

Winter 201

Chapter 201: Louis's Magic Talent (Part 3)

This isn't something that can be explained by luck.

Louis, with a mix of surprise and delight on his face, slowly retracted his fingers and exhaled slightly "exhaustedly," "However, it really seems quite tiring."

Lei Xi'er's throat moved slightly.

He looked at the young man in front of him, who "appeared somewhat strained" as he completed the Light Emitting Technique, and was momentarily unable to determine whether the other was innately talented or... just exceptionally lucky.

Yet a gut feeling told him one thing:

If this person truly wishes to learn magic, he might, in the future, become... a Grand Mage.

Lei Xi'er stood in place, speechless for a long time. His gaze remained fixed on this point of dissipated dim light, his expression complex.

He had initially only intended to test.

A mere basic magic, even if failed, wouldn't be unexpected. Yet what he didn't anticipate was that this young man actually lit it up.

This wasn't a coincidence.

Though the light was weak, it was extremely stable, almost without a trace of magic power escaping.

This meant that the user's concentration of mind, precision of magic power guidance, and even mental resilience had reached a rare beginner's limit.

He slowly furrowed his brows.

Just who is he...?

A mage's practice is far crueler than outsiders imagine, demanding selectivity towards talent, testing of will, and scrutinizing background, every step essential.

And the person before him not only possessed magic power but could successfully cast magic on his first try.

More importantly, he was also a noble, a lord, of clear birth, with identity, responsibility, and stance.

If he truly wished to embark on the path of magic... isn't this a rare opportunity?

Lei Xi'er relaxed his brow and murmured softly:

"Talent... is certainly adequate, might even be called genius.

Background... Ironblood Empire nobility, clean enough.

Plus... he saved me."

Though Mage Forest had strict rules, if it was merely "private guidance now," to supplement formally once he joined, it wasn't unacceptable.

Thus, Lei Xi'er convinced himself and then said, "Indeed you have magic power and possess the potential to cast spells... However, magic isn't something that can be discussed freely."

"So?" Louis asked.

"So," he paused, and solemnly stated, "Before you formally become a member of Mage Forest, I can't teach you more magic publicly, nor do I want you to spread this around."

Louis hesitated not at all, nodding immediately, with a serious and candid expression: "I understand, I won't tell."

He even showed a hint of childlike smile.

"That means... I can continue learning, right?"

Lei Xi'er froze, surprised at his quick response, not even showing a hint of doubt or dissatisfaction.

He had expected nobles to reveal a trace of arrogance or unwillingness when facing rule constraints, but Louis did not; he was sincerely happy.

This made Lei Xi'er suddenly feel a bit uncomfortable.

He cleared his throat and said softly, "Only a little bit of guidance. As preparation."

"Understood." Louis smiled faintly, with light flashing subtly in his eyes, though he hid it well, only leaving evident joy on the surface.

Thus, during his recuperation in Red Tide Territory, besides recovering physically, Lei Xi'er also began occasionally teaching Louis some of the most basic magic.

Initially only out of probing, since Louis displayed magic resonance, capable of releasing the basic "Light Emitting Technique," he decided to just slightly teach some simple Shaping Magic.

For example, Fireball Technique, Body Fixing Technique, Light Beam Technique.

The progress of instruction seemed not fast, for each magic, Louis needed about three to four days to master.

From spell formation, breathing regulation, release rhythm to controlling magic power output, he had to comprehend, practice, adjust each step by step.

He would make mistakes, fail; sometimes recite spells incorrectly, sometimes release excess magic power, even scorched a small patch of grass on his first try with the Fireball Technique.

But to Lei Xi'er, this speed was soaring, Mage Forest students averaged half a month to master a basic magic.

Moreover, Louis' "errors" were quite reasonable, and his growth exceedingly stable.

Unlike some poorly talented magic sensors stuck repeatedly at a certain step, but every three to four days, like unsealing a layer, crossing a threshold.

Just rightly positioned to gain experience, yet avoiding harm or distress.

Especially after his tentative grasp of Fireball Technique, Lei Xi'er casually remarked: "Fireball Technique isn't limited to forming a ball. Magic is flowing, will can shape it. You may try... extending it."

He said this without expecting Louis to understand, merely to let him hear something interesting.

But five days later, when Louis again summoned the flame, Lei Xi'er saw that nearly impossible silhouette.

The fireball didn't burst apart but stretched, elongated, becoming blade-like slender, with slight flame flow on the surface, still unstable but the outline clear, like a crude "Fire Blade."

"...You achieved it?"

Lei Xi'er almost exclaimed this, eyes shocked, as if staring at a cat defying gravity whilst relieving itself.

"This is... Fire Blade Technique..."

In his voice was a complex emotion: incredulous, astonished, even a touch of reverence.

Back when he mastered "Fire Blade Technique," it took him a whole month, relying on his mentor's three spell demonstrations and repeated mental guidance.

Mind you, he was considered elite among mages, and also a genius.

And Louis... this noble youth from a frontier territory with no magic foundation, managed a prototype merely by some pointers and one demonstration?

Chapter 202: Louis's Magic Talent (Part 4)

"...Talent...is extraordinarily high."

Lei Xi'er stared blankly at Louis, her eyes as if reevaluating this person.

This was no longer at the level of "suitable for learning magic," but a constitution born for magic.

Configuration Perception, Magic Power Control, the compatibility of will and spells—all were nearly reaching the theoretical peak.

She even suspected that if Louis received systematic training, in a few years, he would be at the core of the Mage Forest.

"If I take him back... even the Tower Councilors might be moved," Lei Xi'er entertained this thought for the first time.

And there stood Louis in front of her, at this moment only slightly lowering his eyes, bowing his head to put away the flame in his hand.

He displayed restraint and composure, without a hint of pride, even deliberately frowning, affecting a "still not stable" expression.

"Still not quite there...the lines keep floating," he murmured, his voice laced with a slightly imperceptible self-blame.

This was his deliberate attempt to conceal his true level, making the flames appear somewhat ethereal, the edges flickering, as if lacking proficiency.

Louis could certainly do better.

He intentionally slowed his progress, hiding ninety percent of his proficiency and depth.

It wasn't to show off, nor to deceive trust, but out of an instinct for self-preservation.

He couldn't let Lei Xi'er become suspicious, questioning him on "how exactly he did it."

Nor could he let her see that the magic power reserves within him far exceeded that of ordinary people.

Even less could he let her know that the source of the magic power circuit was not the ordinary Meditation Technique she taught, but the Primordial Meditation Technique.

The magic absorption efficiency of that technique was over twenty times that of the version Lei Xi'er taught. And when learning magic configurations, elemental sensing, or will shaping, he almost needn't memorize by rote; he only needed to understand once to naturally reconstruct it in his mind.

This way of learning was hardly "learning," but more of recalling.

And this made him even more cautious.

He couldn't explain where this talent came from.

He couldn't possibly tell Lei Xi'er, "A Grand Mage, before dying, injected a fragmentary yet astonishing mysterious memory into my body."

If that were the case, the other party might directly dissect him.

So he learned a bit more slowly, a bit more stupidly, a bit more error-prone, a bit more failing.

Even though Lei Xi'er was already shocked to disbelief, what she saw was only the part he "allowed to be seen."

"I still have much to learn." He raised his head, showing Lei Xi'er a humble smile.

And Lei Xi'er stared at him for a long while before finally nodding lightly, "You will become a very strong mage."

So she taught even more diligently.

At first, she was still reserved, contemplating whether Louis could handle it, and whether he was learning too quickly. But now, those concerns were already cast aside.

From initially one lesson a day, it turned into two sessions each day, morning and night.

Occasionally, she would even expound on the structure of magic power flow or the theoretical differences between factions during a walk under the moonlight after dinner.

Lei Xi'er rarely showed such enthusiasm for anyone.

But with Louis, she truly couldn't control it.

Because he was too fit to be a mage.

His affinity with magic was high, his breath stable as a lake during meditation, emotions clear, and will focused when casting spells, with comprehension far beyond the ordinary.

