

## Great Master 541

Chapter 541: The Crow and The Eagle!

Jennifer was the first to rush toward the direction from which the note had come.

Amy climbed a nearby tree quickly, looking out from her high vantage point.

Shara gazed at the note with curiosity.

As for Jian, she was the most straightforward.

She walked directly to the largest tree in the center of the small grove, ready to start digging.

While binding her chest with bandages, Anna muttered to herself—

"You all could unite against me just now, so how come you have started acting on your own now?"

The Kledos Family sent me here, hardly to integrate you all, right?

Let me tell you, I'm not going to be your captain.

I'm going to act alone!"

Anna emphasized this, but her body was already involuntarily digging under the tree.

It wasn't for any other reason.

She was just curious.

Anna was curious about what was underneath the tree.

A box!

Underneath the tree was a huge box, with a note attached—

I mean no harm.

For, I shall give you a chance.

A chance to withdraw.

If you leave now, you'll go back to your own lives, but if you open this box, everything about you will change.

The note was unsigned.

But, all five women present knew it was left by Cassandra Cremos.

"At such a time, how could we possibly withdraw?"

Anna grumbled, but didn't immediately open it, instead turning to look at Amy, Shara, Jennifer, and Jian.

Shara and Jian were immediately tempted.

The two women who considered themselves ordinary thought this was too risky. If they could be a bit safer, that would be best.

But Amy and Jennifer thought further.

Having come this far, would their opponent let them go?

Just as Anna said, at such a time, how could they possibly withdraw?

Not to mention whether the words on this note could be trusted, the people present were untrustworthy.

Some joined, some did not.

What would those who joined do to those who did not?

One could guess it with their heels.

Therefore, Amy and Jennifer did not speak up. The two implicitly agreed to join.

And at that moment, the woman who considered herself not too perverse suddenly turned mysteriously to look at the other four women and said—

"Do you think there might be a mission inside the box—to kill those who didn't join?"

Such words shocked Shara and Jian, who had been thinking of withdrawing.

Indeed!

Could it really be so?

Shara thought of Woolter.

Jian thought of James.

'Woolter (James) could do such a thing!'

The two women fell silent at once.

Looking at the four who had tacitly agreed, Anna chuckled.

"Alright, since the four of you agree.

Let's see what's inside the box together!"

Saying this, Anna flipped open the box.

And immediately, the woman, who didn't consider herself too perverse, looked inside—

There were five sets of black hooded capes.

Five strange bracers.

A letter.

"Is this it?"

Anna was slightly disappointed and casually picked up one of the bizarre bracers.

Then, immediately, the lady discovered something different.

There was a sleeve sword in the bracer!

Without hesitation, Anna put it on, and then—with a flick of her wrist—

Click!

A sharp blade sprung out from her wrist.

"Oh-ho!"

Anna let out an excited, strange cry, repeatedly retracting the blade and springing it out again.

"Childish!"

Jennifer judged, then putting on the bracer, she began to flick the sleeve sword in and out, repeating the action twice.

For Jennifer, her review was to get familiar with the new equipment.

Amy had similar thoughts.

Moreover, Amy thought the sleeve sword was very convenient and well-suited for a lady like Shara, whose physical strength couldn't compare to that of a man's.

"A sudden attack is enough to take down an enemy!"

Amy assessed.

As for herself?

She preferred axes.

Under Amy's guidance, Shara used the sleeve sword somewhat clumsily.

Jian was just as clumsy, with Jennifer instructing her.

The clumsy duo glanced at each other, a friendly expression emerging in their eyes.

The instructing duo exchanged a look, a hint of recognition appearing in their gaze.

Only Anna was alone.

"Hey, hey, what are you implying?"

"I have Marinda!"

Anna shouted loudly.

"She's pregnant!"

Jennifer sneered coldly.

Anna paused, then yelled again.

"So what?"

"Someone else's child."

Jennifer sneered coldly again.

"So what?"

Compared to her previous bluster, Anna's momentum was now much weaker, and then, Jennifer sneered coldly once more.

"You can't even beat that man."

"So, so what?"

This time, Anna stuttered.

"You're now a subordinate to that person's aunt."

Jennifer continued her heart-stabbing remarks.

"So, so..."

Anna was completely at a loss for words.

And Jennifer, having claimed a temporary victory, began to take black hooded cloaks out of the box, soft in texture and light-absorbing.

In the night and shadows, they would certainly add a significant advantage.

As Jennifer was distributing the hooded cloaks, Anna swiftly took the letter from the box and opened it directly—

If you are able to read this letter, congratulations on making the right choice.

Of course, I wouldn't issue an order like 'those who join must kill those who haven't joined.'

I am not such a nasty person.

I simply hope that those who haven't joined will, in the future, face endless regret when confronted by you who have joined, and if possible, regret to the point of suicide would be a fine choice.

I won't be assigning you any tasks for the time being.

Because you are still too weak.

Please make good use of this time to grow quickly, otherwise the only thing in front of your gravestones will be the flowers I send.

Finally—

'Shapeless,' welcome.

Cassandra Cremos

...

After reading the letter, Anna looked up and exchanged a glance with Jennifer, Amy, Shara, and Jian.

The so-called not-too-aberrant lady, the lady who considered herself normal, the two ladies who didn't think they were murderers, and the completely unaware psychiatric patient lady all expressed through their eyes: And this isn't nasty enough?

""Shapeless,' huh?""

Jennifer murmured to herself and then pulled Jian away.



Amy did the same, pulling Shara in another direction to leave.

Anna was left standing there alone.

"Hey, hey, I'm the strongest here!

Shouldn't I be the leader?

Shouldn't you show me some respect?"

Anna shouted.

But, Jennifer and Jian, Amy and Shara walked away even faster.

Soon, only Anna was left.

The lady looked at the backs of the four, then at the empty box, and set the letter and the box on fire.

Flames leapt, smoke wafted.

Blue smoke rose into the sky.

Higher up, a falcon flashed by, quickly vanishing from sight.

But the crow, another arcane creature, was different.

It stayed quietly in the shadows, peering into everything in the room, naturally including the voices coming from the Messenger Stone—

"Do everything possible to protect Arthur."

Chapter 542: Monarch's Presence!

The message relayed by Wuni had left Arthur, still in Harold Manor, with a face full of astonishment.

Arthur had considered what might happen when the news that he was a member of the Golden Lion Family and fit the so-called "prophecy" returned to Inner Bay.

But he had never envisaged the situation before him.

Because it completely defied common sense!

Imagine a family member cast out into the world.

Putting it nicely, he's a family member.

Putting it bluntly, he's a bastard.

And then, this bastard becomes the "Child of Prophecy," the "Monarch" within the family.

What normally happens?

Kill the bastard!

One hundred percent that option!

It's absolutely impossible for the family to welcome this bastard back for the family's benefit, overriding personal gain — people are selfish.

It's their nature.

Unchangeable.

If it did change, then it would be a miracle.

Like: love!

But such a thing couldn't possibly happen at this moment!

Not only because the patriarch of the family, the Old Lion, is not Arthur's biological father, but also because the Old Lion has three sons.

Even if the Grand Duke were selfless.

What about the Old Lion's three sons?

These "youngsters" raised in the Golden Lion Family would definitely not be so benevolent.

Would the Old Lion not have considered this?

Impossible!

Although the Old Lion was domineering, he was certainly not lacking in thoroughness.

And after deducting all the impossibilities, only one possibility remained —

Someone had issued this order on behalf of the Old Lion.

And this person must certainly be one of the Old Lion's three sons.

On this, Arthur was quite certain — it had to be one of the three!

Besides these three, no outsider could possibly have contact with such a covert spy.

Rumors had it that the Old Lion was intentionally grooming his three sons.

As for specific information?

Arthur did not know yet.

However, there was one thing Arthur did know.

That was, the situation was in his favor.

"Should I contact the editor of the 'Moon Newspaper' to obtain more information about the Golden Lion Family?"

This idea had just surfaced when Arthur suppressed it.

Information about the Golden Lion Family was crucial.

But his current persona was also important.

What was his current persona?

A young man who had discovered his identity from his mother's keepsakes, slightly curious about the Bloodline of his mother's side, but not identifying with this identity.

