

Elite Mages' Academy

Chapter 51 - Basic Sword Moves

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Wu Qin's post silenced everyone who read it, including those who were eager to see Xiao Lin being ridiculed and those who were simply just curious about the whole thing. If not for the real-name system the forum implemented, all of them would have suspected Xiao Lin of deliberately making that eye-catching post using a fake account.

Then, someone who claimed to be in the same class as Xiao Lin posted a short post, saying that Xiao Lin never did increase his XP during the meditation class. That fact was confirmed by many other people in the class at that time and it was impossible for that to be fake.

"It must be fake! A jump from LVo Basic Meditation to LV1 in just a few minutes? Even if you are a sophomore, you shouldn't pull a fast one on us freshmen!"

"I'm in Xiao Lin's class, and I'll bet my credits that this guy's meditation level is only at LVo!"

"It's not that I don't believe in geniuses, but I heard that even Gu Xiaoyue, who broke the academy's record, needed an entire lesson to get to LV1!"

"Gu Xiaoyue relied on her extraordinary intelligence value to achieve that! What can Xiao Lin rely on when his initial attribute values don't even exceed 10!"

"Senior Sister, you're not being honest!"

"Senior Sister is probably trying to support Xiao Lin!"

"Hehe, Xiao Lin's pretty awesome. He's already managed to woo a sophomore senior in barely a few days of being here!"

"He's probably dependent on her."

Those who responded to Wu Qin's post expressed suspicion and disbelief. The topic soon shifted gradually to speculation about Wu Qin and Xiao Lin's relationship.

Sitting all alone in her dormitory, Wu Qin refreshed the thread repeatedly. Her expression became more and more distorted as she read everything. She could care less about the replies that teased her, but almost everyone who responded clearly told her that Xiao Lin's Basic Meditation really was only LVo, with no XP whatsoever.

Raising Basic Meditation from LVo to LV1 in a few minutes? How laughable!

Wu Qin scratched at her short hair vigorously and had a dazed look after having her worldview so drastically upended. She gritted her teeth and finally decided to post it to the sophomore forum. As one of the sophomore year's underachievers, she believed that those top students—who were dozens of times stronger than her—surely had an explanation for that phenomenon.

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A new week has begun.

Due to the carrot-and-stick approach for attendance, no one dared be late to class anymore. The lessons were the same as the first week, with compulsory courses in the morning and electives in the afternoon.

Their history lesson continued explaining the history of Planet Norma's development. It was quite interesting to listen to if one treated the subject like a novel. Having gone through what happened the week earlier, everyone took the initiative to bring along a notebook. In fact, textbooks were readily available, but the price of 200 redemption points was enough of a disincentive for most.

For their swordsmanship lesson in the afternoon, their tutor Cheng Na was late because of an afternoon nap, but just when everyone thought that the T-rex would not show up, she appeared all of a sudden at around 3 p.m. After discovering that no one in the training hall followed her instruction to train with real swords instead of wooden swords, Cheng Na lashed out immediately.

"Bunch of idiots! Do you think this useless thing is any good for training? Those who reached level three Basic Swordsmanship, please step forward!"

Everyone looked around, but Cheng Ming—as the sole student who reached that level—was the only one who came forward.

Cheng Na asked, "Is progressing your level easy to you, boy?"

"It's very difficult," Cheng Ming shook his head in distress. "Recently, I've had to swing my sword seven or eight times, sometimes even more than a dozen times, just for me to up my XP. Even then it's only by a small amount. Sometimes, my XP won't increase at all. If it continues like this, I really wonder how long will it take to get to level four."

Cheng Na snorted coldly, then waved her right hand in the air. An empty void tore open and a stainless-steel sword appeared in her hand. She pointed the tip of the sword toward Cheng Ming and said, "Come and try me!"

"Again!" Cheng Ming was frustrated. The woman had defeated him so badly the week earlier that he had lost all confidence, but being the earnest person that he was, he bit the bullet and confronted Cheng Na regardless of how reluctant he actually was.

En garde! Swing! Slice!

Cheng Ming's movements flowed smoothly, exactly like how he had been practicing those few days. Cheng Na's expression was very serious, unlike her lax attitude the previous time. She lifted the steel sword and held it close to her, then swung it in a smooth arc. Cheng Ming's attack was

blocked and he staggered back a couple of steps before finally falling to the floor. This time however, the sword did not fly from his grip.

“You’ve made progress and you’re roughly able to exert about ninety percent of your strength,” Cheng Na blankly remarked. Nevertheless, Cheng Ming was elated to hear those words coming from that T-rex’s mouth.

“Take a look at how much your XP has increased.”

“Whoa, it actually increased by one!”

Cheng Ming was stunned. Gaining one XP during training took him much longer, but it was achieved in that short duel with Cheng Na!

Cheng Na ignored the surprised Cheng Ming and turned to everyone else, yelling, “You idiots understand it now, don’t you! As I’ve said before, no other training method is better than actual combat! Also, I can’t stand the sight of your hideous moves. I’ll teach you a systematic way to practice swordsmanship today! Remember, the weapon you’re holding is a sword, not a saber, and most definitely not a wooden stick!”

Xiao Lin was quite surprised that Cheng Na was going to give a lecture, but he soon realized why. If she did not teach anything substantial, she would be quite the useless teacher.

“Are you going to teach us sword skills?” someone asked excitedly.

Cheng Na replied mockingly, “Dream on! The lowest level required to learn sword skills is a level three in Basic Swordsmanship. Aside from Cheng Ming...and Xiao Lin, the rest of you aren’t qualified at all! I’ll only teach a few sword moves. These moves will help you increase your XP quicker and allow you to level up your Basic Swordsmanship!”

Everyone knew that Cheng Ming had reached LV3 in Basic Swordsmanship, but were secretly very surprised when Cheng Na named Xiao Lin as well. As much as they felt like asking about it, they felt that it was inappropriate to do so at that moment.

Xiao Lin was the only one who knew what was going on. Cheng Na knew that he had the Slashing skill, which was still considered a sword skill despite having little practical significance.

“Today I’ll only teach you the eight most basic sword moves. These are: thrust, chop, sprinkle, hang, cloud, jab, burst, and intercept[1]. The beginner and advanced sword skills that you’ll learn in the future will be based on various combinations and permutations of these basic moves.”

Cheng Na paced while holding the steel sword when, all of a sudden, she pointed at a boy not far away and shouted, “You there! What are you doing with that pen and paper? Taking notes? Do you think this is a history lesson? A geography lesson maybe?! Use your mind and body to remember the fundamentals of this action!”

Jumping straight to business, Cheng Na turned around and straightened her posture, then took a deep breath. She held the sword parallel to the floor, then thrust it straight forward, with the sword and her arm forming a perfect straight line. Following that, she suddenly repositioned

herself with the sword tip pointing up, then made a chopping movement by swinging the sword down.

Cheng Na deliberately slowed her actions down so everyone could discern the details of each move. She gradually accelerated her speed from the second repetition onward, up until the fifth repetition. Her movements were fast enough to dazzle them, but at the same time, its smooth execution also left everyone with a lasting impression.

Those were proper sword moves, unlike the usual child's play associated with how they usually trained.

“Let me emphasize again. Practicing with real swords is a must. If I ever find out that you're using those toys again, you won't be as lucky as you are today! I'll kick you out of this training hall!”

[1] 刺剑,劈剑,撩剑,挂剑,云剑,点剑,崩剑,截剑 – these 8 moves are translated to thrust, chop, sprinkle, hang, cloud, jab, burst, and intercept. We name 7 of these moves in reference to The Art of Chinese Swordsmanship by Zhang Yun (1st edition, 1998), while also referring to <http://www.6okok.com/jianshu/chujijian/> to ensure that the moves mentioned by the book tally with each other.

Chapter 52 - Basic Blocking

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Cheng Na left coolly yet again. No one dared to take her words for granted anymore. Their hesitation lasted only a moment and they soon divided themselves into two-person teams in order to start practicing.

All of them had gradually begun to get acquainted with each other after one week. Inadvertently causing injury to a stranger because of misapplied force was one of their greatest worries, especially since they were engaging in one-on-one training with real swords. As a result, the first thing everyone did was look for an acquaintance or a classmate, or at the very least, someone who stayed nearer to them in the dormitories.

None of them took the initiative to seek out talented students. The acting monitors went through the same process and formed pairs after a brief discussion. An awkward problem soon appeared, because a few minutes later, Cheng Ming and Xiao Lin were the only ones left without a partner.

No one dared pair up with Cheng Ming. Aside from his high strength value and LV3 Basic Swordsmanship, his honest and open character did not automatically guarantee that he would not lose his grip and somehow injure his partner. If that happened, redemption points would have to be used for the sake of healing any sustained injuries.

In fact, some people did seek out Xiao Lin in the hopes that he would be a pushover, but he spared no courtesy in rejecting any malicious invitations. He just ordered a magic wand, and was left with only a few redemption points, so he did not want to waste it for no reason whatsoever.