With just a slight hint, he could always quickly grasp the key.

She had seen many "smart people" learning magic and also seen noble scions with extreme talent yet impetuous.

But none were like Louis, taking each step steadily without the slightest waste.

She still harbored a trace of wariness in her heart.

But that suspicion gradually faded amid Louis's repeated "reasonable mistakes" and "sincere requests for instruction."

She even began to persuade herself: "With his conditions, entering the Mage Forest is not a problem. I am grooming a future genius for the Mage Forest."

Chapter 203: Envoys from the Governor's Mansion

Frost Halberd City, Northern Governor's Mansion.

The hearth burned quietly, the room filled with the scent of pine resin and wine.

Duke Edmund lounged on the high-backed chair, fiddling with the silver knife on the table. The fire lacquer seal on the envelope was a familiar sun pattern, the crest of Red Tide Territory.

He hummed lowly, a smile tugging at his lips: "That boy finally wrote a letter... Could it be about the wedding?"

He tore open the envelope, unfolded the paper, and began to read.

The initial lines indeed referred to the progress of wedding preparations, such as the venue and the guest list... but soon, the writing became hurried.

The following content shifted to: insect swarm, parasitic, mind control, corrosive liquid, explosive spreading mechanism, combat puppets with purple-tinged pupils.

The letter trembled slightly in his hand, Duke Edmund's brows slowly knitted, the sinister scar slashing across his face seemed to tug and tremble as well.

This thing... it wasn't the first time he became aware of it.

Three years ago.

It was the strangest war in the Northern Territory for a decade.

That late spring, north of Frost Trace River, a whole Viscount Territory.

About three villages, two farms, a Knight's Fortress, in less than six days, transformed into hollow grounds.

The initial reports were merely of beast disturbances, then evolved into complete villages disappearing, stationed troops disconnecting, relay stations losing contact.

Until a scouting cavalry troop narrowly escaped, the intelligence they brought back kept the Governor's Mansion awake all night.

"The dead move, as if suspended by strings, with eyes that glow... There's something beating in their chests, not hearts, something else.

Underneath the skin, like leeches wriggling, and their mouths and noses leak filaments...

We bombed one to death, and his chest burst open directly, the liquid spraying out from the insect pouch corroded the armor with a sizzling sound. Then insects crawled out from the corpse, burrowing into people!"

Thus, the Northern Orthodox Army dispatched a full regiment of elite troops.

Five teams of elite knights sealed the perimeter, while a squad of extraordinary knights carrying a large number of Magic Explosion Bullets and Burning Agents charged into the polluted zone.

The battle lasted two days and nights, all buildings along with an entire area of over thirty miles of forest were incinerated.

Magic Explosion Bullets shattered insect bodies, petroleum and combustible gray paste completely sealed the insect swarm's escape routes. Someone described the last ten hours of that battle as "like watching Hell breathe."

The whole operation resulted in ninety-four troops missing, fifty-seven confirmed infected...

It became a disastrous loss to the Northern Territory's high-end combat strength,

That land later marked as the "Silent Fire Zone," a rare permanently blocked area on the Northern Territory map atlas.

For the ensuing three years, no similar incidents occurred, but the true cause of the appearance of such insects was never investigated.

Yet now, the phenomena and symptoms Louis detailed in his letter were identical to back then.

More terrifyingly, Louis also mentioned: no corpses or blood were found at the battle scene, as if meticulously cleaned.

That implies the insect swarm not only survived but evolved, more intelligent.

As for Louis mentioning he rescued a mage.

Edmund glanced over this line, showing no emotional fluctuation.

He was neither surprised nor concerned.

An ordinary mage?

In his level of perspective, merely some flashy casters, stirring no major waves in real wars and political situations.

After all, he had at least a dozen mages under his command.

They bear no regret in dying, and their largest usefulness was that the living one told Louis details of their assault by insect corpses.

Duke Edmund remained silent in the office for a moment, fingers lightly tapping the armrest, as if weighing, or rummaging through memories.

"Summon Knight Vic Glanser to see me." He suddenly spoke.

The attendant hesitated momentarily, then bowed and departed.

Not long after, the door was pushed open, cold wind swept in along with the cloak.

The arriving person was a tall, slender middle-aged knight, with white hair tied back, a stern face, armor of silver-black half-plate and a dark red cloak, its edges embroidered with golden threads.

He made no sound of metal clashing when he walked, moving so lightly it was nearly unlike someone in armor.

Only those ash-gray eyes, cold and sharp, seemed capable of piercing through mist.

Knight Vic Glanser, an extraordinary high-tier knight, loyal to Duke Edmund.

Raised in the army since childhood, experienced through the Great Rebellion and multiple vicious wars, he had once single-handedly slain three Snow Swearers of extraordinary power.

In combat, he consistently remained silent, thus was dubbed "the Northern Blade."

But besides combat strength, he had a bloodline talent known by very few—perception.

Activating the bloodline talent made his perception extraordinarily keen, capable of detecting traces and scents ignored by others, especially in searching and scouting proving unmatched.

"I need you to lead a team to Red Tide Territory." Duke Edmund's tone was low.

"Insect corpse traces have appeared once more. Just days ago, Louis discovered residual corrosive marks at the territory edge, conditions strikingly similar to three years ago..."

Vic's pupils shrank slightly, the originally stone-calm demeanor showed a rare ripple.

He asked gravely, "Certainly?"

"It's confirmed." Edmund nodded, his tone icy, "He did not witness personally, but the dispatched team brought back intelligence. He said those traces were identical to back then... during that cleansing in Boroda River Valley."

A silence settled.

Vic slowly bowed his head, voice deep: "Such a thing... should not appear again."

"So you understand why I'm sending you." Edmund gazed at him calmly, "You participated in that campaign; you know how dangerous those things are."

"Besides," his tone paused, gaze growing heavier, "your bloodline talent also makes you the best candidate for this mission. If even you fail to detect any trace, then we truly ought to fear."

Chapter 204: Envoys from the Governor's Mansion (Part 2)

"I need you to assess if there is a risk of a second burst. If a threat is confirmed, take direct action to eliminate it without requesting permission."

Vic was silent for a moment, then knelt on one knee and replied in a low voice, "As you command."

"Choose thirty high-tier elite knights whom you trust," Edmond added softly, "We can't gamble that this is just an 'accidental appearance' this time."

"Yes." Vic stood up, his expression unchanged, yet as sharp as a sheathed blade.

He turned and left, immediately going to select the knights to head for the Red Tide Territory.

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Steady footsteps echoed on the stone stairs of the Red Tide Lord's Castle.

Louis looked up to see a tall knight entering the office, accompanied by a servant.

"Vic Glanser," the knight introduced himself with a slight nod, his tone crisp and decisive.

"Welcome, Knight Glanser." Louis stood up, proactively shaking his hand, "I've been waiting for you."

They each took a seat on opposite sides of the long table, the firelight from the fireplace flickering on the wooden map and the documents spread out.

Louis succinctly explained the location of the insect swarm sighting, the cause of the event, the current lockdown areas, and the Red Tide Lord's response measures.

Throughout, his tone remained steady, even when mentioning those who died in battle, he expressed no superfluous lamentations, just presenting the facts convincingly.

"I want to hear from those two personally," Vic spoke in a calm tone, looking at Louis, "Especially the mage... you mentioned in the letter that he's the only witness."

Louis nodded at these words and summoned his attendant, whispering instructions.

"I'll invite them here," he said, looking up at Vic, his voice steady, "You judge for yourself, but I'll be listening as well, as this matter isn't over yet."

"Of course." Vic nodded slightly, a hint of approval in his eyes, "To be honest, you've handled this well."

In no time, the attendant brought in two people.

First was the middle-aged search knight, tall and dressed in dust and battle intent, who stood quietly after saluting.

The search knight recounted the patrol findings one by one, mentioning the charred, sagging ground of the campsite, the bloodless clearing marks, the putrid stench, and that unsettlingly silent environment.