Such a young man, although knowing more about the family, would absolutely not go knocking on their door so boldly.

It must be awkward!

It must be the kind of situation where everyone knows I want to know, but I have to act like I couldn't care less!

The more awkward it is, the more genuine it is!

If, due to some misunderstanding, there could be a great battle with corpses strewn everywhere, that would be best.

And furthermore, it'd be perfect if, just as the misunderstandings were cleared, and everyone was immersed in sorrow, an external enemy began their invasion, facing thousands of troops, with the bastard drawing his sword and standing at the forefront.

Only then could he be called the "New King."

What battle of the bastard?

No, no, no!

Arthur did not want his own people to die like that.

What he wanted was to ascend to the throne.

Not to be acclaimed king.

A crown delivered by the lives of the people might be brilliant, but Arthur was used to standing alone.

The crown, he took it himself.

And he wore it himself.

After all, it was all the same.

Arthur subconsciously touched the "Bloodline Seal" on his chest; the once pitiful lion tattoo immediately became majestic and proud.

In the silent roar, Arthur's expression did not change in the slightest, but his demeanor was quietly transforming.

Clip-clop, clip-clop!

The sound of hoofbeats arose in the distance—it was Titon.

Titon had returned.

He came swiftly on horseback, leading ten guards borrowed from South Town.

The leader from South Town was Gold.

Behind this Guard Commander and Swordsmanship Chief of the little Lisop, there trailed twenty Cavalry.

As they arrived outside the manor, everyone saw Arthur bathed in the morning sunlight.

Brilliant radiance shone upon the young man.

The sunlight, like gold, draped him in a golden cloak, and as the young man's serene gaze fell upon them, an uncontrollable urge rose from the depths of their hearts.

They wanted to fight for this young man before them.

Even if they faced a hail of bullets, they were ready to charge forward for him.

Even if they knew it was the Abyss of Death that lay ahead, they would plunge into it without hesitation.

All so that this young man could proceed undaunted.

Charge!

To clear the path for the new king.

Fight!

To slay all the enemies for the new king.

Titon and Gold dismounted directly.

"My lord,"

the Cavalry behind them shouted in unison.

Arthur, wearing a smile, looked at them, then turned his gaze toward the distance—quietly testing the "Lionheart King" effect of the "Bloodline Seal," though certainly not for these people before him.

In that dense forest, Little Lisop, Bob, and the guards oversaw the fugitives.

Those fugitives were Arthur's real targets.

As soon as Gold came into view, Arthur was certain of Little Lisop's arrival.

If it weren't for Little Lisop's arrival, Gold, the Guard Commander of the Lisop family, would definitely not appear just because of a minor matter like 'borrowing ten people.'

And the only reason for Little Lisop to be here was one thing—

Death Soldiers!

When leaving the Caesar Manor, Little Lisop had set out alongside Bob.

Arthur also knew a thing or two about what they had planned together.

Bob thought that recruiting candidates from Rat Street and training them before turning them into Death Soldiers was a good idea, but it was too slow.

Thus, Bob believed they should take a two-pronged approach.

Beyond the necessary training, they should also find some who didn't need training.

For instance: fugitives, outlaws.

And such people were plentiful in the mines of South Town.

However, it was evident that Arthur had underestimated their numbers.



By Arthur's estimation, the selection of fugitives and outlaws should take at least 1-2 weeks, no matter how fast, yet here they were, just days later, with quite a number of people.

There were fifty men.

This number surprised Arthur.

Because the number represented the amount of Death Soldier Potions.

Though Bob was loyal to him, he hadn't actually been funded in the true sense—according to the original plan, they were to wait until the recruits from Rat Street had a basic foundation before funding the creation of Death Soldier Potions. But the appearance of these fifty men with special identities indicated Bob's accumulation.

After the 'Seven Years' War' ended, Bob had saved up fifty Death Soldier Potions.

One Death Soldier Potion cost 500 Gold Coins.

Assuming a success rate where two potions yield one successful transformation, those fifty Death Soldier Potions would amount to 50,000 Gold Coins.

Even though Bob was skilled and had some unique connections, this 50,000 Gold Coins should represent his entire fortune.

Yet now, he had put it all forward.

'Is he betting his entire fortune on me?' Arthur wondered, looking at Bob with great admiration.

Regardless of whether Bob did that out of friendship with Malz or because he had made up his mind after meeting him,

the dedication was genuine.

Arthur needed to remember that.

Upon catching Arthur's gaze, Bob immediately bowed deeply.

For some reason, he always felt that Arthur was somewhat different today.

It was as if he was seeing the Duke of the Inner Bay as he once was...

Hiss!

Reaching this conclusion, Bob was shocked and looked up at Arthur.

At that moment, Arthur, courteously receiving a bow from Little Lisop, stood before those fugitives and outlaws, and softly asked—

"Do you wish to fight for me?"

Chapter 543: The Bewitchment of the Spirit Medium!

Arthur's words were heard by a team of 50 recruits composed of fugitives and desperados.

These fugitives and desperados either looked at Arthur with contempt, disdain, or arrogance.

In fact, if it weren't for the shackles they bore and the presence of South Town Cavalry fully armed surrounding them, these fugitives and desperados would definitely have been insolent, with some even not minding spitting on Arthur's face.

However, even so, it angered Little Lisop.

The heir of South Town narrowed his eyes, a deep chill emerging in his gaze.

Arthur was his revered Kind Father.

And these people before him?

A bunch of fugitives and desperados, no better than pigs and dogs.

That such people dared to disrespect the Kind Father!

Instantly, Little Lisop felt the urge to kill.

To Little Lisop, the people before him were dispensable.

As for the Death Warrior project?

In the mines of South Town, there were many more such individuals, and it would only take two or three days to select another batch.

The heir of South Town was about to draw his longsword, but just at that moment, Arthur shook his head with a smile.

The young 'Spirit Medium' gently patted Little Lisop on the shoulder as a reassurance, then turned his gaze back to these special identity Death Warrior reserves.

Compared to the previous contempt, disdain, and arrogance.

At this moment, a trace of fear was clearly visible in the eyes of the fugitives and desperados.

Who isn't afraid of death?

Everyone fears death!

Not to mention these fugitives and desperados.

Even those called 'Heroes,' when facing death, would harbor fear, yet they chose to confront that fear.

Therefore, they became 'Heroes'!

But these fugitives and desperados clearly couldn't do that.

Otherwise, they wouldn't have hidden away in the mines of South Town merely to survive.

But Arthur didn't care.

Or rather...

These were precisely the people Arthur wanted.

The young 'Spirit Medium' spoke again.

"You might be someone's father, or someone's son, and also a husband to a lady, but none of those matter now. Because of a moment of greed or anger, you committed unforgivable mistakes, thus stripping you of your statuses as fathers, sons, and husbands, and bringing shame upon your parents, children, and wives.

I know all this.

Therefore, I am willing to give you a chance.

A chance to stand in the sun again.

Of course, the risk involved is tremendous.

You might die, but I, Arthur Kredos, assure you that your families will be well cared for. Your parents, children, and wives will only be told that you served the Kredos Family for a cause that everyone wished to avoid in the past.

And now?

You have made a choice like a Hero, and naturally, you will be treated as such.

I will take care of your parents, wives, and children.

Your names will be inscribed on the Monarch's Presence Memorial of the Kredos Family.

Everyone will know of your existence and take pride in you.

Your children will see you as role models.

Your parents will stand tall.

Your wives will be celebrated."

Arthur enunciated each word clearly, every single one reaching the ears of the people in front of him.

The voice, mixed with a hint of the 'Sound of Death.Bewitchment' effect, gradually dismantled the mental defenses of the fugitives and desperados who were initially resistant to Arthur.

At first, it was disdain, but later it turned to serious listening.

Especially when they saw Arthur shift from indifference to seriousness, they subconsciously believed that what Arthur said was true and that he truly meant it.

And such authenticity could move people the most.

At this moment, most of the 50 fugitives and desperados showed signs of being moved.

Clearly, they were the 'reluctant' ones among the desperados.

As to whether it was truly reluctant or falsely so?

Does it matter?

Unimportant.

What mattered was that Arthur had given them a way out that allowed them to accept their current situation openly.

What mattered was that Arthur had also given them a brand-new opportunity.