Many of those who invited him to practice with them were students from his own class. Xiao Lin could easily see through their ill intentions—they either wanted to make a fool out of him, or force him to unnecessarily waste his redemption points for treatment.

“Cheng Ming, let’s practice together!” Xiao Lin found it was more reliable to train with an honest person like Cheng Ming.

“Haha! To tell you the truth, I’ve been wanting to try it with you!” Cheng Ming smiled earnestly. “I know your strength is relatively low, and if you accidentally hurt yourself, um, this...this...”

Cheng Ming was probably trying to tell Xiao Lin not to hold it against him if Xiao Lin accidentally got hurt. Everyone understood that accidental injury would result in redemption points being used up, and it was likely that Cheng Ming felt rather awkward bringing that subject up.

What an honest person!

Xiao Lin looked at the stammering Cheng Ming and felt slightly touched. He smiled and said, “Accidental injuries are inevitable in training! In fact, you can try to control your strength just like that T-rex, I mean, the tutor. Every time she makes a move, she controls her strength to the desired level in a very precise manner. That’s swordsmanship too. Just look at all the novels. That’s how they portray it, right? Be at ease and exert control. That’s the sword way’s highest state!”

Cheng Ming’s eyes lit up and he slapped his forehead, saying, “It makes sense! Okay, I’ll control my strength as much as possible, but I’m worried I won’t have it as easy as the instructor. If an accident happens, and you know... Ahem, I hope you’ll forgive me!”

“It’s okay! I don’t mind!”

Several other class monitors nearby looked at Xiao Lin speechlessly. Xiao Lin was clearly reluctant to face Cheng Ming and his strength value of over 20 points because injury would be inevitable. As a result, he deliberately duped Cheng Ming into lowering his strength before practicing, and Cheng Ming was probably the only person who would eat all that up.

No one noticed that Cheng Na was still standing at the door and had not yet left. She stood there quietly for some time, having just wanted to see whether those freshmen were going to slack off on purpose. Having inadvertently eavesdropped on Xiao Lin’s conversation with Cheng Ming, she frowned unexpectedly before leaving.

Practice then began.

As expected, Cheng Ming deliberately restrained his sword strength, but found it difficult to achieve it perfectly. The difference in strength and the Basic Swordsmanship level caused the duo’s training to be almost completely one-sided. Xiao Lin could barely parry away his attacks and could do nothing to fight back.

In reality, practicing with a partner and practicing alone were two completely different concepts. Xiao Lin gradually began to realize that it was not really difficult to practice the tutor’s basic sword moves by himself. Rather, the true test of one’s ability was whether one could find their feet when executing it in actual combat.

When Cheng Ming struck forcefully using the chop move, Xiao Lin had to use the sprinkle maneuver to divert Cheng Ming's strength, and even so, only barely managed to escape injury. It was important to execute the sprinkle move in a standardized manner. For example, the sprinkle move could only be executed at its finest when his strength was concentrated on the front of the blade before drawing it in an arc across his body.

If he used other basic moves, such as point or cloud, or when his sprinkle move was not accurately performed, it would either result in the sword being knocked from Xiao Lin's hand or Cheng Ming's blade giving Xiao Lin a superficial cut.

Fortunately, the wound was very minor, and Cheng Ming did not exert all of his strength as agreed in the beginning. Xiao Lin did not receive treatment immediately. The training hall's treatment system had a detection mechanism in place: it would be forced to start if it discovered a fatal or serious injury, but in the case of minor injuries, the injured person would be asked whether or not medical treatment was required. Xiao Lin refused and gritted his teeth before resuming training.

Those around him could not help but revel in the tragedy with gleeful expressions. The discrepancy in strength between themselves and their partners was not nearly as big as Xiao Lin and Cheng Ming's.

Cheng Ming's moves were swift, and with the help of his LV3 Basic Swordsmanship, he mastered the basic moves Tutor Cheng Na taught equally as quickly. Although he had yet to achieve comprehensive mastery and effortless movement, he could still complete each move in a methodical manner without giving Xiao Lin the slightest chance to fight back.

Xiao Lin smiled bitterly to himself as he practiced. He initially tried to seek out an opportunity to use his Slashing, but evidently, a skill which required time to power up was worthless in actual combat.

An hour and a half passed, and no matter how well Cheng Ming controlled his power, Xiao Lin was already covered with scars. Cheng Ming panted slightly, but did not feel too tired because of his good physical strength. In the end, he could not bear to continue with the practice and kindly said, "Let's take a break! Would you like to be treated first?"

Xiao Lin had long taken off his school uniform and the white t-shirt he wore was already covered with hideous blood stains. Sweat and blood mixed together, making it even more painful when it stuck to the wounds. Xiao Lin did not intend on ignoring Cheng Ming's words on purpose, but the truth of the matter was that he was completely drained of all strength. It took him a while before he spoke weakly, "Heal me!"

The creamy-white beam of light immediately descended from the ceiling and covered Xiao Lin's entire body. It was warm, comfortable, and felt like a hot spring. The wounds and pains all over his body disappeared instantly, and the light faded away after just a few seconds. Save for the blood stains and tears on his shirt, traces of his injuries were all but gone.

"It's mystifying!" Xiao Lin exclaimed, but soon felt another headache coming—the treatment had used up 50 of his redemption points.

Many people in the training hall began to receive treatment with white beams of light, but their injuries were not actually that serious. Of everyone's injuries, many only had minor skin lacerations that came at a cost of 10 to 30 redemption points. Even so, a lot of them regretted it.

"How many redemption points did you use up?" Cheng Ming asked concernedly, with the other acting monitors pricking up their ears immediately.

"Fifty. "

"That much!" Cheng Ming immediately felt guilty and annoyed. "It's all my fault! I really did try my very best to keep my strength value below ten, but it's crazy difficult to get right!"

Although Xiao Lin did not have as accurate an eye as Cheng Na, he felt that Cheng Ming displayed at a strength value between 10 and 20 in those earlier strikes. Coupled with Cheng Ming's LV3 Basic Swordsmanship, it was no surprise that Xiao Lin was beaten up to that extent.

"No, I think I'm the one who should thank you!"

Xiao Lin did not blame the honest Cheng Ming, who had done his utmost best to control his strength. Xiao Lin would have been maimed if Cheng Ming's strength value was more than 20 points.

Xiao Lin glanced at the countless shifty, yet attentive gazes cast on him from all around. He decided that he might as well not hold his voice back and patted Cheng Ming's shoulder very cordially. After a chuckle, he said, "Thanks to you, my Basic Swordsmanship has reached level three, and I even mastered Basic Blocking!"

Chapter 53 - Elemental Affinity

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After one and a half hours of fierce sword fighting, Xiao Lin had to pay a hefty price after his entire body was covered with wounds from Cheng Ming's sword. The cost of treatment was 50 redemption points and he still felt exhausted, even after his injuries were successfully healed. The healing in the training hall was only effective for physical injuries; they did not eliminate inner fatigue. Nevertheless, he gained a lot during that period too.

His Basic Swordsmanship was finally upgraded to LV3, his strength had also risen by one point, and he even gained a pleasant surprise. Xiao Lin received a prompt from the Central Computer, stating that he had successfully mastered Basic Blocking LV1 after repeatedly resisting attacks that surpassed his own power.

Basic Blocking allowed one to use weapons and block the enemy's attacks. The effect was to reduce damage or even avoid damage, making it a defensive skill.

Those who were earlier reveling in Xiao Lin's rough treatment twitched their lips. From the looks of shock and speechlessness throughout the hall, Xiao Lin ascertained that he was probably the only one who had mastered Basic Blocking.

In the Central Computer's explanation, Xiao Lin had successfully resisted attacks that were beyond his own strength. In other words, the strength gap was the main factor, because the gap between other student pairs was not as large as that of his and Cheng Ming's.

In fact, there were only a few times whereby Xiao Lin managed to really successfully block Cheng Ming's attacks. After all, the difference in their strength was too much, and their Basic Swordsmanship was also separated by one level. Most of the time, his sword would either be knocked to the ground or he would suffer a physical injury.

Xiao Lin therefore felt that the learning efficiency his SS-level talent provided played a more critical role, allowing him to master Basic Blocking in such a short amount of time.

"Do you want to continue?" Cheng Ming asked.

"I'm a bit tired. I think I'll head to Basic Meditation now," Xiao Lin said as he rubbed his wrist and smiled. The joints in his wrist were still sore and numb, which made it inconvenient for him to continue practicing swordsmanship. The pressure from training with Cheng Ming was greater than he expected.

After leaving the swordsmanship training hall, Xiao Lin walked directly to the meditation hall in Zone B. Just after turning a corner, he saw Cheng Na in a black leather jacket leaning against the wall, narrowing her eyes at him.

Xiao Lin's face betrayed his shock. He was willing to bet that the woman never actually left the area and was actually observing the training hall in secret. If anyone continued to use wooden swords for training, she would definitely kick that person out of the training hall forever.

"You're going to Li Meiling?" Tutor Cheng Na asked nonchalantly.

Xiao Lin was blank for a moment.

Cheng Na had to rephrase her sentence again. "You're going to the meditation room?"