Vic listened to these words, his expression heavy.

Every detail was exactly the same as three years ago.

Next was Lei Xi'er, still looking weakened, who was helped inside.

He was somewhat surprised, not expecting Louis to report the matter directly to the Governor of the North.

Although his magic robe had been changed, his face was still pale, and his magic power flowed weakly.

He emotionlessly recounted his ordeal: the ambush by the riverbank, teammates being parasitized, himself being poisoned, mental erosion, forcibly suppressing magic power to escape, until collapsing outside the Red Tide...

Of course, he concealed some things, like his identity, his mission...

Vic listened in silence, nodding only after a long while.

His expression was even grimmer than when he first arrived.

"The intelligence is sufficient." He saluted Louis, then took a black-sealed letter tube from his cloak, "This is from the Duke for you."

Louis accepted the tube, not opening it immediately, just nodding, as a response to Vic.

"We will conduct a search from the location you provided, and will inform you when we need assistance."

Vic said calmly, putting on his hood and turning to leave, without the slightest hesitation in his actions.

Moments later, the sound of footsteps vanished completely at the end of the corridor, and the office returned to silence.

Louis silently glanced at the letter, then gently placed it by the table, before turning to look at Lei Xi'er.

"I'm sorry..." he said softly, "This matter is too grave. I can't handle it here and had to report it."

Lei Xi'er nodded gently, without a trace of dissatisfaction, his tone carrying a hint of relief, "I understand. Surviving is already an accident, without you... I probably would have been burned and disposed of."

He paused slightly, then added, "Now with the involvement of local nobility in the investigation, it's also a good thing for us."

After saying this, he was assisted by the attendant to leave.

Louis sat back in his chair alone, staring at the silvery-grey letter tube for a long time, his fingers slowly tracing the edge of the wax seal.

Only after ensuring there was no one else around did he gently open the envelope and pull out the neatly folded letter paper.

The letter began with polite and warm greetings, carrying the typical duke-like tone and style.

But Louis merely glanced at it, skipping over those parts, his attention focused directly on the main points in the latter half.

The letter primarily talked about two things.

The first was the reappearance of the insect swarm traces.

The Duke's wording was uncharacteristically serious, with a touch of suppressed gravity.

He reminded Louis of the matter's severity far exceeding normal demon disturbances, even bringing up the events of three years ago.

Finally, he emphasized that if necessary, the Northern Territory's wartime mechanisms might be activated.

As the Cold Fir Territory had become the forefront observation point due to their appearance at a missing location and its exhibited judgment, it would be considered one of the primary observation points.

"When necessary, I need your full cooperation," the letter stated.

Although it seemed calm, it represented an extremely heavy trust, and this content was not outside of Louis's expectations.

However, what truly raised Louis's eyebrow slightly was the second matter.

It was a notification of rewards.

Accurately speaking, it was about how he had "accidentally" discovered and captured a Jade Federation spy in the outskirts and uncovered Joseph, a traitor daring enough to betray the country.

It triggered a large-scale intelligence cleanup operation across the Southwest Province of the Empire.

Now the storm had finally settled, and he was written at the fore of the cleanup report.

"Thus, it is decided that Joseph's former direct territory will be assigned to the Red Tide as a commendation for this critical intelligence cleanup operation."

Joseph's territory near Qingyu Ridge was now rightfully part of Louis's domain.

Additionally, there was a reward of ten thousand gold coins, along with a batch of unspecified material supplies to be arranged later.

"Well, this reward is quite reasonable."

Louis refolded the letter, his tone carrying a hint of subtle amusement.

After all, on the surface, he indeed merely "happened to pass by and caught a spy."

The subsequent earthquake-like chain reaction across the Empire could be attributed to "luck."

The reward was indeed generous.

Moreover, he had used this event to directly reorganize the various nobles of Snow Peak County, which could be considered an invisible reward.

He called in the attendant and instructed, "Have Bradley come over."

Before long, Bradley jogged into the room.

"Arrange for officials to quickly take over the new territory assigned to us," said Louis calmly, "Officially name it Qingfeng Territory."

"Qingfeng Territory? A nice name." Bradley's eyes lit up, and he swiftly noted it in his notebook.

"That territory was originally managed by Joseph, and since his capture there should be no one overseeing it. Have someone check how many residents remain, and distribute relief aid to those willing and able to stay."

"Understood." Bradley nodded immediately.

"Inform the storage department to allocate fifty sets of temporary farming tools and transfer a batch of seeds from the Red Rock Warehouse, spring planting cannot wait," Louis continued, "Also, send three experienced agriculturists to assist the locals in making plans, aiming to complete sowing by the end of the month, and maybe send some livestock to transport seeds and equipment."

"Yes." Bradley was taking notes quickly, "Understood, I will arrange for a resource officer and a terrain expert to go along."

Louis pondered for a moment, then added, "It needs to be done beautifully; don't just take over, make sure the citizens see changes within a week, spread the word that we're 'here to govern, not just to levy taxes.'"

"Alright, I'll get on it immediately." Bradley nodded with a smile. Seeing Louis had no further instructions, he quickly closed his notebook and left in haste.

Chapter 205: Silver-faced Mage

In the blink of an eye, another half month passed.

Lei Xi'er originally planned to use the "Beacon Technique" to contact his colleagues at the Mage Forest for assistance as soon as his physical strength recovered and inform them of the situation.

But the problem was that his magic power was severely depleted.

So, he stayed for over a month,

recovering his magic power while using the opportunity of Louis displaying his magical talent to teach some basic magic.

From the initial Fireball Technique, Body Fixing Technique, to the later Light Beam Technique, Shock Wave, Magic Shield, Light Body Technique, Burning Arrow, Fire-igniting Technique, Magic Hand, Slow Fall Technique, Resonating Touch...

In over a month, Louis remarkably mastered more than a dozen basic spells of different uses and schools!

The progress was so fast, it was as if he was devouring knowledge rather than learning.

But the days of studying magic would eventually come to an end.

As the weather warmed up, Lei Xi'er's body also recovered day by day.

Lei Xi'er sat in the yard, draped in a cloak, with magic power gently rippling at his fingertips.

His injuries had basically healed, and his spirit was almost fully restored.

That day he glanced back at Louis and said, "I can almost... perform the Beacon Technique now."

"Beacon?" Louis looked up, somewhat surprised, "You mean, you can contact your companions?"

Lei Xi'er nodded: "I've rested for quite a while and need to immediately report the details of the insect corpse to, well, headquarters."

As he finished speaking, magic power circulated in his hand, starting to form a technique.

The magic power at his fingertips slowly rotated into a small silver curse ring, like a miniature light wheel, suspended in the air, emitting gentle yet rhythmic waves, as if sending some kind of "echo" to a distant place.

Then... nothing happened.

Silence descended.

The air was left with only runes quietly floating, the wind making a faint whistling sound as it blew past.

There was no teleportation gate, no magic array, no dazzling spatial rift.

Everything was surprisingly quiet.

Louis stood nearby, watching all this, blinking slightly.

He wore a faint smile, but his gaze was somewhat... puzzled.

Lei Xi'er noticed the momentary pause, turned to look at him, and asked with a hint of confusion, "What expression is that?"

"Uh..." Louis thought for a moment, then answered seriously, "I thought a teleportation gate would suddenly appear from the sky with a 'whoosh,' and someone would walk out of the light."

He gestured as he described it, his eyes even carrying a tad of anticipation and regret.

Lei Xi'er was silent for two seconds, then displayed a complex expression of "I shouldn't expect you to know the basics."

Spending this time together, he realized this lord sometimes had rather abstract ideas.

He sighed dramatically: "This is the Beacon Technique, not the Summoning Technique."

"Oh..."

Louis put on a look of sudden realization, "I thought someone would instantly teleport over and take you away directly."

"..." Lei Xi'er was silent for a second, twitching the corner of his mouth.

Obviously, it wasn't the first time he'd heard such "laymen's fantasies," but he still couldn't help rolling his eyes each time he heard it.

