

Great Master 501

Chapter 501: When the Bloodline Reigns Supreme, Deformities Abound!

Arthur read through the 'Paladin' cultivation method at a swift pace and determined that the 'Paladin' cultivation method was indeed related to the "Death Soldier Potion".

It wasn't that Arthur had any exceptional insight.

Rather, the potion used in the Fourth Stage of the 'Paladin' cultivation was almost identical to the formula of the "Death Soldier Potion".

The only difference was that the "Death Soldier Potion" contained two additional plants called 'Flame Grass' and 'Warrior Mushroom'.

Arthur was not unfamiliar with these two plants.

Although he had never seen the actual plants, many books from the Mystic Side had mentioned them.

Flame Grass, growing near volcanoes, is one of the 'Fire Lizard's' favorite foods, and many 'Monster Hunters' like to use Flame Grass to bait 'Fire Lizards'.

Of course, 'Relic Explorers' were also very fond of Flame Grass.

Because Flame Grass could repel mosquitoes.

Especially in the dark underground, having a few Flame Grasses could save a lot of trouble when camping.

The taste of Flame Grass was also quite pleasant; the renowned 'Gourmet Explorer' Teriko from the Mystic Side once described the taste of Flame Grass as being like hot peppers drenched in hot oil, crispy, fragrant, spicy, and very satisfying.

Because it had so many uses, Flame Grass was priced at about 100-120 gold notes per plant in the 'Mystic Side Market'.

As for the Warrior Mushroom?

It was once the special product of 'Ankonode' in North County.

In the last days of the Empire, the era when great lords rose together, 'Ankonode' was famed for producing fearless warriors who were unacquainted with fear and unmindful of death.

It made all the lords take notice.

Especially with the emergence of the 'Berserker' Lao, who propelled the name of 'Ankonode' to the pinnacle, but it was also precisely because of this undefeated 'Berserker' whose rationality became distorted that the secret of 'Ankonode' was exposed.

'Warrior Potion'!

That was how people at that time referred to that kind of potion.

Descendants preferred to call it 'Berserker Potion'.

'Ankonode' produced fearless warriors because of the 'Berserker Potion', which could grant immense power in a short time to those who took it, but rationality would uncontrollably degrade, even becoming distorted with continuous use.

Just like the 'Berserker' Lao was.

This 'Berserker' not only slaughtered the entire 'Ankonode', but also destroyed the formula of the 'Berserker Potion' all at once.

It was only known that 'Warrior Mushroom' was one of the primary base materials of the 'Berserker Potion'.

As a result, many Potion Masters began to cultivate 'Warrior Mushroom' in large quantities.

In the potion fields of Potion Masters at the time, there would always be these fist-sized, blood-red 'mushrooms', and even to the present day, the quantity of 'Warrior Mushrooms' is not small.

Therefore, the price is not expensive.

It has consistently remained around 10-11 gold notes.

'Burning life to burst forth with extreme power, huh?'

Arthur thought to himself.

Clearly, during the 'Holy Era', The Holy Court that controlled the world had plenty of time and using the original 'Knight's Cultivation Method', cultivated 'Paladins' who were completely loyal to itself.

However, during the 'Silver Age', the nobles in various lands did not have such time, nor did they have such resources, so they modified the key 'potion part' of the 'Paladin' cultivation method to make it more direct and effective.

Of course, it's also possible that these nobles simply did not possess the 'Paladin' cultivation method, but only part of the potion formula survived.

After all, the wars that erupted at the end of the 'Holy Era' caused many Great Nobles to vanish without a trace, including those known as 'Millennial Nobility'.

As for 'Centennial Nobility'?

They were even more common than carp crossing a river.

Therefore, for those who died after taking the "Death Soldier Potion"?

The nobles cared even less.

In the eyes of the nobles, most people were just consumables.

Even in the 'Pioneer Era', this view still existed among some nobles.

'Arrogance stems from the history of the family!

Because, in the history of the family, there is glory!

Because such glory is built upon bloodline and power!

It's just a pity...

Such bloodline and power, with the passage of time, quickly fades away!'

Arthur thought about the latter part of the 'Silver Age', where muggles were common in noble families, and even some noble families, in order to preserve bloodline purity, only allowed internal family marriages.

And then...

A large number of deformed children were born.

Although there were one or two outstanding individuals,

the pursuit of 'Bloodline Honor' by the nobles had evidently led to this result.

The decline of the 'Silver Age'!

At the very beginning of the 'Silver Age,' some 'Gifted Ones' could only become Knight Squires, but in the early 'Silver Age,' they already had the qualifications to become 'Knights.' By the mid to late 'Silver Age,' such 'Gifted Ones' could even gain 'The Title of Lordship.'

Many have said that even if the 'Seven Years' War' had not erupted, the nobles could not have supported it for many more years.

After all, gunpowder had been invented.

The invention of gunpowder gave commoners the courage to 'rebel.'

Most people recognized this.

Many nobles thought the same.

And Arthur?

He used to think so too.

But with the memories of 'Glast' and the emergence of the name of the 'Witch' Cleaver, doubts began to emerge in Arthur's mind.

It seemed as though an invisible hand was pushing all this.

Pushing towards the end of the 'Silver Age.'

So...

Was the birth of gunpowder also a part of it?

Arthur had no evidence, just pure speculation.

Therefore, he kept silent.

Because of this, he planned to investigate from a different perspective.

But not now,

Now?

Arthur, carrying Pendragon and holding a food box full of treats personally made by Lady Mary, stepped down from the carriage.

"Good afternoon, sir."

"Good afternoon, sir."

As Arthur politely bid farewell to the coachman, Merlin was the first to greet Arthur, while Gawain, standing beside him, imitated Merlin and also greeted Arthur.

Though Gawain tried to appear natural, Arthur could see the child's innate nervousness.

Arthur wasn't surprised by this.

Not every child could be so precocious.

A normal child should act like a normal child.

Moreover, as an 'Alert Line,' Gawain's behavior was even more appropriate.

"I've brought back Lady Mary's pastries—

You can each have a piece, then take another one home with you."

Arthur picked up the food box, a smile emerging on his face.

This was not just sharing.

It was the young 'Spirit Medium' buying people's hearts.

Compared to the complexities of adults, the hearts of children are much simpler.

Seeing the excitement on Merlin and Gawain's faces, Arthur opened the door, let Pendragon roam freely, and then fetched some wax paper from the kitchen to wrap the treats for the two children.

The treats didn't need any distinguishing.

They were all egg tarts.

Two for each, Arthur handed them to Merlin and Gawain.

"Thank you, sir."

The two children thanked him, and Arthur nodded with a smile, his gaze, however, leapt past the two children, towards the outside of the courtyard—a tall, slender lady with white hair, standing at a height of 2 meters, was quietly standing there, watching him with a kind and concerned look.

Arthur was taken aback.

"Who are you?"

Chapter 502: The Man Who Truly Throws Away Thousands in Gold

Facing Arthur's inquiry, Madam Susan's lips revealed a smile unique to elders.

It was different from the amiable and concerned look she had when she was watching him.

Instead, it carried...

A hint of indulgence.

After noticing the smile, Arthur's toes began to fidget inside his boots.

'No way, right? Not another one?'

Good Lord, Grandpa, just how many did you find?'

Arthur was filled with helplessness and couldn't help but grumble inwardly, although on the surface he maintained his etiquette—

"Merlin, take this lady to the Spirit Medium Parlor.

Gawain, pour this lady a cup of clear tea."

Arthur instructed, and then, when he turned to look at the lady, an apologetic expression appeared on his face.

"I'm sorry, my lady.

I've just finished attending a gathering and need to tidy up a bit.

Please wait for a moment."

Arthur spoke thus.

"It's all right, I'll wait for you."

Madam Susan replied with a smile and a nod.

Then, as Merlin led Madam Susan to the Spirit Medium Parlor, Arthur entered the washroom, quickly freshened up, and changed into a set of clean, loose clothing.

By the time Arthur returned to his Spirit Medium Parlor, Madam Susan was standing there, surveying the surroundings of the parlor with a nostalgic look in her eyes.

'Could it be?

Has this lady been here before?

Was Grandpa really so daring?'

These were the guesses in Arthur's mind.

As if sensing Arthur's speculations, Madam Susan smiled and waved her hand.

"This is my first time here, but the arrangement here is similar to what it was when I first met Charlie— at that time, it was in the countryside of Yan Fort.

My family and I were living there temporarily to escape the war.