Only then did Xiao Lin remember that Li Meiling was the name of the Lolita who taught meditation. He then nodded in response to the question.

Cheng Na's expression soured slightly. "Do you know Song Junlang. Head of the logistics department? "

"I guess you could say that," Xiao Lin smiled bitterly and thumbed his nose. He already had a guess as to what the T-rex was going to say.

"I was supposed to ban you from my classroom last week, but then a lot of people called me...and I also received a strongly-worded notification from the student union. In the future, you can choose to come to my classes, or not to. No one will interfere with you again..." Cheng Na did not continue further. A proud person like her would probably think it an insult, and a touch of anger appeared on her flawlessly fair face.

After a while, Cheng Na continued, but in a more indifferent voice. "I hate useless and unproductive people. You can pull some strings with your connections and slack off, but I swear

that people like you will be forced to return to Earth after your freshman year ends. Of course, it might also be possible that your lifespan will be exhausted during the monthly exam. Dawn Academy is a place to realize your true strength, and I don't care who the hell you are. It makes no difference if you're a rich kid from Earth, so you'd better behave yourself!"

"This is a misunderstanding, I was helping Department Head Song complete unprecedented scientific research, so he was... Uh, okay." Xiao Lin could not even when sullenly noticed Cheng Na turn to leave, allowing him only a glimpse of her slim back. Never in his life did he expect to be regarded as a rich kid, and he was unsure whether to laugh or cry after what happened.

Song Junlang promised Xiao Lin to help him coordinate his course schedule so he would not be too tired from rushing here and there because of his absenteeism. He did that in order to free up some time for Xiao Lin, thus enabling the latter to head over to the logistics department and assist in the food therapy experiments. It also gave Xiao Lin—who wanted to cultivate both magic and martial arts—a legitimate reason to attend all his courses. Otherwise he would not be able to afford the punishment that came with skipping classes.

In all honesty, he had no idea what Department Head Song did, but in short, Xiao Lin had gotten the opportunity. He could choose the courses he wanted to go to in the afternoon without hesitating anymore. If a woman as fierce as Cheng Na could not even vent her rage, he believed that the other teachers would not object either.

That was exactly what happened when he went to Li Meiling's meditation room. The sharp-tongued Lolita merely stared at Xiao Lin with an unwelcome gaze. Unfortunately for her, gazes did not kill. Under everyone's puzzled expressions, Xiao Lin calmly chose to sit down in the corner, next to Gu Xiaoyue.

On that day, the students were not left to their own devices to meditate. Like how Cheng Na taught them basic sword moves that morning, if none of the teachers actually taught anything substantial, the academy might as well let the students study by themselves. It would have been much more convenient that way too

"There are four basic elements in the world: water, fire, wind, and earth. I've already mentioned these in the last class, and you've all entered your meditative state too... So, the topic I'm about to talk to today will be elemental affinity!"

As she said that, Xiao Lin made a point to observe the entire meditation room. At least half the students buried their heads in shame, evidently because they had not entered a meditative state yet. Only half of the people actually succeeded after a week, but Li Meiling did not seem too keen on holding back those who were successful.

The course went on still and the Lolita gave everyone a detailed explanation about the definition of elemental affinity; it had many properties, such as the speed of casting spells and the spells' power. Everyone's elemental affinity was different. When first entering a meditative state, the elements in that meditative realm were all jumbled up. In the future however, they had to distinguish each element during the meditation process.

Xiao Lin paid close attention. Compared to pure melee training, he actually preferred the mysticism associated with mysterious spell courses. Whenever he played online games, he usually also chose the mage characters.

At the end of the lesson, Li Meiling gave them some time to practice their meditation again.

Xiao Lin was already at LV1 Basic Meditation. His intelligence value had also increased by one point. He soon entered a meditative state moments after sitting cross-legged.

Meditation was a wonderful state to be in. He was practically free from all his worries, but it could be better described as entering a new microcosm—one that had an abundance of elemental particles.

A person's mind was still very clear during the meditative state. Xiao Lin immediately noticed a long, dark river where the elements were in a fuzzy and messy heap. Countless elements were bound tightly together to form a faint cluster of light, drifting around in a haphazard rhythm.

The elements he felt during the initial meditation were clear and definite, but a simple bit of critical thinking allowed Xiao Lin to understand why. He had replicated the LV10 Basic Meditation skill from Wu Qin, and LV10 also happened to be the highest level for Basic Meditation.

Chapter 54 - The Wand Is Complete

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After all, Basic Meditation LV10 was different from Basic Meditation LV1. LV10 allows meditators to clearly distinguish each element, while those at LV1 could only vaguely perceive the amalgamated elements.

For others, meditation would proceed progressively in stages, but Xiao Lin had experienced LV10 Basic Meditation. Even though it lasted for only three minutes, it etched a lasting and unforgettable impression on his mind.

It was analogous to a top master who suddenly lost all of his martial arts skills and became a beginner again. His experience would surely allow him to practice faster than other beginners. One could say that Xiao Lin's current situation was akin to that example.

If other people meditated by trial-and-error while groping around in the dark, then Xiao Lin's meditation realm already had a beacon of light. Trial-and-error was unnecessary; all he had to do was move straight toward an already clear end goal.

Xiao Lin might not have realized it, but as an SS-level talent, his Academic Genius conferred a huge advantage that was slowly beginning to manifest.

After the lesson ended, Xiao Lin's meditation had increased by 30 XP. It was now Basic Meditation LV1: 80/100.

The speed at which that happened shocked him, even with his 100% efficiency. He had only meditated for an hour, while a genius like Gu Xiaoyue needed two lessons to upgrade her Basic Meditation to LV2. At that speed, Xiao Lin felt that he was not much different from Gu Xiaoyue.

As the students left the meditation room, they unwittingly exchanged their meditation experience with each other. Xiao Lin walked behind and listened silently. He was rather surprised to discover that everyone's meditation realm was actually very different.

For example, after Xiao Lin entered meditation, the realm he perceived was a starry sky similar to a galaxy, where the elements were just like the stars in the sky.

Not everyone's meditation realm was the same—some saw the ocean, the sky, a forest, a desert, or sometimes just a dark hut.

Teacher Li Meiling mentioned that meditation was a manifestation of one's personal consciousness. There were a thousand different interpretations of Hamlet by a thousand different readers, and the same principle applied to meditation. Different people had different consciousness, and it was only natural for them to have a different concept of elemental microcosms.

The Lolita explained meditation from its definition and concept, but she never mentioned a single word about the specific process. It was not that she was incompetent, but rather, her own meditation experience may not be suited for others.

Xiao Lin somewhat understood why spell courses were more difficult to learn than melee courses, and why the number of mages was far less than actual warriors. Such conceptual consciousness was undoubtedly several times more difficult than combat training with real weapons.

"Mages and magic are just so cool!" Xiao Lin could not help but exclaim as he looked at the red sunset.

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Nothing out of the ordinary happened during the second week of lessons and everything was basically the same as the previous week. In other words, the freshmen were still building their foundation, so it was unrealistic to teach them anything too advanced.

The compulsory courses and melee courses did not change much, but there was additional weight training for their Basic Fitness lesson. In particular, everyone realized a significant drop in the rate at which their XP increased after their level of fitness had improved. It was very similar to Basic Swordsmanship in that it was difficult to maintain those same training methods if one wanted to raise one's basic skills to the maximum level.

Therefore, their Basic Fitness class started with weight training. Xiao Lin's Basic Fitness had reached LV2, and his physical fitness had improved to five points. It was nowhere near outstanding, but it could just barely keep up with the level of most ordinary people. The most noticeable change that Xiao Lin sensed was a decrease in his belly fat.

Of course, he also knew that the amazing result owed much more to the therapeutic effect of the hybrid iron comb chicken.

Xiao Lin took the initiative to propose doubling weight training during the class, but the response was very lukewarm because his fitness was completely depleted about halfway through the lesson. Xiao Lin left the training hall and went to the classroom for Basic Perception, and no one stopped him because of his relationship with Department Head Song.

Afternoon classes lasted for four hours, but Xiao Lin only used two for each class. With the help of his Academic Genius talent, the effects of his training were at least on par with everyone else. It was advantageous for him because it allowed him to continue his magic-martial arts dual cultivation.

The Basic Perception class continued to develop the students' hit rate, but no one knew how to use magic at that stage. Those who had a novice wand ran out of juice fairly quickly and were unable to cast energy bombs, just as Lu Renjia mentioned.

Once theoretical knowledge for perception was completed, Xiao Lin's basic perception had reached LV1. From then on however, leveling up necessitated the use of spells. Doing so would also accelerate the rate at which the students could increase their meditation level, as did their Basic Focus lesson during the same week. Most of the time, spell-related courses were for students to conduct their meditation training.

Xiao Lin's elective was Basic Body Technique and he also went for class that week. It was a course that mainly cultivated agility, comprising physical flexibility, physical coordination, and control. The basic lesson was also very simple, and most of the content was familiar training. For example, quick-walking on a balance beam, standing on a balance board, making a perfect landing after doing a trampoline jump, and so on. They were not difficult, but they were still strenuous if one wanted to properly execute them.