He explained helplessly, "Instant Teleportation Technique? You think it's as simple as passing gas."

He paused, then switched to a slightly more serious tone: "Instant Teleportation Technique does exist, but it's a high-tier magic with huge consumption. Even for seasoned high-tier mages, continuously using it can easily lead to magic power exhaustion or even mental backlash."

"Moreover, its maximum safe distance..." he indicated with his fingers, "is usually around two hundred meters. Beyond that, it becomes extremely unstable."

As Louis listened, his expression gradually turned complex.

He nodded imperceptibly: "So... what exactly is the purpose of the Beacon Technique you just used?"

"It merely..." Lei Xi'er pointed to the still slowly flickering blue light in the air, "tells my distant companions where I am. Once the signal is stable, they will find a way to come and get me, but not in a 'whoosh' way from the sky."

"How will they come, then?"

"On horseback..."

"Oh..." Louis showed a hint of disappointment.

This world was, after all, a low magic world without those invincible mages capable of splitting mountains with a palm, instant teleporting thousands of miles, or reversing time.

Perhaps they existed, but they were definitely rare.

Most mages... were just somewhat fragile fighting spirit knights with long-range attacks and more variety.

Even long-range fragile mages probably wouldn't even have the chance to finish chanting facing off against fully defensively-maxed fighting spirit knights.

However, it wasn't complete disappointment.

He knew he would continue learning.

Because even if they're "fragile with variety," they're still one of the sharpest and most unpredictable weapons. If used well, they can still decide the course of the battlefield.

Louis just needed to take off those illusionary filters and master it in a real way.

And now he was also an Elite Knight, barely a low-end version of an Otherworldly Gandalf.

Louis imagined himself charging with a sword using fighting energy while simultaneously bombarding with Fireball Technique.

Hmm, somewhat cool.

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Sure enough, a few days after the signal was sent out, three silver-masked mages arrived at Red Tide Territory on horseback, weary and travel-worn.

They were completely wrapped in heavy cloaks, their aura restrained, their words terse, yet they carried an air of mystery that made others dare not approach.

The knight responsible for receiving them couldn't help but feel tense, quickly stepping forward to report to Louis.

"Have them brought into the conference hall," Louis nodded.

The conference hall door closed gently, the surroundings quiet and still, with only the soft glow of candlelight remaining.

Chapter 206: Silver-faced Mage_2

Seeing Lei Xi'er's frail appearance, the three Silver-faced Mages looked at each other, and almost simultaneously removed their masks, revealing anxious faces hidden beneath the silver.

"Lei Xi'er," a slightly older mage with a steady voice spoke first, "you've finally appeared. We couldn't reach you for a long time, and what about Modi and Flavia... where are they?"

Lei Xi'er quietly sat in a wheelchair nearby, covered by a thin blanket, appearing more emaciated than before.

He looked at the familiar faces of the three, a trace of emotion flickering in his eyes, like the joy of a long-awaited reunion, yet also like extreme suppressed sorrow.

The three saw his silence and exchanged glances, their unease becoming more evident.

"They... had an accident." Lei Xi'er finally spoke, his voice so low it was almost inaudible.

As Lei Xi'er slowly recounted every word of that nightmare-like battle in the dense forest, it seemed as if the very breathing sounds were gradually drawn out from the conference hall, leaving only the faint crackling of embers in the fire pit.

Insect Warrior, corrosive insect fluid, self-detonation, parasitism, comrades turning on each other.

Each cold and bloody word was like thorn-laden brambles slowly passing from Lei Xi'er's lips, piercing directly into the nerves of the other three.

The air seemed to freeze, every detail causing their eyes to tremble.

When he spoke of an Insect Warrior getting close to Flavia and self-destructing, the insect fluid corroding her face and ears, the insect body invading. In just a few breaths, her pupils turned purple, and she used magic to kill Modi.

A young mage in the corner suddenly stood up, fists clenched, knuckles whitening.

"What are you saying...?!" His voice trembled, his face showing astonishment, shock, and a disbelief filled with anger, "Are you saying... Flavia was parasitized? Dead?"

Lei Xi'er nodded, a hint of pain and guilt in his eyes: "I couldn't protect her... If I had been more decisive, if I hadn't hesitated at that moment, maybe..."

"Shut up!" the young mage growled lowly, eyes red, glaring at him with gritted teeth, as if trying to force a better ending from his mouth.

But a few seconds later, he abruptly lowered his head, his shoulders trembling: "No, I'm sorry, it's me... I shouldn't have yelled at you..."

"It's okay." Lei Xi'er shook his head slightly, a bitter smile tugging at his lips, "You're right to blame me, I've been blaming myself too. Since that day... every day I've been thinking, if I could be just a bit stronger, if my magic could be half a second faster..."

He closed his eyes, his fingertips trembling unconsciously: "But I can't do anything... can't save anyone."

For a moment, the air seemed to freeze.

Soft shadows were cast by the light, enveloping them.

After a long silence, the oldest mage finally spoke: "Lei Xi'er, don't bear it all alone. You're also our companion. We will remember this hatred, this pain, together and return it to those insects, and the people behind them."

"That's right," another female mage said softly, tears glimmering in her eyes, "It's already a good thing that you survived."

Lei Xi'er was taken aback, his throat tightening slightly.

He suddenly realized, he wasn't alone fighting against the nightmare.

Silence once again spread in the air, but this time it was no longer a silence of despair.

The older Silver-faced Mage slowly stood up, his gaze moving from Lei Xi'er's wheelchair to the tightly closed door, and said in a low voice: "We must report this immediately. The insect swarm isn't an ordinary demon.

It possesses high intelligence, controls bodies, and can even hide its traces, this is far from a simple 'disappearance mission'."

"Yes," the female mage nodded, her expression grave, "Lei Xi'er, you have already done enough by holding on until now. Leave the rest to us."

The older mage took out a silver feather-engraved insignia from his cloak and shook it gently, and the air filled with a low humming sound.

Outside the window, the night sky was like ink, and a magical beast with black feathers and emerald glowing eyes swooped in.

It was a "Night Talker."

A black raven used in Mage Forest to send secret messages, said to cross blizzards and storms, reaching the Mage Holy Tower miles away.

"We'll use the Night Talker to send the initial report on the insect swarm," he said, attaching the written message to the raven's leg, "but that's far from enough. The Grand Mages won't mobilize resources based on a few sentences, they'll require evidence, may even send an observation team."

"You mean..." Lei Xi'er lifted his head, hesitation in his eyes.

The female mage gently patted his shoulder, giving a soft smile: "You're coming back with us, Lei Xi'er. Your condition can't be repaired here.

The injury to your magical power foundation can't be solved with a few potions; you need to return to the main headquarters and let a Grand Mage level healer personally diagnose it."

"But I..." Lei Xi'er wanted to say he hadn't finished explaining the clues, but before he could speak, the young mage interrupted him.

"You want to stay and help? You can't even walk steadily." His words were still somewhat sharp, but not as out of control as before, "Right now, your most important task is to survive and take everything you know back, let the people above hear it."

Lei Xi'er was taken aback, his gaze falling on his own hands.

His palms were still trembling, his magic channels buzzing faintly like burnt strings with pain.

He finally lowered his head and nodded lightly.

"Okay, I'll go back with you."

"Then it's settled." The older mage waved his hand, the Night Talker spread its wings and took flight, scattering snowflakes, blocked by the magic barrier outside the window.

And before leaving, the Silver-faced Mage deliberately paused at the door, bowing deeply to Louis waiting in the hallway.

"Thank you for your shelter and help, otherwise Lei Xi'er might have..." The older one's voice was slightly hoarse, a sincere gratitude in his words.

"But now we have nothing to repay you with, but next time we'll definitely bring a gift and visit again."

Louis stood beneath the porch column, his posture upright, still with that unfathomable calm expression.

He only gave a slight nod: "Um."

A short syllable, neither warm nor cold, appearing both noble and aloof.

But only Louis knew, he wasn't really aloof, he was just pretending to be.