When I arrived, your grandfather was transforming an abandoned Hunter's cabin. After demolishing the original building, he chopped wood, made charcoal, constructed load-bearing columns, built a weatherproof canopy over the roof, and covered it with thick moss. I secretly observed him for more than two months.

I was stunned by Charlie's hands-on abilities.

At the same time, the frantic me, watching Charlie build the wilderness cabin, involuntarily felt at ease, as if a strange pressure had been lifted.

Then one day, there was a sudden downpour, and I was soaked before I could react.

Charlie kindly invited me into the cabin to take shelter from the rain, served me some delicious tea, and his own baked biscuits. He even made umbrellas out of bamboo..."

Watching the lady in the study, lost in her memories, Arthur really wanted to say to her:

Is it possible that my grandpa was actually after you?

If he left out the parts of the lady's story that were embellished, what Arthur had roughly reconstructed was: Charlie, wandering around Yan Fort, took a fancy to this lady and then succeeded in attracting her!

'Grandpa, you're really something else!'

Although he had never seen this lady in her younger days, based on the occasional display of poise from the current Madam Susan, Arthur was certain that she must have been naive, serene, and gentle back then.

And Old Charlie?

Absolutely a wolf in sheep's clothing.

"Charlie was truly a good man."

The lady gave her sincere evaluation.

Arthur: ...

'Yeah, right, right! Every woman who has had contact with my grandpa says the same thing!

So what if he's handsome, witty, has some knowledge of modern medicine and potions, can distill concentrated sulfuric acid, mix gunpowder, make firearms, lead bullets, machinery, knows a bit about gardening, painting, astrology, tailoring, small crafts, is skilled in some combat, swordsmanship, horsemanship, archery, occasionally cooks, and isn't short on cash?

What's so great about that?'

Arthur began to rant inwardly.

It's not envy.

Certainly not jealousy.

And definitely not sour grapes.

Absolutely not!

"Yes, my grandpa was a good man."

Arthur agreed with the lady's words with a nod.

However, afterward, Arthur saw the lady, who although should be of an advanced age still looked quite youthful, squint her eyes slightly.

"Yes, he was a good man, he was kind to everyone,"

"My cousin, having only met Charlie once, never forgot to ask me about him until her dying day—even though she already had five children, she still looked forward to having dinner with Charlie."

"Then, the lady from Yan Fort directly sold her entire family estate to fund Charlie's travels, becoming the laughing stock of our social circle at the time."

Arthur could see that as the lady spoke those words, her fists clenched tight.

Clearly, the lady's mood was not so wonderful.

At this time, keeping silent was a wise choice.

However, Arthur couldn't help but say,

"The lady from Yan Fort must be an object of envy now!"

Arthur's tone was very certain.

Ever since he knew that Charlie could break his own legs, crawl up to Baron Novita's daughter's balcony, and crawl into her bedroom, Arthur had a rough understanding of what kind of man his grandfather was.

Perhaps most of the time, not too reliable.

But when it came to the ladies, he was quite persistent.

Simply put...

Such a scoundrel, to each lady, it was true love.

How could he let his true love become a mockery?

Madam Susan looked at Arthur in surprise.

The lady was somewhat taken aback by Arthur's confidence in his grandfather's actions, as she knew Old Charlie never mentioned his 'great accomplishments' to his family.

'Family trust, huh?'

The lady thought to herself and then did not deny it.

"Yes, Charlie gave the gold mine he discovered during his travels to that woman from Yan Fort, making the woman, who only had a modest fortune, become the wealthiest woman in Yan Fort. All those who laughed at her now grovel before her, and she even acquired noble status, enjoying unlimited glory,"

As she spoke, a hint of envy emerged in Madam Susan's eyes.

And Arthur?

On the surface, all was calm, as if light clouds breezed across the sky.

Internally, however, there was a storm raging.

'What? A gold mine!

Handing out gold mines to woo women?!

Grandfather, you really went all out wooing them!

That's a gold mine!

Not a pebble on the roadside!

How could you bear to part with it?

Do you know what position our family would be in if we owned such a gold mine?

An opening hand in Mahjong!'

The more agitated he became inside, the calmer Arthur's expression grew, to the point where even a smile appeared on the lips of the young 'Spirit Medium'.

This greatly surprised Madam Susan.

Before, the lady had believed that aside from Old Charlie, nobody could remain indifferent to a gold mine.

Even now, the world only knew that the lady from Yan Fort had discovered the gold mine herself, completely unaware of Old Charlie's existence—as always, Old Charlie had not said much about it and was willing to be the butt of the joke for that woman's 'generosity and kindness.'

At the time, she had more than once felt indignant on behalf of Old Charlie.

She had also questioned the lady on how she could be so content?

'I am willing to exchange all that I have now for Charlie to stay by my side.'

That one sentence from the lady left her speechless.

But she, still felt a bit 'upset.'

So when the lady shared such secret news, it was also to 'vent her anger,' hoping to see Arthur's shocked and surprised expression and to dispel that little bit of resentment.

If Arthur were to get annoyed, that would be even better.

Unfortunately, the lady miscalculated.

Arthur showed no shock, no surprise, and certainly no annoyance but smiled indifferently instead.

Seeing this indifferent smile, an illusion seemed to appear before the lady's eyes, as the silhouette of a certain old scoundrel overlapped with that of the young man in front of her, that voice echoing again in her ears—

'The encounter in the stormy rain made me believe in destiny once more, because you are the greatest gift it has given me.'

'I now believe you are destiny's punishment for me, for we have not parted yet, but it already has me missing you constantly.'

Images of the time before and after the storm flashed through her mind, and Madam Susan's face reddened slightly.

Any small residue of resentment naturally disappeared without a trace.

The lady shook her head slightly, adjusting her emotions, and looked at Arthur seriously, formally saying—

"Arthur, hello!

I am Susan, you can call me Madam Susan... Madam."

"Alright, Grandma Susan."

Chapter 503 Mutual... Sincerity?

Old Charlie never cared how much money he spent pursuing women, he freely gave away an entire gold mine if he felt like it.

Even, it seemed he would gladly exchange his life for it.

So, as Old Charlie's grandson, Arthur believed he should not mind having several grandmothers.

After all—

They were the wings his grandfather had traded his life for.

Wings that helped him soar to great heights!

'Thank you for the gift, Grandfather!'

Arthur sincerely shouted in his heart, his eyes looking at Madam Susan with genuine sincerity.

Arthur certainly knew who Madam Susan was.

The housekeeper for the Countess of South Los.

The most trusted person of the Countess of South Los.

And the most trustworthy person there was.

Whether it be the Countess of South Los herself, the subordinates of the Earl of South Los, or even the members of the South Los Family, they all maintained the due respect towards this lady.

Because it was this lady who had single-handedly pulled the South Los Family back from the brink of a cliff, not to mention stabilizing and reviving the then-fragile South Los into prosperity once more.

In the words of the Female Swordsmanship Chief Julie, without Madam Susan, South Los would have long since been divided and swallowed up.

Thus, after confirming the identity of the lady before him, Arthur showed great sincerity.

It was a visibly deep sincerity, just like when Arthur called her 'Grandma Susan'.

What Madam Susan?

This was Grandma Susan!

And as this Madam Susan listened to how Arthur addressed her, she immediately felt an unparalleled sense of comfort—she had overtaken everyone else.

Except for...

That guy.

Whenever she thought of that guy, Madam Susan couldn't help but let out a sigh.

Even she had no chance against that guy.

How could she possibly win against someone who had already died?

She didn't have the means to go to 'The Eternal Resting Land', did she?

Furthermore, even if she went there, it would be useless.

That place belonged to 'Death'.

To barge in there uninvited would only invite death itself.

Beyond that?

It was a more tragic death.

Since ancient times, there have been far too many examples to prove that mortals have no chance against 'Death'.

Even those known as demigods, the 'Ascend Steppers', are the same in their early stages.

But even if an 'Ascend Stepper' reaches the intermediate phase, or even high ranks like the 'Seventh Order' and above, their chances against 'Death' are still slim.

All they have is a faint ability to protect themselves.

The essence of gods and demigods is distinct.

"How has Charlie been doing recently?"

After letting out a sigh inwardly, Madam Susan asked directly.

"Grandfather went to Barny a while back, and now, he should be traveling around," replied Arthur frankly.

As for covering for Old Charlie?

There was no need.

He believed his grandfather could handle everything.

Indeed, it was so.

Madam Susan was not surprised to hear about Barny, she even smirked disdainfully, clearly not taking Selina of Barny seriously at all.

"Hmmp, barbarian."

Madam Susan snorted softly.

Then, with a raise of her hand, a box appeared in it.