If spells relied on intelligence, then close combat relied on physical fitness and strength. Agility comprised a blend of auxiliary attributes, which was why many did not value it that highly and chose not to take it.

Xiao Lin's after-school life did not change much either. In addition to checking the forum at night, he also started doing meditation training in his dormitory, though the efficiency of his meditation was severely reduced because of the daytime fatigue and the fact that he was not inside the dedicated meditation room. Even so, the passive effect of his Academic Genius talent narrowly made up for those deficiencies.

Over the weekend, Xiao Lin received a reply from Lu Renjia, saying that the new ice bullet wand he ordered was successfully completed. Following their agreed-upon location, he went to the third-year's dormitory building, though was unable to enter because he did not have enough authority. As a result, he could only wait at the entrance.

Some suspicion was aroused when a boy in a green freshman uniform came out on patrol in front of the third-year dormitory building. It was not until Lu Renjia hurried out that the passersby felt at ease. Lu Renjia specialized in providing weapons to the freshmen and was considered something of a celebrity among the juniors.

Lu Renjia was very young, and seemed to be younger than Xiao Lin, even though he was in his third-year. Nevertheless, there was no specific age limit for enrolling into Dawn Academy.

Lu Renjia had tousled hair, gold spectacles with thick lenses, and had two dark circles under his eyewear. Xiao Lin sensed the familiar traces of an otaku on the guy.

Chapter 55 - Upcoming Monthly Exam

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The two of them did not exchange many conversations when they met. After the goods were delivered, the young man hoisted his laptop and asked Xiao Lin to pay the balance on the spot. With that, the transaction was completed.

Before leaving, Lu Renjia handed his business card to Xiao Lin. One could see that it was self-made at a glance. In addition to his name and phone number, there was also a rather unattractive business introduction: Custom-made weapons and equipment available made-to-order for freshmen and sophomores.

“This branch of enchantment that I chose is relatively niche, haha.” Lu Renjia smiled shyly.

Of course, Xiao Lin still did not understand what Lu Renjia meant by niche, but he asked out of curiosity, “Did anyone other than me come looking for you to order weapons?”

“Why yes. There’s plenty of rich people in your batch of freshmen,” Lu Renjia licked his dry lips with envy. “More than twenty freshmen have bought equipment here in the past two weeks. Seven or eight of them even asked for custom-made ones.”

As it turned out, Xiao Lin was not the only one who wanted to show off in the upcoming monthly exam. It was likely only those other acting monitors who could get those custom weapons too. Unless anyone achieved Grade S in the admissions test, they could not possibly afford his services.

Xiao Lin repeatedly looked at the wand in his hand as he made his way back. The wand was about half a meter long and had a dark-red wooden handle. A water-blue, fist-sized orb was inlaid on the top of the wand and was slightly cool to the touch.[1]

[Novice wand (Enhanced-type); Attached skill: Ice Bullet; Spell damage evaluation: Grade F; After striking the target, their attack and movement speed will be reduced by 25% for 3 seconds]

Xiao Lin was more or less satisfied with the wand. Upon seeing that it was still early, he decided to go to the training hall to have a feel of releasing the spell.

The academy had prepared a special training hall for students in the spell class, but the hall was empty during the first lesson, when everyone had basically not yet met the requirements for learning spells.

When Xiao Lin went there however, the roar of explosions coming from the hall could be heard from afar. He was obviously not the first person to go there to train spells.

He pushed the door and entered, but hardly anyone was in the hall. More precisely, there were only three individuals including Xiao Lin himself. The other two were Gu Xiaoyue and another long-haired girl in a cape.

Xiao Lin’s arrival caught the eyes of the two girls, but their gazes stopped for less than a second on him before quickly turning to continue focusing on the spell practice at hand.

Gu Xiaoyue was a person of few words, while the other long-haired girl was someone Xiao Lin vaguely had an impression of. He had seen the girl a couple of times in meditation class and also spotted her with Cheng Ming in the lounge area of the dormitory on occasion. She appeared to be an acting class monitor as well, but both sides seemed to have no interest in getting to know each other. As a result, other than remembering how she looked, Xiao Lin never actually said hi to her.

The training hall for spells was different from the large and empty swordsmanship hall. Many single rooms were separated by glass, and each room was about 100 meters long and two or three meters wide. The glass windows clearly looked to have been specially strengthened, as they remained intact despite the dull blasts resulting from the girls' spells.

The biggest problem freshmen faced with spells was the hit rate. Once the spell was released, no one knew what the spell would end up hitting, so the room was designed specifically to prevent accidental injury.

Xiao Lin approached a single room and produced his newly-acquired novice wand, ready to start experimenting. A wand enhanced with spells required only sufficient mental power to release it directly, without requiring the caster himself to learn the spell.

Xiao Lin's main focus of training was his accuracy. He also had to study his current meditation level and intelligence attributes, and how many ice bullets he could cast in rapid succession.

His training used up nearly the entire afternoon, yet his hit rates were still far from satisfactory. His Basic Perception level was not high and he aimed purely by relying on his sight. At most, he was able to accurately achieve 80% of the hit rate against targets within 10 meters.

The limit to his number of uses was worrying too. He could only sustain the spell for a maximum of four times if it was executed in quick succession. It was during the fourth bullet that Xiao Lin saw blackness in front of him and he immediately collapsed to the ground. A few minutes later, he could only barely stand after supporting himself with the glass windows. He would then have to rest outside for at least an hour before going back in to cast more of the spell.

As a Black Iron-rank spell, the Ice Bullet was one level higher than the novice spells in the admissions test and thus consumed much more power.

Xiao Lin now knew that the attributes in Dawn Academy did not represent a certain aspect, but was actually an amalgam of multiple capabilities. The upper limit of his mental power was determined by the value of the intelligence attribute and the level of his Basic Meditation. In light of everything however, his basic intelligence value was still too low.

Basic Meditation also affected the speed at which his mental strength recovered. That was why he had to rest for an hour before continuing to use spells. Students who had not even reached LV1 Basic Meditation could cast spells once or twice, but they subsequently had to rest for a longer time before gradually recovering.

He did not interact with either of the girls throughout the entire afternoon. The long-haired girl, who apparently was the acting monitor, seemed particularly disinterested with Xiao Lin's Ice Bullet. She used a blue ball of light similar to energy bombs but had greater power. Xiao Lin surmised that it might be the upgraded version of the novice-level spell Energy Bomb—the Black Iron-rank Convergent Energy Bomb.

Lu Renjia had also mentioned that the power of the Convergent Energy Bomb had reached a formidable E rating. It was considered to possess the most astonishing power of all the spells of the same level, but its hit rate was extremely low and it took a long time to gather up the energy. Whether or not it was practical was up for debate. Xiao Lin guessed that the girl might have likely commissioned Lu Renjia to make a new, enhanced wand with the Convergent Energy Bomb.

On the other hand, Gu Xiaoyue merely trained her energy bombs throughout the session. The combination of her extremely high intellectual attributes and reasonably good Basic Meditation allowed her to produce energy bombs in a very skillful manner.

One particular aspect that surprised Xiao Lin was that the girl had actually used her bare hands to cast her energy bombs. It meant that Gu Xiaoyue had actually mastered the spell instead of relying on the wand's skills like other people.

A person had to reach at least LV3 Basic Meditation before they could begin to learn the lowest level of novice spells. Xiao Lin remembered that point being mentioned in class, which meant that Gu Xiaoyue's meditation speed was rocket fast.

In addition to shock, Xiao Lin unknowingly developed a curiosity toward Gu Xiaoyue. One could hardly imagine that a silent girl like her would possess such striking magical talent.

He wondered, on more than one occasion, whether the girl actually possessed any hidden talents. Although the two of them were still friends as of then, she would probably not tell anyone else about that sort of thing.

As time passed, life continued at the academy.

After the initial days of the freshman period, most had gradually become accustomed to the Dawn Academy's intensive courses. Once the initial novelty wore off, it was inevitable that everyone had complaints, such as the boring, repetitive courses, and their urgent desire to head off to the new and desirable world the dean described.

During the first month, many people spent their time whining, but because they were left without a choice, they could only endure the suffering. It reached a point where many people even forgot one extremely important event.

On the other hand, the acting monitors—including Xiao Lin—bore in mind the instructor's words from the beginning. At the end of each month, a test similar to the admissions test would be held. That test was also known as the monthly exam. In addition, the results of the two monthly exams would be included in the final exam for their candidacy as true class monitors.

The freshmen would soon be welcoming their first monthly exam.

[1] We admit this fist-sized orb does make the wand seem rather big. There are no problems with respect to its length, but one could argue that this might better be called a scepter in light of that huge orb. However, since there were comparisons made with the wands used in the admission test, it is perhaps better to just say wand here.

