

Chapter 201: The Duel Witnessed by Royalty

Charlot was not particularly afraid of Julian Arsilo. After all, they had crossed paths before, and Charlot had not been at a disadvantage. However, as they practiced spear techniques together this time, Charlot belatedly realized that this youngest "Sky of Byron" had a terrifyingly adept spear technique.

Julian's spear skills surpassed even those of Hughes.

The same basic spear move, when performed by Hughes, was manageable for Charlot. But when Julian executed it, Charlot found it overwhelming. While some of this was due to Charlot's relative lack of proficiency with the spear, it was also clear that Julian wielded his weapon with far greater ease and confidence.

Julian's only drawback was his youth—he was merely a freshman in university. If he reached Hughes' age, his strength would undoubtedly surpass Hughes'.

Under Julian's tutelage, Charlot's progress in spear techniques was painfully slow.

The Mask of the Cat could extract skills but not extraordinary abilities. Undeterred, Charlot had tried once to extract from Julian, only to acquire "wine tasting," which was utterly useless to him.

After a few days of sparring with Julian, during which Charlot became somewhat familiar with the 77 Movements of Heaven's Wing, Aurora Soumet sent someone to deliver three items: a duel writ, a knight's lance, and a rapier.

Charlot had been out at the Old Flor's shop during the day and only received these items upon returning late that evening. Aurora had come by during the day but, upon learning from Dolores Soumet that Charlot wouldn't return until late, left someone to wait and returned herself.

This was to be the third official duel of Charlot's life!

His first two opponents had both been high-ranking Transcendents. Whether it was Harriet Alva or Zolman, they were both formidable and well-deserving of their reputations.

When Charlot received his third duel writ and saw the name of his opponent—Ban Lamorak—he couldn't help but feel a tinge of sentimentality. At last, he had received a challenge from someone of his own rank. Both he and Ban Lamorak were mid-level Transcendents. Though Ban's rank was slightly higher, the gap was no longer insurmountable.

The duel was scheduled for three days hence!

The witnesses would be Count Lamorak, Countess Aurora Soumet, and His Majesty, Emperor Alfred Guillaume!

Typically, duel writs were issued in triplicate: one copy for each participant and a third copy for the local City Patrol Guard Office for record-keeping. However, this writ was issued in quintuplicate, with two additional copies sent to the royal archives of the Ingrima Empire and the Fars Empire.

This elevated the duel to a whole new level of prestige.

The knight's lance delivered by Aurora bore the emblem of the Ebrelrahan Clan. The lance was a dark crimson hue with intricate patterns, a razor-sharp tip, a flexible shaft, a sturdy guard, and a balancing cone at the tail.

Its overall design resembled the lances of medieval Europe on Earth, except that in this world of Transcendents, the nations of the Old Continent had developed sophisticated knightly spear techniques. Consequently, knight's lances here were far sturdier than the disposable ones of Earth.

On the dueling grounds and battlefields of the Old Continent, one would never hear "the sound of a lance breaking resounding through the skies."

This was a Transcendent-grade knight's lance!

Charlot already owned another such lance, which he had taken from Zolman during their duel beneath Mostar Castle. However, as he was not proficient with lances, he had sent it to Machubi for safekeeping and never carried it with him.

That lance, named Mountain Shatter, boasted five attributes: armor-piercing, concussive force, anti-magic, bloodletting, and life-draining to repair the lance itself.

Even in Byron, it was considered a remarkable knight's lance.

Perhaps due to time constraints, Aurora had been unable to procure a vampiric rapier. However, the rapier she delivered was of exceptionally high quality, on par with the Unicorn Griffon weapon.

The duel writ also specified the duel's location, though the site had not been chosen by Ban Lamorak but rather by Emperor Alfred Guillaume himself.

The duel would take place on the Seventais River, which flows through Britain.

While Transcendents could run at full speed across water for short distances, remaining stationary would cause them to sink unless they had specific abilities. By designating the Seventais River as the dueling ground, the emperor added an element of spectacle to the duel, forcing the combatants to keep moving. This not only made the duel more lively but also allowed a larger audience to gather along the riverbanks, which were long enough to accommodate countless spectators.

Charlot, with his Swiftstep Technique and Spider Technique, was not overly concerned about dueling on the river. However, he knew that, as one of the witnesses, Count Lamorak would not have agreed without objection, meaning Ban Lamorak must have some corresponding abilities to give him an advantage on such terrain.

After signing the duel writ and sending it back with Aurora's messengers, Charlot encountered a team of emissaries dressed in Fars uniforms rushing into the embassy late at night. Spotting Charlot holding the writ, one of them asked, "Where is High Priest Auguslatin? Is Mecklenburg here?"

Charlot, seeing the urgency of the delegation, was mildly curious and replied, "The High Priest is not here. He is currently meeting with Ingrima officials on foreign affairs business."

"I am Charlot Mecklenburg. What business do you have with me?"

A finely dressed man stepped forward with an air of arrogance and said, "You're the Mecklenburg who signed the alliance treaty?"

Charlot nodded slightly. "That's correct."

The man continued, "There's no need for you to know my name. I am here to deliver my king's decree. High Priest Auguslatin has made great diplomatic achievements in Ingrima, and you have rendered exceptional service by signing the alliance treaty. Therefore, you are both to be rewarded."

"Here are the commendation documents for the two of you. I've traveled a long way and am utterly exhausted."

"These documents are for you. Please deliver the High Priest's document to him. I'll be returning to rest now."

With that, the man handed over the two documents and departed without further ado, his attitude remaining imperious but not openly antagonistic. He was clearly unwilling to waste time in unnecessary conversation with Charlot, his focus solely on completing his mission and returning.

Charlot accepted the documents, watching the man—likely a high-ranking noble—leave the embassy. He suddenly felt more at ease with the official role and responsibilities Emperor Alfred Guillaume had granted him, along with the residential estate.

In the Old Continent, the nobility often had intricate ties, sometimes even familial connections, spanning different nations. Many held positions in multiple countries, navigating diplomatic intricacies with ease and skill. Their primary loyalties were not to any single nation but first to themselves, then to their families, and finally to their territories. For most nobles, the concept of unwavering national loyalty, so common among commoners, was alien.

Charlot stowed the documents and retired to his room for the night. In the coming days, he needed to conserve his energy and prepare for the duel.

Chapter 202: Three Days Later

The noble who delivered the documents came in haste, left two sets of papers, and was never seen again.

High Priest Auguslatin also did not appear during the following three days.

Charlot spent these days leaving early and returning late, tirelessly practicing various martial arts at Old Flor's shop. On the day of the duel, he brought Dolores, Anastasia, Belisa, eighteen warriors from the Redback Bear Tribe, and a slew of attendants to the banks of the Sevintes River.

Thanks to the publicity efforts by the noble circles of the Ingrima Empire over the past few days, the banks of the Sevintes River were packed with dense crowds. The duel had drawn an uncountable number of spectators.

Two days earlier, Charlot learned that many nobles of Britain had placed bets on his duel with Ban Lamorak. He simply withdrew 2,000 gold écus and entrusted Julian Arsilo to wager on his behalf. If he won, it would be a joyous outcome; if he lost, the money, which was stolen anyway, would return to where it belonged.

The Sevintes River, the largest river on the island of Britain, flowed through more than a dozen cities before emptying into the sea at Britain. It featured over two hundred bridges, six or seven of which were located in Britain alone. The most famous among them was the Britain Bridge, named after the city itself. This bridge connected both banks of the Sevintes River: one end was in the Dragon Fort District, leading directly to Red Dragon Palace, while the other end reached Mount Galvin, home to the Guillaume family's Summer Palace of Quiet Springs.

Britain Bridge had two levels. The lower level was open to the general populace of Britain, while the upper level housed a unique palace-like structure. Most of the time, the upper level was also accessible to commoners. However, on significant holidays or special occasions, it became an exclusive venue and was closed to the public.

Such was the case now. Members of the Guillaume royal family, including Emperor Alfred Guillaume himself, along with a host of high-ranking officials, were present in the palace on the upper level of Britain Bridge to witness the spectacle.

When Charlot arrived at the riverside, he initially intended to head straight into the ring. However, he was stopped and informed about the sequence of events for the duel. There were

to be three preliminary exhibition matches before the main event between him and Ban Lamorak, followed by a grand finale performance.

The veins on Charlot's forehead nearly popped from annoyance upon hearing this, but he ultimately said nothing and waited patiently for his moment.

He couldn't spot Ban Lamorak but assumed that his opponent was with his father on Britain Bridge.

The duel, overseen by the royal family, had considerate arrangements. Charlot and his entourage were provided with a platform by the riverbank, complete with pre-arranged seating, food, champagne, and ale to ensure they could await the duel in comfort.

Charlot picked up a glass of ale and took a sip, just as a long whistle pierced the air. A Saint-rank individual ascended into the sky, eliciting an exclamation of admiration from Charlot. The scale of the event was indeed grand—there was even a Saint participating.

Hovering in mid-air, the Saint announced the names of the first pair of participants and their backgrounds in Ingrima. Two young knights leapt onto a small boat prepared for them and began a duel atop the river.

Charlot had assumed everyone would fight using techniques to walk on water, but it turned out this format was entirely different.

The duel between the two young knights ended when one of them was knocked into the Sevintes River. The victor, demonstrating knightly grace, extended his lance to pull the defeated opponent back onto the boat.

Next, the Saint introduced the second pair of duelists. These two were significantly stronger, leaping from opposite riverbanks and using combat energy to generate surging mists around their bodies.

As a maritime nation, the Ingrima Empire had many knights who specialized in oceanic combat energy. James Cook and Francis Drake, two naval captains, were also adept in this school of combat energy.

Charlot watched as the two contestants dashed across the Sevintes River with combat energy underfoot, their knight lances twisting and striking like dragons. The match was far more entertaining and superior in skill compared to the first.

This duel lasted over an hour before one side was defeated. The losing knight swam back to shore, soaked and dejected, speaking to no one. The victor sprinted across the river and received an invitation from the Emperor to join him on Britain Bridge to watch the subsequent matches.

When the third duel was announced, Charlot perked up. The Saint hovering above declared this to be a life-and-death struggle.

The challenger, whose fiancée had been “dishonored” by the opponent, was unwilling to fight directly and sent his younger brother in his stead.

As Charlot watched the two young men board the small boat, he predicted that their martial skills might be mediocre, but the intensity of their fight would undoubtedly surpass the previous two.

Ten minutes later, Charlot observed the two combatants perish together, their abdomens pierced by the opposing knight's lance. His mood grew somber.

He couldn't comprehend the point of such duels. The true culprit remained unscathed, while the two who died in the ring were entirely innocent.

When the Saint in the sky finally announced Charlot's name, he grabbed the Knight's Lance, Shanlens' Spear, in preparation. However, as he hesitated briefly to consider switching to another weapon, a sound like tearing silk erupted from the opposite side. A figure leapt into the air, rapidly approaching.

A clear voice echoed over the Sevintes River: “Charlot Mecklenburg! If you're willing to abandon Miss Aurora Soumet and forfeit, I'm prepared to postpone this duel.”

Charlot remained silent, activating Swiftstep Technique and Spider Technique to leap into the air. He acknowledged that his own voice couldn't carry across the river like his opponent's—this was clearly the effect of a unique ability rather than sheer technique. Opting for action over words, he refused to respond verbally.

Both moved with incredible speed. When their Knight's Lances clashed over the Sevintes River, they emitted a strange, sharp resonance. The Wings of the Young Dragon technique Charlot had been practicing recently, though progressing slowly, was executed with astonishing precision in this moment. Matching speed with speed, he managed to avoid falling behind in their first exchange.

After a mutual thrust and separation, the two repositioned themselves. Charlot used Swiftstep Technique and Spider Technique to stand miraculously on the river's surface, his Knight's Lance poised and his aura steadily intensifying.

Ban Lamorak, by contrast, stood on a piece of ice the size of a round table. The youngest lion of Britain, he stood as steady as a mountain on the floating ice.

His Knight's Lance also pointed at Charlot. Surprised by Charlot's performance, he shouted, “Despicable Farsian! You dared steal Aurora's heart while I was away from Britain. I will not let you leave the Sevintes River unscathed!”

Charlot was about to retort, “What kind of unscathed?” when Ban Lamorak, stepping onto the river’s surface, launched his second assault. Each step he took froze the water beneath him into ice—a hallmark of the Lamorak family’s secret Frost Dragon Combat Energy, radiating frigid power and unparalleled might.

Chapter 203: The Duel on the Seventais River

Charlot Mecklenburg refused to back down. With a flick of her Knight’s Lance, she shifted her position subtly, making it impossible for Count Lamorak’s charge to lock onto her.

The two clashed a second time with a resounding collision.

Charlot performed admirably but not as flawlessly as the first strike. Her grip faltered slightly, causing one foot to slip into the river. However, she quickly slapped the surface of the Seventais River with her Knight’s Lance, using the water’s rebound force to propel herself back into the air and force Count Lamorak to retreat.

The duelists circled each other three times across the river, their movements synchronized as they launched their next charge. Their lances struck like dragons breaking through the waves.

...

Six or seven rounds passed in the blink of an eye. Charlot’s hands began to tremble slightly. She realized her lance techniques alone wouldn’t suffice against this opponent. Knowing her limits, she raised her voice and called out:

“Count Lamorak’s lance techniques are unrivaled on the Old Continent. Thus, I shall switch to a new Knight’s Lance as a sign of respect.”

“I have experienced the prowess of the Lamorak family’s techniques. Now, allow me to choose a weapon better suited for this fight.”

Cheers erupted from the spectators on both riverbanks. Charlot’s words deeply gratified the vanity of the Ingrima people and even won over some of the residents of Britain.

On the Bridge of Britain, Emperor Alfred Guillaume allowed a rare smile and said, “Permission granted for Charlot Mecklenburg to change weapons.”

The emperor’s decree was quickly conveyed by a Saint rank official presiding over the duel. Count Lamorak lowered his Knight’s Lance and said, “Change your weapon.”

Charlot tossed her lance across the expansive Seventais River, where it lodged firmly into the riverbank. Julian Arsilo, standing on the other side, smiled and retrieved the lance before tossing a rope dart into the air for Charlot.

Charlot caught the weapon, stunned. She had assumed Dolores Soumet would throw her a meteor hammer. Dolores, holding her pair of meteor hammers, was equally surprised. She remarked to Anastasia and Belisa, "What a peculiar weapon!"

...

As Charlot adjusted to the rope dart, Count Lamorak attacked again. Forced to improvise, Charlot executed a series of dazzling maneuvers with the dart. Even Emperor Alfred Guillaume couldn't help but praise her creativity.

Count Lamorak, unfamiliar with such a weapon, found himself overwhelmed. Each strike from the dart carried immense force, and its versatile rope allowed Charlot to launch short blades from unexpected angles. He had to respond with extreme caution.

After 17 or 18 moves, Count Lamorak finally grasped the intricacies of the weapon. If it had been an extraordinary weapon, it might have given him more trouble. However, as a mere mundane tool, it was ineffective against the frost dragon battle energy that fortified his body. Despite its extended range, the rope dart posed little threat.

Changing tactics, Count Lamorak infused rotational force into every strike of his Knight's Lance. This technique ensnared Charlot's rope dart whenever it made contact, forcing her to abandon it.

Charlot discarded the weapon and shouted, "Count Lamorak, let us stop toying around and fight in earnest!"

With a gesture, Dolores activated a magical card, summoning a mysterious power that delivered a pair of meteor hammers onto the battlefield.

Charlot grabbed the meteor hammers and seamlessly switched her technique to the Orc Meteor Hammer Style. Her strikes became both ferocious and intricately precise. Count Lamorak met her attacks head-on, countering each move with methodical precision.

After more than 20 exchanges, Count Lamorak's frost dragon battle energy surged along his Knight's Lance. When it clashed with Charlot's meteor hammers, the chilling force shattered the ordinary weapons into pieces.

Charlot dropped the broken hammers and signaled for another weapon. This time, Anastasia threw two magical rapiers into the fray. As she released them, she realized her mistake: she had given both swords instead of just one. Normally, Charlot only wielded one rapier.

“Oops!” Anastasia thought. “I got too engrossed in the fight to remember which one he preferred!”

Charlot, unconcerned, caught both weapons. Not wanting to risk losing these extraordinary weapons to the river’s depths, she held onto them and smiled wryly at Count Lamorak. “Let me switch weapons again.”

Count Lamorak wasted no time, unleashing a torrent of strikes with his Knight’s Lance, resembling an ice dragon wreaking havoc. His family’s legendary lance techniques created waves of battle energy that resembled a towering mountain range.

Finally armed with his preferred weapons, Charlot steadied herself. With the experience gained from earlier exchanges, she relied on the agility granted by the Swiftstep Technique and the precision of the Spider Technique to maneuver across the river. Her twin rapiers danced in perfect harmony, alternating between crossing strikes and independent thrusts, fully showcasing the elegance of Arsilo Swordsmanship.

...

Charlot had mastered the eighth movement of the Angel’s Twelve Movements, the Twilight Requiem, which placed her swordsmanship above even Julian Arsilo and Hughes. Though her Stardust Battle Energy was somewhat weaker, the six of her seven Blood Vortexes amplified her power, evening the odds against Count Lamorak.

Under the intense pressure of facing one of the strongest young knights of the generation, Charlot discovered the unmatched synergy between the magical rapiers and her skills. Neither weapon length nor technique could compare to the boosts provided by the Angel’s Twelve Movements.

...

For two to three hundred moves, Charlot and Count Lamorak dueled fiercely across the Seventais River. The onlookers—nobles and commoners alike—were utterly captivated. Cheers rang out as they encouraged the fighters.

On the Bridge of Britain, Aurora Soumet stood beside her father, Duke Guillaume, watching the duel unfold.

As she observed Charlot deftly switch between multiple weapons, each wielded with astonishing skill, she couldn’t help but feel a pang of envy. Watching Charlot’s final elegant display with the twin rapiers, Aurora mused bitterly, “Is Menielman truly the Old Continent’s greatest beauty?”

“First Zimourman Axel Robin, now Charlot Mecklenburg. How many more admirers would challenge death for her?”

“Why is it that she can excel at everything?” Aurora wondered.

What Aurora didn't realize was that Count Lamorak had challenged Charlot Mecklenburg for her sake. The duel, witnessed by Emperor Alfred Guillaume himself, had attracted an enormous crowd and left half of Britain's young women burning with jealousy toward Aurora Soumet.

Many of them shared the same thought: "Why is it that you get to be so exceptional?"

Chapter 204: Twilight Requiem

Charlot Mecklenburg's greatest advantage lay in the spiritual elevation he gained from twice confronting the Evil God, which had exponentially accelerated his cultivation of Blood Glory during his early days in this world. Recently, however, his progress had leveled off to what could be described as the pace of an "ordinary genius."

Nonetheless, this spiritual enhancement granted Charlot unique strengths. For instance, he could effortlessly control multiple targets simultaneously. When using Flame Dragon's Hand, he had considered it normal. Yet now, wielding dual rapiers with perfect harmony, each blade executing intricate movements as if extensions of his own arms, Charlot began to realize the profound advantage of his heightened spirit.

After hundreds of exchanges, Ban Lamorak began to gain the upper hand. His cultivation base was undeniably more robust, and his mastery of Arsilo Swordsmanship ran deeper due to years of practice. While their combat experience was nearly equal—Charlot having compensated for his shorter training period through countless duels in dreamscapes and skirmishes on battlefields—Ban Lamorak's inherent strength made him the superior fighter.

Charlot's twin swords danced in the air, but he was beginning to feel stretched thin. Just when the spectators thought the battle had reached an unchanging rhythm, Charlot suddenly shifted his dual swordplay into two distinct styles, each sword embodying a different mood.

Both swords were rooted in Angel's Twelve Movements, but the left rapier radiated the essence of dawn, sunlight, and the ocean, while the right sword exuded dusk, darkness, and mist. It was as though two master swordsmen of equal skill had joined forces, overturning Charlot's disadvantage and dragging the fight back to an intense stalemate with both sides attacking and defending in turn.

Though the nuances eluded most onlookers, Julian Arsilo, himself a practitioner of Angel's Twelve Movements, immediately recognized the ingenuity. Eyes brightening, he murmured to himself, "So the Arsilo Swordsmanship can be wielded like this."

Julian was aware that Charlot's mastery of swordsmanship surpassed his own. He also knew that Angel's Twelve Movements was divided into two parts: the first six movements spanned

from dawn to sunset, while the latter six began at twilight. In other words, the essence of the Arsilo Swordsmanship resided in the latter half of the technique.

Charlot wasn't actually doubling the power of Angel's Twelve Movements. Rather, his left-hand swordplay was the primary focus, executed with full force, while the right-hand technique served as support, drawing only on the first six movements. To the untrained eye, the two blades appeared equally potent, but those unfamiliar with Arsilo Swordsmanship would never discern the subtle disparity.

Especially with the first six movements, which were grand, radiant, and overwhelmingly powerful, no trace of weakness could be seen.

As the fierce battle reached a crescendo, Charlot reversed the roles of his swords. The left rapier now embodied dusk, darkness, and mist, while the right radiated dawn, sunlight, and the ocean. With this seamless transformation, Charlot reclaimed the upper hand.

Despite being lauded as Britain's youngest "Lion," Ban Lamorak, who was even younger than Charlot by several years, had a much stronger foundation. Groomed from a young age through rigorous training in numerous Extraordinary Abilities, his skill in Knight's Lance enabled him to deftly block Charlot's dazzling swordplay, keeping the latter at bay within five steps.

After three successive strikes, Charlot sensed a shift. Ban Lamorak's long spear always intercepted his blades at just the right moment. Realizing that his dual-sword technique had been deciphered, Charlot abruptly stopped changing his tactics. Instead, he hurled one of his rapiers onto the riverbank, where it landed embedded in the ground before Anastasia.

With only one rapier remaining in hand, Charlot's aura surged dramatically.

Julian glanced over and instinctively shouted, "The Ninth Movement: Twilight Requiem!"

In this Extraordinary world, even among the Arsilo Family, few devoted themselves solely to swordsmanship or spear techniques, instead pouring most of their efforts into cultivating Extraordinary Abilities. For instance, one might master the Blade of Emptiness or develop Stardust Battle Energy far superior to that of their peers. Even if their swordsmanship was lacking, they could dominate with techniques like stretching their blades or unleashing indestructible sword auras.

Julian himself had only practiced Angel's Thorn up to Wings of the Young Dragon. Not due to lack of talent, but because only this movement emphasized pure swordsmanship. The rest relied on techniques rooted in Stardust Battle Energy or other Extraordinary foundations.

Primarily a spearman, Julian had little need to invest so heavily in swordsmanship. While he believed he could eventually master Angel's Twelve Movements at Charlot's level if given the same time, he couldn't help but marvel at his friend's innate swordsmanship talent.

Meanwhile, the Septentrio River had transformed into a frozen spectacle. Ban Lamorak's Frost Dragon Battle Energy had created countless ice floes the size of round tables, drifting on the surface like an otherworldly panorama.

When Charlot unleashed the Twilight Requiem, the entire river seemed to dim under an ethereal twilight. His movements resembled a shadowy panther prowling through the night—elegant, agile, and hiding a lethal potential ready to strike at any moment.

The duel, elevated to its peak, became even more intense once Charlot discarded his second rapier.

Emperor Alfred Guillaume watched the battle with great satisfaction. Glancing around, he asked, "Ban Lamorak is Britain's youngest Lion. What title would suit Charlot Mecklenburg?"

Count Soumet replied lightly, "Charlot is no longer young."

The Emperor gave a soft "Oh" in response and returned his focus to the fight.

Aurora Soumet rolled her eyes. She knew her father's intentions. If Charlot received too much favor from the Emperor, it could trigger a series of consequences—like increasing her own competitive pressure.

Aurora herself wasn't exactly young anymore. Although born into nobility with a capable father, rising to the position of Cultural Officer at the Foreign Affairs Ministry had taken her five or six years. Even for someone as exceptional as Aurora, achieving such a rank within a few short years after university graduation marked her excellence. Yet, for a young woman, this was also the age when the bloom of youth began to fade.

A few years ago, Count Soumet had been highly selective about potential sons-in-law, imposing numerous harsh criteria. Now, his standards had lowered to the point of reluctantly accepting "even a Fars native."

Julian Arsilo, with his Arsilo Family upbringing, was diligently attending university, following a structured academic path as a freshman. In contrast, Ban Lamorak, whose father was a famed general, had been subjected to a more aggressive education. Modeled after the achievements of Zimourman Axel Robin, Ban Lamorak entered university at the age of twelve, graduating in just a year and a half.

Aurora couldn't accept Ban Lamorak—not just because of his overly rigid demeanor but also due to the age gap, which made him seem far too young.

At that moment, the Unicorn Griffon in Charlot's hand let out a sharp, resonant cry. For the first time since the start of the battle, Charlot revealed a genuine smile and called out, "Sir Ban Lamorak!"

"The warm-up is over."

Chapter 205: The Ankle of Victory's Goddess

Ban Lamorak was on the verge of collapse.

Charlot Mecklenburg had entered the arena wielding a knight's lance, leading Ban to believe this would be a traditional duel.

Then Charlot switched to a flashy rope dart, which Ban assumed to be a signature weapon from the Fars Empire.

When Charlot brandished a meteor hammer, Ban started to think this might be Charlot's true hidden skill.

But when Charlot transitioned to dual swords, Ban could no longer be sure of anything.

Finally, when Charlot abandoned one of the vampiric rapiers, retaining only the unicorn griffon, Ban was entirely convinced that Charlot's expertise extended far beyond what he had displayed thus far.

At this moment, Charlot declared, "The warm-up is over." Ban Lamorak, instead of feeling pressured, let out a sigh of relief. "I thought as much," he replied, raising his voice, "Come on, then!"

"Let's have a battle to remember."

Charlot swung his sword, carving seventeen precise circles in the air. The Blade of Emptiness solidified into seventeen radiant loops, which he then directed forward with a push of his sword.

Ban Lamorak had never encountered such an extraordinary swordsmanship technique before. He focused, preparing to counterattack. As he channeled his frost dragon battle energy, the ground beneath his feet gave way. His step broke through the thin ice layer, and he stumbled into the water. Hastily summoning his energy to stabilize himself, he was too late to recover fully, exposing a major opening.

Charlot smiled faintly, amplifying the Swiftstep Technique to its peak. With a thrust of the unicorn griffon, he pierced through Ban's guard and pointed the weapon at his chest. "You've lost," Charlot said calmly.

Ban Lamorak was stunned by how cleanly he had been defeated. Yet, he was resilient and didn't try to make excuses about losing his footing due to the broken ice.

“You’ve won,” he muttered, turning his knight’s lance around and handing it to Charlot before walking away without another word.

Charlot reached out, catching the lance in one hand while glancing at the water below. Seven flaming hands, the manifestation of the Flame Dragon’s Hand, emerged from the river and merged back into his body.

This maneuver had been devised to counter Hughes but ended up being used against the youngest lion of Britain.

At the start of the fight, Charlot had noticed Ban Lamorak’s reliance on frost dragon battle energy to freeze the river’s surface and move freely across it. This inspired Charlot’s strategy. To avoid suspicion, he meticulously executed his plan, using the Flame Dragon’s Hand beneath the ice to melt the thicker layers and leave only a fragile crust.

If Charlot had used this technique at the beginning of their battle, it would have been ineffective. At their peak, both combat energy and battle energy would have easily countered the trick. However, after hundreds of exchanges spanning the entire morning, midday, and part of the afternoon, their energies were no longer at full strength.

Ban Lamorak, conserving his energy, had stopped allowing his energy to freeze the river as a precaution. This subtle detail became Charlot’s opportunity to seize Victory’s Goddess by the ankle.

Charlot raised the knight’s lance and the vampiric rapier high, prompting cheers from both riverbanks. Countless young women of Britain blew kisses at him to celebrate his triumph.

Charlot circled the Septentis River twice before returning to the shore. The first words he said to Dolores Soumet were, “Get me some dry clothes and shoes. I’m completely soaked, and it’s unbearable.”

Though Charlot could traverse the river’s surface with the Swiftstep Technique and Spider Technique, he couldn’t keep himself dry. By this point, both he and Ban Lamorak were thoroughly drenched. While Charlot didn’t know how Ban felt about it, he was eager to change into something dry.

Dolores gave him an amused look. “You’ve got a great physique,” she quipped.

“Stop with the nonsense,” Charlot retorted.

Dolores smirked. “Fine, then. Let me be blunt—why would I have men’s clothes prepared?”

Charlot was momentarily speechless. Among the three women in his group, Dolores, being a member of the Soumet family, was a highborn lady. While her father wasn’t an earl like Menielman Soumet’s, she was still a top-tier noblewoman and clearly not one to perform menial tasks.

Anastasia, though an illegitimate child, was the daughter of Baron Febollet and a pampered daughter of high society who had attended university.

Belisa, though of humbler origins, had been raised under the care of the Duchess of Mostar. As a lady-in-waiting, she had supervised others rather than performing such tasks herself.

At that moment, Julian Arsilo approached with a set of clothes. Charlot finally sighed in relief, boarded the Dark Luxury, and closed the carriage door. He drew the curtains, removed his wet clothing, dried off with a towel, and changed into a comfortable, dry outfit, instantly feeling rejuvenated.

When he stepped down from the carriage, a squad of royal knights in full armor approached. “Sir Charlot Mecklenburg,” they announced loudly, “His Majesty requests your presence.”

Charlot promptly stored the Dark Luxury, following the knights toward Britain Bridge.

Meeting the Ingrima Emperor Alfred Guillaume twice within a matter of days was a rare honor. Few among the empire’s highest nobility enjoyed such frequent audiences with the emperor.

Charlot, despite his time in the Fars Empire, had never seen Emperor Julius VI. He hadn’t even glimpsed the imperial palace gates, only encountering the emperor’s brother-in-law, the extravagantly generous Baron Febollet.

When Alfred Guillaume saw Charlot, he was overjoyed. He had a seat placed for Charlot beside him. “The post-duel performances,” he remarked, “are always the best part.”

“This time, the performers are from the royal troupe. The lead dancer is said to be a princess from the New Continent, with a stunning figure—and a husband,” the emperor added, inexplicably more animated when mentioning her marital status.

Charlot couldn’t understand why this detail excited the emperor, but he dutifully replied, “Your Majesty’s troupe must surely be the finest in the continent.”

Alfred Guillaume sighed. “Unfortunately, they all say that as emperor, I shouldn’t indulge in such entertainments. They won’t let me attend!”

“It’s only on occasions like this that I get to witness the troupe’s splendor.”

Charlot glanced at the surrounding nobles and officials and wisely decided to avoid commenting further.

Soon, over a dozen elaborately decorated boats glided down the Seventais River. The largest turned toward Britain Bridge, its companions anchoring it in place with grappling hooks.

Dozens of beautiful dancers emerged, performing with grace. However, their classical routines lacked the provocative allure of the dancers Charlot had seen on short video platforms. After a while, he found his interest waning.

Trapped beside the emperor, escaping midway through the performance was not an option.

Chapter 206: The Whale Slayer and Lion's Maru

Charlot Mecklenburg was feeling drowsy.

This period of time was even more exhausting than the duel against Ban Lamorak.

Emperor Alfred Guillaume was thoroughly enjoying himself, rewarding the dancers with gold écus on the spot. However, with several ministers strongly advising against it, he reluctantly refrained from requesting additional performances.

Finally enduring through the ordeal, Charlot was about to excuse himself when Emperor Alfred Guillaume addressed him. "Lord Mecklenburg, does your Fars Empire have similar dance troupes?"

Charlot thought, *Even if they did, how would I know?*

"These kinds of troupes, which only royal families can afford, I've seen in Ingrima. But in the Fars Empire? Where would I have had the opportunity to encounter them?"

Just as he was about to respond, he suddenly felt the weight of countless gazes upon him.

The ministers of Ingrima were all staring at Charlot, making him feel immense pressure. With a strained smile, Charlot said, "In the Fars Empire, I am merely a humble chief overseer of the city patrol guards. Such opulence is far beyond my reach."

This answer greatly pleased the ministers of Ingrima, and Charlot felt some of the pressure ease.

"It's true," Emperor Alfred Guillaume said with a hint of regret. "Your current position doesn't grant you such access. Unfortunately, I can only bestow titles within Ingrima, not in Fars."

"Lord Mecklenburg, you must strive harder."

Charlot dared not reply. Was this an encouragement to spy on Fars and report back to the Emperor of Ingrima? Such actions would make him a high-level spy, a crime punishable by death—a charge no less severe than summoning an evil god.

This is pure madness...

Likely, I would be torn apart...

Satisfied, Emperor Alfred Guillaume addressed his officials. “Enough. Stop staring at Lord Mecklenburg. I shall return to the Red Dragon Palace to handle state affairs.”

He clapped Charlot on the shoulder, saying, “I’ll summon you again in a few days!”

Charlot felt as though a primordial beast was pressing down on his shoulder—not just mentally but physically. He was alarmed, thinking, *Emperor Alfred Guillaume is at least Saint rank.*

With the Emperor’s departure alongside his ministers, Charlot waited for a while before preparing to leave. He was stopped by Aurora Soumet.

“Lord Mecklenburg, today must have been hard on you,” Aurora said.

Charlot took a deep breath, activating Blood Glory to dispel the physical pressure left by Emperor Alfred Guillaume. Forcing a smile, he replied, “Didn’t I receive generous rewards?”

Aurora offered, “Let me treat you to a meal as thanks.”

Charlot gladly agreed. “I have no objections.”

The two left the Bridge of Love and, instead of taking a carriage, Aurora led Charlot on foot to a riverside restaurant along the Seventais River. The establishment, with its refined décor, extended over the water, offering diners a view of the scenic river as they ate.

Aurora ordered several authentic Ingrima dishes. Charlot, assuming that such a high-class restaurant wouldn’t serve anything too unpalatable, was proven terribly wrong with the first dish.

It consisted of a bowl of sticky vegetable paste ringed with fried fish heads. The appearance was appalling, but the smell was worse. Each fish head stared blankly, as if lamenting their tragic demise and inability to rest even on the dining table.

The second dish was more conventional: an enormous pig’s knuckle. However, its preparation was peculiar. Charlot poked it with a dining knife and confirmed it was raw.

“This is one of Ingrima’s signature dishes: salted pork knuckle,” Aurora explained. “It’s prepared by rubbing salt into it and letting it dry naturally without any other seasoning or cooking. It’s stored in caves to develop its unique flavor and often takes years to cure.”

At Aurora’s insistence, Charlot cut a small piece to taste, only to feel his tongue go numb from the saltiness.

As more dishes were served, Charlot, guided by Aurora’s introductions, sampled each one. He concluded that there was no greater torment on earth than this meal—even the Emperor’s dance performance was preferable.

While he had heard of Ingrima cuisine’s infamous reputation, he hadn’t imagined it would be this bad. The ingredients were top-notch, but the methods of preparation were utterly baffling, their

creativity verging on the absurd. Achieving such levels of unpleasantness seemed an impossible feat for normal cooks.

Aurora casually brought up dueling, but Charlot, struggling with the inedible “delicacies,” couldn’t muster much of a response. Realizing his lack of interest, she shifted the topic. “What do you think of His Majesty’s dance troupe?”

Charlot forced down a piece of salted pork knuckle and said, “I feel that without assassinations, something is amiss.”

“Normally, shouldn’t a princess with a grudge against a kingdom appear as an assassin?”

Aurora burst into laughter. “Assassins? Do you know how many Saint ranks are by His Majesty’s side? Likely more than Fars has stationed in Ferranden. Should an assassin dare appear, not only would the assassin perish, but their organization and patrons would be eradicated.”

Charlot was stunned. “There was more than one Saint rank present today?”

He had never witnessed an emperor’s entourage before, but reflecting on the youthful monarch’s formidable presence, he understood. It made sense for the Emperor’s protective measures to be so robust. Nonetheless, Charlot couldn’t help but secretly grumble: *With His Majesty’s overwhelming power, how much protection does he even need?*

Meanwhile, the Fars Embassy was bustling with activity. Charlot hadn’t returned yet, but Dolores Soumet, Anastasia, and Belisa were already back, bringing with them Charlot’s spoils of victory: Ban Lamorak’s knight’s lance.

Since Charlot couldn’t carry any weapons to meet the Emperor, his Unicorn Griffon, Blood Rose, Aurora’s gifted magical rapier, the Withered Rose, and the knight’s lance, Whale Slayer, had all been brought back by Dolores and the others.

The embassy staff marveled at Ban Lamorak’s knight’s lance. Famous across Britain, Whale Slayer earned its name from the time Count Lamorak, in his youth, used it to slay a giant whale.

As Count Lamorak’s strength grew, he replaced it with a more befitting lance, passing Whale Slayer down to his son, Ban Lamorak.

Armed with Whale Slayer, Ban Lamorak had defeated over a hundred opponents in duels, earning the lance the nickname Lion’s Maru, symbolizing Britain’s youngest lion.

Chapter 207: A Royal Widow Grand Princess

After finishing his meal, Charlot parted ways with Aurora Soumet. He even declined her suggestion to go shopping together. Not having any weapons on him felt unsettling. Normally, Charlot would carry the Blood Rose, and before he had that, he would always have the Vampiric Hand Axe and a Magnum Mauler with him.

Aurora didn't say much, merely asking Charlot to escort her back to the Foreign Minister's residence.

Once Charlot dropped her off, he hurried back to Embassy Street. Finding Dolores Soumet, he reclaimed the Blood Rose and the Withered Rose, storing them inside the Blood Vortex in his left arm. Only then did he let out a long breath of relief, the sense of security washing over him once more.

He thought to himself, *"It's a shame the Anti-Space Long-Range Rifle and both Silver Rhinos are still at Machubi. Otherwise, I'd feel even safer."*

Charlot also retrieved two Knight's Lances and two Vampiric Rapiers. By the time he was finished, night had fallen. Returning to his room, he practiced Blood Glory for a while. Just as he was about to go to bed, he remembered the two letters he had set aside.

One letter was from High Priest Auguslatin, but since the priest had not returned yet, Charlot decided not to open it, preferring to avoid distractions before the upcoming duel. Instead, he opened the letter addressed to himself. Breaking the wax seal, he drew out the official royal document.

It was a standard royal missive. After commending Charlot for his contributions to the alliance between the two nations, the only substantive information was his promotion: Charlot Mecklenburg was advanced to the rank of Level 27, Grade 3 Chief Clerk.

Though it was a promotion, it still didn't place Charlot among the Unreachable Class (Level 24 and above). This was a lower status than his position in the Ingrima Empire.

Even so, Charlot understood that his unique situation in the Ingrima Empire was an anomaly—few were fortunate enough to be personally received and appreciated by the emperor himself.

Satisfied, he carefully stored the important document away.

The next morning, High Priest Auguslatin made a rare appearance at the embassy. No one knew where he had been these past days. He looked utterly exhausted, his legs trembling as though he'd undertaken some grueling "physical labor."

Charlot immediately handed the letter over to him.

Unsealing the letter, High Priest Auguslatin read it briefly before remarking flatly, “Sir Charlot Mecklenburg, your pleasant life in Ingrima is over.”

“You will soon return to Strasbourg, where a new assignment awaits you.”

He handed the letter to Charlot, who glanced over it. Sure enough, it contained orders urging his return to the Fars Empire. This wasn’t some ploy by High Priest Auguslatin. Confused, Charlot asked, “Why am I the only one being sent back?”

With a broad smile, High Priest Auguslatin replied, “I have no idea why they want only you back. But this is good news for you. I too miss Strasbourg, but for the sake of the emperor and the Fars Empire, I must remain in Ingrima.”

Charlot couldn’t see any sign of reluctance in the priest’s expression, which practically radiated happiness.

In truth, Charlot did feel a twinge of longing for Strasbourg, mainly because of Annie Bretagne. Though he had started forming a small social circle in Britain, figures like Julian Arsilo and others were destined to return to their own lands. Meanwhile, Aurora’s charm simply couldn’t compare to Annie’s.

Furthermore, Dolores Soumet, Anastasia, and Belisa would all accompany him back, making the thought even more appealing.

After discussing matters with the High Priest for a while, Charlot drafted a letter to the Foreign Minister’s residence, formally applying for permission to return to the Fars Empire. As a diplomat, every move he made had to follow proper protocol to avoid creating any friction between the two nations.

The response from the Foreign Minister’s residence came swiftly. Along with wishes for a smooth journey, the letter also granted Charlot the rare honor of traveling aboard an Ingrima Empire warship to return to the Fars Empire.

In the afternoon, a messenger from the palace arrived, summoning Charlot for an audience.

Under the envious gazes of other embassy staff, Charlot boarded the royal carriage. He carried no weapons this time, passing through numerous security checkpoints and enduring inspections by eunuchs before once again meeting Emperor Alfred Guillaume, the Red Dragon Emperor.

The emperor greeted Charlot warmly and invited him to a grand royal banquet. The main dishes were almost identical to those Aurora had served him the previous day, but they were more refined. One dish, in particular, stood out—a bowl of sticky vegetable puree topped with a ring of fried fish heads. It was larger and even more grotesque than Aurora’s version, with fish heads sporting expressions of utter despair.

During the meal, Emperor Alfred Guillaume remarked proudly, "I've also arranged for a diplomatic delegation to accompany you to Strasbourg."

"The delegation's Special Envoy with Full Authority is my aunt—a royal widow Grand Princess. I chose her especially for you. Make sure to seize this opportunity."

Charlot involuntarily swallowed a mouthful of fish head, utterly baffled by the emperor's intentions. A widow? A Grand Princess? Each term was respectable, yet coming from the emperor, they all carried a lewd undertone.

Seeing Charlot's stunned expression, the emperor assumed he was overcome with joy. Brimming with enthusiasm, he added, "Besides the feast, I've prepared a little appetizer for you as well. Accompanying my aunt will be Miss Aurora Soumet."

"Well? Have I treated you well or not?"

"You must give it your all, Sir Charlot Mecklenburg!"

Charlot nodded repeatedly, though he wasn't sure if this was an opportunity worth pursuing. What exactly would "giving it his all" entail? What kind of serious consequences might follow?

The emperor, apparently in high spirits, spent the entire dinner detailing his aunt's preferences—from her love for New Continent silk lingerie to her favorite dishes, novels, and poetry. Charlot knew more about the Grand Princess's habits by the end of the meal than anyone outside her inner circle should.

Ordinarily, only a lady-in-waiting or a steward would have such intimate knowledge.

Charlot finished the meal feeling as if he were sitting on needles. He hadn't expected to leave the palace with such a peculiar assignment. Although the emperor never explicitly stated his intentions, the implications were glaringly obvious. The phrase "I'm here for the entertainment" might as well have been written on the emperor's face.

Under this immense pressure, Charlot even found the peculiar Ingrima cuisine less unbearable.

After dinner, the emperor draped an arm around Charlot's shoulders, personally escorting him through two layers of palace gates. Along the way, countless eyes drilled into him, as if he were some sycophantic foreign minister seducing the emperor.

It felt as though he were being embraced by a real Red Dragon, constantly on edge, afraid that a sudden mood swing might lead to him being devoured alive.

Not until he left the palace did Charlot let out a deep sigh of relief, feeling as though he had just escaped from a dragon's lair.

Chapter 208: The Female Saint in a Black Robe

Charlot Mecklenburg was certain now that Emperor Alfred Guillaume was far from being a “guileless youth who couldn’t keep a secret.” His first impression of the Red Dragon Emperor had been utterly wrong.

Though young, His Majesty was a deep and calculating individual, full of strategic insight. Every action he took seemed to have profound meaning, far removed from the image of a shallow man seeking amusement.

A Saint rank could completely conceal their aura from ordinary people, making it impossible for them to detect. Yet Emperor Alfred Guillaume had twice revealed his strength—once at the Bridge of Britain, when he patted Charlot on the shoulder, and again just now, when he escorted him out of the palace with an arm around his shoulders.

Such acts were undoubtedly intentional...

Seated in the carriage, Charlot glanced back at the Red Dragon Palace. A sudden chill ran down his spine, akin to the terror he had felt when facing two evil gods for the second time.

Charlot took a deep breath to calm himself, deciding not to overthink it. As the palace’s carriage brought him back to Embassy Street, he bypassed the Fars Embassy and left, switching to Dark Luxury.

Before departing, he wanted to take a look at the residence bestowed upon him by the Emperor.

The estate was located at 698 Seventais South Riverside Street!

On either side of the Seventais River ran streets that cut through the heart of Britain. The one near the Red Dragon Palace was Seventais South Riverside Street, while the one closer to the Obsidian Spring Palace was Seventais North Riverside Street. The southern side was far more bustling, featuring many renowned landmarks of the Ingrima Empire, upscale shops, restaurants, taverns, and cafés. There was even a tea house—nearly unheard of in Fars—offering a selection of teas from various nations for tasting and purchase.

The journey to 698 Seventais South Riverside Street was brief. Pulled by eight magical steeds, Dark Luxury arrived in just over ten minutes.

As Charlot dismounted and transformed Dark Luxury into a ring, he glanced at the residence. It was even stranger than he had imagined.

Strange, indeed, but not luxurious.

Situated on a solitary hill about seventy or eighty meters high, the estate could only be reached on foot, as carriages were unable to ascend. At the foot of the hill was a dedicated parking area, currently empty, which further suggested that the residence was uninhabited.

Having received the property deed and keys in advance, Charlot approached the grand gate of the estate. The imposing gate opened to reveal two paths—one descending a few steps toward the parking area, and the other ascending steeply up the hill.

Charlot wasn't in the mood to bother with the gate. Using the Swiftstep Technique, he effortlessly leapt over it and climbed the stone steps. After seventy or eighty paces, he reached a small platform, where the path split again. One branch led to a residence at the mid-hill, labeled 699, while the other continued to the hilltop, marked 698.

Intrigued by his neighbor, Charlot guessed the mid-hill residence was likely unoccupied and decided to check it out before heading further up.

However, after climbing just twenty or thirty meters, a faint voice drifted down from above:

"This is private property. Trespassers, halt."

Startled to find the residence occupied, Charlot quickly retrieved the property deed and apologized.

"Pardon me, I have the property deed."

Before he could finish speaking, the deed vanished from his hand.

The shock was immense. Charlot instinctively drew his Vampiric Rapier and assumed a defensive stance.

For someone to take the document from him without leaving a trace—that person had to be terrifyingly skilled.

Moments later, a graceful figure draped in a black robe appeared mid-air and spoke:

"You've mistaken the address. Your destination is the hilltop—698."

The figure casually tossed the deed back to Charlot before vanishing from sight in the blink of an eye. Charlot leapt into the air to catch the fluttering deed, sweat pouring down his back.

"A Saint rank!"

"How could there be a Saint rank here?"

Chastising himself for his recklessness, Charlot couldn't help but wonder why such a powerful individual was his neighbor. The unkempt state of the pathway and the lack of carriages in the parking area had led him to assume the place was deserted. Evidently, he was wrong.

The black-robed female Saint seemed to live alone. There wasn't even a servant in sight—unless, of course, she had Saint-rank servants, which seemed unlikely.

“Why is a Saint rank residing here?”

“What was Emperor Alfred Guillaume thinking, gifting me a residence next to such an enigmatic figure? Was this a trap?”

Lost in thought, Charlot changed course and climbed toward the hilltop.

At the summit, the terrain leveled out into a small square, spanning over ten acres. On one side stood a towering structure in the Sherlock architectural style. Though only five stories high, each floor was more than six meters tall, making it a high-rise by Earth standards.

Using the key, Charlot entered the estate. The first floor resembled his home on 58 Elysée Avenue, featuring three studies, two reception rooms, a main hall, and two dining rooms.

Thick layers of dust coated every surface, suggesting the place had been unoccupied for a long time.

After a quick inspection, Charlot decided not to explore further. Since he planned to return to Fars soon, he'd deal with cleaning the place another time.

Locking up behind him, Charlot descended the hill, casting one last glance at the mid-hill residence. The mysterious female Saint lingered in his thoughts.

According to Earthly customs, one ought to greet their neighbors. But Charlot dismissed the idea—it seemed far too risky. That enigmatic Saint rank clearly had a volatile temperament. If she were to kill him on a whim and toss his body into the Septentris River, even the Emperor of Fars might not seek justice.

Taking a deep breath, Charlot summoned Dark Luxury and returned to the Fars Embassy.

Charlot didn't have much time left in Britain. In the following days, he bought a few gifts to take back to Strasbourg, bid farewell to Julian Arsilo, and made final preparations for his departure.

Julian was indifferent about his departure, merely wishing him a safe journey. Charlot knew that if he returned to the battlefield, they would likely meet again—not as friends, but as enemies.

Such matters, dictated by national conflicts, left little to be said. Charlot could only bid Julian a polite farewell. This time, he would not include Julian in the envoy delegation.

Finally, Charlot received word that the warship Titanic Whale was ready to set sail for Fars. Gathering his belongings, along with Dolores, Anastasia, Belisa, and his eighteen Redback Bear warriors, he headed for the port.

To his surprise, he encountered an unexpected acquaintance there.

Chapter 209: Widowhood Has Nothing to Do With This

James Cook was the captain of the *Titanic Whale*.

Charlot Mecklenburg had once befriended Captain Francis Drake of the *White Sea Dragon* and this James Cook in the city of Cappadocia. With their help, he had defeated a fleet of slave traders and established a financial relationship with both captains through gold pounds.

Incidentally, Charlot had entrusted Julian Arsilo to wager two thousand gold pounds on his victory against Count Lamorak, and the return had quadrupled to over eight thousand gold pounds. Including his earlier savings, Charlot now possessed over nine thousand gold pounds, which made him quite wealthy, even by Ingrima Empire standards.

Upon seeing James Cook, Charlot warmly embraced him, and the feeling was mutual.

During their last encounter in Cappadocia, James Cook had been delighted. Upon returning to Britain, he learned that Charlot had not only delivered Chatham and other key targets' heads as promised but had also portrayed him and Francis Drake as heroes in official documents. These reports credited them with rescuing foreign envoys, recapturing Cappadocia, and defeating a pirate fleet.

James Cook had also heard that Emperor Alfred Guillaume greatly favored Charlot, summoning him several times and even granting him a role in the Ingrima Empire's government. This further convinced James Cook that this young man was worth befriending.

Charlot arrived at the port early and was invited aboard the *Titanic Whale*, where James Cook arranged for him to stay in a luxurious guest room, second only to the captain's quarters.

By noon, Aurora Soumet arrived at the dock with a team and boarded the ship. When she saw Charlot and James Cook chatting and laughing like old friends, she could hardly believe her eyes.

James Cook, now thirty-five years old, held the imperial rank of Sub-Lieutenant, Level 25. He was a high-ranking Transcendent with formidable Ocean Combat Energy. Rising through merit alone, he commanded a magical alchemical warship, making him an exceptional figure in the Imperial Navy. Generally, he looked down on those who climbed ranks through noble birth and often treated even Aurora, a Level 19 diplomat and cultural officer under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, with aloof indifference, sticking strictly to business.

Yet, this proud naval captain was now chatting with a foreign diplomat as though they were brothers.

Aurora, feeling a mix of amazement and reflection, recalled her father's advice from recent days about seizing opportunities. She had initially dismissed such conventional rhetoric, but now, seeing Charlot and James Cook, she felt a flicker of interest.

Charlot greeted Aurora with warmth—they were, after all, friends bonded by ties deeper than gold. For Aurora, Charlot had fought duels, acquiring two magical rapiers, two knight's lances, and even the unicorn griffon, all of which were premium items. This history of shared experiences created a bond stronger than his camaraderie with James Cook.

Although James Cook harbored some resentment toward Aurora for outranking him due to her family's influence, he maintained civility, smiling as he greeted her, though his distant demeanor was evident.

Aurora saw no reason to curry favor with James Cook. The three gathered, chatting idly as they waited for the Grand Princess's arrival.

The afternoon came and went, yet the Grand Princess did not appear.

James Cook dared not urge her but muttered some complaints, which Charlot responded to with only a polite smile, remaining an attentive listener.

When James Cook was in the midst of criticizing the Grand Princess's eccentricities—mentioning her seclusion after her husband's death as unsuitable for a diplomatic envoy—the sky darkened slightly. A figure cloaked in black appeared above the magical alchemical warship.

Charlot almost exclaimed in surprise. The figure bore a striking resemblance to a recent "neighbor" he had encountered—same black robe, same elegant figure, same deadly and enigmatic aura.

The only difference was that this black-robed Grand Princess now carried a book.

Charlot would never have imagined that the mysterious Saint-ranked neighbor he had met was, in fact, the Grand Princess herself.

James Cook, mid-rant, noticed Charlot's stunned expression and followed his gaze skyward, where he too froze in astonishment.

A chilling voice descended from above:
"Prepare me a quiet cabin."

James Cook hurriedly led the way, arranging a cabin next to the captain's quarters, directly across from Charlot's room.

Charlot and Aurora watched as the Grand Princess entered her quarters and instructed that she not be disturbed. The two stifled their laughter, exchanged farewells with James Cook, and returned to their respective rooms.

James Cook, needing to command the magical warship for departure, had no time to accompany them further. He returned to his quarters, drenched in cold sweat, wondering if the princess had overheard his earlier grumbling.

Back in his room, Charlot resumed his usual routine, cultivating his *Blood Glory* technique. After completing his practice with all the *Blood Vortexes*, he pondered how to pass the time. Travel by ship in this era was undeniably dull.

A knock at his door interrupted his thoughts. Assuming it was Aurora, he opened the door, only to find the elegant, black-cloaked figure of the Grand Princess standing there.

This was Princess May Guillaume!

Her robe obscured her face entirely, revealing only a pair of lifeless eyes.

Charlot performed the imperial salute and was about to speak when she cut him off: "Do you have books? I only brought one, and I've finished it."

Charlot, momentarily taken aback, asked, "Books? What kind?"

"Novels," the princess replied curtly.

Charlot, having skimmed through some Old Continent novels since his transmigration, internally dismissed them as poorly written with clichéd plots. He thought, "These stories can't even compare to amateur writers pleading for reviews on forums."

Though he didn't voice these thoughts, his disdainful expression betrayed him.

For the first time, the princess's lifeless eyes seemed to gain a spark of vitality as she remarked coldly, "You, of all people, look down on these literary masters?"

"Do you know how many stories of love and loss, heroism and tragedy, grandeur and suspense they've created?"

"Do you realize how deeply they've explored human nature, upheld morality, cherished humanity, and expressed compassion?"

With a casual gesture of her slender hand, she unleashed a pressure akin to a mountain's weight. Charlot could barely resist, struggling to draw his rapier as he frantically channeled his *Blood Glory*.

"I am a great admirer of classic literature!" he cried, gasping for breath.

Never had he imagined that his disdain for Old Continent novels would offend a Saint-ranked princess of such high status.

Widowhood, it seemed, had little to do with this incident...

Chapter 210: The Room Echoed with Charlot's Hoarse Voice

Grand Princess May Guillaume raised her voice slightly and said, "You've read some classic novels? Then tell me, which authors have you read?"

She casually listed a few authors. Charlot was dumbfounded; he knew nothing about them. Novels in this era? What could possibly be worth reading?

Grand Princess May Guillaume sneered and said coldly, "I knew you were bluffing. You don't understand literature at all, let alone classics. Today, I'll teach you a lesson on behalf of all writers."

Charlot was on the verge of a breakdown. His mind raced desperately as he activated the Eye of Insight, taking a quick glance at the book inside the princess's room.

It was a knightly novel—a genre that had long since fallen out of favor on Earth, leaving behind only Don Quixote, a parody of chivalric tales, to be immortalized as a world literary masterpiece.

Charlot had never read any Western knightly novels, but after skimming this Old Continent knight novel through his Eye of Insight, he thought: No matter how bad Earth's knight novels were, they couldn't possibly be worse than this.

Racking his brain, Charlot dredged up every web novel he had ever read. Unfortunately, most of them had settings far too different from the Old Continent, leaving him with very few suitable fantasy classics.

He silently cursed those web novel authors for not writing more fantasy works. In the end, after filtering out the more male-oriented stories, he settled on one slightly leaning toward a female audience. He shouted loudly, "Once upon a time, there was a kingdom called Graycastle, and a fourth prince named Roland..."

The princess was actually quite annoyed. The fact that Charlot had become her neighbor was suspicious enough. The Emperor's nephew specifically naming Charlot to represent the empire in the Fars mission was even stranger. Encountering Charlot again on the Titanic Whale only confirmed the dirty intentions behind the Emperor's nephew's actions.

When Charlot began reciting, she paid it little mind. But as soon as he mentioned how the fourth prince Roland saved a witch named Anna from execution, her eyes lit up. The story's intrigue was beyond anything she had ever heard.

She retracted her hand, easing most of her force, and pushed Charlot into the room. She stepped inside herself, closing the door behind her.

The room was soon filled with Charlot's hoarse voice...

Yes, he was reciting a novel.

After half an hour of recitation, Charlot had only covered five or six chapters. He was utterly exhausted, as if he had fought Count Lamorak in a duel for hours.

Grand Princess May was sitting cross-legged on the bed, attentively listening to the story.

Charlot finally felt the life-threatening pressure dissipate. He poured himself a glass of water and gulped it down before coughing lightly and switching to a calmer tone. He continued reciting the story in a more narrative and engaging manner.

After listening for a while, the princess lazily grabbed a pillow and leaned against it, becoming increasingly engrossed in the tale.

Suddenly, a knock came at the door, and Aurora Soumet's voice called out, "James Cook has invited us to the captain's cabin for dinner."

Charlot was about to respond when the princess suddenly floated over and covered his mouth. She extended her slender fingers into the air, drawing pink combat energy that condensed into a line of Ingrima text: "Don't tell them I was here."

Charlot thought to himself, "With all the noise we made earlier, they must already know. What's the point of pretending?"

The grand princess drew another line of text: "I've sealed the room's sound with combat energy."

Charlot was taken aback. "There's even a technique like that?"

The princess let go of him, and with a swish of her black robe, she disappeared from the room. Charlot didn't even see how she left.

He got up and opened the door, finding Aurora in a gown that made her look every bit the noble lady. It was a stark contrast to her usual clean and practical hunting attire.

Smiling, Charlot said, "I was just training earlier."

Aurora raised an eyebrow and replied, "Why would you explain that to me? I'm not going to inspect your room."

Charlot, feeling guilty, glanced back into his room. Aurora couldn't help but follow his gaze, taking a peek. Seeing nothing amiss, Charlot relaxed.

Aurora, however, frowned and asked, "Why is your room better than mine?"

Charlot was dumbfounded. He hadn't expected Aurora to care about such a trivial matter.

James Cook had reserved the two best guest rooms for Charlot and the Grand Princess. Naturally, Aurora had been assigned a slightly less luxurious room. Huffing with annoyance, Aurora declared, "I'm going to ask James Cook for an explanation. I'm a rank nineteen officer!"

Charlot shrugged helplessly, thinking, "At least she didn't discover the widowed grand princess hiding in my room."

As for the room issue? It was a minor matter. He trusted James Cook to handle it. Worst case, he could switch rooms with Aurora. After all, her rank was higher.

Aurora added, "The princess won't join us for dinner; she doesn't want to be disturbed."

The two arrived at the captain's cabin, where Aurora, who had been fuming earlier, now behaved gracefully, exuding the elegance of a true noble lady.

James Cook proved to be a lively conversationalist. Initially cautious during his first encounter with Charlot, he now adopted a warmer attitude, having learned of Charlot's potential and the Emperor's favor.

The dinner table conversation was mostly between Charlot and James Cook, with Aurora remaining silent throughout.

Charlot, fascinated by the magical alchemy warship, asked many questions about its workings. James Cook answered most of them but noted that certain details were classified military secrets.

The meal ended on a pleasant note. Afterward, James Cook invited them for a cup of coffee before excusing himself to manage the ship.

Charlot was about to ask Aurora if she wanted to take a walk on the deck when a haunting voice whispered in his ear, "Dinner's over. Come to my room."

With a resigned sigh, Charlot bid farewell to Aurora, claiming he needed to resume training.

Aurora said nothing, departing gracefully.

Charlot returned to his room, pausing at the door to glance across at the princess's room. Before he could make a decision, her door opened, and he was drawn inside by an unseen force.

The door closed behind him. Inside, the princess sat on the bed, hugging a pillow. Beside her was a freshly brewed pot of tea, clearly prepared in advance.

With no other option, Charlot resumed reciting the novel. However, the story soon delved into some chemical concepts, which didn't exist on the Old Continent. Desperately, Charlot improvised...

When night fell, Charlot finally escaped to his own room. Letting out a long sigh of relief, he muttered to himself, "Thank you, author! If I ever return to Earth, I must treat her to a meal to express my gratitude."

"...Actually, she could treat me instead."

Chapter 211: The Devil's Rule

"Oh! There are so many kinds of magic? This is unbelievable."

"Magic can even be used like this?"

"His Highness the Fourth Prince is truly a genius."

"Is this one of your authors from the Fars Empire? I'd like to visit this great writer!"

Charlot Mecklenburg, sweating profusely, hurriedly replied, "No, you don't want to!"

"This author..."

"He's out traveling."

"Very far away. It's said he's gravely ill and needs a very peculiar herb to recover."

Princess May rested her chin on her hand, pondering for a while before suddenly declaring, "Stop talking about this book. I think your storytelling skills are terrible. You've ruined such a good novel. When I arrive in the Fars Empire, I'll buy the original copy. Until then, no spoilers."

Though Princess May's face was concealed under a black robe, Charlot was certain that beneath it, the Grand Princess was wearing a look of disdain.

Charlot breathed a sigh of relief, only to hear Princess May say, "Tell a slightly inferior story this time!"

"Sli... slightly inferior?" Charlot suddenly had a horrifying thought: if he ever returned to Earth, he might find it impossible to make a living as a writer due to what he was about to do.

After much contemplation, he finally decided on a fantasy story that might appeal to women. He began, "Once upon a time, there was an earl who had a son named Duwei. This Duwei never wet the bed..."

"When he was born, he couldn't speak until the age of three. Everyone thought he was mute, perhaps even an idiot. On his third birthday, it rained with thunder and lightning, and he suddenly uttered his first words: 'Damn it!'"

As Charlot narrated, an image of a tall, robust man wearing expensive glasses appeared in his mind, roaring furiously, "Who are you calling an inferior writer?!"

Princess May quickly became absorbed in the story. She discovered that it was filled with twists and turns, vivid characters, humorous language, and a subtle sense of sophistication. Compared to this story, everything else she had read in her life—even the previous one Charlot had mentioned—seemed like garbage.

It was unimaginable that such a captivating tale existed in the world.

She suddenly understood why Charlot had looked at her with "scorn" when she said she liked novels. Internally, the Grand Princess mused, "Are Fars Empire novels so superior to those of the Ingrima Empire? No, I've bought many novels by Fars authors before, and none of them were this good!"

"Could it be that only within the Fars Empire can one find authentic Fars novels? That their best works are not published outside their borders?"

"What a bizarre rule."

Princess May still thought Charlot's storytelling was clumsy and incoherent, unaware that he was deliberately adapting the original story to suit the Old Continent's style. He omitted elements involving transmigrators and adjusted the plot, inevitably making the tale slightly fragmented. Still, after listening reluctantly for an entire day, she said when releasing Charlot for the evening, "This story is amazing, but your narration is terrible. I'll also buy the original of this one when I get to the Fars Empire. Tomorrow, pick another story for me."

Charlot's face darkened. As he was about to leave, Princess May added, "When I visit the Fars Empire, I must also meet this author."

Charlot quickly said, "He's the author of the previous book as well."

Princess May replied coldly, "The structure, creativity, writing style, and tone of these two books are completely different. Are you trying to fool me?"

Charlot hadn't expected the Grand Princess to possess such literary acumen. He was about to fabricate an excuse about the author traveling when Princess May interrupted, "Don't tell me he's also out traveling? Do all Fars authors go traveling? Do you take me for a fool?"

Charlot hurriedly explained, "No, no! This author's wife is extremely jealous. She forbids him from interacting with any female readers. Whenever he receives a letter from a female reader, she punishes him by skipping his dinner. If a female reader visits him in person, she beats him up..."

"So, it's truly inconvenient."

Charlot wiped his sweat, feeling fortunate he had transmigrated. Otherwise, the author might have come to the Old Continent to beat him up.

Princess May, half-believing him, waved him off.

...

The next morning, Charlot awoke with a splitting headache, racking his brains to think of another fantasy story that might suit the widowed Grand Princess's tastes. A certain classic was out of the question—its four protagonists included one who had a scandalous relationship with their teacher, who was also a Grand Princess.

The book's indecent depiction of the Grand Princess made it impossible for Charlot to adapt it. If he were to recite it verbatim, Princess May would undoubtedly misinterpret his intent and might even be provoked into murderous rage.

While Charlot was washing up, the ship's alarm suddenly blared. Relieved, he rushed to the deck. In the distance, two magical alchemical warships sailed swiftly toward them, flying the flag of Byron.

James Cook also came onto the deck, gazing into the distance. His expression turned grim as he said, "Turn the ship around. We only have one warship and cannot possibly fend off two Byron warships."

Charlot couldn't help but ask, "Can we request Princess May to intervene?"

James Cook shook his head and pointed to the sky. "They have Saint-rank individuals as well."

Charlot squinted at the horizon. His abilities were slightly inferior to James Cook's, and his Eye of Insight could observe everything but lacked long-range focus. After a while, he finally saw two figures floating in the sky—Byron's Saint-rank combatants.

James Cook's decision was wise. Their best option was to use speed to outmaneuver the two magical alchemical warships.

Two warships combined were undoubtedly stronger than one, but they might not necessarily be faster.

Under James Cook's command, the Titanic Whale executed a flawless turn. However, faced with the pursuit of the Byron warships, they couldn't return to the Ingrima Empire and were forced westward.

The three warships, all from the same generation, had comparable technology and speed. The Titanic Whale couldn't shake off the pursuers, nor could the Byron warships catch up immediately. Byron's two vampire Saint-rank combatants also showed no intention of engaging Princess May directly. Both sides traveled for several days, gradually veering off the mainland's route and into the open ocean.

In this world, while only the New and Old Continents had been explored extensively, the oceans had been mapped out significantly, with seven major seas identified. Among them, the Whale Sea was the most well-known.

As the magical alchemical warships sailed deeper into the open sea, Charlot occasionally spotted massive deep-sea whales surfacing, spraying water high into the air.

This vast ocean was home to these magnificent creatures, earning it the name Whale Sea.

Chapter 212: A True Flight with an Elegant Lady

The monotonous chase on the sea was a rigorous test of a commander's skill.

As a naval elite of the Ingrima Empire, James Cook's command ability was beyond question. However, the two Byron magical alchemical warships, which flickered in and out of sight but relentlessly pursued, were a constant source of pressure even for him.

This mission was not about engaging in battle; his purpose was to escort a diplomatic delegation to the Fars Empire.

James Cook deeply understood that delivering the delegation to Fars was his primary objective. A decisive naval confrontation with the Byron navy was never part of his strategic goal for this voyage.

Looking out over the vast ocean, he turned to Charlot Mecklenburg and said, "If the *Titanic Whale* sails northward, we can circle around the other side of Goring Island. I recall you have a

fleet stationed in Cappadocia. I'll disembark you at Goring Island, and you can cross it and set sail from Cappadocia toward Fars."

Charlot was startled. "Wouldn't that mean you'll have to draw away the two Byron magical alchemical warships?"

"If Princess May isn't on the warship and the Byron Saint rank intervenes to intercept your ship..." Charlot hesitated, trailing off. There were many taboos aboard warships, and certain words were better left unsaid.

James Cook replied gravely, "That is my duty."

"A soldier's foremost responsibility is to complete their mission."

Charlot shook his head and said, "I have a better plan!"

"James, hear me out. If it doesn't work, we'll proceed with your approach."

James Cook was known for his obstinate nature. If anyone else had made such a suggestion, he would have dismissed it outright without a second thought. But Charlot was different. Exercising some patience, he said, "Go ahead."

In truth, James didn't expect Charlot to offer any viable advice.

After all, Charlot was a civilian, entirely outside the military structure. Though he had captured Cappadocia and assembled a fleet from scratch, which James found mildly impressive, he attributed it more to luck than military acumen. After all, the surrender of Chatham's fleet was due to James's pressure.

Unbeknownst to James, Charlot himself harbored no illusions about his own fleet in Cappadocia, a hastily assembled force created for the purpose of fortifying the labyrinthine city.

Before leaving, Charlot had entrusted the fleet to Siman and Cruse.

Siman was a merchant shipowner, unreliable and only barely cooperative under the threat of the *Salty Ball*. Cruse was a native of Goring, initially deceived into believing Charlot was a Byron, only to later discover the truth...

When James Cook and Francis Drake arrived in Cappadocia, the truth was laid bare. The fact that no one exposed Charlot's identity on the spot was sheer luck.

Charlot had no illusions about returning to Cappadocia and finding a proper "fleet" still intact.

As for utilizing the labyrinth to reach Fars...

That wasn't in Charlot's plan either.

This secret was better kept from as many people as possible.

After all, it directly pointed to Charlot Mecklenburg's prior summoning of an evil god.

Charlot cleared his throat and said, "The Ingrima Navy undoubtedly surpasses Byron's. I also firmly believe in your superior command ability, James Cook."

This flattery put James Cook in a good mood, and he showed a willingness to listen as Charlot continued.

Charlot said, "Here's my plan: I'll create a diversion to draw one of the magical alchemical warships away, leaving you in a one-on-one situation with the other."

James Cook acknowledged the soundness of the strategy but explained patiently, "That's almost impossible."

Charlot smiled faintly and said, "The Byrons not only lay in ambush along the *Titanic Whale's* course but also deployed two Saint ranks to pressure Princess May. They're practically reading our every move."

James Cook nodded. The fact that the *Titanic Whale* had been intercepted at sea by two Byron magical alchemical warships indicated that someone had leaked their plans.

Charlot then made a surprising statement: "If Princess May were to flee with you, do you think they would dispatch warships in pursuit?"

James Cook decisively denied the possibility. "I would never abandon the warship."

Charlot smiled. "No one is asking you to leave the warship. If you're not aboard, the plan won't work, and I can't command this massive vessel."

Charlot produced the *Mask of the Cat* and handed it to James Cook. "We'll have Aurora Soumet disguise herself as you. Princess May will take her close to the Byron warships for a diversion. Even if they suspect a trick, they'll likely dispatch one warship to pursue."

"Moreover, they'll send at least one Saint rank!"

"Without a Saint, they won't be able to stop Princess May."

James Cook's mind cleared as the plan unfolded. While crude, it had a certain logic. If Princess May fled with him, the "captain," the Byrons would pursue even if they suspected deceit.

