear Sister Sophia's wellbeing. How are you feeling? Has your memory and magic recovered? Shall I fetch anything to help you... recuperate?"

Each "Sister" laced with syrupy faux-concern made Sophia's skin crawl.

Despite being the eldest witch, Sophia had never received Sephera's respect. Any mistake invited ruthless mockery—always justified, always humiliating.

But this? This bizarre kindness? Unprecedented.

What game was the Toxic Witch playing now?

This sudden shift made Sophia deeply uncomfortable. Cutting through the pleasantries, she demanded: "What do you want? Speak quickly - I have other matters to attend."

Sephera's smile froze, realizing her performance had been too exaggerated. Unfazed, she rubbed her hands together eagerly: "Nothing major really... just a question I'm curious about..."

A sense of foreboding crept into Sophia's heart as she watched Sephera blink, her own face flushing: "When you and Master... um... had your first time just now... what... what position was it?"

Clearly, it took tremendous effort for her to spit out the question.

Sophia stared blankly for two seconds before her face turned crimson. Awkward enough to dig her toes into the floor, her brain raced before she exploded in fury: "Sephera! How presumptuous of you!"

"As holy nuns—pure and unsullied beings—how dare you ask such invasive questions! Is this how the Vice-Abbess of the Monastery behaves? I misjudged you terribly!"

After this righteous tirade, Sophia spun on her heel and fled the scriptorium in feigned outrage. Sephera gaped after the retreating figure, muttering, "Why so shy? Acting like some blushing virgin..."

Sophia didn't stop running until she'd put considerable distance between them. Leaning against the monastery wall, she panted heavily.

Safe at last. That humiliating question—completely unanswerable!

Since when had Sephera, once so proper, become this depraved? To ask something so... so...

Her internal scolding was interrupted by a voice: "Sophia? Are you alright?"

Ruth.

Sophia hastily straightened, smoothing her robes. "Ah! I'm fine. Perfectly well."

Ruth studied her skeptically, nose twitching—then her expression twisted at some peculiar scent.

Sophia's discomfort intensified. "A-Anyway, did you need something, Ruth?"

"Ugh..." The petite witch ducked her head, appearing even smaller. "There's... one thing. I'm not sure if I should ask..."

Her hesitation puzzled Sophia. "What is it?" she coaxed gently, adopting an elder-sister tone. "Between sisters, no question is off-limits."

"Well... um..." Ruth fidgeted, hemming and hawing until Sophia nearly lost patience. Finally, she blurted: "What position did you and Master use... the first time?"

Sophia's jaw dropped. "Ruth! You too—?"

By the gods! What was happening to the sisters in this monastery?!

One month later.

What was once Sophia's private chamber had been transformed by Charles into a new construction - the "Training Grounds." The space now resembled a compact gymnasium, complete with mechanical treadmills, heavy barbells and dumbbells, and adjustable benches. At first glance, it appeared nearly identical to a modern fitness facility.

Yet the opposite side told a different story - simple archery targets stood ready, while walls displayed longbows of varying draw weights. Below them rested racks of blunted weapons: longswords, rapiers, greatswords and more, making clear this space served both physical conditioning and combat training.

At the Training Grounds' center stood Charles, bare-chested with weighted straps simulating armor's burden. His right hand gripped a metal longsword while his left arm bore a round shield. Following Sophia's teachings, he channeled pure magical energy - bypassing his "Pact of the Blade" abilities - to control both weapons' movements without engaging his muscles.

This was the Hexblade's training method. Mastery would grant him this coveted Improved Class.

A full month of dedicated practice had passed. Without a powerful Shadowfell patron bestowing knowledge directly, progress relied entirely on the Training Grounds' enhancements and his own disciplined repetition.

Yet Charles remained patient. With all six monastery witches properly tamed and Theresa's rare visits, this was now his undisputed domain. He could train, study, and develop at his own measured pace.

Above, ventilation fans hummed softly, maintaining fresh airflow. Afternoon sunlight illuminated his once-gaunt frame, now showing defined musculature after weeks of rigorous conditioning.

The month's training had wrought visible changes. Simply wearing weighted gear during daily sessions had improved his Constitution and cardiopulmonary function far beyond scriptorium study's benefits.

Beads of sweat traced down his temples. His white hair clung in damp strands while his back glistened with perspiration.

After two uninterrupted hours of drills, physical exhaustion warred with mental exhilaration. His soul burned with supernatural awareness, perfectly channeling magic to replace physical effort - guiding the longsword's motions through will alone.

Whoosh-!

The blade flashed through the air in a razor-sharp arc before twisting into an elegant flourish.

Throughout the motion, not a single muscle activated - yet the heavy metal longsword moved as fluidly as his own fingertips, obeying his every thought!

Success!

Charles sheathed the weapon, opening his eyes as he panted lightly, heart swelling with triumph.

He opened his System interface - just as expected, a new trait awaited:

Hex Warrior: You can channel your will through bonded weapons. When wielding non-heavy melee weapons, you may use your spellcasting ability instead of physical strength to control their movements. This effect extends to all Pact Weapons if you later select the Pact of the Blade, removing weapon type restrictions.

In gaming terms, this meant substituting Spellcasting Ability for Strength in all melee weapon checks - from wielding specialized arms to winning clashes and calculating damage.

And Charles' Spellcasting Ability - his Charisma - stood at a staggering twenty points, placing him among the mortal world's elite!

This meant he could now wield any mundane weapon with effortless mastery.

Brimming with delight, he removed his shield and retrieved a two-meter-long greatsword weighing over six kilograms from the wall. Binding it through his Pact of the Blade, he began practicing swings.

Such weight normally rendered greatswords impractical - even two-hundred-pound brutes struggled to wield them effectively. Yet channeling magical energy, the massive blade moved as lightly as a training stick, cutting through air with audible whooshes.

After several fluid motions, he returned the weapon, noting neither stamina nor magic depletion - as effortless as moving his own fingers. Satisfaction warmed his features.

From today, he could truly call himself a competent melee combatant...

Well, perhaps not quite. His Constitution still fell below adventurer averages.