She did not hand it to Arthur personally but placed it on the table in the Spirit Medium Parlor instead.

"Inside this box is the 'Cat Faction. Orange' initiation ritual map: Great Orange!

And also included are the corresponding base materials 'Phantom Stomach' required for using the map.

Lord Count originally wanted to exchange this entry-level atlas for your voyage— The recent appearance of three unfamiliar 'Ascend Steppers' had made the Lord Count vigilant once more.

The South Los House was not truly prepared.

So they needed time to develop and leave a way out.

Conveniently, the previous pirate's appearance provided Lord Count with a perfect excuse, and Arthur, you're sufficiently 'inconspicuous', which is why Lord Count is very keen on having you go there.

Of course, the public proclamation is that it's a test for your impending role as head of the '16th Staff Group'."

Without the slightest concealment, the lady revealed the original plan directly.

And Arthur, who was listening attentively, couldn't help but admire this lady's astuteness within his heart.

It wasn't that the plan mentioned by the lady was particularly astute, but the conversation technique of the woman before him—using Old Charlie as the medium to create a chain that linked them together and then employing a 'genuine' conversation technique based on sincerity—was truly impressive.

Not to mention anything else, the sheer 'sincerity' was enough to conquer most people.

Moreover, Arthur was certain that the lady must have done her homework on him before coming, knowing from minor details about the part of his personality that 'dislikes trouble', which is why she chose this straightforward conversation technique.

Of course, this did not mean the lady's feelings for Old Charlie were false.

On the contrary, it meant that the lady truly loved Old Charlie.

And it was because of such love that the lady chose this kind of sincerity.

Even more so, this part was the key.

Without Old Charlie, this lady would definitely not have made such a 'concession'.

Knowing this in his heart, Arthur's eyes shone with even greater sincerity.

The young 'Spirit Medium' did not speak but waited for Madam Susan to continue.

Because the young 'Spirit Medium' knew that a turning point was coming.

In fact, it was indeed the case—

"However, the news you had Julie bring back caused Lord Count much distress.

For this reason, our Lord Count had no choice but to change the original plan.

Just before I left, Lord Count was so angry that he kicked the table leg with his foot."

Madam Susan said this and began to laugh.

Kicking the table leg with his foot?

Is that some childish behavior?

Arthur, in turn, showed his astonishment to camouflage his own puzzlement.

The news he had the Female Swordmaster bring back was about Marinda's 'pregnancy', and her intention to drop out of the Inner Bay Swordsmanship Competition—a message that Arthur would not think was influential enough to make the Countess change her original intentions, unless...

Arthur suddenly had a guess in his heart.

But he spoke aloud.

"Lord Count is full of surprises. I've seen the letters of employment drafted by Lord Count, and the rounded, ornamental script left a deep impression on me, very delicate, calm, and gentle."

"Lord Count does have a secretary."

Madam Susan laughed.

"I see."

Arthur suddenly said.

"Lord Count's temper may not be good, but she's not a bad person. She has the innocence of a young girl and all the goodness that a young girl should have."

So when confronted with such unexpected events that she shouldn't have to deal with, she always resorts to childish ways to express her anger.

If possible, I would take you to meet Lord Count."

Madam Susan's smile became even more amiable.

But Arthur began to feel uneasy.

For some reason, he got the impression of being set up for an arranged meeting.

'Could this lady be trying to match me with Mother Tigress?

I do have Marinda publicly though, don't I?'

Thinking this, Arthur immediately said.

"Of course, I look forward to meeting with Lord Count. Marinda has mentioned Lord Count to me more than once, and she admires her immensely—apart from praising me, no one else has received such admiration from her."

An arranged meeting is out of the question.

Even if it's the master of South Los.

It's a good thing I have Marinda as a shield.

Madam Susan's smile widened a bit more.

The lady did not dwell further on this matter and directly said.

"The news just came that His Highness, the Grand Duke of the Inner Bay, has announced that the champion of this 'South County Swordsmanship Competition' will receive a title and lands."

Arthur appeared startled on the surface, but deep down he breathed a sigh of relief—

"So that's it!"

Chapter 504 Follow 'Balance' for Endless Benefits!

Amid the conversation, a look of sudden realization appeared on Arthur's face.

This realization was not feigned.

It was genuinely sparked by something.

For instance...

His "mother," a descendant of Islan.

For family members stranded outside, the Golden Lion Family clearly cared a great deal.

Especially when a family member as outstanding as Arthur was born, the Golden Lion Family did not mind showing their "sincerity" — he was well aware, able to feel this "sincerity."

'Alvis, pretending to be Dorn, did not make such a decision!

However, Alvis's elders held a higher status within the Golden Lion Family than imagined, being able to react so swiftly.

It's just unknown how the Old Lion reacted?

Most likely, he was not pleased?'

Arthur thought to himself.

After all, "Glast" disguising as "Gillgick" was protecting a descendant of the Golden Lion Family not from the Old Lion's branch.

Thus, Arthur could completely guess the unpleasant expression on the Old Lion's face when he heard the news.

At the same time, it was also confirmed that the protected branch of descendants held significant weight within the Golden Lion Family.

Therefore, the Old Lion compromised.

By increasing the rewards for the champion of the "South County Swordsmanship Competition," he "invited" him to Inner Bay, then identified his identity.

If he was genuine, then he would be the champion, earning titles and lands.

If not, he would end up with nowhere to bury his body.

Of course, the Old Lion's offering of titles and lands was also contemplative.

Clearly, the Old Lion did not intend to truly let him rejoin the Golden Lion Family but provided the reward as a means of pacification.

Why?

The Old Lion was old, but he had sons.

More than one.

Though occasional conflicts arose, it was all "family matters."

But once outsiders got involved, the situation changed.

The Old Lion absolutely did not want his sons to face another competitor with extraordinary Talent.

Meanwhile, the other branch hoped to control the great powers of the Golden Lion Family through Arthur's competition, and therefore, they ardently supported him.

'Tch, lions are feline animals, right?

As the Leader of the Cat Sect, taking charge of the Golden Lion Family is perfectly reasonable!

And doesn't the 'Golden Lion Cat' contain the words 'Golden Lion'?

Plus two more words!'

Arthur thought to himself.

Regarding taking charge of the Golden Lion Family, with the unexpected appearance of this branch of 'clansmen,' Arthur originally only had a ten percent confidence in deceiving the Golden Lion Family.

And now?

He suddenly gained an additional twenty percent!

This branch of 'clansmen' naturally fell short against the Old Lion; otherwise, they wouldn't have agreed to the Old Lion's decision of granting 'titles and lands.'

But what does that matter?

As long as he demonstrates real 'Talent,' the Golden Lion Family will definitely be his.

At worst...

He would just have to get rid of all the Old Lion's sons.

Of course, this was the worst-case scenario.

Arthur hoped to take over his family in an upright and rightful manner!

Just like a lion!

But before that, he must complete his exploration of 'Glast's' foothold.

'Hope it gives me an additional ten percent chance of winning!'

Arthur thought to himself while he spoke aloud.

"The Old Lion really is generous."

Hearing Arthur's remark, Madam Susan simply shook her head.

"The Old Lion didn't just willingly do this, but he had to,"

After Lord Count offered the title of 'Knight' as a reward for the champion, that Old Lion, even just to maintain his reputation as 'the foremost in South County,' had to devise a corresponding strategy.

He certainly wouldn't tolerate losing to Lord Count and letting him steal all the limelight.

Moreover, this was an excellent opportunity to plant his own people—

Joel Colman!

Recognized in Inner Bay as the strongest among the younger generation, his Talent and strength were said to be once in a century. Although of common origin, he had been by the Old Lion's side since he was young.

The Old Lion more than once said that Joel Colman would become the Guard Commander for his eldest son, Gleisa.

Not long ago, someone had already started comparing you to this Joel Colman,"

Madam Susan said as she looked towards Arthur, a smile appearing at the corner of her mouth.

It was a smile that seemed to enjoy watching the drama unfold.

Clearly, in her heart, this so-called Joel Colman was far inferior to Arthur.

Arthur had heard of this Joel Colman.

At Yumir Manor, two true Noble boys, Jimte and Kalal, had mentioned him and candidly stated that he was definitely a hot favorite for the South County Swordsmanship Competition.

But that was about it, Arthur still wasn't familiar with Joel Colman.

Despite his famous reputation, the man himself remained quite a Mystery.

Even Jimte and Kalal didn't know much, only that he had escaped from the hands of an 'Entrant' when he was just fifteen, two years ago.

Because of this, Joel Colman was reputed as the foremost among the younger generation in Inner Bay.