If they didn't pursue, it wouldn't matter much. Princess May could circle back.

After contemplating for a while, James Cook said, "I'll go explain the plan to Princess May."

Charlot thought to himself, "Perfect!"

“These past days, I’ve nearly run out of stories to recite.”

“Every time I tell a few chapters, Princess May says, ‘What an incredible tale! Your dull retelling diminishes its brilliance. I’ll buy the original book myself. Find me another story!’”

“This is draining the well dry!”

James Cook returned after several minutes, saying, “Princess May has agreed to the plan but refused Aurora Soumet as the decoy. She has specifically designated you to impersonate me.”

Charlot felt his head spin. This was far more challenging than anticipated!

But having proposed the plan, Charlot couldn’t refuse. He tried to persuade Princess May but received an unyielding response: “Non-negotiable.”

Reluctantly, Charlot prepared. He entrusted two knight’s lances and a magical rapier to Dolores Soumet, keeping only the *Unicorn Griffon*, two ordinary pistols, and a pouch of bullets. His concealed weapons, the *Blood Rose* and the *Withered Rose*, remained securely hidden in his left arm’s *Blood Vortex*.

After making all necessary arrangements, he donned James Cook’s uniform and transformed into the Ingrima naval officer.

Princess May wrapped her arms under Charlot’s shoulders and lifted him gently. Her combat energy flared as she carried him in an elegant flight near the two Byron magical alchemical warships.

Though Charlot had experienced airborne travel with *Floating Blossoms*, this flight, cradled by Princess May, felt entirely different.

He mused internally, “This is true ‘flight with an elegant lady!’”

After all, she was not just an elegant lady but a commanding *lady!*

Chapter 213: A Very Distant Grudge

Well, by common sense, no matter what the object of veneration was, people should be above it.

Charlot considered Princess May’s imposing aura for a moment. Suddenly, he thought, perhaps being beneath her was acceptable.

The posture didn’t matter.

The commanders of the two Byron Empire magical alchemy warships weren't entirely sure what the Ingrima forces were up to. They did, however, recognize James Cook. After all, young officers of his rank—high-level Transcendents and captains of magical alchemy warships—numbered fewer than twenty across the Five Great Empires combined.

This was basic intelligence that none of the Five Empires would lack.

As Princess May maneuvered near the two Byron magical alchemy warships, one of them fired a projectile. With a subtle twist, Princess May dodged the alchemical shell, which lacked precision due to the long distance.

The alchemical shell fired by the Transcendent-grade magical alchemy cannon exploded midair. Although it was still far away, Charlot's hair stood on end. In a low voice, he said, "Princess May, we can retreat now."

The Grand Princess replied coolly, "How could we leave without retaliating?"

Before Charlot could respond, he felt the rush of wind in his ears as Princess May dove sharply and hurled him toward one of the magical alchemy warships.

Freed from the burden of Charlot, the Grand Princess unleashed a surge of battle energy, transforming into a pink comet as she charged toward one of the Transcendent-grade magical alchemy cannons.

Two Byron Saint-rank vampires scrambled into the air to intercept her. Each Transcendent-grade magical alchemy cannon was extraordinarily expensive, requiring materials and techniques far beyond what personal Transcendent weapons could match.

If Princess May destroyed even one, the loss would be devastating.

Charlot never expected to be tossed onto an enemy warship.

He hastily drew the Unicorn Griffon, and with a flash of his blade, cut down two Byron naval soldiers who rushed at him.

"I must have offended the Grand Princess!"

"Honestly, staying on the warship and telling her stories wasn't so bad. What's wrong with being exploited a little? With so many web novels in the world, I could recite one opening per day and still have plenty left after a year or two. If those run out, I could always turn to world classics!"

"Why did I complain? Why didn't I appreciate the blessing I had?"

Charlot muttered to himself while fighting desperately. He was giving it everything he had since the entire crew of the magical alchemy warship was converging to attack him.

Fearing being shot at or surrounded, Charlot dared not stop moving. Activating Swiftstep Technique and Spider Technique, he darted around the warship like a madman. His mastery of Arsilo Swordsmanship displayed dazzling brilliance, with sword light blooming in a riot of colors.

Even during the siege under Silver Dove Castle, when he single-handedly killed Jonan, Charlot hadn't felt such intensity.

At least back then, the wilderness around him offered countless escape routes. Now, trapped on a magical alchemy warship, his space to maneuver was severely limited.

This warship had not only a high-level Transcendent but also seven or eight mid- and low-level Transcendents on board.

This battle was the most perilous and exhilarating fight Charlot had faced since his transmigration.

Brandishing the Unicorn Griffon, Charlot clashed with a Byron officer who met his strike with a sword of his own. After exchanging one blow, Charlot failed to kill his opponent and immediately used Swiftstep Technique to leap to the lower deck.

Alone, Charlot knew that if the Byron forces surrounded him, he'd last no more than a dozen moves before being beaten to death. He dared not engage anyone for too long.

The entire crew of the Byron magical alchemy warship seemed to go insane. None of them had anticipated that a lone human would board their ship and launch such an attack.

Charlot used the Mask of the Cat to disguise himself as James Cook. While his energy was not of the oceanic type, and his swordsmanship lacked Ingrima's stylistic hallmarks, his ferocity made it clear that only a captain-level Transcendent could pull off such feats.

Though some suspected him, no one had time to think deeply. All they could do was focus on eliminating Charlot.

From a distance, James Cook watched as Princess May threw Charlot onto the enemy warship. Alarmed, he worried for Charlot's safety but soon noticed another Byron warship accelerating toward the Titanic Whale.

In an instant, James Cook realized the opposing captain believed he was absent and sought to destroy his warship.

A magical alchemy warship's combat effectiveness was worlds apart with and without its captain. The enemy wanted to capitalize on James Cook's presumed absence to crush the Titanic Whale.

After a brief hesitation, James Cook made a decision. Setting aside his concern for Charlot and Princess May, he commanded the Titanic Whale to slow down, seeking a location suitable for a one-on-one battle with the Byron warship.

Meanwhile, Charlot continued to fight with blood and sweat, unsure of how many he had slain. Wounded in six or seven places, he had no choice but to keep fighting. Escape was impossible, and he lacked the energy even to curse the Grand Princess.

Swinging the Unicorn Griffon, Charlot's blade swept horizontally but was parried by another Byron officer. Activating Swiftstep Technique, Charlot tried to evade but coughed up blood, his injuries catching up with him. The officer's precise swordsmanship pressed him relentlessly, leaving Charlot in a desperate situation.

Even as he struck down six or seven more sailors, another wound opened on his body. When Charlot thought all was lost, a delicate hand descended from above, grabbing him and lifting him into the sky.

Princess May flew upward, her battle energy blazing as she slashed backward, forcing the two Byron Saint-rank vampires to retreat.

The warship Charlot had battled on began to follow. While Saint-ranks could fly, they couldn't sustain it indefinitely and required periods of rest to recover energy. The warship had to stay close for the Saints to return and recover.

To the Byron forces, their Saint-ranks could rotate back to the warship, but the Grand Princess couldn't. They believed they could eventually wear her down.

Gasping for breath, Charlot felt utterly drained. The previous fight had consumed his Blood Glory to the brink of exhaustion. As he panted, he heard Princess May's calm voice.

"You admire Menielman?"

Startled, Charlot didn't understand why she brought this up but answered instinctively, "Senior Menielman is my idol."

Princess May chuckled lightly and asked, "Do you know why I became a widowed princess?"

Charlot had no idea. Before he could respond, Princess May said, "My husband was killed in a duel by Menielman's fiancé, the infamous Zimourman Axel Robin."

"Now you know why I threw you down there?"

Chapter 214: That Scoundrel Alfred Guillaume

“He was the finest young officer in the Ingrima Empire’s Royal Navy, unmatched to this day. It was just an ordinary mission to eliminate pirates—no one expected to encounter Zimourman Axel Robin...”

“Right, back then, he wasn’t called Axel yet, just Zimourman Robin.”

“At first, my husband’s fleet had the upper hand, but he was provoked by Zimourman Axel Robin’s taunts. His prideful nature couldn’t stand being looked down upon. He prided himself on his swordsmanship and agreed to a fair duel.”

“Zimourman Axel Robin...”

“In that duel, he killed my husband, routed the Ingrima Royal Navy, and rose to become the Pirate King’s second-in-command.”

“No words can describe the despair I felt when I learned of his death. If it weren’t for novels giving me solace, I wouldn’t have survived all these years.”

Charlot, initially enraged, felt a slight pang of sympathy after hearing Princess May’s recounting of events. His rage diminished slightly, though it was still intense, and he shouted, “What does that have to do with me?”

“I’m not Zimourman Axel Robin!”

Princess May replied softly, “It was that scoundrel, Emperor Alfred Guillaume, who had you approach me, wasn’t it? Even without an old grudge, what’s wrong with punishing a little rascal with ulterior motives?”

Charlot was left speechless. He wanted to say, “*What does this have to do with me?*”

But how could he explain this clearly? From the moment Emperor Alfred Guillaume granted him a residence at 698 Seventais River Street, he had been roped into this mess. This was a black mark he had to bear, whether willingly or not.

Princess May smiled faintly and said, “Didn’t I save you in the end?”

“You should be grateful that you know how to recite a few novels.”

“Otherwise...”

She left her sentence unfinished, as two Saint-ranked Byron vampires were closing in.

From his vantage point high in the sky, Charlot could see the Titanic Whale already engaged in combat with a magical alchemy warship of the Byron fleet. Another Byron warship, though

unable to catch up with the flying Saint-ranked combatants, continued to pursue from a distance.

Taking a deep breath to calm himself, Charlot said, "Find an island and drop me off."

"In a battle involving Saint ranks, I'm just dead weight."

He no longer wished to remain in the company of the Grand Princess.

Princess May nodded, then let go.

Charlot plummeted from the sky, nearly losing his soul. Fortunately, he activated Bloodfire Transfiguration just in time to cushion his fall before hitting the ocean's surface. A massive wave swept him dozens of meters deep into the sea.

Hurriedly, Charlot reverted to his human form and activated Swiftstep Technique to rise back to the surface.

Above him, the three Saint-ranked combatants had already begun their clash. He exhaled deeply and chose to drift with the waves instead of running across the surface.

With two "enemy" Saint ranks in the sky, any stray attack would likely spell his end. Exposing himself unnecessarily was out of the question.

Charlot oriented himself, estimating the distance to his destination, and swam towards Goring Island, reasoning that it was likely the nearest landmass.

Exhausted from a recent fierce battle, Charlot moved at a leisurely pace. While slowly recovering his Blood Glory, he made his way toward Goring Island. Soon, the aerial battle among the Saint ranks and the warships on the horizon disappeared from view.

Relieved to have regained some semblance of freedom, Charlot suddenly noticed a massive shadow rising from beneath him. Alarm bells rang in his mind as he quickly swam to the side. Moments later, a giant whale broke through the surface, leaping into the air.

This whale, an enormous creature surpassing any lifeform on Earth, measured seventy meters in length—like a small mountain—and plunged back into the sea, creating waves as high as several stories.

Charlot, tossed about like a grain of coffee in a violently stirred cup, was flung into the air by the waves before crashing back into the water. For the first time, he realized how insignificant even a Transcendent could be against the overwhelming force of nature.

After its dive, the massive whale flicked its tail, sending Charlot flying once again. He landed beside the creature, drew his Unicorn Griffon, and prepared to strike, but the whale turned, its enormous eye—larger than his entire body—locking onto him.

Charlot hesitated and sheathed the Unicorn Griffon. To his surprise, the whale's eye seemed to glimmer with amusement.

The whale extended a fin, appearing to invite him. After a moment's hesitation, Charlot jumped onto the whale's back.

To his astonishment, the whale neither dove nor leapt but instead swam steadily in a particular direction.

Charlot found the situation increasingly odd. He gazed around at the clear skies, the beautiful blue sea, and the idyllic scenery. Yet, every detail seemed laced with strangeness.

Having no other options, he decided to adapt to the situation as it unfolded.

Removing his soaked clothes piece by piece, Charlot wrung them dry before putting them back on. Without Julian Arsilo to prepare dry clothes for him, he could only improvise.

In the martial arts novels of Earth, masters could use internal energy to dry their clothes—a common skill. However, in the Old Continent, very few Transcendents could achieve such precise control.

Charlot knew he couldn't manage it either. His Blood Glory lacked heat, and while Bloodfire Aura could ignite his clothes, using it to dry them without burning them was an art far beyond his ability.

For hours, Charlot practiced atop the mysterious whale, eventually restoring his Blood Glory to near-full strength. Confidence renewed, he shouted, "Old buddy, what's your name?"

The whale let out a resonant sound, almost like singing, but Charlot couldn't understand a word of its "language." Shrugging helplessly, he said, "Sorry, I don't understand!"

Irritated by his "stupidity," the whale sprayed a jet of water at him.

Charlot, relying on his agility, dodged most of it but still got his freshly wrung clothes wet again.

Deciding not to provoke the whale further, he waited patiently. Whatever the whale's origins or intentions, Charlot figured he would eventually learn its purpose.

It couldn't have brought him along to eat him, could it?

Charlot felt oddly confident. Whether or not he tasted good, he was sure he didn't weigh enough to make it worthwhile.

Chapter 215: The Pink Meteor

Charlot Mecklenburg had no idea how much time had passed. As night gradually fell over the ocean sky, the wind grew cooler, and his stomach began to grumble with hunger.

The giant whale beneath him seemed to be a transcendent creature, its immense presence scaring off all other fish in the area. Charlot wanted to catch a few fish to eat raw, but there was no prey to be found.

He had never experienced such a situation before and had no idea how long a transcendent could endure without food. As for his injuries, they had already mostly healed. By repeatedly using Bloodfire Transfiguration to transform into bloodflame and then revert to his human form, his wounds gradually lessened. Though the process consumed a bit of blood energy, after seven or eight transformations, his body was no longer in critical condition.

As Charlot pondered his predicament, he suddenly noticed what seemed to be a meteor streaking across the sky. He quickly made a wish: "Let me escape the crisis of the evil god and ascend to Saint rank!"

After a moment, he felt that this wish lacked ambition. How could a transmigrator be so uninspired? Taking advantage of the fact that the meteor hadn't yet faded, he made a second wish: "I want to become a deity."

A little while later, he noticed that the meteor was still visible and made yet another wish: "Bring me a cola!"

This time, he noticed something strange. The meteor in the sky had a faint pink hue and was heading straight toward him, growing larger as it approached.

Charlot shouted urgently, "Danger! Old pal, let's move out of the way!"

The giant whale let out a resonant song, sounding almost excited. Charlot realized that the whale might not understand what "danger" meant. As he contemplated his next move, he recognized something familiar about the pink meteor.

Sure enough, as it passed overhead, Charlot saw it clearly: it was a mass of Flame Combat Energy, pink in color, wrapped around a graceful woman in a black robe.

Princess May gracefully descended onto the giant whale's head. She extended a slender, elegant hand and gently patted the massive beast's head. The whale responded with an even louder song, echoing across the night sky.

Charlot, still shaken, asked, "Is this your pet?"

Princess May replied, "I also dabble as a magician. It's my contract beast."

"You can call it 'Stargazer,' or simply 'A-Kong,' like me."

Charlot couldn't help but recall a dish from the Ingrima Empire. Try as he might, he couldn't associate this majestic whale with a platter of steamed fish heads. If the creatures consumed by this whale could speak, they likely wouldn't complain about their fate.

It was only then that Charlot realized the Grand Princess hadn't just abandoned him; her actions had been somewhat considerate, leaving him with a friendly giant whale as a host.

No wonder this whale was so humane—and so friendly.

It had an owner.

Princess May let out a long cry, indistinguishable from the whale's song. Stargazer immediately pivoted its massive body and changed direction.

Charlot finally remembered to ask, "How did your battle with those two Saint ranks go?"

"And what about James Cook?"

While soothing her contract beast, Princess May answered, "I severely injured one of Byron's vampire Saints. As for James Cook, he did well, sinking the Byron warship he was fighting."

Charlot was delighted. "Then let's hurry back!"

Princess May replied coolly, "Why should we go back?"

Charlot was stunned. "We've already defeated the Byronites. Why not return?"

Standing gracefully atop the whale's head, Princess May said, "We've finally gotten a chance to enjoy some fresh air. Why rush back? As long as we arrive at the Fars Empire in time, that's enough."

"The Titanic Whale is crowded with people. I find it far less comfortable than being with A-Kong."

Charlot nodded repeatedly, thinking, "Alright, alright, as long as you send me back."

However, after a while, he realized in despair that the Grand Princess clearly didn't consider him "people" since being with him didn't make her "uncomfortable."

This... this was going too far.

He still wanted to maintain his dignity as a human being.

Unlike her demeanor aboard the Titanic Whale, Princess May seemed relaxed and carefree. After gazing at the stars for a while, she produced a massive cushion from who knows where. She carried it over to Charlot, placed it down, leaned against it, and said, "Keep telling me stories!"

“I want to hear more about that Dewey fellow.”

Charlot was about to protest, his face twisted in misery. He hadn't eaten or drunk anything all day. Just as he was about to complain, a delicate flask and a plate of pastries appeared in front of him.

Overjoyed, he grabbed the food and drink, devouring them ravenously. Only after finishing most of it did he think to ask, “Your Highness, have you eaten?”

Princess May said lightly, “Can you start the story now?”

Forcing himself to rally, Charlot began recounting the tales of Dewey once again.

Truth be told, sitting on the back of a giant whale, accompanying a beautiful princess...

Well, Charlot hadn't actually seen Princess May's face, so the “beautiful” part could be put aside for now.

From a literary standpoint, it was undoubtedly romantic.

But Charlot found it unbearable. The whale's back offered no shelter. By day, the sun scorched relentlessly, and by night, the sea breeze was bitterly cold. The whale's slick surface made sleep precarious, and while Princess May could provide food, the pastries became less fresh with time...

In short, Charlot spent seven or eight days traveling across the sea with Princess May atop the whale Stargazer. He had had enough of this life.

Charlot longed for the comfort of the Titanic Whale's luxury suites, let alone his several properties ashore. Even the barren wasteland of Machubi seemed more appealing than the whale's slippery back.

Princess May, however, appeared to relish the experience. Each day, she listened to Charlot recount classic Earth novels and occasionally took brief excursions, leaving the whale for a bit of exploration.

Once, she even managed to summon an entire pod of whales to accompany Stargazer. The majestic procession was truly awe-inspiring.

The only consolation for Charlot was that, in the constant struggle to endure the sun's heat and the night's chill, he continually operated Blood Glory. By the seventh or eighth day, his Bloodfire Aura trembled faintly and broke through once more, manifesting a new rune: the Flame Dragon's Roaring Bullet.

The Vampiric Scroll 卍, a compendium of Adonis Clan secret arts, contained seventeen pages. Charlot had now mastered the first four techniques: Bloodfire Aura, Bloodfire Transfiguration,

Flame Dragon's Hand, and finally the Flame Dragon's Roaring Bullet, pushing back the timeline for the resurrection of the vampire evil god Karnstein by nearly twenty days.

The fifth page of the scroll documented a summoning technique unique to the Adonis Clan: Demonflame Horse.

Chapter 216: Hmm, I Dug Out His Blood Core

The Demonflame Horse is a type of Demon Spirit Horse!

Demon Spirit Horses are not native to the Old Continent. They hail from another world, summoned rather than tamed, and must anchor their existence to a transcendent artifact. Without such a foundation, they cannot remain in this world.

These creatures are unparalleled mounts on the battlefield, charging tirelessly through the fray. However, should their anchor artifact be destroyed, they vanish completely, unable to return.

Every hundred years, Demon Spirit Horses undergo a transformation. Sometimes they become stronger; at other times, they split into two entirely different Demon Spirit Horses, or they might perish altogether.

Generally, after two or three successful transformations, a Demon Spirit Horse has the chance to evolve into a Demonflame Horse, which lacks a physical form and can traverse any terrain—be it hills, swamps, or water. It can even gallop through a sea of flames.

Summoning a Demonflame Horse is exceedingly difficult. The Adonis Clan's Vampiric Secret Arts not only summon such creatures but also use Bloodflame Aura to reforge their connection, creating an intimate bond between the horse and its master. This bond allows the master to draw power from the horse—or even receive its energy in return.

After spending an entire day narrating novels to Princess May, Charlot Mecklenburg finally found some relief. Turning to the Adonis Clan's Vampiric Scroll, he became intrigued by the Demonflame Horse.

In ancient China, horseback travel relied on relay stations and inns that supplied fodder and beans for horses. This network made long-distance journeys feasible. On the Old Continent, however, the lack of similar infrastructure rendered horseback travel cumbersome. Even knights rarely rode into battle as there were no convenient supply depots, forcing riders to source their own fodder—an onerous task.

Even in ancient China, deploying cavalry required large numbers of servant soldiers to provide logistics. On the Old Continent, cavalry deployment often required more than ten times as many infantry to maintain their operations.

More critically, the Old Continent lacked the expansive grasslands necessary for swift cavalry movements; it was dominated by forests instead.

Charlot had heard rumors that the New Continent's vast grasslands allowed cavalry to develop far more rapidly than in the Old Continent.

The Demonflame Horse, a creature from another realm, needed no fodder, sustaining its existence purely through magic.

Charlot, however, was less interested in its combat prowess as a battlefield mount and more in its speed for travel. Compared to a carriage, it was undeniably faster—even if less comfortable.

While poring over the Adonis Clan's Vampiric Scroll—also known as the Charlot Mecklenburg Diary—Princess May suddenly reached over and grabbed the diary. After a glance, she tossed it back and asked, "What stage has your Blood Glory reached?"

Charlot replied quietly, "Eighth stage."

Between the seventh and twelfth stages lay the mid-tier of transcendent ranks. Charlot had only just entered this tier, still far from reaching the high-tier transcendents.

Princess May made no comment, merely stating indifferently, "We're approaching Saint Michael Island."

Charlot was slightly startled. "The Golden Rams Fleet's Saint Michael Island?"

He recalled that Mad Horse Davis had mentioned this: departing from Cappadocia, one could reach Saint Michael Island in at most half a day by sea. The Golden Rams Fleet that occupied the island boasted over thirty ships, including three warships.

One of these warships was reportedly docked at Cappadocia, though the fate of the fleet remained uncertain.

Princess May affirmed, "Yes. Even I wouldn't dare set foot on Saint Michael Island."

"They possess an alchemical warship, an ancient magical warship, and even a Saint-ranked guardian."

Charlot couldn't help but ask, "What happened when Zimourman Axel Robin tried to conquer all the pirate fleets and challenged the leader of the Golden Rams Fleet?"

Princess May replied, "He abandoned the attempt and left Saint Michael Island."

Hearing this, Charlot, who had previously looked down on the Golden Rams Fleet, now saw them in a new light. He remarked, "No wonder neither Francis Drake nor James Cook considered attacking this island city."

Princess May chuckled lightly. "Even if their ships carried a Saint-ranked figure, they wouldn't dare attack Saint Michael Island."

Charlot asked, "If we're not going to Saint Michael Island, where are we headed?"

"Cappadocia," Princess May replied nonchalantly. "Don't you have a fleet there?"

Charlot scratched his head awkwardly. "My methods of seizing merchant ships were rather crude at the time. I didn't leave anyone to manage them. The fleet has probably disbanded by now."

"Why not take a look?" Princess May suggested.

Charlot didn't argue further. If the fleet was gone, so be it.

But if it remained...

Well, what were the odds of that?

...

The next day, as the sun rose, Charlot spotted a small mountain rising abruptly from the sea. The mountain had been transformed into a city, fortified with massive cannons at every angle. Around this island city, three to four dozen medium and large ships moved about, though only a dozen bore the Golden Rams Fleet's flag.

Princess May chose not to provoke this pirate fleet. Their ship, the Titanic Whale, bypassed Saint Michael Island and headed directly for Cappadocia.

The Titanic Whale, much faster than ordinary merchant ships, reached Cappadocia by the afternoon. Charlot was astonished to see that while the port had fewer ships than before—only five or six—the remaining vessels still bore his family's banner.

Yes, during his time in Cappadocia, Charlot had ordered both the city and its merchant fleet to fly the Mecklenburg family's insignia.

The Titanic Whale was too massive to dock, so Charlot and Princess May leapt into the sea, using the Swiftstep Technique and Spider Technique to sprint across the waves. As they neared the city, someone shouted, "It's Lord Mecklenburg!"

In no time, countless residents emerged, waving hands, clothes, and random items in the air, cheering loudly, "Welcome back, Lord Charlot Mecklenburg!"

Princess May raised an eyebrow, casting a curious glance at Charlot. "You're rather popular, aren't you?"

Charlot smiled sheepishly. He hadn't expected to maintain such high prestige in the city after being away for so long.

As he stepped ashore, he was met by Cruse, the former head overseer of Cappadocia, who approached with a tearful expression, leading a small entourage. "Subordinate Cruse greets Lord Mecklenburg!"

Charlot helped him up and asked, "Why are there still five or six ships left? Hasn't the fleet disbanded?"

Cruse explained in a low voice, "They consumed alchemical potions and feared death. I had no choice but to create some ointments, tricking them into believing they were antidotes. To my surprise... it worked."

"Now, the Cappadocia merchant fleet has expanded to twenty-three ships. Several vessels even joined voluntarily. Most are out transporting goods and remain loyal to Cappadocia."

"The city is thriving. Life here is much better than before."

Charlot glanced at his "temporary subordinate" with newfound appreciation. For the first time, he realized Cruse might actually be talented!

While the alchemical potions were fake, their supposed effects should've been exposed quickly. Cruse, however, had managed to use a batch of fake antidotes to maintain the fleet's cohesion. Though some details didn't quite add up, Charlot decided to let it slide for now.

Sometimes, ignorance truly is bliss—a great wisdom of life.

...

Chapter 217: Count D'Artagnan

Charlot carefully examined the object again and finally confirmed it: the faint golden "spots" he had noticed earlier were actually Blood Runes.

Activating Blood Glory slightly, Charlot checked again and confirmed that it was indeed the blood core of the Dorian Clan.

The Dorian Clan's secret arts were rooted in the Blood Chain Technique. Upon advancing to the Transcendent level, one could condense a blood chain, which unlocked endless secret techniques specializing in long-range attacks. Although the Dorian Clan was neither one of the Three Emperor Clans nor one of the Six King Clans, their arts were undeniably powerful. Many of their Transcendent practitioners had achieved fame, contributing greatly to the Byron Empire.

Princess May showed no interest in the port and said, "Let us depart! The sooner we reach Strasbourg, the better."

Charlot quickly summoned Dark Luxury, allowing Princess May to board the carriage before closing the door. Knowing that it was highly inappropriate for a man to share a carriage with a princess, Charlot reluctantly climbed into the driver's seat.

Fortunately, the driver's seat of Dark Luxury was equally comfortable, complete with a canopy overhead. Moreover, the magic spirit horses required no actual driving. Issuing mental commands to the eight magic spirit horses, Charlot set off toward Strasbourg, leisurely flipping through the Vampiric Scroll and pondering how to utilize the blood core.

Because his Origin Blood Ignition was active, ordinary methods such as Blood Glory or other clan techniques could not facilitate the absorption of this blood core. To fully utilize it, he needed to cultivate the Dorian Clan's secret arts to the level of Origin Blood Ignition and condense his own blood core before he could begin assimilating the Saint-rank blood core.

Of course, using it this way would result in significant waste. At most, the Saint-rank blood core could elevate someone to the initial stages of the High-rank and could not be converted without losses.

To avoid such waste, it would be best to use it to forge a Saint-rank extraordinary artifact, which would maximize the blood core's value. However, forging such an artifact would require a Saint Alchemist, along with an array of rare materials. Even though Charlot could afford the astronomical costs, he was not eager to make the investment.

After all, even if the artifact were successfully forged, Charlot doubted he could keep it safe.

While Saint-level individuals might not covet mundane wealth, they would certainly vie for a Saint-rank artifact.

Being only at the Mid-rank, Charlot didn't need a Saint-rank artifact, nor would he have much use for it even at the High-rank. Pondering the blood core for a long while, Charlot mused, "It will likely take this Saint-rank vampire over a decade to re-condense their blood core. Whether they can recover their strength depends on their luck—perhaps it will take ten years, or decades, or they may never recover."

"The lifespan of a Saint-rank vampire far exceeds that of humans, and their strength is comparably overwhelming. For the Grand Princess of Ingrima to take on two Saints and extract one's blood core—just how terrifying is her power?"

Charlot pressed the blood core into his right arm.

The blood core penetrated his skin and merged into the blood vortex in his right arm. Lifting his arm, Charlot scrutinized it again, finding no trace of imperfection.

The blood core had seamlessly fused into the blood vortex.

It was a stroke of luck that the seventh blood vortex he had opened with Blood Glory had been intended to condense the Dorian Clan's Blood Runes. Any other blood vortex would have clashed with the Dorian Clan's Origin Blood, making it impossible to conceal the blood core. However, this particular vortex fit perfectly, allowing the blood core to remain hidden.

Having secured the blood core, Charlot decided to put the treasure aside for the time being, returning to his study of the Adonis Clan's Scroll and the secrets of the magic flame horses.

The Adonis Clan's secret arts were rooted in Bloodflame Aura, from which all their abilities originated. Techniques such as Bloodfire Transfiguration, Flame Dragon's Hand, and Flame Dragon's Roaring Bullet were all advanced applications of Bloodflame Aura.

The magic flame horse, alternatively known as the Summoned Flame Horse, was distinct. It used the Adonis Clan's blood energy as bait to lure a flame horse from another realm, subsequently binding it through secret arts.

Charlot reversed his Blood Glory, converting all his blood energy into Bloodflame Aura. Immediately, the two vampiric weapons he carried—Blood Rose and Withered Rose—seemed to resonate with the aura.

Although both weapons belonged to the Arsilo Clan, the Bloodflame Aura could harmonize with vampiric weapons of any clan, allowing him to manipulate them.

Charlot, accustomed to using Angel's Twelve Movements in combat, realized that switching to Bloodflame Aura would necessitate changes to his fighting style.

For instance, wielding Blood Rose in one hand while a Flame Dragon's Hand held Withered Rose.

Had his Berserker Blade still been with him, he could have employed two additional Flame Dragon's Hands to wield it—or personally used the blade while the hands managed the two vampiric weapons.

The Adonis Clan, despite being one of the Six King Clans, had always prided themselves on their formidable combat strength. With Bloodflame Aura, they possessed long-range attack capabilities. Cultivating Flame Dragon's Hand was akin to gaining an additional doppelgänger.

However, cultivating additional Flame Dragon's Hands required immense time and energy. A coordinated assault using multiple hands was akin to being attacked by several Adonis Clan vampires simultaneously.

As a result, the Adonis Clan was notoriously referred to as the "most shameless vampires."

Even other vampiric clans disliked them and avoided duels with the Adonis Clan, finding it too disadvantageous.

...

The speed of Dark Luxury was astounding. Passing through the war-torn regions of the Fars Empire, Charlot encountered several skirmishes along the way. However, with his formidable strength, minor enemies posed no threat.

Moreover, traveling with the Saint-ranked Princess May of the Ingrima Empire, Charlot was untouchable by the small forces of the Byron soldiers, Black Phoenix Dynasty, or orc warriors he encountered.

Charlot encountered no major armies, whether friend or foe.

After several days of travel, he returned to Fars.

The first thing Charlot did was report to the Central Government Office, which then forwarded formal documents to the Foreign Minister's Office.

Hearing that Princess May Guillaume of Ingrima had arrived in Strasbourg, Count D'Artagnan rushed to greet her.

This was Charlot's first time meeting the Count, who held a prestigious hereditary title within the empire. As a younger man, the count must have been quite the heartthrob; even now, he maintained the appearance of a debonair gentleman, impeccably dressed. Following imperial protocol, he invited Princess May to stay at one of the royal palaces.

While hosting the princess, the count did not neglect Charlot, offering him some reassurances and permission to return home to await further imperial instructions.

Having been away from home for too long, Charlot was relieved to escape the duties of hosting the princess. Feeling a tinge of joy, he bid farewell to Count D'Artagnan and returned to 58 Elysée Avenue.

Chapter 218: The New Appointment

Although Charlot Mecklenburg already had an apartment at 221B Baker Street in Val-de-Vas, he was still more accustomed to staying at 58 Elysée Avenue. For one, the house there was larger, and for another, Mrs. Nancy and Madam Umeboshi provided far more attentive personal services.

Most importantly, Charlot had three clever cats, and the kittens were at their most adorable and playful stage.

On his way back to 58 Elysée Avenue, Charlot stopped by No. 1 Falcon Street. Dolores Soumet had accommodations in Strasbourg and, as an unmarried lady, still lived with her parents, so she wasn't at the Lukavaro District city patrol office. However, Anastasia and Belisa were there, along with his eighteen Redback Bear warriors, all of whom had returned to Strasbourg ahead of him.

Charlot retrieved his two knight's lances, *Shanlens' Spear* and *Titanic Whale*, as well as a magical rapier.

As for the Anti-Space Long-Range Rifle, two *Silver Rhinos*, the assassin's dagger, his once-indispensable vampiric axe, the alchemical staff, and other belongings, they were still at Machubi Fortress Labyrinth. It wasn't feasible to collect everything that day; in fact, much of his wealth didn't need to be retrieved.

After all, for Charlot, the Savings Union wasn't particularly secure.

Machubi Fortress was the only truly reliable place.

Returning to 58 Elysée Avenue, Charlot sent Mrs. Nancy to deliver messages to Annie Bretagne, Dolores Soumet, Venie Arsenault, and Sylvie Martin—his only social circle in Strasbourg.

As for the Fierce Horse Detective Agency, Charlot decided to visit in person when he had the time, so there was no need to send a message.

Charlot hadn't expected that after the messages were delivered, the ladies would arrive one after another at 58 Elysée Avenue.

Annie Bretagne was the first to arrive, as Mrs. Nancy had delivered her message to her first. When Annie saw Charlot, her eyes brimmed with misty emotion. She had been deeply worried about him during this time. Dolores, who had returned earlier, brought troubling news that Charlot had been associating with the Grand Princess of the Ingrima Empire, luring two Saint-rank Byron vampires. It was anything but reassuring.

Upon learning of Charlot's safe return, Annie couldn't wait another day to see her Mr. Mecklenburg.

Venie Arsenault and Sylvie Martin arrived together. Venie, a famous female detective, was surprised by how quickly Charlot had risen through the ranks. She even considered relocating her detective agency to the Lukavaro District.

After all, in Lukavaro, Charlot truly reigned supreme.

Dolores was the last to arrive, having stopped at No. 1 Falcon Street first to bring Anastasia and Belisa along with her.

When Charlot saw the three of them, the curse from the Grand Princess suddenly came to mind.

No, not the kind of curse about people never paying for their meals.

It was the other kind—where several young and beautiful women disguised as readers would visit an author every day.

For a moment, Charlot could only think about how, if Princess May appeared now, this place might host a veritable banquet of tension and rivalry—an event of the highest, most luxurious caliber.

Never before had 58 Elysée Avenue seen such a congregation of charming ladies, and never before had Charlot experienced such a tumult of emotions.

He couldn't help but curse himself for sending Dolores a message.

Fortunately, Miss Annie Bretagne was a very generous young lady. Her portrait, prominently displayed in the first-floor living room of 58 Elysée Avenue, gave her considerable confidence.

She even acted with the air of a hostess, arranging an afternoon tea for the guests.

The second-most conflicted person present was Sylvie Martin. Officially, she was now Charlot's cousin, though she was, in fact, his former fiancée.

If anyone understood Charlot, it was her.

Sylvie knew exactly what a scoundrel her "cousin" and ex-fiancé was. Yet, in just a few years, he had undergone a transformation beyond her imagination.

She had always assumed Charlot was a prodigal son who had turned over a new leaf.

But upon seeing the parade of visitors to 58 Elysée Avenue—five stunning women, all of notable beauty, with varying but impressive family backgrounds—even the lowest-ranking among them, Belisa, was the personal maid of the Duchess of Mostar and accustomed to high society.

Most importantly, excluding Sylvie herself, the other five women were all transcendent.

Sylvie began to suspect that her ex-fiancé wasn't a reformed rake but had evolved into an even more masterful connoisseur of romantic pursuits.

Annie Bretagne, the daughter of a count, a senior at Gorgias University, and a first-tier transcendent.

Dolores Soumet, a young lady of the Soumet family, a Gorgias University graduate, and a third-tier transcendent.

Anastasia, an illegitimate daughter of Baron Feller, a graduate of Hartington Thunder and Storm University, and a second-tier transcendent.

Belisa, the personal maid of Duchess Josephine, a self-taught scholar of Gorgias University, and a second-tier Skysoarer.

As for Venie Arsenault... Sylvie dared not even count her in, or it would be too terrifying.

Sylvie thought, *If I hadn't broken off the engagement and married Charlot, would I wake up every morning to find a noblewoman cradling a child at my door, weeping and wailing?*

"Perhaps there'd also be a few older but still beautiful ladies, or even angry gentlemen brandishing rapiers!"

"That kind of life..."

"I would never want that."

"Breaking off the engagement was the best decision I've ever made."

Charlot, on the other hand, found solace in the fact that he had no special relationship with any of these ladies, not even the faintest hint of romance. After spending some time entertaining his guests, he quietly withdrew from their circle, retreating to a corner with his three clever cat kittens and resuming his study of the diary.

On one hand, Charlot trained diligently every day, striving to improve his abilities. On the other, he remained deeply wary of the two Evil Gods and did not entirely trust the diary.

After some thought, he poured himself a mug of ale and took a hearty swig, feeling instantly refreshed.

Ever since obtaining the trade route between Silver Dove Castle and Machubi, Charlot had never lacked Silver Dove ale. The quality of this ale far surpassed that of the fruit wines produced in Strasbourg. Its beer-like flavor made it his favorite, and he rarely drank the fruit wines of Strasbourg anymore.

As for the more expensive champagne, he had no access to it for now.

In the Ingrima Empire, whether at Count Lamorak's estate or the Red Dragon Palace, champagne seemed to be everywhere, but now, back in Fars, its place of origin, Charlot couldn't seem to obtain any genuine champagne.

As the evening deepened, Venie Arsenault and Sylvie Martin prepared to leave. Charlot put away the diary and asked Mrs. Nancy to bring out gifts he had purchased in Ingrima, which he handed to the two ladies before escorting them out of 58 Elysée Avenue.

Dolores also left, taking Anastasia and Belisa with her. Charlot didn't prepare gifts for them, as they had accompanied him to Ingrima.

Due to the strict rules of the Bretagne family, Annie couldn't stay long either. She waited until the others had left before standing to leave. At the door, she whispered, "I've already inquired about it. Your new assignment is to the Behemoth Principality."

Charlot was startled. "Why am I going back to Behemoth?"

Annie replied, "Our battle with the Byron vampires at Ferranden isn't going well. Someone proposed attacking South Seraph territory—not to occupy it or win, but simply to draw some of Byron's forces away."

Charlot was speechless. While the plan was somewhat feasible, he couldn't understand why he was the one being sent.

Annie embraced him softly and said, "This time, your commander will be my cousin. He'll look after you."

Charlot wanted to ask more questions, but Annie was in a hurry to return home, so he refrained. He still had a few days before his departure, plenty of time to prepare.

After escorting Annie out, peace returned to 58 Elysée Avenue. On the first floor, Annie Bretagne's magical portrait gave a slight bow, offering a courtly salute.

Charlot smiled faintly and returned the gesture with an imperial bow.

He called out to Mrs. Nancy, "Tomorrow, take me to Baker Street and remind me to bring some supplies along."

Mrs. Nancy replied affirmatively and went back to the basement with Madam Umeboshi.

Although Annie had arranged some furnishings at 221B Baker Street in Val-de-Vas, the place still lacked Charlot's preferred ale, fruit wines for guests, coffee, and various other essentials.

Charlot anticipated frequent visits to Baker Street, so it was best to prepare in advance.

Over the next few days, Charlot spent time dating Annie and shuttling between different departments. He hadn't expected that the role of Fars Empire's Special Envoy for War to the

Ingrima Empire was not something he could relinquish after returning. Instead, it was a semi-permanent political appointment that required a mountain of paperwork after every mission.

For instance, his titles gained in Ingrima, including Red Dragon Palace Archivist and First-Level Counsellor, 24th Rank, all needed to be reported. Most of the time, the Central Government Office and the Foreign Minister's Office would review and approve them for concurrent positions. However, occasionally, the process could become quite cumbersome.

Charlot didn't encounter any obstacles, but the sheer volume of government paperwork was overwhelming.

During this time, he also learned more about his new assignment.

The matter traced back to Clair Bretagne, an up-and-coming star in the imperial army. His exceptional performance in Ferranden had earned him the role of commander for this military campaign into South Seraph territory.

The person who recommended Charlot to Clair Bretagne was none other than Her Majesty the Empress...

Chapter 219: The Bretagne Offensive

Charlot was still at sea.

When James Cook escorted Aurora, Dolores, and others back to Fars, Emperor Julius Axel VI received the documentation regarding the matter. Coincidentally, the Empress casually mentioned, "This Charlot Mecklenburg is quite capable. Why not let him assist Clair Bretagne?"

Without giving it much thought, Emperor Julius VI agreed to his beloved wife's suggestion, and thus Charlot became Clair Bretagne's subordinate.

This development seemed entirely coincidental.
It wasn't pushed by any influential figure.

It's said that when Earl Bretagne learned of this, he summoned his daughter, Annie, and explained everything to her in detail. Otherwise, Annie wouldn't have known so much.

On the sixth day after Charlot returned to Strasbourg, an expected visitor arrived at his residence on Baker Street, No. 221B in Val-de-Vas.
Strictly speaking, it was two visitors.

Charlot had arranged to meet Annie at Baker Street, but when he heard the knock at the door and opened it, he found two men and one woman. The woman was, of course, Annie, but the two men were Clair Bretagne and Ebner Soumet.

Slightly surprised, Charlot quickly invited them in and asked, "When did you gentlemen return to Strasbourg?"

Ebner Soumet smiled slightly and replied, "A few days after you. We've been busy coordinating logistics these past days—it's been exhausting."

"We were initially concerned about the subpar quality of the new knight orders, worrying they'd be ineffective in battle. But when we heard that your West Wind Knight Order would join, we felt somewhat reassured."

Charlot asked, "How many knight orders are there in total?"

Clair Bretagne replied indifferently, "Seven. Aside from the Purple Finch Knight Order I've taken over and Febollet's knights, the rest are all local forces converted into knight orders. Their quality is abysmal."

"Even Febollet's knights are in poor condition," Clair added.

Charlot couldn't help but smile. He was well aware of the state of Baron Febollet's knights—barely adequate for a single charge by his own West Wind Knight Order. Though his knight order had humble beginnings as a ragtag group, Charlot's rising rank had afforded him some leverage to gather intelligence. He asked, "Isn't the Purple Finch Knight Order under Viscount Branton?"

Clair Bretagne confirmed, "Yes, it was."

"In the Ferranden battlefield, both Fars and Byron poured in large numbers of troops. Over dozens of knight orders have been deployed on each side. So far, more than ten senior commanders and about seven or eight knight orders have been wiped out."

Ebner Soumet added, "Viscount Branton fell in battle and left no direct heirs. His knight order was reorganized by the Empire and awarded to Clair Bretagne for his exceptional performance on the battlefield."

Clair spread his hands and said, "That gave me command of a cavalry regiment, and I've been reassigned from Ferranden to serve as the interim military governor of Behemoth Principality."

This truly surprised Charlot.

This signified that following the deaths of Grand Duke Ferdinand and Grand Duke Joseph, the Behemoth Principality had fallen out of their respective families' control and been incorporated into the Empire's direct governance.

The Empire categorized local powers into directly governed counties, autonomous territories, noble estates, overseas territories, and protectorates.

As military governor, Clair Bretagne was now the highest-ranking official in an autonomous territory, effectively replacing the Behemoth family as the interim ruler of the principality.

Ebner Soumet smiled and added, "Clair Bretagne is tasked with consolidating all military forces in the Behemoth Principality to launch an offensive against the South Seraph territory. This military operation is even named after him: the Bretagne Offensive."

Charlot tilted his head slightly and thought, *If anyone said this wasn't Earl Bretagne's doing, I'd question their intelligence.*

He naturally understood why Clair Bretagne and Ebner Soumet had come to visit him. Clair needed complete control over all the principality's forces, and Charlot, bearing the imprint of the Bretagne family, was naturally an asset. Though Annie had remained silent since entering the room, a magical portrait of her adorned Charlot's Baker Street residence, her smile bright and enchanting.

This was no longer just a subtle hint...

Charlot rang a small bronze bell in the corner of the hall. Before long, the apartment's housekeeper arrived and politely inquired, "What do you require, sir?"

Charlot replied, "Bring four cups of coffee and four meals."

He handed over a single florin and said, "Keep the change as a tip."

The housekeeper left contentedly and soon returned with coffee, meals, and some desserts. Charlot invited Clair Bretagne, Ebner Soumet, and Annie to the dining room and said, "You have my full support, Clair. There's no need to worry about my end."

Clair smiled faintly. He hadn't expected Charlot to refuse. After all, their families were practically on the verge of becoming relatives. The Bretagne family currently had only one earl, but that might not always be the case.

Pleased by the smooth proceedings, Clair even shared a personal matter with Charlot: "Ebner and I have fought countless battles in Ferranden, each earning us a Proof of War.

"Now, both of us have collected eight knightly proofs and are just a step away from becoming saints.

"Let's see who among us becomes the youngest saint in the Fars Empire first.

“Well, of the living, at least,” he added with a laugh.

Charlot chuckled, knowing who Clair referred to. The youngest saint wasn’t actually dead, but Clair didn’t need to know that.

Charlot jokingly replied, “Sadly, I’m neither a knight nor young, so I’ll have to remain a spectator in this competition.”

Clair glanced at Charlot and sighed inwardly. When they first met, it was because Annie had asked Clair to help Charlot in a duel. Circumstances forced Clair to miss the duel, and he felt so guilty that he promised perpetual friendship.

Yet Charlot had surprised Clair by killing a high-ranking officer from the Chelsea Detective Agency in that very duel. Clair, unaware of Harriet Alva’s true identity, was deeply impressed by Charlot’s prowess.

Even so, Clair admitted to underestimating his would-be brother-in-law.

Charlot’s feats—charging solo into the enemy at Silver Dove Castle to kill Jonan, slaying two Transcendents and a high-ranking officer of the South Seraph restorationists at Mostar Castle—had earned him a reputation as the “Young God of War” among the Empire’s younger generation.

And Charlot’s recent duel in Ingrima, reportedly for a Soumet family lady, had further cemented his fame. This gossip had infuriated Annie, who broke an entire set of dinnerware over it. Nonetheless, it had turned Charlot from a relative unknown into a rising star across the Old Continent.

Clair found the memory amusing, knowing how angry his cousin had been but dismissing it as insignificant. After all, Charlot wouldn’t stay in Ingrima.

Annie, meanwhile, had never mentioned Aurora to Charlot.

Ebner, privy to the details, chuckled and said, “Mecklenburg, you’ll catch up to us sooner or later.”

Charlot doubted he’d ascend to sainthood quickly—he wasn’t even confident about advancing to the high rank. Shrugging, he changed the subject. “When do you set out next?”

“My West Wind Knight Order is stationed in Machubi, en route to the Behemoth Principality. I can bring them along.”

Clair replied, “That’s uncertain for now. You know the Empire’s efficiency isn’t great.”

Pushing his plate aside, Clair said, “I’m done. These days have been tough—neither Ebner nor I have had a proper meal. It’s been a pleasure, but we’ve got matters to attend to and won’t impose further on you and Annie.”

Clair's visit was purely to secure Charlot's allegiance. Despite their good relationship, he couldn't take Charlot's support for granted. Now assured of Charlot's loyalty, Clair could focus on other preparations for his first independent campaign. He was determined to make this battle a resounding success.

Charlot didn't insist on their staying and said, "Do let me know when you're ready to depart."

Ebner laughed and followed Clair out of the Baker Street residence.

Once they were gone, Annie's mood brightened. She wandered about the room, dissatisfied despite all the furnishings she'd arranged. Taking Charlot by the hand, she insisted on buying more decorations.

Although Charlot's home on Elysée Avenue, No. 58, was his official residence, Annie felt no sense of belonging there. Despite leaving her mark on that house, Baker Street, No. 221B was her personal choice, and her affection for it was evident. She wanted it to feel warm and sweet.

Charlot, of course, obliged her. As they left, he remembered the outstanding balance on his Elysée Avenue home's mortgage and casually discussed with Annie whether they should settle it soon.

Chapter 220: Angry Bunana

Charlot Mecklenburg, receiving salaries from two nations and holding a private knight squad position, did not consider the remaining payment for 58 Elysée Avenue to be a significant burden, purely in terms of income, excluding savings.

Annie also supported resolving this debt promptly.

For Charlot, this matter was easy to handle. He handed a sum of écus to Annie, who naturally obtained the relevant debt documents in return.

The two left the Val-de-Vas district but did not proceed to the Picardy District. Although Picardy had a wide range of goods, it lacked the sophistication required. To purchase premium items, the Alexander District was the only option.

Although Annie tried to appear "frugal," as the daughter of the Earl of Bretagne, this shopping trip quickly taught Charlot the true meaning of "spending."

They spent a total of fifty-two écus.

Converting that into modern terms, nearly a million yuan had been spent.

Miss Annie Bretagne handled all the payments.

Mr. Charlot Mecklenburg's only responsibility was signing the delivery address.

Charlot had known this day would come and had prepared himself mentally, choosing to silently accept it...

After purchasing their items, they returned to 221B Baker Street in Val-de-Vas. Charlot noticed a carriage parked outside the door, its occupants not disembarking, clearly waiting for someone.

As Charlot prepared to move the items inside with Annie, a voice called out, "So you really live here. I came to ask why those two books aren't available at any bookstores in Fars?"

Charlot froze. Not only in the Old Continent, but even on Earth, those two books would be hard to find in a bookstore. While web novels were occasionally published, they were seldom printed in large quantities, making them far from perennial bestsellers with wide availability.

Princess May Guillaume stepped out of the carriage in a black robe. Upon seeing Annie, she nodded slightly in greeting.

Fearing Annie might misunderstand, Charlot hastily introduced them. "This is Princess May Guillaume, the aunt of Emperor Alfred Guillaume and a diplomat from the Ingrima Empire, currently visiting our Fars Empire."

"And this is Annie—Annie Bretagne, daughter of the Earl of Bretagne and a good friend of mine."

"Princess May, please come in. Allow me to explain in detail."

Charlot's mind raced. After they all entered the room and he had served everyone coffee, he still couldn't think of a plausible explanation. Finally, he mustered his courage and said, "Those two books were ones I encountered as a child in a bookstore in the Behemoth Principality."

"Starlasburg doesn't have them either?"

"They're very old books, and the publishers may no longer have any stock."

Princess May appeared quite disappointed, muttering to herself, "I've gone through the novels available in Fars, and they're still the same as those in Ingrima. They don't compare to the stories of Roland and Duwei. How could such excellent novels not be bestsellers?"

Annie watched their conversation with curiosity but wisely remained silent.

Princess May lingered briefly before saying to Charlot, "I'm heading to the Behemoth Principality immediately."

Charlot broke into a cold sweat again. Those books wouldn't be there either.

However, he couldn't contradict himself now, so he awkwardly replied, "Wishing you a safe journey."

Princess May didn't stay long. If Annie hadn't been present, she wouldn't have minded hearing more stories from Charlot. But with Annie around...

She felt it necessary to maintain a princess's demeanor.

After sending off Princess May, Charlot decided to "confess partially" and whispered, "I'm in trouble."

Annie asked, "What kind of trouble?"

Charlot skipped the beginning and end, focusing on the key points. "That princess is a novel enthusiast. She brought a novel onto the ship. I made the mistake of showing a hint of disdain, and she almost slapped me to death."

"In desperation, I claimed to have read better novels and made up a story on the spot. That got me out of the situation but created an even bigger problem."

Annie was surprised. "You can write novels?"

Charlot briefly summarized the plots of two fantasy novels for Annie, who became increasingly intrigued. She whispered, "I have an idea."

"What idea?" Charlot asked.

"I'll find a few quick scribes, and you'll dictate the novels to them. Once the manuscripts are prepared, we'll find a publisher to print them."

"That should resolve the issue."

Charlot was both shocked and delighted. "Can that work?"

Annie nodded. "Leave it all to me."

"Tomorrow, I'll bring some people over."

Charlot breathed a sigh of relief. "Annie, you truly are my goddess of luck."

Annie Bretagne beamed. She believed Charlot's story. While Charlot didn't know much about Princess May—being a merchant's son and a transmigrator—Annie, as the Earl of Bretagne's daughter, was well aware of the grand princess's reputation. May Guillaume's passion for novels and the tragedy of her husband's death at Zimourman's hands were well-known across the Old Continent.

Annie had already held Charlot's abilities in high regard, which was why she gradually grew closer to him. But she hadn't expected Charlot to be skilled in storytelling.

Charlot, busy with survival after his transmigration, had no idea that novelists on the Old Continent were held in such high esteem. Many famous authors were even welcomed into royal courts to present their latest works.

Annie herself had loved several novels but had concealed this interest because she believed Charlot disapproved of them. She'd even resigned herself to the idea of reading in secret after marriage. She hadn't realized that Charlot disliked the novels because he found them subpar—he believed he could write better ones himself.

Just from Charlot's summaries, Annie was convinced that his stories were superior to any on the Old Continent. When Charlot mentioned the death of the Crown Prince Chen, Annie's heart broke. How could Duwei not live happily ever after with Crown Prince Chen?

Annie decided that when the novels were published, she would commission a fan fiction-style epilogue to be inserted. This epilogue, penned by the best novelist, would ensure Duwei and Crown Prince Chen lived happily ever after.

Of course, Charlot had no idea Annie planned this.

If he knew...

He would have certainly advised her to make the ghostwriter use a pseudonym with an Ingrima flair—something like "Angry Bunana."

That might ensure a longer life.

Chapter 221: Rising Star Author: Annie Mecklenburg

While Charlot patiently awaited news from Clair Bretagne, Annie organized a team of fifteen rapid scribes for him. Every day, Charlot memorized 5,000 words before immediately switching to another scribe. This ensured the scribes worked at peak speed, producing an astonishing 50,000 to 60,000 words daily.

These drafts were promptly sent to a publisher affiliated with the Bretagne family. By nightfall, they were compiled into finished manuscripts, complete with illustrations. Every 60,000 words were edited into a single volume. Within just seven days, the first volume of two different books appeared on the shelves of major bookstores in Strasbourg.

Charlot, a man who valued his dignity, refused to have his name credited on either book. Instead, he granted the naming rights to Annie. After confirming his decision, Annie published both novels under the pen name "Annie Mecklenburg."

Yes, even the side story depicting the deep bond between Duwei and Crown Prince Chen was released under this pseudonym.

Charlot was terrified that Princess May would discover this. The two books weren't available in the Behemoth Principality, but Charlot couldn't help but feel as though he was inadvertently revealing himself. The Grand Princess of Ingrima had once fought two against one, severely wounding a Saint-rank vampire from the Dolaney clan and extracting their blood core. This achievement left an indelible impression on Charlot.

Even Menielman Soumet, his senior at arms, wasn't nearly as ferocious.

Thus, Charlot leaned into his role as a Transcendent, working tirelessly, reciting manuscripts day and night without pause.

Neither Clair Bretagne nor Ebner Soumet had visited Charlot recently. Both were preoccupied with their own affairs. This deployment of the Purple Finch Knight Order was a significant opportunity for them. As neither was a direct heir of their families and had no chance of inheriting noble titles, they had to forge their own paths.

Not all nobles were born with silver spoons. Some had merely gold-plated ones.

As Charlot labored over his manuscripts, the days slipped by. Initially, he had longed for Strasbourg whenever he was away, but now, he found himself nostalgically yearning for his days at Silver Dove Castle, Mostar Castle, Cappadocia, and even Britain. Life in those places, he realized, had been far more relaxed compared to his current grueling routine of memorizing novels from Earth.

Both novels were over three million words long—unprecedented epics in the Old Continent. Their compelling and dramatic stories captivated readers but tormented Charlot, who had to memorize them.

Countless times, Charlot considered cutting the plots short and ending the novels abruptly. Yet every time he thought of Princess May's ferocity, he envisioned her ensuring he'd have no descendants if he dared such a thing.

...

A week after the novels' publication, Clair Bretagne finally resolved the army's issues and informed Charlot that they were ready to depart.

Relieved, Charlot packed his belongings and prepared for the journey. Annie, ever thoughtful, assembled a creative support team for him.

This team included ten horses and fifteen rapid scribes, ensuring Charlot could continue memorizing manuscripts even amidst the chaos of military campaigns. The manuscripts were sent by express riders back to Strasbourg every few days.

Neither Clair Bretagne nor Ebner Soumet had any objections.

When Charlot set out, he brought along Dolores Soumet, Anastasia, Belisa, eighteen warriors from the Redback Bear Tribe, and all the city patrol guards stationed at No. 1 Falcon Street—nearly 200 people in total.

Of course, this modest group paled compared to the other knight orders.

Currently, Clair Bretagne controlled only two knight orders. Of the remaining five, one was Charlot's own West Wind Knight Order, stationed in Machubi. Another, led by Baron Febollet, had returned to Silver Dove Castle. A third, composed of defeated troops under Duke Joseph, held Mostar Castle. The last two were regional knight orders from the Behemoth Principality, with mixed affiliations. Clair Bretagne had to subdue each of these factions.

Although the task was challenging, Clair remained confident. After all, he already had the best start—the West Wind Knight Order, the most formidable of them all, had sworn allegiance. Its commander was unquestionably trustworthy.

...

After traveling with the main force for a day, Charlot approached Clair Bretagne with a request to return to Machubi and bring his troops.

Clair immediately agreed. He continued onward with two main army regiments, while Charlot split off, heading directly for Machubi.

Machubi was not only Charlot's first labyrinth but also his only one. Having undergone three rounds of labyrinth expansion, it was undoubtedly Charlot's most significant stronghold.

He cared little for the fleet at Cappadocia, knowing it was beyond his control. But the West Wind Knight Order in Machubi? He had left his most loyal subordinates there.

Accompanied by Dolores and others, Charlot made haste to Machubi. From a distance, he noticed the fortress-labyrinth bustling far more than when he had left.

Puzzled, Charlot approached and was greeted by an excited shout: "Commander Mecklenburg has returned!"

"Mr. Charlot is back!"

"Our captain has returned!"

A wave of cheers rolled through Machubi like a rising tide, quickly spreading across the fortress.

Dubin, Yellow Bear, Gwen the Spotted Deer, Bancroft the Swift Wind Wolf, and hundreds of others surged forward, surrounding Charlot and his party as they entered Machubi.

Inside, Charlot was surprised to find the fortress even livelier than before. The population had grown by nearly 30%, and dozens of new shops had appeared. Just as he was about to inquire about the changes, Ross Bard of the Bard Commerce Guild approached with a beaming smile.

Charlot had previously spared Ross from punishment—not out of strategy but due to the peculiar leniency of a transmigrator. Yet seeing the merchant now, Charlot felt a bit uneasy and was about to reprimand him when Ross quickly spoke up:

“After you left, I moved my entire family here and encouraged all Bard Commerce Guild merchants to open branch stores in Machubi.”

“I also helped your knight brothers settle down by covering their relocation costs and bringing their families to Machubi.”

“The population here now exceeds 20,000.”

Ross Bard’s face was full of obsequiousness. Though Charlot had said nothing when he departed, the merchant had been filled with dread. After Charlot left, Ross had a revelation, recalled his family, and gambled his entire fortune on Machubi.

The bustling, thriving Machubi was the result of Ross Bard’s wholehearted efforts, leveraging his lifelong business acumen.

Charlot casually asked a few questions and quickly pieced together the truth. A sudden realization dawned upon him:

“Sometimes, saying nothing and silently playing it cool really works wonders.”

Chapter 222: Menielman and May

Although Charlot Mecklenburg was primarily a civil servant, he had experienced several battles and understood the importance of selecting soldiers wisely. Despite the population boom in Machubi, he brought only a little over two thousand men, leaving the rest to continue developing the fortress. One reason for this selection was the limited numbers of the Purple Finch Knight Order, which comprised fewer than three thousand members. Overloading his force would make Earl Bretagne’s situation awkward.

Furthermore, the West Wind Knight Order had never been particularly numerous.

For this expedition, Charlot left Dolores Soumet and Belisa behind in Machubi. Initially, he considered leaving Anastasia as well, but her preference for the battlefield swayed his decision to bring her. Alongside her came Dubin, Yellow Bear, Gwen the Dappled Stag, and Bancroft the Swift Wolf.

The chosen warriors were the fittest and swiftest, enabling Charlot's forces to catch up with Earl Bretagne's main contingent within a day. Bretagne's army, burdened with excessive supplies far beyond what was necessary for the campaign in South Seraph, moved sluggishly.

Bretagne had heard of Charlot's victories in the Behemoth Principality but was astonished that Charlot had managed to assemble a "knightly order" of over two thousand. After all, he was aware that the West Wind Knight Order had once been a mere city patrol force in the Lukavaro District, notorious for being underfunded. Where had Charlot found these additional soldiers?

No matter how much Bretagne thought about it, he couldn't fathom it. However, he wasn't one to obsess over details. A strong West Wind Knight Order was ultimately to his benefit.

Dolores's absence also pleased Bretagne immensely. As a close friend of Ebner Soumet, he knew Ebner disapproved of his younger sister joining the battlefield. Bretagne had even considered advising Charlot to leave Dolores in Silver Dove Castle, but Charlot had already left her in Machubi. This earned Charlot both Bretagne's satisfaction and Ebner's favor, as they assumed he had done so for Dolores's convenience in returning home to Strasbourg.

In short, it was a misunderstanding—but not a troublesome one.

The army soon reached Silver Dove Castle, where the welcoming party was not Baron Febollet but someone Charlot had never expected yet always held in his thoughts—Menielman Soumet.

The Empire's First Rose remained as dazzling as ever, commanding a force of several hundred troops and awaiting their arrival outside the castle.

Charlot held no romantic feelings for her, but Menielman had been the most dependable figure since his transmigration. Without her support, he wouldn't have achieved his current status.

Compared to Charlot, Bretagne and Ebner were far more excited to see Menielman, their servile attitudes resembling eager puppies wagging their tails.

Charlot barely had time to greet Menielman before Bretagne handed over a significant portion of the army's supplies, including the civilians managing them, to her. At that moment, Charlot realized that Menielman's time in the Imperial Navy might not have been pleasant. This also explained why Bretagne had lingered in Strasbourg for so long with far more supplies than necessary—these were meant for Menielman.

Before leaving, Menielman noticed Charlot, gestured for him to approach, and whispered, "Good luck."

Charlot nodded earnestly.

Menielman offered no further words, turning to depart. Unable to contain himself, Charlot added, "If you pass through Cappadocia, feel free to restock supplies there. I have some modest influence in the area."

Menielman gave a slight nod and left with her supplies and troops, leaving behind three men with varied emotions. Her force quickly vanished beyond Silver Dove Castle, heading toward the Fars Empire's coastal cities.

Charlot, though he had speculated, now fully grasped the impact of the Imperial Rose Incident on Menielman. Even basic supplies required personal effort to acquire.

Bretagne clapped Charlot on the shoulder, pulling him and Ebner close. He whispered, "This must remain a secret."

Ebner said nothing but glanced at Charlot.

With a sigh, Charlot replied, "Menielman is my senior and my benefactor. Save betraying Annie, I'm willing to do anything for her."

This response satisfied both men. Bretagne, in particular, clapped Charlot's shoulder again, saying, "The past is the past. Annie is a good girl, and I'll support you wholeheartedly."

These words carried a profound implication.

Charlot felt a chill.

Their private conversation had barely concluded when a streak of pink light crossed the sky. It twisted mid-air and descended sharply to the ground. Bretagne and Ebner turned pale, shouting in unison, "Saint rank!?"

Charlot, recognizing the pink aura, exclaimed, "It's Princess May Guillaume!"

The declaration turned Bretagne and Ebner's fear into outright panic. They cried out, "Menielman is in danger!" Both unleashed their battle energy, transforming into two storms laced with lightning as they bolted from the formation.

Charlot hesitated briefly before instructing his subordinates, "I'm going to check on this too."

He knew of the enmity between Princess May and Menielman, even if its origin seemed inexplicable. Given Princess May's tendency to lash out at him, her animosity toward Menielman was inevitable.

After all, this was a grudge borne of spousal death.

Charlot recalled an old saying from his past life: "The hatred of killing one's father and stealing one's wife is unparalleled." Reversed, it perfectly encapsulated the grudge Princess May bore for her husband's death at the hands of Menielman's fiancé, Zimourman Axel Robin.

Princess May, cloaked in black and socially reclusive, had seemingly withdrawn from all human connections, indulging only in novels. Charlot vividly remembered her erratic behavior—throwing him into enemy warships, casting him into the sea, and terrorizing him with whales. Not to mention forcing him to recite novels—a traumatic ordeal that lingered.

Although Charlot worried for Menielman, he understood his limitations. He was just a mid-rank Transcendent. If Princess May erupted, Bretagne and Ebner, both high-rank Transcendents, might intervene, but he could only watch from the sidelines.

Nonetheless, Charlot activated Swiftstep Technique twice, coupled with Spider Technique and Wings of the Young Dragon, but still couldn't keep pace with the storm-like Bretagne and Ebner. By the time he arrived, they were already behind Menielman, swords drawn, ready to defend the Empire's First Rose.

Princess May, draped in black, exuded her usual aloof and regal demeanor, standing in stark opposition to everyone else, like a solitary plum blossom blooming defiantly in a snowy storm.

Yet, everyone present understood that Princess May was the stronger party.

Despite Menielman's hundreds of soldiers, she was the vulnerable one.

Panting heavily, Charlot arrived to find the confrontation still in a stalemate. Taking this chance, he considered employing his "persuasion" skills, trusting in his knowledge and experiences as a transmigrant.

Before he could speak, Princess May's voice rang out: "No bookstore in the Behemoth Principality has the two novels you mentioned. Were you lying to me all along?"

Charlot froze, realizing he had inadvertently become the center of attention.

Even Menielman turned her gaze toward him, as did Bretagne and Ebner, both mouthing, "What books?"

Inwardly screaming, Charlot wanted to say, "I'm in the wrong place! I'll leave now! Pretend I was never here!"

But that would've required three sentences.

Princess May didn't wait for an answer, instead remarking flatly, "I have pressing matters. We'll discuss the books in Strasbourg."

Charlot mentally roared, "What do you mean 'we'? Who's 'we'? There is no 'we'!"

He dared not voice his thoughts, terrified of incurring her wrath. After all, this Grand Princess had a terrifying reputation, even among the Saint rank. Stories abounded of her tearing blood cores from vampires without hesitation.

Turning to Menielman, Princess May said, "If not for this liar claiming the novels were exclusive to the Behemoth Principality, I wouldn't have come. How unfortunate to cross paths like this."

"It's our first meeting, isn't it, Menielman Soumet? Or do you prefer your other title, the Rose of Fars?"

Menielman replied coldly, "Enough talk, Princess May Guillaume. Draw your sword."

Princess May smirked and was about to retort when Menielman's black battle energy surged. Her feet lifted slightly off the ground, and the glow of her longsword turned ominously dark. Under the shadowy aura, a strange crescent moon emerged.

Dark Breathing Technique! Black Moon Meditation!

Menielman had ascended to the Saint rank.

The realization sent shockwaves through everyone present.

Charlot, however, was merely stunned.

Everyone knew Menielman was an unparalleled talent. Although her brilliance had long been overshadowed by her late fiancé, Zimourman, her allure, talent, and charisma remained undeniable.

Now, Menielman had proven herself to be more than just a beauty—her strength matched her appearance.

Princess May chuckled softly before transforming into a streak of pink light, charging at Menielman.

The clash between black and pink erupted mid-air.

The resulting shockwaves cracked through the air, echoing like summer thunder.

On the ground, the three men could only watch helplessly. None of them were Saint rank, nor could they ascend into the air.

Charlot regretted not bringing his Floating Blossoms artifact, though its fragile nature and resource cost made it impractical. Even if he had it, he doubted it could interfere in a duel of this caliber.

This was a battle between two of the Old Continent's most famous women.

A fight not only for victory but for pride.

Princess May's pink energy scattered into a cascade of petals, each one mesmerizing. Charlot had never seen her fight so spectacularly before. Against two vampires of Saint rank, her energy had been straightforward—but now, it resembled an ancient poem: “The east wind scatters a thousand blossoms; petals fall like rain.”

Menielman's energy enveloped her in night's shadow, a crescent moon glowing overhead. Dancing within its light, she embodied another poetic verse: “The moon at the window remains unchanged; but with plum blossoms, it feels anew.”

Chapter 223: The Power to Decide One's Own Destiny

The more beautiful the plum blossom, the more desolate the black moon.

The lonelier the plum blossom stands, the more elusive the black moon becomes.

Charlot Mecklenburg had initially worried that Menielman Soumet, a newly advanced Saint rank, might not be a match for Princess May.

But he quickly realized that his understanding of Senior Menielman Soumet was far too shallow.

Menielman Soumet was definitely not a recent Saint rank.

She had merely been hiding her strength all along.

Across the entire Old Continent, both Menielman Soumet and Princess May Guillaume could be considered part of the first tier among Saints.

And if one were to consider only female Saints?

Well!

Charlot Mecklenburg, being somewhat inexperienced, could count only a few female Saints. Nonetheless, he believed that even Grandma Saint Karen paled in comparison to Senior Menielman and Princess May.

At this moment, if someone were to have a bucket of popcorn...

It would be utterly heartless.

Clair Bretagne and Ebner Soumet would absolutely pummel anyone eating popcorn right now.

Regardless of gender!

Irrespective of age!

Clair Bretagne suddenly remarked, "The combat energy Princess May is using is not Red Dragon Battle Energy."

Hartington Thunder and Storm University was renowned for producing Great Knights, whether Thunder Knights or Storm Knights, making it the premier institution of knightly traditions in the Old Continent.

Only Tübingen University, established by the Ebrelrahan Clan—the so-called First Vampire Knight Clan—could rival it.

However, this did not mean the Old Continent lacked other top-tier knightly traditions.

For instance, the Ingrima royal family's Red Dragon Battle Energy and the Lamorak family's Frost Dragon Battle Energy were both pinnacle knightly techniques. However, these techniques were no longer accessible to common folk.

Charlot, though a university graduate, was not well-versed in the affairs of nobles. He had always assumed Princess May practiced Red Dragon Battle Energy, even though its pinkish hue seemed slightly off. After all, they were in the same color family—surely close enough.