What mattered was that under the "Sound of Death's Bewitchment," they no longer resisted Arthur.

As his gaze swept over the lineup before him, Arthur continued speaking—

"Is death terrifying?"

It is terrifying!

But is living like pigs and dogs not terrifying?

I think it's even more terrifying.

So, when an opportunity arises that may lead to death but also might elevate you above others, what should you do?

I will give you 10 minutes to think it over.

After 10 minutes, those willing to take the potions and swear allegiance to me will receive everything I have promised.

Those who choose not to take the potions, I will erase your memories and let you return to the mines.

And those who do survive, will likely come to see you, perhaps to mock, perhaps to bestow charity, but for you with no memories, it will probably be baffling."

This time, Arthur's words incorporated a hint of 'Death Qi'.

The convicts and desperados who were to be persuaded swiftly joined the frenzied celebration of death.

At the fall of Arthur's words, they immediately stepped forward.

"I want to try!"

"And me!"

"Count me in!"

...

A series of voices cascaded, with most raising their hands in signal.

Already being convicts and desperados, what else did they have to lose?

Life?

Life, of course, was precious.

But that does not mean life cannot be gambled.

They needed to seize this opportunity for their families to hold their heads high again, to carve out a grand future for themselves and their children.

Did you hear that?

Superior beings!

These people's breathing grew rapid, their emotions surged, becoming eager.

However, some were still able to remain calm.

Under the "Sound of Death's Bewitchment," they were not unmoved but managed to restrain themselves.

Arthur's gaze swept over the twelve who still remained calm.

He admired these twelve for their restraint against their own murderous desires and the urge to rush into the revelry of death.



So...

Arthur began to recharge.

Gold coins vanished swiftly, as a lion-shaped tattoo joyously devoured them.

With such consumption, the original progress of the "Monarch's Presence," which was at [1/300], visibly filled up.

The first transformation of a Death Warrior.

Arthur hoped to have a perfect start.

Simply put, Arthur sought perfection.

Bob had said that if the state of those who consumed the potions was good enough, it could enhance the success rate.

A mental state good enough...

That counts too, right?

Even, to some degree, the mind should surpass the body!

When Arthur saw that the "Monarch's Presence" reached [300/300], he did not hesitate to activate it.

The next moment—

Arthur's hair and eyes turned golden.

More importantly, Arthur's demeanor changed, becoming...

Worthy of reverence!

Chapter 544: The Spirit Medium's Death Warrior!

Those who were already under the "Sound of Death" and bewitched as fugitives and desperados, upon seeing Arthur in his "Monarch's Presence," did not hesitate and all knelt on one knee.

They fervently looked at Arthur.

It seemed that in that moment, they had found their ultimate purpose in life.

They intended to...

Fight to the death under the command of this great man before them!

Even the twelve who had just managed to control their desires now had fanaticism flickering in their eyes.

'Is this the power of the Golden Lion Family's bloodline?

I wonder which is stronger, the "Monarch's Presence" or the "Lion Group"?

Broadly speaking, the "Monarch's Presence," probably being unrestricted, is stronger...

Indeed, my family needs me to save them!' thought Arthur, as his gaze shifted to Little Lisop and the cavalry of South Town.

At this moment, Little Lisop was the most devout and fervent of all.

To Little Lisop, Arthur was already the Kind Father.

Any change in the Kind Father was still the Kind Father.

Even if the Kind Father displayed a monarch's demeanor, it was only natural.

This only made Little Lisop respect and adore Arthur even more.

As for the cavalry?

Already full of respect for Arthur, they were now wholly committed to following him.

Bob was the only exception!

Bob watched Arthur dumbfoundedly; this veteran seemed to be back on the battlefield once again, seeing the young Duke of the Inner Bay, witnessing how he calmly faced the Musketeer Squad of the West Coast, winning them over with just a smile, a look, and a word.

So similar!

Too similar!

Not just the scenario.

The appearance was very much alike as well.

Blond hair, golden eyes.

In every action, he resembled a lion surveying his hunting ground.

Bob fell into a bit of confusion.

How could Arthur possibly have the Golden Lion Family's bloodline?

That shouldn't be!

Seeing Bob's confusion, Arthur realized that now was not the time for explanations, as the "Sound of Death's" bewitchment coupled with the "Bloodline Seal's" "Lionheart King's Monarch's Presence" reacted subtly together.

Arthur had anticipated this.

But it wasn't enough!

Still not enough!

Not perfect enough!

Arthur activated the "Twisted Legacy" within the "Bloodline Seal."

In an instant, Arthur's figure became imposingly large in everyone's view.

Like a mountain range, as vast as the heavens.

And his voice sounded like thunder—

"I, Arthur Kredos, assure you, your loyalty will not be betrayed by me!

So...

Are you willing to fight for me?"

Thunder roared, the words piercing the heart.

Another inquiry.

The same question as before.

But now, there was no contempt, no disdain, no arrogance.

There was only resolve.

There was only fervor.

"Willing!"

"Willing!"

"Willing!"

One cry after another erupted from these fugitives and desperados, and even the cavalry of South Town soon joined in; soon after, these shouts became uniform, leaving only—

"Fight! Fight! Fight!"

Who says the "Twist of Fate" can only be used for fighting?

Adding special effects to oneself makes the effect even more outstanding!

Arthur scanned the surroundings, the frenzy in the eyes around him almost tangible. He knew the time was nearly right. He walked up to his death warriors, untied each of their ropes, and without any hesitation, patted their dirty, muddy shoulders gently as he whispered—

"Thank you for joining!

After you consume the potion, you must pull through!

I am here, waiting for you."

In an extreme state of frenzy, the muscles of the fugitives and desperados tensed, tears brimming in their eyes.

Every time Arthur spoke softly, they answered loudly.

"I will definitely pull through!"

Especially the initially restrained twelve, who at this moment shouted fervently.

"My lord, rest assured, even if I fall into the abyss, I will climb out and stand before you again."

Restraint seemed like accumulation.

Once forsaken, it was like a dam being destroyed.

The momentum was astonishing.

And unstoppable.

Optimized Death Soldier Potions were handed out by Bob, taken from the potion case on the side of the saddle, and given to these fugitives and desperados.

For each optimized Death Soldier Potion that was handed out, a strange feeling intensified in Bob's heart.

It wasn't reluctance.

After his decision, Bob was fully committed to serving Arthur.

But seeing the fervent faces and the determination in the eyes of these fugitives and desperados, Bob was still extremely surprised.

Bob had consumed the Death Soldier Potion more than once.

And more than once, he had seen others consume the Death Soldier Potion.

Most people were timid when facing death.

Even those friends of his who had survived consuming the Death Soldier Potion once spoke of their past experience with fear.

It was subtle and faint.

But it definitely existed.

But these people before him.

No fear at all!

Not even a trace of fear!

All they had was...

Longing!

Yes, it was longing!

Subconsciously, Bob looked towards the central figure among the crowd.

'They are all longing to fight to the death under Arthur's command!

And me?

Where is my enlightenment?

Can I do the same?'

The 'Sound of Death's' bewitchment.

The 'Bloodline Seal's' Lionheart King's Presence.

The 'Bloodline Seal's' Twisted Legacy.

Combined with some past words of his old friend Malz, even Bob, a veteran of the battlefield, had his mentality completely transformed at this moment.

It was a fundamental change.



When the distribution of the optimized Death Soldier Potions was finished, and Bob humbly retreated with Little Lisop and others outside the woods, Arthur noticed this change.

Arthur marveled at this transformation.

Marveling at the 'Sound of Death's' bewitchment, the 'Bloodline Seal's' Lionheart King's Presence, and the effect of the Twisted Legacy.

Then, suddenly, a thought intensely pierced into Arthur's mind.

'Being able to affect those with spirituality, isn't this just like the Lion Group?

And with the Death Poetry Society's activities in Inner Bay, and some collaboration with the Old Lion, could the Lion Group be a product of Bloodline plus the Death Poetry Society's secret technique, the 'Sound of Death'?

The many restrictions of the Lion Group, could they be because the secret techniques obtained from the Death Poetry Society are incomplete?

And to get the complete secret techniques of the Death Poetry Society, is that why the Old Lion condones the Death Poetry Society?