"I look forward to crossing swords with Sir Joel Colman."

Arthur said.

He maintained a kind of humility and also directly accepted Madam Susan's proposal.

In response, Madam Susan smiled and nodded lightly.

"Joel Colman is very likely a hitman cautiously nurtured by the Old Lion Family—the Golden Lion Family loves doing this.

They very much enjoy cultivating talented individuals, then, at the moment these talents shine brightly, they pledge loyalty to the Old Lion Family to enhance the family's honor.

It's despicable!"

Madam Susan expressed her disdain.

Then, when she looked back at Arthur, a smile naturally formed in her eyes again.

"Arthur, you accepted Lord Count's request.

In the matter of the pirate suppression that follows, I will help you obtain the reward you deserve from Lord Count—definitely the kind that will satisfy you.

Also, once you leave South Los, I will take care of the properties belonging to you and Marinda."

Having said that, the lady rose and walked out.

Arthur followed her, watching as she boarded her carriage, and only after the carriage had disappeared without a trace did he turn and head back to No. 2 Cork Street.

'Cultivating talented individuals to pledge loyalty and enhance honor?

Hasn't the South Los Family always been doing the same?

It was Marinda before, and now it's me.'

Arthur ridiculed himself while shrugging his shoulders.

Upon confirming that Madam Susan was the chief steward of the South Los Family, Arthur could never regard her simply as 'family.'

Perhaps the 'relationship' with his grandfather still existed.

But her identity as the chief steward of the South Los Family also remained.

Therefore, she would certainly 'balance' the two.

Just like the Old Lion balancing his own interests with the family's other factions through 'titles and territories.'

And him?

He was also seeking a balance that allowed for steady development without taking too many risks.

Everyone was playing by the rules of the game.

Thus, Arthur was a fish in water.

Arthur was well aware of this and naturally wouldn't disrupt it,

Especially when there were significant benefits to be had!

Arthur looked at the box on the desk, which contained the 'Cat Sect. Great Orange' Entry-level Atlas and the component 'Phantom Stomach,' carefully checking it before opening the box.

And as he opened the box and picked up the scroll that recorded the Entry-level Chart, a look of surprise flashed through Arthur's eyes—

'Can this even work?!'

Chapter 505: Entry-level Atlas: Great Orange!

When Arthur picked up the Entry-level Atlas "Great Orange," text started to appear in front of him—

[Evaluating Entry-level Atlas 'Great Orange' ...]

[Possessing 'Phantom Stomach,' evaluation passed!]

[Possessing the Ritual 'Orange Cat,' evaluation passed!]

[The 'Orange Cat' Ritual has not reached High Tier, would you like to use 4000 XP to supplement it?]

...

[Evaluating the 'Orange Cat' Ritual...]

[Physique, evaluation passed!]

[Spirituality, evaluation passed!]

[Evaluating the 'Orange Cat' Ritual, capable of reaching its ultimate state, would you like to use 9999 XP?]

...

Arthur looked at the text prompts before his eyes, filled with surprise.

After a 'Ritual' is conducted, it takes time to accumulate before it can wholly transform the participant.

Not just the "Orange Cat," but rituals from other schools and forces are the same.

This, Arthur knew.

It was not only because the special effects "Ordination," "Feast," and "Golden Thread" that appeared after completing the "Orange Cat" Ritual were telling Arthur this, but also due to those records in the books of the Mystic Side.

Even, to some extent, Arthur could say he had a fresh memory—

By browsing through the Mystic Side books moved back from Yumir Manor, Arthur learned of a ritual called "Tortoiseshell Lifespan."

This ritual provided a mediocre enhancement to the [Physique] and balanced [Spirituality] but could greatly extend the lifespan of the one performing the ritual.

With each passing month, the life of the ritualist would increase by an additional six months.

Simply put, live one year, gain six years.

This kind of gift went on up to a thousand years.

But regrettably, not a single performer of the 'Tortoiseshell Lifespan' Ritual truly lived up to a thousand years.

Because—

Hunting!

Although they obtained long lives, the Mystic Side Persons who performed the 'Tortoiseshell Lifespan' Ritual were not undying, and compared to those who performed other rituals, these bearers with mediocre [Physique] and [Spirituality] were truly weak.

Thus, the evil in people's hearts began to surface.

Of course, this manifestation of evil was very clandestine.

However, once the rumor that 'drinking the fresh blood of those who performed the 'Tortoiseshell Lifespan' Ritual could prolong life' spread, this evil just exploded.

Envy towards those with longevity!

A desire for their own extended lifespan!

This led other Mystic Side Persons to begin a massacre of those who had conducted the 'Tortoiseshell Lifespan' Ritual.

And as a result, almost at the end of the Empire's era, the 'Tortoiseshell Lifespan' Ritual was lost.

Of course, the clarity with which Arthur remembered it was not only due to the distinctiveness of the 'Tortoiseshell Lifespan' Ritual but also because the author of that book had a friend who had performed the 'Tortoiseshell Lifespan' Ritual. The author marveled at the magic and greatness of this ritual and then...

When he himself was old and frail, he killed his friend who had performed the 'Tortoiseshell Lifespan' Ritual.

'I deeply regret doing this.

But if given another chance, I would do it again.

Because every time I saw him full of vitality and then looked at my decrepit self, I felt disgusted!

I detested myself!

And even more, I detested my friend!

I felt my envy and rage had swallowed me whole!

So, I killed him.

And, I chose to drink his blood—rumor had it that the fresh blood of someone who conducted the 'Tortoiseshell Lifespan' Ritual could increase another's lifespan...

Unfortunately, it was just a rumor.

I drank all his blood, but my lifespan did not increase.

On the day I had foreseen, I was forced to meet death.

Clearly, it was another "a musk deer dies for its own musk" story.

However, Arthur did remember the author of this book, 'Anteil'.

At the same time, he etched into his mind the phrase 'conducting a ritual is just a beginning'.

Therefore, Arthur wasn't surprised by the time accumulation required for the "Orange Cat" to be supplemented by XP; instead, he felt a sense of delight.

What truly surprised Arthur was the following line.

'The ultimate state of the "Orange Cat"?'

Subconsciously, Arthur thought of the 'Golden Lion Cat' who had obliterated the Pope of the Holy Empire with punches as fast as the speed of light!

Could it be that the other party was so out of the ordinary because they had reached the ultimate state through a 'ritual'?

Very likely!

The ultimate state of the "Orange Cat" brought about a different "Great Orange"!

Then, having reached the ultimate state of "Great Orange", it led to a different kind of 'Ascend Step'!

In the end, they obtained that invincible 'Physique', with punches as fast as the speed of light!

Having thought this, Arthur didn't hesitate to directly open the Entry-level Atlas of "Great Orange".

His XP wasn't enough.

But that didn't stop him from taking a look in advance.

Then...

Arthur froze.

A pudgy and adorably clumsy Orange Cat lay sprawled on its back, beneath which lay a shattered bed and a dragon, fierce tiger, raging bear, and lone wolf, all unable to move.

The dragon opened its mouth wide, wanting to breathe fire, but could only emit a little smoke.

The fierce tiger dug its front claws into the ground, trying to prop up its upper body, but the earth was broken, rendering its efforts useless.

The raging bear was the same, renowned for its strength, trying to push the Orange Cat off with all four limbs, only to end up panting heavily with exhaustion.

The lone wolf simply lay flat, its eyes rolled back like a dog, frothing at the mouth.

And on a tree not too far away, a black Crow was peeping at everything.

In the bushes below the tree, a little snake was wiggling away.

'This...'

Arthur looked closely at this picture, somewhat at a loss for the right way to express his emotions.

Looking at that proud, disdainful yet slightly adorable fat orange face, for some reason, he involuntarily heard the echoing phrase in his ears: 'I am EMO.'

'Is this the Entry-level Atlas?'

Arthur mused to himself.

To be honest, the Entry-level Atlas before him and the one he had imagined were quite different.

In Arthur's mind, the Entry-level Atlas should have been the sort that contained the way of Ascension yet concealed deadly traps, and if a bit more sinister, it could even bewitch the viewer into unconsciously choosing to Ascend. Then, the flesh and soul of those who failed in Ascension would be absorbed by the Atlas.

There should even be a distinction between true and false Entry-level Atlases.

The true one would contain the way of Ascension and hidden dangers.

The false one would be riddled with death traps leading to almost certain death, existing to absorb the flesh and souls of the failed, thereby nurturing the real 'Entry-level Atlas'.

And within this, there must be some grand conspiracy hidden.