Hearing Clair Bretagne's comment, he couldn't help but ask, "It's not Red Dragon Battle Energy?"

Ebner Soumet interjected, "Absolutely not."

Taking a deep breath, he murmured, "If Clair and I aren't mistaken, this combat energy is something Princess May developed herself."

Clair Bretagne nodded in agreement. "That's my view as well."

"This princess is truly a genius."

"No less remarkable than Menielman."

Charlot could hear the faint tremor in Clair Bretagne's voice as he made this statement. It was evident Clair did not wish for any woman to surpass Menielman.

Charlot chose not to dwell on such matters and instead asked, "Who will win?"

Ebner Soumet responded decisively, "I don't know."

Gazing at the sky, he added, "Menielman must have hidden her strength for a long time."

“No one knows when she advanced to Saint rank, but it’s definitely not recent. Her Dark Breathing Technique is solid and refined, likely above the twenty-first tier.”

“Princess May’s strength is undoubtedly greater, but since her combat energy is self-developed, it has minor flaws that occasionally manifest during battle. For now, it doesn’t match the polished precision of the Dark Breathing Technique. However, in the future...”

Clair Bretagne supplemented, “The future is limitless.”

“This Princess May is destined to stand at the pinnacle.”

“As a knight, I feel somewhat ashamed.”

Charlot was slightly relieved. He certainly didn’t wish for Senior Menielman to come to harm.

Oddly, he didn’t want Princess May to suffer either.

The three men had no ability to intervene in this duel. They could only look skyward with bated breath.

Two streams of combat energy clashed and pursued each other in the air, tearing the clouds asunder. Whenever they collided, thunderous roars like summer lightning echoed.

Charlot’s neck grew sore from watching. Giving up, he lay flat on the ground. At that moment, a lovely face appeared above him, blocking the sky. Startled, he exclaimed, “Anastasia! Why are you here too?”

Anastasia smiled faintly and countered, “Why can’t I enjoy the spectacle?”

Charlot was at a loss for words.

Well, maybe she could?

This illegitimate daughter of Baron Feller, hands on the hilts of her dual swords, gazed at the sky with undisguised envy and deep excitement.

She kept imagining how amazing it would be if she were equally formidable.

Anastasia considered herself already strong—there weren’t many among her peers who could surpass her. Yet compared to Menielman and Princess May, she was still not strong enough!

Anastasia longed desperately for power.

She cared nothing for love. All she desired was the strength to control her own destiny.

Charlot glanced around and noticed most of his subordinates had also arrived.

By now, every one of Charlot's followers had attained transcendent abilities. Even Dubin Alger had recently advanced to the second tier of transcendence, with his swordsmanship improving by leaps and bounds.

Following Charlot's lead, his subordinates also lay down to enjoy this rare transcendent battle.

Clair Bretagne and Ebner Soumet, however, couldn't bring themselves to follow suit—it was far too improper! Besides, as high-tier transcedents, they wouldn't feel sore from looking up for a while. They maintained their standing postures with dignity.

The battle raged on for hours.

As dawn broke, the two streams of combat energy collided violently one final time before separating. From the ground, the combat energy glows in the sky appeared like distant stars, motionless for a brief moment. Then the pink energy streaked off toward Strasbourg.

A few minutes later, Menielman descended gracefully, shrouded in night's veil. The moonlight intermittently illuminated her as she landed.

With her feet on solid ground, all signs of her combat energy dissipated.

The Empire's First Rose said nothing, offering only a simple nod to Clair Bretagne, Ebner Soumet, and Charlot Mecklenburg before silently leading her team onward.

Clair Bretagne watched Menielman's group depart before leading Ebner, Charlot, and the others back to their own group. They entered Silver Dove Castle in silence, each lost in thought.

Once inside, Charlot learned that Baron Febollet was absent—and, given the circumstances, could not return. His assets had been gradually stripped away.

The baron was left with only immovable property in Strasbourg. He had departed Silver Dove Castle in tears to plead with his Empress sister for a new domain.

Oddly, the baron had left his knight order behind at Silver Dove Castle, whether out of laziness or on the advice of a wise counselor.

With the castle's master gone, Clair Bretagne unceremoniously took control of Baron Febollet's knight order and placed it under Anastasia's command.

At first, Charlot found this surprising, but he quickly realized the reasoning behind it.

Anastasia was a graduate of Hartington Thunder and Storm University, making her a direct junior of Clair Bretagne and Ebner Soumet.

Such academic ties often brought unexpected benefits.

Similarly, Charlot had gained Menielman's favor, which had earned him a promotion.

Meanwhile, Dubin Alger, though also a second-tier transcendent, had no university background and remained stuck in the lowly position of a forty-seventh rank, third-class squad leader.

To date, he still hadn't received any promotion orders.

Chapter 224: The Last Legacy of Grand Duke Joseph

Dubin Alger did not get his promotion.

Not long ago, this could not have been blamed on Charlot Mecklenburg. After all, Dubin had submitted the necessary paperwork, but the higher authorities simply never approved it.

But now, it was undeniably Charlot's fault.

With his steady rise in rank, Charlot had gained authority over many personnel approvals, including those of Dubin Alger and others. Although the process was somewhat circuitous, he held the ability to promote subordinates indirectly.

Thus, Charlot had promptly arranged a forty-first-grade civil servant position for Anastasia and elevated Belisa to a forty-fifth-grade assistant clerk.

Poor Dubin.

Charlot could swear to the heavens he wasn't deliberately suppressing this loyal subordinate. He had merely forgotten about it entirely.

By now, Clair Bretagne commanded four knight orders: the Purple Finch Knight Order under his direct leadership, the Maple Leaf Knight Order founded with Ebner Soumet, and two others—the West Wind Knight Order led by Charlot and the Silver Dove Militia handed over to Anastasia. The latter had been renamed recently by Baron Febollet, who had taken the liberty to change its original name.

Clair Bretagne stayed at Silver Dove Castle for only three days, resupplying before pressing onward.

He had diverted nearly all his resources to Menielman Soumet, leaving his main forces short on supplies. It wasn't until he replenished them at Silver Dove Castle that the knight orders regained full combat readiness.

Clair's method of resupplying involved imposing an additional levy under the Imperial War Provisions.

Feeling guilty for Silver Dove Castle's inhabitants, Charlot led a contingent of the West Wind Knight Order back to the castle after Clair's departure, distributing compensation to those taxed.

Though the compensation was meager, it earned Charlot immense admiration from the residents of Silver Dove Castle.

Those Silver Dove Castle folk who had moved to Machubi occasionally returned to purchase goods and shared news from Machubi, such as the lack of taxes and nearly free housing. However, as Machubi was a derelict fortress with a poorer living environment than Silver Dove Castle, few people were inclined to relocate there.

This time, Charlot's return with compensation funds sparked an unexpected trend among the locals—a small wave of enthusiasm for relocating to Machubi.

What Charlot did not anticipate was that this compensation money came from Baron Febollet, who would never have spent it on his own people. Yet, the residents firmly believed Charlot had paid out of his own pocket, igniting their fervor.

...

After Duke Joseph's death, his knight order fled back to the Behemoth Principality, gathering at Mostar Castle without a formal leader.

Once Clair Bretagne left Silver Dove Castle, he headed straight for Mostar Castle to claim Duke Joseph's "last legacy."

If Clair could secure control over this knight order, there would be no force left in the Behemoth Principality capable of opposing him.

With Grand Duke Ferdinand assassinated and without heirs, the Empire had entrusted the Behemoth Principality to his nephew. However, after Duke Joseph and his wife passed away, the Empire had no intention of returning the principality to local control.

Although the principality's nobles resisted annexation, their lack of unity and desire for personal gain made them powerless to prevent it.

Mostar Castle was now in utter chaos.

...

A few days later, Clair Bretagne led his forces into Mostar Castle. Charlot Mecklenburg was among them, with the West Wind Knight Order as a key component.

It was Charlot's first time entering Mostar Castle. On a previous visit, he had stayed outside the city.

Now stepping into the Behemoth Principality's capital, Charlot felt a wave of emotions—he was, after all, a Behemoth native.

Not long after entering the city, Charlot witnessed swarms of nobles embroiled in power struggles. They had already fought several rounds of "civil wars," resulting in dozens of deaths.

Hearing these nobles bicker and jockey for Clair Bretagne's support, Charlot couldn't help but feel relieved for Belisa.

Had Belisa not decisively fled Mostar Castle, her status alone would have subjected her to torment and likely death at the hands of these nobles.

While Belisa could be naive, she was not foolish. Her decisiveness was commendable, even if her experience, shaped by her time with Duchess Josephine, left her lacking in some respects and overly sophisticated in others.

Clair Bretagne had no patience for the bickering local nobles. He ordered his soldiers to drive these parasites away and tasked Charlot with summoning the key leaders of Duke Joseph's former knight order to the ducal palace for a meeting.

Charlot accepted the order and brought only Anastasia to Mostar Castle's military camp.

By now, Anastasia had shed her identity as Baron Feller's illegitimate daughter, distancing herself from her Behemoth roots and Lady Nancella's affairs. She was a settled resident of Strasbourg and an imperial civil servant—still a first-class, forty-first-grade official, just as when she had first crossed paths with Charlot.

The gates of Mostar Castle's military camp were tightly shut. Over this period, countless nobles had tried to woo the knight order, but most could not promise a viable future. These local nobles lacked even their own security.

This led to a high level of vigilance within the camp.

When Charlot arrived, he immediately announced himself: "I am Charlot Mecklenburg, Head Overseer of the Lukavaro District Patrol, Commander of the West Wind Knight Order, Chief of the Lukavaro Administrative Bureau, Special Envoy of the Fars Empire to the Ingrima Empire, and twenty-seventh-grade Senior Administrator!"

"I request the three captains of the Mostar Castle Knight Order to open the gates and accompany me to meet Behemoth's Military Governor, Clair Bretagne."

Charlot repeated his announcement three times, but the camp remained silent.

Without hesitation, Charlot retrieved his anti-space long-range rifle from his coat—a weapon he had reclaimed from Machubi.

Raising **Blood Glory**, Charlot declared, "If you refuse to open the gates, I'll blast them apart and enter myself."

His threat was again met with silence.

Unflinching, Charlot pulled the trigger. A single anti-magic armor-piercing round obliterated the gate.

The display of violence was extreme, but effective.

Chapter 225: Breaking the Sky

The Mostar Castle Knight Order had not truly decided how to proceed.

This knight order was originally led by Grand Duke Ferdinand. After the assassination of Ferdinand and his wife, Duke Joseph took command of the order, but his control over it was significantly weaker. Without the rallying cry of avenging Grand Duke Ferdinand, Joseph might not have been able to command them at all.

When Duke Joseph fell in battle in the South Seraph region, the order was left leaderless.

Originally, the Mostar Castle Knight Order had five captains under the commander. Among them, two were high-rank Transcendents who returned alive to Mostar Castle, while the other three were mid-rank Transcendents, two of whom perished in the South Seraph conflict. Currently, the knight order is overseen by the three remaining captains.

With two high-rank Transcendents and one mid-rank Transcendent in its ranks, the Mostar Castle Knight Order was not particularly concerned about the shifting political landscape of the Behemoth Principality.

When Charlot Mecklenburg called out to them outside the camp, the three captains paid him no attention.

Even though Charlot had killed Jonan and defeated Zolman in a duel, his influence only extended to the lower classes and common soldiers. To the knight order's leadership, he was nothing more than a fortunate upstart.

That is, until Charlot fired a single shot, blasting apart the gates of the military camp. Only then did the three captains take notice.

The Green Knight, Enzo, could no longer hold back and said, “A mere youth from Strasbourg dares act so brazenly. Allow me to teach him a lesson.”

His colleagues remained silent, with only the Blood Knight, Diak, giving a slight nod of approval. With that, the Green Knight turned to leave.

The Blood Knight, Diak, was reputed as the finest knight in the Behemoth Principality, his prowess unmatched within the knight order.

Although the Green Knight was also high-rank, he required the Blood Knight's tacit approval to act. As for the mid-rank Transcendent among the captains, his opinion carried no weight.

Charlot, having shattered the gates of Mostar Castle's military camp, calmly set aside his Anti-Space Long-Range Rifle, knowing that it would not be needed for the moment.

Anastasia, who had never seen Charlot display such violence, whispered, “Do you have a grudge against them?”

Charlot touched his nose and replied, “Indeed.”

What he didn't admit was the source of his grudge: years ago, a mid-level officer of the Mostar Castle Knight Order had once chased Charlot Mecklenburg—forcing him to streak naked through the streets.

Though Charlot himself wasn't the one streaking at the time, just recalling the embarrassing incident still filled him with resentment.

This time, Charlot had come to deliver a message on behalf of Clair Bretagne, and he had made his intentions clear. Yet, the Mostar Castle Knight Order did not respond—not even sending someone out to parley. The combination of old grievances and new insults had prompted Charlot's forceful actions.

The Green Knight, Enzo, mounted his warhorse as an attendant handed him his Knight's Lance. Clutching the lance, he spurred his horse forward, galloping like a tempest.

Enzo had no intention of listening to Charlot's explanations. Since the latter wanted to be rough, Enzo was happy to oblige.

As a high-rank knight, Enzo was confident that even in the presence of Clair Bretagne, his standing would eclipse Charlot's. Injuring Charlot would draw no real consequences, he believed.

This was the confidence of a high-rank Transcendent.

Charlot, using his Eye of Insight, sensed the Green Knight's rapid approach before he arrived. He turned to Anastasia and said, “Step aside, lest the fight spill over to you.”

Anastasia leapt back immediately. Though a graduate of Hartington Thunder and Storm University and a practitioner of elite knightly traditions, her youth and mid-rank Transcendent abilities made her ill-suited for such high-level combat.

Since leaving the Behemoth Principality and honing his skills at sea with the Ingrima Empire, Charlot had made only modest progress, remaining at eighth-rank Transcendent. Yet his confidence had grown immensely.

This time, accompanying Clair Bretagne to the Behemoth Principality, Charlot carried with him the Berserker Blade, a vampiric weapon gifted by Aurora Soumet. The weapon boasted five attributes: armor-piercing, impact, anti-magic, life-drain, and self-repair.

Charlot gripped the lance with both hands and silently reviewed the key points of the Arsilo family's secret lance technique: Heaven's Wing. As the Green Knight Enzo closed to within twenty meters, Charlot suddenly sprang into action.

With Swiftstep Technique ×2, Spider Technique, and Wings of the Young Dragon, Charlot leapt into the air as if carried by the wind.

At the apex of his leap, Enzo had galloped another seven or eight meters forward. It was the perfect distance for an attack using Heaven's Wing.

Enzo had not expected Charlot's maneuver. His original plan was to close the distance on horseback, allowing his charging momentum to amplify the power of his strike, ensuring a decisive blow. He had never anticipated Charlot's sudden airborne assault.

From his vantage point, Charlot's strike seemed to descend from the heavens like a collapsing sky. Enzo hastily redirected his battle energy, raising his lance skyward to parry.

However, Charlot's attack was a feint. The Heaven's Wing secret technique, famed for its unpredictability, included a maneuver called Breaking the Sky, which Charlot executed flawlessly.

This was no mere Transcendent ability, but pure skill in lance combat. Yet, without the enhancements of Swiftstep Technique, Spider Technique, and Wings of the Young Dragon, such agile balance and precise control would have been impossible.

Caught mid-attack, Enzo lost control of his stance. Charlot, in mid-air, shifted his trajectory with ease, demonstrating the reason behind the secret art's name.

As Charlot landed his real strike, the Berserker Blade crashed down with earth-shattering force, smashing both Enzo and his warhorse to the ground.

The warhorse neighed in agony, its neck broken by the blow. Though Enzo avoided critical injury thanks to his high-rank battle energy and a last-second parry, the impact left him gasping in

pain, his chest and back throbbing. Enraged, he leapt to his feet, shouting, “You brat from Strasbourg! How dare you attack me by surprise?”

Charlot raised an eyebrow but quickly understood. The knight deliberately refrained from acknowledging Charlot’s Behemoth roots.

Having won several victories in the Behemoth Principality, including killing Jonan, leader of the South Seraph restorationists, and defeating Zolman in a duel outside Mostar Castle, Charlot had gained significant prestige. Recognizing him as a Behemoth native would only elevate his standing further.

Charlot landed gracefully, the Berserker Blade at the ready. “If you’re dissatisfied, come again!”

Enzo gripped his Knight’s Lance tightly. Charlot’s every move had defied his expectations, shattering his conventional understanding of combat. The high-rank knight found himself hesitating, unwilling to face him again.

Chapter 226: Perhaps This is Fate

Charlot Mecklenburg’s mastery of the 77 Movements of Heaven’s Wing was personally honed under the guidance of Julian Arsilo.

Although this spear technique held no particularly profound secrets—its force application and movement transitions could be discerned by any mid-level Transcendent skilled in spear combat—on the battlefield, even simple techniques could be decisive.

The cruelty of combat often meant that there was no second chance. Those who perished under the 77 Movements of Heaven’s Wing might have unraveled its intricacies given time, but the battlefield rarely allowed such luxuries.

The 77 Movements of Heaven’s Wing encompassed techniques like the devastating *Folded Void*. Each of these movements was lethal in its own right, capable of slaying an enemy 77 times over.

When Charlot had initially studied spear combat with Julian, his progress was modest. Yet during his duel with Ban Lamorak, he unleashed a strike of unparalleled precision—his peak performance. Although he couldn’t maintain this level in his second strike and was forced to switch weapons after several exchanges, the duel proved transformative. From that day forward, Charlot’s spearmanship improved daily.

Now, facing Enzo, the Green Knight who barely met the threshold of high-level Transcendent, Charlot saw only flaws in his opponent's rigid combat style. Opportunities for exploitation abounded.

His previous strike further bolstered his confidence.

Without paying any heed to the disoriented Enzo, who dared not demand a rematch, Charlot strode boldly into the military camp of the Mostar Knight Order.

Enzo hesitated briefly, suppressing his fury, and in frustration, impaled an injured warhorse with a swift jab of his spear before turning to reenter the camp.

Anastasia paused, choosing not to follow Charlot.

If Charlot engaged in combat within the camp, having to protect her would reduce their chances of breaking through. Without such a burden, their escape would be much easier.

As someone who had led troops in battle and fought on the lands of South Seraph and the Behemoth Principality, Anastasia had proven herself a competent commander. Her considerations stemmed from battlefield pragmatism rather than emotion.

...

Charlot soon encountered Blood Knight Diak and another mid-level Transcendent captain within the camp. When the Blood Knight saw Charlot's unruffled appearance compared to the disheveled and subdued Green Knight, it was immediately clear who had won their earlier encounter.

Though Blood Knight Diak considered himself far superior to Enzo, even he doubted he could subdue his colleague so decisively in such a short span. The performance of this rising young man from Behemoth could not be underestimated.

"What business brings you here?" Diak asked coldly.

Charlot offered a faint smile. "Clair Bretagne, Military Governor of Behemoth, has requested the three captains to join him for a discussion on deploying our forces."

Diak sighed lightly. "Under Grand Duke Joseph's command, we gathered all of Behemoth's knightly orders, yet suffered a devastating defeat at Interlaken. Of the twelve knight orders we set out with, only three returned. Seventy percent perished or surrendered."

"Even Grand Duke Joseph himself fell in the minor city of Interlaken, and the South Seraph forces pushed us back to Mostar Castle, where they killed the Duchess."

"Behemoth cannot withstand more war. We need to recuperate."

Charlot smiled again. "These concerns can be addressed directly to Governor Clair."

Reluctantly, Diak nodded. “Very well. Let us meet with Governor Clair.”

The three captains of the Mostar Knight Order, accompanied by over ten knights, followed Charlot to the Ducal Mansion. Once the residence of nobility, it had now been unceremoniously occupied by Clair Bretagne.

Charlot refrained from attending the ensuing meeting—not because he lacked the status to participate, but because he found such lengthy political discussions unbearably dull.

Clair and Ebner Soumet were well-versed in political maneuvering, owing to their noble upbringing. Charlot, by contrast, was a merchant-turned-Transcendent. Despite his experiences, he remained something of a political novice, and involving himself in such matters would only lead to frustration.

Instead of lingering in the mansion, Charlot ascended to the battlements of Mostar Castle, gazing out over the plains. A wave of reflection swept over him.

The last time he had come to Mostar Castle, he had fought desperately outside its walls. Yet the nobles within the city had done nothing—allowing Hughes to breach the defenses and decapitate the Duchess.

That duel had elevated Charlot’s reputation, though it was Hughes who gained the most from the victory. With Zolman’s death, Hughes had solidified his leadership over the South Seraph restorationists, silencing any opposition.

Now, Hughes led the South Seraph restorationists into the Ferranden battlefield. Charlot couldn’t help but wonder how many South Seraph soldiers would ever return home.

At the current pace of the war, the Fars Empire and Byron Empire seemed likely to survive, but as the conflict’s instigators, the Behemoth Principality and South Seraph might not.

Behemoth had lost two successive dukes, along with their duchesses. It was no longer viable as an independent principality and would likely become either a direct imperial county or an autonomous territory. While this might not be a disaster for its people, Behemoth’s native aristocracy would suffer greatly, with many losing their lands, like the unfortunate Baron Feller, whose entire family had been wiped out.

South Seraph faced an even grimmer fate. Should Clair’s campaigns succeed, South Seraph would cease to exist. Its army, currently fighting for Byron in Ferranden, might also be lost. Without land or soldiers, the South Seraph people themselves might disappear.

In all scenarios, war was never the best choice.

...

Anastasia, who had silently accompanied Charlot, suddenly spoke. "Will the Behemoth Principality and South Seraph ever know peace again?"

Charlot chuckled bitterly. "Perhaps. But it might not be a peace everyone can accept."

Anastasia fell silent for a long while before murmuring, "Could you help me reclaim my mother's remains? I want to bury her in Silver Dove Castle."

Charlot nodded. "I'll do my best."

He glanced at the young woman beside him, feeling a twinge of emotion. Though Anastasia and Annie shared similarities as noblewomen, their vastly different circumstances had shaped their lives in opposite ways.

Both were graduates of elite universities and Transcendents, admired for their beauty and character. Yet while Annie remained the cherished daughter of a count, leading a blissful life, Anastasia had been forced to fight alone on the battlefield.

Perhaps this was fate.

Just as Charlot, once a mathematics teacher, had found himself transmigrated into this world of Transcendents.

Chapter 227: Hmm, Let's Talk About Morality Later

Clair Bretagne had little trouble subduing the Mostar Castle Knight Order.

Whether it was the Blood Knight Diak, the Green Knight Enzo, or the third captain, after a round of discussions, they all pledged their full support to him in the campaign against the South Seraph territory.

In order to win over the Mostar Castle Knight Order, Clair still allowed them to remain in command of their own group.

Clair was arguably one of the brightest talents of the younger generation in the Fars Empire. Charlot Mecklenburg was not surprised at all that he could handle the Mostar Castle Knight Order with ease.

However, Charlot, after careful consideration, gave this officer a special suggestion: divide the Mostar Castle Knight Order into three, select the best soldiers, and integrate them into the Purple Finch Knight Order, while having Blood Knight Diak and the others recruit new forces to fill the vacancies.

Clair accepted this suggestion. As a result, the Blood Knight Diak, Green Knight Enzo, and the third captain each established their own knight orders, while a group of strong soldiers were transferred into the Purple Finch Knight Order and the Maple Leaf Knight Order.

Viscount Branton's Purple Finch Knight Order was among the strongest forces on the continent, even more formidable than the private knight orders of many counts.

Julius Axel gave this knight order to Clair Bretagne for many reasons. It was intended to reduce the number of unruly great nobles in the empire and replace them with loyal commanders.

The Purple Finch Knight Order had fought battles so brutal that even their captain had perished, leaving the order with severe casualties and an urgent need for reinforcements.

As for Clair supplementing the Maple Leaf Knight Order, it was because he had personally founded it, holding a special sentiment for this group.

After the division, the Mostar Castle Knight Order ceased to exist, a development that worked greatly to Clair Bretagne's advantage.

The three captains each gained their own knight orders, which left them quite satisfied. Although Clair took some of their strongest soldiers, the right to recruit more was a substantial gain. During this period, it was relatively easy to gather scattered and defeated soldiers, making recruitment less of a challenge.

After acquiring the Mostar Castle Knight Order, Clair showed less interest in the remaining two knight orders. Both had fought so fiercely that they were reduced to less than 500 soldiers each, mere remnants of their former strength.

Clair stayed in Mostar Castle for seven days, conducting a simple reorganization of his knight orders before deciding to personally lead the Purple Finch, Maple Leaf, and the newly formed knight orders in a surprise attack on the South Seraph territory. He left Charlot Mecklenburg and Anastasia in Behemoth, assigning Charlot a specific task to gather the other two knight orders.

Though Clair did not state it outright, Charlot suspected he had received recommendations about himself from Blood Knight Diak and Green Knight Enzo.

Clearly, Clair had accepted these suggestions.

To be honest, Charlot had no interest in the war in the South Seraph territory.

Being left behind was a relief for him.

Clair's departure was well-organized and methodical.

Before leaving Mostar Castle, Clair said to Charlot, "Among this group, only Ebner and you are people I truly trust. Ebner will accompany me to the battlefield, so the rear is entrusted to you."

“Our strategic goal is not to capture the South Seraph territory but to create a stalemate, drawing the Ferranden army’s attention. A stable rear is essential for that.”

“Don’t disappoint me. We’re in this together.”

Charlot smiled slightly and replied, “I will guard the rear for you.”

“You can trust me at any time.”

“You know I’ve always wanted to be part of the Bretagne family.”

Clair Bretagne smiled. His trust in Charlot was rooted in that sentiment; there was no stronger political alliance than marriage. Moreover, the Bretagne family had much to offer Charlot.

Both publicly and privately, Charlot would not betray him.

Beyond interests, Clair admired Charlot as an excellent commander and a good friend—capable, morally upright, and of strong character.

Hmm, morality was a topic for another day.

After seeing Clair off, Charlot returned to Mostar Castle, only to find a message from his diary: Charlot Mecklenburg has obtained temporary dominion over Mostar Castle, fulfilling the conditions for constructing the sixth labyrinth. Mostar Castle will soon be labyrinthified. Please complete eighteen rounds of taxation. During this period, you may not leave this location.

Charlot was slightly surprised. He hadn’t expected the Labyrinth of Agmirlas to present such a condition this time.

Perhaps for those in the Old Continent, this was an extraordinarily challenging task—tax collection had always been a significant headache for feudal rulers.

But for someone familiar with the exploitative taxation of post-feudal societies, Charlot had a completely different perspective on burdensome taxes.

Upon returning to Mostar Castle, Charlot convened all the local nobles of the city to discuss the disposition of the duchy’s estate.

With the deaths of two successive dukes, the nobles of Behemoth Principality, though unwilling to accept it, understood that the principality would likely never see another duke. Everyone coveted the inheritance left behind after the principality’s decline.

The ducal mansion was the most luxurious residence in Mostar Castle. For the nobles who valued opulence and indulgence, nothing represented status more than this mansion.

However, no one had previously had the authority to override the opposition of others.

While Clair Bretagne had the status, he belonged to the Bretagne family and maintained a certain level of decorum. He had refrained from handling the matter directly.

As soon as Clair left, Charlot called the nobles together to discuss the estate, subtly signaling that he was acting “under orders” to handle the duchy’s inheritance.

Although Charlot grew up in the Behemoth Principality, his family was based in Seagull City, the third-largest city in the principality, located by the sea. He had studied in Mostar Castle for a few years, attending Leman Academy and the Behemoth National Academy—both located in the city.

Charlot considered himself relatively familiar with Mostar Castle, but even he hadn’t realized how many nobles lived there. Nobles ranked 37th and above were considered lower-tier, while those ranked 24th and above belonged to the unreachable class. Mostar Castle housed over 500 lower-tier nobles and dozens in the unreachable class.

This was, of course, not all. Some nobles from Mostar Castle had fled to Strasbourg or other places, fearing the war.

Nor did this represent the entirety of the Behemoth Principality—these were only the local nobles of Mostar Castle.

Chapter 228: Rumors from Home

Although Charlot Mecklenburg did not hold the highest office, his command of the West Wind Knight Order and the Silver Dove Militia, combined with his representation of Clair Bretagne, ensured the obedience of Mostar Castle’s local nobles. His reputation, built on a series of decisive victories, played a key role in maintaining their compliance.

Facing the local nobles, Charlot said with a faint smile, “It is unfortunate that Duke Joseph perished in South Seraph. The loss of such an exceptional leader is a loss for all of us.”

“However...”

“Mostar Castle belongs to every citizen of Mostar Castle. The wealth of this city should, by right, be shared by its people.”

This statement struck a subtle but profound chord, brightening the eyes of almost every Mostar Castle native. As expected, Charlot continued, “I have decided to distribute the wealth left behind by the duke equally among everyone.”

The nobles were moved, and some even murmured cheers of agreement.

Still smiling, Charlot added, “However, Mostar Castle is a large city with a population of tens of thousands, perhaps even more. It is impractical to distribute the wealth directly to every individual. That is why I ask you nobles to take on this responsibility.”

This proposal sent shivers down the spines of every noble. They admired Charlot’s brilliance—his words carried the weight of a wise king and resonated deeply with their hearts.

Charlot then subtly shifted his tone and declared, “This endeavor shall be guided by three principles: fairness, fairness, and fairness.”

“Of course, certain assets cannot be divided or shared equally—such as this ducal estate. Therefore, I have a modest proposal: we will hold an auction, starting with the duke’s estate. The proceeds from each sale will then be evenly distributed among all the nobles present.”

“What do you all think?”

The nobles of Mostar Castle erupted in cheers, fully embracing the decision. Enraptured by the allure of immense profit, they set aside all doubts.

Charlot promptly organized the first auction, naming it the Mostar Castle War Tax Fundraising Auction.

Before the auction began, Charlot publicly announced that he would not touch a single coin of the proceeds. Instead, he urged the nobles to select eighteen of their most respected peers to oversee the vast sums of money.

This declaration gave the nobles further peace of mind. The selection of the eighteen guardians was swift, and they brought their private knight orders to safeguard the funds.

The first item up for auction was the duke’s estate, which was highly coveted by the nobles. Many reasoned that the auction funds would be shared among them and thus refused to let anyone secure the estate cheaply. Almost every noble enthusiastically bid, driving the price up.

In the end, the ducal estate sold for an astronomical 63,000 gold écus.

Charlot, who had once mortgaged Silver Dove Castle for several thousand écus to offload his debt onto Baron Febollet, thought of that moment. Back then, he had considered himself ruthless, knowing the Silver Dove Castle baronial residence was far from worth the price. Even in Strasbourg, an estate of similar size might fetch only a few thousand écus. What had Silver Dove Castle done to deserve parity with the capital’s prime properties?

Yet, Charlot had never imagined the duke’s estate would sell for such a staggering sum.

When the first war tax proceeds were collected, the diary immediately sent a message: “Labyrinth progress for Mostar Castle: 1/18.”

As one of the empire's most prominent nobles, the duke naturally owned more than one residence. Charlot put all of them up for sale, auctioning them one by one. For the first time, he experienced the thrill of rapid labyrinth progress.

When he sold an estate in the eastern part of the city, the progress reached 18/18, completing the labyrinthification.

The diary issued another message: "Charlot Mecklenburg has obtained temporary rulership of Mostar Castle and fulfilled the tax collection requirements for establishing the seventh labyrinth. Mostar Castle will now undergo a second labyrinthification. Please complete eighteen rounds of tax collection. During this period, you may not leave the area."

Charlot immediately began auctioning off the dukes' manors, shops, and collections. He quickly completed the second labyrinthification of Mostar Castle, gaining access to three passageways leading to Machubi, Silver Dove Castle, and Cappadocia.

To Charlot's surprise, the diary did not trigger a third labyrinthification. Though he knew the process was highly "random," he still felt some disappointment.

After concluding the "grand auction," Charlot announced that he would leave the remaining matters to the local nobles. To demonstrate his "integrity," he departed Mostar Castle without lingering, taking the West Wind Knight Order and Silver Dove Militia to gather two more knight orders.

The moment Charlot left, Mostar Castle buzzed with activity...

For Charlot, this was just a minor detour. Completing two labyrinthifications was already a substantial gain. As for other benefits...

Well, there was no rush for now.

Three knight orders had fled South Seraph, among which only the Mostar Castle Knight Order remained intact. The other two belonged to barons who, despite surviving, had suffered heavy losses but managed to preserve their lives.

These barons received orders from Strasbourg to support Clair Bretagne in launching another attack on South Seraph. However, neither was willing to gamble what little they had left. Instead, they retreated to their territories and even formed an alliance to resist Clair Bretagne.

What they didn't expect was that Clair Bretagne ignored their pitiful forces entirely. Instead, Charlot led the West Wind Knight Order and the Silver Dove Militia in a mighty march to confront them.

To avoid suspicion, Charlot had left Mostar Castle utterly devoid of his presence, leaving behind no one tied to him.

As they approached their destination, Charlot suggested to Anastasia, "I'll head to Seagull City while you take the Maple Leaf Knight Order to Ode Mountain City."

Anastasia readily agreed, taking the Maple Leaf Knight Order to Ode Mountain City.

Seagull City, the third-largest city in the Behemoth Principality, was Charlot's hometown. It was also where he had left countless "romantic escapades"—from a certain coquettish and alluring baroness, whose maturity and charm made up for her slightly advanced age, to the baroness's lively and spirited daughter...

Besides these, there were plenty of "old acquaintances."

Hmm, such as...

Hmm, such as...

Hmm, and such as...

Charlot worried that Anastasia might overhear some unsavory "rumors" in Seagull City.

As far as he knew, Charlot Mecklenburg had a reputation in his hometown for a rather extensive collection of "rumors."

Chapter 229: A Delightful Dive into the Sea of Words

Charlot Mecklenburg halted outside Seagull City and sent Dubin Alger and Yellow Bear to notify Baron Valentine.

He had no desire to meet the baron and felt a sense of embarrassment even contemplating it.

Charlot hoped the baron would simply hand over the knight order, allowing him to report back to Clair Bretagne and keep matters simple.

After Dubin and Yellow Bear left, they returned half an hour later, both forcibly shaved bald, with a message in tow: "Tell Charlot to wash his ass clean!"

At first, this seemed like a straightforward threat, but Charlot immediately wondered if his affairs with the baroness or the baron's daughter had been exposed.

Upon repeatedly questioning them for details, he confirmed that this was unrelated to Baron Valentine—who was still "completely in the dark." The real culprit behind this outrage was someone else with an explosive temper.

The order to detain Dubin and Yellow Bear and forcibly shave their heads came from Freeman Martin, one of Baron Valentine's knight captains.

This Freeman Martin was not a man known for adhering to codes of chivalry. The moment Dubin and Yellow Bear entered Seagull City, Freeman Martin ordered them surrounded by hundreds of riflemen. Under the threat of so many guns, they had no choice but to submit, suffering the humiliation of being pinned to the ground and shaved bald.

Charlot found this matter quite exasperating.

Freeman Martin was the same man who had once chased a young Charlot Mecklenburg stark naked through the streets of Seagull City. At the time, Freeman Martin had been a mid-ranking officer under the Mostar Castle Knight Order. Unexpectedly, he had returned to his hometown and now served under Baron Valentine.

If Freeman Martin's family hadn't lived in Seagull City, that incident might never have occurred.

Charlot had always been a cautious man in his dealings.

For instance, Baron Valentine remained completely unaware of certain matters.

Dubin and Yellow Bear, however, were furious, considering this a grave humiliation. They strongly demanded Charlot launch an immediate assault on the city.

Even in his most reckless moments, Charlot wouldn't bring war to his hometown, especially since his family—his father, brother, and other relatives—lived there. Besides, Charlot was a man who valued peace. After a few minutes of hesitation, he ordered his men to find a bow and arrow. Although firearms had nearly rendered bows obsolete, many still favored these ancient ranged weapons. Using the bow, he shot a written challenge into Seagull City.

Charlot hoped to resolve the issue through a duel rather than a full-scale war.

Within half an hour of the challenge being delivered, a squad of soldiers stormed out of the city gates. Leading them was a bearded man wielding a rapier, his face a strange ashen hue. Battle energy erupted from his body as he roared hoarsely, "Charlot, you son of a dog, come out and die!"

Charlot hadn't expected the challenge to work so effectively.

What shocked him more was that Freeman Martin had stepped into the ranks of the Transcendent.

If Freeman Martin had possessed such extraordinary strength back then, Charlot might never have escaped Seagull City alive, let alone gone to Strasbourg to attend university. He wouldn't have needed the intervention of the Labyrinth God.

Taking a deep breath, Charlot reminded himself that past mistakes had to be faced eventually. He spurred his horse forward, separating himself from his troops, and said, "Long time no see, Sir Freeman Martin."

The soldiers behind Freeman Martin erupted into laughter.

There was no avoiding it—Charlot's history with Freeman Martin was common knowledge in Seagull City.

The incident was simply too comical.

Even the soldiers of Seagull City didn't take the West Wind Knight Order's presence seriously. No matter how much fame Charlot had gained in the Behemoth Principality, his reputation held no weight in his hometown.

No one believed Charlot would attack Seagull City, where his family lived.

Though Charlot had the thick skin of a transmigrator, he still managed to maintain his composure. Freeman Martin, on the other hand, couldn't keep his cool. He clenched his teeth and charged forward, rapier in hand.

Charlot raised his spear, Berserker Blade, and said, "Let me dismount first!"

To Freeman Martin, this remark felt like an insult. Roaring furiously, he surged forward even faster.

Charlot suddenly remembered that his first meeting with Freeman Martin had been accompanied by a similar remark.

It wasn't intentional; it just slipped out...

He really didn't want to dwell on the past.

Freeman Martin had only broken through to the Transcendent in his middle years after a "certain event" pushed him beyond his limits. However, due to his age, he was stuck as a first-tier knight with no hope of further advancement.

Although anger temporarily doubled Freeman Martin's combat strength, the gap between him and Charlot was vast. Against such a flawed sword technique, Charlot easily suppressed him with the pressure of his knightly lance, sending Freeman Martin sprawling to the ground.

Charlot refrained from using excessive force.

Freeman Martin scrambled back to his feet and launched another furious assault. His swordsmanship was barely at the passing level of the Behemoth National Academy's fencing class, reminiscent of Charlot's skills from their first encounter. But now, Charlot was a seasoned

fighter, skilled in both swordsmanship and spear techniques. While not a close-combat specialist, his ability to handle Freeman Martin's clumsy moves was effortless.

With a single sweeping motion of his lance, Charlot sent Freeman Martin tumbling to the ground again.

After exchanging seventy or eighty moves, Charlot had thrown Freeman Martin dozens of times. Exhausted and cursing, Freeman Martin could no longer continue.

Charlot turned to Freeman Martin's soldiers and shouted, "Well? Aren't you going to help your captain up?"

The soldiers reluctantly stepped forward, lifting Freeman Martin while muttering words of consolation: "It's all in the past, sir. You can't beat him now. Charlot's been to Strasbourg for university—he's the most formidable man in the entire Behemoth Principality..."

Freeman Martin roared, "Formidable, my ass! This is the same coward who ran naked through the streets when I chased him with a rapier!"

Charlot nearly considered ordering his West Wind Knight Order to plug their ears, but it was already too late.

Taking a deep breath, Charlot thought of the quick-response manuscripts Annie had prepared for him. He resolved to write another book, starring Freeman *Simon King* Martin as the protagonist. In the sea of words, Charlot planned to grant this otherwise frustrated man a touch of literary glory.

This new book would be penned under the pseudonym "Angry Banana" and published exclusively in Behemoth, without Annie knowing.

Unbeknownst to Freeman Martin, he was about to become a literary legend, immortalized across the New and Old Continents, a cultural icon of the Fars Empire. For now, though, he left cursing, propped up by his soldiers, as he retreated to Seagull City.

Chapter 230: Your Reputation Was Never Good

That day, Charlot Mecklenburg camped outside the city, unwilling to return to his hometown.

By evening, his older brother, Mycroft Mecklenburg, arrived. After the Grand Duchess Josephine was killed by Hughes, her head taken as a trophy, no one cared about the Mecklenburg family anymore. Charlot's father took the entire family and returned to Seagull City.

When Mycroft saw his younger brother, his emotions were deeply conflicted.

The last time they met, Charlot had appeared somewhat glamorous but precarious, as the South Seraph restorationists led by Lady Nancella were still camped outside the city. No one knew what the next day would bring. But this time, Mycroft already knew his younger brother had risen in rank again, even gaining the title of diplomat. Charlot had undertaken a mission to the Ingrima Empire, reportedly earning the emperor's favor and even being offered a post there.

Charlot's position in Strasbourg wasn't high enough to make the newspapers, but in Seagull City, he was a hot topic. Stories about him had always circulated in his hometown, and recent events provided plenty of new material.

If Charlot had returned home or even read a few Seagull City newspapers, he wouldn't still be clinging to any illusions.

Mycroft, adopting a slightly deferential tone, said, "I've come on Baron Valentine's orders to ask you to withdraw your troops."

"This is your hometown, after all. Must you bring war to this place?"

"Your reputation was never good to begin with..."

Charlot interrupted his brother, saying, "I am here under the orders of His Majesty Emperor Julius VI to take the Seagull City Knight Order. Do you think Baron Valentine's commands can compare to those of Emperor Julius VI?"

"Brother, I don't want to bring war to our hometown either. But the only way to avoid it is for Baron Valentine to follow Strasbourg's orders and surrender the Knight Order."

"I am not Lady Nancella. Treating me as an enemy is unnecessary."

"And..."

"Dear brother, stop bringing up the past."

"I am not asking as your younger brother but as Charlot Mecklenburg, Head Overseer of the Lukavaro District City Patrol, Commander of the West Wind Knight Order, Director of the Lukavaro District Administrative Bureau, Special Envoy and Plenipotentiary War Commissioner of the Fars Empire to the Ingrima Empire, and Chief Clerk of the twenty-seventh rank, third class."

"Additionally, I remind you in my capacity as Charlot Mecklenburg, First-Class Counselor of the twenty-fourth rank and Red Dragon Palace Archivist in the Ingrima Empire."

"Do not bring up the past again."

"I don't want our brotherly bond to be fractured because of it."

Mycroft's expression darkened slightly, and he said quietly, "I understand."

Charlot spoke gently, "Go and tell Baron Valentine that I am not his enemy, nor am I here to attack Seagull City. I am simply following orders to transfer his Knight Order."

"This command comes from His Majesty Emperor Julius VI. It is not something a baron can defy, nor something I, a mere third-class clerk, can overlook."

Mycroft, finding himself with nothing to say, requested to leave. Charlot, however, insisted on keeping him for dinner, presenting him with gifts brought back from Britain to pass on to the family.

Charlot Mecklenburg was a wanderer at heart, lacking much affection for his family. Since arriving in Strasbourg, his letters to his family contained only one consistent theme: requests for money.

When Mycroft cut off his financial support, Charlot stopped writing altogether.

"Huang Haisheng," although a better person than Charlot, had no real affection for the Mecklenburg family either. Thus, Charlot had no plans to support the Mecklenburg family significantly. Keeping them in Seagull City with occasional financial aid was sufficient.

However, Mycroft's children—his nephews and niece—might be worth cultivating. If a few could become university graduates or even achieve extraordinary abilities, it would greatly benefit Charlot.

Mycroft had three children, two sons and a daughter. Charlot's gifts for them included three rapiers from the Ingrima Empire, each worth at least six or seven flor. While their quality might not surpass those from the Fars Empire, their exotic designs made them more appealing.

Since Mycroft had come on foot, Charlot used the abundance of gifts as an excuse to give him a carriage, telling him it need not be returned and could be kept for family use.

The Mecklenburg family, being merchants, had a real need for carriages to transport goods and accommodate their large household. Neither Charlot's father nor Mycroft had previously been willing to spend on such luxuries. Charlot had given one carriage before, and with this second, the family's needs would likely be met.

Feeling conflicted, Mycroft returned to Seagull City with the carriage and gifts.

After seeing his brother off, Charlot, as usual, sent Dubin Alger and others out to patrol the area. This precaution, a habit carried over from his transmigration, had proven useful in detecting surprise attacks.

Although he believed there would be no enemies in Seagull City, Charlot maintained this habit. Breaking it would be foolish in his view.

He didn't expect, however, that less than an hour after Mycroft's departure, Dubin rushed back, reporting, "A force has left Seagull City and is heading toward us. They'll likely attack in less than an hour."

Charlot was slightly surprised and asked, "Seagull City has only a few hundred soldiers. Do they really dare attack the West Wind Knight Order?"

Dubin shrugged. "Maybe Baron Valentine thinks he's a military genius?"

Charlot was speechless. He immediately issued several orders, pulling back half of the Knight Order to set up an ambush near the camp. Before long, a force of several hundred knights appeared outside their camp.

Baron Valentine led the charge, his face full of excitement as he whispered, "Charlot is a coward. Everyone in Seagull City knows what kind of person he is. I'll shatter his myth and expose the so-called 'Behemoth's strongest knight' as a fraud."

"If we win this battle, every soldier will receive a centime!"

From a distance, Charlot overheard these words. Unable to contain himself, he shouted a command. Torches flared, lighting up the camp, and he raised *Blood Glory*, roaring, "Anyone who surrenders on the spot will receive twenty centimes! Whoever captures Baron Valentine alive will be rewarded with one hundred gold écus!"

Competing with money?

Charlot Mecklenburg feared no mere baron.

Chapter 231: Everyone's Past Has More Than One Side

Charlot Mecklenburg, though a layman in military matters, understood the importance of proper equipment. Under his leadership, every member of the West Wind Knight Order was outfitted with a rifle, a rapier, and a dagger. Some soldiers used a combination of long rifles and pistols, as those skilled in wielding the Knight's Lance found rifles cumbersome and instead opted for weapons like the Magnum Mauler.

At his command, Baron Valentine and his men were met with a forest of black gun barrels. Those who dared resist were instantly riddled with bullets, their bodies turned into sieves.

The Valentine Knight Order, essentially Seagull City's local garrison, lacked proper discipline and training. Though the baron held the title to raise a knight order, he had been unwilling to bear the expense, leaving his forces poorly maintained. Furthermore, a crushing defeat in South Seraph had already broken their morale.

Faced with an "enemy ambush," many soldiers immediately panicked, dropped their weapons, and fled. These deserters were quickly captured by the soldiers of the West Wind Knight Order, restrained and pressed to the ground.

Charlot, true to his word, publicly awarded twenty centimes to every surrendering soldier. The disarmed members of the Valentine Knight Order, after receiving their coins, were searched thoroughly, and all possessions beyond the awarded twenty centimes were confiscated.

Charlot never shortchanged his own men. As a result, the West Wind Knight Order developed a custom of claiming small spoils of war for themselves, a practice widely accepted from top to bottom within the unit.

The surrender snowballed as more Valentine soldiers, oblivious to their comrades' fates, followed suit.

Baron Valentine was no renowned general. He had dared to launch an attack only because he had heard unsavory rumors about Charlot, whom he regarded with contempt. Now, cornered and overwhelmed, he hesitated, unsure whether to surrender.

While the baron wavered, a tall, slender youth made a subtle hand signal. Seven or eight companions surged forward, pinning Baron Valentine to the ground. The baron screamed in terror, "Don't kill me! Don't kill me! I'm a baron of the Empire, a high noble..."

Some eyes turned greedily toward the baron, hoping to claim the one-hundred-gold-écu bounty on him. However, the slender youth drew a pistol from his belt, and his companions followed suit, their actions intimidating any would-be challengers.

Keeping the baron subdued, the youth approached Charlot, weapon still in hand.

Charlot smiled as he prepared to issue the reward but froze when he saw the youth's face. A memory from Charlot Mecklenburg's past surfaced, and he couldn't help but exclaim, "Are you Yan?"

The youth coldly replied, "I'm not."

Charlot, visibly stirred, quickly suppressed his emotions and smiled again. "I must have been mistaken."

He gestured for Gwen the Dappled Stag and Bancroft the Gale Wolf to take Baron Valentine away and personally led the group of seven or eight youths to a more private spot.

Charlot beckoned the tall youth, who hesitated before following him to the secluded area.

Charlot tried to suppress his turbulent memories but failed. These recollections held too much significance for Charlot Mecklenburg—they were engraved into his very soul. Finally, with a helpless sigh, he asked, “Yan, how have you been?”

The youth’s name was Yan Melianne. His elder sister had been Charlot Mecklenburg’s first love.

The two families had lived close to one another. Charlot and Talia Melianne, being of similar age, often played together as children. When Charlot was seventeen, Talia fell gravely ill and passed away.

Even with modern medical knowledge, the illness was incurable.

Yan Melianne had once been Charlot’s shadow, trailing him everywhere. But after Talia’s death and the subsequent ruination of Charlot’s reputation, the two lost contact.

“I’ve been fine,” Yan replied indifferently.

Charlot felt a wave of melancholy but could do nothing. He sighed again and said, “Now that I’m back, I’d like to visit your sister’s grave.”

Yan’s eyes briefly sharpened before softening. He replied, “It’s on the hill outside Seagull City, near the temple of the Dark Lady. You already know the place.”

Charlot sighed. The temples of the Nine Orthodox Gods often doubled as cemeteries. It was part of their divine duties. However, the temple of the Dark Lady outside the city was in ruins, maintained only by an elderly priest. The other clergy had moved to the city’s newer temple, leaving the old site a burial ground for the impoverished.

Charlot wanted to say more but found himself at a loss for words. Instead, he handed Yan his reward and said, “Don’t stay in Seagull City. I’m not going to kill Valentine, and he’ll remain the local lord. That man is petty and vindictive—he will seek revenge.”

Yan sneered, “We’re not afraid of him.”

After a pause, he added, “We were already planning to leave the area.”

Charlot glanced at Yan’s companions, a group of spirited young men, and asked, “Have you joined a local gang?”

Yan shook his head, a hint of pride in his voice. “I’ve founded my own.”

Charlot considered warning Yan that gang life held no future, but the grim realities of the Old Continent silenced him. For commoners, other careers offered little hope either.

With a casual wave, Yan led his group away. Charlot did not stop him.

In Charlot Mecklenburg's memories, Talia Melianne had not been a particularly beautiful girl. Her personality was far from gentle—she was a tomboy, mischievously roaming the streets like a boy.

Together, Charlot and Talia had shared countless adventures, from wandering aimlessly to catching birds, playing pranks, doing odd jobs, and exchanging small gifts.

Charlot even had the sense that if Talia had survived, he might have led a completely different life. Perhaps he would have become a devoted family man like his brother, working diligently to support his family. Maybe he would have found a decent job in Strasbourg, brought Talia there, and built a modest but happy life.

Although Sylvie Martin had been Charlot's fiancée, Talia Melianne had been his childhood sweetheart.

Charlot pressed his fingers against his eyes, feeling a dampness there. Though he was an eighth-ranked Transcendent, he could not stop his body from trembling slightly.

He knew.

Though the soul inhabiting his body had departed, taken by an evil god, the physical vessel could not help but mourn.

Everyone has a past. And no one's past is one-sided. Life is complicated.

Chapter 232: Frontline Intelligence

Baron Valentine was brought in, his face blank with shock. He was indeed frightened, unsure of how Charlot Mecklenburg would deal with him. Initially, he had thought that Charlot, infamous in Seagull City, was a far less reputable figure than himself. Surely, Charlot couldn't be that impressive; most of the rumors were likely exaggerated. After all, he had seen Lady Nancella before, and the South Seraph restorationists were terrifyingly fierce—Behemoth's knight orders couldn't even compete with them.

However, once he was captured and observed the West Wind Knight Order under Charlot's command, he realized they were entirely unlike his own troops.

The West Wind Knight Order, though initially chaotic, had transformed after several victorious battles. The morale was high, training was rigorous, and the soldiers were well-compensated. Naturally, order emerged from the initial disorder.

Gradually, Baron Valentine became more and more afraid. He shouted several times, hoping to attract attention, but a soldier from the West Wind Knight Order promptly gagged him with a filthy rag, leaving him to mumble helplessly.

Within Charlot's West Wind Knight Order, there were quite a few members with a background in criminal gangs, and they showed little respect for nobility.

After a long pause, Charlot calmed his emotions and ordered for Baron Valentine to be brought in. His feelings upon seeing the baron were complex, entirely different from the emotions stirred earlier when he encountered Yan Melianne and was reminded of Talia Melianne.

If Talia Melianne represented the brightest chapter in Charlot Mecklenburg's life, then Baron Valentine stood for its darkest moments.

Charlot did not intend to kill Baron Valentine. Instead, he smiled faintly and said, "By imperial law, I can demand a ransom."

Baron Valentine, overjoyed, exclaimed, "I can pay a ransom! Just let me leave alive—I'll pay any amount!"

Charlot pondered briefly before replying, "Then let's settle on ten thousand écus."

Baron Valentine's soul nearly quivered with pain. He pleaded, "Could it be less? Say, a hundred écus?"

Charlot's smile widened as he said, "Nine thousand nine hundred écus will also suffice."

Baron Valentine, embarrassed, muttered, "I meant to offer you one hundred écus."

Charlot chuckled, showing no anger. He unsheathed his rapier and traced dozens of shallow cuts across the baron's body. "I've divided you into eighty-one parts and labeled the price on each. If there's a piece you don't care to reclaim, feel free to negotiate."

He left Baron Valentine to ponder his predicament.

Though Charlot Mecklenburg might have owed this baron some recompense in the past, the guilt carried over from his predecessor wasn't worth much in Huang Haisheng's eyes.

It wasn't his doing, after all.

Baron Valentine's hundreds of men were all captured, and Charlot wasted no time in organizing them into a temporary unit under Dubin Alger's command.

Charlot had no intention of incorporating these men into the West Wind Knight Order. First, as people of Seagull City, they were unlikely to willingly leave their homeland. Second, it would be hard to justify this to Clair Bretagne.

Among the hundreds of prisoners, there was an old acquaintance—Freeman Martin.

Charlot had no intention of keeping him around. He specifically ordered Freeman Martin's release, appointing him as Baron Valentine's representative to negotiate ransom terms with the baron's wife.

Freeman Martin, though grumpy, had no choice. After hours of discussion with the baron, he returned to Seagull City.

The next afternoon, Freeman Martin came back with news: the baroness herself intended to negotiate in person.

Without hesitation, Charlot left Baron Valentine behind and set off with his knight order. If given the choice, he would prefer to leave the past behind.

...

On the way, Charlot encountered Anastasia, who had already dealt with the knight order of Odenhire. Following Charlot's strong suggestion, they did not return to Mostar Castle but headed instead to Silver Dove Castle.

At Silver Dove Castle, Charlot was met with an overwhelming welcome. The streets were crowded with people, all eager to greet him.

During his brief time managing Silver Dove Castle, Charlot had brought tangible benefits to every resident. After Clair Bretagne's tax levy, Charlot had even returned to provide compensation for everyone.

To the people of Silver Dove Castle, Charlot was a kind of lord they had never encountered before.

Even though Charlot didn't officially hold the title of a lord.

Anastasia, too, was fond of the city where she had been born and raised. She was especially comforted to see her mother's remains transported to Silver Dove Castle during these days.

After agreeing to Anastasia's request, Charlot wrote a letter to Hughes. Though he held little hope, he was surprised when Hughes not only approved the request but also sent men to deliver the coffin back to Silver Dove Castle.

This incident revealed to Charlot the extent of Hughes' influence over the South Seraph. Despite being in Ferranden, Hughes could still command the South Seraph restorationists to carry out tasks on his behalf.

In truth, Charlot's letter was also a way of currying favor with Hughes.

With his wisdom, Hughes surely understood Charlot's role in Behemoth. This was all part of the Fars Empire's plans, and Charlot was merely going with the flow, giving Hughes the opportunity to take preemptive action. It was a mutually beneficial arrangement for Charlot, Hughes, the Empire, and everyone else—except, perhaps, for Byron.

...

Anastasia found a quiet and historic temple to house her mother's remains. Once the matter was settled, she felt a profound sense of relief, as if a great burden had been lifted.

Anastasia had long carried a mountain of guilt, always feeling that her very existence was a mistake.

As a child, she had known that her mother, who "endured humiliation," was a spy for Lady Nancella. At the time, Anastasia was lost and unsure whether she should side with her father or her mother. In the end, her mother's painstakingly gathered intelligence was handed over to Lady Nancella, only for her mother to be tortured to death by the same woman.

Anastasia knew she should hate certain people, but she couldn't decide whether to embrace Behemoth or pledge loyalty to the South Seraph.

It wasn't until she met Charlot and came to deeply believe in his ideals that she found clarity. She was a Farsian—a true Farsian. She had her own homeland, her own friends, and one day, she would have her own family.

...

At Silver Dove Castle, Charlot quickly received intelligence from the frontlines. Clair Bretagne, the most brilliant of Fars' younger generation, had already conquered seventy percent of South Seraph's territory, taking seven or eight cities.

Only two cities continued to resist.

In a letter to Charlot, Clair Bretagne mentioned the need to requisition grain and supplies from the rear. The military urgently required provisions, as did the South Seraph people living under occupation.

Charlot read the letter and fell into a quiet contemplation. The amount of resources Clair Bretagne demanded was staggering...

Chapter 233: Days in Silver Dove Castle

Yan Melianne sat quietly before the temple of the Lady of the Black Moon. He had waited for over ten days, but Charlot never came...

The young man clenched his fists in anger and muttered under his breath, "I will go to Strasbourg to find you."

Yan turned and descended the mountain. Behind him, a dozen youths of similar age, carrying their packs and looking ready for a long journey, followed closely. In each of their hearts, a single thought floated: "Yan and his sister must truly share a deep bond."

Charlot had no idea that someone had once waited for him for a long time outside the small mountain temple dedicated to the Lady of the Black Moon near Seagull City. Nor did he consider visiting Thalia Melianne. Instead, he deliberately chose to "forget."

That belonged to Charlot Mecklenburg's past, not his...

Charlot was now preoccupied with securing supplies. He had no intention of burdening the common people but also knew he could not openly target the nobles, as that would provoke the wrath of the empire's aristocracy. So, he adopted a different approach—selling spoils of war.

He marked up the map of the South Seraph region with prices and, under the name of Clair Bretagne, offered it to the nobles of the Behemoth Principality.

To his surprise, the strategy worked remarkably well. The Behemoth nobles eagerly purchased the spoils, allowing him to quickly amass the first batch of supplies—an amount far exceeding what Clair Bretagne had initially requested.

Charlot transported the requested materials to the front lines and sent the surplus to Machubi.

When this batch of supplies arrived at the front, both Clair Bretagne and Ebner Soumet were astonished. They had never expected Charlot to procure the entire requested amount. Both of them had assumed that achieving even thirty percent of the goal would be an extraordinary accomplishment.

Seeing the full delivery, they worried Charlot might have been too ruthless, stirring up public resentment. Clair Bretagne even summoned Gwen the Dappled Stag and Bancroft the Swift Wolf, who had escorted the supplies, for a detailed inquiry. The two explained the sale of "South Seraph spoils" in full.

Clair and Ebner both concluded that Charlot was a genius!
To think of such a clever scheme...

Initially, Clair Bretagne considered bringing Charlot to the front lines. However, given the smooth progress of the campaign—South Seraph had nearly no resistance—and the urgent need for Charlot to ensure the flow of supplies in the rear, he changed his mind and sent a letter to Strasbourg instead.

While Charlot was enthusiastically selling off South Seraph lands, a team arrived from Strasbourg. They had only one task: to announce Charlot's new administrative appointment. He was now the provisional steward of Mostar Castle, Bybury City, Seagull City, Silver Dove Castle, and Mount Ode City!

After delivering the announcement, the team hurriedly left.

As a steward, one could serve as a city lord's deputy or even a city administrator if the city had no lord. A steward of the highest level, such as a Level-27 Grade-3 steward like Charlot, could directly serve as the chief official of a city. Holding provisional stewardship of five cities simultaneously, however, was an unprecedented concentration of authority.

Mostar Castle, Bybury City, Seagull City, Silver Dove Castle, and Mount Ode City were the five largest cities in the Behemoth Principality, comprising over seventy percent of its wealth.

Receiving the appointment letter, Charlot pondered for a long time before writing a letter to Clair Bretagne.

Why had this sudden appointment occurred?

There was only one explanation—Clair Bretagne had lent a small hand in the matter.

Charlot did not express his gratitude explicitly. Instead, he mentioned the appointment and subtly noted at the end that he could only supply such a massive quantity of materials one more time within three months.

After sending the letter, Charlot had no intention of inspecting the cities under his jurisdiction. After all, he was merely their provisional steward and saw no need to flaunt his authority.

Nevertheless, he could not remain idle. The "bomb" in Mostar Castle had already exploded. Accusations flew among the nobles, each suspecting others of embezzling funds meant for the collective. Every audit revealed minor discrepancies in the vast sum, and this had already led to several bloody duels.

The nobles of Mostar Castle incessantly sent letters and messengers pleading for Charlot to intervene. However, Charlot had no desire to get involved. What did their troubles have to do with him?

He stayed comfortably in Silver Dove Castle.

Standing atop the city walls, he was ceaselessly praised by passing residents of Silver Dove Castle, their flattery so overwhelming it felt intoxicating. Go to Mostar Castle? What a joke! After refusing countless requests, Charlot, fed up, took dozens of people on a hunting trip outside the city.

Hunting proved to be an expensive pastime. As someone from a merchant family of common birth, Charlot had never been able to afford such luxury. However, as the steward of five cities, he now had the means to indulge in such recreational activities.

With Gwen the Dappled Stag and Bancroft the Swift Wolf overseeing the materials in South Seraph, and Dolores and Belisa stationed in Machubi, Charlot was left with only Dubin, Yellow Bear, and Anastasia by his side.

Dozens of riders galloped on warhorses across the plains outside Silver Dove Castle. With the wind brushing against his face, Charlot finally felt a hint of freedom. Suddenly, he spotted a group of wild boars running by. Drawing his Magnum Mauler, he fired three shots, taking down a young boar.

For such a hunt, ordinary firearms were used instead of extraordinary ones. Shooting at a moving target while riding a fast horse—achieving this result left Charlot satisfied.

Anastasia also drew her pistol and fired, but her marksmanship was lacking. After emptying her magazine without hitting a single boar, the frustrated young woman hurled her rapier, pinning a fleeing boar to the ground.

Charlot smiled faintly and remarked, “Anastasia, your shooting skills need improvement.”

“Want me to lend you the Mask of the Cat so you can practice?”

Charlot had previously lent the Mask of the Cat to Belisa. Fully aware of its supernatural properties, Anastasia hesitated before replying, “Lend it to me for a few days.”

Charlot handed over the Mask of the Cat, but a faint sense of foreboding prickled his mind. Quickly activating his Eye of Insight, he spotted a man clad in animal hides, with pointed ears atop his head, aiming an ordinary rifle at him from several hundred meters away.

Charlot unsheathed his Unicorn Griffon and slashed the incoming bullet out of the air, shouting, “Assassin!”

Leaping from his saddle, he activated Swiftstep Technique twice in rapid succession and used the Spider Technique, moving faster than any horse. Charlot had not been targeted by assassins in a long time, and he refused to let this one escape.

The assassin’s features reminded Charlot of an old “case.” After all, he still had a bounty issued by the Orc Assassin Alliance on his head.

Chapter 234: The Horse King Clan, Fleet as the Wind

Frederica had promised to extend the duration of the third assassination attempt. Charlot believed she had done everything within her power.

Thus, facing this orc assassin, Charlot was neither panicked nor enraged. He was no longer the low-ranking Transcendent of his past.

As Charlot charged forward, the orc assassin showed no sign of distress. He fired eighteen shots in rapid succession. His marksmanship surpassed even that of Aubrey Tildon Atwood. While Charlot managed to slice through the incoming bullets, each shot felt increasingly challenging, with sharper and more unpredictable trajectories.

When the eighteenth bullet came, Charlot had just deflected the seventeenth. His body twisted slightly, making it impossible to intercept the incoming round with his blade. Fortunately, Charlot was not someone who relied solely on swordsmanship. A Flame Dragon's Hand emerged from his palm, crushing the bullet mid-air. At the same time, he closed the distance to the orc assassin.

The orc assassin calmly slung his rifle over his shoulder and drew a long-handled flanged mace. With a steady stance, he held it horizontally to block Charlot's approach.

Charlot's Unicorn Griffon thrust forward as the two exchanged a flurry of moves. Charlot was surprised by the intricacy of his opponent's mace techniques.

Having briefly trained in the Bearman Shield Hammer Technique, Charlot was familiar with the general style of orc martial arts. Orcs relied on their robust physiques and typically wielded heavy weapons. However, their techniques were far from crude. Instead, they used these heavy implements with remarkable dexterity, giving them an air of precision and agility.

This orc assassin, though only a mid-ranking Transcendent, demonstrated a mastery far beyond any orc assassin Charlot had encountered before. His skill even surpassed that of the three Redback Bear warriors under Charlot's command.

The orc's mace technique exuded an air of calm tranquility. Every swing seemed to place the weapon in the perfect position, inviting Charlot's rapier to strike uselessly against it.

Due to the mace's superior weight and the orc's immense strength, Charlot's Vampiric Rapier couldn't gain an advantage over his opponent's weapon.

The orc assassin was not young. His face bore the marks of age, and his disproportionately long, tattered ears gave him an unkempt appearance that was neither endearing nor intimidating—just filthy and repulsive.

Charlot took a deep breath and unleashed a rapid series of sword strikes. The clashing of their weapons produced a steady rhythm of crisp metallic sounds. The orc assassin appeared to

handle the assault effortlessly, but a glint of admiration began to surface on his face. Suddenly, he let out a thunderous shout, his mace erupting in a flourish of hammer art that forced Charlot to retreat several steps.

Before Charlot could recover, the orc assassin spoke for the first time, his hoarse voice laden with grit: "Charlot! The army of the Southern Orc Tribes is about to march through here and invade Strasbourg."

"Consider your head a loan for now!"

"When I march with the army, leveling every city along the way, I'll make sure to kill you as well."

Charlot was startled and shouted back, "The Southern Orc Tribes' army?"

The orc assassin pressed his hand against his chest in a brief salute before turning and departing at astonishing speed. Charlot quickly assessed the situation and knew he couldn't give chase. He drew a Silver Rhino and fired three shots in quick succession, but the orc assassin evaded them effortlessly.

By the time Anastasia, Dubin, and Yellow Bear caught up, the orc assassin had already vanished.

Anastasia, looking alarmed, exclaimed, "That was from the Horse King Clan!"

"His movement technique is Fleet as the Wind!"

Charlot had heard of the Horse King Clan before. This peculiar orc tribe progressed through Transcendent ranks at an unusually slow pace but focused heavily on cultivating extraordinary abilities. Consequently, their combat strength couldn't be measured by rank alone.

However, mastering extraordinary abilities was significantly harder than advancing in Transcendent ranks. As a result, most of the Horse King Clan's experts were middle-aged or older. Their elite warriors were often seasoned veterans, their skills honed to perfection through decades of experience, exhibiting a mastery that was deceptively simple yet profound.

While Fleet as the Wind might not be faster than The Leopard's Hunt, this orc assassin clearly surpassed any others Charlot had faced in terms of extraordinary ability.

Charlot's expression darkened. This Horse King Clan assassin was likely over forty or fifty years old, having cultivated for at least three decades longer than him. Though his Transcendent rank was not high, his strength was undeniably formidable.

Until now, Charlot had never encountered such an elderly Transcendent.

These seasoned veterans, refined by the passage of time, were truly troublesome foes.

But what concerned Charlot more was the prospect of an invasion by the Southern Orc Tribes. His four knight orders would stand no chance against such a force.

The West Wind Knight Order had only deployed 2,000 knights, and Anastasia's Silver Dove Militia had even fewer members, with significantly weaker combat strength. The other two knight orders barely exceeded 1,000 men combined, and they were inferior even to the Silver Dove Militia.

Not only would Charlot fail to withstand the assault, but even Clair Bretagne couldn't mount a sufficient defense. Among Clair's forces, one knight order had already been decimated and reassembled, while the other was freshly formed. The remnants of the Mostar Castle Knight Order, split into three factions, were even weaker.

Charlot's mind raced with questions: "What should I do?"

"Die for the nation? Or flee?"

"And where could I flee? The orc army will undoubtedly march on Strasbourg. Even if I retreat to Strasbourg, it would be futile."

"Strasbourg now only has the Royal Knight Order..."

"Or perhaps I'm overthinking this. While Strasbourg's regular army may be insufficient, it's bound to have high-ranking Transcendents, maybe even Saint-rank warriors."

After weighing his options, Charlot decided to send intelligence reports to Strasbourg and Clair Bretagne. As for how to confront the orc alliance, he resolved to deal with it when the time came.

Hunting no longer interested Charlot. He returned to Silver Dove Castle with Anastasia, Dubin, and Yellow Bear.

The next morning, Dubin rushed in with an urgent report: "The orc army outside... it's like they sprang from the ground. They've completely surrounded us!"

Charlot gathered his weapons and followed Dubin to the battlements. His gaze hardened. Charlot had fought in several battles, but he had never seen such a massive force. The orc army encircling Silver Dove Castle numbered in the tens of thousands, sealing off the city entirely.

After surveying the enemy forces, Charlot noted a lack of Saint-rank warriors and let out a small sigh of relief.

"Fine. Let's continue labyrinth-izing Silver Dove Castle."

Patting the diary hidden in his coat, Charlot decisively activated the labyrinth defenses.

Shortly after surrounding Silver Dove Castle, the orc army launched their first assault.

Charlot's experience in defensive warfare, honed during his battles against Lady Nancella's restorationists, enabled him to command the West Wind Knight Order in repelling this initial probing attack with ease.

The orc army retreated, leaving behind over a dozen corpses. Yet, within half an hour, they launched a second attack, this time deploying a hundred Redback Bear warriors.

Chapter 235: War Is the Most Efficient Way to Cultivate

The Redback Bear Warriors were tall and powerfully built, among the strongest types of orcs.

Charlot Mecklenburg had eighteen of these warriors under his command, so he was well aware of their prowess. Without hesitation, he pulled out his Anti-Space Long-Range Rifle, aimed at one of the Redback Bear Warriors, and pulled the trigger.

Although the Redback Bear Warrior was a mid-tier Transcendent, it couldn't withstand the force of the Anti-magic Armor-Piercing Rounds and was blown apart by a single shot.

Charlot swiftly turned his rifle on a second Redback Bear Warrior. This one raised its warhammer in an attempt to block, but the armor-piercing rounds penetrated easily.

Without a top-tier weapon wielded by a master combatant, even high-tier warriors struggled to withstand the power of these rounds.