Furthermore, could the internal conflict of the Death Poetry Society be related to the Golden Lion Family?'

One conjecture after another appeared in Arthur's mind.

But on the surface, Arthur remained composed.

With a steadfast gaze, he encouraged the fugitives and desperados before him.

Encouraged thus, the group of fifty fugitives and desperados, without hesitation, uncorked the bottles and downed the optimized Death Soldier Potions in one go.

Chapter 545: A Death Warrior, Also a Fighter!

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Hmph!

As the "Death Soldier Potion" was consumed, every fugitive and outlaw couldn't help but let out a muffled groan.

Veins resembling worms rose under their skin, making every outlaw's face fierce and even terrifying to behold.

Simply looking on, one could feel the pain that these fugitives and outlaws were enduring.

Yet, not a single person cried out in pain.

Because—

That person was watching them!

Because—

That person was waiting for them!

All the fugitives and outlaws looked towards Arthur, whose expression was gentle but eyes were filled with determination; they clenched their teeth and persevered, even as their teeth ground noisily and fresh blood overflowed from their mouths, they continued to hold on.

Suddenly, one of them collapsed to the ground.

He was one of the twelve who had initially been able to control their desires.

He was also one of those whom Arthur regarded highly.

Compared to those who succumbed to the "Sound of Death" and its "Bewitchment" in the first round, those who could control their own desires naturally had higher potential.

But unexpectedly, it was one of these twelve who fell first.

'Is it because his "Physique" is not strong enough?' Arthur wondered as he looked at the somewhat frail figure, guessing to himself.

However, his expression remained gentle, though a trace of concern appeared in his eyes.

He was worried about the person who had fallen.

And the person saw it.

The person saw his king's concern.

How can I allow my king to worry about me?

This is extremely rude!

This is a trampling of my honor!

The fallen outlaw suddenly clenched his fist tightly, smashing it into the ground, using his head as support, and slowly exerting force with his legs, managed to "squeeze" himself back up.

"King, I won't disappoint you!

Even in death, I must crawl back!

Even in death, I must charge for you!" roared the slim member of the twelve.

Even as more fresh blood spurted out with his roar, his gaze became unprecedentedly tenacious, and the most special part of his body started to flicker.

It was "Spirituality"!

Arthur looked on in surprise as "Spirituality" flickered within this slim individual.

It was faint.

But it was truly there.

'Indeed, will can conquer flesh!' Arthur thought to himself and nodded solemnly at the man, declaring earnestly—

"I am waiting for you!

I am also waiting for all of you!

Because—

I believe that you will certainly not disappoint me!"

His words resonated unequivocally, without any hesitation.

Arthur truly believed that these people would not let him down.

It was no pretense, nor a performance.

It was a conviction of victory after ample preparation.

Genuine, truly 'sincere'!

Everyone could clearly perceive this, and then, one after another, they let out growls from their mouths.

They wanted to live!

What was this pain in comparison?

The real agony was not being able to charge under the king's command!

Hum!

Gleams of spiritual light began to flicker one after another; the twelve that Arthur had high hopes for, all began to exhibit "Spirituality." Their skin started to turn a rapid red, as if burning with an extreme fever, and wisps of vapor began to rise from their bodies.

A normal person in this condition would quickly lose consciousness.

If treated even slightly late, they would suffer lasting effects.

Moreover, even with timely treatment, they could end up impaired.

But these twelve were different.

They looked at Arthur as if he were the beacon in their lives.

Fainting?

Out of the question.

How could they faint when they could gaze upon their king for even a moment longer?

The pain inside their bodies?

The raging heat that followed?

It didn't matter!

All of it didn't matter!

As long as the king was there, they could overcome.

They could ignore everything.

...

With 12 individuals as an example, the remaining fugitives and desperadoes were also filled with an ignited belief—these people, already different from the ordinary, at this moment, mixed this belief into their own obsession and each chose their own way to resist the pain.

Their way was—

Fantasizing about charging under Arthur's command, conquering cities and seizing territories.

All of them, without exception, fantasized about this.

When pain struck, beautiful fantasies could effectively alleviate it.

And for these guys, what could be better in this life than standing by Arthur's side, charging into battle for him, and dealing with any enemy who dared to offend Arthur?

Beyond that?

There was nothing!

They lived solely for Arthur.

The special properties of the "Sound of Death," the "Bewitchment," the "Bloodline Seal" with the "Lionheart King's Presence," the "Twisted Legacy," and the effects of the "Death Soldier Potion" had completely warped the minds, characters, and beliefs of these 50 individuals at this moment.

They were still themselves.

But they were no longer themselves.

When the world looked at them, it was as if they were looking at monsters.

But they didn't care.

Because, ah—

Aside from their king, no one else in this world mattered to them anymore.

Were they monsters?

Good!

They accepted such praise.

And then?

Obviously, they would carry their king to the throne of the Monster King.

They were ready.

The trial of the "Death Soldier Potion"...

Passed!

All 50 individuals passed!

Bob was stunned when he witnessed this scene, his eyes wide and mouth agape, completely at a loss for words to express his shock.

Because it was impossible!

No matter the previous research or his own.

Such a 100% success rate was impossible.



Death Warriors couldn't be born this easily.

But if it happened...

Miracle!

It really was a miracle!

Bob looked at Arthur, admiration mixed with uncontrollable excitement in his eyes.

Since one miracle had occurred.

Could there be even more miracles?

Yes!

There absolutely would be!

Bob looked at Arthur, so firmly believing.

Arthur simply raised his hand.

Gold bars, Gold Coins, they surged forth like a tide in front of Bob, piling up into mountains.

This was all of Arthur's worth.

From James's Black Gold to Harris's gold bars, along with the money he'd accumulated on ordinary days—after setting aside the necessary, everything was here.

"I need you to go all out in crafting Potions."

Arthur ordered.

"Yes, my lord!"

Bob respectfully agreed.

Afterward, Arthur turned his attention to his Death Warriors.

The corners of his mouth turned up ever so slightly.

He knew he had grasped the key.

Perhaps he wouldn't be able to replicate it with 100% efficiency in the future, but with these 50 men, everything would become much easier; the very first step of his 'plan' truly began.

"My warriors, welcome to rebirth,"

Arthur spoke loudly.

Little Lisop was already there with food and clothing prepared, the heir of South Town, with a warm smile, along with his subordinates, distributing them to the first batch of Death Warriors.

Of course, there was also bathing water.

Outdoor bathing water, though without a bathtub, once boiled in a big pot, a piece of waterproof fabric with eyelets was the best choice.

The Death Warriors bathed and changed, picked up their food, and then sat down beside Arthur.

There was no special arrangement.

These Death Warriors, purely based on their strength, surrounded Arthur.

The weakest were on the outer circle.

The strongest occupied the innermost.

Just as Arthur had predicted, the 12 Death Warriors who had overcome their desires achieved the greatest strength, and as he looked at these 12, a thought suddenly struck him.

He said softly—

"Do you know the story of the 'Zodiac Constellations'?"

Chapter 546: The Earth, the Sea, the Underworld... All Mine, All Mine!

Arthur's voice attracted the attention of the Death Warriors around him. The Death Warriors, who were unconsciously eating bread and drinking meat porridge, all turned their eyes toward their King.

Little Lisop, Bob, and the cavalry from South Town also looked on with curiosity.

'The Zodiac Constellations,' they had truly never heard of them before.

Arthur scanned the crowd and understood at once.

No one has heard of it?

That makes things easier.

You all listen to the story I'm about to make up—

"Many people know that the Kledos Family existed during the Imperial Age, hence the Kledos Family was referred to as 'Millennial Nobility.'

But in fact, the history of the Kledos Family can be traced back to an even earlier 'Golden Age.'

Even then, the Kledos Family of the 'Golden Age' was just a remnant of something greater.

According to the records within the family, the Kledos Family should have been around since the Mythical Age and genuinely experienced the Twilight of the Gods.

And 'The Zodiac Constellations' are mentioned in this part of the history.

The Zodiac Constellations were the collective name for twelve warriors loyal to the Kledos Family.

They stood guard in the Sanctuary of Kledos, fending off all sorts of enemies for the Kledos Family.