But reality...

Colored pencil drawings.

Life-like, yet so ordinary.

'Could my Entry-level Atlas be a fake?'

Even though Arthur knew with certainty that the Earl of South Los wouldn't offer a fake, this thought still involuntarily surfaced in his mind.

Subconsciously, Arthur began to examine this Entry-level Atlas with a more serious attitude.

And then, Arthur indeed made a discovery.

In the bushes depicted in this Entry-level Atlas, Arthur found a name—

Hercules.

Chapter 506

...

The shrubbery depicted in the entry-level atlas intertwined in lush abundance, subtly revealing the name of the "God of Potions" and the "God of Alchemy."

Although obscured, a detailed inspection would surely uncover it.

Arthur compared it with his notes and confirmed that it was indeed Hercules' handwriting.

At the same time, seeing the master's signature in person, Arthur felt a sense of relief regarding the entry-level atlas before him.

It seemed that an entry-level atlas drawn by such a master should indeed look like this.

'Since the entry-level atlas is like this, then the "Phantom Stomach"...'

Arthur thought to himself and picked up the "Phantom Stomach," which somewhat resembled a sachet.

[Name: Phantom Stomach]

[Type: Other Items]

[Quality: Secret Technique]

[Attributes: Special trait space base material]

[Remarks: This is the stomach of a Phantom Whale, possessing exceptional potential. It can serve as a base for magic potions and alchemy, material for forging, and even as a base for rituals, but this is provided that you have a very high level of skill in potions, alchemy, and forging.]

...

'Whales and cats, spatial stomach, should I say as expected of you?

Master Hercules!'

Arthur was well aware of the master's penchant for playful pranks.

And now?

He had an even deeper understanding.

After all, the Great Orange needs fish for its promotion, isn't it justifiable?

But...

A spatial stomach!

Arthur almost couldn't hold it together.

Was this a preparation for a meal that would bankrupt a small treasury, to then wash dishes to repay the debt?

'Heh, within the great orange's stomach? No, no, no, the Great Orange is of utmost importance!'

Arthur rubbed his temples, continuously complaining to himself.

After several minutes of complaints, Arthur finally calmed down.

The young 'Spirit Medium' sat in the chair, beginning to ponder.

If there was the option of reaching the ultimate 9999 XP, then the high-tier option of 4000 XP could be discarded.

Arthur was not a perfectionist.

But if he could be stronger, he definitely wouldn't mind.

The only issue was the XP gap...

It got even bigger!

Of course, Arthur could also take his time to slowly accumulate it.

Unfortunately, he just didn't have the time.

'To exchange resources for time...

So costly!'

Arthur sighed in his mind, then neatly put away the "Great Orange" entry-level atlas and "Phantom Stomach," stretched lazily, and prepared to catch up on sleep.

Kuliqi and Kiri lay in the hallway.

Fujin stood with his eyes closed in the attic.

Wuni acted as a sentinel on top of the roof.

Pendragon naturally was in his arms.

Soon, Arthur's breathing became deep and steady.

Everything indicated that Arthur had fallen asleep.

...

When Madam Susan rode in her carriage back to Earl of South Los' Mansion, she clearly sensed Arthur in deep slumber, and that one "lingering thought" also completely dissipated with this perception—

"Sigh."

Madam Susan sighed with guilt.

She knew she shouldn't have done it.

But as the major-domo of the South Los Family, she had to do it.

'To compensate Arthur with more things.

He no longer needed the entry-level atlas, and although that particular atlas drawn by Master Hercules was of extraordinary value, that was all there was to it.

So...

'Ascension, perhaps?'

Madam Susan thought to herself, her gaze unintentionally sweeping over the Countess's study.

...

If Arthur wanted to "ascend the stairway," the simplest way was to take down the Countess and become the son-in-law of the South Los family.

However, Marinda's existence made this possibility less than thirty percent.

'Arthur is different from that scum Charlie. He's an honest and good kid, especially devoted when it comes to feelings. Even though he clearly understood my hints, he still expressed that he already had Marinda.

To make Arthur accept the Lord Count's offer would be very difficult.

Particularly, one must consider Marinda.'

The lady pondered.

All the while, she never contemplated the possibility that the Countess herself might refuse.

Because if Arthur agreed, this lady was two thousand percent confident she could persuade the Countess to agree.

Nobody understood the Countess better than she did.

'Maybe I could talk to Marinda?' Madam Susan thought.

Madam Susan had seen Marinda.

More than once, in fact.

Madam Susan greatly admired Marinda, not just for Marinda's strength, but also for her bloody decisiveness, both of which were astonishing to her.

Therefore, Madam Susan knew it would not be easy to persuade Marinda.

Indeed, it might be even harder than with Arthur.

Because—

For a mother is steely!

The child in Marinda's womb was enough to make this lady stronger, more determined, and sharper.

Anyone who tried to harm this child or sever the emotional and material benefits the child was entitled to would be regarded by this lady as an enemy, to be fought relentlessly.

Most importantly, in this process, the lady, as a mother, was irrational and reckless.

As a woman, Madam Susan knew women all too well.

Even though she had no children, if she and Old Charlie had one, and someone tried to harm... no, even if someone harbored a sliver of malice towards her child, she would annihilate them and the power they represented, to the extent that they would vanish from the world without a trace, their souls included.

Thus, even this lady began to feel a headache in the face of the current situation.

As for giving up?

It's not an option!

She could not give up!

Because...

The "Cat Hole"'s "Stairway of Ascension" was broken!

The fracture of the "Stairway of Ascension" caused the "Cat Hole" to split into four and fight endlessly.

Madam Susan did not know how the "Cat Hole"'s "Stairway of Ascension" broke, but she knew Arthur could not afford to waste time in the "Cat Hole."

Although for the average person, even a quartered "Cat Hole" would suffice for a lifetime's aspirations.

But that's for the average person!

For someone with Arthur's unparalleled talent, it was absolutely unacceptable!

Arthur was her promising grandson, who must ascend and reach the Tenth Order.

'Old Charlie, you bastard, to conceal yourself, you willingly gave up on your own grandson.

At first, I thought it was because Arthur lacked talent, and you had no choice but to let go.

But now, it's clear that's not the case...

Fine!

If you won't nurture him, I will!

Just you wait!

And you other fellows, you too wait!

Your pathetic plans, I know them!

Shadows?

Hmph!

Shadows will always be shadows!

My grandson should not and could not become a shadow; he is meant to become...

The sun!

I will use all the resources of the South Los House to elevate Arthur to the Tenth Order, to sit high above the clouds!'

The old lady thought to herself, her face returning to its usual gentle appearance as she walked straight toward the study of the Earl of South Los.

When she opened the door, she looked at the one-meter-four Countess who had just finished drinking bone soup and was now jumping in the room, hoping to grow taller. In her eyes was the affection and tenderness only seen when gazing upon a junior.

At the same time, Arthur, who was sound asleep, turned over in his bed.

While the second "Exquisite Human Puppet" had already, under Arthur's conscious control, arrived outside the 'Lotus Leaf Hotel.'

Chapter 507: Determination and Awakening!

As the eldest daughter of the "Lotus Leaf Hotel."

After her mother, Lady Didian, semi-retired, Didian basically took over the management of various hotel affairs.

This included the servants like Sapir and the chefs—they all respected this eldest sister. They remembered that, when they were young, she worked part-time as a "Golden Finger" to feed everyone, on top of helping the family sell lotus seeds and roots.

In the years after the war, Didian had quite a reputation on Rat Street.

However, as Sapir and her other younger siblings grew up, Didian had long since washed her hands of that business.

At least, she no longer did the "Golden Finger" jobs.

Other jobs?

Didian still occasionally moonlighted.

For instance, as an intelligence trafficker.

With the "Lotus Leaf Hotel" at her disposal, Didian always managed to obtain some information and tasks that ordinary people couldn't...

Commissions!

Just like this time!

Someone had offered a large sum of money for Didian to keep an eye on a man named "Dorn"—within an hour of Dorn checking into the hotel, the person showed up at the door with 200 gold notes.

Didian didn't refuse.

It wasn't that she didn't want to.

It was that she couldn't.

The person held a significant sway in South Los's underground world. If she upset him, the entire hotel would be at risk.

But now, Didian was starting to regret it.

With the appearance of the "Spirit Medium" Arthur Kredos, Didian knew things were going to go downhill.

This eldest daughter of the "Lotus Leaf Hotel" had never imagined being involved in incidents related to such significant figures.

So, she initiated her contingency plan—

Confront the adversary alone!

Take down that bastard!