By the time Charlot had taken down his fifth Redback Bear Warrior, the orcs' strongest fighters had already breached the walls of Silver Dove Castle, storming the battlements.

Charlot stowed his rifle and drew his Berserker Blade. Gripping it with both hands, he channeled his energy and dispatched two more of the bear warriors in quick succession.

When using the armor-piercing rounds, Charlot targeted only mid-tier Transcendents, maximizing the value of the expensive ammunition. But with his Berserker Blade, he focused on ordinary Redback Bear Warriors, conserving his energy.

This strategy ensured that his combat efficiency was maximized.

Even though these ordinary warriors lacked Transcendent powers, their sheer strength made them as deadly as their extraordinary counterparts when slaughtering regular soldiers.

As Charlot fought, his subordinates also joined the fray.

The presence of eighteen Redback Bear Warriors among the attackers caused unrest within the orc forces. They shouted loudly to their comrades, but these transformed Labyrinth Guardians no longer recognized their former kin.

The battle, while intense, lasted only a few dozen minutes before the Redback Bear Warriors retreated, leaping down from the walls.

Charlot moved quickly, incapacitating the injured warriors who remained on the battlements. He used his spear to deliver heavy blows, leaving them either gravely injured or unconscious.

At this point, he didn't have the luxury of being merciful. All he could do was wait for Silver Dove Castle to complete its third labyrinth transformation and claim another batch of Labyrinth Guardians.

The orc army's attacks were relentless, wave after wave, giving the defending West Wind Knight Order no time to rest. By nightfall, Charlot's hands were so exhausted that he could barely hold his spear. But he had finally endured long enough for Silver Dove Castle's third transformation to complete.

Charlot pressed his hand to the ground, initiating the transformation of all captives into Labyrinth Guardians.

Over a hundred orc warriors, who had infiltrated Silver Dove Castle but hadn't perished in battle, rose shakily to their feet. One by one, they howled toward the sky, emanating an eerie aura.

While this bolstered the castle's defenses, Charlot remained uncertain about its fate. The orc army outside was simply too vast.

He couldn't understand why the orcs continued to attack piecemeal instead of launching a full-scale assault. If tens of thousands of orcs attacked at once, even a labyrinth-transformed Silver Dove Castle couldn't hold out for long—it would have fallen by noon.

Charlot silently activated Blood Glory, channeling the sinister energy through his Blood Vortex to restore his stamina and energy reserves.

As the Blood Glory energy transformed into Stardust Battle Energy, a bottleneck in his cultivation loosened. With a slight push, the energy broke through, elevating him to the next tier.

Charlot took a deep breath, thinking to himself, "War truly is the most efficient way to cultivate, though it's far too dangerous—life and death are on the line at every moment."

Having reached the ninth tier of Transcendence, Charlot grasped his Berserker Blade once more and shouted, "Victory is ours! Silver Dove Castle will prevail!"

His declaration was met with resounding cheers from not only his West Wind Knight Order but also Anastasia's Silver Dove Militia, the other knight orders, and the castle's militia. Charlot's reputation in Silver Dove Castle was unparalleled. He had led them to countless victories against the South Seraph restorationists, even slaying their leader Jonan. Compared to the fleeing Baron Febollet, Charlot was the true lord in the hearts of the people.

Pointing toward the horizon, Charlot proclaimed, "Tomorrow, we will drive the orc army away and restore peace to Silver Dove Castle!"

The residents erupted in even louder cheers.

Of course, Charlot couldn't guarantee they would repel the orc army the next day. But he could evacuate the residents to Machubi Fortress Labyrinth, leaving behind an empty castle for the orcs to capture.

After a day of brutal combat, Charlot wasn't confident in holding off the orcs' all-out assault. The South Seraph restorationists had never commanded forces of this magnitude, nor did they field so many Transcendents.

The triple-labyrinth-transformed Silver Dove Castle was sufficient to ensure the residents' evacuation while inflicting some losses on the invading army.

Charlot quietly considered his next move. He had no one to consult. Neither the West Wind Knight Order nor the Silver Dove Militia had anyone proficient in strategy. Discussing tactics with Dubin, Yellow Bear, or Anastasia would be futile.

The burden of leadership fell entirely on Charlot.

He waited patiently through the night. At dawn, the orc army resumed their siege.

This time, Charlot avoided holding the battlements and instead lured the orcs into the castle, using the labyrinth's defenses to repel attack after attack.

By afternoon, Charlot had repelled the orc forces twenty-one times. Then, a cheer arose from the defenders.

"Look! The orcs are retreating!" someone shouted.

Charlot peered into the distance and saw banners from several orc clans moving toward Mostar Castle. He exhaled a sigh of relief. Whatever their reasons, the orc army retreating was good enough for him.

At that moment, as Charlot's guard dropped, a spiked hammer flew toward his head.

Reacting instantly, Charlot deflected the hammer with his Berserker Blade. His spear clashed against the weapon, neither side gaining an advantage. With lightning speed, Charlot counterattacked, unleashing twenty-eight consecutive strikes.

The orc assassin, confident in the perfect timing of his ambush, was caught completely off guard by Charlot's swift reaction and relentless strikes.

Despite having spent two or three decades honing his skills to perfection, the assassin lacked the natural talent of warriors like Charlot, Hughes, or Ban Lamorak. His strength, built painstakingly over time, had reached its peak long ago. Without innate brilliance, there was no room for further growth.

Chapter 236: Summoning the Great Winds

In a short time, Charlot Mecklenburg had advanced by another rank, and the enhancement in his abilities brought about a transformation akin to a rebirth.

The two sides exchanged over a dozen moves, during which Charlot executed the 77 Movements of Heaven's Wing flawlessly, fully showcasing the speed and precision of the Arsilo Family's swift spear techniques.

The orc assassin, realizing after his initial failed attack that the assassination was now impossible, flipped off the city wall and shouted, "Though I can't kill you myself, dying under the combined might of three Saint rank shamans should be enough of an honor!"

Charlot's heart sank as he exclaimed, "Three Saint ranks?"

The orc assassin did not reply. Instead, he used the Swiftstep Technique, disappearing in a flash and rejoining the Southern Orc Tribes army.

As the residents of Silver Dove Castle cheered fervently, three figures ascended into the air. Soon after, a mighty gale swept across the heavens and earth. Billowing clouds of dust and sand engulfed the skies, blotting out the sun.

Charlot finally understood why the orc army had retreated. The three Saint rank orc shaman spellcasters unleashed a spell of devastating winds that spared no one, friend or foe. Thus, the orc army withdrew to avoid being caught in the destructive magic.

The winds summoned by these three Saint rank shamans were vast and mighty, shaking the very heavens.

In a place like the Behemoth Principality, such winds could never occur naturally. Only on the boundless ocean or in the infinite deserts could such brutal weather conditions arise.

The relentless wind carried a choking mass of sand and dust, advancing steadily. In less than half an hour, the entirety of Silver Dove Castle was buried. The wind persisted for half a day before the residual force of the shamans' magic gradually subsided.

The orc army wasted no time. They had long since moved on.

The three Saint rank shamans, having completed their task, did not so much as glance back at the city. Each mounted the wild winds and caught up with the orc forces. Among the orcs, these shamans held an extremely exalted status. If not for the failure to take Silver Dove Castle after two consecutive days of siege, they would not have intervened.

After the storm, Silver Dove Castle was entirely buried under a sea of sand, leaving no trace of its once thriving waterways and intricate river systems. It had been transformed into a massive sand dune.

Typically, such a city, subjected to such annihilating force, would see its people utterly obliterated, leaving behind no signs of life.

About a day later, however, it appeared as though a funnel had formed beneath Silver Dove Castle. The sands that had buried the city began to flow away continuously, as if a massive, invisible hole in the ground was devouring the sand without end.

By dusk, Silver Dove Castle re-emerged on the horizon. The sand blown in by the winds summoned by the shamans had vanished without a trace.

Charlot appeared once more atop the city walls, his face still bearing an expression of fear. He could hardly fathom the immense power of the Saint rank shamans of the orcs, whose spells had wreaked such apocalyptic destruction.

He now roughly understood the orcs' ultimate weapon against Strasbourg—their Saint rank shamans. They intended to summon winds and use the suffocating sand to annihilate Strasbourg entirely.

At this moment, there was not a single soul on the city walls of Silver Dove Castle aside from Charlot. However, when he lightly tapped his foot on the ground, it was as though life returned to the city. Soldiers of the West Wind Knight Order and residents of Silver Dove Castle began to reappear gradually. The city came back to life, and the familiar clamor filled the air once more. Known as the "Northern Cynes," the city regained its former splendor.

Almost no one understood what had happened. They only knew that the orc army had retreated, leaving them with joy and relief. No one thought to question why the storm had suddenly vanished.

In an ordinary city, such overwhelming power would have left no survivors. The city would have been buried under the sand, its population and civilization obliterated. But Silver Dove Castle,

having undergone three stages of labyrinthification, was no ordinary city. At the most critical moment, Charlot had hidden all the residents in the third layer of the labyrinth.

By reversing the layers of the labyrinth, Charlot had concealed the buried city in the second layer. The Silver Dove Castle now visible was entirely unscathed, while the original city had been hidden.

Had the Saint rank shamans stayed even briefly to investigate, they would have discovered the truth, and the residents of Silver Dove Castle would have faced certain doom.

Charlot might have survived, given his Saint rank Transcendent abilities, but he would have been powerless to save anyone else.

Fortunately, the shamans' overconfidence in their spells had provided Charlot with an opportunity. However, he knew that Silver Dove Castle would not have a second chance. If the orc shamans discovered the truth, they would undoubtedly return to completely destroy the city.

Charlot closed his eyes, unsure of what to do next.

In the end, he made a somewhat impulsive decision.

Charlot said to Anastasia, "Protect Silver Dove Castle for me. I must leave for a while."

Against tens of thousands of orc troops, the West Wind Knight Order could do little. Yet Charlot felt compelled to return to Strasbourg to protect Annie. Though he knew that Annie was under the protection of Grandma Saint Karen, who was immensely powerful, he could not ignore his duty.

Charlot chose five captured and converted Redback Bear Tribe warriors to accompany him. Among them were Big Bear, Hundred Bears, and Honey Bear, as well as two other Transcendent Redback Bear warriors.

Charlot brought no one else. He wasn't relying on the combat strength of these warriors but planned to use them to conceal his identity.

If he encountered human forces, he could reveal his true identity. If he encountered orcs, he could blend in with the five Redback Bear warriors without being recognized as human.

With his plan set, Charlot set off with the five warriors. Traveling light and unhindered, he caught up with the rear of the orc army after two days. To Charlot's dismay, it became clear that the force attacking Strasbourg was far from the only one.

Along the way, he encountered at least five other orc armies, their banners stretching endlessly across the horizon.

Charlot had once believed that Strasbourg, though lacking in numbers, had sufficient Saint rank Transcendents to hold its ground. But faced with such overwhelming forces, he began to lose confidence.

The Southern Orc Tribes had clearly mobilized their entire strength, throwing everything they had into this campaign.

After weighing his options, Charlot decided to infiltrate one of the orc armies alongside Big Bear and the others. To disguise himself, he exchanged his weapon for a pair of meteor hammers, wrapped himself in animal hides, painted chaotic patterns on his face, and wielded orc weaponry. No orc suspected his identity.

The vanguard of the orc army soon clashed with the Royal Knights of Strasbourg in a skirmish. Both sides tested each other briefly before withdrawing, neither ready to commit to a decisive battle.

Chapter 237: War Is a Terrible Thing

A werewolf suddenly woke from its slumber, howling at the sky, startling the slumbering orc warriors. Many of them awoke briefly, but seeing that it was just a werewolf howling, they quickly went back to sleep. After all, wasn't it normal for werewolves to howl?

A werewolf that didn't howl in the middle of the night was hardly a proper werewolf.

Only this werewolf looked puzzled. It sensed an ominous energy trying to infiltrate its body and instinctively activated its combat energy to repel the intrusion, waking it in the process.

It glanced around but couldn't detect anything unusual. After a while, it fell into a deep sleep again.

Charlot Mecklenburg, hiding nearby, shook his head and abandoned his attempt to corrupt the werewolf.

The Machubi Fortress Labyrinth was near Strasbourg and was once a fortress of the ancient Orc Kingdom. Though it now lay in ruins, several orc armies had entered the area for brief stops.

Charlot followed the orc armies back to Machubi. Using the Threefold Maze, he concealed the West Wind Knight Order and the merchant company within the ruins, attempting to convert a portion of the orc warriors into labyrinth guards.

Previously, he had only experimented with converting eighteen warriors from the Redback Bear Tribe and prisoners from Silver Dove Castle. This time, attempting a large-scale conversion of labyrinth guards brought problems he had never encountered before.

The conversion process relied on using a strand of corruptive power from the Labyrinth God Agmirlas to invade the life forms that entered the maze, transforming them into cursed entities. However, Agmirlas was not omnipotent. When the orc soldiers gathered in sufficient numbers or when their ranks included more powerful transcendent warriors, the conversion process failed as the orc warriors resisted the transformation.

Dolores Soumet couldn't help but remark, "This is the Old Continent, not the New Continent. The light of the Nine Radiant Gods shines strongly here, protecting us. You'd best not rely too much on the power of such foreign gods of chaos like Agmirlas."

Charlot gave a bitter smile. "I understand."

The Old Continent worshipped the Nine Radiant Gods, and apart from vampires, almost no one paid homage to foreign gods of chaos. In contrast, while the New Continent also revered the Nine Radiant Gods, their influence there was weaker. Many New Continent residents instead worshipped foreign gods of chaos. Agmirlas was highly revered there, and many New Continent cities had become labyrinthine to protect their inhabitants.

As a high priest, Auguslatin had knowledge of Agmirlas, and Dolores was no stranger to the Labyrinth God either. She worried Charlot might sink too deep into this path.

Charlot couldn't explain that he had already gone too far.

Though Charlot Mecklenburg was a follower of the Lady of the Black Moon and had attended Sheffield University, which was under her patronage, his transcendent path was that of Blood Glory. While he did not worship the vampiric gods, his abilities still fell within the domain of corruptive energy.

To ascend further in his transcendent path, Charlot had once summoned a foreign god of chaos...

That was an even more unfortunate tale.

Later, it was Huang Haisheng's story. Unknowingly, Huang had encountered a painting tainted by Agmirlas' influence, inadvertently drawing the attention of two foreign gods of chaos. He nearly lost his life in the process.

If Charlot had a choice, he wouldn't have walked this path. But his predecessor had already taken this road to its bitter end, leaving no room to turn back. Charlot had even fantasized that if he had transmigrated earlier, back to Charlot Mecklenburg's university days, he would have chosen the Lady of the Black Moon's path to transcendence. Even if he failed to master Dark Breathing Techniques, he could have pursued the path of a Dark Moon Warlock.

...

As dawn broke, the orc armies resting in Machubi began to move out, leaving behind a trail of destruction.

Charlot silently sensed the NPC markers he had placed earlier. These markers, gradually worn away as the orc armies marched toward Strasbourg, became less potent over time.

Unlike labyrinth guards, NPCs could not be directly controlled. While the maze master could assign them tasks, NPCs could only carry a few missions and would eventually lose connection once they left the labyrinth. At best, Charlot could only sense their approximate locations.

This was the first time Charlot realized NPC markers could fade over time.

If Charlot were alone, even a single high-ranking transcendent commanding a few hundred people could dismantle this maze. However, with enough NPCs and labyrinth guards, the maze could withstand several times the attacking force. This was why many New Continent cities opted for labyrinthine transformations. Agmirlas' power was highly effective against the rampant threats of the New Continent: malevolent entities, abominations, magical beasts, and other dangers.

The labyrinth's greatest strength lay in its secrecy.

Its power was most effective when the target was unaware of its existence. Once discovered, it became much easier to counter.

Charlot also discovered that the labyrinth was highly effective against vampiric threats but less so against ordinary transcendent beings. For instance, Lord Leo had once been trapped in a maze and couldn't escape, while Aubrey Tildon Atwood, former head of the Fierce Horse Detective Agency, had managed to break free. At the time, Charlot thought it was a fluke, but now he understood otherwise.

The more Charlot delved into his studies, the more he realized the labyrinth's power had limits.

Agmirlas remained nothing more than a foreign god of chaos. Its blessings were far from the boundless grace and might of the Nine Radiant Gods.

...

Belisa, like Dolores, had spent a long time in Machubi. She had also noticed the peculiarities of this ancient Orc Kingdom fortress. Though Charlot never spoke of it, her knowledge of the New Continent led her to suspect that Machubi had become a labyrinth.

She had grown to love the city deeply.

Belisa had chosen the Path of the Skyfarer because it promised freedom. Life in Machubi was far freer and more enjoyable than serving as a maid to Duchess Josephine. Here, she could do

as she pleased without fear of making mistakes that would earn her punishment or scolding. In Machubi, she was no longer a servant but one of the city's masters.

Unlike Dolores, Belisa wasn't worried. In her heart, she quietly mused, "Labyrinth transformations aren't so bad. Plenty of cities in the New Continent have done it."

Of course, she wouldn't dare voice this opinion to Dolores. As a God Pact Holder, Dolores, though not fanatically devout, was among the Old Continent's most steadfast believers.

Charlot clapped his hands and said, "Ladies, please guard Machubi for me."

"I'm off to witness the war between the orc armies and Strasbourg."

"I'll take all the labyrinth guards with me. You'll need to rely on your own strength and the remaining West Wind Knight Order to hold off the orc forces."

Dolores reassured him, "I'll take good care of everything here. Go without worry!"

Charlot waved, leading a contingent of hundreds of "orc" labyrinth guards. These were the fruits of his conversion efforts, and he departed Machubi quietly.

Dolores watched him leave and remarked to Belisa, "War is a terrible thing."

Chapter 238: Food

Charlot Mecklenburg served as an administrative officer under Clair Bretagne, stationed in the Behemoth Principality. He was also acting steward for Mostar Castle, Seagull City, Silver Dove Castle, Odeshan City, and Byberry City. According to imperial law, Charlot was not permitted to leave his jurisdiction. During wartime, leaving without authorization could result in charges of treason, punishable by the severest penalties.

Though the Empire's laws were sometimes treated as a joke, they were no laughing matter for someone like Charlot, who had no significant connections. For him, the law was often enforced with unflinching severity.

Many naïve individuals believed that aligning themselves with a powerful figure gave them license to act recklessly, assuming their benefactor would always protect them. However, anyone with basic common sense knew that no superior would tolerate a troublemaker for long.

After all, a benefactor was a benefactor, not a surrogate parent.

While Charlot was deeply concerned for Annie Bretagne, he could not abandon his responsibilities or his identity to rush back to Strasbourg, leaving the five cities under his protection unguarded. If he did, countless nobles would seize the opportunity to push for his execution.

From a purely strategic standpoint, Charlot's ability to operate outside Strasbourg offered greater utility, given the city's limited military potential. For instance, he now commanded a troop of orcs, including seven Transcendents. Among them were five warriors from the Redback Bear Tribe and two from the Yellow Bear Tribe.

Charlot mused to himself that he seemed to have an unusual affinity for bears.

The noble families of Fars Empire had not anticipated the Southern Orc Tribes bypassing the frontlines and arriving directly at Strasbourg's gates. As a result, the city had descended into daily chaos, frantically conscripting troops from the civilian population to replenish the Royal Knights Order.

The Royal Knights Order, once the Empire's most formidable force, had been significantly depleted, with the majority of its strength reassigned to Ferranden. What remained to defend the capital was less than a fifth of its original numbers, leaving Strasbourg alarmingly weakened.

Due to political considerations, the city was left with only the Royal Knights Order, city patrol guards, prison troops, and other local forces. Private knight orders belonging to nobles were confined to their own territories, as the Emperor could not permit any noble's knight order to establish a foothold in the capital.

Julius Axel, infuriated by the situation, had berated numerous ministers, though his rage did little to mitigate Strasbourg's crisis.

The orc army, meanwhile, continued to swell, exceeding 200,000 soldiers, with reinforcements arriving steadily. However, they refrained from launching a full-scale siege, engaging only in minor skirmishes with the Royal Knights Order before withdrawing.

Strasbourg's officials were baffled by the orcs' intentions. Why weren't they launching an assault? Couriers were dispatched in all directions, pleading for reinforcements to converge on the capital.

Yet, time was not on Strasbourg's side. If the stalemate continued, the orcs would gain nothing.

Hidden among the vast orc army, Charlot quickly deduced their strategy. He had already encountered more than ten Saint-rank shaman sorcerers among the orcs. Their objective was clear—they intended to replicate what they had done at Silver Dove Castle.

At Silver Dove Castle, three shaman sorcerers had summoned a raging sandstorm to bury the fortress. But Strasbourg, being far larger, required far more power. The orcs were well aware of this and had gathered at least twelve to fifteen Saint-rank shamans for the task.

If they succeeded in engulfing Strasbourg in sand, the 200,000-strong orc army could devastate the Fars Empire completely. No force in the Empire could hope to stop them.

With the city gates sealed shut, Charlot had no means of delivering a warning. The Royal Knights Order would neither trust him nor allow him entry under the watchful eyes of the orc horde.

From his vantage point, Charlot gazed at Strasbourg, his thoughts drifting to Annie. All he could do was hope that the Saint-rank defenders within the city could hold off the shaman sorcerers.

Deep in the heart of the orc army, surrounded by danger at every turn, Charlot refrained from acting recklessly.

Suddenly, Hundred Bears growled low, signaling the approach of another orc unit. This troop, numbering only a few hundred, was escorting nearly a thousand human captives. The sight of orcs beating and abusing the prisoners ignited a fire of fury in Charlot's chest.

Suppressing his anger, Charlot ordered sternly, "Find out what they're doing here."

Hundred Bears roared his inquiry, "State your tribe and purpose!"

An elderly werewolf emerged from the group, shouting, "We are from the Shanda Tribe, delivering food to the frontlines."

"We need rest and a place to prepare the food."

Charlot glanced at the convoy, his heart sinking. Besides the human captives, there was no sign of other provisions. It was clear that these prisoners were the "food."

Burying his rage, Charlot gestured. "Let them into the camp."

Hundred Bears relayed the order, opening the way for the Shanda Tribe to settle in the camp.

As Charlot pondered how to address the situation, a commotion broke out. He hurried over to find a female human captive fighting back against several werewolves. Her injuries were severe—her arm dangled, clearly broken, and her head was matted with blood. Her fine clothing was so tattered and soaked with mud and blood that it was impossible to discern its original style or color.

Her feet were bound, and the werewolves beat her with sticks as she rolled on the ground, desperately attempting to retaliate.

One burly werewolf roared, "Little wench, you killed over twenty of our brothers. Before you die, I'll make sure you taste the sweetest pain in this world!"

"Brothers, stop beating her. She's mine!"

Charlot shot a glance toward the edge of the camp and signaled to a few Redback Bear warriors before striding forward.

“This woman belongs to me,” he declared.

The burly werewolf glared. “The Shanda Tribe is not to be trifled with.”

Charlot smiled coldly. “What a coincidence. Neither are the Redback Bears.”

As Charlot extended his hand, Big Bear obediently handed him the Berserker Blade. The werewolf’s eyes narrowed in alarm, and he howled, “You’re a human!”

Charlot thrust the Berserker Blade with flawless precision. Employing the 77 Movements of Heaven’s Wing, he pierced the werewolf’s throat in one clean strike.

As the werewolf’s body flew, Charlot shouted, “Kill them!”

His orc warriors erupted into action. The Shanda Tribe’s werewolves, possessing only two Transcendents, were utterly unprepared. One of them, the burly werewolf, had already been slain by Charlot. The other, an elderly leader, barely had time to let out a warning howl before his skull was crushed.

Chapter 239: Sophia Gallanord

Although both sides had roughly equal numbers, Charlot’s subordinates were far more capable. In particular, Charlot’s knight’s lance swept through the battlefield like a soaring dragon, leaving no foe standing for even a single exchange.

Hundred Bears, Big Bear, Honey Bear, and four other extraordinary-ranked bearmen fought fiercely. The two Yellow Bear warriors didn’t even need weapons, casually swatting werewolves aside with their massive paws as if they were slicing cucumbers—quick and crisp.

The human female prisoner with a severed arm hadn’t anticipated such a turn of events. She didn’t know why this group of beastmen was fighting among themselves, but her strong will to survive drove her to grasp a werewolf warblade from the ground. She cut the ropes binding her legs and struggled to stand.

Her injuries were severe, with wounds all over her body. The simple act of standing caused her to cough up blood.

Charlot drove his lance backward, pinning a werewolf to the ground, and shouted, “Don’t overdo it! You need treatment!”

The human female prisoner, wary, asked, "Are you human? Why do you have so many beastmen under your command?"

Charlot responded curtly, "I'm not in the mood to explain."

"In a while, try to find a way to escape!"

"I still have a mission and can't take you with me."

Charlot had already cleared the area around him of enemies. Switching to his Withered Rose, he fired dozens of shots. This lower-tier vampiric weapon, with each bullet equivalent to the full force of a fifth-tier extraordinary attack, easily dispatched the ordinary werewolf warriors.

Soon, Charlot blew away the faint blood mist lingering around the barrel of Withered Rose and surveyed the surroundings. The werewolves of the Shanda tribe had been wiped out. He ordered his subordinates to untie the human prisoners, preparing to release them.

As for their survival afterward, Charlot didn't concern himself. Encircled by the vast beastmen army, he had no means to protect so many people.

Simply rescuing them was already an act of utmost kindness.

The one-armed woman gritted her teeth and said, "I am a seventh-tier Darkmoon Sorceress. I can fight alongside you."

Charlot raised an eyebrow in slight surprise and asked, "Are you a Sheffield University graduate?"

The woman replied, "Not yet. I'm a sophomore."

Charlot, still surprised, scrutinized the young junior. When he was in his second year, he was nothing remarkable, yet here she was—a seventh-tier extraordinary! And a Darkmoon Sorceress, a path Charlot greatly envied.

He nodded slightly. "Fine!"

Since she was extraordinary, she might be of some use, and Charlot lacked sufficient extraordinary combat strength.

Most of the human captives were locals from nearby areas, with a small number being soldiers of the Fars Empire. Without Charlot revealing his identity, the majority chose to leave, their wariness of Charlot's beastman subordinates clear.

However, over a dozen individuals decided to stay. These soon gathered around Charlot's "junior," apparently familiar with and trusting her.

Charlot dared not linger. The freed captives, being ordinary humans, would likely be caught by beastmen if recaptured and spill everything. After disposing of the werewolf corpses from the Shanda tribe, he led his group to relocate.

Charlot skillfully maneuvered past dozens of beastmen warbands. Once he was certain no pursuers remained, he set up a new camp. The southern continent was home to nearly a thousand beastman tribes, many of which harbored deep feuds. The beastman army lacked centralized command, making identifying a specific tribe difficult.

The dozen humans following Charlot, though weary, were exhilarated at having narrowly escaped death. None complained during the journey.

These individuals were in excellent physical condition. Aside from the one-armed junior, there were three others with extraordinary abilities. Though all were low-ranked first or second tiers, slightly stronger than ordinary people, their skills were limited.

After establishing the campsite, Charlot summoned the group and asked, "Are you all from Strasbourg?"

A young man with slightly curly golden hair replied, "We are all students of Sheffield University. You saved us. If we can return to Strasbourg, we will surely reward you generously."

Charlot, slightly surprised, asked, "All of you are Sheffield University students?"

As the group of young men and women nodded in unison, he grew curious. "How did you end up outside the city, captured by beastmen?"

The one-armed junior took a deep breath and answered, "Sophia Gallanord."

Seeing Charlot's puzzled expression, she didn't elaborate further but continued, "We were working on a class assignment, searching for an herb outside Strasbourg."

"When we discovered the beastman army, we misjudged the situation and attempted to fight our way back to Strasbourg, only to be surrounded. Nearly half of our classmates died..."

Sophia's voice trembled as she said, "Many of them were eaten by those brutal beastmen. The rest of us were kept as food for the frontlines."

Charlot sighed. "It's over now."

As a transmigrator, Charlot understood that beastmen and humans held vastly different perspectives. While such behavior was customary for beastmen, it was something he couldn't accept.

Sophia lowered her head slightly. "I still want to know your identity. We don't wish to pry into your secrets, but it determines how well we can cooperate."

“I am a Gallanord. Even in death, I will never aid beastmen in attacking my people.”

Charlot regarded his junior with newfound respect and replied, “I also graduated from Sheffield University. These are my subordinates.”

Sophia seemed puzzled. “Your attacks earlier weren’t from Dark Breathing Technique.”

Charlot, a bit embarrassed, explained, “I didn’t choose Dark Breathing Technique; I chose Blood Glory.”

Sophia’s expression lit with realization. “The Spider Technique from the Thirteen Miraculous Techniques! These beastmen are blood puppets created by Spider Technique? I see now.”

Charlot considered explaining but ultimately shrugged. “I am a civil servant of the Behemoth Principality. By law, I cannot leave my jurisdiction, but I discovered the beastman army and became worried about my family in Strasbourg. So, I infiltrated the army with my subordinates.”

Sophia Gallanord finally believed Charlot.

The young woman wiped her face, revealing a pair of striking emerald-green eyes. They were stunningly beautiful. Despite a lingering trace of doubt in her gaze, Charlot sighed and said, “I’m Charlot Mecklenburg! Graduated in Black Moon 33.”

Sophia Gallanord pondered briefly but couldn’t recall any notable seniors named Mecklenburg from previous years. She only remembered the exceptional ones.

Suddenly, the golden-haired young man exclaimed, “You’re the one who chased away Gorgias University’s West Wind Goddess?!”

Chapter 240: The Rose of Strasbourg

More than a dozen students from Sheffield University seemed to have opened the floodgates of gossip, recalling everything they knew about Charlot Mecklenburg.

Even Sophia Gallanord suddenly remembered this “senior.”

Indeed, Charlot had been an obscure figure during his school years, so when Sophia reminisced about the outstanding seniors of the past, she had no memory of anyone named Mecklenburg. However, when someone mentioned the man who had wooed the West Wind Goddess of Gorgias University, it wasn’t just the students of Gorgias who knew of him—Charlot’s name was also famous at Sheffield.

After all, Charlot was their senior, and many younger students felt a subtle sense of pride, as though his achievements reflected on them.

This feeling was peculiar yet profound, instilling a sudden and unwavering trust in Charlot among this group of students.

Sophia Gallanord noticed that Charlot's expression seemed a bit grim and quickly said, "So you're Senior Charlot. We're willing to follow your commands entirely."

Charlot's heart stirred as he asked, "I have intelligence that needs to be sent to Strasbourg, but I have no way to deliver it. If any of you can infiltrate Strasbourg and relay this information, I will offer my full support."

"This time, the orcs have gathered more than a dozen Saint-ranked shaman mages. They might use a Great Wind Spell to stir up dust and sand, attempting to bury Strasbourg."

Sophia Gallanord wasn't surprised by the news. She replied, "Senior, if that's the message, there's no need to send it to Strasbourg."

"Strasbourg has at least forty or fifty Saint-ranked individuals. A mere dozen or so orc Saint-ranked shaman mages can't make any waves."

"Even the orcs' Great Wind Spell can be countered by many of our Saints."

Charlot blushed slightly. Coming from a humble background, he was unaware that Strasbourg harbored so many hidden Saint-ranked individuals, nor did he understand the levels beyond Saint rank.

Sophia Gallanord's words eased his concerns slightly. He said, "Since there's no need to deliver the message, we'll patrol the periphery of the orc army for now."

"I suggest you all treat your injuries first. There may be many battles ahead."

As soon as Charlot finished speaking, a young man tore off a small piece of his own skin, revealing a black cloth pouch. He said, "I have the finest Radiant Holy Water."

"Sophia, you're the strongest among us and were injured the most while protecting us. You should quickly recover your strength. Take all this Radiant Holy Water."

Sophia Gallanord hesitated several times but ultimately accepted. From the pouch, she took out a slender ceramic bottle and gently poured its contents onto her arm. A white mist rose as the liquid touched her skin, and the sound of cracking bones filled the air as her broken arm miraculously healed.

After tending to her wounds, Sophia hesitated briefly before tilting her graceful neck to drink a few drops of the liquid. Her complexion immediately turned rosy, a clear sign that her condition had improved significantly.

Sophia passed the bottle to another injured companion and said, "Inod, you should heal yourself too. You're a Dark Knight, the best among us in direct combat."

The injured man didn't hesitate. He took the bottle and drank a small sip.

The bottle was passed from one to another. Almost all the young people were injured, many severely. Some of their companions, more gravely wounded, had already been killed by the orcs and used as food.

The young man who had produced the black cloth pouch looked pained. He had intended to curry favor with his goddess, but Sophia had distributed the Holy Water to everyone.

Sophia handed the pouch back to him and said, "Once we return to Strasbourg, I'll repay you double."

The young man hesitated to respond but ultimately didn't say that repayment was unnecessary.

Charlot found their interactions amusing and refrained from interrupting. After the group regained some strength, he ordered his subordinates to bring out a batch of weapons for them to choose from.

Inod selected a knight's lance, while the others picked weapons suited to them. Sophia hesitated briefly and asked, "Do you have a knight's lance of slightly better quality?"

Charlot was a bit surprised and asked, "Aren't you an Umbra Sorceress?"

The young man who had offered the Radiant Holy Water interjected boastfully, "Sophia isn't just a Tier Seven Umbra Sorceress; she's also a Tier Six Dark Knight. The twelve goddesses of Gorgias may be beautiful, but the Rose of Sheffield is the most radiant flower among the four imperial universities."

Charlot nodded slightly, recalling a person Julian Arsilo had once mentioned. He casually asked, "Have you heard of the Rose of Strasbourg?"

Sophia's dirt-streaked face turned slightly red, and she said, "That's me."

"You've heard of my nickname?"

Charlot nodded. "I graduated years ago and am not as familiar with the school anymore. Still, a fellow named Julian mentioned it to me once."

"I didn't..."

Charlot's brain abruptly halted mid-sentence, narrowly avoiding saying, "I only know about the Empire's First Rose." That would have been far too tactless.

Sophia asked curiously, "Julian?"

Charlot nodded again. “He’s said to rival you in fame. They call him the youngest Skybreaker of Byron, Julian Arsilo.”

Sophia and the other young students from Gorgias University gasped in unison. While Charlot knew little of Julian, this group was well-informed. How could they not know the most exceptional individuals under twenty from the five great empires? These figures were their future rivals, challenges they aspired to overcome, and sources of both envy and admiration.

Seeing their reactions, Charlot grew curious but decided not to pursue the topic. Instead, he said casually, “Speaking of Julian, I just remembered that I have a decent knight’s lance. However, it’s a commemorative piece, so I can only lend it to you.”

With a light clap, a Redback Bear warrior brought over a weapon named *Whaleslayer*, also known as *Lion’s Fang*. Before heading to Strasbourg, Charlot had prepared an extra knight’s lance, anticipating fierce battles.

Sophia accepted the lance, stunned after taking a single look. Her voice trembled as she asked, “Is this *Whaleslayer*?”

Charlot nodded.

Sophia pressed further, “Was it Count Lamorak’s weapon?”

Charlot smiled faintly. “Yes. Not long ago, during my diplomatic mission to the Ingrima Empire, Ban Lamorak insisted on a duel. Witnessed by Emperor Alfred Guillaume on the Seventais River, I defeated him, and he surrendered this lance to me.”

Chapter 241: The Divine Guardians of Strasbourg

Sophia Gallanord held the Lion’s Fang in her hand but still couldn’t help asking, “Senior, did you really defeat him?”

Charlot Mecklenburg shrugged and replied, “I am a few years older than him, after all.”

Sophia Gallanord inwardly muttered to herself, “I’ve met plenty of older Transcendents, but few are stronger than me.”

That Charlot knew Julian Arsilo wasn’t surprising. As an envoy, he had been to the Ingrima Empire. In the minds of Sophia Gallanord and the other junior students, they only assumed Charlot had encountered Julian in Britain.

Of course, that was true.

But for Charlot to have faced Count Lamorak under the witness of Emperor Alfred Guillaume and defeated him—this honor was indescribable.

Even though he was a few years older, it did not diminish the feat.

The group of junior students' gazes quickly filled with admiration, including even the Rose of Strasbourg, Miss Sophia Gallanord.

Charlot organized accommodations for the group of students from Sheffield University. Fortunately, hiding a dozen humans among several hundred orc warriors wasn't difficult. For a moment, Charlot wasn't sure what else to do.

But he didn't have to worry for long.

Out of concern for being discovered, Charlot frequently changed camp locations. On this particular morning, just as they were preparing to move, he noticed the sky had turned a murky gray. Acting decisively, he commanded his subordinates to head for a nearby hill.

Once atop the hill, Charlot looked out and saw that the skies over Strasbourg were filled with howling winds and rolling dust clouds. The scale was far greater—ten times more dramatic—than the previous time at Silver Dove Castle.

More than ten orc Saint-rank shamans floated high above, combining their powers to stir up a storm of dust, aiming to bury Strasbourg beneath it.

Charlot's heart tightened. His city was home to his loved ones and friends. But as a mid-level Transcendent, he could do little.

The group of students from Gorgias University, including Sophia Gallanord, grew equally worried. They knew, however, that Strasbourg was not so easily overcome.

Charlot grew increasingly anxious, tempted several times to charge down into the fray. But even if he did, what could he accomplish? Kill a Saint? Even anti-magic armor-piercing rounds couldn't necessarily harm a Saint. He lacked any means to injure one—unless he summoned an evil god...

As Charlot seriously considered the consequences of summoning two foreign gods of chaos, a painting flew up from Strasbourg into the sky.

Charlot instantly recognized the painting. As it transformed into an endless corridor, countless crimson-skinned creatures wielding massive spiked hammers—resembling flayed monsters—began roaming through the corridors.

The raging winds and dust storm vanished the moment they entered the corridor.

Charlot exclaimed in surprise, "It's that painting!"

He remembered it well—not just because he had once used it to summon the Labyrinth God Agmirilas, but because its emergence had deepened his relationship with Annie Bretagne.

To this day, Charlot had no idea why Yanmills purchased a painting depicting a foreign god of chaos. Yanmills was now dead, and there was no way to find out.

Charlot did, however, know who currently possessed the painting: the widowed Princess of Fars Empire, the second daughter of Emperor Julius Axel VI.

This princess was a taboo topic within the empire. Even High Priest Auguslatin referred to her only as “that lady,” never daring to utter her title or name.

Charlot knew nothing about her but was familiar with another widowed princess: Princess May Guillaume of Ingrima.

Well, not exactly “familiar.” Their acquaintance hadn’t yet reached the level of exchanging gold écus.

As Charlot gazed at the painting, he felt a small sense of relief. But only hours later, he heard a loud noise from the sky. The endless corridor collapsed layer by layer, and the crimson-skinned creatures with their massive spiked hammers let out wretched screams before disintegrating into ash.

The painting depicting the foreign god of chaos reappeared briefly before shattering into countless pieces, utterly destroyed.

The combined might of the ten orc Saint-rank shamans was too much for even this artifact of chaos.

Charlot’s heart clenched again, but before he could spiral into worry, a radiant light emerged from the heavens. A grand, square structure ascended, its four gates open in four directions, exuding an overwhelming aura.

It was the Gate of Radiance on Elysée Avenue.

As soon as the Gate of Radiance rose, several other buildings followed, forming a shimmering protective barrier that enveloped Strasbourg entirely.

The orc Saint-rank shamans, mustering their full strength to unleash a cataclysmic windstorm, churned up so much dust that the skies darkened across the region. But Strasbourg, shielded by the divine power of the Twelve Gods, stood unshaken.

Only then did Charlot breathe a sigh of relief.

Suddenly, he felt the diary in his arms tremble slightly. When he took it out to look, the page for Agmirilas’ Labyrinth began to expand, as though “reprinting.” The diary, originally 15 pages, swiftly grew to over 30. A thought entered his mind: Charlot Mecklenburg has inherited the

legacy of the Labyrinth God Agmirlas. Upon mastering more than fifteen labyrinths, he will gain access to the true labyrinth of Agmirlas.

Charlot's eyes widened. He knew foreign gods of chaos were deceitful, but he hadn't expected this level of malice.

The diary's original warning stated that if the owner failed to master fifteen labyrinths within a set time, they would lose their identity as the owner and have their soul consumed by the diary.

It had not mentioned that mastering more than fifteen labyrinths would result in being sent to Agmirlas' true labyrinth!

In other words, failing to master fifteen would summon Agmirlas to devour him, while exceeding fifteen would feed him directly to the god. Either way, death was certain.

What was he supposed to do?

Charlot pondered for a long while before concluding, "In the Old Continent, Agmirlas holds no influence, and few are familiar with this god. I couldn't even find relevant texts at Sheffield University. High Priest Auguslatin mentioned that many cities in the New Continent have adopted labyrinth structures, which might include methods to resist Agmirlas. To solve this issue, I'll likely need to make a trip to the New Continent."

"Only the New Continent holds the solution to dealing with Agmirlas."

"For now, I'll address the present and think about the future later."

With that thought, Charlot tucked the diary away and gazed into the sky.

Chapter 242: Under the Blessing of the Black Moon Goddess

Charlot finally realized that the city he had lived in for two or three years concealed such immense power.

Apart from the widowed Princess May deliberately revealing the painting of the foreign god of chaos, no Saint-rank Transcendent had yet taken action. Even Princess May's involvement seemed primarily intended to destroy the painting.

Of course, it was more likely that she was buying time for the activation of various divine miracles.

Even with just the relics of the nine Orthodox Gods, the miracles they left behind were enough to firmly withstand the massive wind spells cast by over a dozen orc Saint-rank shamans.

Charlot had always thought that landmarks like the Gate of Radiance and the Lantern Tower were simply somewhat mystical attractions, mere places for leisure and sightseeing. Who would have imagined that these divine miracles could also serve to protect the city?

The orc Saint-rank shamans, their figures flickering in and out of view in the high skies, showed no intention of giving up. They relentlessly poured their energies into the spellcasting, but no matter how fiercely the winds howled or how thick the stirred dust became, they were unable to breach Strasbourg's defenses.

The heavens and earth seemed engulfed in chaos, with only a small cluster of light visible at the very center.

Charlot watched for a long time, uncertain of the outcome. From their vantage point on the hill, they could see further, but the winds were also more intense there. As time passed, the storm around Strasbourg grew ever more ferocious, and many ordinary orcs and university students who had not yet ascended to Transcendence found it increasingly difficult to endure.

Sophia Gallanord suggested, "We should take shelter. Otherwise, things could turn dire."

Charlot agreed with a nod and immediately ordered the group to descend the hill, using the terrain to shield themselves from the wind.

The group of several hundred sought refuge behind the hill. The situation indeed improved—though still harsh, it was far better than being exposed on the hilltop or in the open plain.

Charlot, unfamiliar with defensive magic, had only intended to endure the storm. But to his surprise, as they reached the back of the hill, Sophia Gallanord planted her Lion's Fang in the ground, clasped her hands at her chest, and began chanting silently. A Black Moon rose slowly, enveloping the group within its protective glow.

Only then did Charlot remember that Sophia Gallanord's primary Transcendent path was that of a Dark Moon Warlock.

The signature defensive spell of a Dark Moon Warlock: Under the Blessing of the Black Moon!

This spell was renowned across the Old Continent. Unlike the Radiant Magic Array, known for its unyielding strength, or the Origin Blood Boundary, which excelled in both offense and defense, the Black Moon's spell was celebrated for its rapid deployment, adaptability to various situations, low mana consumption, and enduring effect.

Even so, it was not a spell that ordinary low-to-mid-rank Transcendents could cast alone.

For Sophia Gallanord to single-handedly invoke Under the Blessing of the Black Moon at her mere seventh-rank Transcendence, barely entering mid-tier, was a testament to why she was considered one of the most powerful young talents under twenty across the Five Great Empires.

The Rose of Strasbourg—a title well deserved.

In terms of pure talent on the Transcendent path, Sophia Gallanord was in no way inferior to their mentor, Lady Menielman Soumet. She was indeed comparable to elites like Julian Arsilo and Ban Lamorak.

A hint of envy arose in Charlot's heart as he thought, "I wonder when I'll be able to master the Origin Blood Boundary and independently cast such a defensive magic array."

The Radiant Magic Array was hailed as the Lament of the Gods, while the Origin Blood Boundary, drawn from the Vampiric Scrolls of the Arthur Clan, was known as the Ultimate Wall. These were among the Old Continent's most famous defensive arrays.

Charlot had inherited the Arthur Clan's legacy, activating the Blood Vortex and even mastering Blood Clan Verbal Spellcasting, but he had yet to learn any true Verbal Spell techniques.

The spiritual elevation Charlot had gained from facing two Evil Gods head-on had been completely expended not long ago. The rapid advancements he had achieved had slowed to the pace of an ordinary prodigy. Recently, he had only managed to master Swiftstep Technique x2 and Flame Dragon's Roaring Bullet. His ability to acquire new extraordinary abilities had slowed significantly, forcing him to focus on swordsmanship, marksmanship, and advancing his Transcendence rank.

"Rank is easier to ascend, but extraordinary abilities are difficult to acquire!"

This was a universally acknowledged truth among Transcendents on the Old Continent.

Charlot's ability to challenge higher-ranked foes as a low-to-mid-tier Transcendent was due not only to his cunning strategies and superior weapons but also to the spiritual elevation he gained from directly confronting the Evil Gods, granting him a brief but explosive period of breakthroughs in acquiring abilities.

Figures like Hughes, Julian Arsilo, Ban Lamorak, and Sophia Gallanord, though they had not faced Evil Gods, were blessed with innate spiritual aptitude, allowing them to effortlessly manifest extraordinary abilities and shine among their peers.

Others, such as Anne, Anastasia, and Dolores, though slightly less gifted, were still among the elite few chosen from hundreds of university students, their futures boundless.

Charlot planted his Berserker Blade firmly in the ground and sat cross-legged, operating the Blood Glory to maintain his peak state, waiting patiently for the storm to pass.

By now, the sky had blurred the boundaries between dawn and dusk, day and night. No one could tell how much time had passed when a muffled thunderclap echoed from above. The tempest reached its zenith and transformed into a torrential downpour.

Gale winds, torrential rain, and thunder!

Charlot couldn't help but worry about his friends in Strasbourg, particularly Anne. He thought to himself, "If only I were by Anne's side now. How safe she would feel."

Anne, of course, was not with Charlot at this moment.

Count Bretagne had already gathered his family together. Gazing at the skies, a faint smile of disdain crossed the count's face. Countless schemes formed in his mind as he mused, "These pathetic orc barbarians, lured into believing that destroying Strasbourg would reclaim their lost lands and revive their ancient kingdom."

"Just as orcs have no use for humans, humans have no need for orcs."

"If the orc coalition hadn't attacked Strasbourg, those incompetents would never have been able to initiate the war to annihilate the orcs."

"After this war, the orc tribes will likely vanish from the Old Continent."

Regardless of how the storm, rain, and thunder raged beyond the protective shield, Strasbourg stood like an ancient, ferocious beast, silently gathering its strength for a counterattack.

Anne, safely at her father's side, felt no fear. However, she too was starting to miss Charlot.

Since meeting Charlot, they had quickly fallen into a fervent romance, their dates frequent and joyful.

To Anne, it seemed as though Charlot had suddenly crossed a threshold, transforming from a somewhat carefree individual into someone relentlessly striving for achievements—gaining merits, promotions, and steadily ascending the ranks of Transcendence.

Anne thought to herself, "He must be pushing himself so hard for our marriage, squeezing every bit of his potential to move forward. I must also work hard so I won't hold back my dear Mr. Mecklenburg."

Chapter 243: The Orcs' "Staple Food"

Charlot Mecklenburg endured until the third day before he had to order the small unit to retreat due to a lack of supplies.

Before leaving, Charlot glanced back at Strasbourg, where the storm still howled, lightning flashed, and rain poured relentlessly. He couldn't help but quip, "These Saint-rank orcs sure have stamina!"

Sophia Gallanord, unable to understand the humor of another world, earnestly replied, "Saint ranks can indeed fight for several days straight."

Charlot offered her a faint smile before leading the group toward Machubi.

The small force, consisting of a few hundred people, braved the storm and trudged through lightning and thunder for more than half a day before finally putting over twenty kilometers between themselves and Strasbourg.

The further they distanced themselves from Strasbourg, the less they were affected by the gale conjured by the orc shamans. By twenty kilometers out, though the wind still howled, they could faintly see a gray sky. The torrential rain had subsided to heavy rain, and the thunder, which had dominated the skies, now appeared only occasionally.

Relieved, Charlot exhaled deeply and said to Sophia Gallanord, "We have a base nearby. Once we get there, we can rest for a while."

"The battle between Saint ranks is beyond us. Once Strasbourg has a victor, we'll reassess our options."

By this point, Sophia Gallanord had come to trust Charlot completely. It wasn't just because he had saved her but also because of the courage, determination, and reliability he consistently displayed—qualities rarely seen in someone of his age.

At times, she even felt a twinge of jealousy toward the West Wind Goddess of Gorgias University.

Charlot, showing no signs of hesitation, led the small unit toward Machubi. They hadn't traveled far when they encountered an orc encampment. Outside the camp, thousands of human heads were displayed—some mummified, others fresh. There were the heads of the elderly, men, women, and even children.

Some truths Charlot had long suspected, but he hadn't dared to fully imagine.

With only a few hundred men and no way to resupply in the orc-dominated vicinity of Strasbourg, he had always wondered how the army of hundreds of thousands of orcs sustained themselves.

From the moment Charlot saved Sophia Gallanord and her peers, he had already realized what the orcs' "staple food" was.

Humans.

As Charlot surveyed the orc encampment, he said nothing. He merely raised his hand and commanded, "Attack."

Sophia Gallanord had been subtly signaling her classmates to remain cautious and not act recklessly. After all, they were surrounded by the orc army, and danger was everywhere. Saving these innocent humans seemed an impossible task.

But even she struggled to suppress her desire to fight.

The moment Charlot gave the order, Sophia Gallanord could no longer hold back. Shouting fiercely, she wielded her Lion's Fang and was the first to charge into the orc camp. Her knight's lance swept across the battlefield, taking down seven or eight orcs in an instant.

Following her lead, more than a dozen students from Sheffield University surged forward. These were individuals who had narrowly escaped becoming the orcs' "staple food." For years, whenever the empire suggested cleansing orc tribes, there were always those who argued from a place of compassion, insisting that orcs shouldn't be slaughtered indiscriminately.

Yet almost everyone in the Fars Empire knew that only a small fraction of orcs had embraced human civilization. The majority still maintained their barbaric customs, including cannibalism.

In the southern reaches of the Old Continent, where the climate was harsh, the orcs had never developed advanced agriculture, and food shortages were a constant struggle...

Charlot once thought orc assassins from the Orc Assassin Alliance behaved no differently from humans. Their mannerisms were indistinguishable from human norms, and individuals like Frederica even attended Gorgias University.

But his perspective shifted when he encountered the Redback Bear Tribe. These bear warriors embodied every stereotype of orcs from fiction: boorish, voracious, heavy drinkers, utterly devoid of caution, and loud snorers.

And yet, the Redback Bear Tribe was among the more civilized orc clans. The reality of most orc tribes was far grimmer than Charlot had ever imagined.

The raid ended swiftly.

Charlot didn't even need to join the fight.

After all, his unit had over ten individuals with extraordinary abilities. Charlot, Sophia Gallanord, Hundred Bears, Big Bear, and Honey Bear were all mid-level transcents. The remaining four bear warriors and three Sheffield University students were no less capable.

A mere orc camp like this stood no chance.

Charlot glanced at the wounded and surrendering orc soldiers on the ground and muttered, "Take them along. Keep moving."

Sophia Gallanord couldn't help but ask, "What about the humans?"

Charlot raised his voice and declared, "We are knights of the Fars Empire. Those willing to follow us, join now. Those who aren't, you are free to leave."

"The orcs' forces will arrive soon. Their retaliation will be merciless, so you must flee quickly."

Under normal circumstances, Charlot would have incorporated all the humans into his ranks. But now, there was no time.

With Charlot's command, the unit departed almost immediately, abandoning most of the spoils of war and taking only essential weapons.

Approximately two hundred human captives decided to follow the group. Others, however, chose to leave on their own, some demanding supplies like travel funds. A few, emboldened by their newfound freedom, attempted to loot the orc camp. Some merely wished to rest, entirely unaware of the danger still looming.

Sophia Gallanord hesitated, saying, "We could bring more of them."

Charlot sighed and replied, "We can't make their decisions for them."

"Spending time persuading a few more people doesn't save them—it condemns all of us."

Sophia Gallanord wanted to argue further, but Charlot's resolve was absolute. Though the skirmish had been brief, it would undoubtedly draw nearby orc forces. They had to leave immediately.

Not long after Charlot's unit departed, an orc force stormed the camp. At least five or six hundred humans remained behind.

What awaited them...

Charlot forced himself not to think about those who had refused to leave.

At that moment, he shut off his emotions entirely, relying solely on logic to guide his actions.

Humans, for the smallest gains or the most trivial reasons, would risk their lives recklessly.

Charlot, having lived in an era of information overload, had seen countless vivid examples of this.

He led his troops another ten kilometers ahead, finally reaching a zone where only a gentle breeze stirred. The skies were clear, and the rain had ceased. Finding a suitable spot, they began to rest.

Roughly an hour later, the sound of orc cries and the dust of their pursuit rose from the rear...

Chapter 244: The Power of Agmirlas, the Evil God

Charlot desperately wanted to change into clean clothes, but having left in such haste, he had none with him. With a sigh, he muttered, "The bad habits of Earthlings."

In the world he had traversed from, dry, clean, and comfortable clothing had been the norm. Yet, in this extraordinary world, such luxuries were rare.

Charlot had endured countless occasions wearing damp, dirty, and uncomfortable garments. It was simply the way of life on the Old Continent.

Even while facing pursuers, Charlot found himself distracted by such trivial musings...

Because he did not fear battle in the slightest.

Before long, a horde of orcs emerged on the horizon. Many among them—hulking figures adorned with severed human heads, limbs, or half-torsos hanging from their belts and necks—carried their gruesome "provisions."

Back when Charlot commanded the West Wind Knight Order, his first directive was always to form an ironclad defensive formation and fire rifles from safety. But now, his troops consisted of orc warriors. Thus, he ordered shield-bearing orcs to form a front line, bracing for the incoming, sparse volley of arrows. Only then did he give the command to charge.

With the Swiftstep Technique ×2, Charlot accelerated to his maximum speed, drawing Withered Rose, his extraordinary pistol. Firing rapidly, the weapon unleashed bullets equivalent to the full-force strikes of a fifth-tier Transcendent. While mid-to-high-tier Transcendents might withstand them, ordinary orc soldiers stood no chance.

Within moments, Charlot had felled dozens of orcs in the short sprint to close combat. When the melee began, he stowed Withered Rose into the blood vortex on his left arm. Extending his hand, Big Bear tossed him his lance, Berserker Blade.

Letting out a fierce battle cry, Charlot plunged into the enemy ranks. In swift succession, he pierced through six or seven orc soldiers before hearing a thunderous roar. A two-handed warhammer intercepted his lance.

Charlot's hands tingled slightly from the impact. This opponent—a Mauling Yellow Bear warrior—was a mid-tier Transcendent, nearly as powerful as Big Bear, and second only to Hundred Bears.

The Mauling Yellow Bears and Redback Bears were two branches of the bear clans, renowned among orcs as fearsome warrior tribes. The Yellow Bears boasted greater physical strength, while the Redback Bears excelled in martial skill. There was a common saying among orcs: "Never meet a Mauling Yellow Bear on the battlefield or duel a Redback Bear in the arena."

Charlot flicked his lance, unleashing seven or eight spear flowers aimed at the Yellow Bear's eyes. The bear roared defiantly, swinging its massive warhammer with reckless abandon, ready to trade its life for Charlot's.

Charlot, however, did not flinch. Berserker Blade directly blinded the Yellow Bear warrior, while Charlot deftly evaded the incoming warhammer using his extraordinary speed.

With a reverse swing of his lance, Charlot struck the bear on the head, rendering it unconscious. He had intentionally held back, knowing these orcs would become valuable labyrinth guards once he reached Machubi.

The pursuing orc troops had only one mid-tier Transcendent. The other two low-tier Transcendents were slain by Sophia Gallanord, while the ordinary soldiers scattered after a single charge.

Charlot dispatched a small squad of wolfmen to flank the fleeing orcs, shouting incessantly for them to surrender. Confused about who their adversary even was, many orcs assumed their foes were simply another band of orcs. With their leader dead, resistance was weak, and most chose to surrender.

The few who refused to surrender were killed by Sophia Gallanord and the students from Sheffield University. Having nearly been devoured as food themselves, these students now harbored a deep hatred for orcs.

After subduing and capturing the orcs, Charlot wasted no time. He continued advancing toward Machubi Fortress. Over the next two days, he encountered no further combat. It seemed the main orc army had gathered in Strasbourg.

Upon reaching Machubi, Charlot integrated the rescued humans into the West Wind Knight Order and transformed the captured orcs into labyrinth guards.

As all the captured orcs were converted into labyrinth guards, Charlot's diary emitted a sudden mental projection: "Charlot Mecklenburg has gained over one thousand labyrinth guards, including nine Transcendents. You may now perform three labyrinthizations and infuse yourself once with the Power of Agmirlas, the Evil God."

Charlot was startled. After a moment's hesitation, he made a resolute decision—Infuse!

Charlot's decision was purely intuitive, with no logical basis or clear understanding of the consequences.

His diary, having absorbed the residual aura of Agmirlas, the foreign god of chaos, from an oil painting destroyed by a dozen orc Saint shamans, expanded from fifteen to thirty-seven pages.

Previously, Agmirlas' Labyrinth had been reduced to six pages after performing labyrinthizations for Silver Dove Castle (three), Machubi Fortress (three), Mostar Castle (two), and Cappadocia (one).

Now, with an additional thirty-one pages, Charlot no longer lacked labyrinthizations. Yet he still could not fathom their full value.

As Charlot finalized his choice, a sinister energy surged into his body.

He found the sensation odd. This power felt eerily familiar, compelling him to instinctively activate Blood Glory and merge it with the invading force. Then, something entirely unexpected occurred.

The chaotic power of Agmirlas formed a blood vortex within Charlot's eyes. At the vortex's core, silver blood runes materialized, coalescing into a mirror.

The mirror revealed an endless maze of corridors, passages, corners, walls, and halls...

For a fleeting moment, Charlot wondered if he had been discovered by a blood god rather than receiving Agmirlas' power.

Ten minutes later, the diary reduced itself from thirty-seven to thirty-four pages. Charlot had not acquired any significant powers of the Evil God. Instead, he had formed an entirely new blood vortex, unrecorded even in the Protagoras Scrolls.

Charlot's progress with the Protagoras Breathing Technique had always been methodical, save for two deviations: when Baron Valentine taught him the Arthur Clan's secret scrolls, unlocking the blood vortex in his throat; and now, with Agmirlas' chaotic infusion, unlocking the vortex within his eyes.

It seemed the foreign god Agmirlas possessed a peculiar identity indeed.

Chapter 245: Congratulations! The West Wind Knight Order Becomes the First Loyalist Army

When Charlot was in university, he once delved into the history and culture of the Thirty-One Vampire Clans.

He knew that among vampires, the Three Royal Clans were the most revered.

The Three Royal Clans consisted of the Arsilo Clan, the Arthur Clan, and the Van Gogh Clan.

The Arsilo Clan excelled in swordsmanship, ancient and noble. The Arthur Clan was unmatched in magic, their Blood Clan Verbal Spellcasting unparalleled in its mysteries, with the Origin Blood Boundary rivaling even the Radiant Magic Array in defensive capabilities.

The Van Gogh Clan was even more enigmatic than the Arsilo and Arthur Clans. Vampires from this clan were solitary wanderers, seldom holding official positions within the Byron Empire.

In his research, Charlot once encountered records of the Van Gogh Clan's foundational secret art, known as the Infinite Mirror World. This technique could create a world within mirrors and allow for free traversal between them.

The *Protagoras Scrolls* also documented encounters where Protagoras himself barely survived battles against three extraordinary members of the Van Gogh Clan. He recounted how he had narrowly avoided death each time, only surviving because he carried a special tree sap that could coat reflective surfaces to nullify mirror reflections.

Charlot was convinced that the blood vortex formed in his eyes was linked to the Van Gogh Clan's secret arts. The mirror composed of silvery runes hidden within the vortex was undoubtedly the Infinite Mirror World.

After pondering deeply, Charlot mused, "Could the blood progenitor of the Van Gogh Clan be Agmirlas? Did He abandon His turmoil on the Old Continent to quietly head to the New Continent and establish an entirely new faith?"

"This doesn't make sense either! If Agmirlas were the Van Gogh Clan's blood progenitor, why would their abilities differ so greatly?"

"While the Infinite Mirror World allows for void traversal and can even evolve into a mirrored dimension, which might seem akin to a labyrinth in some ways, their fundamental powers remain distinct."

"Or perhaps Agmirlas is merely a descendant of the Van Gogh Clan's blood progenitor?"

"Hmm, I recall..."

"Never mind, I don't recall anything specific about Agmirlas's encounter with Karnstein. What happened between those two deities?"

Despite racking his brain, Charlot could only vaguely recall fragmented memories from a time when his soul had been shattered. Unable to perceive the outside world, he had no knowledge of what transpired between the two evil gods.

Charlot had already activated nine blood vortexes, two of which were undocumented in the *Protagoras Scrolls*. These vortexes contained eight blood runes. Most astonishingly, the blood vortexes of the Three Royal Clans had also been activated, each condensing a blood rune. In terms of fortune alone, Charlot was no longer inferior to the Protagoras of the past.

He was immensely curious about his newly acquired abilities.

However, finding a mirror in Machubi was no simple task, so he had to set the matter aside for now.

...

Charlot closed his diary, reflecting, "If I stay in Machubi, I should have some time to recuperate, but... I must take action!"

"Why not lead the Labyrinth Guardians to patrol the nearby areas and capture as many beastmen soldiers as possible?"

Having spent considerable time in this world, Charlot was well aware of how wars on the Old Continent were often decided. Victory hinged on the outcomes of extraordinary duels rather than conventional military strength.

It was reminiscent of the battles in old tales, where audiences only cared about duels between mighty warriors, assuming that such encounters determined the fate of wars. The number of soldiers or the efforts of civil officials never seemed to matter much.

Charlot, who had once charged into battle on his own, had fought in over a hundred battles and knew firsthand how negligible ordinary soldiers' combat strength could be.

His Labyrinth Guardians now boasted nine extraordinary individuals, including five warriors from the Redback Bear Tribe, three warriors from the Yellow Bear Tribe, and one werewolf Charlot didn't even recall capturing. Among these, four bear warriors were mid-tier extraordinaries, including his latest captive—a mid-tier warrior from the Yellow Bear Tribe named Invincible Bear.

Transformed into a revenant, this mid-tier warrior's eyes glowed with an eerie blue flame. Charlot couldn't tell whether he could see or not, but his combat reflexes were remarkably agile.

With this thousand-strong force of beastmen Labyrinth Guardians, Charlot could even contend with a regular army of over ten thousand soldiers.

...

When Sophia Gallanord arrived in Machubi, she was astonished by the transformation of this ancient orc fortress ruin.

Dolores and Belisa, who had heard of the famed Rose of Strasbourg, were equally surprised that Charlot had brought her here.

As the chief steward of Machubi, Dolores led the dozen or so Sheffield University students to freshen up and change into clean clothes.

When Sophia Gallanord reappeared in hunting attire, even Dolores couldn't help but exclaim, "Miss Gallanord, your beauty truly lives up to its reputation. You could charm birds into singing on your shoulders."

Sophia smiled faintly. "I've heard that the Laurel Goddess's beauty could inspire any man to duel for her favor."

Dolores shrugged, clearly uninterested in anyone dueling for her sake.

Sophia's tall, elegant figure surpassed Dolores and Anne, her sapphire-like eyes not soft but commanding and brimming with authority.

For Charlot, this was his first time seeing the true appearance of the Rose of Strasbourg. She had looked so disheveled before that he hadn't imagined she could look like this.

The first thought that popped into his mind was Catherine the Great.

Of course, not the real empress from history, whom Charlot had never seen, but the version played by Marina Alexandrova in a historical drama.

The Sheffield students, though talented, faded into the background as mere followers in Sophia's presence.

Sophia formally curtsied to Charlot, saying, "Sophia Gallanord thanks Charlot Mecklenburg for his rescue. Should you ever need assistance, the Gallanord family will repay this debt."

Charlot wanted to ask Dolores about the significance of the Gallanord family but restrained himself. Such a question couldn't be asked openly.

He smiled slightly and said, "Miss Gallanord, there's no need to dwell on this matter. I merely did what any Farsian would do."

Sophia quickly discerned that Charlot was no ordinary individual. Transforming a ruined orc fortress into a thriving stronghold housing two thousand people and organizing a near ten-thousand-strong knight order was beyond the capabilities of a typical imperial official.

Especially upon meeting Dolores, Sophia grew even more convinced of her suspicions.

Although Charlot officially held only a minor rank as a civil servant, Sophia mused, “Charlot Mecklenburg must be leveraging this war to rise to a higher status, possibly aiming for a title of nobility!”

In the Old Continent, rebellion was nearly unheard of. After all, anyone with ambitions for an imperial throne could simply expand their territory. For instance, Grand Duke Guillaume had seized the British Isles to establish the Ingrima Empire. The New Continent was almost boundless, with vast unclaimed lands. Anyone with sufficient capability could claim as much as they could control. Thus, if Charlot had been on the Old Continent, Sophia might have suspected him of harboring treasonous intent.

Sophia’s promise to repay Charlot was a form of political support. Her position within her family far exceeded that of Anne or Dolores within the Bretagne or Soumet families, and even surpassed the standing of Clair Bretagne and Ebner Soumet in their respective clans. This gave her pledge substantial weight.

However, Charlot himself had no clue about the gravity of Sophia’s promise.

Dolores, on the other hand, understood and was mildly surprised but chose not to comment.

Charlot, regaining his composure, found himself more impressed by Sophia Gallanord than by Menielman. The latter had no real-world counterpart for him to compare, but Sophia so strongly resembled the actress who had portrayed Catherine the Great that it was hard not to be struck by the resemblance.

Back when he had watched that historical drama, his only thought had been, *Release my Empress!*

After his momentary shock, Charlot returned to business and asked Sophia, “Would you and your companions be willing to temporarily join the West Wind Knight Order?”

Sophia responded decisively, “We are all willing.”

Charlot nodded, immediately assigning the Sheffield University students a two-hundred-man combat unit. These university elites were some of the empire’s best talents, and it would be a waste not to put them to use.

“We cannot confront Saint-rank opponents,” Charlot declared, “but we can’t just stand idle either. My plan is to patrol the outskirts of Strasbourg and strike at the invading beastmen.”

“You may rest in Machubi for two days. After that, we set out.”

...

Charlot returned to Machubi and was immediately engulfed in work. He didn't specially entertain his fellow students, but none of them minded. Instead, they were impressed by the commanding presence of their senior.

On Charlot's second day back, Anastasia arrived with over two thousand elite knights of the West Wind Knight Order from Silver Dove Castle. Charlot was initially taken aback but soon learned it was Dolores who had sent a letter calling for reinforcements, leaving Dubin and the Yellow Bear behind to command the other three knight orders.

Silver Dove Castle no longer faced any threats; the beastmen had already advanced toward Strasbourg. Leaving the West Wind Knight Order's best troops there would have been pointless.

Charlot, now bolstered by reinforcements, spent another day regrouping before mobilizing the entire force.

The current structure of the West Wind Knight Order, designed by Charlot himself, organized fifty knights into each combat unit. However, direct subordinates like Dolores, Dubin, and himself commanded larger units of up to eight hundred knights.

This structure allowed the knights to operate independently in battle. Each unit could fight autonomously without needing detailed instructions from higher command.

Given Charlot's limited military acumen, this decentralized approach was ideal. As someone who wasn't even a "keyboard warrior" in terms of military knowledge, he could issue broad commands while the unit leaders handled specifics.

This system had proven effective since Charlot had first transformed the Lukavaro patrol guards into the knight order. On the battlefield, their coordination felt almost seamless.

With their forces fully mobilized, the West Wind Knight Order swiftly engaged with the beastmen's outermost troops.

Charlot deliberately avoided targeting powerful tribes, instead focusing on weaker, smaller groups. Over the next seven to eight days, they achieved successive victories, capturing anywhere from dozens to hundreds of beastmen each day.

By the end of this campaign, Charlot's Labyrinth Guardians had expanded to over two thousand beastmen, allowing him to enter his familiar "troop-building" rhythm.

Charlot had initially planned to sustain these skirmishes for a while longer, but something unexpected happened.

The beastmen forces began to scatter and retreat in large numbers. After successive victories against several beastmen tribes, Charlot grew increasingly suspicious and decided to lead the West Wind Knight Order directly toward Strasbourg.

This time, their journey was unimpeded by storms.

...

When the West Wind Knight Order arrived at the gates of Strasbourg, the skies were clear. The only remnants of the beastmen's Saint-rank shamans were the massive ring-shaped dunes encircling the city, formed from accumulated sand and dust.

Charlot soon encountered the Royal Knight Order, who were pursuing the retreating beastmen.

The leader of this Royal Knight Order was a young man Charlot had met once at the Foreign Minister's residence. Although they weren't close, their acquaintance had reached a level above formalities.

The young man smiled upon seeing Charlot. "Charlot Mecklenburg, congratulations! Your West Wind Knight Order is the first loyalist force to arrive."

He quickly penned a letter of commendation and handed it to Charlot. "My advice is to forgo the pursuit of the beastmen and head directly to the Central Government Office."

Charlot, understanding the implicit suggestion, smiled back. "I see. Thank you for your counsel."

"This isn't the right time for formal thanks," he added, knowing that their shared camaraderie as imperial elites wasn't something to display openly in public.

The young man merely smiled, leading his Royal Knight Order past Charlot's forces and into the distance.

After a brief hesitation, Charlot decided to follow the advice. Leaving most of his forces outside the city—particularly the beastmen Labyrinth Guardians, who were certainly not welcome in Strasbourg—he brought two thousand knights from the West Wind Knight Order and marched into the city.

On their way, Charlot saw several Royal Knight Orders heading out to pursue the beastmen. However, he neither encountered anyone he recognized nor was approached by anyone.

He left his knights stationed at No. 1 Falcon Street and, accompanied by Sophia Gallanord, Dolores, Belisa, and Anastasia, proceeded to the Central Government Office.

All his male commanders were absent, leaving him with an all-female entourage.