Of course, besides The Zodiac Constellations, there were also the Twenty-Four Silver and the Forty-Eight Bronze, who assisted in guarding the Sanctuary alongside The Zodiac Constellations.

Each member of The Zodiac Constellations had their own expertise!

The one of remarkable beauty and grace made roses bloom everywhere, showing the Divine Spirits that the Sanctuary of the Kledos Family was inviolable.

The one who always kept his eyes closed took up self-sacrifice, sealing the enemy army with a one against One Hundred and Eight Evil Stars.

The utmost strong, even when ambushed, would stand tall, inspiring their comrades.

The playful and irreverent, facing the Divine Spirits, would also shatter the chessboard and strike with a punch.

The aloof swordsman was all the more formidable, capable of slaying deities with a sword in one hand.

And the archer, with a single arrow, could bring down Divine Spirits."

Arthur began to exaggerate.

After all, everyone present trusted him completely, and since he didn't need to provide more evidence, Arthur naturally let loose with his tall tales.

And the Death Warriors present listened with rapt attention.

Because, the circle of Death Warriors closest to Arthur happened to number twelve.

How could such a coincidence not be significant?

And this is exactly what Arthur wanted.

As Arthur spoke, he looked around at the twelve individuals surrounding him.

"When you saw me, did you feel a sense of familiarity?

Believe me, I felt the same when I saw you.

My bloodline tells me that the Zodiac Constellations who once protected the Kledos Family have appeared before me!"

As Arthur spoke, his gentle smile was tinged with a sense of relief.

"Thousands of years have passed...

I have finally found you, my twelve Golden Fighters!"

"King!"

The twelve uniquely talented Death Warriors immediately knelt again on one knee.

Yes!

Why did they feel an urge to follow Arthur the moment they saw him, a sense of impatience that left them all surprised?

So that was it!

It turns out we were originally the twelve Golden Fighters of the Kledos Family!

It turns out the King has been searching for us for a thousand years!

"King, we have returned."

One of the twelve Death Warriors, who had narrowly made it through due to a weak Physique, said this.

Touching his own eyes that had been blinded by the Death Soldier Potion, the slight unease he had felt completely vanished—this was his true self from days past.

To embrace death willingly?

To stand against One Hundred and Eight Evil Stars?

He didn't remember, nor did he know.

But, if it was for the King.

He was willing to do it all over again.

"King, we have returned."

The remaining twelve Death Warriors answered in unison.

Among them, someone caressed the handsome face he once detested the most; as a man, he disliked his own face so much that he had poisoned three men who had ill intentions toward him and embarked on a path of flight.

But now?

He truly ignored his appearance, as he contemplated his poison.

The man who was originally two meters tall had, after consuming the "Death Soldier Potion," grown even more, reaching a height of two and a half meters. After careful thought, he added two extra plates of armor to the lower back and spine area.

As for the front?

He could crush his opponent with a single punch.

The disdain left in the eyes of the unflinching Death Warrior slowly lifted his head.

Even a god, would he punch with one blow?

Could he achieve such a feat?

Indeed, it's just like him.

Afterward, this warrior looked toward Arthur, feeling a gratitude in his heart that was beyond compare.

'King, thank you for helping me rediscover myself.'

The Death Warrior who had regained respect and immediately requested a longsword now caressed its blade, his gaze toward Arthur brimming with reverence.

He was completely convinced that his sword could slay any enemy standing in Arthur's way.

The Death Warrior holding a longbow and silently standing behind Arthur felt the same.

He firmly believed that his arrows could hit anyone.

An unparalleled confidence filled these twelve Death Warriors.

Their already slightly distorted "Spirituality" began to soar.

Their "Physiques" also began to strengthen at random.

Then, they...



Started to eat!

They consumed a massive amount, almost insane amounts, of food.

These foods transformed into the purest energy, enhancing the twelve of them.

Bob, watching these twelve, had become numb to their progress.

With his experience, he believed these twelve had the qualifications to consume a second "Death Soldier Potion," yet they had just recently taken the first one!

Is this what a miracle looks like?

Did another miracle occur again?

Appearing too fast, wasn't it?

As if it were just a made-up story?

Bob thought this and then quickly rejected the notion.

Impossible!

How could such things be mere fabrications?

It must be a miracle!

If such miracles truly existed, then...

Could one descend upon me?

I want a child!

Bob thought wistfully, yet he took out the military rations he carried with him and passed them to the twelve Death Warriors... no, twelve Golden Fighters.

"Eat these rations. The taste and texture are mediocre, but they will help you now."

"Thank you."

One Golden Fighter said politely.

The remaining thirty-eight Death Warriors watched enviously.

They could feel that the twelve who were already stronger than them were becoming even more powerful.

'Indeed, worthy of the Zodiac Constellations!'

The Death Warriors exclaimed in admiration, their eyes once again filled with expectation as they looked toward Arthur.

The King had just said, aside from the "Zodiac Constellations," there are also the Twenty-Four Silver and Forty-Eight Bronze.

Perhaps...

They could be among them!

Faced with the hopeful gazes of the remaining thirty-eight Death Warriors, Arthur, however, shook his head.

Instantly, disappointment filled the eyes of the thirty-eight Death Warriors.

But, the next moment, Arthur spoke—

"The 'Zodiac Constellations' are the guardians of the 'Sanctuary' on land, the 'Seven Generals' above the sea, the 'One Hundred and Eight Evil Stars' within the City of Death...

Do you think that if you emerge at the same time as the 'Zodiac Constellations', you would be just ordinary Silver or Bronze warriors?"

Chapter 547 Arthur Hopes to Have a Short Vacation!

Arthur was always willing to give hope to others.

This was especially true for his subordinates who pledged their loyalty unconditionally.

Therefore, under the watchful eyes of the remaining 38 Death Warriors, comforting words effortlessly spilled from Arthur's mouth.

Instantly, the expressions of the 38 Death Warriors changed.

Amid their determination, there was a sense of realization.

They firmly believed in Arthur's words.

Indeed!

How could those that appeared alongside the "Zodiac Constellations" be mere silver or bronze?

The "Seven Generals" of the sea?

The three originally from pirate backgrounds felt a connection.

The "One Hundred and Eight Stars" of the City of Death?

Which of the remaining Death Warriors hadn't killed, who hadn't experienced death?

Without any prompting, they began to identify with those roles.

Moreover, Arthur continued to whisper to them—

"Believe in yourselves, seek your own paths, ignite... your fighting spirit.

It will guide you to your rightful place!"

Speaking off the cuff, Arthur who almost let slip "small universe" quickly corrected his words.

Arthur looked on with satisfaction as the remaining 38 Death Warriors started to experience significant increases in "spirituality" and "physique" under subtle distortions, particularly the 35 who believed themselves to be the "One Hundred and Eight Stars," whose aura became distinctly remarkable.

"Is it because of the 'Death Qi' I possess?

That said, I could soon assemble the One Hundred and Eight Stars, right?

Tsk, I'm Arthur, not Aaron," he mused internally.

Arthur chuckled to himself.

Then, he gestured for Little Lisop to come forth.

Immediately, the heir of South Town quickened his pace towards him.

"Kind Father!"

Upon confirming that the surroundings were clear of outsiders, the heir of South Town dropped his disguise.

Little Lisop's fervor and his ability to inspire others post-awakening were what he needed.

Simply put, he needed a worldly Pope to manage the so-called "Sanctuary" in his stead.

And him?

He was of course meant to stand above the clouds.

But that was a matter for later.

For now?

"First, find a large amount of deer antler, deer blood, and deer meat to nourish their bodies."

Power didn't come from nothing.

Without the ordeal of time, it had to be extracted from elsewhere.

Such as: lifespan.

Arthur didn't wish for his Zodiac Constellations, Seven Generals, or One Hundred and Eight Stars to die from lifespan issues before they were fully formed.

He would find ways to replenish his fighters.

Deer antler, deer blood, and deer meat were of course the first step.

Afterward?

Naturally, it was to find more supplements.

And even powerful magic potions to replenish his fighters.

Moreover, Arthur already had an excellent candidate in mind.

His beloved Marinda would surely help him.

Of course, he had delegated the early phase of this task to Little Lisop, and it definitely wasn't because he was out of money.