After all, "Make sure not to expose the fact that I taught you magic, remember."

That's what Lei Xi'er solemnly instructed him before the Silver-faced Mages arrived.

"Once I get back to the Mage Forest, I'll formally submit your apprentice application, report your talent assessment results. Only then can you use magic publicly under a legitimate identity, understand?"

Otherwise, I would be questioned for a whole day."

Louis agreed.

So he could only maintain his usual composure and distance, like an ordinary nobleman who had no interest in magic and was simply enthusiastic.

Lei Xi'er could already walk by himself, although still looking thin and pale, he was no longer the one with festering wounds and blurry consciousness from before.

He wore a gray-blue cloak, his steps slightly slow, but with a certain stubbornness that refused aid.

Before getting into the carriage, he looked back at Louis, a reluctant smile tugging at his mouth, then raised his hand to wave at him.

Louis did not respond, only slightly nodding his head.

Actually, he sighed inwardly: "Alas... no more magic lessons three times a day, I'll have to figure it out by myself now."

He lightly tapped his magic notebook at his waist, it was the magic notes Lei Xi'er left for him to study before leaving, dense with annotations showing the amount of effort put into it.

"But it's alright... the basic framework is already set up. From here, it's not impossible to figure it out on my own."

Louis glanced back at the clear sky in the distance, a small, imperceptible smile tugging at the corner of his mouth.

Chapter 207: Magic Test

On the second day after Lei Xi'er left, Louis couldn't wait to set out.

He didn't tell anyone the reason, just brought Lambert, Sif, and two of his most trusted elite knights across the woodland at the edge of the Red Tide Territory, arriving at a deserted and uninhabited clearing.

The sky was clear, the cold wind blowing over the withered grass, and the surroundings were so quiet that only the flapping of crows' wings could be heard in the distance.

Louis was silent the whole way, his expression calm, yet his pace was much quicker than usual.

Only Sif, who knew him well, noticed the trace of undisguisable excitement in his eyes.

Like a child finally reaching their birthday, eager to unwrap the long-sealed gift.

"This is the place." He stopped in front of a bare rocky ground and spoke softly.

Then he raised his hand, flicked his sleeve.

"Fireball Technique!"

No lengthy chanting, no complicated gestures.

The air seemed to be stirred violently by some invisible force, the fluctuation of magic power surged from his body like waves.

Everyone just felt a tightness in their chests, even their breathing shortened a little.

The next moment, a ball of flame ignited in his palm.

Not an ordinary flame, but a scarlet swirling flame compressed to the extreme.

The fireball spun violently, as if it would break free from his hand at any moment.

"Step back a bit." Louis said calmly.

Then he raised his hand and threw it.

BOOM!!!

The fireball crashed down like a meteor, with a terrifying roar hitting an old tree over ten meters away. The violent wave of heat exploded, the trunk blackened and shattered in an instant, the thick branches emitting a groaning cracking sound in the thick smoke, crashing to the ground.

"...Is that... magic?" Lambert was stunned.

"And, also its power is too..." Knight Thomas half-opened his mouth, looking like he'd seen a miracle.

But it wasn't over.

Louis didn't look back at the others, just slowly walked forward.

"Fire Blade Technique!"

With his steps, a blazing flame extended from his arm, forming a nearly one-meter-long fire blade.

The blade was scarlet, with turbulent waves of heat, even the air seemed to make a slight "sizzle" sound.

He raised the blade and swung it.

The flame slashed through the air, striking the wooden targets set up in advance.

Three thick wooden shields were slanted and split open in just a few seconds, the cut blackened, the wood carbonized, with edges as neat as if polished by a master of blades.

"One more. Burning Arrow-Light Beam Technique!"

He opened his left hand, three burning arrows instantly gathered at his fingertips, seamlessly combined with the rapidly unfurled Light Beam Technique from his right hand.

A jet of blazing white light shot out like a laser, carrying the arrows within.

"Whoosh—!!!"

"Boom!" "Crack!" "Bang!"

Several rock targets exploded in succession, rubble flying. The distant wooden targets were directly burned to charcoal, pieces twisting and curling in the heat, crumbling upon hitting the ground.

The air twisted, the grass blackened, even the wind seemed to halt, as if time had paused for this scene.

After releasing a series of magic spells, Louis finally slowly withdrew his hand.

The fingertips still had a trace of flame lingering, like the last breath of a slumbering beast.

Louis was very pleased with the outcome, this was the result of his own research combining the Burning Arrow and Light Beam Technique.

The residual heat of the flames hadn't dissipated yet, the air still filled with the scorched scent post-burn.

But more scorching than the heat wave was the almost fiery shock in everyone's eyes.

"You... know magic?!" Thomas couldn't help but exclaim, as if witnessing some earth-shattering secret, clutching his head in disbelief.

Green's face was pale, muttering: "But... isn't magic supposed to have disappeared long ago? Isn't it something only found in books!?"

"Calm down." Lambert spoke, his voice still calm and low, though his fingertips lightly gripped his sleeve, concealing that barely noticeable tremor.

He knew of the mage's existence, having once had the fortune to see a mage back in his family, and the old zombie who attacked Louis last time seemed to be a mage as well.

But when did Lord Louis master magic! And with such power!

Louis grew up under his watch, never having learned magic, leaving him questioning everything he knew.

He looked at the old tree that was directly blown apart, then to Louis's hand, a genuine sense of uncertainty emerging in his eyes.

Sif stood aside, not speaking.

She didn't exclaim aloud like the others, she just quietly watched.

Watching the back that stood immovable amidst the flames, that face which had been so calm almost cold on countless nights, now showing a rare hint of... relief?

Yes, she understood.

In everyone's eyes, Louis was always the perfect noble lord, the tactical genius with composure, restraint, reason, and strength.

But this time was different.

His steps carried an irrepressible lightness, his eyes glimmered with a faint light, the joy of freedom.

"So you were holding back all along." Sif softly said in her heart, her lips curling into a barely perceptible smile.

She was genuinely happy for him.

Louis turned around, looking at the still stunned few, nodding in satisfaction.

When he was learning magic, it was always in private sessions with Lei Xi'er, so no one else knew.

Showing off, feels great!

Calmly he said: "This must not be spread."

"Understood!" Thomas and Green bowed almost simultaneously, looking like newly enlightened followers.

"...I know." Sif said softly, her gaze still not leaving him.

Lambert also nodded, his eyes complex: "Yes. You must have your reasons, I won't ask further."

Louis smiled slightly, turning to look at the charred open space.

No one knew that it was only thirty percent of his magic power just now.

His real trump card, he still had hidden.

Louis retracted the flame from his hand, calmly scanning the few people, finally fixing his gaze on Green.

"Green." His tone was calm, yet carried a hint of undeniable command, "You give it a try."

Green was stunned, then immediately straightened up, stepping forward.

He was a high-tier elite knight from the noble family's regular army, having experienced numerous battle arrays, once slaying hundreds of enemies, one of the most trusted warlords in the Red Tide Territory.

But facing the lord in front of him, he had never felt such an inexplicable sense of oppression before.

Louis was a junior elite knight, just two ranks apart.

But in the high-tier system, that one rank often marked the boundary between life and death.

There should have been no suspense in the duel.

However, the incredible string of magic just now completely disrupted Green's judgment.

He slowly unsheathed his knight's sword, bowing and with an eye of cautiousness beyond his usual calmness: "I dare not underestimate... I will do my utmost, please, my lord, go easy on me."

Louis nodded.

Chapter 208: Magic Combat Training

In the center of the clearing, the wind swirled up the fallen leaves, scattering them around.

In the silence, there was a kind of solemnity almost like a ritual.

Green slowly took a few steps forward, standing opposite Louis, gripping the sword hilt, with a grave expression.

"...My lord, if I show any disrespect, please pardon me." His voice was low, yet you could hear the hesitation.

He was not unwilling to spar, but he feared his sword might truly harm this lord.

But when Louis nodded and said lightly, "Feel free, without holding back," Green finally let go of the last bit of restraint.