Chapter 56 - ttribute Improvement

Chapter 56: Attribute Improvement

[Name: Xiao Lin]

[Student ID: 201235]

[Credits: 40]

[Redemption points: 150+200 (200 points for full attendance)]

[Basic attributes: Strength 5; Agility 3; Intelligence 6; Physique 6]

[Skills mastered: Slashing LV3 (MAX), Basic Swordsmanship LV3, Basic Blocking LV2, Basic Physical Fitness LV3, Basic Common Language Mastery LV2, Basic Perception LV2, Basic Meditation LV3, Basic Body Techniques LV2, Basic Focus LV2, Basic Fire Resistance LV1]

After finishing lessons on the last day of the month, Xiao Lin checked the changes in his attributes in his dormitory room. His total Basic Attribute value of 20 points had doubled from the initial physical examination. If Dawn Academy recruited students with a requirement on a total attribute value of about 20 points, Xiao Lin finally met the minimum standard.

The effect of magic-martial art dual cultivation was incredibly promising in the earlier stages. The XP required for each skill level was relatively small, and generally speaking, he only needed 50 XP to get to LVo from LV1, while going to LV2 from LV1 required only 100 XP. However, going from LV2 to LV3 required 500 XP, and LV3 to LV4 required 1,000 XP.

Xiao Lin had a few basic skills that were promoted to LV2 or LV3. Each upgrade would enhance the basic attributes associated with said skills. As someone who had 100% learning efficiency, he certainly took full advantage of it.

However, the higher the XP, the more difficult it was to upgrade. For example, Xiao Lin had upgraded to LV3 Basic Swordsmanship in the second week, but the latter half of the month had seen a marked decrease in his upgrade speed.

From LV3 onward, pure swordsmanship and slashing movements no longer increased his XP. Even with the Academic Genius talent, the bonus would remain at zero if the base XP increase was 0.

Xiao Lin had to repeatedly practice the foundational sword moves that Cheng Na taught in order to increase his XP, albeit slowly. The T-rex would sometimes be present to guide him, and even though those moves were utterly simple, there were many minutiae which affected the speed at which his XP increased, such as speed and distribution of power. Not a lot of people could execute them perfectly, but it was those details that had the most profound impact.

Of course, Xiao Lin felt that every time Cheng Na suddenly appeared was because she wanted to see if anyone disobeyed her. However, the students had been honestly practicing with real swords in the training hall from the second week onward.

The XP gained through training in pairs was indeed faster than individual training. Cheng Na's personality was rather fierce, but her experience was something to be commended.

Xiao Lin continued practicing with Cheng Ming, and although his Basic Swordsmanship had been upgraded to LV3, he had also mastered Basic Blocking by accident during their repeated clashes. Cheng Ming had gradually become more adept at controlling his strength, and could suppress the power value that he exerted within 15 points. Nevertheless, there remained an insurmountable gap between the two's strength.

Whenever Xiao Lin was badly beaten and covered with cuts, he ended up having to use the training hall's automatic treatment system to heal him. Due to the severity of his injuries, he spent 50 redemption points every time, so much so that he found his points to be insufficient when he finally thought of buying some armor.

As a reward, his Basic Blocking had risen to LV2. There were also others who gradually mastered Basic Blocking, but he was the only one who had raised this skill by two levels.

Unforgettably, his LV1 Basic Fire Resistance was a skill given to him by Song Junlang, the head of the logistics department. On the weekend of the third week, he called Xiao Lin over again and prepared a kind of poultry called Fire Chickens. Unlike turkeys[1] on Earth, Song Junlang's fire chickens were literally birds wreathed with flames. They were also the result of hybridization.

Due to the fire chicken's characteristics, there was no way to cook it and had to be eaten raw. After consuming it, Xiao Lin spent the whole day vomiting and having diarrhea instead of collapsing like the previous time. His legs remained limp until the next day.

As a result, Xiao Lin acquired the brand-new skill of Basic Fire Resistance LV1. An astonished Song Junlang then comforted Xiao Lin by saying that there was no other person in their freshmen year who could possess that skill. The reason for that was because elemental resistance skills were extremely difficult to train, and such courses were often not offered until sophomore year.

Department Head Song felt that the diet's effects were very surprising. He originally thought that eating fire chicken would increase one's intelligence, or produce an elemental affinity toward fire, but in any case, he was very satisfied with the results of the experiment.

Xiao Lin did not waste his weekly opportunities for replication. When possible, he went to the sophomore meditation room to look for Wu Qin and replicate her maxed out Basic Meditation for three minutes' worth of meditation. Nevertheless, as his level improved, the amount of meditation XP that could be increased each time became increasingly less too. He only gained 50 XP by the second time, and 30 after that.

However, he could gradually feel the added benefit to passive skills brought about by the high-level replication after his three-minute meditation. Even though his Basic Meditation would revert back to its original level, Xiao Lin had a more thorough understanding of the microcosmic elements. The most noticeable response to that was his amazingly quick meditation speed, surpassing even the other talented students and becoming only the second in the class after Gu Xiaoyue to reach LV3.

Basic Meditation LV3 was a level where one could already learn novice-level spells. Unfortunately, after he reached that level, there was little time left for Xiao Lin before the monthly exam, so there was no way he could ask for Gu Xiaoyue's tutelage.

With only one day left before the end of the month, Qin Chuan—the instructor who had not been seen for a long time—reappeared and summoned all of Class Seven’s freshmen who had just finished their day’s lessons to the public classroom. He then handed out a few sheets of information.

Ever since the end of the admissions test, Qin Chuan rarely showed up in person other than to answer the freshmen’s doubts within the forum. It was unsurprising, since the so-called instructors were also students and faced a lot of pressure too.

After a month of life in the academy, the freshmen were no longer as naïve and clueless as they were when they first entered the academy. They also knew that Qin Chuan’s term as an instructor was actually only three months, and the comprehensive evaluation of each class after the three months would affect the rewards instructors gained.

Therefore, everyone’s respect toward Qin Chuan had diminished significantly since long ago. They communicated with each other after getting the information and had somewhat disapproving looks.

“I understand that some of you have achieved very good grades in the admissions test, but if you think that the monthly exam is equally as simple, you’re very much mistaken.” After passing all the information over, Qin Chuan took a copy for himself, then walked to the podium and looked unhappily at the students whispering in the audience. His tone gradually became more solemn.

“Information about the monthly exam has never been provided in the past, but after the academy took into account your freshmen’s adjustment period, they decided to hand out all the relevant materials needed for the exam. This is so your life won’t go to waste. You’d best be making the most of it, because this special treatment is only provided to freshmen!”

[1] It is worth nothing that turkey in Mandarin is 火鸡, which can be literally translated to fire chicken (火 = fire, 鸡 = chicken). The name supposedly comes from the red flap of skin under their necks. In this case, Song Junlang’s bird is not a turkey, but a chicken that’s on fire (a literal fire chicken, if you will).

Chapter 57 - Sunset Canyon

Chapter 57: Sunset Canyon

Qin Chuan emphasized the phrase ‘so your life won’t go to waste’, prompting everyone to immediately put on a serious look. One death in the exam would deduct 10 years of their life, but many people were actually quite confused. If Dawn Academy—an academy whose target was to colonize new worlds and ought to have armies or colonists specifically for that purpose—really had the ability to reduce one’s life, why would they needlessly waste the students’ lives in an exam simulation?

However, no one dared express their curiosity because of one reason: all things said and done, everyone still felt nervous regardless of whether their feelings toward the monthly exam was novelty, anticipation, or indifference.

Xiao Lin buried his head and looked at the data book in his hand. The first was a large color map titled Sunset Canyon. It was a topographic map with 1:5000 scale. A series of markers with various symbols were beside the map, and as one could easily guess, it contained strange symbols.

Continuing further with the topographic map, the second piece of information was a text introduction, the contents of which was the background to the map for that monthly exam. It was rather interesting and Xiao Lin looked at it carefully.

‘Sunset Canyon was hot all year round, sporting a very dry climate. The area was inaccessible and infested with heat-resistant desert cryptids. About one-third of the canyon was under the jurisdiction of the Thunder Kingdom. The kingdom garrisoned two light infantry squadrons and one wolf cavalry squadron at its borders.

‘New Century Calendar Year 45. In order to seize control of Planet Norma’s Thunder Kingdom, America’s Judge Academy dispatched their elites to Sunset Canyon for the purposes of infiltrating the kingdom’s borders and obtaining information. Their reconnaissance on the kingdom’s defense was successful, but carelessness betrayed their presence. The Thunder Kingdom dispatched a light infantry squadron and a wolf cavalry squadron to chase and intercept Judge Academy’s squad. A week later, Judge Academy’s squad managed to escape the pursuit, inflict severe damage on the enemy, and bring back intelligence.’

The above was an introduction to Sunset Canyon’s history.

The so-called New Century Calendar was a brand-new calendar set by education institutions who aimed to colonize Planet Norma. Its purpose was to distinguish the years in Planet Norma and Earth.

The New Century Calendar started with the year when the first pioneers made initial contact with Planet Norma. At present, it was year 210 N.C. in the New Century Calendar.

The battle described in the information took place in the Year 45; more than a century ago.

Then, there was one last piece of information, which happened to be the task that the freshmen would be facing during the monthly exam. In that task, the freshmen would be playing the role of America’s Judge Academy.