...

Charlot submitted the letter of commendation at the Central Government Office. Not long after, a royal messenger arrived, bearing an imperial decree.

The messenger, smiling broadly, addressed Charlot. "The Emperor himself led the counterattack against the beastmen army, personally commanding the battle that slew seven Saint-rank shamans. His Majesty is gratified to learn that someone had come to Strasbourg's aid so promptly."

"Julius Axel has decided to reward your loyalty. Charlot Mecklenburg is hereby promoted two ranks to a Level 25 Chief Clerk and granted the right to expand your private knight order to a hundred men."

"Furthermore, as His Majesty heard that you practice Blood Glory, he has gifted you a Blood Core of a vampiric baron and instructed Stellar Workshop to craft a custom vampiric weapon for you, all expenses and materials provided by the royal treasury."

This unexpected reward left Charlot both astonished and delighted. He accepted the royal decree and the sealed box containing the Blood Core, offering a generous gratuity to the messenger before seeing him off.

Reflecting on the events, Charlot felt deeply grateful to the young man from the Royal Knight Order. He suspected the man had rushed out first to claim credit, ensuring Charlot's recognition came through. However, given the circumstances, it would be some time before he could thank him in person.

...

After completing his duties at the Central Government Office, Charlot allowed Sophia and Dolores to return home, as both were Strasbourg natives.

Charlot himself returned briefly to No. 1 Falcon Street to organize his affairs before heading to his residence at 58 Elysée Avenue.

He was still unclear on how the empire had managed to turn the tide against the beastmen, so he sent Mrs. Nancy to inform Annie of his return and requested that she bring back recent newspapers on her way.

...

Back in the familiar comfort of his home, Charlot indulged in a rare moment of peace. After a refreshing bath, he changed into clean clothes and enjoyed a meal prepared by Madam Umeboshi.

However, this tranquility was short-lived as Annie burst in, her tears streaming as she threw herself into Charlot's arms.

Charlot coughed lightly, beginning his performance. In a voice full of emotion, he said, "I encountered the beastmen army. From their captives, I learned that they had crossed the border to attack Strasbourg."

“Though I trusted Strasbourg’s defenses, I couldn’t quell my anxiety. So I led the West Wind Knight Order through great peril to return, only to be repeatedly delayed. When the storms subsided, I rushed into Strasbourg at once.”

“Seeing you safe and sound makes every risk I took and every battle I fought worthwhile.”

Nestled in his arms, Annie felt a deep sense of warmth. Hearing his recount of deeds didn’t particularly move her, but the mention of the West Wind Knight Order stirred her emotions.

She had long known the name of Charlot’s knight order but hearing him speak it aloud brought a newfound depth of meaning.

Quietly, she murmured, “I would rather you stayed safe and never returned than risk your life to claim the honor of being the first to arrive in Strasbourg.”

Chapter 246: The Mirror Spirit

Previously, Charlot Mecklenburg had made the mistake of notifying everyone he knew simultaneously. This time, he wouldn’t repeat such a folly. On the first day, he only informed Annie Bretagne, allowing them to enjoy a warm afternoon together on the terrace of 58 Elysée Avenue. They sipped coffee, played with clever cat kittens, and admired the scenery along the Lukavaro River.

Across the Lukavaro River was Charlot’s jurisdiction. He was not only the Chief Overseer of the Lukavaro District patrol guards but also the director of the Administrative Bureau for the district, as well as the owner of both No. 1 and No. 2 Falcon Street.

However, the third-floor terrace of 58 Elysée Avenue was not tall enough to offer a view of No. 1 Falcon Street.

Although the two young people did nothing but chat idly, sharing heartfelt stories about their time apart, Charlot still felt contentment and joy.

Spending time with the girl he cherished, on his own terrace, with a scenic view and three adorable clever cat kittens frolicking about, indeed brought a subtle sense of happiness that lingered in the air.

After all, isn’t this fleeting moment of leisure what many people toil so hard to achieve?

If such carefree tranquility could be enjoyed all the time, without the burdens of life, there would be no need to struggle so much.

Yet, this world demands beasts of burden far more than it needs people capable of perceiving happiness.

Thus, some continually push the world towards chaos.

Charlot had never imagined that he, a mere mathematics teacher, would transmigrate to another world. Nor had he thought that, as a civil servant, he would lead troops. Yet in less than a year, he had been forged by the battlefield into a seasoned "veteran."

...

After sending Annie Bretagne off, Charlot continued his daily routine of practicing Blood Glory. Once he completed his training, he sought out a mirror.

When he infused the nine swirling vortices of Blood Glory into his eyes and gazed into a mirror in the hall, a "Charlot" appeared in the reflection. Though this mirror version of himself mimicked his posture, an indescribable sinister smile played on its face.

Charlot smiled faintly and murmured, "So, this is the Mirror Spirit?"

The Infinite Mirror World of the Van Gogh Clan was an exceedingly eerie supernatural ability.

Anyone from the Van Gogh Clan who trained in the Infinite Mirror World was forbidden from looking into mirrors in their daily lives. The reason was simple: the moment they gazed into a mirror, a Mirror Spirit would be born.

The Mirror Spirit could only exist within the mirror, but within that world, it possessed all the abilities of its original. To control a mirror, the clan member had to kill the Mirror Spirit.

The more Mirror Spirits killed, the more mirrors they could control, strengthening the Infinite Mirror World until it eventually evolved into a fully-fledged mirrored world.

...

Charlot raised an eyebrow; the Mirror Spirit mirrored the action.

Charlot picked his nose; the Mirror Spirit followed suit.

Charlot struck a seductive pose; the Mirror Spirit mimicked it precisely.

Finally, Charlot reached for a Knight's Lance, and the Mirror Spirit also grabbed one.

Charlot then discarded the ordinary Knight's Lance and replaced it with the Berserker Blade.

The Mirror Spirit's expression shifted drastically.

Mirror Spirits could replicate their original's abilities since those powers were derived directly from the original. However, they could not replicate artifacts, not even ordinary enchanted replicas.

Charlot burst into laughter and strode into the mirror world with the Berserker Blade in hand.

The mirrored world was exceedingly small, limited to a part of 58 Elysée Avenue, as the mirror could only reflect portions of the residence.

With his Knight's Lance pointed forward, Charlot advanced. The Mirror Spirit mirrored the movement, assuming the exact same posture and unleashing a charge with Heaven's Wing Spear Technique.

When the two Knight's Lances clashed, the Berserker Blade emitted a faint blood-red aura, shattering the Mirror Spirit's lance.

The anti-magic property of the Berserker Blade came into play. Being a malevolent entity, the Mirror Spirit's lance, conjured from corrupt energy, was countered and destroyed.

With a swift thrust, Charlot skewered the Mirror Spirit onto his lance. Grasping its head with his free hand, he casually twisted it.

The Mirror Spirit dissolved into wisps of black smoke and vanished.

Standing still for a moment, Charlot sensed that he had taken control of this small mirrored world.

Charlot lingered briefly in the mirrored world before laughing and remarking, "Interesting!"

"Though it's too much trouble."

Exiting the mirrored world, he began pacing around the house with the mirror in hand.

Mrs. Nancy and Madam Umeboshi, along with the clever cat kittens, watched their master curiously but refrained from disturbing him. Both women were well-trained housekeepers who knew better than to interfere with their master's eccentricities.

Charlot held the mirror high, reflecting the entirety of 58 Elysée Avenue, the nearby streets, the river, and the scenery from the terrace.

When he returned the mirror to its original position and re-entered the mirrored world, it had grown considerably larger. It now encompassed most of Elysée Avenue, a section of the Lukavaro River, numerous buildings, Mrs. Nancy, Madam Umeboshi, the kittens, and even distant passersby.

However, the mirrored buildings were inaccessible; the mirror could only capture their exteriors, not their interiors. The Lukavaro River was also shallow, appearing broad but not deep enough to submerge an ankle.

The mirrored figures were simplistic, performing only a few repetitive motions.

Initially amused, Charlot soon found the mirrored world dull.

Leaving the mirrored world, he mused, "This house only has one mirror. A world built on a single mirror is too fragile. I'll need to gather more mirrors. But it's late now, and the shops on Elysée Avenue have already closed. I'll go tomorrow."

...

The next morning, Charlot had yet to ask Mrs. Nancy to notify Venie Arsenault, Sylvie Martin, or any of his other friends, nor had he gone out to purchase more mirrors, when a visitor arrived.

While enjoying breakfast prepared by Madam Umeboshi, he heard a knock at the door. He instructed Mrs. Nancy to answer it, and in walked a middle-aged gentleman he didn't recognize.

The man was plainly dressed, with a stern visage, devoid of any ornamentation. Beside him stood someone Charlot did recognize—Sophia Gallanord.

It was then Charlot recalled that he had forgotten to ask Dolores Soumet about the Gallanord family's situation.

Chapter 247: Miss Bunana's Fury Will Become a Literary Giant of the Fars Empire

Sophia Gallanord had changed into a formal dress. When she saw Charlot Mecklenburg, she gave a slight bow and said, "Mr. Mecklenburg, thank you for your care during this time. I have come to express my gratitude personally."

The middle-aged gentleman accompanying her gave a polite smile and said, "I am Yalman, the steward of the Gallanord Estate, accompanying the young lady. I also bring the earl's gratitude."

"The Earl said that Sophia's life is worth more to him than all the treasures of the world. He cannot imagine how he would continue to live without his daughter. He also mentioned that no gift could match the value of Sophia herself, so he can only repay you with his sincerest friendship."

“Should you have any needs in the future, the Gallanord family will do everything in their power to assist you.”

Charlot smiled while searching his memory, thinking to himself, “The Earl? I don’t recall ever hearing about him. Never mind, I’ll ask Dolores about it later.”

“Hmm, actually, Annie might know too. How did I forget this yesterday?”

“Oh, right...”

“Asking about the Rose of Strasbourg in front of Annie is like courting death. Out of respect for life and my pursuit of a good existence, I instinctively avoided that tragic question.”

In the Fars Empire, some nobles wielded real power and held high status, while others had their prestige rooted in history, rendering their status relatively modest.

For instance, Grand Duke Ferdinand, though a duke, held far less influence than Earl Bretagne. Even the nannies of the Bretagne family were at the Saint rank, while the Grand Duke struggled to gather a handful of mid- to high-ranked transcendents.

Charlot invited the two inside and instructed Madam Umeboshi to prepare coffee and tea.

Although he was in the middle of breakfast, he set aside his meal and asked Madam Umeboshi to remove the tableware, instead inviting the two guests to sit in his small study.

Sophia Gallanord’s every gesture displayed the demeanor of a noble maiden, yet her sapphire-like eyes seemed to convey a hint of unease, as though saying, “With Steward Yalman here, I cannot express closeness.”

Charlot dismissed it as a misperception and treated them as ordinary friends.

After half an hour, Steward Yalman reminded her, “Miss, the Earl has matters requiring your presence later.”

Sophia rose, gave a slight bow, and bid farewell.

Once Charlot saw them off, he exhaled a small sigh of relief. For some inexplicable reason, Steward Yalman’s presence felt oppressive.

Charlot no longer had the appetite to resume his breakfast and instead instructed Mrs. Nancy to send messages to Venie Arsenault and Sylvie Martin. He also asked her to visit No. 1 Falcon Street to bring Anastasia and Belisa over. With Dolores just returning to Strasbourg, Charlot opted not to disturb her.

Madam Umeboshi, aware of the impending guests—mostly young ladies—began preparing pastries. She couldn’t help but mutter to herself, “Mr. Mecklenburg’s guests are always beautiful young ladies. I’ve never seen him host a single gentleman.”

“If he were born in the New Continent, he’d probably have over a hundred children by now.”

Unaware of his cook’s grumblings, Charlot hadn’t activated his Eye of Insight while at home.

Half an hour later, Madam Umeboshi brought out a tray of freshly baked apple pies.

Charlot, though not very hungry, found the pies irresistible. Their crispy exterior and warm apple filling were delicious, and he ended up eating the entire plate.

An hour later, the young ladies began arriving at 58 Elysée Avenue one after another.

Miss Annie Bretagne was the third to arrive, while Miss Dolores Soumet was the last.

Aside from Belisa, these young women were all university graduates. Even Belisa, as a second-tier Sky Ascender, was a high-caliber individual—far beyond the reach of most ordinary graduates to transcendence.

Soon, the residence at 58 Elysée Avenue turned into a lively gathering of ladies. Charlot, though present, hardly dared to interject in their conversations, doing his best to reduce his presence.

When Sylvie Martin heard Anastasia mention Charlot’s recent appointment as acting magistrate for Starburg, Bybury City, Seagull City, Silver Dove Castle, and Mount Ode City, she was astonished and casually asked, “Have you been back to Seagull City?”

This seemingly trivial question instantly drew the attention of all the ladies.

As the son of a merchant, Charlot had cultivated an image of estrangement from his family, emphasizing how his brother monopolized their family assets. Even Venie Arsenault, among others, was quite concerned about Charlot’s family situation. This merchant’s son was now one of the most outstanding young men in the empire, standing shoulder-to-shoulder with peers from illustrious lineages.

Charlot shrugged and replied, “I sent them some small gifts.” His tone carried a hint of grievance.

Sylvie Martin, fully aware of Charlot’s “true nature,” said nothing, but the other young women began to imagine all sorts of scenarios. Annie even conjured up visions of a wicked sister-in-law and a greedy brother plotting against the younger sibling—a classic tale from folklore that sparked maternal sympathy.

Sylvie quickly realized the awkward atmosphere and refrained from pressing the issue. After all, her own relationship with Charlot was somewhat complicated. Moreover, Charlot’s sister-in-law was her older sister, and once that connection was exposed, her former fiancée status would become impossible to conceal.

Hastily, she said, “Though it’s not ideal, I think you’re managing well enough as things are.”

Sylvie's ambiguous remark sounded like an acknowledgment of familial strife to the other ladies.

Anastasia, known for her bluntness, remarked, "I've heard there are many rumors about Mr. Mecklenburg in Seagull City. Why would anyone spread baseless rumors unless they had something to gain? It must be his brother trying to prevent him from returning to claim the inheritance..."

Charlot broke out in a cold sweat and quickly interrupted, "Anastasia! Please, let's not talk about that anymore. Just forget it."

Enemies? Charlot had more than his fair share in Seagull City.

In fact, the city was crawling with them. Some didn't even realize their enmity toward Charlot Mecklenburg, while others spread tales that were anything but baseless.

Charlot thought to himself, "I was considering whether to make Freeman Martin the protagonist of the narrative. For the sake of my future reputation, he must be the protagonist—whether he likes it or not."

"Freeman Martin will go down in history, no doubt about it."

"The fury of Miss Bunana shall establish her as a literary giant of the Fars Empire!"

"I'm an innocent man."

Chapter 248: Alchemical Magic Crystal Glass Window

As evening descended, Charlot Mecklenburg bid farewell to each of the ladies. Although his affection for Annie Bretagne was evident, he refrained from any intimate gestures in front of others—there was no rush, as they had plenty of private time together.

Charlot did not return home immediately. Instead, he strolled along Elysée Avenue for several hundred steps until he reached a shop outfitted with alchemical magic crystal glass. The shop had long closed, but under the dim moonlight, Charlot's shadow stood vividly reflected on the glass.

Suddenly, the shadow on the alchemical magic crystal glass window grinned and made an inviting gesture.

The Van Gogh Clan, practitioners of the Infinite Mirror World, were known for their peculiar cultivation method. Each time they killed a mirror spirit, their power would increase. However, if a mirror spirit killed them, the spirit would take their place, assuming their identity.

In Byron, there was a legend suggesting that the entire Van Gogh Clan had already been killed by mirror spirits during their cultivation, and that the current clan members were merely "spirits of the mirror."

Charlot was uncertain about the truth of this legend, but one fact was indisputable: mirror spirits were incredibly dangerous.

Still, mirror spirits had significant weaknesses.

Without hesitation, Charlot stepped into the alchemical magic crystal glass window. Immediately, his vision transformed, revealing a bustling, brightly lit version of Elysée Avenue. The streets teemed with ten times the usual number of people, each wearing an unsettling smile.

The pedestrians spoke among themselves, yet their actions and expressions suggested they were conversing with someone unseen. They opened the doors of shops but rarely exited through the same doors. Instead, others emerged in their place.

This mirrored version of Elysée Avenue exuded an eerie and surreal aura, a discordant atmosphere that defied explanation.

Charlot quickly grasped why this mirrored world felt so bizarre. The alchemical magic crystal glass window had stood on this street for many years, reflecting countless passersby. The mirror spirit manipulated this window, creating a world within that mirrored the bustling evening life of Elysée Avenue. The people here weren't from the same moment in time, which explained their unnatural behaviors and excessive numbers.

A newspaper boy darted past Charlot.

Without hesitation, Charlot struck out, channeling Stardust Battle Energy into his palm and landing a blow on the boy's forehead.

The boy had concealed a short gun within the Withered Rose of Blood Glory. His twisted smile lingered even as his body crumbled into ash. Retrieving the Withered Rose, Charlot's expression turned grim.

"This mirror spirit can take the form of others. Tracking it down and killing it will be no simple task."

"Never mind. I won't bother searching."

With a flick of his wrist, Charlot aimed the Withered Rose at a random passerby and fired, killing them instantly. He didn't even glance at the disintegrating figure before turning the gun on a nearby woman.

This was the mirrored world. The people here were reflections, not real beings.

Charlot had no qualms about killing them all.

Every time the Withered Rose claimed a life, a new bullet appeared in its magazine.

Although these mirror-spawned individuals lacked true vitality, they contained a faint trace of malevolent energy. The Withered Rose could not distinguish between their energy and genuine power, absorbing it indiscriminately.

This discovery intrigued Charlot.

He stood in place, firing repeatedly. As the streets emptied, a young girl suddenly approached him, her mouth agape as if to scold him for his wanton slaughter. Yet no words came out, only the expression of indignation on her face.

Charlot shot her without hesitation. Her death added over a hundred bullets to the Withered Rose's magazine. Startled, Charlot chuckled to himself.

"Who would've thought mirror spirits could be so entertaining?"

The girl's figure dissolved into ash.

Suddenly, the entire street froze. Then, individuals began embracing one another, merging into single forms. These fused beings continued embracing others until the mirrored Elysée Avenue was left with just six "Charlots," each wielding an alchemical magic staff and advancing toward him from different directions.

Charlot, who often frequented this street, had unknowingly left his image reflected in the window many times—typically as a figure holding an alchemical magic staff.

Shaking his head, Charlot holstered the Withered Rose and unsheathed the Blood Rose. With a swift motion, he severed one of the mirror "Charlots," staff and all.

The remaining five mirror spirits responded by employing Arsilo Swordsmanship, but Charlot danced effortlessly among them. Even under their coordinated assault, he maintained control. Spotting a flaw in one of their movements, he struck with the Blood Rose, cutting the mirror spirit down.

"You can't replicate the true essence of Arsilo Swordsmanship."

Charlot sighed, countering another spirit's staff strike with a deft parry. Dark Corrosion infused the Blood Rose, causing the mirror spirit to explode into a cloud of black mist.

Mirror spirits couldn't replicate transcendent artifacts or reproduce secret techniques from outside the Van Gogh Clan.

However, the strength of mirror spirits derived from their original hosts in the Van Gogh Clan. The stronger the original practitioner, the more powerful the mirror spirit became.

At lower or intermediate levels, practitioners could rely on transcendent artifacts or supplementary powers. But at higher levels, obtaining equivalent artifacts became increasingly difficult, and secondary powers could no longer keep pace with the clan's secret techniques.

Fortunately for Charlot, such concerns were not yet relevant.

When he slew the final mirror spirit with the Blood Rose, the mirrored world fell under his control. He sensed another mirrored world connected to the mirror in his home.

Smiling faintly, Charlot reached out his right hand and gently clasped it, merging the two mirrored worlds into one.

Stepping forward, he did not exit through the alchemical magic crystal glass window on the street. Instead, he emerged from the mirror in his own home.

This was the Van Gogh Clan's secret art: Infinite Mirror World.

With any reflective surface, they could traverse and linger freely.

Mastering the Infinite Mirror World also allowed them to trap any opponent, even those slightly stronger than themselves.

However, the technique had its vulnerabilities. Its full potential could only be realized within the mirrored world. Refusing to enter the mirrored world or simply covering reflective surfaces could nullify its effects, as seen with Protagoras.

After contemplating for a moment, Charlot smiled and remarked, "This truly is a fascinating technique. What a pity it can't be used effectively on the battlefield."

He was now certain that the Infinite Mirror World and Agmirlas' Labyrinth Arts were entirely distinct. Yet why mastering three labyrinth transformations could unlock the Infinite Mirror World remained an enigma Charlot could not explain.

Chapter 249: The Stellar Workshop

On the third day after Charlot Mecklenburg returned to Strasbourg, Annie had classes and could not accompany him, so he decided to pay a visit to the Stellar Workshop.

Emperor Julius Axel had granted him a blood core of a vampire baron and instructed the Stellar Workshop to craft a vampiric weapon tailored specifically for him. All costs and materials would be covered by the royal treasury.

Charlot had no shortage of extraordinary weapons, but the ones truly compatible with him were few. While the Blood Rose, capable of housing the Blood Vortex in his left arm, had its merits, it was merely a low-tier extraordinary weapon. The Berserker Blade was powerful but inconvenient to carry around.

Among the rest of his extraordinary arsenal, his favorites were his three anti-space firearms. Unfortunately, whether it was the Anti-Space Long-Range Rifle or the two Firequell Silver Rhinos, they were heavily reliant on anti-magic armor-piercing rounds, which were prohibitively expensive and extremely hard to acquire.

This made Charlot particularly curious about what kind of extraordinary weapon the Stellar Workshop could craft for him.

...

The Stellar Workshop was located in the Rosé District, part of the old city area of the Sherlock dynasty. Charlot had visited the area once before with Annie for shopping. He chose not to take his Dark Luxury carriage but instead let Mrs. Nancy drive the usual horse-drawn carriage.

Charlot had heard of the Six Great Alchemy Workshops of the Fars Empire. The three anti-space firearms in his possession came from one of these workshops, the Firequell Workshop. He also once owned a Swiftstride Horse crafted by Stellar, which, while not extraordinary, was still an excellent alchemical creation. He had gifted it to Dubin Alger.

The Stellar Workshop had a long history and spanned an entire block. Both sides of the street were lined with shops owned by Stellar. Behind these shops were the workshop's Eastern and Western Alchemy Districts, where all Stellar products were crafted.

...

Charlot presented the emperor's writ at one of the shops and handed it over. The shopkeeper, too intimidated to handle such a significant matter on his own, promptly escorted Charlot to the back.

Soon, Charlot met a young man.

Willomar Stellar!

The heir to the Stellar Workshop!

Though the term "heir" wasn't used in the Old Continent, Willomar Stellar was the only son of Hasu Stellar, the workshop's master. Willomar was a highly skilled high-tier alchemy master and the youngest in the Old Continent to achieve this rank.

Hasu Stellar had no intention of meeting Charlot personally, so he sent his son instead.

Willomar greeted Charlot with a warm smile and said, "By the command of His Majesty Julius Axel, the Stellar Workshop will do everything in its power."

"What grade is the blood core you hold?" he asked. "Is it low-tier or mid-tier?"

Charlot hesitated for a moment and then said, "Could you return the writ to me for a moment?"

Willomar looked puzzled but replied, "I'm afraid the writ is the Stellar Workshop's royal mandate. Returning it to you is not possible. Should you insist on taking it back, we would be unable to craft your extraordinary weapon."

Charlot smiled apologetically. "I merely wish to look at it again. I do not intend to retrieve it."

Though the request was unusual, Willomar handed the writ back to Charlot. Charlot examined it carefully three times and noticed something that thrilled him—there was no mention of the grade of the blood core in the emperor's writ!

This was no royal oversight. The blood core of a vampire baron was already high-tier and extremely rare.

No one could have anticipated...

Charlot still possessed a Saint-tier blood core!

...

Returning the writ to Willomar, Charlot smiled and said, "I will need a private space."

Though Willomar found Charlot troublesome, he accommodated the request and arranged for a room.

Charlot placed his hand over his right arm, extracting the Dorian Saint-tier blood core from the Blood Vortex.

He had long been uncertain about how to use this priceless object. Though Charlot knew he might not be able to wield a Saint-tier extraordinary artifact until he reached the Saint rank, he also understood the inherent danger of possessing such a treasure. After all, the old Eastern adage said: "A man without sin becomes guilty simply by possessing a treasure."

But the opportunity was right before him. Why waste it?

When Charlot handed the Dorian Saint-tier blood core to Willomar Stellar with a bright smile, the youngest high-tier alchemist in the Old Continent's face changed seven times in rapid succession.

It couldn't change more—not because there wasn't time but because human skin could only display so many shades of complexity.

Willomar dared not question Charlot's legitimacy. After all, Charlot held the emperor's writ, and the document was authentic. A duplicate copy had been issued directly to the Stellar Workshop by the royal palace.

After a long pause, Willomar excused himself, saying he needed to consult his father. When he returned half an hour later, his expression was strange.

"In thirty minutes, you will have your vampiric weapon," Willomar announced.

Charlot was shocked. "In just thirty minutes?"

He could only imagine the Nine Ancestral Evils crafting a Saint-tier extraordinary weapon in such a short time. Charlot was skeptical that even a Saint-tier alchemist could complete such a monumental task so quickly.

Willomar smiled. "You'll see the result soon enough. Why not wait a little longer?"

"Hand me the blood core."

Though wary of potential theft, Charlot handed over the Dorian Saint-tier blood core. Willomar hurried off once more.

...

Half an hour later...

Willomar still hadn't returned.

Charlot grew restless. While he doubted the Stellar Workshop would dare steal from him—given his possession of the emperor's writ—the core's immense value left him uneasy. Finally, he called out, "Send for Willomar Stellar at once!"

The attendant—a low-tier alchemist assigned to assist him—dared not delay and quickly went to fetch Willomar. Another thirty minutes passed, and Charlot, nearly ready to dismantle the workshop himself, saw Willomar return, carrying a small box.

"Mr. Mecklenburg," Willomar began with a deep bow, "my father underestimated the difficulty of crafting this weapon, causing a slight delay."

“However, this extra time allowed us to perfect the weapon. I trust you’ll understand a true alchemist’s commitment to excellence.”

Charlot eyed the small box. It seemed far too compact to hold a weapon...

Chapter 250: The Blood Rhinoceros

Charlot Mecklenburg accepted the box, still finding it hard to believe. He remarked, “Your father can forge a Saint-rank transcendent weapon in just half an hour? That’s simply incredible.”

Willomar Stellar chuckled slightly and replied, “That’s impossible.”

Charlot’s expression shifted subtly, and an ominous feeling crept over him.

Seeing Charlot’s change in demeanor, Willomar Stellar realized the misunderstanding and smiled, explaining, “To my knowledge, even a Saint-rank alchemist, given ample materials, would take at least two years and six months to craft a Saint-rank transcendent weapon.”

“That particular Saint-rank transcendent weapon is now in the hands of Earl Bretagne. It’s a Saint-rank transcendent short spear.”

Charlot was mildly surprised. He hadn’t expected Annie Bretagne’s father to possess a Saint-rank transcendent weapon.

Calming himself, Charlot observed that Willomar Stellar exuded confidence and didn’t seem to be trying to deceive him. With the man right in front of him, even if there was some ulterior motive, Charlot felt he could handle it “as the situation unfolded.”

Although high-ranking alchemists held esteemed positions, their combat abilities were generally unimpressive. Charlot was confident he could skewer the man with a single sword strike if it came to that.

Unaware of Charlot’s sinister thoughts, Willomar Stellar could sense, however, that Charlot’s patience was reaching its limit. Smiling warmly, he decided to reveal the truth: “As you’re aware, we and the Byron vampires fought an unprecedented battle in Ferranden, involving dozens of Saint-ranks on both sides. Several Saint-ranks even perished.”

Charlot nodded slightly. Willomar Stellar continued, “Earl Gallanord killed a Saint-rank vampire and destroyed the enemy’s weapon. He found the weapon intriguing and entrusted it to our Stellar Workshop for repair.”

Charlot hadn't expected that, after hearing about Annie Bretagne's father, he would now also be hearing about Sophia Gallanord's father. Offhandedly, he asked, "What governmental position does Earl Gallanord hold?"

Willomar Stellar seemed slightly surprised and responded, "He's the Minister of War, one of the empire's top-ranking officials. Haven't you heard of him?"

Charlot broke into a sweat. Indeed, he had not.

He understood the weight of the title "Minister of War." In earthly terms, it was equivalent to a U.S. five-star general or a French seven-star marshal. Charlot hadn't realized that Sophia Gallanord's family was so powerful—that her father, Earl Gallanord, was the Minister of War. This Minister of War had also recently slain a Saint-rank vampire on the battlefield in Ferranden...

Willomar Stellar waited a moment, and when Charlot didn't ask further questions, he continued, "However, the most critical component of the weapon was destroyed, and my father was unable to repair it. Earl Gallanord decided to sell the weapon to us at Stellar Workshop."

"My father originally planned to disassemble it to harvest a batch of rare materials. He didn't expect you to bring in this Saint-rank blood core."

"You must have guessed it by now—the component that Earl Gallanord destroyed in that Saint-rank transcendent weapon was the blood core. With the Saint-rank blood core you've provided, my father can restore it."

Charlot finally understood why Saint-rank alchemist Hasu Stellar had been able to produce a Saint-rank vampiric weapon for him in just half an hour.

Taking a deep breath, Charlot opened the box in his hands. Inside was a short segment of chain, incredibly fine—slightly thinner than a pair of chopsticks. Of course, chopsticks didn't exist on the Old Continent. It wasn't particularly long, just enough to loop around his wrist once.

It was, essentially, a bracelet.

The chain glowed a blood-red hue, exquisitely crafted, but it didn't resemble a weapon in the slightest.

Standing nearby, Willomar Stellar whispered, "This weapon requires the secret techniques of the Dorian Clan to activate. Without them, you may be unable to use it, but that doesn't change the fact that it's a Saint-rank vampiric weapon."

Charlot asked calmly, "What is its name? And what special properties does it possess?"

Willomar Stellar answered, "Its name is *Blood Rhinoceros*."

“The weapon master who designed *Blood Rhinoceros* was exceptionally skilled. Depending on the blood core embedded in it, the weapon can manifest in different forms and acquire unique attributes.”

“Originally, the weapon appeared as a short spear. But now that a Saint-rank Dorian blood core has been embedded, I have no idea what changes it might undergo.”

Charlot couldn't extract any more useful information from Willomar Stellar, so he dropped the matter. Channeling a sliver of his Blood Glory into the chain, he confirmed that it was indeed a transcendent artifact, unfathomable in depth. At the moment, however, he couldn't activate it.

Putting the *Blood Rhinoceros* away, Charlot said, “I have one final request: I hope Stellar Workshop can keep this confidential. Just say I used a baron-grade blood core.”

Willomar Stellar smiled and replied, “I can assist with that. However, you understand that related documents must be sent back to the Imperial Palace. Whether they leak information or not is beyond our control.”

Charlot smiled faintly and said, “Just do your best. I won't demand more.”

Willomar Stellar hadn't anticipated the imperial task would be completed so easily. After chatting with Charlot for a while, he excused himself, saying, “The workshop has many pressing matters, so I must take my leave.”

Charlot didn't mind and replied, “I was about to depart as well.”

...

Leaving the Stellar Workshop, Charlot did not return to his carriage. Instead, he wandered the streets for a while. Passing a shop with a magical alchemical crystal display window, he checked to make sure no one was watching before stepping into the “Mirror World.”

The mirror spirit within this window behaved almost identically to the one inside the shop on Elysée Avenue. Using the same tactics as before, Charlot subdued the mirror spirit within half an hour, gaining control of this segment of the Mirror World.

However, the Rosé District was too far away. This Mirror World segment was entirely disconnected from the one Charlot had established on Elysée Avenue.

Charlot didn't mind. He merely wanted a quiet place to examine the *Blood Rhinoceros* he had just acquired.

While in the Stellar Workshop, he hadn't dared to fully unleash his abilities. But in the Mirror World, there was no such concern. Channeling all his Blood Glory into the blood vortex in his right arm, he directed the surging blood energy into the *Blood Rhinoceros*.

As expected of a Saint-rank artifact, its quality was extraordinary. Even after receiving nearly all his Blood Glory, the artifact remained unresponsive. When Charlot was on the verge of exhaustion and about to give up, the short chain suddenly wriggled upward as if alive, burrowing into the blood vortex in his right arm.

It was clear that this transcendent artifact possessed remarkable sentience. It simply had not yet acknowledged Charlot as its master.

Charlot pulled it out from his right arm. However, the moment he loosened his grip, the *Blood Rhinoceros* immediately slipped back into the blood vortex.

Aside from transforming from a Saint-rank blood core into a transcendent artifact, it seemed to exhibit no other change.

Chapter 251: Business Is About Meeting Needs

“Unfortunately, my strength is still too weak.”

Charlot Mecklenburg gave up on his attempt. After lingering in the mirror world reflected in the shop window for a while, he managed to recover about 30-40% of his blood energy before stepping out of the window.

Charlot checked the Withered Rose. As before, the bullets transformed by killing the Mirror Spirits in the mirror world disappeared upon leaving it. Even if he reentered the mirror world, the bullets would not reappear.

However, these bullets weren’t particularly valuable—not like the anti-magic armor-piercing rounds. Losing them wasn’t a big deal.

Charlot retraced his steps and found the carriage still parked by the street. Once inside, he didn’t immediately instruct Mrs. Nancy to return to 58 Elysée Avenue. Instead, he pondered for a moment, pulled out the baron-grade blood core, and extracted the Blood Rose from the blood vortex in his left arm. Turning to Mrs. Nancy, he said, “Go to the largest shop nearby and ask if they can enhance the quality of this vampiric rapier.”

Mrs. Nancy carefully took the Blood Rose and the baron-grade blood core, then left the carriage.

After a while, she returned with the two items in hand and said softly, “I asked at five shops, and all of them said it couldn’t be done.”

Charlot took back the Blood Rose and then retrieved the Withered Rose. “Try five more shops,” he instructed.

Mrs. Nancy followed his orders and left again. Before long, she returned and said, “Three shops said they could do it, but the prices they quoted were all high. The lowest was 1,500 écus.”

Charlot was silent for a moment before saying, “Got it.”

He retrieved the Withered Rose. This extraordinary weapon had cost him 200 gold pounds—a currency with slightly more purchasing power than écus. The baron-grade blood core’s value was harder to estimate but likely no less than 1,000 écus. Spending another 1,500 écus to forge a new weapon would bring the total cost to nearly 3,000 écus.

This price was reasonable. After all, Baron Feller had spent 3,600 écus to acquire the Dark Luxury, which wasn’t even an extraordinary weapon but merely a luxury item. If Charlot could obtain a high-grade vampiric weapon for just 3,000 écus, it would be a good deal.

But Charlot couldn’t calculate the value this way. The Withered Rose had been sold to him at a friendship price by Julian Arsilo, far below its true worth. The baron-grade blood core was priceless and extremely rare. If sold under the right conditions, it could fetch two or three times its base value of 1,000 écus.

Charlot concluded that selling the baron-grade blood core outright and using the proceeds to buy a vampiric weapon might save him the Withered Rose and the processing costs.

He couldn’t help but lament how profitable alchemists were. A single transaction like this could earn them one or two thousand écus, while Charlot’s salary alone might never allow him to save up that much in his lifetime.

Just as Charlot was about to instruct Mrs. Nancy to drive back to 58 Elysée Avenue, he heard a voice outside the carriage.

“Sir, I am Sean Connor from the Blue Magpie Workshop in the Stellar District. I heard you have a baron-grade blood core in your possession. Might you be willing to sell it?”

The Stellar Workshop owned all the workshops and shops in this district.

Charlot realized that sending Mrs. Nancy to inquire at shops in the Stellar District about enhancing vampiric weapons must have attracted the attention of interested parties. He responded in a low voice, “What’s your offer?”

Sean Connor’s voice came through the carriage door. “1,500 écus.”

Without hesitation, Charlot replied, “That’s a fair price, but I’m not in need of money. I’ll only part with it for something of higher value.”

Sean Connor's voice quickly followed. "Might I invite you to discuss this further at my workshop?"

Charlot responded, "Let's find a café instead."

"The Stellar District is known for its alchemical products, but its cafés leave much to be desired."

Charlot pushed open the carriage door. Sean Connor was a middle-aged man with a firm and clean appearance, though his face bore faint traces of weariness. Calmly, he boarded the carriage and sat opposite Charlot, scrutinizing the young stranger.

Charlot gave a brief instruction, and Mrs. Nancy drove the carriage out of the district. After turning onto another street, they soon arrived at an area with numerous cafés. Charlot randomly picked one, disembarked with Sean Connor, and entered. He ordered the house specialty coffee, while Sean Connor chose a classic bitter coffee resembling an American-style brew.

Sean Connor was the first to speak. "You visited several shops asking to enhance the quality of two vampiric weapons but didn't place an order. I take it you aren't entirely satisfied with either weapon."

Charlot smiled faintly, neither confirming nor denying.

The Withered Rose did lack some power, but it was still quite functional.

The Blood Rose, on the other hand, was his primary weapon, without equal.

Charlot found the vampiric rapier perfectly suited to his Arsilo Swordsmanship. It even fit into the blood vortex, making it an unparalleled choice.

Seeing Charlot's lack of objection, Sean Connor assumed he had guessed correctly and continued, "I'm unsure whether you seek to enhance these weapons for yourself or for a friend."

"But as you know, outside Byron, vampiric weapons are relatively inexpensive among extraordinary weapons."

"Even within Byron, due to differences among clans, the adaptability of vampiric weapons is rather limited."

"However, a baron-grade blood core, due to its broader applicability, can either be used to forge a brand-new, customized vampiric weapon or to upgrade an existing one. While its value might be moderate in human empires, it can fetch astronomical prices in Byron."

Charlot interjected at the right moment. "When flour costs more than bread."

Sean Connor chuckled, clearly finding the analogy apt. "Exactly."

"Business is about meeting needs."

"You have two less-than-ideal vampiric weapons and a baron-grade blood core."

"I, on the other hand, have two high-grade vampiric weapons but lack willing buyers."

"I wonder if the two high-grade vampiric weapons in my possession might interest you. If so, we can continue this discussion."

Sean Connor produced two short-barreled pistols. It was clear they had been crafted by the same alchemist; aside from minor differences in color and a few components, their main structures and dimensions were nearly identical. These pistols were elegantly designed yet practical, their contours reminiscent of the "Rattlesnake" series from Sig Sauer. Even Charlot, a military novice, could appreciate their beauty.

After a moment's contemplation, Charlot glanced at the workshop owner. Though Sean Connor spoke with confidence, his fatigue was evident in his expression. Charlot said lightly, "I'd wager that creating these two vampiric weapons drained your entire fortune... am I correct?"

Sean Connor's bitter smile deepened.

It was the taste of life itself.

The dominant flavor was always bitter, with only an occasional hint of sweetness.

Chapter 252: An Alchemist Always Dreams

Sean Conner took several deep breaths, as though pulling himself back from the brink of being overwhelmed. With a faintly bitter smile, he said, "I was too impatient, and you saw right through me."

"I went to Byron on business and came across two high-grade blood cores at a very favorable price. I intended to resell them but couldn't resist. You might not understand—every alchemist dreams of crafting one or two masterpieces."

"I exhausted all my resources and even took out a loan to forge these two vampiric pistols."

"I thought I could sell them for a high price, but after several auctions in Byron, they went unsold every time."

Charlot Mecklenburg raised an eyebrow in mild surprise and asked, "Why is that?"

Sean Conner was silent for a long moment before replying in a low voice, "I am from the Fars Empire and was trained in traditional alchemy."

Charlot nodded in realization. "Byron favors classical alchemy."

Several of the extraordinary weapons in Charlot's possession were made using both classical and traditional alchemy. He never found either inconvenient. In fact, the anti-space long-range rifles forged with traditional alchemy felt more practical and easier to use—aside from the cost of anti-magic armor-piercing rounds being slightly expensive, there were hardly any downsides.

Yet Charlot also understood why Byron's vampires disliked traditional alchemy. Vampires abhorred machinery!

Being a peculiar form of sinister entity, most machinery was ineffective against them.

Weapons forged through traditional alchemy were highly effective against humans but less so against vampires.

Vampires, like humans, valued weapons that could harm their own kind the most.

Sean Conner murmured, "I am willing to sell one of these pistols to you in exchange for your baronial blood core."

Charlot smiled faintly and said, "I want both pistols. How about a thirty percent discount?"

Sean Conner looked up in shock. "That's impossible."

"I'm already selling at a loss."

"Another thirty percent discount..."

"You're breaking my back here."

Charlot spread his hands and said, "After all, you can't sell these pistols to anyone else. Why not sell both to me?"

Sean Conner flatly refused. "No! I will only sell one."

Charlot didn't argue further and instead asked, "What was your original asking price for these pistols?"

Sean Conner looked despondent. "Five thousand écus each. Ten thousand for both."

Charlot quickly calculated in his head and arrived at a figure. One écu equated to about 18,000 to 19,000 yuan in purchasing power. Based on Sean Conner's initial asking price, each pistol was close to 90 million yuan, and together they surpassed three hundred million.

Where was the loss? Where was the supposed breaking of his back?

This was the attitude of a true capitalist.

Charlot's eyes gleamed faintly as he asked, "Do these pistols offer any unique bonuses when used together?"

Sean Conner's eyes brightened as he replied, "Both blood cores in the pistols come from the Nicholas Clan. One pistol's core is inscribed with a Swiftstep Technique x6, and the other has Swiftstep Technique x7. When the same user owns both, the effects combine to grant Swiftstep Technique x9."

"As for other attributes..."

Charlot kept his expression neutral, but inside, a storm raged. Only one thought floated above the turbulent waves: "I must have them. Both of them."

"These pistols are a necessity."

"Even if this purchase becomes the single largest expense of both my lifetimes combined."

"Most West Wind Knight Order soldiers earn only a few dozen centimes weekly. This sum could support the entire Order for two or three months... but it's worth it!"

Charlot wasn't even interested in their offensive capabilities. With Swiftstep Technique boosted to x9, his speed would be unmatched beneath the Saint rank.

Besides, he already had Swiftstep Technique x2.

Charlot gave a soft "Oh" in response. He wasn't sure about his acting skills, but Sean Conner clearly didn't catch on. With great effort, Sean said, "Even now, I cannot accept less than three thousand écus per pistol. Both together, at least ten thousand écus."

Charlot sympathetically patted Sean's shoulder and said, "You won't sell them."

"Also, have you considered someone might try to split the purchase by involving an acquaintance?"

Sean Conner's eyes lit up. "If I sell one, I'll raise the price of the other. Buyers will then understand the unique value these pistols hold."

"Extraordinary weapons should be expensive. These are lifesaving tools capable of defeating enemies. How could they be cheap?"

Charlot countered, "What if someone purchases one just to collect, not to use?"

Sean Conner grew agitated. "Impossible! My creation, my masterpiece—it's flawless. Who wouldn't use it?"

Charlot shrugged. "Many nobles don't personally fight."

Sean Conner retorted, "I wouldn't sell my masterpiece to such people."

Charlot sighed. "Only those kinds of people have money. I now understand why you haven't sold these pistols."

"If you stay this stubborn, you'll go bankrupt."

The words struck a nerve. Sean Conner slumped, muttering repeatedly, "I won't go bankrupt. I won't go bankrupt. I still have a chance to rise again. I will become a great alchemist."

Charlot, his eyes filled with sympathy, said, "Sell them to me, and you'll have the capital to rise again. I suspect you're already struggling with debt. The interest must be high."

"You still have a chance now, but if you delay, the accumulating interest might leave you with nothing even after selling them. You'll lose the opportunity to bounce back."

Sean Conner hung his head, whispering to himself. Charlot didn't interrupt, giving the man space to think.

After half an hour, Sean Conner made a firm decision. "You can have both pistols for your baronial blood core, two vampiric weapons, and 6,500 écus."

Charlot shook his head. "I can't give up my vampiric weapons. Baronial blood core and 3,000 écus."

Sean Conner's forehead veins bulged. "That price is impossible."

Charlot replied, "Both my weapons are worth over 1,000 écus each. Your price lacks sincerity."

The negotiation continued, with both sides gradually softening their positions.

Finally, when the price reached a range of a baronial blood core plus 7,000 écus versus 4,500 écus, Charlot played his trump card. He summoned a waiter, paid for two coffees, and said, "Why don't you take some time to reconsider?"

Sean Conner wrestled with his thoughts like an internal battle between angels and demons. At last, he pushed the box containing the two pistols toward Charlot and said, "Baronial blood core and 5,500 écus!"

"That's my final offer!"

"I see you truly love these pistols. May they follow you to great deeds and legendary feats."

Chapter 253: The Future Renowned Guns—Rattlesnakes

Charlot Mecklenburg did not bargain further; he agreed immediately.

Of course, he didn't have that much money on him. Even his deposits at the Savings Union fell short of the required amount. After all, 5,500 gold écus, converted to purchasing power in yuan, was roughly equivalent to a "small target." Only by returning to Machubi could he access enough cash to pay Sean Connor and complete the transaction.

Charlot proposed retrieving the money, explaining that he would need to leave Strasbourg for another city.

Sean Connor was visibly hesitant. After a moment of thought, he made a suggestion: the two parties could first exchange goods, and then he would accompany Charlot to retrieve the cash.

Charlot had no objections. The owner of the Stellar Workshop on Star Street immediately summoned a young runner. Soon, seven or eight low-ranking alchemists, led by a middle-aged woman, arrived at the café.

The woman was evidently Sean Connor's wife. While concerned for her husband, she understood she couldn't stop him. She bid him a gentle farewell, expressing her hope for his swift return.

The woman took the baron's blood core, and Sean Connor, as though drained of all his strength, pushed the gun case toward Charlot, saying, "They are yours now."

Charlot smiled and said, "Let's get going!"

With a snap of his fingers, the Dark Luxury emerged. Charlot turned to Mrs. Nancy and instructed, "Return to 58 Elysée Avenue. If Annie comes by in the next couple of days, tell her I'll be back soon, within a day or two. No need to worry."

Mrs. Nancy drove the carriage away.

Sean Connor gazed at the Dark Luxury, unable to resist stepping closer to touch it. "Is this the Dark Luxury crafted by Saint Alchemist Stardust?" he asked.

Charlot smiled. "Indeed, the Dark Luxury. We'd best hurry. Though ordinary carriages would take several days to travel, even the Dark Luxury needs to make good time to ensure we return by tomorrow."

Sean Connor, now entirely reassured by the transaction, followed Charlot aboard the Dark Luxury. Someone who owned such a carriage surely wouldn't be troubled by a few thousand gold écus.

Then again, no ordinary person would spend that much on a supernal carriage.

Once aboard the Dark Luxury, Charlot opened the gun case. Inside lay two high-grade extraordinary vampiric pistols. He picked one up.

As Charlot grasped the extraordinary pistol, its attributes immediately became clear: enhanced speed, life devour, bullet animation, anti-space, invisibility, and venom. It featured a composite magazine capable of loading standard, energy, and anti-magic bullets.

The enhanced speed equated to Swiftstep Technique x6.

The life devour ability allowed the weapon to absorb the enemy's life force to heal its wielder and could also condense blood energy bullets. This was similar to the Withered Rose, but with the added ability to restore the wielder's health.

Bullet animation was a unique property, enabling ordinary bullets to behave as though alive, burrowing through an enemy's body. Blood energy bullets could continually devour life force to grow stronger, inflicting sustained damage.

As for anti-space, invisibility, and venom, they hardly needed explanation. The pistol could be hidden within any object, its wielder could blend into the air, and bullets could carry potent toxins.

This pistol was undoubtedly a top-tier extraordinary weapon, even more lethal than the Firequell Silver Rhino.

Charlot set the first pistol down and picked up the second.

This one boasted eight attributes: enhanced speed, life devour, ultra-long range, anti-space, eagle eye, bear strength, adrenaline, and sleeplessness. Like the first, it could load standard, energy, and anti-magic bullets.

Its speed enhancement, Swiftstep Technique x7, slightly outperformed the first pistol.

The ultra-long-range attribute was self-explanatory, surpassing even Charlot's anti-space long-range rifle in range and covering a vast area.

Eagle eye enhanced vision, bear strength increased physical strength, adrenaline temporarily boosted physical stamina, and sleeplessness sacrificed life force for endurance.

It was difficult to say which of the two pistols was superior, but Charlot liked both immensely.

After admiring them for a while, he asked, "Do they have names?"

Sean Connor replied, “No. I had hoped they’d become the crowning works of my career as an alchemist, but they remained unsold, so I never named them.”

Charlot said, “I think they should be called Rattlesnakes!”

The name reminded Charlot of the Rattlesnake short-barreled rifle produced by SIG Sauer on Earth, so he casually gave them that name.

Sean Connor’s face froze momentarily before he muttered, “A good name.”

In fact, these two pistols once had a name—Rattlesnakes. Sean Connor had removed the name when they failed to sell, but their first owner ended up naming them Rattlesnakes again.

It seemed like destiny.

One pistol, with red accents on key parts, Charlot decided to name the Red Viper. The other, with blue highlights, he named the Blue Rattlesnake.

Charlot concealed the two vampiric pistols within mechanisms on his wrists, allowing him to draw and fire them with a simple motion.

Pulled by eight Mirror Spirits, the Dark Luxury trotted through Strasbourg. Once outside the city, it accelerated, leaving a trail of dust in its wake.

The Dark Luxury at full speed was far faster than any ordinary carriage. The endurance of the Mirror Spirits was unmatched by regular horses, allowing them to run nonstop for days.

Outside Strasbourg, a few scattered orcs lingered, but most couldn’t catch up to the Dark Luxury. Those who could were usually smart enough not to block such a vehicle, understanding that only a “great noble” could afford a supernal carriage.

In the Old Continent, great nobles were often synonymous with the extraordinary, sometimes even high-ranking extraordinaries.

By dusk, the Dark Luxury had arrived in Machubi.

Sean Connor’s expression shifted slightly at the sight of Machubi, but his astonishment grew as the Dark Luxury entered the city. Although he was from Strasbourg and knew of the ancient orc fortress ruins just 200 kilometers from the capital of the Fars Empire, he hadn’t expected the ruins to be bustling with life, transformed into a vibrant hub.

For Charlot, returning to Machubi felt more like coming home than being at 58 Elysée Avenue.

Charlot retrieved two stacks of flor bills and handed them to Sean Connor with a smile. “Please count them.”

As Sean Connor counted the money, he couldn't help but ask, "How has this place regained its vitality?"

Charlot found the question difficult to answer, so he replied with a chuckle, "Perhaps because there are no taxes here."

Sean Connor's eyes lit up.

Charlot didn't linger. After paying for the pistols, he and Sean Connor returned to Strasbourg.

The next morning, Charlot dropped Sean Connor off at the Stellar Workshop. When he returned to 58 Elysée Avenue, he unexpectedly received a summons requiring him to return to his territory and forbidding him from staying in Strasbourg any longer.

Chapter 254: Orc Saint Rank

The document was worded harshly, and Charlot Mecklenburg dared not neglect it. After a brief farewell with Annie Bretagne, he hurriedly departed Strasbourg, taking all his subordinates with him.

This time, Sophia Gallanord was no longer part of his team, nor were the students from Sheffield University.

Charlot had returned to Strasbourg with bountiful gains—both in position and personal strength. Apart from a slight reluctance to part ways with Annie, he was in a rather cheerful mood.

Upon leaving Strasbourg, Charlot rendezvoused with the troops stationed outside the city and set out directly for Machubi Fortress Labyrinth. Though they encountered small groups of defeated orc soldiers along the way, none posed any threat. After all, he now commanded the main force of the West Wind Knight Order as well as the Orc Labyrinth Guards, a force capable of standing up to any orc tribe head-on.

Back in Machubi, the first thing Charlot did was convert the orc warriors captured en route into Labyrinth Guards. However, he soon discovered a major issue.

Among the over 300 orc captives, there was one who could not be turned into an NPC, no matter what he tried. It was utterly impossible to transform this individual into a Labyrinth Guard.

At first, Charlot was simply surprised, but that surprise soon turned into something else—terror.

What kind of person could resist NPC conversion? The answer was something he didn't want to face.

Countless ideas flooded Charlot's mind, but in the end, he decided to do nothing. It was akin to discovering a tiger hiding among his flock of sheep. As long as the tiger pretended to be a sheep, it was best for the shepherd to also pretend the tiger was just another sheep, rather than provoke it.

With this unexpected variable, Charlot decided not to linger in Machubi. He ordered Dolores Soumet to lead the elite forces of the West Wind Knight Order along one route, while he took the Orc Labyrinth Guards down another path.

Charlot didn't need much effort to identify the "aberrant" individual in his team. It was an elderly orc, seemingly of the leopard tribe, like Frederica. Despite his advanced age, he was lean, muscular, and as tough as iron.

One day out from Machubi, the old leopard orc remained with the group. Charlot stopped in his tracks; he couldn't risk bringing this individual to Silver Dove Castle.

Charlot retrieved the twin pistols, Red and Blue Vipers. He didn't intend to use them for combat but gently placed them against his left leg, merging them with the Blood Vortex within.

He hadn't displayed this technique before Sean Connor, but now, faced with an extraordinary orc of terrifying power, Charlot couldn't afford to hold back.

The synergy between the pistols and the agility runes within the Blood Vortex pushed the Swiftstep Technique to a tenfold amplification. Charlot felt as light as a feather, his confidence soaring.

The Orc Labyrinth Guards, like the West Wind Knights, were organized into small squads of fifty. Charlot first sent out a team composed mostly of older or weaker orcs, ordering them to scout for a campsite ten kilometers ahead. Half an hour later, he dispatched another weaker squad to join them.

The third time, Charlot carefully sent the old leopard orc's team ahead. Once they had departed and traveled for about ten minutes, Charlot decisively led the remaining Orc Labyrinth Guards in the opposite direction at full speed.

By evening, Charlot stopped to rest and checked his remaining forces. To his shock, the three dispatched squads had all returned, somehow rejoining the group without his notice.

This discovery left him deeply unsettled. That night, Charlot was restless and plagued by anxiety. At dawn, after a brief moment of relief, he devised another plan. Through an elaborate series of maneuvers, he left the old leopard orc and most of his troops in place, taking only his elite Labyrinth Guards on a furious dash away.

By evening, however, Charlot found his group inexplicably growing larger once again. By the end of the day, all the Labyrinth Guards had returned, and the old leopard orc was among them.

On the third day, Charlot made a desperate decision. Abandoning the nine extraordinary-ranked Labyrinth Guards, he fled alone, using the cover of darkness and the full power of his Swiftstep Technique x10 to run through the night. But as dawn broke, he saw a fully-formed orc camp calmly waiting for him ahead.

Charlot took a deep breath, finally understanding that he had been toying with forces beyond his control. Just as he had noticed the old leopard orc's oddity, the other had clearly discerned his small schemes.

Charlot gripped Berserker Blade tightly and strode into the orc camp. With a single command, all the Orc Labyrinth Guards drew their weapons, pointing them at the elderly leopard orc.

The old orc, who had previously feigned clumsiness and injury, appeared briefly stunned before letting out a chuckle. Rising to his feet, he said, "Young human, you are clever. You've uncovered my identity."

"But do you truly know whom you face?"

Charlot felt a familiar pang of frustration and replied, "I'm not well-versed in orc Saints."

The old leopard orc's eyes gleamed sharply. "So, you knew I was Saint rank all along?"

Charlot gritted his teeth. "Yes."

There was no point in explaining how he had deduced it.

The old orc grinned, baring sharp teeth. "Are you not afraid? I could easily annihilate all your subordinates."

"How could I not be?" Charlot thought grimly. "But what choice do I have if you refuse to leave?"

He replied aloud, "Fear changes nothing. Besides, if you've infiltrated my Labyrinth Guards, I suspect you're not in peak condition—probably injured by the Saints of Strasbourg."

The old leopard orc let out a low laugh. "You're quite perceptive. Indeed, I've been grievously wounded. Even with only ten percent of my strength, however, I could still kill you and these traitors."

Charlot had never imagined he would find himself face-to-face with an orc Saint, let alone one as ferocious as this.

He didn't know why this old leopard orc had infiltrated his forces, nor did he care to find out. He wasn't the type to risk his life for answers he didn't need.

The old orc didn't strike immediately but instead turned a sorrowful gaze to the Labyrinth Guards. After a long silence, he said softly, "Do you know why the orcs launched an all-out assault?"

Charlot didn't have an answer.

The old orc didn't wait for one. "Because the Byron Empire promised us that a Blood God would descend to help us break through Strasbourg."

"But those vile vampires deceived us. No Blood God appeared. What awaited us was annihilation."

"Strasbourg is protected by nine True Gods. Even with sixteen orc Saints working together, we could not break through the city's defenses. After exhausting our magic over ten days of casting Grand Wind Magic, Strasbourg's Saints suddenly struck. Hundreds of thousands of orcs, along with our Saint-ranked shamans, were wiped out."

"Orcs..."

The old leopard orc let out a long, mournful sigh, his voice carrying the weight of sorrow and despair.

Charlot's expression was complicated. He couldn't understand why the orc would share such a tale with him.

Chapter 255: Orcs Are People Too

Charlot hesitated for a moment and handed over a cotton handkerchief, saying, "Wipe your tears."

The old leopard-man took the handkerchief, wiped his face twice, and then burst into anger. "What tears? Where do you see tears? I wasn't crying!"

He squeezed his hand, and the cotton handkerchief was crushed into powder.

To crush cotton fabric like that, his grip strength was far beyond what it took to crack a walnut.

Charlot remained silent. Since his transmigration, he had created many small items to make life more comfortable, including these inexpensive disposable cotton handkerchiefs. He always carried a few, using and discarding them as needed, so losing one didn't matter.

Charlot's mind raced. Although the old leopard-man hadn't started a killing spree yet, he felt it was only a matter of time unless he could change the situation.

Taking a deep breath, Charlot decided to take a bold gamble—either he would succeed or meet his doom.

He slowly began, "Elder, I believe you understand a fundamental truth."

"There is only one kind of human, and orcs should also be one kind, not divided into countless tribes."

"There is only one kind of human, and orcs are human too. Enemies should not remain enemies for a thousand years."

"This defeat should not be seen as just a failure for the orcs but as a rainbow heralding success."

The old leopard-man showed no reaction. Charlot reflected that he might have spoken too abstractly. He decided to lower the threshold of "understanding" and said, "The orcs need a king, uniting all under one banner..."

The old leopard-man waved his hand. "Stop! Repeat the last sentence."

Charlot quickly responded, "This defeat should not be seen as just a failure for the orcs but as a rainbow heralding success."

The old leopard-man said, "Not that one."

Charlot adjusted, "There is only one kind of human, and orcs are human too..."

The old leopard-man interrupted, "That's it. No need for the rest."

He fell silent for a long time, repeating the phrase, "There is only one kind of human, and orcs are human too..."

"What a profound truth."

"Why didn't I think of this earlier?"

"If I had heard this earlier, I could have prevented this disaster."

Charlot had accurately pinpointed the old leopard-man's need and softly added, "There is only one kind of human, and orcs should also be one kind, not divided into countless tribes."

"Humans are humans, and orcs are humans too. They deserve the rightful power to live openly on this earth."

The old leopard-man slapped his thigh and roared, "That's the statement!"

Charlot wiped the sweat off his brow and thought, *What else can I say to get this old man to spare me?*

The old leopard-man stood and declared, "Now I understand why the orcs failed."

"Humans are humans, and orcs are humans too. They deserve the rightful power to live openly on this earth."

Charlot thought to himself, *Don't you think the previous sentence was just as important?* But he quickly realized that the concept of "tribes" was deeply ingrained in every orc's heart. Orcs had different races and lifestyles that made unification nearly impossible. Attempting to instill the idea of unity in this old leopard-man would be futile.

He had no intention of changing the old leopard-man's beliefs.

He only wanted to use his words to buy himself a chance to survive.

Charlot was about to elaborate on the idea of "orcs are human too" when the old leopard-man suddenly asked, "Would you consider becoming an orc?"

Charlot was startled and thought, *Is he suggesting I reincarnate as an orc?*

No, reincarnation isn't a concept in this world. Not even the Nine Principal Deities dabble in that sort of thing.

Then the old leopard-man spoke in a low voice, "I've tried many ways to restore the ancient Orc Kingdom."

"I even prayed to the Eternal and Illusory Dragon, the deity of the orcs."

"One stormy night, I received a revelation from the Eternal and Illusory Dragon and created the Orc God's Transformation—a secret technique that allows orcs to turn into humans and humans to turn into orcs."

Charlot's mind suddenly cleared, and he exclaimed, "You're from the Orc Assassin Alliance!"

The old leopard-man grinned. "Indeed, I am Tumisan."

Charlot felt a chill. The Orc Assassin Alliance had seven leaders, three of whom were Saint-rank. Tumisan was one of them.

This notorious Saint-rank orc was unmatched in cruelty. Countless officials on the Old Continent had fallen to his blade.

Tumisan had even succeeded in assassinating three Saint-rank targets.

Charlot, still distracted by his swirling thoughts, asked, "You're not here to assassinate me, are you?"

Tumisan chuckled. "Did you really believe the Orc Assassin Alliance's slogan?"

"If we didn't claim that, how would we attract clients?"

"If we endlessly pursued assassinations, how could our organization survive?"

"Still, younger orc assassins these days are foolish enough to take our slogans literally."

"Let's get to the point. I can teach you the Orc God's Transformation so you can become an orc."

"You, such a clever young man, should join the leopard-men."

Charlot forced an awkward smile, too afraid to outright refuse. He feared this leader of the Orc Assassin Alliance might kill him on the spot. "I'm afraid I wouldn't be able to learn it."

Tumisan pressed a hand to Charlot's head. "Don't worry. The Orc God's Transformation is a simple spell. Accept my knowledge."

Charlot felt countless profound thoughts pour into his mind. Endless secret techniques and transformations embedded themselves into his consciousness. He wanted to resist but couldn't. After a long time, Tumisan finally said, "You must diligently practice the Orc God's Transformation. Next time I return, if you've mastered it, I'll take you to accomplish something grand. If not, I'll kill you."

Charlot opened his eyes, only to find that the old leopard-man had vanished without a trace.

With his heart still racing, Charlot pondered for a long time but couldn't figure out why the old leopard-man had infiltrated his labyrinth of orc guards—or why he had suddenly left.

As for Tumisan's talk of some "grand task"?

Charlot had no intention of joining.

Once this war ended, he planned to return to Strasbourg. He doubted Tumisan, leader of the Orc Assassin Alliance, would dare follow him there. After the war, orcs were no longer allowed into Strasbourg. Even Frederica, who had previously studied there, wouldn't be able to enter.

But just as Charlot thought of this, the secrets of the Orc God's Transformation surfaced in his mind. His face darkened. The transformation technique was popular among the Orc Assassin Alliance, but most assassins preferred using masks crafted from the spell rather than enduring the arduous practice it required.

Tumisan, however, could take on endless forms, becoming anyone. Strasbourg couldn't stop him.

Chapter 256: The Beast God's Transformation Technique

Charlot Mecklenburg led the orc labyrinth guards on a seemingly aimless march for several days, finally confirming that Tumisan had not continued to follow them.

He remained uncertain about the orc saint's intentions. Tumisan had arrived mysteriously and left without explanation.

In the interim... there had even been moments of weeping.

Upon calming down after the encounter, Charlot was entirely certain that Tumisan had not come to assassinate him. Charlot was not prominent enough to warrant the intervention of a saint-ranked being.

He speculated that Tumisan might have been injured at the time, possibly evading the pursuit of a human saint. However, Charlot had no concrete evidence. Moreover, he doubted that a human saint, upon encountering an orc labyrinth guard, would take the time to distinguish it as part of the West Wind Knight Order, let alone spare them. Most likely, the human saint would kill them all in one fell swoop.

Charlot redirected his orc labyrinth guards toward Silver Dove Castle, while taking a few days to delve into the Beast God's Transformation Technique.

Charlot possessed the extraordinary ability of Bloodfire Transfiguration, but it only allowed him to transform into a mass of bloodfire. Unlike versatile transformation techniques, it was primarily used for escape or healing wounds and was of little use in combat.

The Beast God's Transformation Technique, on the other hand, was touted by Tumisan as a formidable secret art. Tumisan claimed to have received enlightenment from the Eternal and Illusory Dragon on a stormy night, which led to the creation of the technique.

In truth, the technique merely allowed orcs to transform into humans and humans into orcs, without any additional extraordinary abilities.

Moreover, due to the structural differences between orc and human bodies, humans could not cultivate the orcs' bloodthirsty combat energy, and orcs could not operate human secret arts. After transforming, their strength could not be transferred, leaving them as ineffective as a "blank slate."

It was a transformation technique with no value beyond changing one's biological form.

Even within Tumisan's own Orc Assassin Alliance, the Mask of the Cat was more popular, as it did not diminish the user's strength. For orc assassins, it was a useful auxiliary tool, but few bothered to practice the Beast God's Transformation Technique.

Tumisan himself had described the Beast God's Transformation Technique as a simple minor spell.

He had not lied. The technique was no more profound than the Cat Transformation, though its practice was far more demanding. It required a deep understanding of each type of orc's anatomy to ensure seamless transformation.

Charlot spent five or six days studying the anatomical structures of Hundred Bears, Big Bear, and Honey Bear. His efforts allowed him to transform into a diminutive bear-person over two meters tall.

After transforming into a Redback Bear Warrior, the Blood Glory within Charlot's body was sealed and rendered unusable. Although his strength increased, Blood Glory had never been known for raw power. His body became clumsier, though his innate agility remained unaffected.

After this experiment, Charlot refrained from attempting to transform into other types of orcs.

...

He eventually made his way back to the "faithful" Silver Dove Castle.

When Charlot appeared beneath the walls of Silver Dove Castle, countless residents climbed the ramparts, waving their arms and cheering to welcome the return of the West Wind Knight Order.

Charlot's return to Silver Dove Castle felt more like coming home than returning to Seagull City. He even recognized many of the city's residents.

Waving as he led the West Wind Knight Order into the city, Charlot noted that many of his soldiers hailed from Silver Dove Castle. The order had repeatedly defended the city against the Southern Orc Tribes and the South Seraph restorationists, earning them immense local goodwill. The residents admired the West Wind knights more than their own Silver Dove Militia.

After Charlot's departure, he had left the city in the care of Dubin Alger, Yellow Bear, and three other knight orders. Upon his return, he resumed control of Silver Dove Castle, throwing himself into its affairs with unrelenting fervor.

A letter from Clair Bretagne soon arrived at Silver Dove Castle, requesting Charlot to organize another shipment of supplies for South Seraph and to send additional reinforcements, including the three knight orders.

In Clair Bretagne's letter, Charlot learned that while the Byron riders had not yet arrived, forces of the Black Phoenix Dynasty had invaded South Seraph, and fierce battles were ongoing.

Sighing deeply, Charlot noted that this was still the early stage of the war. Most regions of the Fars Empire remained unaffected by military mobilization. Life in Strasbourg continued as usual, with shops open and residents largely untroubled.

However, as more nations joined the conflict, Charlot was certain that these tranquil days would soon be a thing of the past.

Contemplating Clair Bretagne's letter for a full day, Charlot began organizing supplies for the front lines. At the same time, he ordered the West Wind Knight Order to leverage Silver Dove Castle's bustling commerce to stockpile food and necessities. He also selected a site within the city to construct a massive warehouse.

Officially, the warehouse was intended to store supplies purchased by the West Wind Knight Order, but it secretly connected to Machubi, Mostar Castle, and Cappadocia.

Charlot dispatched messengers to Mostar Castle and Machubi, instructing Dolores Soumet to begin constructing additional warehouses.

The materials stored in these warehouses could be accessed from any of Charlot's labyrinthified cities—a precautionary measure for the future.

As Clair Bretagne had not released Gwen the Dappled Stag and Bancroft the Swift Wolf, Charlot had no choice but to entrust the transportation of supplies to Dubin Alger, Yellow Bear, and Anastasia, who led three knight orders to South Seraph.

With their departure, Charlot once again found himself alone.

The West Wind Knight Order's key members—Dolores Soumet, Anastasia, Belisa, Dubin Alger, Yellow Bear, Gwen, and Bancroft—were all absent. Charlot was left with ordinary soldiers of the order and over a thousand orc labyrinth guards, including nine transcendent warriors.

Barely a few days after Dubin and the others departed, urgent news from the front arrived. Clair Bretagne requested Charlot to send another batch of soldiers.

Charlot was reluctant to part with more soldiers of the West Wind Knight Order.

As the Chinese adage goes: "A kind heart cannot command soldiers."

Yet Charlot would rather forgo the title of an excellent strategist than send his loyal West Wind knights to die in a meaningless war.

To Charlot, the war in South Seraph held no significance.

Nonetheless, he could not outright refuse Clair Bretagne's request. After half a day of deliberation, Charlot decided to leave behind a thousand soldiers, selecting as many Silver Dove Castle locals as possible. He personally led the rest of the West Wind Knight Order and the orc labyrinth guards to South Seraph.

To Charlot, leading the troops himself would at least allow him to protect more of his men.

Chapter 257: A New Novel

Charlot Mecklenburg could still feel "peace" in the Behemoth Principality, with almost no signs of war. But as soon as he entered the South Seraph territory, the atmosphere of war was unmistakable.

Initially, the people of South Seraph hated only the Behemoth Principality. However, after such a long war, they harbored no goodwill toward the Fars Empire either.

The West Wind Knight Order, under Charlot's command, was attacked twice shortly after entering South Seraph territory. These assaults weren't from the South Seraph restorationists; their main forces were still in Ferranden. Instead, the attackers were merely local farmers.

Charlot, now commanding a formidable force, easily repelled both attacks.

After the skirmishes, he neither resorted to slaughter nor generously released his captives. Instead, he forcibly conscripted them into the West Wind Knight Order, attempting to indoctrinate them. However, his efforts often failed, as many would escape.

To Charlot's surprise, among the dozen or so efficient clerks assigned to him by Annie Bretagne, one particularly creative young man stood out. While transcribing stories for Charlot, this clerk, Italio Calvino, became so inspired by Charlot's tale that he decided to write his own novel.

When the West Wind Knight Order entered South Seraph territory, Italio Calvino was struck by inspiration and penned a novella using Charlot as the protagonist. In this tale, Charlot was audaciously depicted as the illegitimate son of Jonan, and Hughes was portrayed as a loyal knight devoted to protecting his young master. Together, they ruled South Seraph and the Behemoth Principality, achieving legendary feats and earning recognition from Emperor Julius Axel of the Fars Empire—Charlot was made a duke, and Hughes an earl.