Before that, though, she needed Sapir to take their mother and younger siblings and run for it!

To take a boat and leave South Los.

To head for Yan Fort!

The guy under the alias "Dorn" came from Inner Bay. Choosing Inner Bay as the safest option to flee was naturally out of the question, so she decided on the next best thing.

Yan Fort was a good place too.

Only after her family had left could she fight without holding back.

As for the siblings who had already left?

They had their own lives, which she didn't want to disrupt, nor did they want their lives disrupted.

After all, the frequency of their visits to see their mother during holidays was dwindling.

Maybe due to busyness.

Being busy was already enough.

During such times, Didian wouldn't "bother" them.

Of course, some troubles are out of Didian's control, aren't they?

"Eddie, go get Sapir and the others up."

"Charles, you go and pack our things."

"Charles, keep an eye on the street corner. If any suspicious people show up, come right back and report."

Didian started to give orders to her three brothers.

Meanwhile, she had begun inspecting the drawer at the counter for daggers, firearms, and crossbow arrows.

The road to Yan Fort would definitely not be peaceful.

She needed to prepare in advance.

With the crossbow strapped to her forearm and three firearms slanted across her chest.

The two sisters who worked as cooks in the hotel, Eva and Bosa, had already appeared at the door; recently woken, Sapir came out of his room.

"What's going on, Sister Didian?"

Seeing their fully armed sister, Eva and Bosa immediately gathered around her.

Turning back into his room, Sapir emerged again with a longsword, a firearm, explosives on his waist, and a wolf-toothed club in his hand that was as tall as an average person.

"Sister, who are we dealing with?"

Sapir asked directly.

For Sapir, Didian was his sister.

And her enemies were his enemies.

They just needed to deal with them.

No reason to ask why.

Smack!

Didian leaped up and smacked her brother on the forehead. A crisp snap echoed as Sapir looked puzzled.

"This is something I must do myself.

You need to protect Eva, Bosa, and...

Mother!"

Didian instructed, plucking the explosives from Sapir's waist and attaching them to her own back.

Hearing his mother, Sapir's lips parted but in the end, he couldn't say anything.

"Take everyone to the docks to board a ship to Yan Fort.

You know who to look for at the docks.

If all goes well, I'll go to Yan Fort to meet up with you, and then we can all return to South Los.

If not, remember never to return to South Los."

After speaking, Lady Didian handed over all the money she had saved, a total of 1042 gold notes, 125 Zeroes, and 7 pennies, to Sapir.

As Sapir took the purse, his eyes immediately reddened.

The 2.2-meter-tall strong man's tears flowed freely down his face.

"Take good care of our mother."

Lady Didian once again urged Eva and Bosa, her two younger sisters who were already sobbing softly.

Then, the lady walked toward the door.

"Sister, Garcia..."

"That guy is just my drinking buddy," replied Didian without turning her head or stopping her stride.

Garcia?

Lady Didian had met Garcia a long time ago.

She had also read articles written by Garcia.

She thought they were quite good.

Unfortunately, Garcia wasn't famous, and it was difficult to get his articles published, so Lady Didian was not surprised to see him at the information tavern.

Many people choose to sell information at small taverns when they are at their most helpless.

She was like that.

So was Garcia.

Watching the clumsy Garcia, Lady Didian had helped him several times in the beginning.

And Garcia was very grateful to her.

In fact, his first paycheck was spent on buying her a drink to express his gratitude.

Lady Didian had been invited for drinks before.

But a low-alcohol beer was a first for her.

Especially since, after buying that low-alcohol beer, Garcia didn't have even a single Zero left in his pocket, a truly unique situation.

Hence, Lady Didian actually accepted and drank the beer.

And in return, she treated Garcia to a meal of roasted meat with bread.

Because of this, their relationship became more familiar.

Because of this, Lady Didian knew that Garcia had recently seemed to be in favor with some important figure—Garcia didn't explicitly say so, but through his words and behavior, Lady Didian could feel that this man had changed.

But this change was ultimately Garcia's own.

Lady Didian wouldn't bring that kind of trouble upon her friends.

Even if her friend had gained some confidence.

Watching his eldest sister's retreating figure, Sapir handed the money over to his sisters Eva and Bosa for safekeeping, then hurried upstairs to find his mother.

Sapir had decided that he would first get his mother and his younger siblings safely to Yan Fort.

After that?

Of course, he would return to South Los and kill those bastards.

Thump!

A strong heartbeat resonated within Sapir's chest.

But at this moment, Sapir was completely unaware of it.

No one around him noticed.

Except for the "Exquisite Human Puppet" controlled by Arthur's consciousness.

'An unexpected Awakener?'

From the shadows, Arthur cast a surprised glance at Sapir.

Bloodlines are special; some people seek them in vain, others are born with them, and yet others awaken to them later in life—and it's for this reason that people say our ancestors were Nobles.

But today's Nobles won't acknowledge that.

They only expel those who staunchly believe in such ideas.

Meanwhile, they recruit the Awakened.

People like Sapir, who awaken unexpectedly, are even more favored by those in higher positions.

After all, they can form a certain fighting strength without the need for much training.

The only pity is that they are few in number.

And Arthur, naturally, would not let go of such a rare existence.

Without hesitation, Arthur walked out of the hotel.

To recruit Sapir, a direct persuasion is far less effective than finding Lady Didian.

Arthur believed that as long as Lady Didian joined, then Sapir would surely join as well.

As for how to get Lady Didian to join?

"Thank the darkness of South Los's gutters!"

The "Exquisite Human Puppet" murmured softly to itself, then in a few agile movements jumped onto the rooftop and stood straight on the eaves, looking down slightly at the scene below.

Chapter 508: Clean and Efficient!

Arthur, with the help of the "Exquisite Human Puppet," could clearly see Didian cleanly slit the throats of two secret sentries—her lightness and neatness showed that she was quite familiar with the dagger, and her calm and collected manner in handling the bodies told Arthur that this wasn't her first time doing such a thing.

Moreover, Didian had clearly made preparations in advance.

This lady was very familiar with this place.

As she approached this street, she concealed her form and headed straight for the two secret sentries.

'Tsk, what a dangerous otherworld.

Even a hotel proprietress can be called an assassin!

Arthur sighed inwardly, his gaze fixed on Didian who, after taking out the two sentries, snuck into the courtyard.

This courtyard seemed to be converted from a hand-drawn workshop of paperboard boxes.

From Arthur's perspective, he could clearly see the raw materials piled on the ground.

Didian, on the other hand, was moving these materials quietly, stacking them at the entrance of each room before setting them on fire.

Whoosh!

The blaze roared.

"Fire!"

People inside the rooms began to shout and ran out.

They were met with a crossbow arrow.

Thwack!

The crossbow arrow struck the throat, and the person who had just run out immediately fell to the ground, clutching his throat.

Those in the rooms who had just thought of rushing out were instantly scared back in.

At the same time, the former 'client' also cleared saw Didian holding the crossbow.

"Didian, you... It was out of necessity, we can talk this over."

The 'client's' urgent shouting quickly turned into a plea.

Because—

Didian lit the explosives in her hand.

The fuse burned quickly.

The hissing sound was incessant.

Like a countdown to the end of life.

The 'client' and his subordinates inside the room all turned pale.

It was clear that Didian had no intention of sparing them.

When the fuse reached a critical length, Didian would surely throw the explosives inside, and by then, everyone in the room would be done for. The only way out was to rush out, but...

Who would rush out first?

The first one out would have to face the crossbow arrows and firearms.

Didian's three firearms hung on her chest were all seen by the people in the room.

The 'client' and his subordinates, who used to strut around the streets, had never imagined that the ordinarily subservient Didian could be so ruthless.

"Didian, I'm innocent!"

"Yes, Didian, I'm innocent!"

"I've never targeted you!"

"Neither have I!"

The 'client's' subordinates began to shout.

"Hmm, you haven't, but someone has always been doing things that displease me."

Didian nodded, then her gaze turned to the 'client.'

At the same time, she pinched the end of the fuse, stopping it from burning any further.

Her gesture said it all.

The 'client,' seeing this, also understood what Didian wanted to do.

Right away, the 'client' yelled loudly—

"Don't be fooled by her!

Even if you kill me, this madwoman will not spare you!

You have to... ah!"

The 'client's' words were cut off by his own scream of agony as a dagger thrust into his lower back by one of his subordinates.

The 'client,' whose kidney was pierced, immediately fell to the ground with a wail.

The former subordinates swarmed like hyenas, each eager to prove their worth in front of Didian and gain a chance at life.

But soon, they despaired.