He, Arthur, the Spirit Medium of South Los, how could he be out of money?

It's just that after giving most of it to Bob, there wasn't much left.

The remainder?

Quality steel must be used on the edges of a blade!

Surely the owner of South Town, Little Lisop, would understand.

In fact, that was the case.

"Please leave it to me, Kind Father.

I will properly arrange their diet and accommodations, as well as their weapons and gear,"

Little Lisop responded immediately.

Arthur smiled and nodded.

Then, he once again looked towards his Death Warriors.

The appearance of this batch of Death Warriors would make his forthcoming journey to Inner Bay much safer.

Of course, they absolutely could not be exposed.

Concealment in South Town was just right.

After he had set off, some of the Death Warriors secretly followed him while the others arranged ahead of time, in order to achieve the best effect.

'Inner Bay, huh?'

Arthur murmured to himself.

He had prepared as much as he possibly could.

Now, it was time to enjoy the peace of the Cold Winter Festival.

Was this not a rare relaxation before his departure?

He wanted to listen to the snow rustling as it fell on the rooftop, he wanted to add enough firewood to the stove when it snowed, he wanted to place a roasting pan on the stove, and lay slices of meat on it, listening to the sizzling of the fat, and of course, he also needed a warm drink.

An apple and pear cooked in red wine would probably taste pretty good, right?

The rising alcohol vapor would make the alcohol content very low.

It's still not safe.

Better make it fruit juice and milk.

It's all the same.

Arthur was making arrangements for the upcoming 'Cold Winter Festival.'

He had a feeling that he would have lasting memories of this 'Cold Winter Festival.'

Watching the high sun, Arthur stretched lazily.

At the same time, standing on the deck, Alvis Hamlet also stretched.

'Safe!



Even Gleisa wouldn't expect me to have arranged such a fast boat on standby, capable of crossing West Berlin Territory and Ainhars Territory within a day and reaching Bert Territory.

According to the current speed, I should be able to return to Inner Bay in the afternoon.'

Thinking of this, after meeting Arthur briefly and then swiftly leaving the 'Lotus Leaf Hotel' and leaving South Los after setting a deceptive plan, the young man couldn't help but smirk.

Especially thinking about his own deceptive plan, he felt somewhat proud.

'Even if Gleisa discovers the two diversionary troops I sent out now, what of it?

You are ultimately one step behind!'

Thinking of how Gleisa would look frustrated when he discovered those two diversionary troops, the young man from the Golden Lion Family couldn't help but want to laugh.

In Inner Bay, due to his father's influence, this young man from the Golden Lion Family had been taken care of by Gleisa several times.

Some of these instances had caused him unspeakable woes.

Now that he could cause that 'older brother' some annoyance, the young man felt genuinely happy.

'Master Alvis, your breakfast is ready.

Do you want to eat in the cabin, or on the deck?'

The captain of the boat asked.

'On the deck.'

The young man from the Golden Lion Family answered quite politely.

The captain was a trusted subordinate of his father.

This trip to South Los had gone smoothly and resulted in unexpected discoveries, largely relying on him.

Considering this, the young man from the Golden Lion Family became even more respectful towards the captain.

Moreover, he decided that once he returned to Inner Bay, he would definitely ensure his father rewarded the man generously.

Especially when he saw the breakfast, he thought even more so.

Fried eggs, fried ham, bread, hot milk.

Roasted beef shoulder served with lettuce and radish.

Steamed lamb served with sauce.

These were all Alvis's favorites.

Without hesitation, Alvis sat down on the deck and began his sumptuous breakfast.

But after eating only half of it, the young man from the Golden Lion Family sensed something was wrong.

It was poisoned!

Instinctively, Alvis tried to stand up.

But then, pain shot through his lower back.

Alvis turned his head and saw the captain with a sinister smile—

"Greetings from Master Gleisa!"

As he spoke, he moved to twist the dagger.

The young man from the Golden Lion Family didn't know why his father's trusted subordinate would betray them, but he knew that if he let the man twist the dagger, he would surely die.

Jumping into the Inland River was his only chance at survival.

With all his effort, the young man from the Golden Lion Family leapt down.

The captain sneered and was about to order a search.

But just at that moment—

Clatter, clatter, clatter!

Three young men appeared on the shore.

Chapter 548

Hayes awoke on Manta's bed to find his mistress already sifting through the latest intelligence on Inner Bay—as one of Inner Bay's intelligence chiefs in Bert Territory, Manta held very high clearance, so the woman was not easily fooled by covert matters.

Upon seeing Hayes awake, Manta tucked the loose hair by her ear behind, blocking the gaze Hayes had on her slender, fair neck.

Manta knew what Hayes liked about her.

So, she always enjoyed teasing the man who set her heart racing.

Just like at this very moment—

"Do you know what happened in South Los?"

Turning her head with a playful smile, Manta teased.

The sight of her shallow dimples made Hayes unable to resist reaching out to touch them, but with a quick move, Manta caught his finger in her mouth and gently licked the tip with her tongue.

"Hiss!

Stop that, Manta.

Today I've got two troublesome guys coming over.

I need to be fully energized to deal with them."

Hayes inhaled sharply, going on and on with his words.

"Mhm, I know.

That's why you're awake now.

Otherwise...

You'd wake up around four in the afternoon, and when you left here, you'd be rubbing your waist, leaning on the wall, and muttering 'this medicine doesn't work anymore, need to switch to another.'

Manta teased her man.

Hayes could only wear a bitter smile, not daring to refute even a tiny bit.

Because he didn't want to be the butt of jokes for Jimte and Kalal.

He wanted to present himself to them as perfectly normal.

So, the nephew of Count Bert begged for mercy.

"I swear, last time, taking advantage when you weren't looking was my fault.

But I just couldn't help myself.

And...

I love you."

Hayes looked at Manta with deep affection.

Unfortunately, the lady was not fooled.

However, she did give Hayes some face.

She knew men needed their pride.

And Hayes needed it even more.

So, the lady wrapped her arms around her chest, the black and red silk nightdress immediately bulging impressively, before slowly saying.

"Guess what happened in South Los?

If you guess correctly, I'll let you leave.

And for the next week, you can rest at home."

Hayes didn't hazard a guess right away.

He knew this woman's tricks too well and, keeping a serious tone, he said.

"A week is too long!

I can't stand to be away from you for a moment, Manta.

Evening!

I will come back in the evening!"

Having said this, and after seeing the smile on his lover's face, he then spoke, "It must be related to the 'Spirit Medium,' right?"

Recent messages have all been about this 'Spirit Medium'!

The long-hidden Kledos Family must be making their move!"

Having received the answer she wanted, Manta was not so concerned about other matters anymore.

Upon hearing Hayes' response, she just nodded—

"Mhm, it's related to the 'Spirit Medium.'

He has become the new master of Harold Manor.

The daughter of Baron Harold has become his goddaughter."

Even though he was somewhat prepared, Manta's words still made Hayes frown.

As far as he was concerned, Baron Harold was a lonely man.

And without any Talent, a complete dud.

Apart from a loyal butler worthy of praise, there was nothing else.

Even in his notes, there were records of Baron Harold's activities for the past six months.

According to these records, it was clear that Baron Harold was not doing well.

As for why keep records?

Of course, it was because he had his eyes on Baron Harold's title and manor.

As the nephew of Count Bert, he enjoyed numerous privileges in the Bert Territory, but as his uncle aged, and his cousins gradually took control, he knew he would inevitably have to "travel."

This was crystal clear to Hayes.

Therefore, he had made some preparations in advance.

But any preparation can encounter the unexpected.

For example: Manta.

For example: Jimte, Kalal.

He had known the former's identity for a long time, and his approach was deliberate; Manta knew that he knew her identity and also knew of his deliberate approach.

But at that time, both needed each other.

Thus, they hit it off right away.

Gradually, Hayes, with the help of Manta, accumulated his first pot of gold.

Similarly, Manta had gone from an insignificant spy to one of the persons in charge of the Bert Territory.

However, what started as a relationship of convenience between them gradually developed a tiny bit of affection as time went by.

The two were smart enough not to voice it.



But they couldn't help but test each other in various ways.

As for Jimte and Kalal?

The two could be considered half friends of Hayes.

The only reason they became such was because their family backgrounds were similar, and they sympathized with each other's plights.