Although Italio's story entirely overlooked the plot hole of Jonan's death, it was otherwise well-paced and coherent.

When Charlot received Italio Calvino's manuscript, he was greatly impressed. Drawing from his years of reading experience, Charlot added a subplot involving Jonan's Twelve Trials. He also

introduced a brother for Jonan, forcefully inserting elements of the Hercules myth and the tale of the Lion King.

The revised plot turned into a story where Charlot, after completing Jonan's Twelve Trials, was poised to inherit Jonan's ambitions. However, Jonan's brother murdered him and framed Charlot...

Zolman even gained a sense of honor!

Once a forgotten figure in history, Zolman was revived due to a lack of characters. He was reimagined as Jonan's brother with the nickname "Scar." Thanks to "borrowing" many classic tropes, Zolman's new persona was far more vivid than his real-life counterpart—a cunning, scheming villain whose every pore exuded malevolence.

After several rounds of refinement, Charlot decisively used this novella to replace his original indoctrination plan for the South Seraph populace.

Knowing that most commoners in this world were illiterate, Charlot distributed copies of the story to his clerks, instructing them to recite it aloud to the people of South Seraph.

Initially, the South Seraph people refused to believe the tale. But whenever doubt arose, Charlot would appear with a face full of sorrow and offer small acts of kindness—better food or personally bandaging a young South Seraph villager's wounds. (Notably, Charlot had no medical skills beyond tying bandages.)

Unexpectedly, this indoctrination through storytelling proved remarkably effective.

The emotions of the captured South Seraph people gradually stabilized.

However, the story's success created tension among Charlot's Behemoth-born soldiers, who grew uneasy.

To address this, Charlot quickly released a second version of the story, giving himself a Behemoth-born mother. While Charlot's actual mother was indeed from Behemoth, to preserve her dignity, this character was transformed into Anastasia's mother instead. Baron Febollet of Silver Dove Castle, as a result, posthumously received a peculiar new title.

As Charlot adjusted the story based on audience feedback, Italo Calvino's novella underwent several revisions, becoming increasingly polished. Its indoctrination effect also grew stronger.

Before long, this story spread across the South Seraph region.

On the thirteenth day of Charlot's campaign in South Seraph, an independent unit of South Seraph restorationists defected to him.

Charlot was delighted and treated the leader of this unit with great care. Upon learning that the young leader, Sebald, had to leave higher education due to poverty, Charlot even taught him the *Beastman Transfiguration: Redback Bear Warrior* technique.

Perhaps Sebald truly possessed talent buried by a hard life. Within five or six days, he successfully practiced the Redback Bear Warrior transformation, developing the ability to turn his hands into “bear claws,” which greatly enhanced his arm strength.

News of this spread quickly, and Charlot’s army encountered no further resistance. Each day, more South Seraph people defected to him.

As for whether this plan would backfire...

Charlot no longer cared. After all, he had no intention of ruling South Seraph or the Behemoth Principality. Those future rulers could deal with the consequences.

What did this have to do with Charlot?

With the resistance from the South Seraph people resolved, the West Wind Knight Order advanced rapidly, soon nearing the front lines.

At this time, Clair Bretagne and Ebner Soumet had been locked in battle with the Black Phoenix Dynasty’s army for seven or eight days. They had no idea that Charlot had returned to Strasbourg. If they had known, both would have been furious. The frontlines were tense, and Charlot had gone back to the capital for a “vacation”! Who could tolerate that?

Fortunately, they were unaware. Charlot’s decision to personally lead reinforcements moved Clair Bretagne and Ebner Soumet deeply. Neither had time to meet him and simply ordered Charlot to capture a nearby small city.

This city was none other than Interlaken, where Duke Joseph had been besieged and killed.

During the Battle of Interlaken, the Behemoth Principality’s army was utterly decimated. Only about twenty percent of its forces escaped; the rest perished in the city.

The battle left Behemoth without heirs for seventy percent of its noble estates. Many territories remained unclaimed, including Silver Dove Castle, which Baron Febollet had opportunistically seized.

Interlaken was now guarded by a noble knight squad from the Black Phoenix Dynasty. Their numbers were small, only seven to eight hundred. The city, mostly destroyed in the previous fierce battle, had crumbling walls and no natural defenses. As defensive warfare was not customary in the Old Continent, the knight squad assessed their situation upon seeing the West Wind Knight Order and decisively retreated.

Charlot entered Interlaken, and his diary emanated a faint thought: Charlot Mecklenburg had become the master of Interlaken, fulfilling the conditions to establish the Thirteenth Labyrinth. Interlaken was about to transform into a labyrinth.

Chapter 258: The First Battlefield Duel

Interlaken has completed its labyrinth transformation, requiring 1,800 new residents! During this time, no one may leave the area.

Charlot immediately felt the transformation of the small town into a labyrinth, the fastest such transformation since he mastered *Agmirlas's Labyrinth*. However, it was only now that Charlot realized that the three instances of infusing the power of the Evil God Agmirlas also counted toward the labyrinth transformations.

Silver Dove Castle and Machubi Fortress Labyrinth had each undergone three transformations, Mostar Castle had two, and Cappadocia had one. Combined with the three consumed by the infusion of the Evil God Agmirlas's power, there had already been twelve transformations in total.

With the first transformation, the small town of Interlaken gained pathways to Machubi, Silver Dove Castle, Mostar Castle, and Cappadocia.

Charlot decided to reserve three instances for emergencies; he wasn't ready yet to unlock a passage to the true *Agmirlas Labyrinth*!

After completing the labyrinth transformation of Interlaken, Charlot directed his orc warriors to rebuild the small town. The last battle had left the town in ruins, with many residents killed or fleeing, leaving it nearly deserted.

Charlot easily restored Interlaken. For convenience, he ordered the demolition of all the old, low houses in the town. With the orcs' immense strength, they divided the town into five districts and redesigned all the residential areas.

Charlot, in his past life as a math teacher rather than an architect, found it challenging to create original housing designs. However, drawing inspiration from others was not difficult for him. His meager salary as a teacher meant he couldn't afford a mansion, but he had watched plenty of videos about luxury homes, including some by the likes of Uncle Ai...

Wait, that wasn't about mansions.

There were others, like the videos from Uncle Ai or luxury-focused commentators. Drawing on those, Charlot's redesign made the small town of Interlaken look far more refined.

Naturally, a warehouse was indispensable.

While Charlot was busy with these chaotic efforts, the Black Phoenix Dynasty sent three knightly orders to attack Interlaken.

Charlot's West Wind Knight Order, though it consisted only of elite troops—just over a thousand human soldiers and another thousand or so orc labyrinth defenders—exceeded 3,000 in number when combined.

To put things in perspective, most ordinary knightly orders comprised only a few hundred members. Unless one belonged to a super noble or the royal knight orders, the scale of the West Wind Knight Order was unprecedented. While Charlot's potential for "rapid troop expansion" was undeniable, his force had already surpassed the norm for knightly orders.

The commander of the Black Phoenix Dynasty dared not underestimate such a strategic force. He dispatched three knightly orders, each consisting of several hundred ordinary knights, totaling around 1,000 men. Their main goal was to pin Charlot's West Wind Knight Order at Interlaken, preventing its involvement in the main battlefield.

Unaware of the enemy's strategic objectives, Charlot mistakenly believed these three knightly orders were the vanguard, with reinforcements en route. Far from a keyboard strategist, Charlot couldn't decipher the enemy's intentions at all.

To avoid a protracted battle, Charlot launched an all-out attack before the three knightly orders could establish themselves.

The leaders of these orders were all barons. They initially thought this would be an easy fight. Unfamiliar with Charlot's reputation, they still regarded the West Wind Knight Order as a militia-turned-knightly order. Though puzzled by its sheer size, they dismissed its combat effectiveness.

Any commander with basic military knowledge would assume that conscripted peasants wouldn't form an effective fighting force. The larger the number, the greater the strain on logistics, with no corresponding increase in combat power.

This assumption wasn't wrong, but it didn't account for the fact that the West Wind Knight Order had undergone several battles, significantly enhancing their capabilities. Additionally, Charlot's 1,000 orc warriors—culled from various orc tribes—were individually formidable.

When Charlot led the West Wind Knight Order out of Interlaken, the leaders of the three knightly orders hesitated, treating Charlot as an inexperienced amateur. They were confident of victory.

Eventually, the Black Phoenix Dynasty's Baron Regretbird took the lead, riding out with his knights. He called out, "Commander of the West Wind Knight Order, come out for a duel!"

Charlot had never engaged in a battlefield duel before, only a few personal combats in the chaos of war. Excited, he pulled out his *Blue Rattlesnake* pistol and fired a shot at Baron Regretbird.

He didn't even use an anti-magic armor-piercing round, opting instead for a blood energy bullet.

The *Blue Rattlesnake*, a high-tier vampiric pistol, could produce blood energy bullets with a power level up to Tier 15. Charlot, lacking sufficient strength, could only compress a Tier 9 bullet. Still, he hadn't expected that one shot would blow off Baron Regretbird's head, killing him instantly.

After the single shot, Charlot felt a twinge of uncertainty. "Did the duel even start?"

Baron Regretbird likely never expected his opponent to wield a high-tier transcendent weapon. His corpse fell to the ground, while the *Blue Rattlesnake*'s energy magazine gained over 300 blood energy bullets—a "gift" from the baron, condensed from the entirety of his life essence. However, the bullets' power limit depended on the transcendent tier of the compressor. Given the baron's quick death, his tier was clearly unimpressive.

Charlot casually holstered the *Blue Rattlesnake* into his *Blood Vortex* holster on his left thigh. Switching to his *Berserker Blade*, he led a charge that routed Baron Regretbird's knights and pressed onward toward the remaining two knightly orders.

The Black Phoenix Dynasty's Baron Dimcrow and Baron Rainbowcrane were stunned by Regretbird's swift demise. Hastily rallying their knights to retaliate, they faced chaos as the fleeing remnants of Regretbird's forces disrupted their formations. Even Charlot, a military novice, shook his head at their poor response and ordered the West Wind Knight Order to attack.

Before the main clash, the formations of Baron Dimcrow and Baron Rainbowcrane's forces were scattered. Both barons attempted to leverage their martial prowess to turn the tide, but each was surrounded by three bear warriors—two mid-tier transcents and one low-tier. Within minutes, both barons were captured alive, and their knightly orders were utterly destroyed.

Concerned that the routed forces might regroup under the Black Phoenix Dynasty, Charlot worked hard to recruit deserters. While many still escaped, around 400 to 500 captives were secured after the battlefield was cleared.

Charlot promptly confined these prisoners in the "warehouse" and transferred them directly to Machubi.

Chapter 259: Continuous Battles

Charlot Mecklenburg defeated three knight orders but did not wait for the enemy's "main force." He thought the commander of the Black Phoenix Dynasty might be plotting some special "scheme." In response, Charlot temporarily promoted the swift-scribe Italo Calvino to hold Interlaken while he himself left the city, taking with him a group of Labyrinth Beastman Guards and some members of the West Wind Knight Order to prepare for an ambush.

Charlot's military aptitude could not be considered average—rather, it was almost non-existent. His tactic was directly copied from *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*.

Unbeknownst to Charlot, his maneuver startled the Black Phoenix Dynasty's commander. The latter assumed Charlot was preparing for some grand operation. After all, Charlot had easily crushed three knight orders, proving his strength.

The Black Phoenix Dynasty dispatched another knight order, this one belonging to the royal family. Not only was it well-equipped, but its commander was also a high-ranking Transcendent.

One day later, Clair Bretagne received news of the battle at Interlaken and ordered Ebner Soumet to lead the Maple Leaf Knight Order into action.

The two sides maneuvered forces between seven or eight small towns, quickly descending into chaotic skirmishes. Charlot himself encountered two knight orders in succession. These forces were far superior to those he had faced before. Although Charlot managed to avoid major losses, he still suffered casualties of one to two hundred, which pained him greatly.

Charlot was certainly not a competent general, but he genuinely cared for his subordinates. After the two battles, he realized that both armies had fully committed their forces, with knight orders weaving through each other's lines. He decided to retreat to Interlaken and temporarily withdraw from the chaos.

However, before Charlot could extract the West Wind Knight Order from combat, they were confronted by a royal main knight order of the Black Phoenix Dynasty. After a fierce battle, Charlot found himself trapped behind enemy lines, completely cut off from Interlaken.

While Charlot fretted over this, the main knight orders of the Black Phoenix Dynasty were equally alarmed. They had no idea Charlot had accidentally wandered into their rear during the skirmishes and assumed the bold Fars commander intended to outflank them.

Soon, one knight order relentlessly pursued Charlot's West Wind Knight Order. Over a dozen fierce engagements followed. Charlot made several attempts to kill the knight order's commander on the battlefield, but their duels—seven or eight in total—ended in stalemates, with neither gaining the upper hand.

This knight order was one of the royal main knight orders of the Black Phoenix Dynasty.

Among the five great empires, the size and scale of royal knight orders varied, but each boasted at least fifty or sixty knight orders, forming massive elite armies. Their main knight orders were the empire's elite forces, incomparable to ordinary battle formations.

To be frank, even Clair Bretagne's Purple Finch Knight Order and Maple Leaf Knight Order couldn't match the soldier quality of the main knight orders of the great empires.

That Charlot could stand his ground against such a force astonished his opponents.

The commander of this royal knight order was a distant royal relative named Chloe Hadrian. Exceptionally talented and powerful, Chloe had already reached Transcendence before university and graduated as a Tier 4 Transcendent. Now in his early thirties, he was an exceptional high-ranking Transcendent knight, wielding his lance and spear skills with mastery. He had earned the Five Knight Proofs and was a formidable Tier 15 high-ranking knight.

Chloe had initially believed that no one in the Fars military—aside from Clair Bretagne or Ebner Soumet—could match him. Thus, he wasn't afraid to duel Charlot.

However, after several battlefield duels, Chloe found himself exhilarated yet uneasy. Charlot showed no adherence to conventional chivalry, employing unpredictable and unconventional tactics. Twice, Chloe nearly believed he wouldn't make it back home.

When Chloe once again caught up to Charlot's West Wind Knight Order, he didn't immediately attack. Instead, he ordered his soldiers to rest.

His knight order was nearing its limits after relentless pursuit and battle.

Chloe's adjutant prepared him a meal. Following the Black Phoenix Dynasty's dining customs, it wasn't tea but a thick soup brewed with various ingredients. Regardless of the meal, the Black Phoenix Dynasty always included such a soup.

Chloe paired the soup with a dense wheat bread mixed with grains and nuts, eating heartily while occasionally furrowing his brows in thought, pondering how to defeat Charlot.

Chloe's adjutant, a young woman from a lower noble family, maintained an impeccable appearance despite days of marching and fighting. Her hairstyle remained pristine, her military uniform spotless, and her imposing figure added to her air of authority. Seeing Chloe's troubled expression, she consoled him, "Although the Fars commander is cunning and employs a group of enslaved beastman warriors, he is only a mid-tier Transcendent."

"In the previous battles, he relied on tricks, not genuine strength."

"I believe, Sir Chloe, that you'll kill him next time on the battlefield."

Chloe nodded slightly. Despite not gaining the upper hand in their encounters, he remained confident that once he saw through Charlot's tricks, strength would prevail as the decisive factor.

At that moment, a messenger rushed over, shouting, "The enemy commander, Charlot Mecklenburg, is challenging you. He has come alone, with no accompanying troops."

Chloe quickly finished his soup and stuffed the remaining bread into his mouth. "I'll go meet him again."

Grabbing his lance, he stepped out of the camp alone. Sure enough, Charlot was standing calmly between the two armies, waiting for him.

Chloe shouted, "Charlot, today you will die by my hand!"

Charlot smiled faintly and replied, "Chloe, this isn't the first time you've made empty boasts."

Charlot had faced high-ranking Transcendents before, even defeating opponents like Harriet Alva and Zolman. But there were differences among high-ranking Transcendents, and rank alone wasn't the only measure of combat power.

In the Dreamcrafting realm, Charlot had been defeated by Hughes hundreds of times. Before acquiring the Red and Blue Rattlesnake Pistols, he had no confidence in challenging Hughes head-on. But with those pistols in hand, his confidence soared.

However, he hadn't encountered Hughes again since.

The commander of the Black Phoenix Dynasty's knight order was one of the most formidable opponents Charlot had faced.

Charlot relied on Swiftstep Technique ×10 to repeatedly salvage situations in his cross-rank challenges.

After some verbal sparring, Chloe suddenly lunged forward, his spear thrusting in a direct and clean line, his entire form gliding over the ground as though he were flying.

Chapter 260: Proof of Oath

Charlot dragged Berserker Blade backward as he retreated a step, then swiftly spun his lance to counterattack.

On the battlefield, a rapier was not the most practical weapon, and Charlot had gradually adapted to using a knight's lance. The lances of the Black Phoenix Dynasty differed significantly from those popular in Fars, Byron, or the Ingrima Empire, both in design and technique. The Black Phoenix Dynasty's lance techniques were far more intricate, full of unexpected variations.

In comparison, the lance techniques of Fars, Byron, and Ingrima were much simpler and more straightforward. Even Byron's famed 77 Movements of Heaven's Wing, known for its versatility, paled in terms of variation.

Fortunately, Charlot had Swiftstep Technique ×10, and in every exchange, he relied on his speed to outmaneuver his opponent, forcing the battle into his own rhythm.

Chloe parried Charlot's strike with a horizontal sweep of his lance, dissipating the attack. The lance in Chloe's hand spun rapidly, producing seven or eight flashes of light, each forming a five-petaled "flower." This elegant and intricate technique was so extraordinary that, despite having seen it numerous times, Charlot couldn't help but inwardly marvel.

Unable to counter this lance move, Charlot simply retreated a step and waited for Chloe's stance to wane before launching a lightning-fast strike with Berserker Blade in retaliation.

The two fought fiercely on the battlefield for over half an hour, neither gaining the upper hand.

Behind Chloe, the Black Phoenix Dynasty's banner fluttered in the wind, faintly emanating the image of the War God. A shadow of a hill loomed over his body as he manifested three of the Five Knight Proofs, making him as impenetrable as a turtle shell.

Charlot, however, did not walk the path of a knight. His Stardust Battle Energy, derived from Blood Glory, was a pure swordsman's inheritance and could not condense into Knight Proofs. But Charlot's versatility allowed him to exploit his speed to create distance and then fire his alchemical pistol.

Unfortunately, the energy bullets from his Blue Rattlesnake—powered by cartridges provided by Baron Valentine—were of average potency and couldn't break through the protective barrier formed by Chloe's Proof of the Hill.

Charlot had tested Chloe's lance techniques in previous duels and suspected that Chloe also possessed the skill to deflect Anti-magic Armor-piercing Rounds. Thus, he had deliberately refrained from using them, instead sticking to energy bullets as a probe. In this duel, he started with energy bullets again, watching as Chloe repeatedly used the Proof of the Hill to deflect them without making any special effort to counter. Charlot thought to himself, "Now's the time."

After firing two consecutive shots, Charlot switched the Blue Rattlesnake to a special alchemical magazine and pulled the trigger.

A scroll of parchment suddenly materialized over Chloe's body. Almost instinctively, Chloe's lance spun rapidly, its blade encasing the oncoming Anti-magic Armor-piercing Round and deflecting it to the ground.

The round exploded, leaving a deep crater in the earth.

Charlot was stunned and exclaimed, "You've even condensed the Proof of Oath?!"

Chloe glanced at Charlot, his gaze filled with wariness. Without the Proof of Oath, which could shield him against all forms of ambush and conspiracy on the battlefield, Chloe would have been in serious danger. He hadn't expected Charlot to conceal the fact that he possessed Anti-magic Armor-piercing Rounds through so many duels, only to unleash them after firing two energy bullets to catch him off guard. If Chloe had relied solely on his own reflexes, he might have been severely injured.

Chloe roared in anger, "Coward! Fight me head-on!"

"You Farsonian swine only know how to grovel to women!"

"Come on! Fight like a man!"

"If you dare face me head-on, I'll name my son after you, Charlot!"

Charlot's incredible speed had always frustrated Chloe, and now he finally erupted into a tirade on the battlefield.

Charlot looked a bit sheepish. He had once used this same tactic to ambush Zolman, killing him with a single shot.

However, unlike Chloe, Zolman—despite possessing the Five Knight Proofs of Glory, Courage, War, Hill, and Earth—had failed to condense the Proof of Oath due to his lack of integrity. Thus, he had been vulnerable to Charlot's ambush.

Charlot hadn't expected the Proof of Oath to be so effective, completely nullifying his schemes and rendering all his efforts futile.

Relying on his mid-tier strength to challenge a high-tier opponent, Charlot's only advantage was his remarkable speed. There was no way he could engage Chloe in a direct confrontation. As for whether Chloe's son would be named Charlot, it didn't matter to him—after all, they didn't share the Mecklenburg name.

Charlot holstered the Blue Rattlesnake and switched back to Berserker Blade, musing to himself, "High-tier transcendent weapons require high-tier transcendent strength to be truly effective. If I had high-tier strength, each bullet would pack the power of a high-tier's full-force attack. With just gun-and-lance techniques, I could go toe-to-toe with this guy for an entire day."

"Unless I find a high-tier to help me craft bullets, but each one would take a day or two to forge. Who would want to do such a grueling job?"

Charlot and Chloe battled fiercely for the rest of the day, exhausting themselves before retreating to their respective camps. Chloe, still fuming, shouted, "Charlot Mecklenburg is nothing but a battlefield scoundrel, too afraid to fight me directly and only capable of running around and using underhanded tricks!"

“Tomorrow, I won’t duel him anymore. I’ll lead the army in an all-out assault!”

Chloe’s adjutant, a young lady, had never seen him this enraged before. Chloe Hadrian, despite being from a distant branch of the royal family, held a respected position as one of the Black Phoenix Dynasty’s brightest young talents. Although he couldn’t match the previous generation’s Zimourman Axel Robin or the current prodigy Clair Bretagne, Chloe was widely admired for his gentle temperament and steadfast courage.

For the adjutant, it was the first time witnessing Chloe losing his composure and venting his frustration on the battlefield. She refrained from advising him, knowing full well that Charlot’s antics would make anyone furious. Lacking any solutions, she could only offer gentle comfort.

Charlot, meanwhile, had no adjutant to console him. Dolores Soumet, a Chief Overseer, was more of a colleague than a subordinate. Not that Charlot would dare have one even if he could—he remembered the wisdom of a certain predecessor named Ancient Dragon, who once said, “Men come in many types, but women are all the same.”

“Thinking your girlfriend or wife is unlike other women is just... ignorance. Not true.”

“No woman doesn’t get jealous. It’s just a matter of how strongly they feel it.”

Charlot brushed such frivolous thoughts aside. Returning to his camp, he first operated Blood Glory to replenish his energy and then began contemplating a midnight raid.

“Chloe has the Proof of Oath, which warns against attacks and conspiracies targeting him. But surely, it doesn’t protect against a full-scale raid?”

“Though Chloe himself is formidable, his subordinates aren’t particularly strong. I currently have nine transcendent beastman warriors. In a raid, it’s all about overwhelming numbers, and there’s a good chance I can take him down.”

“Still, these beastman labyrinth guards would likely lose a few to him.”

“What a pity...”

Chapter 261: Victory Built on Sacrifice is No Victory

If it were Dolores, Belisa, Dubin, Yellow Bear, Gwen the Dappled Stag, or Bancroft the Swift Wolf, Charlot would never consider using their extraordinary lives to pile on the death of a higher-rank Transcendent.

Even if he lost his mind, he wouldn't do such a thing.

That would be beyond foolish.

If it were the orc Transcendent guards, Charlot might ponder the idea briefly, but he would ultimately abandon such thoughts because he truly believed that victory gained through sacrifice was no victory at all.

Even though these labyrinth guards could technically be considered abominations, Charlot still couldn't bring himself to make that decision.

Charlot had always admitted that he was neither a competent military strategist nor a capable commander. He only wanted to lead the West Wind Knight Order through this war with as few casualties as possible. He had no desire to achieve great merit or renown.

Every battle he had fought so far was one he couldn't avoid, each with a reason that left him no choice.

But Charlot didn't think any reason was worth sacrificing his subordinates just to kill Chloe Hadrian.

While Chloe was undoubtedly an exceptional commander of a knight order, to Charlot, he wasn't worth that price.

Ultimately, Charlot gave up on the idea of a raid. Instead, he first withdrew part of the West Wind Knight Order's forces, taking all the supplies with them and leaving only the swiftest elites behind.

This tactic was one he had picked up after engaging in several pursuit battles.

With elite forces holding the battlefield, the enemy would hesitate to give chase, ensuring the safe retreat of the supplies. Once the supplies were secure, the elites could retreat swiftly, leaving the enemy powerless to act.

Charlot maneuvered while engaging in skirmishes, weaving a large loop behind the Black Phoenix Dynasty's main army. Unbeknownst to him, his actions had a profound impact on the entire battlefield.

The main forces of the Black Phoenix Dynasty were caught between the need to confront Clair Bretagne's Purple Finch Knight Order on the front lines and the fear of an attack on their rear, leading to significant logistical and strategic difficulties.

Seizing this opportunity, Clair Bretagne launched a fierce assault, forcing the Black Phoenix Dynasty's primary knight order to retreat and reversing the battlefield's downward spiral.

At the same time, Ebner Soumet took advantage of the chaos to strike at the rear, annihilating two auxiliary knight orders of the Black Phoenix Dynasty. The battle grew increasingly intense.

Charlot, deep in enemy territory, had no idea what was happening on the main battlefield. His goal had been to escape back to Interlaken, not to engage the Black Phoenix Dynasty's main forces.

For nearly two months, Charlot fought in the enemy's rear. Every time he thought he had found a path to retreat, Chloe Hadrian would "intercept" him. What Charlot didn't realize was that every route he found happened to be a weak point in the Black Phoenix Dynasty's main army. If he broke through from there, it could destabilize their entire front line. Chloe couldn't risk letting him pass and intercepted him each time with all his might.

Charlot, unaccustomed to such prolonged combat, felt utterly exhausted both mentally and physically. After finally escaping another pursuit by Chloe, he longed for a place to rest for a few days and replenish his supplies.

During this period, Charlot had carried out many raids. Each time, he left IOUs for the Black Phoenix Dynasty's civilians, stating that they could exchange them for centime and flor at Mostar Castle or Silver Dove Castle. Despite this gesture, he couldn't shake the emptiness he felt after each raid.

He always felt that such actions were wrong, but he had no other choice to keep his army going.

What Charlot didn't know was that while he plundered from the front, Chloe's forces behind him were driven to despair.

Charlot, ever the military novice, adhered to a simple principle: never leave supplies for the enemy. His raids were devastatingly thorough, leaving not even a needle for the pursuing troops.

He didn't bother burning the supplies he couldn't carry. With his Mind Channel ability, he could transport materials directly to Machubi Fortress, Silver Dove Castle, Mostar Castle, Cappadocia, and Interlaken. While he couldn't retrieve them later, he ensured nothing went to waste.

Charlot's aggressive looting left Chloe's forces struggling to resupply, forcing them to fetch provisions from distant locations. This logistical strain made it increasingly impossible to keep up with Charlot's West Wind Knight Order.

Meanwhile, Charlot's rampant raids had caused an uproar in the Black Phoenix Dynasty's court, sparking heated arguments among the politicians, who turned on each other and even blamed the frontline forces.

As Charlot considered his next direction of retreat, a werewolf scout came rushing in to report, "Commander, ahead is Oia Town."

Charlot was shocked. Half of his geographical knowledge came from his past life and was useless in this world; the other half came from his university studies. Unsurprisingly, he had lost his sense of direction in the chaotic retreat.

He never expected to stumble upon Oia Town.

Oia Town wasn't a small town. Much like how Shijiazhuang wasn't a mere village, Oia Town was a large city. However, it belonged to the Black Phoenix Dynasty and wasn't near the border.

Charlot was startled because Oia Town was deep within the Black Phoenix Dynasty's territory.

"What should we do now? How did we penetrate this far into their land?" he wondered.

"Hmm, I heard Oia Town is a free trade city with no stationed troops!"

"Not sure if what I learned in university is accurate."

While Charlot's mind raced, his instincts—honed through countless battles—kicked in. Without a second thought, he waved his hand and commanded, "Capture Oia Town!"

The West Wind Knight Order had now grown to nearly five thousand men, bolstered by recruits, including Lady Nancella's followers and a substantial number of Black Phoenix citizens. During his raids, Charlot had distributed IOUs to reassure the populace, but some chose to follow him out of desperation.

Those who caused trouble along the way were quietly sent back to Machubi Fortress in secret locations.

This practice led the remaining Black Phoenix followers to perceive Charlot as "ruthless." The result was a more obedient group since dissenters seemed to mysteriously disappear.

Charlot's talent for organizing troops was his most developed military skill. He distributed these recruits across different combat squads, managing them with surprising efficiency.

At Charlot's command, this rapidly expanding knight order stormed into Oia Town.

The residents of Oia Town, who had been living peacefully, were stunned to see the Fars Empire's knights. Overwhelmed and unprepared, they surrendered without much resistance.

After capturing Oia Town, Charlot heard the long-absent voice of the Diary in his mind:

"Charlot Mecklenburg has become the ruler of Oia Town. The conditions for labyrinthification have been met. Collect taxes eighteen times to complete the process. Until then, you may not leave."

Chapter 262: Only the West Wind Knight Order Remains

The residents of Oia Town, after their homeland was occupied by the forces of the Fars Empire, quickly learned the harsh reality of exorbitant taxes.

Administrative officer Naiman, a conscientious official, initially tried to negotiate with the invaders, aiming to raise funds to persuade them to leave. Meanwhile, he sent letters to nearby cities, requesting military aid to expel these “invaders.”

However, Naiman never anticipated the actions of this Fars knight order. Upon entering Oia Town, they captured a group of young men, announcing that these individuals would be taken back to the Fars Empire.

Left with no choice, Naiman braced himself to negotiate. Surprisingly, the leader of the knight order appeared reasonable, stating that the townspeople could ransom the young men by paying a head tax.

The tax was not exorbitant—just one drachma per person.

The Black Phoenix Dynasty's currency, drachma, differed from those of Fars, Byron, and Ingrima. It was a hybrid coin made of gold and silver, with its denomination determined by the ratio of the metals. Roughly 3.2 drachmas equaled one flor.

Although the dynasty also issued paper currency equivalent to gold and silver coins, Charlot Mecklenburg refused to accept paper money, demanding only gold and silver drachmas.

The residents of Oia Town, unwilling to see their sons, fathers, brothers, and husbands taken away by the Fars soldiers, paid the ransom enthusiastically, reclaiming the young men.

Having collected his first round of taxes, Charlot launched a new sweep, this time targeting children. Naiman, who had already dealt with Charlot once, understood that the man was not inherently cruel. He once again approached Charlot to plead for the children's release. Charlot, consistent as before, set the child tax at one drachma each.

Once the children were ransomed, Charlot turned his attention to women, the elderly, livestock, and even furniture. Over the next seven or eight days, he transformed Oia Town into a labyrinthine structure without the residents noticing.

When the regional forces from nearby cities arrived to provide aid, Charlot decisively retreated. Shortly after his departure, the nobles, wealthy merchants, and farmstead owners of Oia Town found their properties mysteriously vanished. Additionally, 70% of the town's grain stores were gone.

Charlot sent the plundered wealth and food to Machubi Fortress but soon sensed that the labyrinthine connections of Oia Town and other maze-like towns had been severed.

He understood that labyrinthine transformation was not omnipotent. Cities with extraordinary individuals or powerful defenders were immune to such manipulations. This was his first encounter with someone breaking the labyrinthine effect, restoring Oia Town to its normal state.

Though surprised, Charlot did not linger. With adequate supplies in hand and a clear sense of direction, he swiftly headed toward Interlaken City.

This leg of his march proceeded smoothly, and Charlot soon returned to the front lines.

Ten days after Charlot's departure, Chloe Hadrian arrived in Oia Town. Everywhere he went, he was met with weeping residents. Rumors of Charlot levying taxes hundreds of times a day and stripping the city of all its wealth spread like wildfire.

As a member of the imperial family, Chloe primarily interacted with nobles during his journey. Coupled with Charlot's scorched-earth tactics, Chloe gained an extremely poor impression of him and believed the rumors wholeheartedly.

Enraged, Chloe immediately led his troops in pursuit. This time, however, he failed to catch Charlot.

Charlot had slipped through a gap in the front-line skirmishes and returned to Interlaken City after months of absence.

The small city was just as Charlot had left it. Thanks to his diversionary tactics drawing attention elsewhere, the front lines remained a chaotic battleground, with both sides locked in intense combat. Miraculously, Interlaken City had been spared further conflict, and a few hundred residents had even returned.

These returning residents, naturally, could not find their old homes. Italio Calvino, temporarily appointed by Charlot as chief clerk, was not versed in warfare but excelled at administrative tasks. He distributed housing to the residents using a lottery system he devised.

When Charlot returned, Interlaken City was running smoothly.

After two days of rest, Clair Bretagne and Ebner Soumet arrived together. Charlot, surprised by their visit, promptly welcomed them into the city and asked, "What brings Mr. Bretagne and Mr. Soumet here? Has the war on the front lines ended?"

Clair Bretagne sighed and replied, "The war on the front lines continues, but the Bretagne offensive has concluded."

Ebner added, "Byron has not retreated. Instead, they've continued reinforcing their troops, forcing the Empire to increase its presence in Ferranden. Our original strategy of feigning an attack on South Seraph to divert Byron's forces has completely failed. As a result, the Purple Finch Knight Order and the Maple Leaf Knight Order are being redeployed to Ferranden."

Charlot was taken aback by the news. Unable to suppress his curiosity, he asked, "What about South Seraph?"

Clair Bretagne replied, "It must be abandoned."

Seeing Charlot's dissatisfaction, Ebner said, "This is strategic! We'll reclaim South Seraph sooner or later."

Charlot longed to ask about the fate of the Behemoth Principality but restrained himself, knowing that this was beyond Clair Bretagne's and Ebner Soumet's purview. After a moment of contemplation, he asked, "May I request to stay in South Seraph?"

Clair Bretagne shook his head. "Your rank is too low. You cannot assume the position of military governor. Even I lack the authority to become a lord there, so it's out of the question for you."

Ebner understood Charlot's desire to remain in South Seraph. He knew Charlot wished to keep the flames of war away from the Behemoth Principality—Charlot's homeland. It was only natural for him to protect it.

With a faint smile, Ebner suggested, "However, there's another option."

"For instance, as we did in Behemoth, Clair Bretagne and I could appoint you as an administrative officer for several key cities in South Seraph."

Charlot felt slightly less frustrated. He was not solely motivated by the Behemoth Principality; he also wished to spare South Seraph from further destruction. Although he didn't know how much he could achieve, doing something was better than doing nothing.

Clair Bretagne patted Charlot's shoulder and said, "Before we leave, we'll need supplies. Someone will come to Silver Dove Castle to collect them. I'll always remember this act of friendship. There's no need for further words."

Charlot nodded. "I'll prepare the supplies."

Neither man mentioned the recipient of the supplies, but all three, including Ebner, were well aware of their destination.

Clair Bretagne smiled lightly. "Don't be so disheartened. While we didn't achieve our strategic objectives, we weren't defeated in battle."

"Furthermore, all the other knight orders have had their formations shattered during the war..."

Clair Bretagne winked and added with a sly grin, "From now on, in the Behemoth Principality and South Seraph, only the West Wind Knight Order remains."

Chapter 263: The Tacit War

Charlot had only one thought in his mind: "This is far too grim!"

The Fars Empire wanted to directly annex the Behemoth Principality and the South Seraph region into its territories while dismantling the knight orders. Regardless of whether Brittany's offensive succeeded in holding back Byron, these two objectives had been largely achieved.

The South Seraph restorationists were entrenched in Ferranden, while the knight orders of the Behemoth Principality had been completely obliterated. Not only the noble orders but even Baron Febollet's knight order had been entirely wiped out during Brittany's assault.

As for whether Baron Febollet would cry to his elder sister or find another way to vent his frustrations, Charlot couldn't care less.

In the following days, Clair Bretagne gradually handed over the defense zones to Charlot, along with several knight orders. However, he specifically requested to take Gwen the Dappled Stag and Bancroft the Swift Wolf with him, two extraordinary individuals. Charlot generously agreed.

Naturally, Charlot did not retain these knight orders as they were but disbanded and reorganized them into the West Wind Knight Order. He also supplemented the combat squads of Anastasia, Dubin, and Yellow Bear, bringing their forces up to 800 soldiers each. Additionally, he promoted Italio Calvino, the quick-handed scribe, and Sebald of the South Seraph restorationists, granting each of them command over 200-man combat squads.

Charlot initially planned for the departure of Clair Bretagne's Purple Finch Knight Order and Maple Leaf Knight Order to lead to an intense assault from the Black Phoenix Dynasty. He had even prepared a strategy of fighting and retreating. To his surprise, after Clair Bretagne's departure, the main forces of the Black Phoenix Dynasty also withdrew, leaving behind only Chloe Hadrian, who had been harassing and chasing him for the past two months!

Chloe was unwilling to let it go. He felt Charlot had made a fool of him and was determined to settle the score with Charlot Mecklenburg in South Seraph through a final showdown.

Upon learning that Chloe had stayed behind, Charlot immediately sent a messenger with a letter, stating that war was truly terrifying and proposing a truce until the greater war concluded.

This reflected Charlot's true feelings. After tangling with Chloe for over two months, he knew the man was quite formidable, and his knight order was equally elite. Rather than sacrificing large numbers of soldiers and witnessing daily deaths, it was far better for both sides to engage in a tacit understanding of war.

When Chloe received the letter, he furiously cursed Charlot as a coward, insulting his ancestry all the way back to his great-grandfather. In his rage, he tore apart two copies of *The Chronicles of Charlot*, a novel authored by Italo Calvino, and challenged Charlot to a duel.

Charlot, however, was not afraid of Chloe. He simply had no interest in fighting. He replied with a letter stating that their numerous battles had already proven inconclusive, and further duels would be meaningless. Instead, he suggested both parties retreat to focus on cultivation, with the promise of a duel once one of them broke through their current limits.

To his surprise, Chloe found this proposal acceptable and responded in agreement.

Despite some initial turbulence, the war progressed precisely as Charlot had hoped. The armies faced off in stalemates, while the commanders dedicated themselves to intense cultivation. The situation had achieved ninety-nine percent of Charlot's vision for a "tacit war."

Besides practicing Blood Glory, Charlot focused on spreading *The Chronicles of Charlot* across the South Seraph region. He even trained hundreds of storytellers for the purpose.

The Old Continent lacked the profession of storytellers. Writers occasionally dabbled in storytelling, but such performances were exclusive to the nobility. Charlot's initiative introduced a new form of entertainment for the Fars Empire's common folk and created a completely new occupation.

With this outlandish novel as a tool, Charlot's efforts to indoctrinate the people of South Seraph progressed smoothly.

Charlot also widely proclaimed that South Seraph would be exempt from taxes in the future, combined with relaxed economic policies. This convinced many South Seraphians to abandon resistance.

In truth, Charlot cared little for taxation. War was the most lucrative enterprise.

With Clair Bretagne and Ebner Soumet showing no interest in South Seraph, and the Empire yet to assign officials to govern the region, the original administrative system of South Seraph had completely collapsed. The entire region was now under Charlot's sole authority.

During the war, Charlot seized countless lands, shops, estates, and industries. While he promised to sell part of these assets to the nobles of Behemoth, he did not intend to break his word. The remaining war profits were more than sufficient to sustain the West Wind Knight Order.

Apart from maintaining the West Wind Knight Order, Charlot had no other administrative expenses. As for the future...

He was neither the ruler nor the lord of South Seraph. Why worry about the future?

Two and a half months later, an envoy from Strasbourg arrived, granting Charlot the same privileges as those of Behemoth, appointing him as the chief administrator of South Seraph's five largest cities.

Charlot never imagined that this appointment would spark widespread cheers throughout South Seraph. The temporary official who had governed the region for only a few months had somehow earned the genuine love and respect of its people.

The envoy also brought news that the Fars Empire and the Ingrima Empire had finally formalized an alliance to jointly oppose Byron, the Black Phoenix Dynasty, and the Orc Tribal Alliance.

Although Charlot privately criticized the two nations for taking nearly half a year to finalize their alliance, he was relieved. This meant that Ingrima's forces might soon cross the seas to join the war and alleviate the pressure on Fars.

After sending off the envoy, Charlot expected a brief period of peace. However, the very next day, an extraordinary figure arrived in South Seraph.

Princess May Guillaume, the Grand Princess of the Ingrima Empire, graced South Seraph with her presence.

When Charlot saw the Grand Princess of Ingrima, he was utterly flabbergasted.

No, he was stunned.

He could not comprehend why this Grand Princess, instead of reading novels in Strasbourg, had come to the South Seraph front lines.

Accompanying Princess May was Aurora Soumet, whom Charlot had nearly forgotten was also part of the envoy delegation.

However, Princess May and Aurora were not leading an envoy. Instead, they had brought a "mercenary group." Though technically mercenaries, this group was, in reality, an investigative team.

Coincidentally, they were detectives from the Fierce Horse Detective Agency.

This team, tasked with escorting foreign princesses and deputy envoys to South Seraph, was ecstatic to meet Charlot. They had long heard from Strasbourg's grapevine about the meteoric rise of their new agency owner.

Their enthusiasm only grew when they learned that Charlot Mecklenburg was not only acquainted with the Ingrima Grand Princess but also with a countess. They felt immense relief that the former director, Aubrey Tildon Atwood, had sold the agency and that they had chosen to remain.

Charlot, however, had no time to indulge his detective agency members. After arranging accommodations for Princess May and Aurora at a South Seraph noble's residence, he couldn't help but ask, "Princess May, what brings you and Aurora to the front lines?"

The Grand Princess replied indifferently, "Because in a few days, someone will go to Silver Dove Castle, and I have a personal grudge to settle."

Chapter 264: I'm Just Naturally Shy

Charlot was stunned and cautiously asked, "How did you know?"

Menielman Soumet coming to Silver Dove Castle was supposed to be a secret. If even the Grand Princess of Ingrima Empire, Princess May Guillaume, knew about it, didn't that mean everyone knew?

Princess May replied calmly, "Your labyrinth's passages are very useful. I've gone back to Cappadocia a few times and happened to encounter Menielman resupplying at the docks."

Charlot was utterly shocked!

Seeing his expression, Princess May asked flatly, "The labyrinth isn't exactly some top-secret thing. Why do you look like someone just exposed your greatest secret?"

Charlot was even more shocked!

He knew the labyrinth wasn't a sophisticated power, but he hadn't realized it would appear so full of flaws in the eyes of someone at the Saint rank. That Princess May could use the labyrinth's passageways to go to Cappadocia was astonishing. Whether departing from Machubi Fortress or Silver Dove Castle, it was a groundbreaking feat.

Princess May's sharp gaze grew curious as she asked, "Or is it that you think I've discovered those two novels were actually written by you?"

Charlot was *completely* shocked! He had reached his limit—there was no room for further shock.

Princess May said nothing, but Aurora Soumet spoke up instead: "When Princess May bought the two books from the bookstore, she inquired with the publisher and found Miss Annie Bretagne. Miss Annie admitted to it readily."

Charlot couldn't help but ask, "Annie just told you?"

Aurora shrugged. "The author's name is Annie Mecklenburg. Even if she didn't admit it, what difference would it make?"

Charlot nearly broke through his "shock limit" once again. He hadn't known Annie had blatantly signed the novels with such an undisguised pen name.

"Annie Mecklenburg!?"

"That's practically a confession!"

Princess May remarked curiously, "Mr. Mecklenburg, I must say, you're a truly gifted novelist. Why hide your identity? I've read *The Mecklenburg Chronicles* as well. While its quality doesn't match the other two books, that's mainly due to the lack of refinement in prose and detail. It was probably written in haste, but its storytelling is superior to the others."

Charlot thought to himself, "Ridiculous. Those are Greek myths and *The Lion King*!"

Since Princess May had stripped away all his defenses, he stopped bothering to hide anything. "I'm just... naturally shy," he said.

If Earl Bretagne were present, he would have interjected: "Mr. Mecklenburg! You're naturally shameless! Shy? A man who streaks naked has no claim to shyness!"

Even without Earl Bretagne, the two ladies, who had read the side stories of Duwei and Crown Prince Chen's entangled relationship, couldn't help but have similar thoughts:

"A man who writes such provocative novels and calls himself shy?"

"Is he mocking the concept of shyness?"

Charlot dared not continue the topic of novels. Instead, he casually asked, "So Senior Menielman also went to Cappadocia?"

He thought this was a safe question.

Then another thought occurred to him:

"Why didn't Princess May and Senior Menielman settle their personal grievances in Cappadocia? Why insist on coming back to Silver Dove Castle?"

"Hm, maybe that's not a safe question either..."

Charlot immediately realized his mistake.

Princess May replied calmly, "She said it was you who sent her to Cappadocia."

"Oh, and she also took your fleet with her."

Charlot wasn't particularly upset about losing a few merchant ships. After leaving Ingrima, he couldn't control Cappadocia anymore, and the fleet would eventually slip away. Having Menielman take it at least counted as putting it to good use.

However, Princess May's words made Charlot sensitive to one fact: Senior Menielman didn't have a magical alchemical warship.

If she did, why would she need to repurpose ordinary merchant vessels into warships?

For a moment, Charlot felt a pang of sympathy for Menielman. In the eyes of commoners in the Fars Empire, she was nearly perfect. Charlot himself had once felt fortunate to cling to her coattails. But as his status rose, he gradually realized that her life wasn't easy.

The impact of the *Imperial Rose Incident* ran deep and turbulent.

At the beginning, Charlot thought Menielman held immense power and influence, as he was merely a first-class civil servant ranked forty-one. Now, he understood that the warden of Kilmainham Prison wasn't a particularly significant governmental position.

Currently, even Charlot Mecklenburg himself held a slew of official titles: Chief of the Lukavaro District City Patrol Guards, Commander of the West Wind Knight Order, Director of the Lukavaro District Administrative Bureau, Fars Empire's Special Envoy for War to the Ingrima Empire, and temporary municipal steward of Mostar Castle, Bybury City, Seagull City, Silver Dove Castle, and Mount Ode City.

Additionally, he held the position of full municipal steward for the five cities of Arcadia Port, Sedona City, Solvan City, Carmel Town, and Interlaken in the South Seraph District, under the title of twenty-fifth-rank civil servant.

Yes, the South Seraph region had quietly been reclassified as a major district, and his five-city stewardship no longer carried the "temporary" prefix.

Had Charlot transmigrated directly into his current status, the dynamic between him and Menielman might have been entirely different regarding who needed whom.

Of course, Menielman still had the support of the Soumet family and numerous allies, while Charlot Mecklenburg had no such backing.

Charlot had never considered Annie a political pawn. While he had gained certain benefits from the Bretagne family, and even entertained shallow dreams of marrying into wealth, he would never sacrifice Annie for political gain.

For instance, if Annie were to fall out with her father, Earl Bretagne, Charlot wouldn't side with the earl for the sake of his career. He would stand in front of Annie, even if it meant losing everything.

After all, as a transmigrator, he had started with nothing.

Because of the war, Charlot's often-overloaded brain had failed to grasp why Princess May had come to South Seraph. But it didn't take him long to figure it out...

Princess May had come to supervise his scribes directly. She even summoned Italio Calvino—formerly the temporary steward of Interlaken—to Sedona City...

...to *demand manuscripts* with maximum urgency.

Charlot wasn't a web fiction author, nor any kind of professional writer. He didn't know whether Earth editors were this ruthless in chasing deadlines, but he doubted any editor there could rival Princess May's intensity.

Thanks to her, Charlot's oral storytelling career, which had been gradually derailed by war and cultivation, suddenly reignited with dazzling brilliance.

Apart from sleeping and eating, nearly all his time was devoted to storytelling.

Even during bathroom breaks, Princess May wouldn't follow him personally, but she would assign a scribe to accompany him.

Chapter 265: One Must Not Be Too Drunk, Green Bull!

During this period, Chloe Hadrian had been training with unprecedented diligence, and his combat energy had advanced at a remarkable pace. After enduring the trials of war, he finally shattered the bottleneck and condensed the Proof of the Earth, one of the eight Knight Proofs, doubling his strength.

Brimming with confidence, he ventured alone from the military camp, spear in hand, and loudly issued a challenge to Charlot Mecklenburg.

Charlot, whose mouth was dry from dictating text for hours, was overjoyed at hearing the challenge. He exclaimed, "Chloe, you brat! I'll end your life right now—"

Before he could finish, Princess May Guillaume pressed him back into his seat and said indifferently, "I'll go."

Charlot hesitated. "But this... doesn't seem appropriate?"

However, Princess May had already leaped into the air, completely ignoring him. Beside Charlot, the quick-handed scribe, Italio Calvino, urged him in a low voice, "Mr. Mecklenburg, please don't waste any more time. We are still far from reaching the word count set by the Grand Princess today. If we delay any further, none of us will have dinner."

Charlot sighed deeply, gazing skyward as he resumed dictating his web novel. He regretted showing off on the battleship that day.

If the novels of the Old Continent were bad, why did he have to sneer so conspicuously? What was the point?

One must not be too drunk, Green Bull!

Yes, that was a line from some online novel.

Suddenly, a chill ran down Charlot's spine as he thought to himself, "I mustn't let the Grand Princess hear about that book. If I recall correctly, did that book even have an ending? Or was it unfinished?"

"Regardless, I'm sure the Grand Princess would never approve of its conclusion."

"If she suspects I'm slacking off, she'll make me keep dictating."

"That would truly be the death of me."

...

Chloe Hadrian stood frozen, his expression blank, as he watched Princess May Guillaume descend from the sky. A single thought echoed in his mind:

I'm done for.

Dead!

He couldn't understand. Saint ranks rarely cared about the lives of ordinary people. Charlot Mecklenburg had fought his way to Oia Town without encountering a Saint. So how was it that now, at Sedona City, when he came for a one-on-one challenge, a Saint intervened?

Was Charlot the illegitimate son of some Grand Duke?

No, wait...

Why am I still alive?

Lost in thought, Chloe was startled by Princess May's cold, clear voice. "Charlot Mecklenburg is currently writing a novel. Do not disturb his draftwork."

Chloe Hadrian scrambled to show his sincerity and quickly said, "Mr. Charlot Mecklenburg and I had agreed to a friendly spar to deepen our camaraderie. I had no idea he was busy creating. I will never dare to challenge him again."

Princess May was satisfied. She flicked Chloe on the forehead with a Saint's strength, knocking him unconscious, and floated gracefully back to Sedona City.

...

Chloe's deputy, who had been watching the duel from the military camp, had been somewhat worried about her commander. However, the moment Princess May revealed her Saint-level power, the deputy froze, utterly stunned, like a small chick pinned down by a tiger's paw.

When Princess May flicked Chloe unconscious, the deputy let out a sharp cry, grabbed a rapier, and sprinted to her commander. As she threw herself over Chloe and confirmed he still had a pulse, her emotions overwhelmed her, and she fainted on the spot.

Frankly, it was beyond bizarre for a knight commander and his deputy to be sprawled out together under the enemy's walls. Yet, it had happened in such an open and undeniable fashion.

Charlot, immersed in dictation, had no idea this had occurred. Had he known, he would have stormed out and run both of them through with a single spear strike—ensuring they perished by the same blow, rather than different methods.

Ten minutes later, Chloe's subordinates cautiously ventured out of the camp to retrieve their commander and his deputy, hauling them back inside.

...

It was only during dinner that Charlot had a moment to ask, "What happened to Chloe?"

A straightforward scribe replied, "His deputy ran out, and then the two of them lay under the city wall for a while before returning."

Charlot froze in disbelief, his mind spinning.

They lay under the city wall for a while? What were they doing? Are people from the Black Phoenix Dynasty always this uninhibited?

Did I miss something interesting?

Doubting the first account, Charlot asked another scribe, who gave a similar response. "Indeed, they lay there for about ten minutes. Chloe collapsed first, and then his deputy rushed out with a rapier, only to throw herself on top of him."

These scribes, like Charlot, were overworked from daily dictation. Compared to Charlot, who only had to narrate, they had it worse—they wrote so much that their fingers were covered in calluses.

Typically, these quick-handed scribes wouldn't write more than five hundred words a day. But after being sent here by Anne, they now averaged ten thousand words daily.

They hadn't gone to the walls to witness the scene themselves but relied on gossip from the West Wind Knights, which naturally lacked many details.

The straightforward scribe, fearing Charlot's disbelief, added, "They really were lying there for a full ten minutes!"

Charlot muttered to himself,
So Chloe isn't all that impressive.

Ah, he trained in the Black Phoenix Dynasty's royal secret arts, not as effective as Blood Glory, which even boosts endurance.

If he dared to challenge me, he must have made some progress in his cultivation.

Good thing I didn't go out. Otherwise, I might have struggled to defeat him.

I've been neglecting my training for dictation. After finishing these two books, I must resume my practice.

...

After dinner, Charlot resumed his arduous dictation. He often mused that the authors of these two books should treat him to a feast. How many legitimate readers had he secured for them in the Fars Empire? Even the Grand Princess of the Ingrima Empire was a die-hard fan. Bragging about this would surely trump boasting about a dinner with a certain world leader.

Though the royalties all went into Charlot's pocket, he considered that irrelevant.

For a while, Charlot had been under the illusion that he hadn't transmigrated to the Old Continent but into a modern urban setting, where shameless plagiarism was his claim to fame...

Until one day, Princess May suddenly summoned him, said nothing, and took off into the sky.

Charlot asked, "Princess May, where are we going?"

She replied coolly, "To Silver Dove Castle. Menielman has arrived."

Charlot exhaled a long breath and sincerely exclaimed, "Praise Senior Sister Menielman."

That wasn't a mere thought; it was a shout from the heart.

Then he heard Princess May's frosty response: "Quite bold of you."

Only then did Charlot realize he was being carried by Menielman's sworn enemy, in mid-air...

Chapter 266: Lionheart King Charlie

"It's not too much, really, it's not."

Charlot Mecklenburg truly wasn't known for his courage, and besides, what did courage have to do with this matter? Challenging a Saint rank was something only fools would do.

Princess May didn't say anything more.

Charlot, drenched in cold sweat, began to reflect on whether he had been too "arrogant."

How could he, in front of Princess May, say something like: "Praise Senior Menielman"?

Especially since it was Princess May who had forced him to recite the novels in the first place. Wasn't this blatant resistance?

Princess May flew over a hundred kilometers before gracefully landing. She said, "Bring out your Dark Luxury."

Charlot asked, "Aren't we flying directly?"

Princess May replied indifferently, "Menielman Soumet's strength is not to be underestimated. I need to conserve energy for the upcoming battle."

Obediently, Charlot summoned Dark Luxury while secretly muttering to himself, "Grand Princess, even your endurance is lacking?"

"We've barely flown this far!"

"Not even as enduring as a tiny ant."

The two boarded Dark Luxury, and Charlot noticed that Princess May's mannerisms seemed somewhat peculiar. However, this grand princess was draped in an all-black robe, with even her face obscured, so Charlot couldn't discern her expression. He simply pretended nothing was amiss, slumping lazily in his seat and even considering sticking his tongue out to pant.

Lately, he had been utterly exhausted.

The Grand Princess was more ruthless than any capitalist!

Charlot secretly grumbled to himself in her presence, finding the act quite satisfying.

Once aboard the carriage, Princess May remained silent. Initially, she gazed at the scenery outside, but after a while, unable to contain herself, she asked, "Do you feel like something is wrong?"

Charlot glanced out the window. "We're not off track."

Princess May fell silent for another half hour before speaking again, "Are we perhaps..."

Charlot gave her a curious look and countered, "Are you hungry? Do you want something to eat? I didn't bring any food. If we pass through a village, I can buy some."

Princess May took a deep breath and said, "As an imperial princess, I shouldn't be sharing such a small space with an unrelated man."

Charlot felt as though a bucket of cold water had been dumped on him. Only now did he realize why Princess May had been acting so strangely. He had not only casually boarded the carriage but was lounging in his seat without a care for appearances—completely improper conduct in front of a princess.

Ah, yes. The Old Continent was still a feudal empire. Offending a royal princess was a crime punishable by death.

At first, Charlot was a little frightened and didn't dare to rise. But after a few minutes, he relaxed and said, "Since it's already like this, Your Highness needn't worry. There are no outsiders here, and I won't speak of this to anyone."

"Let's just leave it at that!"

Princess May hesitated for a long time before giving a slight nod.

Charlot suddenly recalled how Princess May had often dragged him into private rooms to recite novels. Why, then, did it suddenly matter that they couldn't share a carriage?

"This woman is really peculiar. No wonder she ended up a widow."

Charlot dared to grumble a little more to himself. To ease the awkwardness, he added casually, "Shall I recite another book for you?"

"Hmm, a new novel?"

Charlot immediately regretted his words. He was nearly done reciting the two current books, and once finished, he would finally escape this torment. Offering to start another would only prolong his suffering.

Princess May said lightly, "Very well."

Determined to choose a short one, Charlot racked his brains for several minutes before settling on a non-web novel fantasy story. He began, "Once upon a time, there were four children who discovered a large wardrobe in their home. Inside were many clothes. While playing hide-and-seek, they found themselves in a snow-covered forest..."

"They encountered a lion! The lion told them a witch ruled the world and that they were destined to be its saviors..."

Princess May interrupted his recitation. "Did you base this story on Lionheart King Charlie?"

Charlot was about to deny it when he realized the Lionheart Empire's legendary founder, Lionheart King Charlie, bore many uncanny similarities to the story. The parallels were enough to make one question whether the author of this Earth classic had been inspired by him.

Princess May said coolly, "This book should not be published in the Fars Empire. Publish it in the Ingrima Empire instead."

"Make sure to sing praises of the Lionheart King. You might even reap unexpected benefits."

Charlot doubted a mere book could bring him any tangible advantage. He replied, "You can publish these books in Ingrima as long as I receive my royalties."

Princess May was surprised. "You'd allow all of them to be published?"

Charlot nodded. Princess May secretly thought, "Even the side story about Duwei and Crown Prince Chen can be published?"

"Alright. He truly is a shy man."

Charlot had no idea he was digging his own grave. He didn't even know about the side story, let alone its existence.

When Anne had managed the matter, she had gone to great lengths to ensure her ghostwriter signed a permanent copyright waiver and a confidentiality agreement.

In return, she promised the ghostwriter a substantial one-time payment and 10% of the royalties from each volume sold thereafter—a significant percentage in this world, where most authors earned far less.

Anne was wealthy, and the ghostwriter was a young noblewoman. She also demanded that Anne promise never to reveal her involvement.

This noblewoman was far more concerned about her identity being exposed. She believed the book was her magnum opus but absolutely did not want anyone to know she had written it.

What she hadn't expected was that, in the decades that followed, she would earn royalties amounting to several écus annually—enough to make her financially independent until her death in her nineties. Even then, the royalties continued to grow year after year.

She kept her word and never spoke of her involvement.

It wasn't until her death that her great-great-great-granddaughter discovered a mysterious annual payment. Investigating further, she traced it to the publisher and uncovered the truth.

Yes, Charlot would be unjustly accused for over a century.

Chapter 267: The Senior Sister's Letter

The Dark Luxury was truly an exceptional carriage! Wherever it had been before, it required no driver; the eight Demonflame Horses would pull it directly to its destination. Of the thirteen Dark Luxury carriages crafted over a hundred years ago, there were few places they hadn't visited. Every time Charlot Mecklenburg operated the Dark Luxury, he experienced the thrill of what could only be described as "intelligent luxury driving."

When the walls of Silver Dove Castle appeared in the distance, Charlot let out a small sigh of relief. He did have a special affection for Silver Dove Castle, after all—it was what people often called a "place of past battles."

Charlot was just about to disembark from the carriage when Princess May suddenly called out, "Get in!"

Charlot hesitated, about to ask, "Which seat should I take?" when the carriage door swung open, revealing the heroic figure of Menielman Soumet inside the Dark Luxury.

Charlot nearly gasped out loud in astonishment.

Menielman seated herself beside him, opposite Princess May. The two women ignored everyone else's presence entirely. Charlot was about to quietly open the door and slip away when Menielman remarked, "No need to leave. I just need a few words with Princess May."

Charlot thought to himself, "I don't want to hear a single word," but his body obediently remained seated.

He was genuinely curious: what kind of connection could there be between Senior Sister Menielman and the Grand Princess? The two didn't appear to harbor any grudges.

Princess May spoke in a low voice. "The last time, in Cappadocia, I spared your life. This time, don't think you'll have such an opportunity again."

Charlot mused, "There was a fight in Cappadocia, too?"

Menielman replied coolly, "Were it not for Fars Empire and its alliance with Ingrima, I wouldn't have let you off."

In just a few words, the tension between the two escalated to explosive levels. Charlot, unwilling to see his beloved Dark Luxury destroyed—its value being in the thousands of gold écus—quickly interjected, "Shall we step outside first?"

Princess May responded dismissively, "There's no need. Even sitting here, I can take down this calamity-causing little demon."

Charlot glanced at Senior Sister Menielman. Although the First Rose of the Empire had indeed stirred countless storms, she couldn't possibly fit the title of a "calamity-causing demon." That term typically referred to figures with resplendent identities—like the empresses of vast empires, such as Daji, Yang Guifei, or even rulers like Wu Zetian, Catherine the Great, and Cleopatra.

Hmm... Charlot couldn't quite recall Cleopatra's actual name, only that the actresses portraying her in several films were all quite remarkable.

Menielman didn't sneer or retort. Instead, with an air of nobility, she slowly removed her gloves and tossed them onto Princess May's chest.

A faint pink battle energy shimmered around Princess May's hands, ready to unleash a devastating strike at any moment.

The thought of the two Saint-rank women clashing, which could obliterate the Dark Luxury in an instant, made Charlot act. He pressed his hand against the carriage floor and shouted, "Retract!"

The Dark Luxury vanished in an instant, transforming into a ring.

A slender hand reached out, grabbing the ring. Princess May remarked icily, "Are you worried we'll damage it?"

"It's just a secondhand carriage," she continued, "hardly worth such a bold move."

With a burst of pink battle energy, Princess May sent Charlot flying out of the carriage.

In mid-air, Charlot activated Blood Glory, flipped over, and landed unscathed. He knew Princess May must have held back, likely out of consideration for his hard work as a messenger. Hastily, he called out, "That thing's expensive! I'm not exactly rich, so of course I'd want to save money wherever I can!"

Menielman stepped forward, shielding Charlot. "Don't target my junior. If you have the nerve, come at me instead."

Pink battle energy surged around Princess May as her feet slowly lifted off the ground.

Unwilling to be outdone, Menielman exuded an aura like a shadowy night, within which a Black Moon loomed. She, too, ascended into the air.

The two clashed in a fierce exchange of energy, their auras intertwining. Within moments, at least seven collisions erupted in rapid succession.

Caught in the aftermath of the confrontation between the two Saint-rank warriors, Charlot was sent tumbling several times before he managed to cast Swiftstep x10, retreating from the battlefield as quickly as possible.

Though he ran far, the residual energy from their clash still swept over him, pushing him back six or seven dozen paces. Turning back, he saw two radiant spheres of energy rising into the sky. Above, the clouds suddenly burst apart.

After watching for a moment, Charlot turned and headed toward Silver Dove Castle. Witnessing such battles was intriguing at first, but after seeing it enough times, it became just another spectacle.

Upon reaching Silver Dove Castle, Charlot received a grand welcome from the residents. Nearly every passerby greeted him and asked about the commotion in the sky. Charlot reassured everyone, telling them there was no need for concern, and returned to the castle itself.

Although the castle officially belonged to Baron Febollet, Charlot felt more like its true master. Even the castle servants treated him as such, preparing food for him without needing to be asked.

Charlot instructed the chef to prepare a few extra dishes. This time, he didn't wait long—just about half an hour later, Senior Sister Menielman and Princess May both arrived in succession. Neither mentioned the battle they had just fought, behaving as though the other didn't exist. Thanks to his mental fortitude, Charlot managed to endure the tension over the meal.

After eating, Princess May stood and coldly ordered, "In three days, we return to Sedona City."

Charlot quickly nodded, and Princess May left gracefully.

Once she was gone, Menielman turned to Charlot and warned, "Try not to provoke that madwoman. She's Saint-rank, after all, and her mental state is extremely unstable."

"I need some supplies. Can you arrange them for me?"

Charlot had already prepared the requested items. Knowing Menielman's subordinates were stationed nearby, he arranged for the supplies to be delivered to them.

Menielman departed Silver Dove Castle shortly after receiving the supplies, without staying any longer.

After seeing her off, Charlot found himself overjoyed at the prospect of having more than three days of free time. There was no way he would head back to Sedona City early.

He called for the castle servants to prepare a few barrels of ale, planning to enjoy the night and drink at his leisure. Just then, a castle steward approached, handing him a letter. "Miss Soumet left this letter for you. She instructed me to deliver it after her departure."

Charlot was curious as to why Menielman would leave him a letter.

As he opened it and read the first line, he nearly jumped in shock.

Menielman had revealed something truly astonishing!

Chapter 268: A New Journey

"I've already secured the allegiance of Zimourman's former subordinates, and now we have nearly a hundred warships. However, without a magical warship, we can never become a truly formidable fleet. I've devised a plan to attack Saint Michael Island and seize two magical warships from the Golden Rams Fleet. If you're willing to join, come to Cappadocia."

Charlot read the letter and remained lost in thought for a long time. He never expected his senior, Menielman Soumet, to have forged such an influential maritime power.

If Menielman successfully claimed Saint Michael Island, she would undoubtedly transform into a force that could not be ignored across the Seven Seas.

The Golden Rams Fleet of Saint Michael Island boasted both an alchemical warship and an ancient magical warship, as well as a Saint rank warrior among their ranks. Their power was immense. Precisely because of their strength, assimilating them would propel Menielman to meteoric heights. No longer would she simply be the First Rose of the Empire; she would ascend to the Noble Class, rivaling even Count Ingrima and Count Fars.

But should he join her? That was the question.

Charlot hesitated to make an immediate decision.

He was aware, however, that since Princess May Guillaume's arrival, Chloe Hadrian would no longer trouble him. A tacit confrontation between South Seraph and the Black Phoenix Dynasty seemed inevitable.

After all, the South Seraph region was an area of little strategic value, neither for the Fars Empire nor the Black Phoenix Dynasty. It was like tasteless food: not worth keeping, but too inconvenient to discard. Hughes had already led the South Seraph restorationists to Ferranden. Following a series of wars, this land had become barren, devoid of tax revenue, and lacking any strategic importance. The Black Phoenix Dynasty had no compelling reason to occupy it.

With no immediate conflict between South Seraph and the Behemoth Principality, a visit to Cappadocia seemed like a viable choice.

Charlot wasn't particularly interested in Saint Michael Island. Instead, his sights were set on Cappadocia.

He was only two labyrinths short of completing fifteen. Cappadocia, with its abundant warships, was the ideal location to achieve this milestone.

Once one controlled over fifteen labyrinths, they gained access to a passage leading to the true Agmirlas Labyrinth!

However, failure to complete this task would cause Agmirlas to descend prematurely.

Charlot's time was running out.

Nevertheless, he knew this decision required careful consideration. Placing Menielman's letter aside, he embarked on a three-day retreat.

...

After three days, Charlot departed from Silver Dove Castle for Interlaken and then journeyed back to Sedona City.

The former capital and largest city of South Seraph had been Arcadia Port, but the war with the Black Phoenix Dynasty shifted the front line to Sedona City. Charlot's West Wind Knight Order was stationed there.

Sedona served as the temporary capital of South Seraph, and Charlot managed its affairs efficiently.

Upon his return, Charlot resumed his routine of dictating documents. However, this monotonous life would soon end.

Princess May received an imperial edict from the Ingrima Empire, summoning her to return without delay. Before departing, she instructed Charlot to memorize the entirety of *The Legend of the Lionheart King*. She also tasked him with sending updates on two other books to Ingrima at his earliest convenience before leaving with Aurora Soumet.

Before Aurora left, she simply asked Charlot to write to her when he had the time and said nothing more.

With Princess May gone, Charlot gave his overworked document clerks a well-deserved vacation. Their unanimous cheers and prolonged applause reflected their gratitude.

Those days had been rough for Charlot.

For the document clerks, they had been worse than life as a stray dog.

Charlot ordered his team to gradually send the completed drafts back to Strasbourg in batches, rather than all at once. With that settled, he made up his mind to visit Cappadocia.

Perhaps gaining access to the true passage of the Agmirlas Labyrinth wouldn't result in his death after all. Maybe he could simply choose not to open it?

But waiting for Agmirlas's descent would certainly spell his demise.

Moreover, Menielman's fleet of nearly a hundred warships would undoubtedly include many experienced sailors. Surely, among them, someone would have knowledge of the New Continent. Though Charlot couldn't venture there himself yet, finding someone who knew about it could be a worthwhile alternative.

Charlot organized affairs in South Seraph and the Behemoth Principality, assigning competent subordinates to key cities. From Interlaken, he used a passageway to arrive directly in Cappadocia.

Charlot rarely used these labyrinthine passageways, even after leaving the Ingrima Empire. It was his first return to Cappadocia.

...

As soon as he appeared in the city, passing pedestrians noticed him, and one of them suddenly exclaimed in astonishment. Their face quickly lit up with joy as they sprinted away, shouting, "Charlot Mecklenburg has returned!"

"Charlot Mecklenburg has returned!"

In no time, a crowd formed around Charlot. Everyone who saw him seemed eager to reach out and touch him. Many wept openly, their affection and nostalgia evident.

Charlot raised his hands and said, "It's me. I've returned. Could someone tell me where Cruse and Siman are?"

Someone immediately pointed the way and replied, "Lord Cruse and Lord Siman are at the City Lord's Manor. Miss Aurora Soumet is also there."

Walking through Cappadocia, Charlot was surrounded by a throng of residents. It felt like a triumphant parade.

Charlot couldn't understand what he had done to earn such adoration from the people of Cappadocia. Yet whenever he voiced such sentiments, he was met with even louder cheers.

In the end, he could only stay silent.

As he walked through the city, Charlot noticed significant changes since his last visit. The population of Cappadocia had tripled, bustling with activity. Numerous new buildings surrounded the city.

Upon reaching the City Lord's Manor, he made even more discoveries. Strangers moved in and out of the manor, and when the cheers erupted, they initially appeared puzzled but soon recognized Charlot. Their gazes turned warm, filled with admiration.