‘Combat goal: Escape the pursuit of the Thunder Kingdom’s army within a week and arrive at a safe location. Those who complete the mission will get 10 credits and 100 redemption points.

‘Optional tasks:

‘1. Infiltrate the Thunder Kingdom’s border army and draw a map of the area where the troops are stationed. You are successful if the accuracy of your map exceeds 70% and you will get 10 credits as well as 200 redemption points.

‘2. Kill the wolf cavalry squadron’s captain. Reward: 15 credits and 300 redemption points.’

Those were all the contents of that monthly exam. The amount of information contained in the handouts were quite weighty and there was silence throughout the classroom. Everyone either pursed their lips or concentrated quietly, digesting the information.

Indeed, it was vastly different from the admission test!

Xiao Lin somehow understood why Qin Chuan showed up in person to gather everyone together. A similar scenario happened to the other classes, with the instructors giving the freshmen a detailed explanation of the monthly exam.

“If I remember correctly, the Thunder Kingdom is a country that belongs to Planet Norma, right?” Xiao Lin thought for a while and tilted his head toward Gu Xiaoyue.

Gu Xiaoyue pushed the frame of her glasses and whispered, “The Thunder Kingdom is a very small country that lies southeast of Planet Norma’s main continent. In the year 48 N.C., the capital of the Thunder Kingdom was attacked by the American academy and the entire kingdom fell. After close to a century of governance by America, the territory of the former kingdom is now the main colony of the America’s Judge Academy in the New World.”

After a pause, Gu Xiaoyue added, in a crisp tone, “It was mentioned in our history class.”

Xiao Lin coughed a few times. Professor Dai briefly introduced that country in the third week of Planet Norma’s sociology lesson. However, Xiao Lin obviously did not pay much attention in class, and it just so happened that he ate Department Head Song’s fire chicken the previous day. With all the vomiting and diarrhea, he was weak and drowsy throughout the entire lesson.

Xiao Lin changed the subject and said enthusiastically, “They invaded the Thunder Kingdom in 45 N.C. and seized the capital in 48 N.C. It only took them three years to conquer a country. The American academy must be very powerful.”

That particular piece of knowledge had been explained in Professor Dai’s history class, but for freshmen who only just arrived at the academy, the concept of the New Century Calendar was still very vague.

Gu Xiaoyue turned her head again and looked at Xiao Lin with brightened eyes. “The Thunder Kingdom had a population of about one million before it was destroyed by America. The country’s area is about the size of a small to medium-sized city in our country, so their strength is very weak. This was all mentioned in the geography class. ”

Xiao Lin touched his nose and felt a little embarrassed. He had to admit that whenever it came to subjects requiring memorization, such as history and geography, he was hardly on the same level as Gu Xiaoyue, even with his Academic Genius talent.

“Are we really going to the New World for actual combat?” Xiao Lin raised his question to the instructor Qin Chuan.

Qin Chuan looked rather displeased, but the questioner was a class monitor who had the right to put forth their own questions. Meanwhile, Qin Chuan was an instructor whose responsibility was to answer those questions. He therefore suppressed his discomfort and explained, “It’s now 210 N.C., and it’s been about a century since the Thunder Kingdom was destroyed by Judge Academy. It goes without saying that there’s no way we can send you to Planet Norma for your monthly exam. You’re still not yet eligible to enter the New World!”

Many people were disappointed.

Qin Chuan explained, “This so-called monthly exam is to create a completely realistic simulation space for reconnaissance, combat, and other tasks in various environments and under various conditions. It ensures that you are brought into a warzone that resembles the real deal as closely as possible, allowing you to adapt to battles in the New World. I prefer to call these monthly exams exercises rather than exams! It is a preparatory exercise for your future entry into Planet Norma’s colonial army!”

Those remarks gave the entire class a big shock. In comparison, the admissions test was simply a test on a very small scale

As acting class monitor, Xiao Lin continued to ask, “In other words, we’ll be playing the role of Judge Academy in this monthly exam, I mean, this simulated exercise, and we’re to do what they did in the past?”

“Yes! Of course! You can also do better than what they did in the past! For example, when gathering intelligence, one of the mistakes their academy committed was getting detected by the border army’s scouts. That was the reason for the pursuit,” Qin Chuan affirmed.

“But we’re just freshmen. How can we compare to America’s elite students?” someone questioned.

Qin Chuan snorted. “When the earliest colonists invaded Planet Norma, their team was not only small, but they were generally very weak too. Although the team from Judge Academy is remembered as elites, their strength was only around Black Iron and Bronze. Of course, that was already considered outstanding enough at the time.”

“Is it difficult to face an entire army? We have only a few people in one class! By the way, will our entire freshman year be taking the exam together?” someone asked.

Qin Chuan replied somewhat sarcastically. “Dream on. This is an exam that will be taken by each individual class. Look clearly at the combat objectives in the handouts! It’s not asking you to go to war! If you’re proficient enough in history, you’ll know that this was one the most well-known reconnaissance operations in the history of colonization. Judge Academy relied heavily on their findings to push deeply into the heart of the Thunder Kingdom and destroy their elite troops. Until now, many of the world’s colonist academies continue to simulate this battle, be it for freshman or sophomore exams.”

Chapter 58 - Lifewater

Chapter 58: Lifewater

The corners of Xiao Lin’s eyes twitched suddenly. “Freshman or sophomore? What you’re saying is that other colonial academies use the contents of this exam for their sophomores too? Wait, I think that’s it! Back then, the members of Judge Academy had strengths between Black Iron-rank and Bronze-rank, which indicates that the Thunder Kingdom’s army should at least be at this level too. How can an examination of this level be used against freshmen!”

“That isn’t something that concerns you. Even though this monthly exam’s simulated battle will be reconstructed as realistically as possible to actual events, it won’t turn out to be exactly the same.

For example, the formation and location of the kingdom's border troops will be arranged at random. The enemy's strength will also drop to the same level as yours."

Qin Chuan's quick explanation relieved everyone of their worries, but Xiao Lin noticed a solemn and helpless look between the instructor's eyebrows, which left Xiao Lin feeling as though the exam was not as simple as it was made out to be.

Xiao Lin actually had more doubts, but he did not ask any further questions. He felt that an instructor might not know that much anyway, and besides, he had a frosty relationship with Qin Chuan.

After that, Qin Chuan briefly explained the key points to note for the monthly exam, glossing over and even overlooking many of the details that were floating around in everyone's mind.

For example, when entering the exam's simulated environment, they were not allowed to carry any other helpful information other than the weapons and equipment they owned. Even the map and data at hand was disallowed from being brought in, since Judge Academy's team had no map back in the day.

Although allocating maps to freshmen in advance to familiarize everyone with the environment could be considered a surreptitious means to reduce difficulty, the academy obviously did not intend to let the freshmen have it so easy.

In another example, Qin Chuan repeatedly warned everyone that the monthly exam was different from the admissions test. The simulation exercise was very real and 10 years of life would be deducted with each death. In fact, his purpose was not to scare them.

There were still people who found it difficult to accept that regulation. Although a month went by in a rather dull and boring manner, many people had subconsciously treated the place like an ordinary academy.

"There are three objectives in the monthly exam's tasks, but the truth is, there's another task in addition to this: to live! Even if you failed your tasks, it's better to live than to die!"

Qin Chuan's words cast a shadow over many people's minds. There was no death penalty in the admissions test, and many people actually doubted whether the academy would actually implement such cruel regulations. At that point, it seemed inevitable.

Xiao Lin was not too worried about that for the time being. He still had a lot of life left, but he could not help but glance with concern at the indifferent girl beside him. Gu Xiaoyue only had two years of life remaining, and it was something he had always been worried about.

Xiao Lin asked again, "When we enrolled in the academy, you mentioned before that there's a way for us to increase our life expectancy. Can you be more specific?"

"This is also one of the points I'll touch on next." Qin Chuan glanced at Xiao Lin blankly and said, "Yes, Dawn Academy implements a system of simulated monthly exams, and although the difficulty is reduced specifically for freshmen, death is still unavoidable. Lifewater is currently the only item that can supplement one's lost lifespan and even increase one's maximum lifespan."

“Lifewater?”

Whispers were heard throughout the classroom and Xiao Lin asked again. “How do we get it?”

Qin Chuan shrugged it off. “The official store in the forum. It’s easy to find.”

“I’ve visited the official store, but I’ve never even seen it,” someone immediately stood up and retorted. They visited the forums frequently in their spare time, so it was impossible for anyone not to know.

Qin Chuan smiled in disdain. “Do you think lifewater is like a head of Chinese cabbage that you can buy as and when you please? I don’t know much about it, but what I can tell you is that lifewater’s production process is very difficult and complicated. Basic lifewater can only be harvested once every three months. Each bottle is priced at a thousand redemption points. Each bottle can either increase the limit of your life or supplement another a ten-year lifespan. It’s in short supply and the quantity is very limited, so it’s almost impossible to meet the demands of the entire academy. There are times where it’ll be sold out in less than an hour after going for sale. You’re out of luck because the last batch of it was just sold out last month. You’ll have to wait another month to buy it!”