Checking his attributes panel confirmed this:

Host: Charles

Gender: Male

Race: Human Subspecies (Silver Kin)

Age: 15

Height: 1.71m

Weight: 60kg

Strength: 8

Agility: 9

Constitution: 10

Intelligence: 13

Perception: 12

Charisma: 20

Class: Hexblade Level 4

Supernatural Gift: Toxin Immunity

Class Abilities: Pact Magic, Hex Warrior, Hexblade's Curse, Eldritch Invocations, Pact of the Blade

Remaining Spell Slots: 17/17

Highest Spell Slot Level: 2nd

Eldritch Invocations: Eyes of the Rune Keeper, Eldritch Mind

Feats: Extended Spell

Spells:

Cantrips: Blade Ward, Eldritch Blast, Light, Shocking Grasp

1st-level: Create/Destroy Water, Mage Armor, Shield, Absorb Elements, False Life, Sleep

2nd-level: Gust of Wind

Remaining Purification Points: 4729

A month's rigorous training had boosted his Constitution by one point alongside noticeable physical growth. Yet he barely reached normal human standards - far from exceptional melee combatants.

Take Kendrz - built like a wild boar, that man had tanked five Eldritch Blasts through poison clouds without slowing down. His Constitution surely exceeded sixteen, perhaps higher!

Charles sighed. His previous world's saying "the poor study letters while the rich practice martial arts" held twisted truth here. While true wealth pursued magic, martial training demanded massive nutritional investments.

That Kendrz developed such physique in the slums' malnutrition spoke volumes about his exceptional talent - a veritable prodigy among warriors.

Yet this genius died achieving nothing, wasting his gifts brawling with gutter gangsters over scraps...

Gazing beyond the monastery walls toward the slums, Charles wondered - how many other exceptional talents languished in South Harbor District, their potential buried by this unjust world?

Chapter 96: Chapter 96: The Amazon Woman's Desire(Two-in-One)

A flicker of melancholy passed through Charles, but he shook his head, dispelling the unnecessary thoughts in his mind.

Forget it. I haven't even carved out a future for myself yet—how can I spare the energy to worry about others?

With a self-deprecating chuckle, he steadied his mind and turned his attention back to his attributes panel. Under the "Class" category, "Warlock" had now been replaced with "Hexblade." However, his Class Features remained largely unchanged, with only two new additions: the recently acquired "Hex Warrior" and the long-practiced "Hexblade's Curse."

The effect of "Hexblade's Curse" was to mark a foe within thirty meters. Every subsequent strike would resonate with the curse, dealing additional damage. And if the cursed target fell, their vitality would be siphoned, replenishing his own.

This was an ability he had mastered long ago. With the help of the scriptorium and Eyes of the Rune Keeper, he had fully grasped Sophia's teachings in under three weeks, unlocking the power.

Yet, even after mastering it, his class hadn't shifted to "Hexblade." Only now, after attaining "Hex Warrior," had his advancement finally been completed!

At any rate, his class progression was successful. He exhaled in relief, dismissed the system interface, and strode toward the side door.

He had deliberately adjusted the layout so that the training grounds adjoined the bath chamber. After a thorough rinse, he changed into fresh clothes, intending to visit the scriptorium for some reading before dinner.

But to his surprise, the moment he stepped out of the bath chamber, Ruth approached, bowing slightly with practiced deference. "Priest Charles, Ms. Porter is here to see you."

It was their habit—when outsiders were present, no matter how distant, they maintained a formal demeanor to avoid suspicion.

Hearing this, Charles' expression soured. "Why is there never a moment's peace...?"

Ever since that night he tamed Sophia, people had been coming to the monastery every few days: slum residents looking to sell their houses, clerks from the District Office, investigators from Force Grey Squad, and then there was Porter...

At least the first three had legitimate business when they came to the monastery, official matters to attend to. But Porter...

She came purely out of boredom, just to tease Charles for fun!

Every time this woman visited, she would either flick his chin, pinch his nose, or last time even went so far as to grope his backside - behaving exactly like a lust-crazed seductress, making Charles want nothing more than to keep her at arm's length.

This woman had the backing of a major company and got paid without having to do anything, while he was completely different - he actually had important matters to attend to!

Yet, this was a woman he couldn't afford not to receive...

Seeing Charles' distressed expression, Ruth moved closer, her face gradually turning serious, a glint of killing intent appearing in her eyes: "Master, shall I simply..."

She left the sentence unfinished, but her words already carried a murderous tone. To this, Charles waved his hand and firmly refused: "No no, Porter is after all an influential figure in our district, and we've had quite a bit of contact with her recently."

"If she were to die suddenly, the hard-won peace in South Harbor District would likely be thrown into chaos again, and we would definitely be among the primary suspects."

As he spoke, he somewhat headache-inducingly ran his fingers through his hair, deliberately making it look messy and unkempt, then said: "It's not worth offending the Amazons over such a trivial matter. I'll deal with her myself. Sigh, it probably won't take too long to send her away."

Having said this, he strode directly toward the doorway. Ruth stepped aside to make way, watching his retreating figure, lightly biting her lower lip, filled with unwillingness: "Master..."

Meanwhile, Charles walked straight to the main doorway, where he saw Porter - that typical Amazon woman with her bronze skin, tall stature, scorching figure and revealing clothing that made it seem she didn't feel the cold at all - who had somehow moved a

stone block here and was now sitting on it, her long, muscular legs crossed in a completely unladylike manner as she basked in the sun waiting for him.

Seeing him emerge from the gates, the woman's crimson lips immediately curled into a radiant, enthusiastic smile: "Priest Charles, you've finally stopped clinging to those fair and lovely nuns of yours and decided to come see me?"

As she spoke, she rose from the stone block and walked directly toward him, like a hunting lioness approaching a helpless rabbit.

Charles reflexively took half a step back, intimidated by her overwhelming presence. He swallowed hard and forced himself to muster some courage: "Ms. Porter, if I recall... shouldn't you be at work right now?"

Amazon Fisheries Company's official hours ended at six each evening, but in such a vigorous company, overtime was common. After all, every extra deal secured meant extra pay, and employees were happy to work late into the night.

The sun was already dipping westward, yet its rays remained scorching. By no means could this be considered quitting time.

To this, Porter gave a light chuckle: "As Director of the Intelligence Division, checking in on old friends and gathering information falls squarely within my job description."

As she spoke, she suddenly stepped forward, leaning down until her face was almost touching his: "Your situation happens to be very, very important to me."

Her warm breath washed over his face as she spoke, forcing Charles to retreat another half-step, his heartbeat accelerating: "Er... I'm just an ordinary priest, hardly that important. Was there something else you needed? I have my own duties to attend to, so if there's nothing else, perhaps you could..."

He turned to leave, but Porter immediately grabbed him, pinning him against the nearby wall, then abruptly raised her long leg to plant her foot on the wall beside his shoulder -

Thud -

Trapping Charles against the wall with no room to move.