Before Charlot could announce his presence, Menielman emerged, accompanied by a dozen subordinates, including Cruse and Siman. The two men clearly respected Menielman, their expressions filled with admiration. Upon seeing Charlot, they stepped forward with enthusiasm and respectfully bowed.

Menielman's face showed signs of fatigue, though it softened slightly upon seeing Charlot.

Once inside the City Lord's Manor, Menielman dismissed her subordinates, leaving only Charlot. She spoke, "I've tried many strategies and have clashed with the Golden Rams Fleet several times. The battles have been evenly matched."

"The only way forward is through internal collaboration. But I lack any allies on Saint Michael Island, so someone will need to infiltrate it."

Charlot asked, "Isn't there anyone on Saint Michael Island who knows me?"

Menielman smiled faintly and replied, "Oh, quite the contrary. Many people know you."

"You have no idea how famous you truly are."

Chapter 269: The Eight Orc Blood Oaths

Charlot Mecklenburg asked with deep suspicion, "How exactly am I supposed to infiltrate?"

Menielman Soumet replied, "In a few days, a slave ship carrying orc slaves will arrive at Saint Michael Island."

Charlot asked, "And then?"

Menielman responded, "Don't you know Beast God's Transfiguration?"

Charlot was once again astonished and asked in return, "Senior, how do you know about that?"

Since Menielman was already aware of his ability to use Beast God's Transfiguration, Charlot decided there was no point in hiding it. Yet, he couldn't help but wonder how Menielman, being so far away at sea, had found out.

Menielman smiled faintly and said, "Tumisan used to be one of my subordinates. Distrusting the Byron vampires, he quarreled with the other orc tribal leaders and led a group of orc assassins to join me across the sea."

"When the orc coalition besieged Strasbourg, Tumisan was forced by the Orc Elders' Council under the binding of the Orc Blood Oaths to return. After their catastrophic defeat, he encountered you. That's when he thought of disguising you as an orc slave to infiltrate Saint Michael Island and taught you Beast God's Transfiguration."

Charlot froze for a moment before asking, "So..."

Menielman explained, "He wasn't there to assassinate you. He was delivering a message from me."

Only then did Charlot realize why that old leopard-man had infiltrated the orc labyrinth guards—it was all for this reason.

Menielman smiled again, adding, "Tumisan said you were amusing and quite suitable for infiltrating Saint Michael Island, so he gave you a bit of a scare."

Charlot recalled the old leopard-man's parting words: "You must master Beast God's Transfiguration. The next time I return, if you've made significant progress, I'll take you along for something big..."

It turned out that the "big thing" Tumisan mentioned was this mission.

Charlot hesitated. Acting as a spy often led to disastrous outcomes. He said, "Senior, I'm too timid and terrible at disguises. I'm afraid I'll ruin your plans."

Menielman replied, "Tumisan also told me that if you're willing to act as an informant, he can resolve the crisis of Agmirlas."

This time, Charlot wasn't surprised. He remained silent for a while before asking, "Is he knowledgeable about the Labyrinth God?"

Menielman answered, "Tumisan once visited the New Continent and even created a labyrinth there. He wanted to establish a passage between the two continents. It would have been incredibly convenient if it had succeeded, but unfortunately, he failed."

Charlot nodded and said, "I'm willing to help you take Saint Michael Island."

Menielman whispered, "Thank you."

After a brief silence, the Empire's First Rose said softly, "Few people are willing to help me. Among them, you are the most unique. If I survive this ordeal, I will never forget how a junior went to such lengths for me."

Faced with this show of gratitude, Charlot readily accepted and replied solemnly, "Senior! I'll also need a copy of the orc's Bloodthirst Combat Energy manual."

Menielman beamed and said, "I've already prepared it for you."

The orc's Bloodthirst Combat Energy was said to be a secret technique passed down by the Eternal and Illusory Dragon, one of the Nine Just Gods. It was compatible with all orc races, but the resulting energy varied greatly among different races.

Orc combat energy, similar to the extraordinary knights' path of humans, didn't form a Knight Proof after reaching the tenth rank. Instead, practitioners forged a covenant with nature through the Eight Orc Blood Oaths: they must pass on their lineage, never abandon their comrades, never betray their allies, defend their faith to the death, embrace self-sacrifice, face death without fear, show compassion and care for life, and respect the cycle of nature.

Tumisan was forced to join the siege of Strasbourg because of the "never betray their allies" clause in the Blood Oaths.

The Eight Orc Blood Oaths were the source of orc strength. Breaking them would cause the Blood Oaths to collapse, leading to a sharp decline in power, often with no chance of recovery.

Charlot had never considered practicing Bloodthirst Combat Energy. Although it wasn't a secret among orcs, he had never bothered to seek it out.

Menielman handed him a wax-sealed parchment and said, "This is something Tumisan left for you. It's an original manuscript from when the Eternal and Illusory Dragon first taught the technique. It's said to carry a slight chance of summoning this Just God's favor."

Charlot was wary of anything capable of summoning a god but reasoned that a Just God might be different from an Evil God. He accepted the manuscript.

With the mission now accepted, Charlot felt unexpectedly calm. He asked, "Senior, once I've infiltrated Saint Michael Island, what should I do?"

Menielman outlined three objectives: "First, send out as much intelligence as possible. We need to understand the strengths and weaknesses of Saint Michael Island. Second, support the internal resistance forces. While we don't have insiders there, the island's factions aren't entirely unified. There's a group called the Golden Rams; try to establish contact with them. Third, find a way to infiltrate Saint Michael Island's prison. Three Saint-ranked individuals are held there. Freeing them will undoubtedly plunge the island into chaos."

“As soon as Saint Michael Island shows a vulnerability, I will lead the fleet in a full-scale assault.”

“The island’s master once dueled a certain someone to a draw. Though that was years ago, and I doubt their strength surpasses mine now, I’ve still prepared three Saint-ranked fighters for the Golden Rams Fleet to ensure victory.”

Hearing about the three Saints, Charlot was astonished. He had initially thought Menielman’s situation wasn’t very favorable, but now he realized he had underestimated the Empire’s First Rose. Despite facing both internal and external difficulties, she had still managed to recruit Saint-ranked allies.

Truly, a formidable and capable woman!

Menielman continued, “Their magical alchemy warship comes from the Fars Empire. It originally belonged to the Duchess of Mesu and served as the flagship of the Northern Fleet. How it ended up at Saint Michael Island remains a mystery.”

“However, the most formidable assets of Saint Michael Island are an ancient magical warship and the island itself. Both originate from the ancient Saint Michael Kingdom. I don’t know their secrets either.”

“If you can uncover the secrets of the ancient warship and the island itself, it will significantly aid our conquest.”

Charlot committed each task to memory.

After talking with Menielman for several hours, Charlot was given accommodations in the lord’s manor. His former room had been taken over by his senior, but Charlot didn’t mind. He switched rooms and slept soundly.

The next day, Charlot began preparations for his infiltration of Saint Michael Island. Many weapons couldn’t be carried on the mission. He arranged for Berserker Blade and the Unicorn Griffon to be sent back to Machubi. Instead, he brought the Silver Rhino, Blood Rose, Red-Blue Rattlesnake, Withered Rose, and Blood Rhinoceros.

Yes, and also the Blood Spirit Rhinoceros.

Chapter 270: Infiltrating the Slave Ship

Many of Charlot Mecklenburg’s earlier weapons had long been abandoned.

For instance, the second-hand Magnum Mauler that had accompanied him early on, the vampiric hand axe, and even the magical alchemical staff that could be considered a "costly" creation later on.

There were also some fine pieces of equipment Charlot had never truly used, such as the Assassin's Dagger, a pair of fingerless-glove-shaped alchemical pistol holsters, a crystal vial, and the Bag of Insects he acquired in Cappadocia, as well as the extraordinary Knight's Lance he obtained after killing Zolman.

The Assassin's Dagger, for example, carried anti-space properties, making it an excellent tool for infiltration. However, Charlot had long mastered the Blade of Emptiness, an inherent extraordinary ability far more convenient than relying on equipment.

The alchemical pistol holsters, classified as spatial artifacts, suffered from a major flaw—they could not be hidden. Once discovered during a body search, they could no longer be concealed, making them impractical for use.

As Charlot reviewed his collection of extraordinary items, he recalled three particular artifacts not currently in his possession. The Dark Luxury had been taken by Princess May Guillaume, and Charlot dared not ask for its return. Lion's Fang remained with Sophia Gallanord, and Charlot planned to retrieve it later. Lastly, the Silver Knight, which Belisa held, could be reclaimed at any time, though Charlot doubted its usefulness in his current situation.

Beyond weaponry, Charlot also sought to enhance his personal strength.

During his time in the South Seraph region, where he engaged in fierce battles with Chloe Hadrian, Charlot had trained relentlessly. His Blood Glory had accumulated to a formidable level.

On the Old Continent, all cultivation systems measured transcendent levels by energy intensity. However, Blood Glory, a system created by Protagoras, was unique in that its early stages were categorized by the number of Blood Vortexes a practitioner opened.

Protagoras's classification system was imprecise. Most vampires only managed to open one Blood Vortex, and many practitioners of Blood Glory would unlock merely one or two, yet still amass enough blood energy to be regarded as mid-level or even high-level Transcendents.

Charlot, having opened nine Blood Vortexes, had already gone beyond this framework. By transforming Blood Glory into Stardust Battle Energy, his strength surpassed not just the ninth or even tenth rank—he had stepped into the eleventh rank, nearing the threshold of high-level Transcendents.

While further progression in Blood Glory was unlikely within a short period, Charlot aimed to master the Demonflame Horse, an extraordinary ability, within the coming days.

Each advancement in his Adonis Clan Secret Arts delayed the descent of Karnstein. Currently, Karnstein's arrival was estimated at just over two months. Mastering the Demonflame Horse could potentially delay this by an additional two to three months.

The Demonflame Horse, almost incorporeal, could traverse any terrain—hills, marshes, water, and even fire. It was an ideal mount.

Since losing the Dark Luxury, Charlot had yearned for the Demonflame Horse. His longing deepened further when the current mission presented its demands.

The Demonflame Horse, capable of sprinting across the ocean, was a reliable ally for escaping danger.

To infiltrate Saint Michael Island, Charlot's top priority was ensuring his survival, and the Demonflame Horse would be a significant boon.

Charlot devoted the following days to intense cultivation of the Adonis Clan Secret Arts, temporarily setting aside other aspects of Blood Glory for refinement.

Despite his efforts, a few days were insufficient to break through and master a new extraordinary ability.

When Menielman Soumet informed him that the slave ship had reached its designated waters, Charlot regretfully boarded a merchant ship prepared for him and departed from Cappadocia.

Menielman's plan was straightforward. The merchant ship would approach the slave ship under the guise of seeking "assistance," claiming to have lost freshwater supplies during a storm. Regardless of whether the slave ship agreed to help, this maneuver would buy enough time for Charlot, a Transcendent, to infiltrate it.

Though simple, the plan was practical.

Five or six days after leaving Cappadocia, Charlot's merchant ship encountered a large vessel painted with black seagull insignias.

As the merchant ship drew near, the black-seagull ship immediately opened fire. Though the cannonballs were ordinary, they startled the merchant crew.

Unaware of the operation, the merchant crew had only been instructed to approach the ship. When the black-seagull ship began firing, they panicked and hastily turned the vessel away. The black-seagull ship gave chase for a while before abandoning pursuit and resuming its course to Saint Michael Island.

During the chase, Charlot refrained from action. Instead, he leapt into the sea, using his extraordinary abilities to dive beneath the water and cling to the slave ship's hull with the Blade of Emptiness.

Charlot clung to the ship until it altered course toward Saint Michael Island. Then, using his skills, he silently climbed aboard.

This slave ship, an ordinary pirate vessel, housed no Transcendents. With Swiftstep Technique x10, Charlot moved like a phantom, unnoticed by anyone on board.

The ship had over a hundred crew members and transported slaves confined in the cramped and suffocating lower hold. Charlot avoided the foul hold, finding a hidden spot aboard to conceal himself. Days later, upon overhearing the crew's conversation, he learned the ship was half a day's journey from Saint Michael Island.

Using Beast God Transformation, Charlot transformed into a young Redback Bear barely two pimi high and "frail" in appearance.

Merely showing himself briefly in the hold was enough for a few crew members to mistake him for an escaped orc slave. They immediately restrained him and threw him back into the hold.

The moment Charlot was shoved into the hold, he nearly vomited. The stench was unbearable, and the space so cramped that even sitting upright was impossible. Many of the orc slaves had become numb, their gazes hollow from relentless suffering.

Charlot loathed the slave trade but knew this was not the time to act. He resigned himself to enduring the conditions, curling up like the other orcs.

While confined, he quietly cultivated his Bloodfire Combat Energy, knowing that regaining his human form would restore his full strength. Maintaining some combat ability in his orc form, however, was prudent for contingencies.

Looking at the orc slaves treated like livestock, Charlot's mind turned to the human victims of the slave trade. He silently vowed that once he escaped, he would destroy Saint Michael Island and eradicate the slave trade from the Aggras Sea.

Chapter 271: A Pirate's New Recruit

Charlot, having received a modern education, always believed that the problem lay not in specific groups of people but in the morally depraved actions committed by individuals. Humanity had evolved from its primal roots, surviving nature's brutal selection to gradually develop emotions like shame, morality, dignity, love, and compassion. This was civilization—and also a shackle.

Slave traders had no such lofty ideals. They trafficked orcs, humans, indigenous peoples, and even nobles from the New Continent. It was conceivable they might even sell citizens of the

Fars Empire or the Ingrima Empire if given the opportunity; it was simply a matter of whether they'd encountered such prey.

This was a vile trade...

One that should be eradicated with violence.

Charlot tried to clear his mind. In this situation, his current form as a Redback Bear youth, while considered "slim" among the bearfolk, was still tall and imposing compared to humans. It made the cramped space of the slave ship's hold particularly uncomfortable.

To distract himself, Charlot began practicing Bloodfire Combat Energy, calming his thoughts. In this meditative state, he could temporarily ignore the harsh conditions around him, allowing a sliver of relief.

Like human combat energy, Bloodfire Combat Energy required the condensation of a power seed, which represented the concentrated essence of one's vitality. Back at the Behemoth National Academy, Charlot had practiced the Lamia Breathing Technique, also known as the Nymph Breathing Technique. This method not only served as an alternative to sleep but also improved water affinity. Unfortunately, he hadn't succeeded in mastering it.

Charlot didn't expect practicing Bloodfire Combat Energy to be drastically different. However, as he sank deeper into cultivation, he felt his vitality stir restlessly, gathering in his lower abdomen.

Gradually, his lower abdomen began to radiate warmth, as though a small ember had ignited there. The warmth spread throughout his body, providing comfort despite the damp, suffocating conditions of the ship's hold. His bear fur, which had been slick with moisture, began to feel less oppressive.

In his orc form, his body's unique structure suppressed his Blood Glory, but the power seed condensed years ago through the Lamia Breathing Technique—a seed long forgotten because it had failed to hatch—suddenly emerged. In the next moment, it shattered and merged with his lower abdomen.

At first, Charlot thought his years of "hard work" had finally paid off, imagining the seed had hatched at last. Instead, it had completely disintegrated.

Reflecting on his past self, Charlot felt a pang of bittersweet nostalgia. It was as though he had finally bid farewell to the remnants of his old identity. Even the last trace of the former Charlot Mecklenburg had now vanished from the world.

Though the vitality contained in the shattered seed wasn't particularly strong, it was still the fruit of years of effort by the former Charlot. When it merged with the life force generated by the Bloodfire Combat Energy, a small new power seed quietly took shape in his lower abdomen.

This seed's formation was akin to installing a "switch" within his body, allowing him to control his life force—to either restrain it or unleash it.

While Charlot was experiencing the new sensations of this cultivation, a sharp voice rang out: "Get out here, you wretched slaves! Anyone who doesn't come out will die down here forever!"

Charlot snapped out of his reverie and was the first to climb out of the ship's hold. The dazzling sunlight made him squint, and it took a moment for his eyes to adjust to the brightness.

One by one, the orc slaves emerged. The ship's crew counted them and soon descended into the hold to drag out a dozen or so corpses, which they casually tossed into the sea without so much as a second glance.

Charlot's attention was drawn to the horizon ahead, where an island loomed. Its towering elevation resembled a mountain rising from the sea. The entire island had been converted into a fortress, with alchemical cannons pointing menacingly in every direction.

Around the island, nearly a hundred ships were anchored, about half of which were slave ships. In addition to orcs, the captives included mostly natives from the Ingrima Empire's Three Islands, with a small number hailing from the New Continent. New Continent natives were considered premium cargo and commanded high prices.

These slaves were destined for various markets. For example, natives from the New Continent would inevitably be sold to the five great empires, where wealthy individuals could afford such "luxuries." However, natives from the Ingrima Empire's Three Islands were rarely sold back to their homeland; instead, they were sent to the Old Continent and sold to nations like the Fars Empire or Byron. A few were shipped to the New Continent.

As for orcs, they were exclusively shipped to the New Continent. The Old Continent's empires considered them a nuisance and would never purchase such slaves.

Charlot, having been born and educated in another world, found this blatant, despicable trade intolerable.

Yet for now, he was powerless to change it.

The crew of the slave ship ordered the orc slaves onto the deck to clear out the hold, tossing the dead overboard. A few orcs were made to carry large buckets of seawater to wash down the hold, after which the survivors were shoved back inside.

Before long, the slave ship docked at Saint Michael Island.

Charlot and the other slaves were herded from the ship to a storage warehouse. After spending half a day there, a man dressed in a brightly colored shirt and dyed shorts—the sort favored by pirates—arrived to select slaves.

Charlot's tall, strong physique and youthful appearance quickly caught his eye, and he was chosen.

Charlot worried at first that he'd been picked by another slave trader, but his fears were soon put to rest. He and a few hundred other selected slaves—some orcs, but mostly humans—were taken to the island's castle walls, where they were assigned grueling manual labor under strict supervision.

Charlot, with his sturdy build, was tasked with hauling stones to repair the walls.

For someone who had lived two lifetimes, this kind of hard labor was foreign to Charlot. Yet in his current circumstances, he had no choice but to endure it, slowly channeling his newly formed power seed as he worked. His movements were deliberately sluggish, conserving energy and biding his time.

At night, the workers were given a bucket of gruel of questionable origin. The foul smell was nauseating, but the starving slaves dove into it ravenously.

Charlot, however, used the commotion as an opportunity to look around. When he spotted a pirate dozing in a corner of the castle wall, he thought to himself, "Here's my chance!"

He shuffled over, pretending to move casually. With a sudden shove, he sent the pirate tumbling off the wall. At the last moment, Charlot grabbed the man's wrist and shouted, "Help! Someone fell!"

The startled pirate, jolted awake by the fall, screamed in terror, "Don't let go!"

Nearby pirates noticed the commotion and rushed over. Working together, they pulled the unfortunate man back onto the wall.

Charlot, feigning meekness, attempted to slink away, only to be stopped by a pirate officer. The man looked Charlot up and down before saying, "My crew is short on hands. You're with me now."

Chapter 272: The Daily Duels of the Pirate Crew

Charlot's methods, though rough around the edges, proved effective. Within a single day, he had risen from being a slave to becoming a low-ranking member of the Golden Rams Fleet. The pirates on Saint Michael Island came from all walks of life, many of them being orcs, making Charlot's addition to their ranks entirely unremarkable. However, this wasn't the Prison Army or the city patrol guards; no one here handed out free weapons. Charlot had to settle for picking up a tree branch, which he carried in his hand, giving him a somewhat bear-like appearance.

Before long, the pirates and slaves on this stretch of the wall all came to know this new bear-like recruit in the Golden Rams Fleet.

All the slaves knew Charlot had once been a slave himself, which made him treat everyone kindly. He even initiated several small projects to improve the lives of the slaves.

The pirates, on the other hand, quickly realized that this bear-like newcomer wasn't just diligent but also exceptionally clever. He often came up with cunning ideas that solved problems neatly and made life a little easier for everyone.

For Charlot, this was his first time in this new world trying to exhaust every ounce of his abilities to rebuild his "social connections."

In the blink of an eye, Charlot had been blending in on Saint Michael Island for seven or eight days. After finishing his tasks, he found a secluded spot to secretly cultivate his Bloodfire Combat Energy.

Truthfully, Charlot would have preferred to train Blood Glory, but he didn't dare risk revealing his true identity. For now, he could only use Bloodfire Combat Energy to hone his spiritual abilities.

Charlot's spiritual aptitude was among the highest even within the ranks of high-level Transcendents. His exceptional aptitude allowed him to cultivate various secret techniques with unusual speed. Although he lacked the divine blessings that might come from directly confronting an evil god, he was still at the level of an "ordinary genius."

Recently, the power seed formed by his Bloodfire Combat Energy had grown increasingly fiery. Even after a long day of labor, just a short session of cultivation would cause the heat waves radiating from the seed to restore his body to peak condition.

Charlot took a deep breath and was about to run through another cycle of Bloodfire Combat Energy when he suddenly felt a gust of wind at the back of his head. Quickly tilting his head to one side, he narrowly avoided a black iron rod that swiped past, almost smashing his skull.

This was the closest Charlot had come to death since his transmigration. Facing an evil god might shatter one's soul instantly, but even then, it was a metaphysical danger. Battling orc assassins or dueling high-ranking Transcendents allowed some room for counterattacks. But this sneak attack had come with no warning, catching him completely off guard and nearly ending his life.

Charlot kicked up the tree branch from the ground, grabbed it with one hand, and swung it backhanded, striking the attacker's wrist. The black iron rod clattered to the ground with a metallic ring.

Charlot focused his gaze on the assailant and flew into a rage. "Why are you trying to kill me?" he demanded.

The attacker, a pirate from another section of the wall, looked panicked. "Monkey Boss ordered it! It's not my fault!" he stammered.

Charlot was familiar with this Monkey Boss. Among the pirates, nobody bothered to remember each other's names, and few were willing to share their real ones, as they all carried some shameful past. Nicknames were the norm.

Monkey Boss was also an orc, though Charlot didn't know his exact tribe. He suspected the man was from the Mangken Tribe, as he had a naturally red face, was cunning, and had a ruthless streak. Monkey Boss treated his subordinates with cruelty and slaves even worse. Rumors swirled that he had a penchant for cannibalism, secretly cooking and eating slaves he had killed.

Charlot was confident he hadn't offended Monkey Boss, but he wasn't the type to dwell on the reasons behind enmity. They were enemies now, and that was enough. Why waste energy pondering the cause? That would be self-torment.

Picking up the black iron rod, Charlot tested its weight. Though it wasn't particularly long—about one and a half meters—it felt a bit unwieldy in his bear-like form. Still, it was far better than a tree branch.

The pirate who had attacked him saw Charlot's expressionless face and assumed he was too scared to retaliate against Monkey Boss. He turned and bolted.

Charlot waited until the man had taken ten steps before hurling the iron rod. The weapon struck the fleeing pirate squarely in the head, splitting his skull and spilling his brains.

While Charlot could be soft-hearted at times, he was merciless to those who tried to kill him.

After dispatching the pirate, Charlot dragged the corpse by one leg and headed straight for another section of the wall.

Monkey Boss, the red-faced Mangken orc, was laughing and whispering with his underlings when he saw Charlot approaching. His expression turned to alarm, and he hastily grabbed an iron trident. "Kainan! What do you think you're doing?" he shouted.

"You ordered your lackey to ambush me, aiming to bash my head in," Charlot bellowed. "I'm here to challenge you to a duel!"

Hearing this, Monkey Boss forced a smile. His earlier panic stemmed from guilt, not fear. He didn't consider Charlot—a rookie in the Golden Rams Fleet—a genuine threat. Laughing, he sneered, "A guest from the New Continent has a taste for bear paws, and you're the only bear around here. I was going to let you die peacefully, but since you insist on making trouble, I'll kill you myself!"

Raising his hands, Monkey Boss barked, "Everyone, attack!"

Monkey Boss had the air of a proper pirate leader, issuing commands with grandeur. Yet, like many bullies, he had no intention of fighting himself.

Dozens of pirates surged forward.

On Saint Michael Island, fights broke out daily, and death was commonplace. Might made right; justice and reason had no place here.

Charlot took a deep breath, forcing himself to adapt quickly to the pirate way of life. As the first pirate charged, Charlot sidestepped, tripped him with a foot, and struck him in the back of the head with the iron rod. The blow to the unprotected vital area killed the man instantly.

“Leaving without even offering drinks? So rude,” Charlot muttered with dark humor.

Having trained with masters such as Hundred Bears, Big Bear, Honey Bear, and Invincible Bear, Charlot was well-versed in bear combat techniques. Wielding the iron rod with the finesse of the Bearman Shield Hammer Technique, he held his ground against dozens of opponents, quickly knocking down five or six pirates.

The pirates, realizing they were outmatched, hesitated. They were not disciplined soldiers but opportunists who thrived on numbers. Seeing their comrades fall, none dared to advance further.

Ignoring the hesitant crowd, Charlot charged toward Monkey Boss, iron rod in hand.

Monkey Boss roared, brandishing his trident. The two clashed in a fierce melee, trading five or six moves. Charlot’s bear-like physique gave him greater strength, and his skill with the rod surpassed Monkey Boss’s crude techniques. Feigning an opening, Charlot baited his opponent into overextending, then swung his rod downward, breaking Monkey Boss’s neck.

As the red-faced orc collapsed, Charlot let out a triumphant roar. The power seed within his abdomen suddenly burst open...

Chapter 273: Jump Down

In both his previous life and this one, Charlot Mecklenburg experienced combat energy for the first time.

However, it wasn’t the combat energy of human knights but rather the bloodthirsty energy of the orc race.

Blood Glory, part of the category of evil energy, was close to combat energy but not quite the same. When Charlot converted Blood Glory into the Arsilo Family's Stardust Battle Energy, it still wasn't true combat energy.

And Bloodflame Aura...

Fine! Bloodflame Aura also belonged to evil energy, not combat energy.

Charlot Mecklenburg didn't care about such distinctions. As long as he could achieve transcendence, the path didn't matter. That was why, during his university days, he abandoned the study of knightly combat energy and turned to cultivate Blood Glory.

Charlot Huang Haisheng cared even less about what he practiced. He had even aspired to become a Darkmoon Sorcerer. However, the former player of his character had already locked in his build, leaving him no choice but to continue on the transcendent path of Blood Glory.

Now, Charlot stood proudly like a bear, emanating the glow of bloodthirsty combat energy. With a murderously black iron club in hand, he scanned the trembling pirates on this section of the city wall. It was unclear who was so quick-witted, but someone suddenly shouted, "Welcome, Lord Kainan, to take charge of our squad!"

Charlot was pleased with the flattery and shouted, "Anyone dissatisfied?"

Having just killed the leader known as Monkey Boss and with the radiance of bloodthirsty combat energy bursting from his body, it was evident Charlot had ascended to transcendence. The ordinary pirates wouldn't dare oppose him. They all believed that with the ferocity of this young bear-man, anyone who voiced dissent would end up as dinner for their new boss.

Orcs eating humans was a deep-rooted belief in these pirates' minds.

Charlot hadn't expected this outcome either. He had been trying to rise within his original squad but unexpectedly found himself becoming a leader in another group.

Pirates lived in chaos, often fighting among themselves. Deaths were common occurrences, and even among these small-fry pirates, changing leaders was nobody's concern. Charlot became the leader of dozens of pirates, unnoticed by the mid-level ranks of the Golden Rams Fleet, let alone the high-ranking officials.

Thanks to his earlier experiences, Charlot quickly bonded with the slaves and pirates under his command. He even promoted over ten strong slaves to pirates, secretly teaching them the Orc Assassin Alliance's secret technique—the Beast God Transformation: Redback Bear Warrior form—significantly enhancing the strength of his squad.

The Beast God Transformation was the signature secret art of the Orc Assassin Alliance. The cat-shaped masks forged through this technique even served as identification for assassins from the alliance.

Charlot had never encountered humans practicing it before.

A bear-man mastering the Orc Assassin Alliance's secret technique was virtually flawless.

Even though the slaves who learned the Redback Bear Warrior transformation wouldn't necessarily ascend to transcendence, and even if a few worked tirelessly to achieve it, it would take years, maybe decades. Charlot didn't intend to train transcents; he had two simple goals: practicing the Beast God Transformation to increase his strength, just as knightly breathing techniques enhanced a person's physique before they became knights.

As a bear-man youth of the Redback Bear Tribe, Charlot's identity had its advantages. Other orcs found him approachable, but humans remained wary. After all, orcs had a poor reputation among humans.

However, the slaves who learned the Beast God Transformation: Redback Bear Warrior form, regardless of their origins, developed a natural affinity for Charlot. A subtle sense of kinship emerged.

Charlot had been on Saint Michael Island for over half a month. Not only had he firmly established his footing, but he had also gathered valuable intelligence about the island.

Saint Michael City had a population nearing 100,000, making it a large city even by the standards of the Old Continent. For context, the capital of the Behemoth Principality, Mostar Castle, was about the same size. The top ten cities on Goring Island combined probably didn't have as many residents as Saint Michael City.

However, most of this population consisted of transient individuals—pirates and black-market traders arriving with pirate and merchant ships, and slaves brought for sale. The actual number of people loyal to the Golden Rams Fleet was only about 30,000, with over half of those being official pirates. The remaining were low-level workers who lacked the qualifications to sail or even board ships, and many of them could end up as cargo themselves.

For instance, if some big shot desired bear paws for dinner, Monkey Boss wouldn't hesitate to target Charlot, sending people to "kill the bear and harvest the paws." When Monkey Boss's attempt to curry favor failed, his death didn't raise any alarm; nobody would avenge him.

These low-level pirates, nominally part of the Golden Rams Fleet, were divided into over a dozen factions. Each faction was led by a transcendent boss.

Charlot's killing of Monkey Boss and his display of combat energy had already drawn the attention of many pirate leaders. Over the past few days, various figures had subtly hinted that he should join their factions. These low-level leaders, despite their fortuitous rise to transcendence, lacked foresight and didn't even bother offering "proper political promises" such as captaincy or sub-leadership. Charlot ignored all of them.

One pirate came running up excitedly, shouting, "Boss! Someone's willing to sell the thing you wanted, but the price is a bit steep."

As a bear-man, Charlot found it inconvenient to use vampiric combat techniques. Besides, Blood Clan techniques required various supernatural abilities to be effective, and their moves were mediocre without them. Charlot had been looking for a bear-man weapon. Since there were no weapon shops on Saint Michael Island, he had tried to acquire an iron chain when he couldn't find his preferred meteor hammer.

Ships were abundant on Saint Michael Island, and so were anchor chains. However, most ships didn't carry spare chains. Despite Charlot's efforts, he hadn't succeeded in buying one.

Hearing the news, Charlot remained indifferent. He considered the weapon a temporary tool and didn't care much if he couldn't get it. "How much are they asking?" he asked calmly.

"Five gold pounds!" the pirate replied.

"Tell them to go to hell!" Charlot cursed. "Even a transcendent weapon doesn't cost that much. Five gold pounds for a broken chain? Why don't they just rob someone?"

The pirate scratched his head awkwardly and said, "Well, the chain was robbed. They raided a merchant ship, killed the crew, burned the vessel, and looted the treasures. On the way back, they found the anchor too heavy, only to discover it was dragging the chain of a first-tier merchant ship."

"But they're adamant. They won't lower the price."

"They even said if they don't get five gold pounds, they'd rather throw it into the sea than sell it to us."

Charlot snorted and dismissed the idea of buying such an overpriced chain. These pirates had no credibility. Even if he agreed to the price, they might increase it on the spot. Besides, Charlot, now a small-time leader, had no money to his name.

Monkey Boss hadn't dropped any gold coins upon death. His wealth was all in Machubi, far out of Charlot's reach.

"Let them throw it into the sea," Charlot said. "It's just a piece of chain. There's no shortage of that in the ocean."

From a distance, Charlot saw a patrol team approaching and quickly shoved the small pirate aside. The patrolling pirates were official members of the Golden Rams Fleet, not to be trifled with by low-ranking workers like them.

The patrol reached him. A middle-aged pirate looked at Charlot and asked, "Are you the one they call Kainan?"

Charlot smiled earnestly. “That’s me. Do you have orders, sir?”

The middle-aged pirate sneered, pointing to the sea below the wall. “Jump down.”

The pirates behind him burst into laughter, all wearing mocking expressions. They clearly wanted to see Charlot humiliated. This pirate, nicknamed Black Seahorse, was infamous for tormenting low-ranking workers. Forcing people to jump into the sea was his favorite trick. Anyone who resisted would be accused of disobedience and brutally punished. Over a hundred workers had died at his hands, making him notorious in Saint Michael City.

Charlot showed no sign of resistance. Instead, he acted as if preparing to run, and as he passed Black Seahorse, he suddenly lunged forward, grabbing the pirate tightly and jumping off the wall with him...

Chapter 274: Eleven Ranks vs. Four Ranks

The Black Seahorse was caught off guard, allowing Charlot Mecklenburg to gain the upper hand. Suspended mid-air, he cursed vehemently, “You brat! I’ll make your death miserable, a torment you’ll regret!”

Despite his threats, he wasn’t overly concerned about danger. The walls of Saint Michael Island were high, but the waters below were deep. As a fourth-rank Transcendent, he was confident he could escape the predicament with ease.

The Black Seahorse plunged into the water along with Charlot. The impact of their fall caused both of them to sink deep. Unable to open his mouth to curse anymore, the pirate leader fumed inwardly, *When I get back to the wall, I’ll throw you into the dungeon and subject you to every conceivable torture. I’ll show you what true cruelty means, bear-boy.*

“Do you think just because you’ve become a Transcendent, you’ll earn respect on Saint Michael Island?”

“I’ll show you that a first-rank Transcendent is nothing.”

As the Black Seahorse prepared to utilize his abilities and surface, he suddenly felt a heavy blow to his abdomen.

The force of the strike wasn’t overwhelming, but it was precise, like a bullet piercing his protective combat energy. It disrupted his energy, scattering it throughout his body.

After plunging into the sea, Charlot reverted to his human form. With one calculated strike, he didn’t even spare the Black Seahorse a glance. He immediately activated Beast God Morphing

and transformed back into his Redback Bear form, rising above the water's surface as a bear-boy.

When Charlot reversed the effects of Blood Glory into Stardust Battle Energy, his combat energy surged to the eleventh rank, just a step away from becoming a high-rank Transcendent.

Since his transmigration, Charlot had often fought opponents far superior to him. Occasionally encountering a lower-rank Transcendent, if he couldn't defeat one in a single strike, wouldn't he be wasting his time?

As Charlot surfaced, the Black Seahorse's life essence suddenly compressed, condensing into a single point. His appearance turned skeletal and horrifying. In the next moment, this condensed life energy exploded, disintegrating the Black Seahorse into fragments without leaving a drop of blood.

This was the peculiar ability of Stardust Battle Energy: Dark Corrosion.

Usually, when Charlot fought enemies of higher ranks—legendary warriors or unparalleled heroes—this secret technique didn't stand out much, as his adversaries could withstand its effects. However, Dark Corrosion, a secret art of the Arsilo Clan, one of the three great vampire families, was devastatingly effective against a mere fourth-rank pirate. Its sinister dominance was fully revealed.

Charlot shouted above the waves, and soon his crew lowered a rope to pull him up.

Meanwhile, the Black Seahorse's subordinates waited atop the wall for their leader to surface. Time passed, but he didn't appear.

The pirates exchanged uneasy glances, unsure of what to do.

The Black Seahorse could bully Charlot because he was a fourth-rank Transcendent. But his underlings lacked another Transcendent among them. How could they dare to insult or accuse Charlot, a Transcendent himself?

In pirate circles, only personal strength mattered. Status was irrelevant. Even though they were officially part of the crew, none of them dared to confront Charlot.

As time dragged on and the Black Seahorse remained missing, a foreboding realization set in. Their leader was likely dead.

Charlot accepted a towel handed to him by his crew, casually wiping the seawater from his face. With a hearty grin, he asked, "So, how about joining me from now on?"

The pirates exchanged nervous glances before silently falling in line behind Charlot. In pirate society, strength ruled. Without a strong leader, their positions were untenable. Without Charlot,

they risked being demoted to grunt work—or worse. While Charlot wasn't necessarily the best choice as a leader, they had no better options.

Charlot led this group of pirates along with his original crew on a patrol through the area, boldly returning to the inner city afterward.

The Golden Rams Fleet was vast, with more members than a small city's population. Administrative chaos reigned, as there were few capable managers. The grunt pirates formed cliques, with little oversight. Even the official pirates had only marginally better organization.

Charlot took over the Black Seahorse's former quarters and patrol duties. At first, he was cautious, but he quickly realized no one seemed to care. Not a single person asked him, *Where's the Black Seahorse?*

Having lived in peaceful times before his transmigration, Charlot had no concept of the underworld, mafia, gangs, or pirate society. He couldn't grasp how simply killing a leader could result in seizing their power.

But he adapted quickly to his new role and began his usual habit of "amassing forces."

The wall patrol assigned to the Black Seahorse covered ten sections, each manned by a group of pirates and anywhere from a few hundred to over a thousand slaves.

Rather than meddle with the unruly pirate cliques, Charlot selected 200 to 300 slaves to bolster his direct forces, swelling his numbers to over 500.

These slaves, beaten down by despair, were overwhelmingly grateful when Charlot freed them. Their loyalty far surpassed that of the pirates.

From these slaves, Charlot handpicked the strongest dozens and taught them Beast God Morphing: Redback Bear Warrior Transformation.

Beastfolk made up only a small fraction of the slave population. Most slaves on Saint Michael Island were humans. While it was impossible for them to reach Transcendent levels in a short time, learning the Redback Bear Warrior transformation increased their strength and fostered a sense of kinship with the bear-boy Charlot, as though they'd met one of their own.

Charlot didn't worry about the risk of his secret technique being leaked.

First, he only taught slaves in secret. These slaves, unfamiliar with anyone else on Saint Michael Island, were closer to him due to the oppression they'd endured.

Second, Charlot was prepared to take risks. He believed that as long as he displayed enough strength, everyone would choose loyalty.

Charlot's swift rise among the pirates soon caught the attention of higher-ups.

One of the Golden Rams Fleet's ten commanders, nicknamed Deep Sea Squid, who controlled three ships, unexpectedly summoned Charlot to accompany him in welcoming the fleet's flagship.

Charlot had no idea why he'd been chosen but dutifully brought his men to the port.

Deep Sea Squid was already considered a senior figure on Saint Michael Island.

The Golden Rams Fleet, besides its leader, had five deputy leaders. Below them were the ten commanders, each with thousands of subordinates and at least three ships under their command.

One of these commanders had already been killed by Charlot in a prior encounter.

Thus, as Menielman Soumet had remarked, Charlot was now "quite famous" on Saint Michael Island.

Chapter 275: Ancient Magical Battleship

In the past, Mad Horse Davis conspired with the slaver Chatham and the Golden Rams Fleet, intending to ambush Charlot Mecklenburg at sea.

Charlot saw through their scheme during the first naval battle, shooting a burly, bearded pirate known for his underhanded tactics. That pirate, who died in a rather humiliating fashion, turned out to be one of the ten lieutenants of the Golden Rams Fleet, nicknamed "Demon Eye."

Charlot's killing of Demon Eye caused an uproar within the Golden Rams Fleet. Many veteran pirates swore vengeance against him.

At the time, the Golden Rams Fleet was preparing a large-scale assault on Cappadocia. However, James Cook and Francis Drake docked the Titanic Whale and the White Sea Dragon at Cappadocia, forcing the pirates to abandon their plans.

They were pirates, after all, not madmen eager for war.

Although the Golden Rams Fleet boasted two extraordinary-class battleships, no one in their ranks dared to pit themselves against the Imperial Navy of the Ingrima Empire.

Charlot was completely unaware of any of this.

He didn't know he had killed one of the Golden Rams Fleet's ten lieutenants.

After all, he had dispatched Demon Eye with a single shot...

In fact, Charlot had already forgotten the incident entirely.

If someone were to remind him of the bearded pirate he killed, Charlot's likely reaction would be: "Who was that again?"

Charlot waited at the port for a long time before the pirate leader Deep-Sea Squid finally appeared with his men. Upon seeing Charlot, the imposing figure made no acknowledgment.

Charlot didn't bother initiating any interaction, such as attempting to strike up a conversation.

After more than an hour, a small black dot appeared on the horizon. Thanks to the Eagle Eye ability provided by the Blue Rattlesnake, Charlot could discern that the dot on the sea was actually a ship.

Although the ship was still far away, Charlot was already astonished.

The Golden Rams Fleet did possess a magical alchemical battleship, but their flagship was an entirely different vessel: the legendary ancient magical battleship, Queen Bee!

The Queen Bee was renowned as the fastest ship across the Seven Seas.

No one knew how it was built or who constructed it.

Since the Kingdom of Saint Michael came into existence, the Queen Bee had always stood as its guardian.

Charlot had long been curious about this legendary battleship.

Among the Seven Seas, only twelve legendary battleships existed.

Even the White Sea Dragon and the Titanic Whale, as remarkable as they were, didn't qualify for this category.

The design of the Queen Bee looked nothing like something from the medieval era. Its hull was sleek, stretching over three hundred pimi. The prow rose sharply, adorned with the head of an ancient siren.

And no, it wasn't a sculpture—it was an actual siren's head, severed from her neck in ancient times.

This siren, known as Dumusa, was said to have the terrifying ability to turn anything she looked at into water when she opened her eyes. While transcents might resist the effect temporarily, an ordinary ship seen by Dumusa's head would instantly dissolve into water, merging with the vast ocean.

This was the Queen Bee's ultimate weapon and the key to its dominance over the Seven Seas.

The ship's hull was covered in countless transparent honeycomb-like patterns. These were remnants of a lost magical array, enabling the ship to slice through waves at unmatched speed. It was rumored that ancient masters who understood the true control mechanisms of the Queen Bee could even navigate it to other worlds.

Each honeycomb pattern on the hull doubled as a porthole, allowing people inside to view their surroundings while remaining unseen from the outside.

Charlot had read about the Queen Bee in university and had encountered more detailed accounts on Saint Michael Island, where everyone marveled at the flagship of the Golden Rams Fleet. Yet seeing it for the first time still left him awestruck.

Charlot mused silently, "If Senior Menielman could acquire the Queen Bee, she would indeed dominate the Seven Seas, becoming a major force on the ocean..."

"Hmm, but I think the Queen Bee suits me better."

Though Charlot deeply appreciated Menielman Soumet's mentorship and felt a degree of gratitude, he lacked the intense devotion shown by his companions like Clair Bretagne or Ebner Soumet.

If an opportunity arose to claim the Queen Bee for himself, Charlot would seize it without hesitation.

Handing it over to Menielman? Never.

That would be sheer waste!

The Queen Bee's speed was indeed extraordinary. From the moment it appeared on the horizon, it took only a few hours to reach the waters near Saint Michael Island, where it slowed down and began its approach.

A tall, imposing man ascended into the air from the ship. He wore three golden rings on his fingers—not ordinary gold, as they shimmered with a strange and dazzling light.

This man was none other than Herolf, the captain of the Golden Rams Fleet and a Saint-rank transcendent.

Deep-Sea Squid immediately led his entourage to greet Herolf. However, Herolf didn't linger at the port and went directly to his palace, with Deep-Sea Squid following closely behind. Charlot, however, was left behind to oversee the arrival of the remaining pirates.

A few hours later, another fleet appeared on the horizon.

This fleet consisted of ordinary merchant ships or modified trading vessels, similar to those Charlot had seen in Cappadocia.

By the time the fleet docked, night had fallen. Countless pirates poured off the ships, swarming into Saint Michael Island. Charlot was left to handle the looted treasures and slaves, directing the unloading and distribution of the goods to various recipients.

The largest portion, naturally, belonged to Herolf, the lord of Saint Michael Island. Following that were the five vice-captains, the ten lieutenants, and finally, shares allocated to lower-ranking pirates based on their contributions during the raid.

Piracy was a profession without salaries; its income came entirely from plunder.

Pirates who could go out to raid were often wealthy, while their leaders were extravagantly rich. Herolf himself was said to possess wealth comparable to a nation. However, pirates unable to participate in raids lived in abject poverty, scraping by with menial tasks, barely better off than slaves.

Unloading treasures for others was grueling work.

Charlot worked tirelessly through the night with his team, finally completing the task of delivering the goods to the pirates' residences.

As dawn broke, Charlot returned to the port.

Gazing at the Queen Bee, he felt an overwhelming desire.

Men love cars.

Why wouldn't they love ships?

Because they can't afford them.

And why wouldn't they love spaceships?

Because Earth's technology can't build them.

If Charlot ever had money, he'd probably buy a second-hand carriage.

Now, with an ancient magical battleship right in front of him, Charlot couldn't help but feel a burning desire:

"This thing is going to be mine one day."

Chapter 276: Brother, Can You Take Me on a Tour of the Queen Bee?

Although most of the pirates had left their ships, a few still remained on board as sentries. As one pirate descended from the legendary *Queen Bee*, Charlot Mecklenburg suddenly approached him. Stuffing a bundle of paper currency—whose origin was too mixed to discern—into the pirate's hands, he whispered, "Brother, can you take me on a tour of the *Queen Bee*?"

The pirate glanced at the money, grinned, and said, "You've got ten minutes."

He pocketed the cash and led Charlot aboard the legendary warship.

Charlot's heart surged with excitement as he stepped onto the deck of the *Queen Bee*. Just as he was about to head into the ship's cabin, the pirate stopped him and said, "This is as far as you go. You can't go inside."

"You've got eight minutes left," he added.

Charlot asked, "I can only stay on the deck?"

The pirate smirked and said, "Of course! For the amount you gave me, walking the deck is all you get."

Charlot glanced around. The ship was eerily quiet since most of the crew had gone ashore to revel. Life at sea was monotonous, and few sailors could resist the temptation of a port-side celebration. The unlucky ones left behind were likely slacking off somewhere on board, with little vigilance.

Taking a deep breath, Charlot slightly lowered his head, and his entire frame seemed to shrink.

The pirate who had led him aboard froze mid-grin. Before he could shout, Charlot's fist slammed into his abdomen. The pirate felt as though all the life force in his body had rushed to his stomach. He wanted to scream, but his body refused to obey. His vision blurred, and Charlot became a dark haze before everything went black.

Charlot glanced at the pirate's now mummified corpse. With a small surge of energy, he shattered the body into dust. As for the strange residue left on the deck? By the time someone came to investigate, it would likely be hours later.

Without reverting to his *Redback Bear Tribe* form, Charlot strode boldly into the ship's cabin. Maintaining that form would weaken his strength significantly, making improvisation impossible.

Moreover, as a member of the tribe, his appearance would draw unnecessary suspicion, jeopardizing his covert infiltration. If Kainan fled, their carefully coordinated mission would fail.

Two pirates, deep in conversation, walked toward him. One of them looked startled upon seeing Charlot, while the other immediately questioned, "Who are you? How did you get aboard the *Queen Bee*?"

Charlot smiled faintly and replied, "Old Mark took some money from me and let me take a stroll."

The two pirates exchanged confused looks. With nearly a thousand crew members aboard, several named "Mark," neither recognized the name. The questioning pirate sneered and said, "I don't care who took your money. Get off this ship, or I'll skin you alive and toss you into the sea to taste salted meat."

Charlot extended his hands, and with two sharp cracks, twisted the pirates' necks. Without breaking stride, he pushed open the nearest cabin door and tossed their bodies inside.

Afterward, he carefully cleaned the traces of blood and even scavenged their belongings. Charlot donned a set of pirate attire, took two rapiers from their belts, and discarded their shoddy pistols, deeming them worthless.

As Charlot roamed the ship, he encountered several more pirates. Some ignored the young stranger outright, allowing him to pass unchallenged. Others, more "dutiful" or, as Charlot thought, "suicidal," confronted him. Those were promptly dispatched, earning Charlot a string of personal victories.

Charlot was a mid-tier *Transcendent*, near the peak of his rank, skilled in various abilities. His proficiency in both firearms and swordsmanship made him a formidable opponent. He could dispatch low-tier *Transcendents* in a single strike and had a strong chance against mid-tier foes. Fortunately for him, powerful *Transcendents* were rare in pirate crews.

Only the thought of alerting the high-tier *Transcendents* of the *Golden Rams Fleet*—or, worse, their *Saint-rank* leader, the Golden Ram Herolf—kept Charlot from launching a full-scale rampage.

Charlot had spent time aboard the *Titanic Whale* and commanded a fleet of his own in the past. Familiar with a ship's general structure, he moved swiftly and silently, making his way to the captain's quarters. However, the door was guarded by two pirates and a peculiar, slender red serpent coiled like a living rope around the handle.

The two pirates exuded a calm aura, suggesting they were likely *Transcendents*, though they didn't frighten Charlot. The strange crimson snake, however, gave him pause.

Not wanting to risk an alarm, Charlot circled around and used the *Blade of Emptiness* to pierce a hole into the adjacent wall. Using *Bloodfire Transfiguration*, he transformed into a streak of bloodfire and slipped through the gap.

Every time Charlot encountered a barrier, he used the *Blade of Emptiness* to carve a path and relied on his bloodfire form to pass through. Twisting and turning through the ship's walls, he suddenly emerged into a spacious room.

After a quick survey of the lavish furnishings, Charlot was confident he had found the right place. He quickly noticed a mirror and stepped into it with delight.

The mirror reflected only the captain's quarters, but within the mirror world, Charlot found himself in a cramped, shadowy version of the room. Over a dozen *Queen Bee* crew members surrounded him, but the Golden Ram Herolf was conspicuously absent.

Charlot surmised that Herolf's immense power prevented the mirror spirit from manifesting his image.

The confined space and the overwhelming number of enemies made firearms impractical. Relying on raw strength, Charlot engaged the mirror spirits in close combat. Unlike typical Van Gogh Clan members, who struggled against their mirror counterparts, Charlot excelled. His mastery of *Blood Glory* and extensive training in Arsilo and Adonis Clan techniques gave him an edge. With his *Transcendent* weapons and prior experience slaying mirror spirits, he methodically dismantled the opposition.

After a grueling half-hour battle, Charlot eradicated every mirror spirit.

He wasted no time lingering in the mirror world. Stepping back into reality, he lifted the mirror and used it to capture every corner of the captain's quarters, ensuring nothing escaped the mirror's reflection. Even the sliver of space under the door was brought into the mirror world.

Satisfied, Charlot re-hung the mirror. A sudden chill ran down his spine as if he were being watched.

Turning toward the room's five "bee-wing" portholes, Charlot saw mirror spirits within each one. They stared at him coldly, their postures varied—some sitting, others lounging.

Charlot shrugged and stepped through one of the portholes.

Chapter 277: Welcome Aboard the Queen Bee

The Mirror Spirit stood atop the surging waves of the ocean, like a regal prince of the sea. It even performed a formal imperial bow and smiled warmly, saying, "Welcome aboard the Queen Bee!"

Charlot Mecklenburg couldn't help but reply, "Since when did you get smarter?"

The Mirror Spirit offered a graceful smile. "It's because your strength has grown."

Charlot glanced around at the vast, tumultuous ocean. Suddenly, a realization dawned on him. The mirror in the captain's cabin could only reflect that confined space, but the portholes had experienced every sea the Queen Bee had sailed through. This was the largest mirror world he had ever seen—boundless and infinite.

The Mirror Spirit, of course, wasn't being truthful.

Charlot could sense that an unusual aura, unrelated to the Van Gogh Clan, emanated from this Mirror Spirit. Most likely, a mysterious power aboard the Queen Bee had influenced the Mirror Spirit, leading to changes Charlot couldn't predict.

Charlot drew Blood Rose.

In response, the Mirror Spirit unsheathed a rapier, assuming a combat stance.

Charlot raised an eyebrow slightly and began to execute the Angel's Twelve Movements swordsmanship. The Mirror Spirit mirrored his actions, flawlessly replicating the technique. Their duel erupted at lightning speed, clashing fiercely through fifty or sixty exchanges within moments.

Every strike Charlot delivered was countered by the Mirror Spirit with precision, matching his speed, angles, and the fluidity of his techniques exactly.

It truly was like battling a reflection of himself.

Charlot remained calm. During the ferocious battle, he suppressed Blood Rose and, with a miraculous flick of his wrist, produced Red Viper. Without hesitation, he pulled the trigger.

The Mirror Spirit, astonishingly, also conjured a short pistol. However, it didn't fire but instead froze, its expression filled with shock and humiliated betrayal.

Charlot fired several consecutive shots, shattering the Mirror Spirit. Even as its body fragmented and dissipated into nothingness, its face remained locked in disbelief. It couldn't comprehend how Charlot wielded a power it couldn't replicate.

After slaying the Mirror Spirit, Charlot sensed a faint connection to the Infinite Mirror World, leaving him with a peculiar feeling. Typically, one could only grasp the Mirror World's power fully by eliminating a Mirror Spirit. Yet now, he had gained just a fragment. He quickly realized the reason: the Mirror Worlds of the five portholes were interconnected.

Charlot chuckled to himself. "Why did I bother fighting my way up? The Queen Bee is filled with bee-wing-shaped portholes. I could simply master each Mirror World one by one and move freely throughout the ship..."

"I'm still too accustomed to thinking like an ordinary person. I've forgotten this is a world of extraordinary abilities."

With a casual flick of his wrist, Charlot shot a leaping fish. The vastness of the Mirror World complicated matters. The Queen Bee had sailed through countless seas, creating an expansive and chaotic Mirror World. It was impossible to kill every living being he encountered; there were simply too many.

Charlot decided the only solution was to lure the Mirror Spirits out and destroy them.

The earlier shot had easily dispatched one Mirror Spirit, but it would serve as a warning to the others, making them more cunning.

Charlot closed his eyes and smiled faintly, tossing Red Viper high into the air. Then he kept his eyes shut.

The pistol reached its apex before plummeting downward. Just as it neared the ocean surface, two figures materialized, reaching out to grab it.

Suddenly, Red Viper turned mid-air, its grip sprouting a blood-red hand. It fired repeatedly, obliterating the two Mirror Spirits.

Charlot felt the scope of the Mirror World under his control expand more than threefold. He smiled, stepping forward and sinking into the "sea." His foot soon found solid ground.

A mirror could never reflect the true depths of the ocean. Though the Mirror World's ocean seemed vast, with towering waves, it lacked the profound depth of a real sea. Its waters were shallow.

The Flame Dragon's Hand returned Red Viper to Charlot. He caught the vampiric pistol, spun it deftly, and commanded, "Part the sea!"

A white line unfurled beneath Charlot's feet, dividing the boundless waters into two halves—one under his control and the other belonging to the remaining Mirror Spirits.

Two versions of Charlot emerged from the opposing Mirror Worlds. As mere Mirror Spirits, they couldn't fathom human cunning. They assumed Charlot had devised a devastating method to defeat them and prepared to strike with overwhelming force.

One Mirror Spirit wielded a rapier, while the other gripped pistols in both hands. Charlot fired seven or eight shots, all deflected by the Mirror Spirits' weapons.

Charlot's expression grew serious. The strength of these Mirror Spirits was marginally greater than the one he had previously defeated.

However, his test confirmed they weren't mere illusions; they were genuine Mirror Spirits.

Since he had left his Anti-Magic Armor-Piercing Rounds behind for his infiltration of Saint Michael Island, Charlot had relied on deception to kill the first three Mirror Spirits by catching them entirely off guard.

Charlot moved at blinding speed, engaging the two Mirror Spirits in a chaotic skirmish. Meanwhile, the Flame Dragon's Hands calmly reloaded Red Viper and Blue Rattlesnake, switching their magazines to Life Devour mode. The pistols fired relentlessly at the sea behind the Mirror Spirits.

One by one, the creatures of the sea fell, and with each death, Charlot's control over the Mirror World expanded.

The two Mirror Spirits shrieked in terror as the ocean in their Mirror World began to boil. Enraged, they summoned countless fish, sea monsters, and oceanic sprites to launch a massive assault against Charlot's domain.

Charlot smirked, countering with his own sea creatures, which clashed violently with their forces.

The Mirror Spirits hadn't anticipated that every time they unleashed a powerful sea monster, the Flame Dragon's Hands would shoot it down instantly. Charlot's Mirror World grew steadily stronger, while their attacks only exacerbated their plight.

Charlot pressed forward relentlessly. Suddenly, the Mirror World dimmed slightly. One of the Mirror Spirits' powers waned dramatically, and Charlot struck it down with a single effortless slash. With one more defeated, Charlot gained an overwhelming advantage. Moments later, he dispatched the last Mirror Spirit.

Now in full control of the Mirror Worlds from all five portholes, Charlot stood upon the mirrored sea and snapped his fingers. The five Mirror Worlds merged seamlessly with the captain's cabin mirror.

Just as Charlot was about to leave the Mirror World, he overheard a conversation. Peering through the Mirror World, he spotted Herolf in the captain's cabin, berating several subordinates.

Chapter 278: The Treasure and the Queen Bee

Charlot had spent far too much time in the Infinite Mirror World, and his infiltration of the *Queen Bee*—where he had killed several individuals—was finally exposed.

He quickly turned his head away, not daring to linger. Golden Ram Herolf, after all, was a Saint Rank powerhouse who might sense something unusual.

Though it was only a fleeting moment, Golden Ram Herolf glanced at the porthole. However, he did not suspect anything. The *Queen Bee* was no ordinary magical ship. As one of the twelve legendary warships of the Seven Seas, it was believed that no one could come and go freely aboard it.

Moreover, his captain's quarters were protected by two Transcendents and a Fate Serpent, ensuring no one could enter unnoticed.

Golden Ram Herolf was furious. He roared, "An enemy managed to sneak aboard the *Queen Bee*! What in the world have you all been doing?"

"And you still haven't found the infiltrator?"

"Damn it! Damn it!"

Herolf's subordinates, reprimanded harshly, did not dare to speak. They were equally baffled—how could anyone have infiltrated the *Queen Bee*, especially when it was anchored at Saint Michael Island, a place impenetrable to outsiders?

When questioned, no one had seen any unfamiliar faces boarding the ship.

Charlot had previously encountered several pirates who didn't like meddling in others' affairs. These individuals knew better than to attract trouble. Golden Ram Herolf's temperament was volatile and unpredictable. Reporting a sighting of a stranger would only result in accusations of negligence and likely severe punishment.

The pirates who had managed to survive under Herolf's command were well-acquainted with his temper and understood the importance of self-preservation.

This inadvertently worked in Charlot's favor.

After venting his rage, Golden Ram Herolf slumped into the captain's chair, still fuming. "I will make the *Queen Bee* uncover the intruder," he declared.

Herolf lightly rubbed a golden ring on his finger. Soon, a faint buzzing sound filled the air, growing louder until it reverberated from the bow to the stern. Every corner of the ship was filled with the sound of wings vibrating.

Countless bizarre black insects materialized out of thin air, conducting a meticulous search of every nook and cranny of the *Queen Bee*.

Charlot dared not look outside, fearing he might alarm Golden Ram Herolf. Yet, the Infinite Mirror World reflected everything in the real world, including the black insects, whose mirrored forms now appeared within the mirrored realm.

Charlot caught one of the black insects and found it vaguely familiar. Suddenly, he recalled something—back in Cappadocia, he had killed two of Chatham's subordinates, Redbeard

Morgan and Jack the Wasp, and had obtained two Extraordinary Artifacts: a delicate crystal vial and a *Bag of Insects*.

The black insects from the *Bag of Insects* were identical to the one now in his hand.

At the time, Charlot hadn't examined them closely. Now, upon closer inspection, the insect resembled a wasp, albeit slimmer and larger, entirely black with faint dark-red markings.

Charlot mused, "So this is the *Queen Bee*? It certainly lives up to its name. But what's the connection between the *Queen Bee* and the *Bag of Insects*?"

"I remember hearing that Redbeard Morgan and Jack the Wasp brought two Extraordinary Artifacts back from some deep-sea treasure. Could that treasure be related to the *Queen Bee*?"

He let the mirrored *Queen Bee* fly off without making any move, waiting silently. Golden Ram Herolf commanded the insects to search the ship three times, inside and out, but they found nothing. This left Herolf increasingly uneasy.

An enemy capable of infiltrating the *Queen Bee*, evading detection, and possibly hiding onboard was a deeply troubling prospect.

Reluctant to admit his failure, Herolf muttered, "Lucky bastard. He must have already escaped."

He dismissed his crew and remained alone in the captain's quarters for some time. Eventually, he gazed out of the porthole at the rolling waves and the distant silhouette of Saint Michael Island.

"Everything's been going poorly lately. Menielman has her sights set on me. If not for her lack of a Transcendent Warship, she almost killed me last time. Where did that woman find two Saint Rank allies?"

"One of them I know—Tumisan, from the Orc Assassin Alliance. But the other..."

"Damn it, how are there so many Saint Rank individuals in the world?"

Herolf poured himself a drink and downed it in one gulp, his frustration palpable. In his younger days, he had dueled Zimourman Axel Robin. On the surface, the match had been declared a draw, which bolstered his reputation. But only Herolf knew that during the duel, he had relied on a secret ritual to sacrifice part of his fate, barely enduring Zimourman's relentless assault. The ritual's cost left his strength stagnant ever since.

After two more drinks, Herolf muttered bitterly, "If I hadn't faced Zimourman back then, my power wouldn't have stalled. That damn Menielman would be no match for me."

"Even with help, I have the *Queen Bee*. I won't lose."

"It's all Zimourman's fault."

"I hear he's dead!"

"Good riddance."

Herolf had initially planned to spend the night ashore at Saint Michael Island, enjoying the comforts unavailable aboard the ship. However, the infiltration incident soured his mood, and he stayed aboard instead. After drinking an entire bottle of wine, he collapsed onto his bed, fully clothed, and quickly fell asleep.

Charlot remained motionless, hidden within the Infinite Mirror World.

The next day, Herolf went ashore again. Only then did Charlot slip out of the porthole. He didn't reenter the *Queen Bee* but instead used Swiftstep Technique to float silently to another porthole. Reaching inside, he roughly pulled out a Mirror Spirit.

As a transmigrator, Charlot had studied many weaknesses of the Mirror Spirits. One hypothesis he tested was whether he could partially reflect only part of his body.

This attempt proved successful. When he only extended a hand through the porthole, the Mirror Spirit's strength was limited to a single hand.

Dragged out through the porthole, the Mirror Spirit let out a silent scream before dissolving into black smoke under the sunlight.

Charlot immediately sensed he had gained another Infinite Mirror World.

The hull of the *Queen Bee* was adorned with countless transparent bee wings, with thousands of portholes in total.

Even though Charlot had discovered a small loophole to increase efficiency, the task remained arduous. He also had to remain vigilant, frequently retreating into the Infinite Mirror World to avoid the pirates. This significantly slowed his progress.

By the afternoon, he had barely managed to deal with one-tenth of the portholes.

At one point, Charlot considered using a bold strategy to reflect his image in every porthole simultaneously. But common sense stopped him from courting death.

He knew he couldn't handle more than five Mirror Spirits at once.

Chapter 279: Infinite Mirror World 2

If it were just an ordinary mirror, it wouldn't matter.

Occasionally, members of the Van Gogh Clan would accidentally break a mirror, and the shattered fragments would give birth to dozens, even hundreds, of Mirror Spirits.

Mirror Spirits could only exist within the Mirror World.

Only by killing the original owner could a Mirror Spirit replace them, leave the Mirror World, and become a dangerous anomaly.

As long as one avoided entering the Mirror World and destroyed the shattered mirror fragments, the Mirror Spirits would vanish.

Charlot Mecklenburg was unwilling to abandon this opportunity. By manipulating all the portholes aboard the *Queen Bee*, he couldn't yet seize control of the ship, but he was one step closer to achieving that goal.

Charlot pulled out a Mirror Spirit, watching as it silently screamed and turned to ashes. Suddenly sensing something, he quickly concealed himself within one of the portholes.

Dozens of pirates strode toward the port and boarded the *Queen Bee*. One pirate glanced at the porthole, but of course, he saw nothing.

Charlot snapped his fingers, linking this porthole to the Mirror World under his control.

In an instant, countless silvery Blood Runes appeared in his eyes, forming a second mirror. The two mirrors, composed of silver runes, established a wondrous connection—this was Infinite Mirror World ×2!

It was a brand-new extraordinary ability that could be called—Mirror Gate!

The Mirror Gate could create a portal anywhere, allowing the user to return to the Mirror World at any time.

In simpler terms, it was akin to carrying a portable mirror that granted control over the Mirror World.

For vampires of the Van Gogh Clan, this ability was the ultimate escape technique.

This was also why, despite their lack of powerful combat skills or spells, the Van Gogh Clan remained one of the three royal clans.

Vampires of the Van Gogh Clan were notoriously difficult to kill.

They were elusive and made for the perfect assassins.

Charlot had already occupied the Mirror World of hundreds of portholes aboard the *Queen Bee*. Once connected, it allowed him to monitor almost the entire ship. The Mirror World's vast ocean stretched endlessly, seemingly without boundaries.

Ordinary mirrors, fixed in one place, could only reflect a small area, and the Mirror Worlds they created were relatively small.

The *Queen Bee* had existed for at least several centuries, sailing through countless seas and docking at countless ports, resulting in an expansive, boundless Mirror World.

Even if Charlot carried a mirror for decades of travel, it would be impossible to create a Mirror World as large as the one tied to the *Queen Bee*. Moreover, Mirror Worlds depended on the mirrors themselves. If the mirror were accidentally broken, decades of effort would be wasted. But the *Queen Bee*, as a transcendent artifact, was nearly indestructible, making its Mirror World exceptionally stable.

This was another crucial reason why Charlot was reluctant to give up control over the ship's portholes.

The ancient magical warship soon set sail. Charlot was puzzled as to why Herolf the Golden Ram hadn't accompanied it.

After some hesitation, he chose to temporarily leave the *Queen Bee*.

Charlot leaped out of the Mirror World, diving back into the port waters. Using the Beast God Transformation, he turned into a small bear-man.

He had been away for several days, and his subordinates dared not question him. One of the top ten generals, Deep-Sea Squid, had sent someone to check on him, but finding him absent, the general had made no further inquiries. Charlot had been prepared to use the Mirror Gate to flee if his identity was exposed, but nothing happened.

The chaos of pirate gatherings meant there was no logic to follow.

After days of continuous battles with Mirror Spirits, Charlot was exhausted. The spiritual toll was especially great. Returning to Saint Michael Island, he rested for two or three days to recover.

Charlot had another purpose in returning to Saint Michael Island—he wanted to verify a few things.

When he was a slave, he had no personal freedom. Even if he wanted to escape, there was nowhere to run on Saint Michael Island.

Later, as a lowly errand boy among the pirates, his freedom remained limited. But after replacing Black Seahorse, he gained the privilege to go anywhere except the royal palace.

Once refreshed, Charlot found an excuse to wander around Saint Michael City.

During the era of the Saint Michael Kingdom, the island was extraordinarily wealthy. The city, built into the mountain, was a massive fortress rarely seen even in the Ingrima and Fars Empires.

The city was divided into seven tiers. The topmost tier was, of course, the royal palace. The second tier housed the kingdom's former nobles, now occupied by the five vice-captains and the ten top generals of the pirate fleet.

The third tier served as the base for mid-level pirates, dark merchants, slave traders, and mysterious dignitaries visiting Saint Michael Island. It was also the location of taverns, casinos, slave markets, and pirate trade zones.

The fourth and fifth tiers held barracks and warehouses, while the sixth and seventh tiers housed low-level pirates and slaves performing menial tasks.

Charlot went directly to the third tier, where he quickly found a shop with a display window.

After ensuring no one was watching, he calmly stepped into the Mirror World.

This Mirror World was unexpectedly vast. Having reflected the streets of Saint Michael City for many years, it contained countless pirates, slave traders, and underground merchants coming and going.

He spotted a Mirror Spirit identical to himself, sitting on a stone pedestal by the roadside, resting its chin in its hands. Upon seeing him, the Mirror Spirit shrugged and said, "I wish I could walk in the outside world like you."

"You must know, this place is too small, far too small, and unbearably dull."

"Could you lend me your body for a little while? I just want to go outside for a moment. I'll return it to you right away."

Charlot shrugged as well and said, "Sure!"

The Mirror Spirit was overjoyed and extended a hand to touch Charlot. Waiting for it was a thin rapier. Charlot's sword pierced through the Mirror Spirit's body. He observed the Mirror World but felt it still hadn't fallen under his control.

"You lied to me!" he said.

The Mirror Spirit reappeared among the crowd. Furious, it was about to shout those very words, but Charlot cut it off.

With a Red Viper pistol in hand, Charlot fired six shots, all of which the Mirror Spirit evaded with bizarre movements.

Charlot knew the Mirror Spirits grew stronger over time but hadn't expected this one to surpass all the others he had faced. This wasn't surprising, given that his Infinite Mirror World had advanced.

The Mirror Spirit also drew a pistol identical to the Red Viper. Although it lacked extraordinary properties, every bullet it fired struck with the full force of an eleventh-rank Transcendent.

They exchanged over a dozen moves, racing through the streets of the Mirror World in a parkour-like chase, showcasing gunplay even more dazzling than a gun-dueling technique.

Suddenly, Charlot smiled and tossed the Blood Rose. Like lightning, it shot toward the Mirror Spirit.

The Mirror Spirit threw a rapier in response, but its expression immediately turned to terror, as if it had realized its mistake...

Chapter 280: The Pure Malice of the "Hive"

A blazing hand appeared in front of Charlot Mecklenburg, catching the thrusting rapier projected by the Mirror Spirit.

Simultaneously, a flaming hand appeared before the Mirror Spirit as well, but despair was evident in its gaze.

Charlot's Blood Rose was a transcendent weapon, while the rapier thrown by the Mirror Spirit was merely a common mirror projection.

Charlot's Flame Dragon's Hand was a secret art of the Adonis Clan, while the Mirror Spirit's flaming hand was merely an imitation, lacking the profound mysteries of the Adonis Clan's secret arts.

Thus, Charlot's blazing hand easily crushed the rapier projected by the Mirror Spirit, while the Blood Rose pierced through the Mirror Spirit, reducing it to ashes.

Having seized control of this mirrored world, Charlot promptly departed.

He wandered around the third city layer of Saint Michael Island, took control of five other mirror worlds through shop windows, and then found a secluded spot to cast the Mirror Gate.

Charlot, however, did not return to the five mirror worlds he had just seized, nor did he choose the Queen Bee, but instead appeared on Elysée Avenue.

Without returning home, Charlot, taking advantage of the early hour, purchased several mirrors, hired a carriage, and headed straight for Machubi.

He intended to retrieve the Crystal Bottle and Bag of Insects from Machubi, as these two items were undoubtedly connected to the Queen Bee.