Because the explosives, which were about to burn out, were thrown in.

In their final moments, what they saw were Didian's cold eyes.

Boom!

The explosion blew the roof off the house.

Didian, shielding her face with her right arm and only her eyes exposed, showed no signs of regret or guilt.

This lady was clear, not a single person here could be left alive.

Keeping even one would bring destruction upon her and her family.

So, she was determined to wipe them out completely.

Once the explosions had ceased, Didian rushed to the blast site and tallied up the bodies present, the lady finally breathed a sigh of relief.

The two secret sentries who had their throats slit, the one shot with a crossbow arrow.

And the five people in the room.

The "client" and the seven underlings from the Core were all there.

There were some peripheral members left, all of whom were unimportant.

Even if they wanted to cause trouble, they couldn't stir up any waves.

After all, this was a juicy piece of meat.

Powers would soon extend their tentacles here.

You must know, this is the Core Shire District of South Los!

Even just the outskirts of Shire District were the same.

Sometimes, a title is enough to drive those people crazy.

Some might even come forward to claim the incident as their work willingly.

All for the sake of that title.

And to "rationally" inherit this territory.

Didian knew this all too well.

Therefore, the lady did not panic but left the place as carefully as she had arrived.

Standing on a rooftop was an "Exquisite Human Puppet," through which Arthur clearly saw this scene.

'Before acting, plan carefully.

After acting, show no mercy.

Always keep your vigilance.

Good!

Arthur praised the lady inwardly, and then slightly changed the original plan.

Previously, Arthur valued the lady's brother, Sapir, more.

A person who had an "Awakening" of the Bloodline, with a little training, could become a decent combatant.

And now?

Arthur thought the lady could also be a recruitment target.

At least, the lady commanding a small team and taking charge of an area was more than adequate.

And she was of the type easiest to control.

Family!

She cared deeply about her own family!

And in certain aspects, that makes for perfect subordinates!

Thinking this, Arthur controlled the "Exquisite Human Puppet" to follow her silently.

The matter was far from over!

Didian planned to make a couple of detours before returning to the 'Lotus Leaf Hotel.'

The situation had concluded faster than she had anticipated, but Didian wouldn't allow herself to be careless. She would rather spend extra effort afterward to catch up with her mother, brothers, and sisters than lead danger back home.

Of course, what was more important was the unease in her heart.

She always felt as though someone was peeping at her.

Because of this, the already cautious Didian became even more so.

And just as the lady had circled twice and was still feeling uneasy, planning to take an even longer detour home, a voice suddenly rang out from beside her—

"Madam, you truly are astonishing."

Didian was startled, quickly withdrew, and put distance between herself and the other party.

The person who spoke didn't give chase but instead walked out with a calm demeanor.

A middle-aged man in a worn coat.

There are many such middle-aged men in the Docklands, and their presence in the border area of the Shire District is not conspicuous. Especially given the stains on the man's face and the smell of alcohol on him, it's easy to think of homeless laborers who get by doing odd jobs and spend any money they have drinking in small taverns.

Nobody would notice such a person.

There are too many like him in South Los.

But Didian was different; she kept her eyes on him and slowly retreated.

However, the next moment, the lady stopped in her tracks.

Because two more men had appeared at the mouth of the alley, blocking her path.

The Hand Crossbows in their hands were already aimed at her.

"Madam, we mean no harm; we only wish to ask you a few questions. If you answer truthfully, we will let you go," one of them said.

Didian didn't believe a word they said, but she nodded her head anyway.

The lady needed a chance to escape, and stalling for time was the best way to find one.

"Very well."

The middle-aged man nodded and then asked directly—

"What do you know about 'Spirit Medium' Arthur Kredos?"

Suddenly, a chill went down Didian's spine.

Chapter 509: Cripple Arrow and Broken Bottle!

Upon learning that the person who had come to the hotel in the morning was the "Spirit Medium" Arthur Kredos, Didian knew she had gotten herself into big trouble.

So, after only a slight hesitation, she chose to take a risk.

She wanted to sever ties with the dangerous "association."

That "client."

Of course, Didian knew that the "client" couldn't possibly be the one after "Spirit Medium" Arthur Kredos.

Given the other party's status, they were simply not a match.

But the person behind that client certainly was.

And what she had to do was make sure she didn't catch the eye of that guy behind the "client."

However...

It seemed a bit late for that.

Looking at the middle-aged man in front of her, and then at the two people at the mouth of the alley holding crossbow arrows, Didian felt resigned.

At this moment, the lady had already figured it out.

The "client" was bait set out by the middle-aged man in front of her.

It was all for fishing!

Of course, they were certainly not fishing for a foolish fish like her.

But rather, they wanted to snag a shark.

Yet she had plunged headlong into the trap.

'Still too impulsive...

Have peaceful days made me slow-witted?'

Didian thought to herself, yet without much regret.

Because this lady was well aware that if the middle-aged man in front of her was fishing, then he wouldn't be too kind to the bait—the "client" was the bait, no doubt.

And her?

Wasn't she just another piece of bait as well?

It was for this reason that the middle-aged man before her didn't mind the bait snuffing each other out.

Or perhaps...

Due to her unusual behavior, the middle-aged man believed he had indeed caught a shark.

'Damn it!'

The lady cursed in her heart, but what she said aloud was straightforward.

"Are you talking about the Child of Misfortune, the Grim Reaper's Favor, the present-day 'Black Cat,' the Champion of the South Los Swordsmanship Competition, the lord of Caesar Manor, the 'Spirit Medium' Arthur Kredos?"

"Of course!

I do not believe there exists a second 'Spirit Medium' named Arthur Kredos in South Los."

The middle-aged man laughed and nodded his head.

"I know some things about this gentleman..."

Didian dragged out her speech, her gaze drifting toward the two men with crossbows at the alleyway's entrance.

The implication could not have been more clear.

Secrets should not be known by too many people.

However, the middle-aged man simply shook his head.

"Their loyalty is beyond question.

Lady, please say what you know.

If I am satisfied, I will let you leave as I just mentioned."

The middle-aged man emphasized once more.

And that made Didian sneer inwardly.

You think you will be satisfied?

How could you possibly be!

"Well, I know one thing..."

Bang!

As her speech was drawn out once more, Didian suddenly moved to the side, her firearm, which was slung diagonally across her front, now adjusted along with her right arm pressing down, her finger pulling the trigger as the gun fired.

The middle-aged man was brought down by one shot.

The two men wielding crossbows also released their triggers simultaneously.

Facing the incoming arrows, Didian could only try to dodge while her other hand hurled the dagger she held.

Didian anticipated that the dagger she threw would hit its target accurately.

But the lady took no delight in that at all.

Because—

The two crossbow arrows would hit her as well.

One of them would even strike a vital spot.

There was no escaping!

If she couldn't dodge, then she wouldn't!

The lady drew her dual guns from her chest and directly aimed at the other crossbowman.

...

She was doomed.

But before she died, she had to take these people with her.

Bang, bang!

The gunpowder shimmered with light.

Bullets whistled through the air.

Didian's lips curled up as she prepared to face death with a bit of grace.

At this moment, the lady once again thought back to that dimly lit tavern, where a slightly tipsy her had encountered that man once again.

That embarrassed man, whose stomach was growling from hunger, insisted on offering her a drink to repay a favor, all the while begging her not to hurt his fragile pride.

So, she had accepted.

'That guy said he'd treat me to a drink again once he got his manuscript fees.'

As expected, that will never happen in this lifetime.

With the quality of that guy's writing, how could he possibly earn any manuscript fees?'

With a touch of derision, Didian closed her eyes.

Then—

Crack, crack!

Two crisp sounds echoed through the alley, followed by the distinctive fragrance of barley beer beginning to spread.

Didian's eyes snapped open, and she saw two broken bottles and the two crossbow arrows they had smashed to the ground.

And...

A man gasping for air as he ran toward her.

"Didian, are you alright?"

Garcia, drenched in sweat, looked at the lady in front of him with concern.

Just moments ago, Garcia, who had received his first real manuscript fee earned by his own efforts, did not hesitate to buy two bottles of barley beer and headed straight to the Lotus Leaf Hotel.

He wanted to fulfill a promise to a lady.

Then, he found the doors of the Lotus Leaf Hotel tightly closed.

Immediately, Garcia knew something was wrong.

The following explosion guided Garcia to the right direction.

Straightaway, the Cloak Society's novice, who also held the roles of a writer and an intelligence trafficker, made his way here without delay.

Then he saw Didian facing the incoming arrows, pulling the trigger and igniting the firearm's bullets.