"Ugh..."

Charles averted his gaze, desperately trying not to look at her bare foot clad only in a sandal, a bead of sweat trickling down his temple: "This... this isn't appropriate, Ms. Porter. If anyone saw us like this, they might suspect..."

His entire body tensed, nerves stretched to breaking point. It wasn't that he was unaccustomed to women - this one's ferocious aura completely overwhelmed him. Her undisguised predatory stare made him feel like he was about to be devoured whole!

All Charles could do was tremble.

What he didn't realize was that the more he reacted like this, the more endearing he became in Porter's eyes. "I'm not afraid," she purred. "What are you so scared of?"

Her heart pounded wildly, feeling nothing but boundless desire roaring through her veins.

Ah, how I want to press him down right now, pinch his delicate cheeks, and mercilessly play with his body...

How I want to mount him, claim him, wring every drop of his essence, and see what glorious life our union would create...

No, she had to restrain herself. He was already wary enough - if she pushed further, she might genuinely earn his dislike...

Thinking this, Porter forcibly reined in her burning desires. Before Charles could voice a second refusal or rebuke, she withdrew her thigh and stood properly, then found a legitimate excuse: "Alright, enough joking, Priest. I did come here on actual business this time."

"I heard you're preparing to build houses for sale?"

Charles blinked, swallowing back the righteous criticisms he'd prepared: "Ah, yes, that's correct. As you know, our Church of the Goddess of Life has been struggling financially in recent years..."

He wasn't surprised Porter knew about this. The nuns had been openly purchasing land and bribing officials at the District Office to streamline procedures - none of which could escape the Amazons' notice.

These women had been colluding illegally with the District Office to reap massive profits for ages. As Intelligence Division Director, Porter's primary job was gathering intel - she'd naturally know all about such matters.

"Truth be told, some of our warriors are interested in buying property in South Harbor District," Porter said seriously. "So if the price is right, we might make a bulk purchase."

"Speaking of which, what quality are these houses? And what's your asking price?"

She wasn't lying - though the matter wasn't nearly this urgent, with few currently interested. It certainly didn't warrant a daytime visit.

Her true target remained Charles himself - she'd merely suppressed her urge to molest him.

Charles nearly quoted a price, then hesitated and gave an inflated figure: "Market rate, I suppose. This is our first venture, so we're not experts. Probably... eighty square meters, two bedrooms, at ten gold per square meter... roughly."

Porter's eyebrow arched: "That cheap? What kind of houses are you building? If they're slum-quality shacks, we won't buy."

This was practically bargain-basement pricing. Between land, blueprints, construction materials, labor costs, and bribes to officials - each represented significant expenses.

With inevitable complications and troubles, ten gold per square meter would surely mean losses.

"Certainly not that shoddy," Charles said, pointing toward the stone houses on District Office streets nearby. "More like those."

Porter looked surprised, then smirked: "At that price, don't come crying later."

Unaware he had special methods to slash costs, she chuckled: "Then I'll return later to discuss details. Oh, and remember - bulk purchases deserve discounts."

Charles' lips curled slightly as he nodded: "Certainly."

Both believed they had the upper hand.

As they spoke, from the slums' direction, Hattie and Sephera rounded the corner together, approaching slowly.

At the sight of the two, Porter let out a faint sigh. She knew they disliked her—and worse, they were sharper with their words than she was. Last time, Sephera had mercilessly mocked her, every syllable striking a nerve, leaving her speechless and unable to retort.

She knew she had to leave, but slinking away in defeat wasn't the Amazon way.

Her eyes glinted with mischief. In a flash, she leaned in—before Charles could react—planted a bold kiss on his cheek, then threw her head back with laughter as she strode away, leaving him stunned.

Charles stood frozen, but the Amazon was already too far to catch. Then, he noticed Hattie and Sephera approaching, their beautiful eyes brimming with murderous intent as they glared at Porter's retreating, towering figure.

They had naturally witnessed Porter's brazen act. Now, Sephera gritted her teeth, resentment thick in her voice. "That woman keeps coming here, yet never has real business. She's definitely up to no good!"

"We must find a way to teach her a lesson!"

"Absolutely. She needs to remember her place!"

Charles, suddenly awkward, coughed. "Uh, actually, no. She did come for a reason this time. She asked about our housing project's pricing—said her people might buy in bulk if the numbers work..."

Sephera blinked. "Ah... Oh..."

She knew the monastery needed funds for upgrades. Still, her eyes flicked to the lingering lipstick on Charles's cheek. A thousand questions burned in her mind, but she chose to pretend she hadn't seen it. "Well... I suppose I misjudged her this time."

Her gaze, however, remained restless. Meanwhile, Hattie stepped forward, pulling out a handkerchief. With gentle motions, she wiped the lipstick and saliva from his face.

Charles felt a surge of gratitude—until she softly asked, "Master, have you grown tired of us? Is that why you're... sampling other women now?"

A chill shot up his spine. Though he knew the witches would never harm him, her words made his hair stand on end. He shook his head frantically. "No, no! Impossible, Hattie! Don't overthink it. I respect Porter as a formidable female warrior—nothing improper!"

Hattie lowered her lashes, her voice tinged with melancholy. "I wasn't talking about her..."

Charles stiffened. Then, the girl began recounting past grievances, her tone haunting. "That day... Lady Anno visited you. You two stood at the doorway, talking for ages. She laughed so brightly."

"And you, Master... I'd never seen you so happy before..."

His scalp prickled. His mind flooded with the memory—Anno's pure, radiant smile under the sunset, her shyness laced with admiration as she'd arrived in casual attire, her usual armor absent.

Guilt twisted in his chest. Cold sweat drenched his back; his heartbeat roared. "N-No, Hattie, you've got it wrong! I was just... handling her..."

He cared for the witches as deeply as they cared for him. He cherished them, naturally unwilling to let them feel even a hint of bitterness or wronged emotion.

Even if it wouldn't shake their loyalty.

Struggling for words, he glanced around the deserted streets, then pulled both Sephera and Hattie into the courtyard. Shutting the gate, he drew them close, arms around their shoulders, and whispered, "I was only flattering her. Force Grey is clearly investigating us. I had to play along, to avoid Blackstaff Tower's scrutiny."

"Believe me, my dears. I respect Anno—paladins who uphold justice—but nothing blasphemous crosses my mind..."

Hattie's expression softened slightly.

Then, Sephera suddenly spoke. "Master, why do you always call Anno's team 'Force Grey'?"

Charles looked confused. "Because... that's their name? Blackstaff Tower's operational branch."