In the next moment, fighting energy surged forth like a tide.

Crimson fighting energy burst out from around him, swirling like a tidal wave around his body, and when it slammed to the ground, the earth cracked in response, sending stones flying.

It was a sense of pressure, like mountains collapsing and thunder crashing down.

"The full release state of a High-tier Elite..." Thomas's throat moved slightly, "Green is going all out."

"Indeed," Lambert's tone was slow, "Look, his eyes have changed."

Thomas: "There won't be any accidents, right? If he inadvertently hurts Lord Louis, it would not be good."

On the other side, Louis quietly drew his sword, waved it casually, and a ripple of light red fighting energy emanated around him.

But that was not his focus.

It was his other hand, fingers joined, eyes slightly closed, with that barely perceptible wave of magic power.

The air started to heat up, as if something was slowly brewing, suppressing, waiting to explode.

"The lord's fighting energy level... is quite different from Green's," Thomas swallowed, "but the aura is almost the same."

Lambert did not answer, only fixated on those seemingly calm eyes, yet within them, undercurrents surged like a volcano.

It was the gaze that belonged only to a "Hunter."

Louis had already chosen the angle of the battlefield, predicted the enemy's first move, second move, and even the unbalanced retreat path.

Since the power of practical combat was to be tested, one must go all out.

When both were ready, Lambert shouted in a deep voice: "Begin!"

In the next instant.

Green burst forth, like a bowstring drawn taut and suddenly released!

"Thrust!"

The longsword sliced through the air, a dull explosion resounded in an instant.

The red fighting energy tracing the ground carved a trajectory like lightning, aiming straight for Louis's chest!

He excelled at closing in on the enemy in an instant and using merciless slashes to end the battle.

He was confident that his speed and burst were unmatched by any Elite Knight.

But this time, his heart was hanging by a thread.

"Lord Louis... This is, after all, the first time using magic in real combat, if he truly gets hurt—"

He was still hesitating when Louis on the other side raised his hand to form a seal.

"Fire Wall Technique!"

The tone was unfamiliar, the pronunciation slightly paused, the flow of magic power somewhat sluggish, but the magic was successfully cast.

Boom!

A barrier of flames rose from the ground, blocking Green's advance.

"...Ugh!" Green was forced to brake sharply, the fighting energy rippling under his feet.

"The fire wall was set up too early, the rhythm was off." The fire wall obscured the view, but Louis was not satisfied.

And in the next moment—"Light Beam Skill - Interference!"

From behind the fire wall came several beams of white light, piercing through the scorching flames, darting out like meteors.

They lacked destructive power but aimed precisely at the "must defend" spots like the chest, feet, and neck, with each shot resembling a predicted killing move, forcing Green to instinctively block.

"Something's not right."

A thought flashed through Green's mind as he blocked two beams with his sword, only to realize the third would not hit at all, a feint.

"Body Fixing Technique."

Almost simultaneously, a cool wave of magic came from beneath, just as he was about to lift his leg, his ankle was already entangled.

"This is the real target!"

Green's eyes widened abruptly, shouting angrily, "Ha!"

The scorching red light exploded at his feet, tearing the newly formed technique into fragments.

His body spun, rising from the ground, flipping back three steps.

However, this maneuver depleted a lot of his fighting energy.

"He's luring me to use my fighting energy..." Green landed, finally realizing Louis's intent, his face grew even more serious.

Behind the fire wall, Louis had sweat on his forehead.

His spellcasting was somewhat rusty, his tone still carried hesitation.

Fortunately, he didn't strive for perfection with each release, only for constraint.

And each constraint was roughly aligned with Green's "must react" points.

This wasn't the power of a skilled practitioner, but the cunning of a strategist.

"Scorching Arrow·Triple!"

Even before Green could catch his breath, the fire wall opened up again, and three flaming arrows shot out, tracing irregular arcs.

It wasn't a frontal assault but "harassing interference," locking Green's movement and jumping routes.

Green spun sideways, slashing away two, while the last was barely deflected by the ripple of fighting energy.

The combat techniques were perfect, but the fighting energy was being forced to use, never getting close to Louis's body.

"I'm somewhat on the defensive."

Green's eyes turned cold, finally realizing: Louis was treating the entire battle as a chess game, manipulating it all.

His magic lacked suppressive power and lethality, yet it was like ropes, binding him one by one, restricting, depleting, probing, and disturbing.

"If this continues, it'll truly become a war of attrition."

He finally stopped hesitating.

The next moment, he roared, "Fighting Energy Burst!"

Boom!!

The ground cracked beneath his feet, a bright red light burst from his body like the scorching sun, and a wave of intense fighting energy blasted a gap through the fire wall.

The swirling wind was scorching, flame fragments flew through the air, drawn into the fiery current, forming a rift in the battlefield.

Green transformed into a stream of light, leaping forward!

"He's coming!!"

Louis immediately chanted, "Shock Wave!"

He pressed his palms fiercely toward the ground, a semicircular airwave pressed forward, causing Green to stagger and forcibly use fighting energy to guard his legs, sliding a distance before continuing to charge.

"Light Beam Technique!"

White light dropped like a silk curtain, Green swept it away with his sword energy again, with a light crack, the light beam disintegrated.

Green pounced like a fierce tiger.

The crimson fighting energy churned on his body, but from repeatedly dealing with magic, the energy appeared chaotic, like a roaring fire gradually dimming.

He forcibly suppressed the turmoil in his chest, swung his sword with his right hand, slashing directly at Louis's shoulder and neck!

"Ha—!"

This strike was fast, accurate, and fierce, containing all his remaining strength. If taken head-on, even armor would shatter.

Lambert watched nervously, prepared to intervene and block.

But Louis did not take it head-on.

He abandoned the spell, stepped forward, shifted his figure, fought energy infused into his feet, like a ripple of water passing through the edge, avoiding certain death.

At the same time, his right hand longsword did not directly clash with the opponent but flicked backhand, using Green's forward-leaning momentum, twisting deftly.

"Thud!"

Green had not yet recovered his sword path, only felt a sudden hit to his chest, Louis's left elbow had already precisely struck his rib side!

The angle was tricky, the timing fierce and precise.

Green grunted, staggering back three steps, his sword arm trembling.

In the instant his defense was broken by the elbow strike, he couldn't gather stable fighting energy anymore.

But Louis did not pursue further.

He simply stepped forward, twisted the sword edge in a flash, and the blade was pointed at Green's neck sideways.

The air seemed to solidify at this moment.

Green's eyes widened, his chest heaving violently, but ultimately he did not struggle further.

He slowly knelt on one knee, speaking in a deep voice, "I concede."

The battle was finally over.

Thomas slapped his thigh hard, seemingly shouting out all the emotions he had been holding back, "Lord, you're amazing!!!"

He raised both hands high, his face unabashedly filled with admiration and shock, as if witnessing a wondrous scene.

"That elbow strike just now... was so cool! Fighting energy reversed in an instant, the sword immediately pointed at the neck! This is strategy, talent, and charm combined!"

He muttered enthusiastically, turning to his companion beside him, as if seeking someone to share his excitement with.

But Lambert said nothing, just furrowed his brows, seemingly lost in thought.

His gaze was fixed on Louis standing in the field, sheathing his sword, pondering each word carefully in his mind:

"The magic wasn't executed perfectly, but the combined strategy was nearly mature... controlling the rhythm, depleting fighting energy, restricting movement... if the magic power was stronger, he could almost suppress an elite knight alone.

In his current state, he's at least... High-tier Elite Knight level, or even stronger."

Sif's breath was unsteady from nervousness, her fingertips slightly curled, fists hidden under the cloak never loosening.

She knew he would win.

But actually seeing him repel Green with that sword, she instinctively bit her lip, her eyes slightly heated.

It was admiration tinged with a hint of awe and an inexplicable sense of peace.

But what was even more shocking was that Louis had, for the first time, truly incorporated magic and fighting energy into a battle, even defeating a trained elite knight.