From Garcia's perspective, Didian was certain to be hit by the arrows.

So, he threw the bottles in his hands.

Garcia didn't know if it would be effective.

But it was all he could do.

Then, the two bottles...

Missed!

They flew towards the wall on one side!

Garcia's eyes widened in despair.

But the next moment, under Garcia's gaze, the two mistakenly thrown bottles miraculously changed direction and smashed directly into the two arrows.

The arrows hit the ground.

Didian was unharmed.

Garcia let out a sigh of relief and rushed over.

Seeing the sweaty and somewhat clumsy Garcia, a smile unconsciously appeared in Didian's eyes, but she immediately grabbed Garcia and pulled him behind her.

With a rub of her foot on the ground, the arrow that had been knocked down leaped into her hand.

The sharp tip of the arrow pointed directly at the middle-aged man who had been shot and was slowly getting up from the ground.

Garcia, shielded by Didian, also tried to pick up another arrow, but after bending over for a long time, the alcohol-soaked arrow proved to be slipperier than anticipated. After several failed attempts, the Cloak Society's novice could only pick up half a bottle that still had the neck intact, using the sharp edge to face the middle-aged man.

Watching the pair, the middle-aged man burst into laughter.

"Haha, arrows? Broken bottles?"

You have no idea who you're facing.

Lady Didian, you truly disappoint me. I genuinely intended to ask you a few questions and then let you go.

Who would have thought that you would foolishly choose to protect 'Spirit Medium' Arthur Kredos!"

As he spoke, the middle-aged man paused deliberately, his eyes filled with mocking contempt, and his voice turned razor-sharp—

"You're protecting that so-called Spirit Medium, Arthur Kredos of South Los, but now you and your friend are going to die—where is he?"

You and your friend are destined to die in vain!

And that 'Spirit Medium' Arthur Kredos won't even notice such insignificant creatures as yourselves!"

The malicious words reverberated through the alley.

But then, the next moment—

"Oh, is that so?"

...

Chapter 510: Black Magic... No, It's the Black Cat Faction!

The voice behind him made the middle-aged man startle.

Because this middle-aged man was sure there was a wall behind him.

When intercepting Didian, this middle-aged man had already surveyed his surroundings.

His heart was filled with unease and doubt.

But his body was quick.

Without any hesitation, the middle-aged man moved sideways two steps and darted diagonally toward the exit of the alley.

He was so fast that Garcia didn't react in time.

Didian, however, raised her hand to throw the arrow she was holding.

But the middle-aged man knocked the arrow away with the back of his hand.

At the same time, the look the middle-aged man gave Didian and Garcia over his shoulder was vicious, like that of a rabid wolf.

Didian took another arrow in hand.

This lady knew that she absolutely couldn't let this guy escape.

Otherwise, she, Garcia, and her relatives at the Lotus Leaf Hotel would never know peace again.

At this moment, Garcia finally snapped back to reality.

This 'Cloak Society' novice and part-time intelligence trafficker threw what was in his hand—a half-broken bottle—like a grenade.

The half-bottle spun through the air, tracing an arc.

The middle-aged man saw it but didn't care.

Such an attack was nothing to him; he could dodge it with his eyes closed.

What he cared about was the person talking.

'Where?

Where exactly?'

The man, seemingly fleeing, was earnestly searching.

With a step, he avoided the half-broken bottle.

But what the middle-aged man didn't see was that the half-bottle, as it passed by him, actually came back!

Thud!

The sharp end of the half-bottle plunged fiercely into the back of the middle-aged man.

His face showed surprise and disbelief.

Then, the second crossbow arrow thrown by Didian also found its mark.

Unlike Garcia's unruly throw.

The way Didian threw clearly indicated considerable practice—it was accurate and vicious.

Thud!

The arrow pierced straight through the man's neck.

However, the middle-aged man didn't fall.

With a half-bottle stuck in his back, an arrow lodged in his throat, and yet another bullet embedded in his body, he remained as lively as a dragon.

"Is this all?"

What a disappointment!

Is this the rumored 'Spirit Medium' Arthur Kledos?"

No longer running, the middle-aged man who couldn't find the hidden assailant began to mock.

Seeing this, Arthur, who was controlling the "Exquisite Human Puppet," revealed a smile.

'That's more like the Old Lion!

How could he compromise without showing even a tiny bit of resistance?

An old lion is still a lion.'

When the Old Lion and another force within the Golden Lion Family reached a 'compromise,' offering 'titles and territory' as the prize for the South County Swordsmanship Competition champion, Arthur became somewhat suspicious.

Although Arthur had never had direct contact with the Old Lion, he had encountered him indirectly more than once.

Ferocious!

Unforgiving!

The man gave no quarter!

If you offended the lord of Inner Bay, you could expect relentless revenge.

That was Arthur's direct impression of the Old Lion.

Of course, it seemed that because the Old Lion was getting on in years, more people interpreted his actions as bluster and bravado.

But Arthur, who had personally experienced the Old Lion's revenge, knew that even if it were all bluster and bravado, the death the Old Lion brought was real.

Moreover, weren't those who described the Old Lion as blustering and full of bravado intentionally misleading others?

Or even...

Fearful?

So, when Arthur learned of the Old Lion's "compromise," suspicion arose in his heart.

Moreover, to ease Madam Susan's mind, Arthur had dispatched a second Exquisite Human Puppet, and it was certainly not because he instinctively thought of "quietly stepping back to protect everyone in front."

Through the eyes of the Exquisite Human Puppet, Arthur sized up the middle-aged man before him.

'Above Arcana Level, approaching Great Arcana Level—a spy within spies?

At first, he must have been aimed at Alvis, but now he's turned to target me?

No, not to target me!

To be precise, to warn me!

With another faction within the Golden Lion Family aware of my presence, the Old Lion, for the sake of the family's stability, wouldn't truly intend to kill me, but he could use the man to warn me!

Additionally, the Old Lion knows the strength of my "Entry" level, how could he possibly send an opponent of this level against me?

So, he wants to use some sort of life-consuming secret technique to demonstrate his resolve, majesty, and honor, to give me a fright, huh?'

As Arthur thought this, the Exquisite Human Puppet had already come out.

It came out from "the wall."

The Exquisite Human Puppet, with an ordinary face and hair dyed a pale white, looked at the middle-aged man with a cold gaze, yet its voice was increasingly gentle—

"Heh, the master pities you and wants to let you go.

But some people are truly beyond pity."

The middle-aged man, seeing the Exquisite Human Puppet emerge, showed a flicker of surprise in his eyes.

He had always thought it was Arthur, but it turned out to be a stranger.

"Who are you?"

The middle-aged man asked in a deep voice.

"Black Magic... Black Cat Faction, Grindelwald."

Arthur, controlling the Exquisite Human Puppet, reported his own name.

The Black Cat Faction?!

The brows of the middle-aged man furrowed tightly.

Just a Black Cat Faction member?

This did not align with the established target!

But by this time, the middle-aged man could no longer care about these things.

The effects of the drug...

were fading!

Thinking this, the middle-aged man strode towards Grindelwald.

"Let me experience what the Black Cat Faction's..."

"You're not worthy."

Grindelwald sneered contemptuously, shaking his head slightly.

The next moment, this Black Cat Faction member turned directly to Garcia and Didian.

The middle-aged man was taken aback.

Following that, a sense of humiliation rose from deep within.

This little Black Cat Faction member was insulting him!

Rage!

The anger borne of humiliation completely overwhelmed the middle-aged man.

"Roar!"

"Be careful!"

Within the beast-like roar, Garcia and Didian exclaimed in unison.

In the eyes of the two, the body of the middle-aged man began to emit a bizarre red glow, like flowing flames, especially the eyes, which were unbearable to look at directly.

Grindelwald remained indifferent, raising his left hand to eye level and snapping his fingers lightly—

Snap!

The sound was crisp.

Chilling to the bone.

A layer of ice crystals appeared out of nowhere on the middle-aged man's body.

The flame-like glow, flowing like fire, was instantly covered by the ice.

The flame extinguished.

The ice crystals twinkled.

In an instant, the middle-aged man lost all signs of life and became entirely a sculpture of ice.

Grindelwald gracefully approached Garcia and Didian, greeting them with a smile—

"Good afternoon, Mr. Garcia, Lady Didian, I extend greetings on behalf of the secretly born Child of Misfortune, the favored by the Grim Reaper, the contemporary 'Black Cat,' Leader of the Cat Faction, champion of the South Los Swordsmanship Competition, master of Caesar Manor, 'Spirit Medium' Arthur Kredos."