Racking his memory, he recited the game's lore: "After the Goddess of Magic disappeared, Blackstaff Tower couldn't produce enough mages capable of 3rd-level spells. To maintain combat strength, they formed Force Grey—to serve their interests and recruit talented members as reinforcements..."

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Chapter 97: Chapter 97: Level 2 Monastery

Liberl Port was a city deeply intertwined with the Goddess of Magic: Its finest institution, Strixhaven University, was founded by five ancient dragons—all allies of the Goddess of

Magic; its city guard, the Blackstaff Tower, consisted entirely of fifth-level Mages personally bestowed power by the Goddess of Magic; even its current Open Lord, Lady Laeral Silverhand, was the trueborn daughter of the Goddess of Magic...

Every facet of this city thrived under the influence of the Great Goddess. Thus, it was no surprise that when the Goddess of Magic—the mightiest golden pillar of the material world, nay, the entire Multiverse—vanished, Liberl Port swiftly declined, spiraled out of control, and became little more than a puppet city manipulated by foreign powers.

"Huh? None of you have heard of this?"

Charles scratched his head, watching the stunned expressions on the two witches' faces. "Why the shock? It's just a human military organization..."

Hattie swallowed hard, her beautiful eyes wide with disbelief. "No, Master, what did you just... say?"

"The Goddess of Magic... is missing?!"

Charles nodded lightly. "Yeah, just—"

He opened his mouth to explain, then froze.

No!

The Goddess of Magic had been assassinated by the God of Murder and several other Evil Gods—her fate remained unknown, and no one knew of this yet!

This was a secret meant to be revealed in the late-game, possibly even after multiple major expansions!

Damn it! He'd read too many guides, been spoiled too many times, and completely forgotten this was a revelation years away. He'd almost spilled the truth!

If he carelessly let slip such words and drew the attention of that madman, the God of Murder, he'd have no one to blame but himself!

The thought sent a chill down Charles' spine. He quickly shook his head, dismissing his own words. "Never mind, just a speculation... Don't repeat it!"

The two witches' expressions turned grave, their faces hardening as they grasped the severity. In unison, they nodded. "Understood."

Charles exhaled deeply, then swiftly shifted the topic. "How's progress today?"

Hearing this, Hattie brightened. "Even smoother than expected, Master. Take a look—perhaps we can upgrade the monastery now?"

Charles raised a brow, tapping the system with his fingertip. His eyes gleamed.

The display confirmed the monastery's area had now expanded to 10,200 square meters—just enough to meet the upgrade requirement!

Coupled with the prestige amassed from the witches' frequent porridge offerings, they were fully prepared.

"Good." He gave a firm nod. "Tonight, once it's late, we'll upgrade the monastery to Level 2!"

Anticipation surged within him. His ambitions were about to ascend to new heights—a fresh beginning loomed on the horizon!

...

That night, within the monastery, in the main church—the place where the Goddess of Life was enshrined.

Six witches, along with Charles, gathered there, their expressions solemn. The monastery's upgrade was about to begin, a rare moment indeed, and so a sense of ceremony was necessary.

The goddess's statue stood over three meters tall, the layers of dust upon it now wiped clean, gleaming as never before.

In the past, unless inspectors from headquarters arrived, the witches wouldn't set foot here even once a year, leaving it in a near-completely abandoned state.

But now, everything had changed.

Gazing upon the saintly, maternal statue before him, Charles couldn't help but feel a swell of emotion. The Goddess of Life was, without a doubt, one of the kindest deities in this world. Every effort she made was solely for the happiness and well-being of her believers, that they might savor the beauty of life—nothing more, nothing less.

Yet, as if to prove the adage "the good die young," this benevolent goddess had also been betrayed. To this day, none knew whether she lived or perished—the game had never revealed it, likely saving the truth for a future update. But alas, Charles would never live to see it.

As he reflected on the goddess's noble yet tragic fate, his gaze lingered on her statue, unable to pull away. Noticing his demeanor, Hattie leaned close to his ear and whispered, "Master... could it be you've fallen for the Goddess of Life?"

Snapping out of his thoughts, Charles quickly shook his head. "No. For this compassionate and all-loving goddess, I feel only reverence—not a shred of blasphemous desire."

Even as he spoke, he realized he'd been lost in memory for too long. Summoning the system, he decided to delay no further. "Well then, let us begin."

With that, he tapped lightly on the "Level" column within the monastery's system interface.

Buzz—

A thousand Purification Points flowed out like water. A milky radiance burst forth from the Goddess of Life's statue, spreading in an instant to envelop the entire monastery.

Outside, the old walls crumbled silently—only to be replaced by newer, taller, sturdier barriers, encircling all the land he had purchased and marking it as the monastery's domain.

Meanwhile, in the lobby, the witches sensed changes within their own bodies. The Goddess of Life's statue continued to emanate a gentle white light, bathing them in its glow. Their auras surged, their strength growing with every passing second.

Charles watched in astonishment before turning his eyes back to the goddess's statue, a thought forming in his mind.

Could the system's true nature be somehow intertwined with the missing Goddess of Life?

He didn't know. It was just a baseless conjecture. Across the room, the white light around the witches finally faded. Hattie raised her hands, sensing the surge in her magical power, her voice trembling with disbelief. "Master... I—I think I've grown stronger!"

Sephera's voice was even more exhilarated. "Master! My Essence... it feels partially restored!"

The other four wore equally exhilarated expressions, each having reaped tremendous benefits from the process. Charles maintained a composed smile, as if this were all expected—but upon hearing Sephera's words, his brow furrowed imperceptibly.

What kind of power do Purification Points truly represent?

He couldn't unravel the mystery. These questions swirled in his mind, refusing to fade.

Ah, well. What will be, will be. At the very least, for now, the system brought him nothing but advantage—without it, he'd have been drained dry by Hattie on his very first day in this world.

For now, though, he'd focus on the task at hand.

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Chapter 98: Chapter 98: Unique Construction – Altar

Charles then navigated to the Construction page and upgraded the Dorm, Scriptorium, and Training Grounds all to Level 2 in one go, spending 600 Purification Points like flowing water.

With this, their Assistance efficiency increased, and their capacity expanded. For example, the Scriptorium could now simultaneously Assist two people, allowing them to study Spells and various Eldritch Invocations at a higher rate.

For example, in dorm, if nothing unexpected happens, the big bed is big enough to sleep eight people at the same time, and you don't need to open orgies in the big baths...

Of course, that was merely a secondary function. Its primary function was still to improve the rest quality of its occupants...