Of course, Hayes felt he had been more comfortable lately compared to the two of them.

He heard that at 'Yumir Manor,' these two ran into that 'Spirit Medium' and suffered a crushing defeat.

Not only was their pride severely damaged, but upon returning to their respective territories, they also faced a fair amount of censure.

Especially Kalal, who almost lost all his honors.

Therefore, after receiving the prize for the 'South County Swordsmanship Competition' Champion from the Old Lion of Inner Bay, Kalal sent a letter early, stating that he wanted to spend the 'Cold Winter Festival' in Bert, closer to Inner Bay, and go directly to the Swordsmanship Competition.

Jimte did something similar.

The Marquess of Seberlin hadn't said much to his daughter, but the Marquess's daughter emphasized something every day.

So, Jimte also sent a letter.

Hoping to spend the 'Cold Winter Festival' in Bert.

And coincidentally, they both chose today.

Because of this, Hayes felt a headache coming on.

He was well aware of their discord and conflict.

Having them appear in Bert at this time, he hoped nothing unexpected would happen.

"Sigh!"

Hayes sighed, both for the helpless situation of Jimte and Kalal and because his own plan of usurpation was thwarted in advance by Arthur.

'In a way, the three of us really do sympathize with each other's plight.'

With this sentiment, Hayes got dressed.

"I've saved some money,"

just as Hayes was leaving the house, Manta suddenly said.

"I've saved some money too.

But I'm just a little short of the goal.

I can't help but feel unwilling to give up without trying."

Hayes turned and smiled.

Manta smiled as well, then turned away, paying no further attention to Hayes.

Years of living together had made it clear to Manta that Hayes was not someone she could persuade.

Her attempt just now?

It was also an effort driven by unwillingness to give up.

And the answer she just received?

It was reasonably good.

At least, Hayes had promised that if they didn't succeed this time, he would join her in moving to South Los or overseas to live a secluded life.

That was enough for her.

Hayes turned to leave the house, and just then, Manta's voice rang out again in the room—

"I'll leave the door unlocked for you tonight."

In her voice, there was a clear note of invitation.

Suddenly, Hayes felt his face blanch, and his legs trembled a bit as he descended the stairs.

It wasn't until he arrived at the meeting place and saw Jimte and Kalal that he snapped back to reality.

Looking at the two who could be called his friends, Hayes unconsciously smiled.

However, the next moment, the nephew of Count Bert frowned—

'Something's off!'

Chapter 549 Jimte, Kalal, and Hayes. Up!

Hayes was, of course, familiar with Jimte and Kalal.

In fact, it was precisely because he knew them that the two could become his half-friends.

Firstly, his similar background to the two naturally won him their favor.

Secondly, their subtle enmity was something that could bring him even greater benefits.

And the latter was much more important!

In the past, Hayes had relied on the latter, playing both sides to reap the benefits.

But today was somewhat different!

Jimte and Kalal had changed!

In the past, there were times when the two did appear together, but they always deliberately maintained a safe distance between themselves, their toes subtly angled towards each other, and their dominant hands would never stray far from the hilt of their swords, even when exchanging pleasantries, they remained ready to draw their swords at any moment.

But now?

The two stood shoulder to shoulder, and their palms were even away from the sword hilts.

The most important thing was that there was no longer that subtle confronting angle of their toes; instead, they were pointed at...

Him?

'Something's not right! Something's not right!' Hayes thought to himself, having already stopped in his tracks, but he did not immediately retreat and instead greeted the two with a smile:

"Good morning, Jimte, Kalal.

It's really great to see you two together during the winter days.

Have you thought about how to spend the 'Cold Winter Festival' in Bert Territory?

If not, I have quite a few recommendations."

Jimte's fair face immediately revealed a smile, and with his smooth features, the smile appeared even warmer.

This son of the current Baron Norvia and the fiancé of the Marquess of West Berlin's second daughter scratched his cheek, seemingly a bit embarrassed.

"I'm sorry to intrude, I'll leave everything up to you."

Speaking, Jimte also bowed slightly.

Kalal, on the other hand, was much more straightforward.

"Women, wine, and a warm room."

The exceedingly direct words of the nephew of the Marquess of Ainhars were filled with arrogance, making one frown involuntarily upon hearing them.

Hayes furrowed his brows.

But not because of Kalal's arrogance.

Rather, it was that Kalal had spoken such arrogant words while walking directly behind him.

Now, in front of him stood an embarrassed Jimte, and behind him was the self-assured Kalal.

With one in front and one behind, he was sandwiched in between.

Without any hesitation, Hayes raised his hands high.

This nephew of Count Bert might not have understood what was happening, but the attitudes of Jimte and Kalal explained enough: if he didn't want to suffer, he'd better be smart about it.

"Hey, Jimte, didn't I tell you? This guy would surrender at the first opportunity!" Kalal said, standing there and laughing.

"Hmm, you win," Jimte sighed as if reluctantly, but the smile on his face did not diminish at all.

And as Hayes listened to their conversation, his heart kept sinking.

When had these two become so close?

Could it be...

With questions swirling in his mind, Hayes shouted loudly:

"Gentlemen, give me a chance?"

My previous robbery of the West Berlin Family and Ainhars Family's merchant ships had no ill intent; I was merely venting for you. The goods are still in the warehouse; I haven't touched them at all."

Upon hearing Hayes's explanation, Jimte and Kalal narrowed their eyes.

Previously, the fleets of the West Berlin Family and Ainhars Family had been robbed several times in Inland River.

Each time, the people on the ships were left with no survivors, the cargo vanished into thin air.

And every time, the lost goods were of high value.

Initially, both families thought there was an 'inside job.'

Especially in the Ainhars Family, those so-called 'family members' all pointed their fingers at Kalal, blaming his arrogant and domineering attitude for breaking up the loyalty of the family's retainers.

"Tsk!" Kalal clicked his tongue softly.

Hayes immediately had a bad feeling.

It wasn't about this matter.

Right then, the nephew of Count Bert shouted again—

"My kidnapping of the wealthy merchants from the West Berlin Territory and the Ainhars Territory wasn't premeditated, they just accidentally stumbled upon some of my affairs, and I had to do it.

Please believe me, I am innocent!"

The words of Hayes caused Jimte to lose his smile.

A year and a half ago, one of his agents suddenly disappeared within the West Berlin Territory, thoroughly disrupting some of his plans.

He even suspected that the Marquess of West Berlin was trying to knock him down a peg.

As a result, he laid low for over half a year.

It turned out to be Hayes all along.

"Heh!"

Jimte let out a cold laugh.

Hayes was taken aback.

It wasn't about that matter?

Then what was it?

Apart from these two issues, the nephew of Count Bert couldn't think of anything else that would warrant both men coming after him together.

He had done quite a few things.



But aside from these two issues affecting their interests, the rest were unrelated matters.

"Is there a chance you could give me?

At least please spare Manta."

Hayes said with a bitter smile.

The nephew of Count Bert couldn't figure out what was going on, but he hoped for a chance to start over—at least Manta was innocent.

The thought of the woman who was initially just being used by him, a faint warmth rose in Hayes's heart.

Then, resignedly, he drew his longsword.

He was most likely going to die.

However, if he could ensure Manta was a tiny bit safer before his death, it would be great.

As for running?

It was not possible.

If he turned his back on these two fellows, he knew he would die without a place to be buried.

"Kalal has better swordsmanship, so I must take down Jimte first, and it has to be by surprise, ideally with enough strength left to turn and strike another blow.

If I could severely wound Kalal as well, that would be even better!"

Hayes thought to himself without showing any sign.

Yet, Jimte revealed a smile once again.

The fiancé of the Marquess of West Berlin's second daughter, without moving his feet, slightly shifted his upper body and looked towards Kalal, who was behind Hayes.

"I've won this time.

One win, one loss, a draw," Jimte said, his voice tinged with a hint of joy, which puzzled Hayes.

What puzzled Hayes even more was that Kalal, who had been behind him ready to form a pincer attack with Jimte, actually circled back to stand shoulder to shoulder with Jimte once again.

"This guy seemed so sinister, but I didn't expect him to have even a tiny bit of courage," Kalal said with a corner of his mouth cocked, an expression of surprise.