Louis silently sheathed his sword, appearing composed, yet his mind quickly reevaluated the battle just now.

The victory was not easily won.

Only one fire wall was set, the light beam was of basic level, and the Body Fixing Technique wasn't enhanced with spells.

"Green is a subordinate, not an enemy." He muttered to himself, "To suppress him at the lowest cost is the best result."

Louis's gaze turned to the edge of the training ground in the distance, eyes slightly focused, realizing it was the first time he truly brought magic into actual combat.

"There are many areas still immature. The fire wall's position is off, the speed of the Light Beam Technique is insufficient, the Body Fixing Technique is too easily broken... indeed, magic is best used in moments of 'unexpectedness.'"

He reflected, but a satisfied smile appeared at the corner of his mouth.

"But, it only took me a month."

From Lei Xi'er teaching him magic to today's date, only a little over a month had passed.

He started from scratch to construct a framework of magic, utilizing the Primordial Meditation Technique to develop over ten combat-capable spells.

Now, not only had his survival ability greatly increased, but he could also shift the direction of small-scale battles.

And as long as time went on, his magical power would continue to grow, and his tactical system would become complete.

The Primordial Meditation Technique had become one of his most crucial trump cards.

Louis sheathed his sword, sweeping his gaze over the four people, his tone calm yet indisputable: "What happened today must not be spread."

Thomas, who was about to shout "Hail the Lord," immediately shut his mouth upon hearing this, nodding repeatedly: "Got it! Absolute secrecy!"

The other three also nodded, saying: "Understood."

Chapter 209: Planning the Wedding

The setting sun cast warm silhouettes on the high towers of Red Tide Castle, as if the entire territory was steeped in a solemn atmosphere.

Bradley stood at the center of the wedding hall, the silver rim of his single lens glasses perched on his nose trembling slightly with his anxious breaths.

As the chief steward of the Red Tide Territory, his duty should have been as steady as a clock, yet he hadn't had a proper night's sleep for three consecutive nights.

"Raise the Calvin Clan's moon-pattern banner half a foot higher... Yes, a bit higher, it must not obscure the Edmund Family's silver eagle."

He whispered commands to the attendants, the thick manual in his hands already dog-eared from use.

His gaze swiftly scanned over the steps, the guest seats, the main entrance, and the altar's center spot.

Every detail had been crafted to near perfection.

Yet he knew, in a true noble wedding, perfection is never enough.

This was a union that could not afford any mistakes.

The ceremony would be led by a high-tier divine officer from the Northern Territory, carrying considerable reputation in the North.

Although the ceremony had been simplified much by His Highness Louis, many key segments were still fully retained, refined, and dignified.

Bradley had even arranged for musical performances for each segment, involving both a local orchestra from Red Tide Territory and three-stringed flutists from Northern traditions, blending pragmatism with the symbolism of "North-South unison."

The seating chart for the guests had been revised six times.

The front row was reserved for the bride's father, Duke Edmund, Governor of the North, and representatives of the Calvin Clan.

The rest were arranged according to rank and lineage, comprising the core knights of the Red Tide, personal nobility, and invited nobles.

Bradley walked to the window and saw the Northern guard of honor training in the clearing below, their silver armor gleaming, capes billowing, marching like thunder.

He exhaled slightly in relief: at least in terms of grandeur, they would not lose face.

The arrangement of the wedding venue was his greatest pride.

The vaulted ceiling of the main hall displayed interwoven banners of both great families, a silver eagle with outstretched wings and a bright moon shining, symbolizing the union and a new Chapter of reestablishing noble order.

Lime drew precise pathways across the floor, complemented by red carpets and silver decorations, exuding a solemn yet distinct pragmatic style of the Lord's Mansion.

The flowers came from a noble guild that specialized in cultivating blooms, after three rounds of selection, ending with a combination of bluebells, white violets, and ice roses, symbolizing loyalty, purity, and Northern glory.

As for the guests' meals... he noted with pride the latest southern delicacies that had arrived today.

They included ice-scaled carp from Cloud Bay, crystal honey dates from Dalan, and dried black hazel venison, all top-grade offerings specifically dispatched by the Calvin Clan from their private storerooms.

Even in a subdued union, none of the dignity should be lacking.

"Is there something missing..." he murmured quietly as his eyes fell once more on the ceremonial table covered in red silk.

"Lord Bradley, you haven't returned to your room to rest for three days," an attendant advised.

He shook his head, mustering his spirit and pulling out the sixteenth draft of the procedural map, squeezing out a tired reply:

"This wedding is very important... it must match the Calvin Clan's lineage, and also give the nobles of the North something to talk about. It can be low-key, but it mustn't lose dignity."

While everyone was bustling about with the upcoming wedding, Louis finally found some time.

To be precise, it was after he received a personal letter from Emily that he remembered his own wedding was just half a month away.

So, that evening, Louis, accompanied by two guards, stepped into the banquet hall at the back of the main hall, set up specifically for the wedding.

For the first time, he saw this room, once used for investiture and ceremonial honors, now transformed into a noble wedding stage adorned with blue and red tapestries.

The musicians were tuning in the corner, the stable sound of the double-stringed lute harmonizing with the Northern Flute, producing serene melodies.

Several maidservants moved around the steps, backs straight, trying to complete the welcoming ritual without stepping on their skirts.

Meanwhile, a few young attendants, clad in trial robes, were simulating the oath-taking scene, reciting vows softly and reverently: "In the presence of the Dragon Ancestor and all, I vow..."

The entire space was filled with solemnity, yet carried an indescribable tension.

Perhaps, it was the overly serious traditional rituals of the Imperial Nobility, or the overly reserved staff of Red Tide Territory.

In sum, it felt like a meticulously crafted scabbard, perfect yet missing a touch of warmth.

"You've arrived." Bradley arrived after hearing the news, still holding the day's ceremonial scroll, his expression characteristically restrained and steady, save for the slight bluish shadows under his eyes.

"The preparations are not bad," Louis glanced over the setup and said softly.

Bradley appeared somewhat hesitant, clearing his throat and cautiously speaking: "Your Highness, may I dare to ask if this wedding, for someone of your and Miss Emily's status... might seem too plain?"

He paused, adding: "Given the current prestige and standing of the Red Tide Territory, plus the union of two great families from North and South... perhaps adding some ceremonial sections or viewing processes could further emphasize its significance."

He didn't say what was unspoken, that the wedding had already been perceived within noble circles as an important signal of an "old power alliance."

If too modest, would it lead to misunderstandings about the Calvin Clan's declining influence in the Imperial Capital?

Or perhaps raise suspicions that this marriage was rushed?

Louis listened, but his expression remained unchanged, his gaze slowly shifting to the honor guard practicing their entrance routine not far away.

"I know you're doing this for my sake." His tone was calm, "But it can't be any grander."

Bradley was taken aback.

"The current situation is that the Royal Family is purging the old nobility, the Southern Noble Lineage is gradually retreating, and this wedding is already sensitive enough," Louis said with a flash of rationality in his eyes.

Bradley lowered his head and gently replied, "Understood."

Although Louis mentioned keeping it simple, and despite having to be low-key due to the special situation,

this was, after all, his first wedding in life, and very likely his last.

He was not particularly obsessed with ceremony and grandeur, but this wedding represented the consolidation of identity, the forging of alliances, and the fulfillment of emotions behind it all.

This wedding deserved to be remembered.

Yet now, looking at this almost textbook-perfect flowchart and listening to the attendants reciting vows in an emotionless tone, he couldn't shake a thought gently tapping in his mind:

"There's something missing... that instant that can move people."

He slowly walked to the edge of the observation platform, his hands clasped behind him. The last light of the sunset cast over the rooftops of Red Tide City, and the distant Northern Mountains were wrapped in golden red as the night silently approached, with the first stars appearing on the canopy above.

In the evening breeze, the citizens in the distance were still making final preparations for the wedding, children running in the alleys, adults hanging banners and transporting barrels, a scene busy yet peaceful.

At that moment, a thought suddenly arose in Louis' mind.