Ahem!

Without delay, he located his long-desired Level 2 Construction in the system's interface:

Altar Unique

Cost: 200 Purification Points.

Description: Offer sacrifices upon the Altar to ignite the flames of ritual, purifying the tainted forces in the air. For every 1 Gold worth of offerings, gain 1 Purification Point that day.

Maximum Daily Purification Points: 10.

Remaining Offering Value: 0 Gold.

A Construction that converted money into Purification Points. Its advantage was the ability to sustainably generate a steady stream of Purification Points at a low cost—at least with Charles' current funds, he could keep it running for three or four years without issue.

The downside? Its efficiency was painfully slow. Only ten points per day, just over 3,600 a year... and, to make matters worse, only one could be built.

Assuming the Purification Points required for upgrades matched the Experience Points from the game, reaching the maximum Class level—Level 20—would require a total of 350,000 Purification Points.

At this rate, it'd take a century to save up enough!

Fortunately, he was still young and destined to live in this world for a long time. Over the years, this would accumulate into a decent sum...

But it was still too damn slow!

Sigh. He could only hope that as the monastery's level increased, the Altar's efficiency would multiply exponentially.

"Hattie, fetch the offerings from the warehouse," he said, setting aside his grievances. "I've placed the Altar. Once you arrange the items on it, it'll start working on its own."

Hattie nodded and left. Without pause, Charles spent another 100 Purification Points to construct an interior wall within the monastery, dividing different areas to prevent interference.

Next, he invested 200 points to unlock the Level 1 Tailor's Shop, then another 200 to upgrade it to Level 2. He then spent 400 more to establish both a Blacksmith Shop and a Trading Post.

The Tailor's Shop and Blacksmith Shop were placed deep within the monastery, while the Trading Post faced the outer streets—specifically, the side near the District Office.

Outwardly, it appeared to be nothing more than a humble Small Shop, but this way, he could ensure a steady influx of Gold.

Yet, as his Purification Points drained away like water, he soon found himself with only 2,100 remaining—still 1,700 short of the next upgrade...

The thought drew a heavy sigh from him.

Tch. Even if he stopped spending Purification Points entirely from this moment onward, barring some unexpected windfall, he'd still have to wait nearly six months before leveling up again...

But no matter!

This body of his was still young, and there were plenty of things he could do. He could afford to wait—to grow stronger steadily...

"Sephera," he continued giving orders, "you'll oversee the Trading Post. The monastery's expenses and income will still be under your management."

"Ekta, you'll take charge of the Blacksmith Shop. Focus on crafting high-quality cookware and fishing gear—those will sell well."

"Ruth, you'll temporarily manage the Tailor's Shop. Later, I'll describe a few special clothing designs for you to test your skills on..."

"Andny, keep monitoring the slums. See if there are more people near our monastery looking to sell their homes and relocate, then report to Hattie. Our monastery still needs to expand further..."

Every witch had been assigned a task—except Sophia. He was keeping her aside to later Assist him in his studies.

Charles estimated that just mastering his own class's knowledge would take him well into next year.

Sigh. The road ahead was still so long!

Once the arrangements were complete, he looked at the Witches with earnest eyes.

"Whether our monastery thrives or not... depends entirely on your efforts, my dearest ones!"

...

The next morning.

The witches each attended to their duties, and the entire monastery quickly fell into smooth operation. As for Charles himself, he buried himself in the Scriptorium, drafting an exhaustive Study and Exercise Program for his future self:

6:00 AM: Wake up, morning run.

8:00 AM: Begin studying the Eldritch Invocation "Agonizing Blast."

10:00 AM: Another light jog for physical conditioning.

Then return to the Scriptorium to continue studying Eldritch Invocations.

After lunch, a thirty-minute nap.

The afternoon followed the same pattern...

After dinner, two more hours of study, then a bath...

Looking at his meticulously packed schedule, he couldn't help but sigh inwardly:

What an utterly disciplined proposal!

Future me will surely thank present me for working so hard!

But upon reflection, it had been nearly three months since his transmigration. Between studying and Training, his days were packed to the brim—barely any time for rest beyond bathing and sleeping.

Almost no leisure activities to relax his mind, let alone wild celebrations of feasting, drinking, or singing...

Well, except for those "orgies" with the witches.

The thought made him ruefully amused:

I'm living like some ascetic monk!

Before his self-admiration could continue, the mosquito controlled by Andny buzzed by his ear:

"Master, Lady Anno has come to see you again."

Instantly, Charles' eyes lit up—a stark contrast to his reaction when the Porter had visited yesterday. Forget the schedule dictating he should be studying "Agonizing Blast" right now. He pushed back his chair and stood.

"Tell her to wait a moment. I'll be right there!"

With that, he was already out the Door, striding down the garden's gravel path toward the monastery's gates.

At the grand doorway, Anno stood waiting—golden-haired, blue-eyed, her face free of makeup, her long wavy hair tied back simply with a blue ribbon. A delicate leather handbag hung from her arm, and she stood perfectly straight, legs together, patiently awaiting Charles' arrival.

Today, she wasn't clad in her usual heavy plate armor. Instead, she wore a carefully selected, fitted gown of moon-white silk. At the highly emphasized Chest, two rows of pristine pearls were embroidered with golden thread, shimmering like sunlit foam atop turbulent waves—impossible to ignore.

Her eyes brimmed with nervous anticipation, eager for the time she would spend with him today.

Inside the monastery, Charles struggled to appear composed, but his hurried steps betrayed his true feelings. As he pushed open the gates and saw Anno bathed in morning light, the world seemed to brighten around her—like spring's first bloom.

"Apologies for the wait, Lady Anno."

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Chapter 99: Chapter 99: The Blushing Maiden Paladin

It was still early dawn, and Anno's home lay not in the South Harbor District but in the distant Blackstaff District. One could only imagine how early she must have risen to arrive at the monastery at this hour.

As he approached, Anno's beautiful face brightened with an angelic smile. "Not at all, Priest. You flatter me—I've only waited a short while before your arrival."

Her large eyes blinked, long golden lashes catching the sunlight. Her blue eyes shimmered with a gentle, liquid warmth as they lingered on his face—but the moment their gazes met, she suddenly looked down, her cheeks flushing a delicate pink, as if unable to hold his stare. "Priest... I came today to bring you a spellbook."

Ever since that night, Anno had often visited under the pretense of "investigating the Xanathar Guild's past crimes" to question him.

At first, she had been formal—summoning him and the other nuns to a temporary room provided by the District Office, with scribes meticulously recording every word.