The expressions of Jimte and Kalal completely baffled Hayes.

What are they planning to do?

Mock him?

It didn't seem so!

The subtle killing intent from before in Jimte and Kalal, he could clearly feel, even though it was elicited by his own confession, but that killing intent was real, definitely not a joke.

Yet the attitude of the two now seemed indeed like a joke.

Suddenly, Hayes was filled with doubts.

Almost subconsciously, Hayes began to sort through the recent events.

Hayes hoped to find some clues in them.

Then, a thought flashed into Hayes's mind, and almost instinctively, the nephew of Count Bert suddenly looked up.

Looking at the two men standing shoulder to shoulder, a look of shock surfaced in the eyes of the nephew of Count Bert—

'Could it be?!'

Chapter 550 Jimte, Kalal, and Hayes. Continued!

Hayes looked at Jimte and Kalal with a shocked expression.

In the mind of this nephew of Count Bert, there had already been a rough guess, but faced with this guess, the nephew of Count Bert simply could not bring himself to believe it.

Because—

It was too incredible!

According to the timeline, the last time Jimte and Kalal met, there had been a vague confrontation.

But this time when they met, they were fighting side by side.

And in the process, what had happened to each of them individually seemed highly unlikely to result in such a 'close-knit' partnership.

Even if one changed.

The other one?

He was likely just using him.

That feeling, Hayes was sure he could not be mistaken.

So, something must have happened to both of them at the same time.

And such an event that happened simultaneously must have required the two to be together.

Only by experiencing something together could they have arrived at this 'fighting side by side' situation.

And indeed, during the interval between these two meetings, there really had been one such encounter.

And it was one he hadn't been present at.

Yumir Manor!

Once he confirmed this location, Hayes naturally thought of that Spirit Medium from South Los, Arthur Kledos.

In recent times, the brilliance of this 'Spirit Medium' had particularly caught the eye of this nephew of Count Bert, especially some information he had obtained from Manta, which made this nephew of Count Bert raise the dangerousness of this 'Spirit Medium' to the extreme—extraordinary talent, formidable strength, these were still within the nephew of Count Bert's acceptance, for he was such a man himself.

What truly concerned this nephew of Count Bert was the secretive family.

This nephew of Count Bert was silently gathering information about the Kledos family.

And the more he gathered, the more startled this nephew of Count Bert became.

Merely bits and pieces of information were enough for this nephew of Count Bert to confirm that the Kledos family had to be a family that existed for hundreds of years.

Even thousands of years!

Millennial Nobility!

The existence of such a family, concealed in South Los, could only spell trouble, he thought to himself.

But still, Jimte and Kalal couldn't just blatantly become someone else's vassals, could they?

It wasn't as if they were facing the 'Lion Group' of the Old Lion.

So, this nephew of Count Bert was as much shocked as he was curious and incredulous.

"At Yumir Manor, were you guys putting on an act?"

About what had happened at Yumir Manor, Hayes had made investigations after the fact.

At this time, he was naturally probing.

"That's why I hate this guy.

Even when he's figured out the answer, he's still here poking and probing.

What a sly fox."

Kalal rolled his eyes and said irritably.

And Jimte explained with a smile.

"My lord created the 'Yumir Manor Incident' to draw us into the scheme, we..."

"Wait!

Is this something I can hear without paying?

You guys aren't planning to kill me to silence me, are you?"

Before Jimte could finish speaking, Hayes quickly waved his hands.

What he wanted to know had been completely confirmed by the time Jimte began to speak.

As incredulous as it was, the fact remained a fact, unchangeable.

And at this moment, his interruption?

It was still probing.

He wanted to understand the true attitudes of the two men, then, provide a corresponding countermeasure.

Although the two men seemed to have guesses about what they wanted to do, this nephew of Count Bert also had an inkling.

But,

doesn't everyone have a bit of fantasy?

However, with Jimte looking at him with a semi-smile, and as Kalal again placed his hands on the hilts of the swords on both his sides, Hayes completely gave up on any fantasy.

"Are you here to open up the 'Inland Waterway Route'?"

Are the tax exemptions in West Berlin Territory and Ainhars Territory not enough to make that dignitary back off?

Must you also break through Bert Territory?

Isn't this a bit too conspicuous?"

Hayes asked.

"When has my lord ever been inconspicuous?"

And don't tell me you weren't prepared?

The sons of Count Bert... they're all part of your plot, aren't they?"

Kalal sneered coldly.

In the past, Kalal hadn't been too fond of Hayes.

Because, Kalal instinctively felt that the man was devious, unlike Jimte, whose disguise was more for self-protection.

And Hayes's disguise?

It was more for scheming against others.

If it weren't for the mutual interests that had entangled them previously, he would have drawn his sword and struck Hayes down long ago.

"They are all involved.

But...

I can't make a move."

Facing Kalal's pressing, Hayes nodded and still wore an innocent look.

As the nephew of Count Bert, he absolutely could not take action against his three cousins as long as he wanted to inherit the Bert Territory.

Therefore, he made connections with Jimte and Kalal.

Especially Kalal!

Previously, Hayes had always believed that Kalal would be a good knife.

But now?



A bitter smile appeared on Hayes's lips.

Why?

Why had his plan been foiled by that South Los 'Spirit Medium'?

"Hmm, you are protecting yourself, you absolutely cannot take action.

Even, from beginning to end, this matter had nothing to do with you.

It was Kalal acting on his own, enticing your three cousins to partake and obtaining the Bert Territory docks and factories from the three of them.

There was a touch of luck, but Kalal actually tore a piece of flesh from Count Bert—and all these were the orders of the Marquess of Ainhars!

They certainly would have been the orders of the Marquess of Ainhars!

Kalal was just a pawn.

Even if war erupted between the two territories, it would not be related to Kalal!"

Jimte said with a cheery smile.

"Indeed, those with squinty eyes are monsters!

How can you calmly talk about such terrifying things?"

Although Kalal said this, his demeanor was eager and full of anticipation.

After pondering for a moment, Hayes asked,

"What about you?"

"I don't want war to break out and try to prevent it as much as possible, but the Marquess of Ainhars, driven by greed, sent someone to assassinate me for the Bert Territory's docks and factories.

The West Berlin Territory naturally cannot remain indifferent."

Jimte retained his cheery demeanor.

However, at this moment, Hayes couldn't smile.

The Count of Bert stared at Jimte.

"Are we playing this big?

If we're not careful, we might just end up skinned and disjointed!"

Hayes looked seriously at Jimte.

"Bert Territory, do you want it?"

Jimte asked.

Hayes was silent.

He certainly wanted the Bert Territory, but he preferred to acquire it in his own way, not through such risky means.

No!

It was no longer just risky.

It was absolutely a madman's plan!

Was this the South Los 'Spirit Medium'?

As Hayes sighed, the ever perceptive Kalal spoke out—

"Don't bring up the lord.

The lord's vision is far greater than this.

We are just laying the groundwork for the lord in advance, while incidentally clearing out some short-sighted fellows."

Kalal's words made Hayes's heart jump in silence.

More than this?

That means....

Inner Bay?!

Hayes gasped.

Before Hayes could fully exhale, Jimte already handed him a contract, and this time Kalal unsheathed his sword directly.

The meaning couldn't be clearer.

Sign it, and you're one of us.

If not, then die.

Hayes didn't want to die, so he signed.

Moreover, strangely, Hayes felt a tiny bit of excitement.

He wanted to be part of such a plan.

He wanted to test his own capacity.

He was impatient.

Right then, Hayes walked and talked with Jimte and Kalal.

With Jimte and Kalal fully cooperating, Hayes felt his plan could be perfected further.

And just as the three were quietly discussing, they suddenly heard the sound of someone falling into the water from the Inland River.

The three did not care to pay attention.

The place was secluded, and anything happening here wouldn't be odd.

But the next moment, the captain on the ship saw the three young men on the shore.

The three were dressed exceptionally well, clearly of unusual origins.

Normally, the captain would naturally be more restrained.

But today was different.

The matters of today could not be known by outsiders.

So, the captain gave the order—

"Go, kill those three to silence them."

Instantly, the expressions of Jimte, Kalal, and Hayes darkened.

Then, all three smiled simultaneously.