“That’s crazy expensive!” Xiao Lin was a little surprised. The total redemption points one could get after obtaining Grade S in the admissions test was only 800 points. In addition to the 200 points as reward for his perfect attendance, it amounted to exactly 1,000 points. That was only enough to buy one bottle. Those who could not get a high evaluation would likely only have the opportunity to save enough redemption points for lifewater after a couple of months.

Xiao Lin looked at the expressionless Gu Xiaoyue and hesitated to say anything. After all, it was inappropriate to talk about it in class.

“There must be intermediate lifewater and advanced lifewater, right?” Someone noticed the phrase ‘basic’ that Qin Chuan mentioned earlier.

Qin Chuan paused and his tone became a little helpless. “Although basic lifewater can increase your lifespan, it is only limited to a maximum of a hundred years. Between 101 and 150 years of age, you must use intermediate lifewater to achieve the intended effects. Those between 151 and 200 years-old require advanced lifewater. As I said earlier, it takes three months to produce basic lifewater, while intermediate and advanced lifewater takes longer. It’s more expensive, and even scarcer in quantity. There’s no necessity for freshmen to even consider lifewater for a hundred years old and above, because you can’t afford it!”

“What about those over two hundred?” someone asked.

Qin Chuan scoffed, “Two hundred and above? Hmmm, sorry, no colonization academy in this world has the ability to produce lifewater to increase it over two hundred years-old. The only way to surpass two hundred years of life is to go to the New World. If you’re lucky enough to defeat a Legend-level dragon, you’ll stand a chance of getting the kind...of material that can be used to make lifewater!”

Once the key points were all addressed, everyone left the classroom in droves with the data in their hands. Qin Chuan made no mention of the specifics in the monthly exam, and in the end, it was all left to new students to rack their brains.

Taking advantage of the period of time before the dormitory was locked, Xiao Lin hurriedly went to the logistics department. The golden dragon in front of the building was no longer there and he heard that it had been brought back to the New World by the dean.

Department Head Song was fertilizing Chinese cabbages in his vegetable garden. He raised his head and glanced at Xiao Lin, who was panting, then looked at the fertilizer in his hand. He lowered his voice and quietly reminded, “Hush! Don’t say anything. Don’t scare them ”

“Scare who?” Xiao Lin looked around in befuddlement and did not see anyone else, so he walked over and said, “Department Head Song, I’ll be taking my first monthly exam tomorr—”

“Shut up!” Department Head Song whispered furiously.

Suddenly, the cabbage garden began to emit a harsh and sharp howling sound, similar to the cry of a baby. Xiao Lin was startled, especially after discovering that the howling sound was actually coming from the Chinese cabbage within an arm’s length of him.

“Quick! Spray the medicine for me!” Song Junlang gave Xiao Lin a helpless look and hurriedly tossed the fertilizer he was holding. He took out two bottles of pesticide-like substances from the house, then threw one to Xiao Lin and said, “Spray this right now!”

Xiao Lin was a little confused. “What is this?”

Song Junlang explained as he sprayed at the cabbage garden, “This is a powerful hypnotic. It’s the same as the one that was given to you before. Hurry up and quit your nonsense. Spray it now. These are still seedlings, and they’ll lose their nutrients if they are frightened for too long!”

Xiao Lin eyes twitched. The story of spraying hypnotic on cabbages would make for a ludicrously weird story, but he was somewhat immune to the strange hybrid species in Song Junlang’s logistics department. Xiao Lin grabbed the bottle of hypnotics and helped to spray it all over the cabbages.

Chapter 59 - Law

Chapter 59: Law

In the afterglow of the setting sun, the two of them hurriedly got busy for more than ten minutes. After spraying the powerful hypnotic potion, the harsh crying in the vegetable garden finally ceased.

Xiao Lin breathed a sigh of relief and sat down on the ground to rest. He was not tired. Rather, the sound was far too ear-piercing and his eardrums were straining then.

“Thank goodness, thank goodness!” Even Song Junlang was somewhat traumatized.

“These cabbages are living things[1]?”

“Yes, they’re hybrids. I’ll let you try them when your total attributes are higher.”

Xiao Lin shuddered, then immediately shook his head firmly and refused.

“Although you almost messed things up for me, I won’t hold this against you because you helped me. Your dormitory building is going to be locked soon. Time for you to head back!” Department Head Song picked up the empty pot of hypnotics and waved Xiao Lin goodbye.

Xiao Lin was momentarily speechless and immediately called out, “Wait, I didn’t come here to spray hypnotics for you!”

Department Head Song stood still and put his hand to his forehead. He looked as though he was thinking, but he could not remember what Xiao Lin had said earlier.

Xiao Lin could only remind him again, “We’re going to have our first monthly exam tomorrow.”

Department Head Song suddenly clapped his hands, “Oh, okay! Good luck, remember to come to me after you’re done. I recently thought of a species that suits you very well. It can increase the damage of your basic spells...”

“This is the information for this exam.” Seeing as the sun was about to set, Xiao Lin cut through all the nonsense and passed the information about Sunset Canyon that he had just received. He felt that Song Junlang, who was a department head, would definitely be able to help him.

Song Junlang glanced at the information but did not take it. He looked at the red clouds on the horizon and said slowly, “Reconnaissance in Sunset Canyon. The topic was set last week and I’ve known about it all along. After all, I do know someone high-up.”

What followed was a brief silence. After a few minutes, Xiao Lin was forced to speak. “And? Don’t you have anything to say to me?”

Department Head Song was dumbfounded. “Are you asking me for help?”

“Well, duh!”

“I can’t. I’ve never taken the simulated combat exam with this map.” Song Junlang then kept quiet for a while before saying, “Actually, this kind of simulated combat map isn’t suggested for use in freshmen exams.”

“The simulated combat map?”

Song Junlang sighed and spoke as he walked. “There are actually two simulation environments used in exams. One is a reconstruction of the various battles that have happened in colonist history, and the other is created by the academy. The first type is more difficult. Even if there are practical examples in history to refer to, the difficulty often exceeds the strength of candidates because the actual combat environment is full of uncertain factors. In general, freshmen shouldn’t be facing simulated combat.”

Xiao Lin followed behind and could not help but feel angry hearing it. “Why are they using this simulated combat map then if it’s so difficult? Did you know that ten years of our life will be deducted if we die! Why are there such cruel rules when this is a school! Isn’t this an academy to train colonists? If all of us fail the exam, who will colonize the New World!”

The latter point left Xiao Lin angry and agitated, as he was thinking of Gu Xiaoyue, who had only two years left to live. As instructor Qin Chuan mentioned, they would have to wait another month for the next batch of lifewater. In other words, if Gu Xiaoyue perishes in the coming exam, she would die for real!

Although Xiao Lin himself still had several chances to die, who knew how long he would be able to stay in the academy and how many times he would have to go through simulated combat exams like this? Could anyone guarantee that he would not die in the future?

It was both a fear of death and a dissatisfaction with the academy. After venting however, Xiao Lin quickly calmed down and smiled bitterly. “I’m sorry, I shouldn’t be angry with you. I’m just a little unhappy about this.”

Song Junlang stood still, then turned around and looked at Xiao Lin quietly. Then, he asked in an emotionless tone, “Let me ask you this. Who do you think we are?”

“Us? We’re colonists?” Xiao Lin was not quite sure why Department Head Song’s asked that question.

“In that case, what do you think colonists are?” Song Junlang’s tone was very unassuming.

“Conquerors of Planet Norma and establishers of a new world,” Xiao Lin answered very curtly that time. It was what the dean said at the opening ceremony. Those words were practically the motivation and driving force of all the freshmen who studied hard.

“That’s what you call an invasion!” Department Head Song sighed, and when he raised his head a second time, his eyes were a little cold. “The Eight-Nation Alliance during the late Qing Dynasty invaded China. They burnt, killed, looted, and divided China. Have you ever considered that the world’s colonist academies, us included, are actually the same as the original invading forces that destroyed China! When we set foot on the New World, we were destined to be enemies of the natives of Planet Norma. Our hands will be covered with their blood!”

Xiao Lin was stunned. He had not seen it from that angle and he really did not ponder about it in more detail. Song Junlang felt like a more distant person with hardly any of the gentleness he showed in the past. His eyes were filled with an apathy that inspired reverence, and Xiao Lin suddenly remembered the article in Dawn Academy Evening News about the logistics department’s head who had been to the New World and participated in many battles. No one knew the number of New World inhabitants who died at his hands.

Song Junlang’s low and slow voice continued resonating. “Remember, Dawn Academy has never been a welfare institution, let alone a charity. This is a military academy that trains qualified soldiers! If you fail to meet the requirements of the school, is there any difference between you dying right now and you dying in the New World when the time comes?”

Lives would be lost in actual combat exercises on Earth too. If the monthly exam was regarded as analogous to that, then it was actually very normal that some lives would be lost in the process, especially when Dawn Academy had colonization on the mind.