But gradually, the "investigations" became little more than an excuse. She no longer called the other nuns, and her questions drifted from gang warfare to the simple rhythms of life in South Harbor. Eventually, even the interrogation room was abandoned, and the two of them would stroll the monastery grounds, speaking of idle things.

Charles, being a seasoned adventurer, knew far more amusing tales than Anno could have imagined—like how "Wanderers are the perfect class—so proclaims the Wanderers' Guild!"—jokes that never failed to make her stifle laughter behind her hand.

He delighted in their conversations. After many such meetings, and considering her noble standing and connections at Blackstaff Tower, he had asked her help in finding spellbooks containing higher-circle magic.

Anno understood perfectly. With the Goddess of Life vanished, her church could no longer ordain new priests. If the faithful wished to defend themselves, they had no choice but to take up the sword or study the arcane.

"Oh? You remembered, Lady Anno? My deepest thanks." Charles's eyes lit up as Anno drew a lambskin-bound spellbook from her satchel. "Time was short, so this is all I've found for now. Tell me, Priest—will it be of use?"

Charles took the book, flipping through its pages—then his heart nearly stopped.

By the gods! It contained 5th-level spells!

Though the true divide lay between the fifth and sixth circles, the third circle marked its own threshold. This book contained spells beyond that first great barrier—making it worth a fortune!

This... this was...

Though not a magical artifact itself, the knowledge within was easily worth 1,000 gold—no, even 2,000 gold would be a fair price!

Thank the heavens he could still afford it.

"Extremely useful!" He nodded earnestly at Anno. "My thanks, Anno. How much for the book?"

When he addressed her so familiarly, Anno's gaze grew evasive. "No cost. It's...well, my father acquired this from a mage friend when he wished me to study spells. It's been sitting unused for years."

Mages didn't need to painstakingly memorize every spell like Charles did to perform magic.

They simply paid gold and spent time transcribing spells into their personal spellbooks, then could cast directly from the pages.

This explained why battlefield mages always appeared with spectacles, a staff in one hand and their spellbook in the other.

Consequently, high-quality spellbooks became crucial for mages. Upon reaching higher levels with sufficient funds, they'd commission superior books and transfer their spells, leaving old tomes—still filled with valuable knowledge—to be sold cheaply.

"I've no use for such things," Anno murmured, her blush now reaching the tips of her ears. "If it helps you, Priest...consider it a gift. As...as thanks for saving us that night..."

Charles couldn't help recalling how differently Anno had carried herself a month ago—battered yet poised. Now she fluttered like a startled dove, her eyes repeatedly darting to his face yet fleeing whenever their gazes met.

He'd grown fond of their private conversations, listening to her soft-spoken work troubles and shared joys, watching her anticipate his reactions with shy delight.

"My gratitude, Lady Anno." Securing the spellbook in his pouch, he gestured inward. "Have you visited our monastery? Might I offer a tour?"

Anno's eyes brightened—she'd been searching for an excuse to stay. "Truly? Wouldn't my presence as an outsider disturb your monastery?"

"But first and foremost, you are a paladin, are you not?" Charles smiled. The Church of the Goddess of Life was not so strict with its rules. "Ah, though if you have official duties to attend to, I mustn't keep you."

He played at reluctance, and just as expected, Anno held her breath, her cheeks flushing.

"No, I... happen to have no pressing matters. In fact, I was just wondering how to spend the rest of the morning."

"Then... I shall trouble the Priest to guide me. I've always been curious... what another church's monastery might look like..."

As she spoke, she stepped forward, falling into stride beside Charles as they passed through the gates and into the monastery, walking along the gravel path of the garden.

The monastery was not large, and its gardens were filled only with common plants—far less impressive than Anno's own private courtyard. Yet at this moment, her mind was not on the scenery at all.

Her full attention was fixed on the figure beside her.

She longed to draw closer, to breathe in his presence—warm and radiant as the sun itself. Yet the teachings of her upbringing compelled her to remain composed, expressing her feelings only in the most indirect ways.

"Over there is our monastery's indoor training grounds," Charles said, casually closing the distance between them until their shoulders and arms nearly touched. "It's well-equipped. Come, I'll show you."

"Ah—! Yes..."

The sudden closeness sent a flutter of panic through Anno. She stammered her agreement, her pulse quickening—yet she did not pull away.

Instead, she allowed herself to be guided, nearly pressed against him, as they walked toward the training grounds together.

Meanwhile, the mosquitoes lingering by the ears of the gathered witches suddenly buzzed in unison, Andny's voice ringing out:

"Sisters! The Master has taken Anno alone—into the training grounds!"

Inside the Training Grounds

"I never would've guessed... From the outside, this room looks utterly ordinary, but inside—gods, it's astonishing!"

Anno's eyes widened as she took in the meticulously arranged metal training equipment, weighted sandbags, blunted weapons, and archery targets lining the walls.

"My own training grounds aren't nearly this well-equipped."

It was no exaggeration. Her private training area had been tailored exclusively for her, designed to hone every essential skill of a paladin.

But the monastery's training grounds—especially now upgraded to Tier 2—catered to all classes, boasting a far more diverse array of equipment.

"What choice do we have? Our numbers are few. To survive, we must be versatile."

Charles chuckled softly, inwardly smug.

"Your approval means our investments weren't wasted. That alone makes it worthwhile."

"'Worthwhile'? This is beyond worthwhile!"

Anno stepped forward, tapping a fingertip against a sword hilt. The crisp ping made her voice quiver with excitement.

"By the Light, this quality... Dwarven make? Or Sein steel?"

In this world, magic existed—but no self-respecting mage would debase themselves with blacksmithing. Thus, ironworking here mirrored the crude methods of antiquity.

Only two factions mass-produced high-quality steel: the dwarves (who'd enslaved a fire elemental lord) and the Empire of Sein (which had genuinely mastered the craft).

Others relied on the "bloomery process," smelting ore into spongy iron, then hammering it endlessly to produce barely functional weapons.

Naturally, this method was slow, exorbitant, and wholly dependent on ore purity—some impurities simply couldn't be beaten out.

High-grade longswords? Rarer than phoenix feathers. Even Anno had only received one after becoming a paladin—a treasure she cherished beyond reason.

Yet here, such steel lay scattered like firewood!

Watching Anno's awe, Charles froze, realizing:

The System's products far surpass this era's crude standards.

Hiss... The System's superiority might dwarf even my wildest estimates.

Wait—does that mean my Blacksmith Shop produces... this same transcendent-grade steel?