"If all this could end with a stunning climax... even if it's only for a few seconds, it would be enough."

He squinted slightly, as if seeing some scene through the twilight.

He tilted his mouth into a smile and turned to Bradley, saying, "Let's add an element.

When night falls, we'll light 'fireworks' in the sky of the Red Tide Territory."

Bradley was stunned: "...Fire? Are you referring to a fire pit? A torch? Or...?"

"None of those," Louis waved his hand, with a beautiful picture in his eyes, "It's the kind that flies into the sky, and then with a 'boom' bursts into light."

Bradley's brows furrowed like ravines, unable to figure out what Louis was talking about: "Sir, is this some sort of... weapon?"

"It's not a weapon either," Louis laughed, "It's a device for celebrations, only startles people, doesn't hurt. But the effect, well, it'll make everyone stare at the sky, forgetting whether they should toast or dance."

He paused for a moment, adding, "And I want Emily to see that moment."

Bradley was momentarily speechless. Although he was a perfectionist butler, he couldn't find a suitable reference at this moment.

He was silent for a few seconds and then said softly, "...I really can't imagine what that is."

"It's okay," Louis had already turned and walked away quickly, "I'll find someone who can make it."

To turn the inspiration in his mind into reality, Louis rushed off to the workshop area.

That was Hillco's domain, the place in the entire Red Tide Territory most likely to "blast something out."

At this moment, with the sunset sinking, Louis strode through the door, the iron gate echoing with a "bang" and releasing a faint smell of gunpowder.

"Hil..."

Before he could finish, a chaotic sound of footsteps arose inside, accompanied by glass bottles tilting and metal clanging, even the noise of a chair tipping over.

As he walked into the main workspace of the lab, he saw Hillco standing by the workbench, sweating profusely.

The curtain behind him had just been hastily drawn, and a conspicuous female figure was faintly visible through the edge of the curtain.

"What are you doing?"

"I-I? I was... formulating a potion."

Hillco's face was filled with an awkward smile, which he couldn't hide no matter what, like a child caught stealing candy.

And the female figure behind the curtain seemed equally flustered, accidentally showing half her face, her cheeks flushed, and she quickly shrank back.

"You-you came too suddenly!" Hillco coughed, and the redness in his ears was visible to the naked eye.

Louis raised an eyebrow, surveying the mess with a half-smile, speaking slowly: "Hmm? Did I interrupt you... during some important experiment?"

The girl's face flushed red to the neck, hiding further back.

Hillco quickly coughed a few times, forcing a serious face: "Y-you, how did you know?"

"Know what?" Louis tilted his head, arms crossed, with a playful smile.

"That... the 'Knight Growth Potion' has been successfully developed!" Hillco's eyes still carried a hint of panic.

"We just produced the first batch... we were so excited, we... celebrated a little, hadn't had time to inform you! How did you know?!"

Chapter 210: Knight Growth Potion

"It's about... the success of the 'Knight Growth Potion'! We just finished brewing the first batch of the product..."

We were so excited that we celebrated a bit and didn't have time to notify you! How did you find out?!"

"Wow, it's completed?" Louis's eyes suddenly brightened, and he leaned forward, "Are you serious? Not a semi-finished product, it's really completed?"

The mischievous thought of teasing him earlier was instantly thrown out of his mind.

Hillco, hearing his excitement almost to the point of dancing on the table, breathed a sigh of relief and carefully took out a metal box wrapped in thick fabric from a small ice crystal cabinet under the lab bench.

"Since you're already here, let you be the first to witness the results."

He unwrapped the fabric, opened the lid of the box, and took out a glass bottle containing the potion.

The potion inside showed a strange purple-red hue, the surface seemingly surrounded by a faint halo, like some sleeping creature gently breathing.

Even without uncorking the bottle, there was already a subtle scent in the air, both sweet and with a hint of stimulation.

"This is the Knight Growth Potion." Hillco said, as if introducing his child, "Made with Azure Patterned Honey and Frost Blood Redberry as the main ingredients, successfully fused with Alchemy Transformation Technique and Low-Temperature Extraction Technique."

Louis's eyes widened: "It doesn't look simple... this light, it's like a soul flowing."

"That's the Fighting Qi Factor moving naturally," Hillco pushed his glasses-like goggles, "indicating its activity is very stable."

He paused, with a bit of pride in his eyes: "The Azure Patterned Honey is gentle and long-lasting, stabilizing the flow of fighting energy, suitable for apprentices with average talent, and long-term use can alleviate the hidden danger of internal injuries during training."

"But relying on it alone is too slow." Hillco pointed to the bottle's eerie purple glow, "This is Frost Blood Redberry, with a very high magic power concentration, greatly enhancing the gathering speed of fighting energy. What originally would take three years for a Junior Knight, now only takes a few months."

His tone shifted, eyes shining: "The key is in the fusion. We extracted the 'slow-release factor' from the honey, neutralized the berry's 'magic catalysis,' and refined this potion capable of stable release and continuous improvement."

He paused, his tone solemn: "It's not just a supplement, but a strategic resource. From basic knight breathing regulation to advancing breakthroughs.

It comprehensively covers the most core stages of knight growth. You want to train a reserve knight order? This thing is the heart of your logistical support."

Louis nodded; of course, he was aware of this, as he was the one who instructed Hillco to create it.

Hillco scratched his head and coughed awkwardly: "Ah... this is mostly Jenny's achievement."

As he spoke, he gestured to the girl who had hurriedly hidden behind the curtain earlier.

The girl, who seemed surprised to be mentioned, blushed deeply and lowered her head:

"I... I'm just an Alchemy Apprentice good at potion configuration... mainly theoretical proportions... still haven't had time to conduct complete tests."

"It's already quite impressive." Louis looked at her sincerely and nodded in affirmation.

His tone shifted, turning to Weir beside him: "Didn't you say you've been stuck at the High-Tier Official Knight level for a long time? Try it."

"Yeah... been stuck for almost half a year now." Weir scratched his head with a troubled expression.

Louis nearly laughed out loud at what he heard.

Half a year?

It's known that ordinary knights getting stuck at that stage for ten years or more is considered normal.

Even the more talented ones take three to four years to break through steadily.

Is this... a genius's display of humility?

"Enough with playing pitiful, just drink it," Louis handed over the potion, his tone too exasperated to comment.

Weir took the bottle without further questioning.

He never doubted Louis's words, whether strategic orders or experimental potions.

No reason, just like questioning if the sun would fail to rise one day.

The scarlet, blood-like potion gently swirled in the bottle, with a faint purple halo flickering like a weak heartbeat.

"Good luck," Jenny whispered.

"Thank you." Weir smiled at her, then tilted his head back to drink it all.

Weir tilted his head and downed the potion.

In just seconds, he gave a sudden shudder, a look of pain and surprise crossing his eyes.

"Uhh!"

In the next moment, it was as if a blazing energy exploded inside him, surging up from his abdomen like wildfire spread, sweeping through his veins.

"Hoo..."

The young man managed to stay upright, sitting cross-legged immediately, closing his eyes to begin breathing practice.

The previous burning sensation like scorching flames was soothed under the guidance of his breathing rhythm, the once raging energy turning gentle like a clear spring flowing through his limbs, nourishing his body.

A subtle red glow emanated from his skin, the aura around him gradually rising, stabilizing, solidifying, and growing stronger.

A moment later, it seemed as though the air around him rippled.

"Is this..." Louis's gaze sharpened in disbelief.

The aura of an Elite Knight!

Indeed, Weir, at that stage, had finally... broken through.

At thirteen, he became an Elite Knight!

He instinctively glanced at the now-empty potion bottle, then at the youth whose aura was still swelling in front of him, muttering: "This potion... is incredibly effective."

When Weir opened his eyes, he was still in a daze.

Louis asked, "How do you feel?"

The young man pressed his lips, trying to find the right words, but showing a troubled look: "Uh... it's just... I feel like I've really... gotten stronger."

"Isn't that obvious?" Louis couldn't help but laugh aloud.