Department Head Song sighed and his tone softened again. “If you have the opportunity to contact any of the foreign academes in the future, you’ll understand that Dawn Academy has actually done a good job in protecting new students. As for the deduction of your life upon death, do you really think that the dean is willing to do that? Even though the academy continues to expand their enrollment quota every year, we’re still at a disadvantage in terms of the number of people on Planet Norma. It’s only as a last resort. Who would want the students to waste their entire lives on the simulation battle?”

The rule of deducting life points was indeed the main reason for Xiao Lin’s displeasure.

Looking at Xiao Lin’s persistent eyes, Song Junlang shook his head reluctantly and sat on the ground. He faced the horizon of the setting sun and said, “A special teacher is the one who’s supposed to be telling you all this when you finally go to the New World, but since you want to know about it so badly, I guess it doesn’t hurt to tell you earlier.”

After thinking for a moment, Song Junlang rephrased his words and said, “In the beginning of colonial history, the pioneers had only one life. In addition, the physical quality of Earth’s people were several levels worse than natives of Planet Norma. They fought terribly in the colonial war... Those pioneers were extremely talented, but the disadvantage in terms of numbers was too great. Many people died just so they could gain a foothold in Norma...until a prodigious pioneer appeared and used his unparalleled powerful talent to create a new law. The specific details of that law are no longer known, but it likely means that anyone who was marked with a special brand will have the power of immortality!”

After a pause, Department Head Song smiled bitterly, “This predecessor of ours has an unprecedented double SS-level talent, and he was also the only one with a clear record of having an SS-level talent. His strength was unimaginable, and although his original intentions were good, he went against natural order when he changed the law of the world. Despite burning his own soul and life as the price to pay for creating this law, he was still unable to fully realize his intentions. He failed to give the world true immortality, and a law like that is bound to bear a massive defect!”

[1] Normal cabbages (that don’t scream) are supposed to be living things too, right?

Chapter 60 - Origins of the Monthly Exam

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The sun had completely descended below the horizon, leaving only a few reddened clouds.

“Before this, let me talk to you a little bit about science and law.” Song Junlang pondered for a moment to construct his sentences and said, “The sun rises in the east. Flowers bloom and wilt. There’s growth, aging, sickness, and death... These natural laws are called laws. We are very much familiar with these laws on Earth and we take them for granted. When the pioneers set foot on Planet Norma, they unexpectedly discovered that they could forcibly change those laws when their

power was strong enough and when they reached a certain level. Of course, changing these laws is extremely difficult, and it comes with an even heavier price. The only one who has been confirmed to have successfully changed the law is our predecessor, who created the law of immortality for colonists all over the world.”

“Then what is the flaw of the law of immortality?” Xiao Lin asked.

“Don’t you already know the flaws? True immortality is impossible to achieve. This law only gives colonists a chance to resurrect. On Planet Norma, where the law has taken effect, all colonists branded by the academy only have their lifespan deducted by twenty years.”

“Wait!” Xiao Lin hurriedly stopped Department Head Song, and asked curiously, “It’s only ten years, wasn’t it? Why twenty?”

Song Junlang replied helplessly. “Let me finish talking... I’m referring to Planet Norma. Although it’s impossible to achieve true immortality, this law is also sufficient in handing us an advantage when we colonize other worlds and fight against other natives... It was not until later that everyone found out the law is not only effective in Planet Norma, but also on Earth, in Dawn Academy, and even when we conduct simulation exercises, which is the so-called monthly exam. This law for the deduction of one’s lifespan remained valid, even in all those places! Everyone, even the predecessor who created this law, was quite surprised with that unexpected result.”

After a moment of silence, Xiao Lin tried to digest all that mind-boggling information about laws. It was still very foreign to him, prompting him to ask, “What if the mark is erased? Can’t we just temporarily erase the mark during a simulated battle?”

Department Head Song smiled bitterly. “It’s not that simple. When the freshmen undergo the initial physical examination, they will actually be automatically engraved with the soul mark. The law affects anyone who has that mark, but a person only has a once-in-a-lifetime chance of ever getting that soul mark. Once erased, it can never be engraved again. Those who are sent back to Earth will only get one chance to live, even if they one day return here.”

Xiao Lin was still puzzled. “Why do we still have the tests then?”

Song Junlang explained, “When this amazing result was first discovered, Dawn Academy immediately terminated all mock exams in order to protect the students who had not graduated. More than ten years later however, Dawn Academy suffered even more losses in the New World. Even the limited amount of lifewater was slowly failing to keep up with the rate of lost lives, and we saw our highest number of casualties during Dawn Academy’s war with the orcs!”

“Casualties?”

“Yes. Death! Ridiculous, isn’t it? Dawn Academy’s deaths increased even more after the resurrection law existed!” Song Junlang shook his head and sighed, “After counting the casualties suffered during the war with the orcs, it was found that more than seventy percent of the deceased were students enrolled after the mock examination was terminated. I’m sure you can guess why.”

Xiao Lin smiled bitterly. “Is it the gap between new recruits and veterans?”

“Correct. New recruits will always make up the largest number of casualties during a war. Everyone knows that because it’s common sense, but no one is willing to bring it up. It’s as though those who trained in the academy for a few years finally stepped out of their ivory towers. They’re just students. They can’t even be considered as soldiers! Even if there was a chance at resurrection, they would quickly waste away their lifespan because they had zero combat experience. Eventually, they died at the hands of the orcs.”

The expression on Department Head Song’s face became slightly more solemn as he mentioned that. “Ever since that war, Dawn Academy officially resumed the simulation exercise system, which is commonly known as the monthly exam. There is no such thing as dying in a simulated battle or dying in the New World. The difference is that Dawn Academy is located in an independent space, and the influence of the law is not as strong than it is on Planet Norma. That is why only ten years of life will be deducted if you die here. If you’re on Planet Norma, twenty years of your life will be deducted!”

A cool breeze struck them and the last afterglow of the setting sun sunk completely in the darkness. Night had fallen, and the two moons—one large and the other small—rose into the night sky.

After hearing about the origins of the monthly exam, Xiao Lin had a mix of emotions. The sky was already dark when he snapped back to his senses and he smiled wryly. By then, the dormitory was surely already locked.

“Spend the night here then!” Song Junlang got up, patted the dirt off his body. He smiled. “I can’t help you in the exam tomorrow. After all, as I just said, it’s better to die once or twice here than dying in the New World in the future.”

“I understand.” Xiao Lin sighed.

“But I can give you some advice.” Department Head Song turned around, thought for a while, then said, “The difficulty of this exam has been reduced in order to give the freshmen a helping hand. As far as I know, most of the enemies you’ll have to face won’t use any skills, but your individual strength is still too low, hence the difficulty! The point to note here is that many of you don’t have any experience, so sh*tty teammates are sometimes more dangerous than a strong opponent.

“Remember your core mission: reconnaissance over combat! Be sure to avoid confrontation, because you can’t hold your own against those enemies, even though their strength has been significantly reduced. The key here is to save your life.

“This task is assessed based on comprehensive strength, wisdom, and teamwork. If your tactics are on point, you don’t even need to fight at all. I think the student union prepared maps for you after weighing the difficulty of your first monthly exam. You must study that map and memorize it. In fact, the difficulty was reduced by at least half after the map was provided.”

“Didn’t you say that you’ve never taken a test with this simulation?” Xiao Lin could not help but mutter.

Song Junlang touched his nose and said somewhat begrudgingly, “Ahem, I haven’t. But this is America’s classic battle, and when I was a guest at Judge Academy, everyone there droned on and on about it for almost a week. It’s hard not to remember it.”

“Thank you!” Xiao Lin was slightly touched, because being able to say all that was more than enough for him.

Song Junlang waved his hand, murmuring as he walked, “If you die, where would I ever find such an obedient candidate for my experiments in the future?”

...

Having declined the diet meal Department Head Song offered, Xiao Lin prepared to go to bed early, but he tossed and turned, finding it difficult to fall asleep. Department Head Song’s words shocked him tremendously and made him think about many things. He lay in bed as his thoughts wandered. He thought about himself, the New World, Gu Xiaoyue, and his first monthly exam.

He was wracked with insomnia that night.

The exam started at eight in the morning, and Xiao Lin, who could not sleep for most of the night, woke up at seven. Once again, he firmly rejected the strange breakfast prepared by Department Head Song, and went back to the dormitory to pack his dagger and his new wand. Then, he arrived early at Class Seven’s public classroom.

There were already a dozen people in the classroom, many of them with dark circles in their eyes. It appeared that Xiao Lin was not the only one who suffered from insomnia the night before. The pressure of death and deduction of their lifespan made everyone look incredibly nervous. Each person tried to strike up a conversation with those around them and attempted to calm their nerves by talking.

Xiao Lin silently went to a corner and placed his weapon on the table. He took out the data and map that was given the day before and studied it carefully. The monthly exam system forbade all that information from being brought into the actual combat environment, which meant that he had to use all his brain power to quickly remember the topographical map of Sunset Canyon.

Xiao Lin had actually gone through it the night before and was just revising it a couple more times to remember it better. At the same time, it also served to pass the time.