The thought sent a thrill through him. With an awkward cough, he deflected:

"Ah, a... friend in the Empire of Sein procured these. Cost me a small fortune."

Unlike the secretive dwarves, the war-torn Empire of Sein leaked resources like a sieve. Corrupt officials smuggled out steel en masse via Liberl Port—how else would Anno own a blade this fine?

Blaming Sein was plausible, untraceable... perfect.

Anno's sapphire eyes gleamed as she studied the wall of longswords and greatswords.

"Priest, are you skilled in sword-and-shield combat?"

Charles nodded. "I know a thing or two."

"Then shall we have a friendly spar?" Her fingers twitched with barely contained excitement at the sight of such fine weapons. "Blunted blades, pure technique—no magic, first touch wins. What do you say?"

Charles weighed the offer for a second, then smiled. "Agreed. First touch it is."

A practice duel would be beneficial—especially in this Tier 2 Training Grounds, where its construction amplified training effects exponentially.

Though the coven had melee specialists like Ruth, her expertise lay in lethal strikes rather than disciplined swordplay. Sophia was all theory, no practice. Until now, Charles had only been able to train alone, with no opportunity to test his skills against a live opponent.

This chance was priceless. Especially against an opponent like Anno—a noble paladin trained since childhood, her technique far surpassing his. With the Training Grounds' enhancement, he might even glean a trick or two from her movements.

They each retrieved a round shield and longsword from the wall. Anno marveled once more at the exceptional craftsmanship before shifting into a combat stance, her expression sharpening.

Charles mirrored her readiness.

"Priest," Anno said, "you first."

He nodded and advanced without ceremony, his shield guarding his torso as his longsword thrust toward her left shoulder.

Anno raised her shield to block—but Charles' blade flicked outward in a fluid arc, bypassing her defense to aim at her throat.

She leaned back just in time, barely avoiding the strike. Charles pressed his advantage, forcing her into a series of unbalanced retreats until—

Clang!

Her shield lashed out, deflecting his sword with a sharp metallic ring. Seizing the opening, Anno swung downward—but he stepped back, resetting the engagement.

First round: Charles, by a narrow margin.

Rather than frustration, Anno's eyes burned brighter. She'd never expected such strength from his slender frame—her attempt to parry had nearly failed!

Unaware of the Hexblade warlock's unique prowess, she attributed it to sheer skill. Her blood sang with the thrill of a worthy opponent, her mind narrowing to a single goal: victory.

"My turn!" She lunged low, her movements fluid as a golden panther. A feint drew his shield up—then she pivoted, driving her shield into his blade with explosive force.

CLANG!

The impact sent Charles' arm wide, wrenching him off-balance. Before he could recover, her boot slammed into his chest—

THUD!

—and he flew backward, hitting the ground hard with a pained "Oof!"

The sound snapped Anno from her battle trance.

What have I done?!

She'd come to bond with him, not beat him senseless!

"Priest!" Horror drenched her as she sheathed her sword and rushed to his side. Holy light flared from her palm. "Lay on Hands—"

Charles caught her wrist, gently pushing it away. "Unnecessary. I'm not made of glass."

He smiled up at her, unharmed—thanks to the Mage Armor beneath his robes.

Anno froze. Then she realized: He's holding my hand.

A scarlet flush consumed her face. "I-I'm sorry, Priest! I got carried away—"

Her pulse roared, palms sweating. The more she floundered for words, the blanker her mind became—until raw impulse took over. Her fingers interlaced with his, locking tight...

Charles blinked up at her. Anno ducked her head, too mortified to meet his gaze—

CREAK.

The Training Grounds' door swung open.

Two tall silhouettes stepped inside.

Hattie and Sephera.

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Chapter 100: Chapter 100: Theresa is back

Among the witches, Hattie was voluptuous while Sephera possessed a slender waist—but both shared the same statuesque height.

Now, standing in the doorway with the sun at their backs, they cast long shadows across the room, covering the two figures on the floor—their fingers still tightly intertwined.

Seeing the newcomers, Charles and Anno sprang apart like scalded cats, scrambling to their feet in flustered disarray.

While Anno merely blushed crimson, Charles' heart hammered against his ribs!

Damn it! Just yesterday I swore I harbored no such desires toward Anno, and now we're caught red-handed!

This... this...

His scalp prickled as he forced out an explanation: "Lady Anno and I were sparring. I may have... overexerted. Though we both learned much from the exchange..."

Truthful, yet woefully inadequate under the circumstances.

Hattie's gentle smile never wavered. "I see. The Priest has VIP guests requiring... private tutelage these days."

"Our apologies for interrupting this special session. We'll inform Sister Sophia to reschedule today's agonizing blast practice—after you've finished... attending to Lady Anno."

With a slight curtsy, she made to leave.

Beads of sweat formed on Charles' brow, but before he could speak, Anno abruptly declared: "Unnecessary, Sister Hattie. Priest Charles, please tend to your duties. I've been absent too long."

Head bowed, cheeks burning, she nearly fled toward the exit—her thoughts too tangled to parse.

Charles watched her retreating figure helplessly when Hattie commanded: "Sephera, escort Lady Anno."

Sephera hesitated momentarily, but unwilling to challenge Hattie's authority publicly, acquiesced with a stiff nod—swallowing this subtle defeat as she followed Anno out.

With their departure, the vast Training Grounds held only Charles and Hattie.

Charles rubbed his nose awkwardly before muttering: "It truly happened as I said. She came to deliver that spellbook I commissioned... I merely offered a tour... That moment was completely accidental."

Hattie chuckled, linking arms with him. "I never doubted you, Master. Even if you lied, you'd have good reasons for discretion."

She rested her head on his shoulder. "Our trust in you transcends all worlds."

Moved, Charles stroked her hair—until Hattie's tone shifted slyly: "Starting tomorrow, I'll increase your meat intake to improve constitution."

"And we should intensify physical training. Unlike us, Lady Anno's a paladin conditioned by daily drills. Should your stamina prove inadequate... well, a man's pride suffers in such situations."

Charles nodded thoughtfully. "Your foresight astounds me, Hattie."

Instantly, her voice dripped honeyed venom: "How telling that you didn't deny it this time."

"Respect'? More like wanting to worship her between bedsheets, no?"

Charles gaped.

Goddammit! Hattie was fishing all along!

And I took the bait!

Watching Hattie's smugly curling lips, he sighed: "Fine... explanations are pointless now."

"But yes... let's schedule that endurance training."

...

Monastery Doorway

Sephera escorted Anno to the monastery's entrance before halting, her smile polite yet distant.

"Lady Anno, forgive me, but given our station, we cannot accompany you further. The rest of your journey must be made alone."

Anno nodded, her composure now regained. As she prepared to take her leave, she hesitated, then—with an almost naive curiosity—asked:

"Ah, Miss Sephera, if I may... what does Priest Charles enjoy? Beyond spellbooks, I mean. Surely, even he must have some pastimes...?"

Sephera, who had been about to turn away, froze mid-step. Flames of indignation flickered behind her eyes.

So this woman really does have designs on Master!

Churches imposed varying constraints upon their clergy—and the Goddess of Life was famously lenient. She scarcely restricted her followers, even encouraging lovestruck believers to pursue romance during divine manifestations, celebrating life's pleasures.

Were it not for the public's broad assumption that nuns must remain unwed (and that those who took vows had forsaken earthly love), suitors for the Goddess of Life's devotees would form lines stretching to the sea.

While ordinary folk might not grasp such nuances, Anno certainly knew. That was why she dared ask so boldly, oblivious to the subtle tension between Charles and the sisters.

In her innocence, Anno believed their bond purely pious—never suspecting the undercurrents of rivalry.

Sephera seethed inwardly, yet her expression remained flawless as she turned back with a practiced smile.

"My apologies, but I couldn't say. The Priest's days are spent in study and training, nothing more."

She spoke truth—after all, "day after day" perfectly described monastery life.

Anno sighed, impressed.

"Priest Charles lives with the discipline of an ascetic monk!"

Reaching this conclusion, Anno's reverence for Charles swelled even deeper. Meanwhile, Sephera wore a smile, her heart seething with venom—until it spilled forth in mocking words:

"Indeed. This was our very purpose for joining the monastery, wasn't it?"

"After all, our Strength is so pitiful. If we neglect our training, gallivanting about and fraternizing with outsiders, what then? When monsters next emerge, we'll fall in battle—only to be trussed up by cultists in most undignified postures!"

Her words were daggers aimed at Anno's scars. She longed to voice cruder, bolder taunts—to provoke the maiden paladin into unseemly fury.

Yet, mindful of the monastery's reputation, she choked back the venom, swallowing every unspeakable syllable.

Alas, Anno—now wholly preoccupied with pondering what gift to bring Charles next—missed every poisoned nuance. She took Sephera's words at face value: This sister is emphasizing Priest Charles's hardships. Her heart ached; her brow furrowed softly. Then—a spark in her mind.

If he trained so relentlessly with sword and shield, his life so arduous, his frame so frail... why not bring him nourishing food next time?

The thought lit her face with clarity. She beamed at Sephera. "Thank you for the reminder, Sister Sephera. I'll take my leave now—until we meet again!"

With that, she spun and hurried off. Sephera's polite smile held until the paladin vanished—then twisted into bafflement.

What just happened? Did she understand me?

If she did, how could she smile?

If she didn't... what exactly did I 'remind' her of?

Uncertainty churned within her—a tempest of confusion and unease.

...

Several more days passed.

After receiving the spellbook from Anno, Charles adjusted his schedule. He skimmed through the entire tome and couldn't help but marvel—though the highest-level spells within were only of the 5th circle, their sheer number surpassed his expectations.

Had he tried to purchase this on the open market, even 2000 gold might not have been enough.

To put it in perspective, a skilled laborer in Liberl Port earned barely 60 gold a month. A modest 80-square-meter home in the South Harbor District rarely cost more than 1000 gold.

Yet Anno had gifted him this priceless spellbook without a second thought. Truly, the gap between Liberl Port's upper echelons and its underbelly was as vast as heaven and earth.

With a sigh, Charles revised his study plan, deciding to master a few 2nd-circle spells before anything else.

At present, his only mastered 2nd-circle spell was Gust of Wind. While he could upcast his 1st-circle spells, they still paled in comparison to true 2nd-circle magic.

For a spellcaster of the 4th level, this was downright embarrassing.

Moreover, the book appeared to have been written by a mage well-versed in adventuring. From Charles's perspective, it contained nearly every practical, battle-tested spell imaginable—learning them would swiftly bolster his combat prowess.

Add to that Sophia's warning that Agonizing Blast was particularly challenging to master, and he promptly shelved his original plan. A few 2nd-circle spells first!

However, mastering 2nd-circle spells proved far more difficult than their 1st-circle counterparts. Even with the dual advantages of Eyes of the Rune Keeper and the 2nd-tier scriptorium, it took him a full week to finally learn one.

Blur.

The spell's effect was simple: it rendered his silhouette hazy, causing him to flicker indistinctly in the eyes of others for 1 minute. This made him exponentially harder to hit—another invaluable defensive tool.

Of course, against foes who relied on senses beyond sight—warriors trained in blindsight, bats navigating by ultrasonic echoes, or oozes perceiving through other means—the spell's utility dwindled. But in the material world, its battlefield value remained undeniable.

"Not bad..."

After mastering it, Charles cast Blur on himself and examined the results in a mirror. Watching his own form waver like a mirage, he gave a satisfied nod.

With this, combined with Mage Armor and the 2nd-circle False Life, ordinary weapons could hardly touch him.

Even against something like a heavy crossbow, layering Armor of Agathys on top would ensure near-impenetrable defense!

The only downside? The mana cost of this protective suite was... steep.

Well, improving his Constitution wouldn't happen overnight. He'd have to make do.

Suppressing his own greed, Charles glanced at the spellbook on his desk and sighed.

A single 2nd-circle spell had taken him a week to master. But what of 3rd-circle spells? 6th? 9th?

At this rate, a single spell might take an eternity!

Ah, how he envied proper wizards—they merely needed to transcribe spells into their spellbooks to wield them in battle, without the agony of memorizing every arcane syllable. Their efficiency dwarfed his own!

Alas, such was the price of choosing the Pact of the Blade for balanced combat strength.

He'd chosen this path. Now, he'd grit his teeth and walk it to the end.

Just as this thought crossed his mind, a new mosquito flitted in through the window—undoubtedly one of Andny's apostles. Spotting the tiny messenger from the corner of his eye, Charles felt a flicker of anticipation.

Who's seeking me out this time?

Please let it be Anno. Anyone but Porter. Though if Porter's here to pay the house deposit in advance... well, she's welcome too.

Who doesn't love a money-bearing guest?

But as the mosquito alighted on his ear, the message it carried shattered his hopes:

"Master! Hide—Theresa's back!"

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