Charlot planned to test them aboard the Queen Bee.

Without the Dark Luxury, his journey was slightly inconvenient, causing some delays before he finally obtained the two extraordinary artifacts. Using the Mirror Gate, he appeared back aboard the Queen Bee.

This ancient magical warship was heading in the direction of Britain.

Charlot had no idea what the Queen Bee intended to do in Britain, but it didn't stop him from conducting a small experiment.

He released a black insect, which could also be called a queen bee.

The black insect, unguided by the holder of the Bag of Insects, circled Charlot once, then flew downward, heading directly for the ship's hold.

Intrigued, Charlot transformed into a wisp of Bloodflame Aura and followed closely.

Suddenly, an overwhelming surge of malice, as vast and turbulent as stormy waves, struck him head-on.

For a moment, Charlot felt he could not breathe.

He even thought he was once again facing an Evil God.

The hold of the Queen Bee had no bottom, only an impenetrable darkness.

Within the darkness, countless black queen bees fluttered, their dark red eyes brimming with all the malice of humankind.

Occasionally, the dark mass churned, producing a surging force that transmitted to the bizarre magical arrays surrounding the hold. Charlot sensed that this darkness was the Queen Bee's source of propulsion, and it was not of this world.

In an instant, Charlot realized why the ship was named the Queen Bee—its energy source was a hive of pure malice and ultimate darkness.

He had no idea what this thing was.

But he knew it was extraordinarily sinister.

The black queen bee Charlot had released was now lost within the darkness, impossible to locate.

He pulled out the Bag of Insects, and the extraordinary artifact emitted a strange attraction. Countless queen bees swarmed toward it, voluntarily crawling inside.

Charlot stroked his chin, thinking, "It only collects some queen bees? This thing isn't particularly useful."

Just as he was about to test the Crystal Bottle, he felt an immense pressure. A colossal figure, seven or eight pimi tall, emerged from the darkness beneath the ship. It had a stunningly beautiful head and an upper body resembling a voluptuous woman, but its lower half was that of an enormous queen bee. Its massive wings buzzed, emitting a sound like gnashing teeth.

Charlot activated his Bloodflame Aura and fled the hold. Behind him came a deafening crash as the monstrous creature slammed against the sealed deck of the hold, shaking the entire Queen Bee.

Heart pounding, Charlot thought, "What is this monstrosity?"

From below, the sounds of relentless pounding echoed continuously. The creature was attacking the hold like a mad beast, seeming ready to break through at any moment. Charlot dared not linger.

Moments after he left, over a dozen pirates entered the hold. None dared descend into the bottomless darkness. One pirate leader shouted, "Throw them in!"

Soon, a group of slaves was brought in. The pirates hurled dozens of them into the hold, followed by harrowing screams and horrifying crunching sounds. The atmosphere was chilling.

Though Charlot did not witness this, he saw the pirates herding slaves into the hold. When the area fell silent, and the pirates emerged without the slaves, Charlot understood what had occurred.

These pirates had used the lives of the slaves to appease the creature.

Charlot couldn't help but gasp. He had not expected the Queen Bee to be such a sinister ancient magical warship.

Although he confirmed that the Crystal Bottle and the Bag of Insects were indeed connected to the Queen Bee, they seemed largely ineffective. Apart from the Bag of Insects' ability to collect some queen bees and provoke the hive queen, Charlot found little value.

For the next few days, Charlot tirelessly "conquered" mirrored worlds. By the time the Queen Bee reached the island of Britain, he had already seized control of half the ship's porthole

mirrors. These mirrors' worlds were interconnected, allowing Charlot to map most of the Queen Bee's journey.

He uncovered a significant secret: the mirror worlds of the Queen Bee's portholes revealed scenes from its construction.

The Queen Bee was not built in the Seven Seas, but on the Old Continent.

The Queen Bee did not dock in Britain but stopped at a military port about five or six hundred kilometers away. At this port, Charlot spotted the Imperial Navy of the Ingrima Empire.

Though he knew the Golden Rams Fleet collaborated with the steward of Cappadocia, he had not anticipated a tacit understanding between the Golden Rams pirates and the Ingrima Navy.

On reflection, this seemed reasonable. Every empire needed a black-gloved enforcer for unsavory tasks. If Ingrima had this arrangement, so likely did the Fars Empire. Charlot simply lacked the status to encounter such dealings.

This explained why the White Sea Dragon and Titanic Whale had appeared in Cappadocia City, causing the Golden Rams Fleet to abandon their attack. Similarly, the Ingrima Navy showed no intention of assaulting Saint Michael Island.

From the pirates' conversations, Charlot learned that the Queen Bee would stay at this port for a week. Suddenly, he felt compelled to visit Britain to meet an "old friend."

With Golden Ram Herolf absent from the Queen Bee, this was a golden opportunity.

Tacit understandings, after all, had their limits—not everyone shared the same understanding. Some within the Ingrima Empire worked with pirates, but certainly, others... did not know of it.

Chapter 281: Princess May's "New Carriage"

Charlot Mecklenburg held the position of a Level 25 Assistant Clerk in Fars and a Level 24 First-Class Civil Servant in the Ingrima Empire, while also serving as the Archivist of the Red Dragon Palace.

In the Ingrima Empire, Charlot had surpassed the insurmountable Unreachable Class, and back in his homeland, his life was even more comfortable and well-connected.

As for High Priest Auguslatin, he was still in Britain.

When Charlot arrived in Britain, he immediately went to visit High Priest Auguslatin.

This esteemed High Priest, enjoying his time in Britain, seemed utterly unbothered about Fars. He was living a blissful life. On this particular day, he was seated in a carriage on his way to discuss church affairs with several local Radiant Priests when the carriage door suddenly opened. A young man barged in.

High Priest Auguslatin was startled to see Charlot and asked, "What brings you back to Britain?"

Charlot shrugged and replied, "Personal matters!"

"I know, High Priest, that you don't care about wealth or glory, but here's an opportunity to save the people of Fars. Surely you wouldn't want to miss it."

Though High Priest Auguslatin had his eccentricities, he was a genuine Saint rank individual.

In Charlot's plan, this High Priest played a crucial role.

The moment the words "wealth" and "glory" left Charlot's lips, the High Priest's eyes lit up. "What opportunity?" he asked.

Charlot, with a pleasant smile, replied, "An ancient magical warship belonging to pirates is docked at a port several hundred kilometers away. I stumbled upon this information..."

The High Priest's voice trembled as he asked, "Is this true?"

An ancient magical warship was of immeasurable value. If it belonged to pirates, it meant it had no legitimate owner, making it ripe for the taking.

Charlot confirmed, "Of course! I even stowed away on that very ship to arrive at the island of Britain."

"And," Charlot added, with a sly grin, "there's no Saint rank aboard. In your presence, it's as defenseless as an unguarded... pure virgin."

The High Priest grew even more excited. But after a few minutes of enthusiasm, he paused and said thoughtfully, "Unless you can find another Saint rank, I won't act."

Charlot didn't question the reasoning behind this condition but agreed immediately. "I can do that!" he said.

The High Priest gave him a knowing smile, the kind that seemed to conceal countless unspoken remarks.

Charlot planned to visit others for assistance, but before he could leave, the High Priest said, "Go to 698 Seventais Riverside Street."

Charlot was startled. "Why go to 698?"

The High Priest, smiling mischievously, said, “Princess May returned from Fars and got herself a new carriage.”

Charlot suddenly had a bad feeling.

The High Priest confirmed his suspicions, adding, “It’s none other than your Dark Luxury.”

“Originally, the Grand Princess lived a reclusive life at 699 Seventais Riverside Street and rarely ventured out. Now, however, she goes to the bookshop almost daily and visits bookstores regularly. Every time she steps out, she rides in the Dark Luxury. All of Britain knows about it...”

Charlot stiffened. “What does this have to do with me?” he retorted stubbornly.

The High Priest patted him on the shoulder and said, “Perhaps you’re unaware, but Emperor Alfred Guillaume recently promoted you!”

“Charlot Mecklenburg, you are now a Level 23 Second-Class Civil Servant, Archivist of the Red Dragon Palace, and Literary Consultant of the Obsidian Spring Palace.”

This surprising news brought mixed feelings of joy and bewilderment. Charlot couldn’t fathom why the High Priest was connecting these events.

Seeing Charlot’s confusion, the High Priest dealt a final blow, smiling as he said, “Your promotion was justified as having ‘earned the Grand Princess’s favor.’”

Charlot blurted out, “Isn’t this just forced matchmaking?”

And it wasn’t just anyone orchestrating it—it was Emperor Alfred Guillaume himself, personally fanning the flames!

The High Priest didn’t understand what “forced matchmaking” meant but continued smiling as he said, “We’ve arrived at 699 Seventais Riverside Street!”

“Charlot Mecklenburg, I wish you the best of luck.”

“If you manage to find another Saint rank to join, I am at your disposal.”

Charlot stepped out of the carriage, feeling somewhat dazed. When he glanced at the small hill by the Seventais River, he hesitated...

Five minutes later, he was standing in the hall of 699 Seventais Riverside Street.

Even before Charlot could say a word, the door opened on its own.

It was Charlot’s first time visiting Princess May’s private residence. It resembled 698 in style—imposing and filled with books.

The Grand Princess, as always, was dressed entirely in black robes, her demeanor cool and aloof. She didn't even offer Charlot a glass of water.

Since he was already there, Charlot decided to cut to the chase. "There's an ancient magical warship belonging to pirates docked at a port several hundred kilometers away. It has no Saint rank aboard. I'm looking for a few people to seize it."

Princess May was silent for a moment before asking, "Is it the Queen Bee?"

Charlot nodded. "Yes, that's the one."

The Princess replied, "You won't be able to take it."

Charlot was startled. "Why not?" he asked.

The Princess, still cool and composed, explained, "The Queen Bee's control core is one of three golden rings. It's currently in the hands of Herolf, the Golden Ram. Its containment vessel—a crystal vial—has long been lost."

"With Herolf holding the golden ring, even if we destroy or sink the ship, as long as that Golden Ram summons it, the Queen Bee will return to Saint Michael Island."

Charlot's hands trembled with excitement as he pulled out a crystal vial and handed it to Princess May. "Is this it?" he asked.

Princess May touched the vial, removed the ring containing Dark Luxury, and returned it to Charlot.

Charlot's earlier joy vanished instantly.

The Princess remained silent for a while but uncharacteristically offered an explanation. "Even if you take the Queen Bee, you won't be able to keep it."

"However, with my endorsement, no one will dare lay claim to it."

Charlot's rational mind told him the Princess was right. If he secretly seized the Queen Bee, all would be well. But with figures like High Priest Auguslatin and Princess May involved, many would soon learn that a legendary warship had fallen into the hands of a mid-level Transcendent.

If nothing else, the Fars Empire's Central Government Office could issue an order, or Julius Axel might intervene, leaving Charlot in dire straits.

Even if the Queen Bee were nominally handed over to Senior Menielman Soumet, it wouldn't deter the empire's upper echelons from coveting it.

But with Princess May, there would be no problem. She was, after all, the aunt of Alfred Guillaume, the fifteenth emperor of the Ingrima Empire.

Chapter 282: Saint Michael Island's Blessing

Princess May seemed to feel her earlier explanation was insufficient. After a while, she added, "Without the golden ring, you can only temporarily house the Queen Bee. Even if you want to sever ties with the Fars Empire, mastering the Queen Bee alone won't allow you to dominate the Seven Seas."

Charlot sighed and asked, "Is this crystal vial truly the container for the Queen Bee?"

Princess May retorted, "Haven't you already obtained it?"

Charlot gave a sheepish smile. "I got it by accident. I didn't know what it was for! Even though it's a crystal vial, it might not necessarily be the storage container for the Queen Bee."

Princess May replied coolly, "Don't you know the origins of the Queen Bee?"

"It's one of the seven magical warships built during the peak of the Sherlock Dynasty's power."

Princess May turned the crystal vial over and said, "You can look at its base. It has the Sherlock Royal Emblem."

Charlot took the vial and inspected it. At first glance, he saw nothing, but when he activated his Eye of Insight, the vial became transparent, and he saw the emblem at the base.

However, what surprised him even more was the peculiar "water" within the vial. When he gently shook it, the water barely moved. After a moment, it rippled, but unnaturally—as if it weren't water contained in a bottle but a miniature sea. The splashes were not mere droplets but tiny waves.

Charlot suddenly thought of another concern and asked, "Even if it is the container, what if it's not compatible?"

Princess May answered indifferently, "This artifact is designed to be universal."

Charlot had one last question. "When are we setting off?"

Princess May replied, "Now."

Charlot thought to himself, *There's really no rush...*

But since Princess May had decided, he didn't argue further. Just as he was about to ask whether they would fly directly or take a carriage, Princess May raised her hand to her lips, whispered a few words, and made a throwing gesture.

A minute later, Charlot heard the voice of High Priest Auguslatin from outside. His tone was extremely respectful as he said, "Your Highness the Grand Princess, I have not left and am ready to depart with you at any time."

Charlot realized then that this old man had been lingering nearby all along.

Princess May reached out and grabbed Charlot. They began to ascend slowly into the sky.

Charlot found himself enveloped in a soft pink combat energy, which was far more comfortable than the "dominant elder sister" flight experiences he'd endured before. He even had the leisure to glance at High Priest Auguslatin, who followed calmly behind them. The three of them quickly flew out of Britain, heading straight for a naval port.

This time, Princess May didn't pause. She flew directly, and from afar, the Queen Bee came into view. She gently lowered Charlot to the ground before silently gliding into the ancient magical warship's cabin.

High Priest Auguslatin followed closely behind her.

Charlot suddenly felt out of place. *What use is a mid-level Transcendent in a Saint-rank battle? Am I just here to stand out?*

Before long, the entire Queen Bee began to tremble. Countless bee-like wings on the ship's hull buzzed, and the ancient siren figurehead—Dumusa—let out a pained wail. However, her tightly shut eyes remained closed.

Charlot prayed fervently that those eyes would not open. He wasn't sure if he could withstand Dumusa's extraordinary powers. By all accounts, this ancient siren was nearly as terrifying as an Evil God. A mere mid-level Transcendent like him stood no chance.

The Ingrima Imperial Navy stationed at the port grew nervous. They didn't understand what was happening with this infamous pirate ship. Previously, the Queen Bee had docked peacefully, unloaded and loaded cargo, and departed without incident. This time, it was stirring trouble.

The ship's bee-like wings suddenly retracted, and countless compound eyes opened across the hull. Each compound eye consisted of thousands of smaller eyes. Charlot quickly pulled up his clothes to cover himself. He couldn't imagine what might happen if those eyes saw him.

Suddenly, a sharp, piercing sound echoed, reminding Charlot of the half-woman, half-giant-bee creature in the ship's hold. Just as he began to worry about Princess May's safety, the sound abruptly stopped.

He heard Princess May's calm voice. "It's done."

Charlot opened his eyes. The Queen Bee was gone. Only Princess May and a gleeful High Priest Auguslatin remained. Charlot asked, "Where is the Queen Bee?"

Princess May took out a small crystal vial. Charlot peered at it but saw nothing unusual. Activating his Eye of Insight, he saw within the water's surface a tiny ship—a perfect replica of the Queen Bee.

Overjoyed and astonished, Charlot asked, "What about the pirates?"

High Priest Auguslatin shrugged and said, "They willingly fused with the ancient magical warship."

Charlot recalled how those pirates had thrown slaves into the ship's hold. He decided not to dwell on it. *After all, they were heinous criminals. This ending seems fitting.*

Charlot handed the crystal vial back to Princess May. Though the Queen Bee was invaluable, it was useless to him in this form. He felt safer leaving it in Princess May's hands.

Had it been the actual Queen Bee, Charlot wouldn't have minded assembling a fleet and playing pirate for a while.

High Priest Auguslatin said regretfully, "This warship still lacks the key item needed for control—the golden ring. Without it, the Queen Bee can only be used sporadically. If Herolf the Golden Ram summons this ancient magical warship, it will seek its master unless sealed in the crystal vial."

Charlot suddenly realized he had more work to do.

Sure enough, Princess May said coolly, "Return to Saint Michael Island and find a way to acquire those three golden rings."

Charlot took a deep breath, only to hear Princess May add, "I hear you've established a modest foothold there. You should be able to hide a few people. High Priest Auguslatin will accompany you and provide some assistance in critical moments."

Charlot's eyes lit up. Who was High Priest Auguslatin?

A Saint-rank Radiant Lord...

Wait. Correction. A Saint-rank who favored beautiful young men...

Damn it!

Still, having a Saint-rank ally like him on Saint Michael Island was undoubtedly a blessing.

Charlot muttered under his breath, "I'll retrieve the golden ring for the Princess."

Princess May replied, "Not for me. For us."

High Priest Auguslatin turned away, pretending to admire the scenery, his body language and expression clearly saying he'd heard nothing at all.

Chapter 283: Princess May's New Ride

Charlot woke up in the morning at his residence on 698 South Riverside Street, Seventais. The place had already been cleaned, and new furniture had been moved in. Looking out over the Seventais River, he saw an incredibly peculiar "big ship."

It was none other than the Queen Bee.

The Queen Bee was docked quietly, but its mere presence exerted immense pressure on all the other ships along the river. This was an ancient magical warship, one that even the Ingrima Empire's alchemical warships could not compare to. Across the Five Great Empires and both the Old and New Continents, only twelve such legendary warships existed.

And here it was, docked on the southern shore.

Imagine waking up in the morning to find a spaceship parked in your driveway. That was the sort of impression the Queen Bee gave.

Naturally, it wasn't just the neighborhood residents who were alarmed; even the local police and possibly the military district would have sent people to investigate. Was this an alien invasion?

Surrounding the Queen Bee, two other warships floated nearby, while close to a thousand troops stood ready on the shore. Most striking of all, three Saint rank figures hovered in the sky.

Charlot had the urge to step outside and reassure them, "Don't worry! It's just Princess May's new ride!"

"And I gave it to her..."

But Charlot knew his "word carried little weight." No one would believe him even if he said it, so he waited patiently at home. Soon, the three Saint rank individuals descended one by one and entered the house next door—699 South Riverside Street. They didn't stay long, exiting shortly after to deliver orders to the warships and the troops on the shore. Then, they quietly departed.

Not long after, an emissary from the Red Dragon Palace arrived, dispersing a portion of the troops and ships but leaving behind a small contingent, evidently for Princess May's use.

Leading this contingent was someone Charlot recognized—an old acquaintance, Ban Lamorak!

The youngest "Lion of Britain," Ban Lamorak, seemed to have made further strides in his cultivation. Every gesture exuded the aura of a strongman.

Charlot thought to himself, "If I'm not mistaken, he's advanced to a higher rank. His speed of advancement is astonishing."

Seeing that the situation had settled down, Charlot finally got dressed and stepped out of his house.

The location of 698 South Riverside Street was truly exceptional. Nearly every bedroom in the house had a view of the Seventais River. Some rooms even offered a view of both the river and the cityscape of Britain.

The bedroom Charlot had chosen allowed him to enjoy the scenery without even getting out of bed.

Descending the hill, he approached the makeshift military camp formed from a few carriages and politely inquired, "Is Sir Ban Lamorak here? Could someone inform him that his old friend, Charlot Mecklenburg, has come to visit?"

Before anyone could respond, Ban Lamorak stepped out. Upon seeing Charlot, his expression grew complicated. "What brings you back to Britain?" he asked.

Charlot pointed to the Queen Bee anchored on the river and replied, "I came aboard that ship. It was an unexpected journey, and I'll be leaving soon."

Though Ban Lamorak's tone wasn't friendly, there was no malice behind his words. Their last encounter had ended in Charlot's favor—not due to superior strength, but in a way that left Ban convinced and respectful. True to his word, Ban no longer pursued Aurora Soumet.

However, Ban had assumed Charlot and Aurora would end up as a happy couple. Instead, rumors about Charlot and Princess May Guillaume had spread throughout Britain. For the youngest "Lion of Britain," this was unsettling.

Initially, he thought these rumors were absurd. But soon, he saw Princess May herself, clad in Dark Luxury, frequenting bookshops and bookstores. Word spread that Princess May had secured publishing rights for four novels authored by Charlot. These rumors were quickly verified—copies of the novels were available throughout Britain.

To make matters worse, the author's name on the novels was Annie Mecklenburg.

Annie was said to be a young lady of the Bretagne family, a noble house from the Fars Empire.

If that wasn't enough, gossip from the Fars Empire about Charlot soon began circulating in Britain. These rumors were so outlandish that anyone with "normal intelligence" would struggle to believe them.

For example, one rumor claimed Charlot had been an intimate guest of multiple baronial couples and was once chased down a long street naked after being caught in improper behavior.

Or another...

Ban Lamorak dismissed them all outright.

Charlot? The man who had once dueled Ban himself on the Septentis River and won honorably? Who could possibly chase him down the street naked?

A Saint rank? Saints had better things to do!

Ban Lamorak found it impossible to reconcile the man he knew with the "playboy scoundrel" described in these tales. Charlot was clearly an upright man, as evidenced by the discerning tastes of both Aurora and Princess May.

Still, was Charlot entirely virtuous?

That didn't seem accurate either. After all, Ban could name at least three women who had genuine interest in Charlot. And the rumors about Princess May? Those had reportedly been verified by Emperor Alfred Guillaume himself.

Seeing the Queen Bee docked on the river further complicated Ban's feelings. Every rumor seemed to point to one undeniable fact: the legendary warship had been Charlot's gift to Princess May.

A gift?

Ban Lamorak felt as if he had been hit by a hammer. The Queen Bee wasn't just any ship—it was the flagship of the Golden Rams Fleet, one of the most renowned fleets on the Seven Seas.

One of the Twelve Legendary Warships.

Ban wanted to ask Charlot: "How do you live such a complicated life?"

"Is there no limit to your ostentation?"

For a long moment, neither spoke, just standing there. Ban's thoughts churned, while Charlot felt uneasy. He worried Ban might suddenly challenge him to another duel.

Charlot had been neglecting his training lately, and his rank had fallen behind Ban's.

Moreover, he hadn't brought his Knight's Lance or anti-magic armor-piercing rounds.

All he had were the Blood Rose and his two Red and Blue Vipers, which wouldn't suffice.

While extraordinary weapons, the pistols' power depended on their ammunition. Charlot couldn't generate high-level energy bullets himself, and without anti-magic rounds, he couldn't unleash their full potential.

As Charlot considered how to rely on his swordsmanship alone, Ban Lamorak finally spoke. "I've been ordered by the Red Dragon Palace to follow your instructions from now on. May I ask, what exactly are we going to do?"

Charlot hadn't expected to gain such an ally in addition to High Priest Augustatin. This time, Saint Michael Island would surely be blessed.

"Such is the style of Emperor Alfred Guillaume!"

Chapter 284: Mr. Roger Otaree Rivers Changes His Name to Guillaume

Charlot was certain—Ban Lamorak was the kind of Englima native who had no tacit understanding with pirates.

Thus, he spoke plainly, "We're going to eliminate the Golden Rams Fleet of Saint Michael Island."

"However, this is a military secret. You can't tell anyone."

Ban Lamorak was ecstatic and exclaimed, "As a man of honor, I shall achieve glory today! Mr. Mecklenburg, rest assured, I, Ban Lamorak, will spare no effort!"

Charlot honestly had no idea how to proceed. He was, after all, just a minor undercover agent.

The task Menielman Soumet had given him did not involve capturing Saint Michael Island single-handedly.

His assignment was to relay messages, establish contact with the resistance forces—known as the Golden Sub-Ram—and rescue three Saint rank prisoners from Saint Michael Prison. Though difficult, the tasks were generally manageable for an "inside operative." However, sending a High Priest from Englima, along with Britain's youngest lion and a military force, far exceeded his scope of operations.

Charlot could only take it one step at a time.

He had no choice. This mission was arranged by the Englima Empire's Grand Princess, and possibly even involved one of their majesties. There was no way to refuse.

In the entire Englima Empire, few people could command Ban Lamorak so easily. Not even Princess May Guillaume had that privilege. After all, Britain's youngest lion was the son of Count Lamorak, and the Count of Victory Champagne was once a peer of Zimourman Axel Robin.

After exchanging a few words with Ban Lamorak, a group of messengers arrived, summoning Charlot to the Red Dragon Palace.

Charlot had no option but to bid farewell to Ban Lamorak and follow the envoys to meet Emperor Alfred Guillaume.

After going through all the formalities, Charlot once again stood before the young emperor.

Emperor Alfred Guillaume carried himself with an air of composure and grandeur, flawlessly embodying the image of a young emperor of a great empire. Any observing statesman would have proclaimed, "Our lord is a true monarch!"

Charlot, however, sensed something was off but dared not speak of it.

The emperor briefly inquired about the alliance between the two nations, chatting for barely ten minutes. Without inviting Charlot to stay for dinner, he dismissed him.

Relieved, Charlot exited the Red Dragon Palace, feeling an innate fear of this young Red Dragon Emperor. Yet, as he walked out, an attendant hurriedly approached, handed him a letter without a word, and rushed off again.

When Charlot returned to No. 698 on Seventais Riverbank Street, he opened the letter and was greeted with an exuberant handwriting. Its contents were simple, just a few lines:

"You've done well. I didn't expect you to take the approach of writing novels to win over my aunt. Those two gifts were thoughtful.

Sir Mecklenburg, keep it up. I will not treat you poorly. A new position is already in process.

The novels you wrote were good, but why only *The Lionheart King's Legend*?
Where's *The Red Dragon Emperor*?

Write a *Red Dragon Emperor*, and on the day you deliver the manuscript, I'll gift you a piece of the New Continent's land."

Charlot thought for a moment, slapped his thigh, and mused, "I'll have to trouble Roger Otaree Rivers to change his surname to Guillaume."

“Mr. Qiu’s prime years are still ahead; he won’t transmigrate into this world for at least forty years. I should be safe for now.”

With a new novel outlined, Charlot wasn’t planning to start writing right away. Without his efficient writing team, doing it himself was just too exhausting.

...

Far away in Strasbourg, the Gallanord family was hosting a grand ball.

The ball’s guests were all young, aristocratic, and impeccably mannered. They formed small groups, casually discussing various bits of gossip. Even the war in Ferranden was just another topic of chatter, not even the most popular one.

At the center of this gathering was, naturally, Sophia Gallanord.

The Rose of Strasbourg wore a faint expression of disinterest. She preferred adventures to the decadence and faintly corrupt atmosphere of social balls.

A dozen young gentlemen surrounded Sophia, engaging in spirited discussions. Though other young men tried to approach, the aura of prestige surrounding these elite gentlemen created an unspoken barrier that dissuaded the less notable from venturing near.

One of these gentlemen suddenly said, “Sophia, I hear you recently acquired a transcendent lance. Could we perhaps have the honor of seeing it?”

“Or, we could compare it to the knightly lances in our collections and see whose is the finest.”

The suggestion drew enthusiastic cheers. All the young men sought Sophia’s favor, and a chance to outshine their peers was irresistible. Each believed his family’s treasured lance would triumph.

Sophia found the whole affair amusing and chose not to engage.

A noblewoman, a distant relative of Sophia, approached with graceful poise and said, “Sophia! You’re the pride of Strasbourg. Surely your lance is extraordinary. I’ve wanted to see it for so long, and you’ve always refused. Won’t you let us see it this time?”

Sophia had no affection for this relative. She responded coolly, “Apologies, but that lance is only on loan to me. It’s not mine to display.”

The young man who proposed the comparison looked a bit disgruntled. He pressed, “Even if you won’t show it, at least tell us its name. Surely that much wouldn’t hurt.”

Sophia, growing impatient, replied indifferently, “It’s *Whalebane*.”

The name silenced the room. Someone stammered, “You mean *Whalebane*? The one called Lion’s Fang?”

“Isn’t that the weapon of Britain’s youngest lion?”

Many immediately thought of Count Lamorak’s famed weapon, given his unparalleled reputation.

The noblewoman exclaimed, “How could you possibly have *Whalebane*? That’s impossible!”

Sophia replied serenely, “A friend of mine, under Emperor Alfred Guillaume’s witness, dueled Ban Lamorak on the Seventais River and won this knight’s lance. It is indeed temporarily loaned to me and not available for display.”

With those words, Sophia turned and left, leaving the astonished young nobles to speculate wildly.

This was the Rose of Strasbourg in all her splendor—effortlessly commanding attention and respect.

She could casually mention a friend who defeated Britain’s youngest lion and “borrowed” his lance.

What was sophistication?

This was sophistication...

The attendees of the ball left with a unified thought: Sophia Gallanord epitomized the Rose of Strasbourg.

It wasn’t long before the news of the duel between Charlot and Ban Lamorak spread across Strasbourg, overshadowing even the Ferranden frontline.

When Annie Bretagne heard the gossip...

Chapter 285: The Gunslinger’s Second Appearance

Due to a previous incident where an entire set of tableware was smashed, Miss Annie Bretagne refrained from another tantrum. Instead, she generously hired the same writer who had created the side stories to make a second appearance, adding a new plotline to *The Chronicles of Charlot*.

In this newly added segment, Charlot Mecklenburg courageously dueled the youngest lion of Britain for Miss Annie Bretagne. After emerging victorious, he presented the spoils of his triumph to Miss Annie as a token to be treasured forever.

Annie firmly believed that while the *Titanic Whale* might temporarily reside in the hands of Sophia Gallanord, it would ultimately belong to her, Annie Bretagne. She even planned to display it at 221B Baker Street in the Val-de-Vas district and host a coffee gathering for a few noble ladies once it was reclaimed.

Annie went so far as to personally compose a monologue for her fictional counterpart in *The Chronicles of Charlot*:

"I cannot compete with Sophia Gallanord for the spotlight.
But love is about victory, not reason."

Charlot, meanwhile, was unaware that a storm concerning him had erupted in Strasbourg.

...

After spending several leisurely days in Britain, Charlot received two new promotion letters. The first announced his elevation to a second-tier, twenty-third-rank councilor, alongside titles as the *Red Dragon Palace Archivist* and *Obsidian Spring Palace Literary Advisor*.

The second letter promoted him to a third-tier, twenty-second-rank councilor, with additional posts as the *Cappadocia City Steward*, *Saint Michael City Administrator*, and the continuing roles of *Red Dragon Palace Archivist* and *Obsidian Spring Palace Literary Advisor*.

Indeed, this was the very definition of meteoric success and imperial favor.

Upon securing his credentials, Charlot chose not to linger in Britain. Instead, he departed with High Priest Auguslatin, Ban Lamorak, and nearly three hundred elite warriors from the Ingrima Royal Knights Order, returning to Saint Michael Island via the Infinite Mirror World.

Upon Charlot's extended absence, an issue had arisen: the residence once belonging to the Black Seahorse had been occupied by a pirate known as "Anglerfish."

This pirate, showing initiative, had seized control of Charlot's forces and appropriated all his belongings.

When Charlot returned, a group of his original subordinates—seven or eight in total—immediately rallied to their "old leader." They eagerly reported the recent events, speaking all at once. Not a single person questioned the newcomers Charlot had brought with him.

High Priest Auguslatin observed the situation with an amused smile, confident Charlot could resolve it. Ban Lamorak, however, clenched his fists. For convenience, he had replaced his

weapon with a knight's lance forged through Classical Alchemy, which could be stored in the form of a ring. With a swift motion, he retrieved the lance, strode inside, and confronted the situation directly.

...

Saint Michael Island, once an ordinary city, had been reorganized into districts after being occupied by pirates. Groups loyal to specific pirate leaders claimed small territories for communal living. This was a necessity, as pirates struggled to maintain control over their followers. If allowed to live separately, subordinates would either be recruited by rivals or simply defect on their own.

Anglerfish, delighting in his newfound status, had barely enjoyed his spoils for two days before disaster struck. While he was preoccupied training new female slaves in his hideout, none of Charlot's former subordinates bothered to warn him of the impending danger.

Ban Lamorak burst into the room and was greeted by a scene of blood and suffering. Several young women had been tortured to the brink of death. Overwhelmed with fury, the youngest lion of Britain erupted like a volcano. Without hesitation, he drove his lance through Anglerfish, lifting the pirate into the air with a single strike.

Although Anglerfish was a low-level Transcendent, he was utterly helpless against Ban Lamorak. The pirate couldn't muster a proper resistance and was slain on the spot.

Even after Anglerfish's death, Ban Lamorak's rage remained unquenched. He yearned to slaughter every pirate on the island.

Charlot, arriving shortly after, patted Ban Lamorak on the shoulder and said, "I always knew you were my best ally! Only a knight like you, unafraid of danger, dares to charge at infamously ruthless foes."

Charlot's words tempered Ban Lamorak's anger slightly. The young knight muttered, "I want to kill every pirate on this island!"

Charlot replied, "I can promise you—kill as many as you like."

"However, not yet. We must consolidate our strength first."

Ban Lamorak hesitated before saying, "I could call for my father's help."

Internally, Charlot cursed Herolf the Golden Ram: *Damn you!*

Are you even human?!

While High Priest Auguslatin was a "mere" Saint rank, Count Lamorak was a warrior of unparalleled might. Known for his invincibility and often compared to Zimourman Axel Robin, he was one of the Old Continent's most formidable generals.

If this legendary count arrived on Saint Michael Island...

Well, Senior Menielman Soumet's plan would be ruined beyond repair.

Charlot, now slightly familiar with Ban Lamorak's personality, knew the young lion of Britain was fiery and unyielding, with no tolerance for injustice.

But such youths were also easy to manipulate.

Charlot whispered, "You are Britain's youngest lion, not a sheltered boy under Count Lamorak's wing!"

He said no more, but Ban Lamorak's eyes lit up with determination. His voice trembling with passion, he declared, "Charlot, from today onwards, you are my closest friend. I heard in the New Continent that one of the five types of friends is a 'candid friend'—someone who offers guidance and ensures their companions stay on the right path."

"You are my candid friend!"

Charlot was oblivious to the rampant rumors about him circulating in Britain. Ban Lamorak, seeing him as a mentor and confidant, would certainly shock Count Lamorak, who might fear his son was falling under a bad influence—albeit with great pride.

Patting Ban Lamorak on the shoulder, Charlot said, "Seizing Saint Michael Island is but a small step for Britain's youngest lion to establish his legacy. This is merely the beginning of your life's legend. Calling for your father now would undermine it!"

Well, Senior Soumet doesn't count as a guardian.

And High Priest Auguslatin? He's just a nobody in this scenario.

Though Charlot's words were righteous and fervent, the truth was simple: it was all about self-interest.

Chapter 286: The Rebellion of Saint Michael City

Saint Michael Island falling into Menielman Soumet's hands would mean Charlot Mecklenburg would gain a little. If it fell into Count Lamorak's hands, Ban Lamorak would certainly take a sizable portion. As for Charlot...

Well, he might just end up with an empty city.

In any case, Charlot Mecklenburg would undoubtedly devour all the wealth the Golden Rams Fleet had accumulated over the years, not leaving behind even a drachma or centime for outsiders. Judging by himself, Charlot believed Count Lamorak to be the same kind of person.

Otherwise, how else could the Count of Victory Champagne afford all that luxurious Fars champagne for his parties?

Charlot Mecklenburg, even as a twenty-fifth-grade fifth-level Assistant Clerk, couldn't get his hands on a single bottle. Yet Count Lamorak seemed to have so much champagne he could bathe in it.

Hmm, perhaps as a Bibliographic Officer of Red Dragon Palace, a Literary Advisor of Obsidian Spring Palace, and the third-grade twentieth-rank civil servant of Saint Michael City, Charlot Mecklenburg might manage to secure a few bottles.

Upon his return, Charlot easily slew the pirate leader nicknamed "Deep Sea Squid," capturing all his subordinates.

Naturally, his forces doubled overnight...

And even then, he had surplus resources!

The name "Bear King Kainan" began to grow renowned within the Golden Rams Fleet.

However, despite his growing manpower, Charlot still failed to attract the attention of the fleet's leadership. For one, his personal strength was deemed "low"—he was merely a first-rank Redback Bear Warrior. Secondly, he had no ship. After all, in a pirate fleet, only those with ships could be called pirates. Without one, you were nothing more than a lackey.

No ship meant no raids, no plundering. No plundering meant no income. And no income meant no future.

For ordinary pirates, securing a ship would be their primary goal. But Charlot, not being a genuine pirate, had no interest in acquiring one—especially if it wasn't some ancient magical battleship or alchemic warship.

About seven or eight days after Charlot's return, the Golden Rams Fleet was shaken by a major event.

Herolf, the leader of the Golden Rams, grew suspicious when his flagship, the Queen Bee, failed to return. Using a golden ring to summon it, he received no response even after an entire day. Alarmed, he dispatched a fleet to Britain to investigate.

Normally, it would take days for the Queen Bee to return. Herolf waited patiently, but his temper got the better of him, and he vented his frustration by killing dozens of female slaves.

Charlot and his men witnessed corpses being dragged out daily from the highest levels of Saint Michael City and dumped into the sea.

Ban Lamorak muttered several times that, were it not for Herolf being Saint rank, he would have stormed Saint Michael Mountain to duel him.

While Charlot managed to restrain himself, he accelerated his preparations.

Unfortunately, he was not skilled in these matters. He failed to locate the Golden Rams' deputy leader or make contact with the rebellion forces. Nor did he uncover information about the imprisoned three Saint ranks. As for sending messages out, he managed to do so a few times.

Using his Mind Channel, Charlot transmitted intelligence to Cappadocia several times, though he received no reply from Menielman Soumet due to the channel's one-way nature.

The atmosphere in Saint Michael City grew increasingly oppressive. Over ten days later, a pirate ship returning from Britain brought devastating news. The Queen Bee had been sighted on the Septentis River.

According to reports, it was said to have been captured by Charlot Mecklenburg, a renowned Fars author. To curry favor with Emperor Alfred Guillaume XV and his widowed aunt, Princess May Guillaume, Charlot used a strategy called the "Great Anaconda" to seize the ancient magical battleship and present it to Her Highness.

The princess, eager to show off her prize, had the Queen Bee docked on the Septentis River for the entire population of Britain to admire.

As for why Herolf's summons failed, the pirates speculated that the Saint ranks of the Ingrima Empire had suppressed the flagship.

Upon hearing this news, Herolf was furious. Leading his fleet personally, he departed from Saint Michael Island.

Charlot immediately sent out this information and decided to act.

With Herolf away, Saint Michael City was without a Saint-rank guardian.

In the past, Charlot would have been powerless in such a situation.

After all, Saint Michael City still had five deputy captains and ten generals. While not all of them stayed on the island—some were out raiding—at least six or seven remained. These high-ranking pirates were either mid- or high-ranked Transcendents. While Charlot might not fear any one of them individually, taking on so many at once was beyond his abilities.

But that was the past.

Now, Charlot had High Priest Augustatin, a Saint rank.

He also had Ban Lamorak, the youngest Lionheart in Britain. Though newly advanced to high rank, Charlot believed Ban could defeat five ordinary high ranks—or at least three, even by modest estimates.

Five hours after Herolf set sail, Charlot initiated his rebellion.

Charlot was no professional in such matters. He didn't even bother with a pre-battle speech. Instead, he simply gathered all his subordinates and silently stormed the second level of Saint Michael City.

Among the Golden Rams Fleet's five deputy captains, only one remained on the island. Two were out raiding, and the other two had accompanied Herolf to Britain. Of the ten generals, only three were present; the others were either raiding or with Herolf. It was the most vulnerable moment in Saint Michael City's history.

The Golden Rams Fleet, which had dominated the Aggras Sea for years, often colluding with the Ingrima Empire's royal navy, had never anticipated an internal rebellion.

When Charlot confronted the lone deputy captain on the island, the man remained composed and sneered, "I've heard of you, Bear King Kainan. If you want to make a name for yourself in the fleet, work hard for another few decades, and you might have a chance. But to rebel? Do you have any idea how powerful the Golden Rams are?"

"Ignorance isn't a sin. Arrogance is. You overestimate yourself."

Charlot, unfazed by the mid-rank Transcendent pirate, had only one thing to say: "High Priest Auguslatin! Attack!"

The High Priest, unaccustomed to such brusque commands, offered no protest. Light radiated from his body as he unleashed seven consecutive Radiant Arrows.

High Priest Auguslatin was no knight. He was an experienced mage. Although Radiant Arrows were among the more common spells of the Radiant Lord's faith, their effectiveness depended on the caster.

Hearing Charlot's command, the deputy captain initially thought it was a bluff. But when a Saint-rank Radiant High Priest materialized behind Charlot, glowing with divine might, the captain's eyes nearly popped out of his head.

He had no chance against the Saint's "furious strike."

Chapter 287: We Must First Preserve the Fruits of Victory

High Priest Auguslatin wasn't truly angry with him—what was the point of being angry with a mere pirate vice-captain?

In any case, those seven Radiant Arrows were undoubtedly High Priest Auguslatin's masterpiece, obliterating the unfortunate vice-captain on the spot, leaving nothing but "void."

Of course, the seven Radiant Arrows didn't reach the level of disintegrating matter. The primary reason for the destruction was the sheer intensity of the blast.

Charlot held both pistols in his hands and shouted, "Surrender and you live. Resist and you die!"

With that, he casually fired two shots, killing two pirates who stubbornly resisted.

The pirates, as expected, had no sense of loyalty, and very few possessed "unwavering devotion." Faced with a Saint-rank fighter like Charlot, the vice-captain's subordinates surrendered en masse.

Charlot immediately incorporated these pirates into his ranks, a process he executed as effortlessly and naturally as breathing or drinking water.

High Priest Auguslatin and Ban Lamorak had never witnessed such a seamless capture. Before they could even express their astonishment, Charlot was already directing the newly surrendered pirates to locate the vice-captain's hidden treasures. Through the Mind Channel, all of the vice-captain's wealth was sent straight to Machubi.

High Priest Auguslatin glanced at the scorched and desolate streets, barely able to reflect on the scene, when three top commanders of the Golden Rams Fleet who had remained on Saint Michael Island led their forces to attack.

Ban Lamorak, worried that High Priest Auguslatin might casually kill these enemies and leave him with nothing to do, charged forward with his lance and took down one of the commanders. The remaining two turned to flee upon seeing the High Priest rising into the air, but Charlot shot one of them in the back, killing him as well.

High Priest Auguslatin finished off the last commander with a Radiant Arrow before floating gracefully in the sky, smiling as he watched Charlot take control of the remaining pirates.

Charlot swept through the second level of Saint Michael Island, consolidating his forces before leading them toward the summit of the island.

The ancient Saint Michael Kingdom had carved the mountain into a fortress, with the summit housing the opulent royal palace. This architectural masterpiece, filled with countless artworks, had fallen into disrepair after being occupied by pirates. Herolf, the leader of the Golden Rams Fleet, had added crude defensive cannons, further degrading the palace's aesthetics.

Herolf was absent, leaving behind only his personal guard—a unit composed of the most fearsome pirates he had handpicked over the years. While most of the guard had followed him to Britain, over a thousand remained, boasting immense combat prowess.

Not even High Priest Auguslatin could intimidate these desperate fighters.

The High Priest launched several Radiant Arrows, killing the fiercest among them, but the pirates merely shouted louder. Shrugging, he asked, “Shall I kill a few more?”

Charlot was about to respond when a protective barrier enveloped the entire palace. He fired a shot at it, but the shield remained impervious.

Cursing under his breath, Charlot shouted, “High Priest Auguslatin, can you break this turtle shell?”

From the air, the High Priest replied, “Perhaps, but I don’t recommend a direct assault.”

Charlot immediately grasped his meaning. If the Saint-rank High Priest exhausted his power, their rebel forces would lose their advantage.

Charlot commanded, “Move to the third level!”

Ban Lamorak hesitated. “Why don’t we keep trying?”

Charlot replied, “We must first preserve the fruits of victory.”

Though Ban Lamorak didn’t fully understand, he refrained from questioning Charlot’s order. His upbringing had taught him to follow his superior’s commands during war—unless he was certain his superior was an outright fool.

Indeed, this was precisely how Count Lamorak had educated his son.

Charlot led his forces back to the second level but didn’t stop there. Instead, he thoroughly looted it again before advancing to the third level.

The third level of Saint Michael Island housed mid-tier pirates, dark merchants, slave traders, and other mysterious, high-profile guests. It was also the commercial hub, filled with taverns, casinos, slave markets, and pirate trading posts.

With the rapid expansion of Charlot’s forces after absorbing the vice-captain’s troops and three top commanders’ subordinates, resistance was futile. The dark merchants, slave traders, and shadowy guests found themselves too intimidated by the overwhelming strength of the rebels to fight back.

After all, High Priest Auguslatin floated above them, radiating a deterrent force comparable to a nuclear weapon on Earth.

Charlot's forces swept through the district, forcing everyone into the Infinite Mirror World. While transporting so many people through the Mind Channel would cause chaos in any city, the Infinite Mirror World posed no such issue—there was nothing inside it.

The Van Gogh Clan was infamous for fighting in the Infinite Mirror World. Within that realm, they wielded godlike powers, often defeating foes far stronger than themselves.

Those familiar with the Van Gogh Clan's reputation would never willingly step into the Infinite Mirror World to fight them. Once inside, the only way out was to kill the realm's owner.

The Mirror Spirits themselves were subject to many restrictions. For instance, they couldn't leave the Infinite Mirror World unless they killed their original master. Only then could they replace them in the real world. However, the Van Gogh Clan not only freely entered and exited the realm but often controlled multiple such worlds and could disguise their true identities, making detection nearly impossible.

Being sent into the Infinite Mirror World was akin to being imprisoned in a supernatural jail. Unless someone killed Charlot, there was no hope of rescue.

As for the wealth, resources, and treasures from the third level, Charlot sent them all to Machubi.

After clearing the third level, Charlot advanced to the fourth.

The fourth and fifth levels contained barracks and warehouses.

By now, both High Priest Auguslatin and Ban Lamorak had deduced Charlot's plan. Charlot intended to empty Saint Michael Island of its population and resources, leaving it a ghost city—except for the impenetrable first level.

Everyone knew Charlot practiced Blood Glory, derived from vampiric secret arts. Both the Saint-rank High Priest and the so-called "Young Lion of Britain," renowned as the strongest among his generation, had received extensive education on the capabilities of vampires.

The Van Gogh Clan was traditionally portrayed as elegant, mysterious, and elite assassins. Yet Charlot's crude and brutal use of the Infinite Mirror World left both men astonished.

Atop Saint Michael Mountain, the Golden Rams Fleet's fiercest pirates had been prepared for a desperate stand. Despite Charlot's forces including a Saint-rank, they were undeterred; Saint Michael Island itself was a colossal war machine equipped not only with a protective barrier but also the most fearsome artillery.

What they didn't anticipate was Charlot's refusal to engage in a frontal assault. Watching the rebel forces loot their way across the island, the pirates began to wonder, "Who are the real pirates here?"

Chapter 288: The Return of the Golden Ram

Charlot stood at the port, gazing at the vast sea for a while.

The diary in his arms remained silent; he knew he had not yet gained full control of Saint Michael Island.

The ships still docked at Saint Michael Island were mostly in the hands of second- and third-tier pirates, slave traders, and underground merchants. These individuals did not believe anyone could successfully rebel on Saint Michael Island, so few of them had fled.

Charlot moved swiftly, taking control of nearly 90% of the ships. He instructed Ban Lamorak to command the fleet and transport a group of liberated slaves to Cappadocia.

The fleet under Ban Lamorak's command had just disappeared beyond the horizon.

Charlot gazed at the now empty port of Saint Michael, devoid of a single ship, and allowed a faint smile to surface.

Ban Lamorak had sailed off with all the ships, not primarily to transport slaves, but to deliver the fleet to Menielman.

Charlot intended to send all the slaves from Saint Michael to Cappadocia. Those who wished to return home could wait for merchant ships in Cappadocia, while those who wanted to settle could find a new life on Goring Island. As a massive island, it could easily accommodate this group of freed slaves.

For those willing to join Menielman's forces or Charlot's faction, the transition would be even simpler.

As for the pirates of Saint Michael, Charlot planned to integrate the lower-level ones into his West Wind Knight Order, even though some had committed crimes. He lacked the resources to try each one individually and would conduct a brief screening process instead.

The mid- and upper-tier pirates, on the other hand, Charlot intended to hand over to Ban Lamorak. They would serve as a significant contribution to his military achievements.

Charlot planned to leave behind only a small, elite force to guard Saint Michael Island. If Herolf, the Golden Ram, returned safely, Charlot would immediately retreat. If other scenarios arose, he would adapt accordingly.

Charlot felt no regret about not conquering the first level of Saint Michael City. He had already gained immensely from this endeavor and dealt a heavy blow to the Golden Rams Fleet, fulfilling his “strategic objective.”

The pirates themselves didn’t care about the slaves or the lower-level crew members, viewing them as expendable. However, without these expendables, the city’s operations would grind to a halt.

Much like many large cities, having only well-dressed elites at the top would not suffice. Despite holding most of the wealth, they depended on the labor of the lower classes. Without them, the city would become a dead husk, incapable of functioning.

Herolf, the Golden Ram, likely didn’t understand this principle, nor did many people on the Old Continent.

High Priest Auguslatin, dressed in his flowing ceremonial robes, remarked with a smile, “For my share, there’s no need for tangible assets. Just transfer it to my account at the Savings Union in Strasbourg.”

Charlot returned the smile and said, “Why would such a trivial matter require the High Priest’s instructions? I’ll ensure it’s done flawlessly.”

As Charlot looked out at the empty sea, he prepared to leave with the High Priest. Suddenly, the distant roar of cannons broke the silence.

The two exchanged glances and decided to stay, waiting patiently. Before long, two fleets appeared on the horizon, locked in fierce battle.

One fleet was smaller, with just over twenty ships, but it boasted a magic alchemy warship. A tall, burly figure hovered above the ship, relying on the magical array onboard to fight against three Saint rank opponents simultaneously.

High Priest Auguslatin commented, “This is the true use of a magic alchemy warship. Its greatest function is as a mobile magic array. As long as Herolf doesn’t stray far from it, not even Zimourman could do much to him.”

After observing for a moment, Charlot asked, “High Priest, would you like to join the fight?”

The High Priest shook his head and replied, “Even with my involvement, it wouldn’t change the outcome.”

“Fortunately,” Charlot said, “Herolf’s ancient magic warship was stolen. If he still had it, he might even manage to turn the tide.”

Charlot couldn’t help but click his tongue in amazement. While he understood that the ancient magic warship was more formidable than ordinary magic alchemy warships, he couldn’t fathom

just how powerful it truly was. To him, the current magic alchemy warship already seemed incredible.

Since the High Priest showed no interest in the battle, Charlot didn't press the matter. Instead, he said, "According to your analysis, does this mean Senior Menielman is unlikely to win?"

The High Priest nodded. "Exactly."

Charlot sighed. "In that case, let's retreat as well."

"At the current pace, Herolf will return to Saint Michael Island in a few hours."

"If he still controls the island's secrets, Senior Menielman will have no choice but to withdraw."

The High Priest agreed with this assessment.

Although Charlot felt a tinge of regret, he understood when to fight and when to let go.

"Young people often make the mistake of giving up when they shouldn't or stubbornly persisting when it's pointless," he reflected.

"They think failure brings experience, but often, they're just wasting time. Those who succeed directly will leave them far behind."

"This world has no shortage of inspirational platitudes, but none of them can truly fill an empty stomach."

Charlot and High Priest Auguslatin led their "pirate rebels" away from Saint Michael Island before vanishing from sight.

A few hours later, Herolf, while fighting a retreating battle, suddenly sensed a surge of energy enveloping him. He raised his hands high, emitting a radiant light.

A towering figure, dozens of pimi tall, with wings on its back, materialized in the sky above Saint Michael Island. Herolf's aura climbed rapidly.

With just one glance, Menielman ordered a retreat.

The three Saint rank individuals dispersed. Even with the magic alchemy warship, Herolf dared not pursue them. After all, Menielman was still formidable. Without the warship's support, he had no confidence in defeating the Fars Empire's First Rose in a one-on-one duel.

Herolf declared coldly, "Menielman, as long as Saint Michael Island remains under my control, you'll never lay claim to it."

"Without a magic alchemy warship, even with two Saint rank allies, you'll never stand a chance against me."

Menielman's expression remained calm, but her eyes stayed fixed on Saint Michael Island rather than Herolf.

She couldn't help but wonder about Charlot—had he escaped safely?

Yet, she knew she couldn't continue the assault. Saint Michael Island's hidden powers were far beyond her current capabilities to overcome.

"I hope my junior is safe!"

Chapter 289: Too Despicable, Too Shameless

Herolf, the Golden Ram, was in a hurry to return to Saint Michael Island. His magical alchemical warship sailed swiftly, leaving the rest of his fleet far behind. Meanwhile, Menielman Soumet's fleet had already isolated Herolf's magical alchemical warship from the twenty-odd regular ships under his command. By the time Herolf realized what was happening, it was too late—under the pressure of three Saint-rank powerhouses, all the pirates aboard the twenty-some regular ships surrendered.

Witnessing this, Herolf hesitated to fight further, his courage failing him. He could only watch as Menielman took the twenty-plus ships and sailed away triumphantly.

Though Herolf felt heartache, he consoled himself with the thought that he still had his magical alchemical warship. Regular ships could always be recruited, and with Saint Michael Island's bustling harbor—filled with merchant ships, warships, and slave-trading vessels—his power could be quickly rebuilt.

However, as he cursed loudly from the skies, something felt off. Why was there no response from Saint Michael Island? According to his arrangements, a few ships should have been left behind, and the slave traders and underground merchants' vessels should also have shown up in a commotion. But this time, there was nothing.

Landing his warship, Herolf ordered it to head toward Saint Michael Island. When he finally returned to his base and stepped off the deck, he was stunned. The island was utterly deserted. The usually bustling docks, swarming with slaves and low-ranking pirates, were empty. Even the taverns, shops, and trading posts that should have been alive with activity were eerily silent.

Herolf's eyes widened in disbelief. He soared into the air, surveying the island layer by layer, his heart sinking with each sweep. He could not accept this reality—how had Saint Michael Island become a ghost town? For a moment, he even doubted whether he had landed in the wrong place. But the familiar buildings confirmed he was indeed on Saint Michael Island. Besides, he

had already summoned Saint Michael's Sacred Spirit, which had responded as usual. There could be no mistake.

It wasn't until Herolf reached the first level of Saint Michael City that he encountered his guards. Their expressions were complicated as they explained what had happened. They too had noticed Menielman's fleet separating Herolf's warship from the regular ships. But Herolf had ignored the plight of the regular ships, focusing solely on racing back to Saint Michael Island. This had allowed Menielman's fleet to ensnare and capture all of them.

Menielman's tactics weren't particularly sophisticated—he merely exploited Herolf's fear and urgency to return to Saint Michael Island. Menielman deliberately avoided heavy artillery strikes, keeping a controlled distance and maintaining pressure. Only after Herolf arrived at Saint Michael Island and activated Saint Michael's Sacred Spirit did Menielman fully close the net, successfully capturing the remaining twenty-some ships.

By now, there wasn't a single vessel left at Saint Michael Island. Compared to Menielman, Charlot Mecklenburg's methods had been even more ruthless.

Herolf's guards recounted how, while Herolf battled Menielman, Charlot had thoroughly plundered Saint Michael Island, leaving nothing behind. The pirates remarked that Menielman's victory was a textbook example of naval strategy, effortlessly toying with Herolf as though he were a child.

Menielman's plan was simple yet effective. By exploiting Herolf's panic and desperation to return to Saint Michael Island, he delayed his full assault until Herolf had tied his fate to the island. During this time, Herolf missed his chance to reverse the situation by turning his magical alchemical warship back to rescue the fleet. Paralyzed by his fear of leaving the Sacred Spirit's protection, Herolf could only watch as Menielman secured a decisive and lucrative victory.

With over twenty ships captured, Menielman not only gained substantial spoils but also acquired experienced sailors and skilled mariners. This made his fleet the largest in the Aggras Sea. Apart from lacking a magical alchemical warship, his fleet was now almost flawless.

The morale of Herolf's pirates was shattered.

First, Charlot Mecklenburg had robbed Saint Michael Island of everything valuable, and now Menielman had wiped out the remnants of the Golden Rams Fleet, leaving Herolf utterly destitute.

Had this been ancient China, such a scene would have called for a melodramatic display of ruler and ministers weeping bitterly together. But Herolf, a mere pirate king of the Old Continent, was left with only rage as his guards recounted Charlot's deeds on the island.

Charlot had committed these acts in his true identity, and Herolf immediately realized that the same shameless scoundrel who had stolen his Queen Bee ship was behind this.

Herolf's hands trembled with fury. He had previously inquired about the Queen Bee on Britannia Island but found no opportunity to reclaim it. After all, the ship was now under the protection of Princess May Guillaume, housed in the capital of the Ingrima Empire, where countless Saint-rank powerhouses resided. A pirate king like Herolf had no chance to act recklessly there. Despite his scheming, he had been forced to return empty-handed.

In the process, Herolf also learned more about Charlot Mecklenburg.

Rumors painted Charlot as a notorious figure from the Fars Empire, with scandalous tales about his exploits in Ingrima. The most infamous involved Charlot, a Fars envoy, meeting Princess May and becoming infatuated at first sight. His obsessive pursuit of the widowed princess drew widespread attention.

The young Ban Lamorak, son of Count Lamorak and one of Britannia's rising stars, challenged Charlot in a duel to defend the princess's honor. Witnessed by Emperor Alfred Guillaume, Charlot shamelessly used trickery to defeat the young lion.

Princess May had initially scorned Charlot, but his persistence wore her down. Upon learning of her fondness for novels, Charlot even masqueraded as a female author under the pseudonym Annie Mecklenburg, penning four volumes to win her favor.

The scandal of gifting a second-hand carriage only added to Charlot's reputation for absurdity.

Strangely, his most impressive feat—giving away the Queen Bee—was seldom discussed, as it earned him too much acclaim, which the Ingrima public disliked.

Despite his notorious reputation, Ingrima citizens viewed Charlot with an odd affection, akin to that reserved for a mischievous child. Much of this stemmed from Charlot's official role in Ingrima's administration, which made him "one of their own."

One rumor even eclipsed Charlot's infamy: a tale from Fars, where he was once chased naked down a street by a gentleman wielding a sword.

Herolf cursed furiously:

"Charlot, you're too despicable, too shameless! Is there nothing you won't do?"

"How could you do this to Saint Michael Island? This hatred, this enmity, is irreconcilable!"

"I swear I'll kill that wretched Charlot, that contemptible scoundrel!"

Charlot, of course, never anticipated the day when he would be cursed as despicable and shameless by a pirate king.

And yet, this was so very Charlot.

Chapter 290: I Still Trust My Junior

Menielman Soumet led the fleet back to port, accompanied by Tumisan and Sabastine, whose faces showed faint joy.

Tumisan had brought some members of the Orc Assassin Alliance to join Menielman, hoping that the Empire's First Rose could help him realize his ambitions.

Sabastine, a female pirate, had once been impressed by Zimourman Axel Robin's charisma and followed him when he pledged allegiance to the Fars Empire. At first, she was pleased—being a navy admiral in a great empire was far better than living the dangerous life of a pirate. However, Sabastine soon discovered that after Zimourman returned to Fars, he ignored the pirates who had submitted to him. Within the Imperial Navy, they were often suppressed and mistreated. True to her fiery nature, Sabastine rebelled, colluding with a group of pirates to break away from the Fars Empire Navy and return to piracy.

Unlike Tumisan, Sabastine had not willingly sought refuge. Menielman, who was also under pressure within the Imperial Navy, had no choice but to seek supplies independently. She discovered Sabastine's stronghold and attacked it. During a one-on-one duel, Menielman subdued Sabastine. For a pirate, loyalty to a master was inconsequential; Sabastine surrendered without hesitation.

After surrendering, Sabastine was concerned about Menielman's ability to sustain her forces. After all, even the Empire's First Rose was reduced to raiding pirates for resources. Her situation seemed dire.

But Sabastine didn't expect Menielman to suddenly acquire a large stockpile of supplies from Silver Dove Castle and later establish a stronghold in the small Ingrima Empire city of Cappadocia. This base was not only a commercial hub but also provided Menielman with nearly twenty ships, enabling her to rapidly expand her power and secure her footing in the Aggras Sea.

Sabastine thought this was already remarkable, but when she learned Menielman planned to attack Saint Michael Island, she almost thought the woman had gone mad. As a pirate, Sabastine knew better than anyone how formidable the Golden Rams Fleet was—far beyond Menielman's ability to conquer.

Yet...

Sabastine was astonished when Menielman enlisted a "person" to infiltrate Saint Michael Island, repeatedly providing critical intelligence, including the movement of the fearsome Queen Bee and the whereabouts of Herolf, leader of the Golden Rams Fleet. This information allowed Menielman to stage an ambush.

The intelligence stated that the Queen Bee had been stolen...

Sabastine dismissed this as nonsense—only a fool would believe it. However, this time, Herolf was indeed without the Queen Bee and accompanied only by a single alchemical warship. This allowed Menielman to catch him off guard.

With three Saint-ranked combatants joining forces, they pressured Herolf into a mistake, seizing over twenty of his ships, all of excellent quality.

Menielman's fleet now boasted a staggering 120 ships—crossing the hundred-ship threshold—and had become the largest fleet in the Aggras Sea outside the Five Great Empires, though it still lacked an alchemical warship.

Officially, Menielman remained a naval admiral of the Fars Empire.

Sabastine remarked, "Although we didn't severely wound Herolf, capturing his fleet should deter him from coveting Cappadocia."

"Still, we must be prepared in case he returns with the Queen Bee for a decisive battle."

"That ancient magical warship is truly ferocious."

"Not easy to deal with."

Menielman replied calmly, "He will not regain the Queen Bee."

Sabastine scoffed, "Your junior claims someone has taken the Queen Bee. Although his recent intelligence has been reliable, I still urge you not to believe such nonsense."

"You know as well as I do—so long as Herolf possesses the Golden Ring, no one can take the Queen Bee from him."

Menielman said softly, "I still trust my junior."

"Enough. Let's not argue."

"We're returning to Cappadocia to reorganize the fleet," Menielman continued. "Sabastine, it's time for you to command your own fleet again."

Hearing she would have her own fleet once more, Sabastine beamed, her concerns about this junior's intelligence completely forgotten.

Menielman had been exceedingly secretive about her junior's information, never revealing his identity even to Tumisan or Sabastine. This left Sabastine curious—who was this graduate of Sheffield University that Menielman trusted so deeply?

When the fleet reached Cappadocia's waters, the three Saint-ranked figures grew tense. Outside the city, they saw over a hundred ships—warships and merchant vessels alike—anchored in the port. Many of these ships were famous across the Seven Seas, often linked to slavers or the dark trade, and many had connections to the Golden Rams Fleet.

A sudden thought struck Sabastine: "Could this be a ploy by Herolf? Did he lure us into attacking him so he could dispatch the Queen Bee to seize Cappadocia?"

"Even if the fleet remains intact, losing our base would leave us without resupply."

"Herolf is truly a cunning old fox."

"But he really sacrificed over twenty ships..."

"Is this some kind of war strategy?"

As Sabastine tried to reconcile the contradictions in her logic, a figure radiating brilliant light floated into the sky. A gentle voice echoed above them: "I am High Priest Auguslatin. Menielman, you need not worry. These are the ships we brought back from Saint Michael Island. They are the spoils of war."

A large vessel sailed out of Cappadocia's harbor. Standing on its deck, Charlot Mecklenburg stood with hands on his hips, exuding joy. He had just calculated the spoils from this "raid," a fortune comparable to the wealth of 27 or 28 Barons Febollet combined.

Charlot wore a broad smile, not because he was reuniting with Menielman, but because of the vast fortune he had gained. "Ridiculous! I crossed worlds thinking I'd become a businessman. What business could compare to profiting from war?"

"Well, fine!"

"Writing novels is quite lucrative too. Emperor Alfred Guillaume even promised to grant me land in the New Continent once I deliver the Red Dragon Emperor manuscript!"

"I wonder how large that land will be."

With such thoughts, Charlot's face radiated happiness.

To Sabastine, his expression spoke volumes. Her earlier shock at learning the port's ships were captured from Saint Michael Island had transformed into a single thought: "No wonder she's the Empire's First Rose—her charm is truly irresistible."

"A man who can invite High Priest Auguslatin, demonstrate both intellect and courage, and capture over a hundred ships from Saint Michael Island, is no less extraordinary than Zimourman."

"And such an extraordinary man is her loyal follower."

“When will I have such a man chase after me?”

Chapter 291: Senior, This Stealth Mission Has Failed

“It’s a pity we couldn’t conquer the first level of Saint Michael City. Otherwise, the wealth obtained there might have exceeded that of the lower six levels combined.”

Charlot Mecklenburg's thoughts were interrupted by the arrival of High Priest Augustatin, who descended from above with a cheerful expression. The High Priest smiled and said, “Mr. Mecklenburg, congratulations are in order.”

Charlot returned the sentiment. “Likewise, congratulations to you!”

Augustatin chuckled knowingly. He was fully aware of what “likewise” implied. This infiltration of Saint Michael Island had indeed been a cause for mutual celebration!

Beside them, Ban Lamorak was visibly elated and joined in the cheerful exchange.

Charlot knew that, as a scion of a prominent noble family, Ban Lamorak might not care much for wealth. Therefore, Charlot allocated him a fleet, allowing him to select ten warships and crew members of his choosing.

Though Ban Lamorak was indifferent to money, he was deeply fixated on achieving greatness and surpassing his father. However, no matter his accomplishments, people would always compare him to the Count of Lamorak, concluding that he fell short of his father’s legacy.

Ban Lamorak didn’t openly challenge this judgment, but each time he encountered such situations, a rebellious seed would sprout in his heart. Charlot's gesture of giving him the fleet was akin to watering that seed.

With his own fleet, Ban Lamorak, as a noble scion, could now legally own and command a private naval force.

This act was like opening a vast door for Ban Lamorak—a door he’d never imagined. It was akin to showing a curious boy, unfamiliar with girls or technology, the dance section of a streaming platform.

Occasionally, Ban Lamorak would feel grateful to Aurora Soumet. If not for this woman, he wouldn’t have crossed paths with Charlot. Without his duel with Charlot and the resulting "solid friendship," Charlot wouldn’t have taken him along to assault Saint Michael Island.

And without participating in that assault, how could Ban Lamorak, at just twenty years old, have acquired a personal fleet of ten ships? Moreover, he could freely select seasoned sailors to man them. Most importantly, these sailors required no pay.

Charlot had promised the pirates that after five years of service, they would gain legal residency in Cappadocia, land ownership, and a free house. If they disliked island life, they could relocate to one of eleven cities in the Fars Empire. Listing all the cities would take too much space, so Charlot refrained.

For those unwilling to serve, the alternative was execution and their heads cast into the sea.

Hardly any pirate chose the second option!

When Charlot's fleet crossed paths with Menielman Soumet's, Charlot, accompanied by High Priest Auguslatin and Ban Lamorak, leaped aboard Menielman's flagship.

Charlot's fleet then merged with Menielman's.

Charlot said, "Senior, this stealth mission has failed."

"Circumstances changed, forcing an early return."

"Although I sent messages several times, I failed to locate the Golden Rams Fleet or establish contact with the rebel forces on Saint Michael Island. Worse, I couldn't find the detention site of the three Saint ranks."

"Hmm, it might be in the first level of Saint Michael City. Unfortunately, I couldn't conquer it due to the protective shield, and even High Priest Auguslatin was powerless against it."

High Priest Auguslatin coughed lightly and added, "Among those you brought back are all the members of the Golden Rams Fleet. Once captured, they immediately revealed their identities."

Charlot was stunned. "How did they end up captured? Without them on Saint Michael Island, they're useless as insiders. Should we send them back?"

Auguslatin's face beamed as he replied, "They have all expressed an unwavering refusal to return. In fact, they are eager to join us."

Menielman asked, "Did you bring back many others as well?"

Charlot replied, "Roughly eighty or ninety thousand. I freed all the slaves and recruited the lower-ranking pirates. Senior, you may select a group for your purposes, and I'll handle the rest. I have other plans for them."

Sabastine interjected skeptically, "Eighty or ninety thousand? That sounds like an exaggeration. Did you empty Saint Michael Island entirely?"

Charlot chuckled awkwardly, ready to offer a modest response, but his attention was caught by the tall and athletic Sabastine. Distracted by counting loot earlier, he hadn't noticed her presence. Suddenly, he blurted, "Wonder Woman?"

Realizing his mistake, he quickly corrected himself. However, Sabastine's elegant yet powerful demeanor, combined with her finely crafted leather armor, indeed reminded him of Gal Gadot's portrayal of the superhero.

Sabastine smiled faintly and said, "Wonder Woman? I like that nickname. Is it your gift for me?"

Sensing the Saint rank aura emanating from Sabastine, Charlot quickly replied, "If you like it, it would be my greatest honor."

Menielman, though somewhat skeptical of Charlot's claims, chose to support her junior. "Let's return to Cappadocia first."

When Charlot encountered Tumisan, he made no mention of the orc Saint rank scaring him previously. Instead, Charlot adopted a warm and respectful demeanor, greeting Tumisan as an elder and showing deference. This left the old leopardman slightly uncomfortable.

When the fleet finally reached Cappadocia, the sight was overwhelming: over two hundred ships, comprising both merchant vessels and refitted warships, made an awe-inspiring display.

Once ashore, Menielman confirmed Charlot's claims. Cappadocia was indeed bustling with new arrivals, even though Charlot had already sent a portion of them to Machubi. Naturally, Charlot ensured he reaped some benefits for himself in the process.

The freed slaves proved far more reliable than the pirates. Having endured slavery, they cherished the promise of a better life even more.

Menielman found herself too busy managing the integration of so many prisoners and ships to catch up with Charlot.

Meanwhile, Charlot idled for a few days while Menielman, Tumisan, and Sabastine remained occupied.

Even High Priest Auguslatin and Ban Lamorak realized that when it came to "building an army," the so-called "First Rose of the Empire" was far outclassed by her junior. Charlot's methods of subduing and recruiting were nothing short of an art form.

First, he dismantled any cliques, ensuring no small factions formed. Then, he divided and restructured groups, offering promises that served as motivation. To secure loyalty, he identified reliable individuals and rewarded them with excellent treatment. This incentivized others to work hard, striving for similar rewards.

Finally, Charlot developed a system of identity recognition, erasing divisions of region, race, nationality, and cultural differences. The results were extraordinary...

Chapter 292: A Simple Little Spell

Menielman only selected a portion of the strongest sailors. After all, she was part of the Imperial Navy of the Fars Empire and had no interest in notorious pirates, preferring instead to recruit her crew from among civilians.

Once Menielman finished her selection, Charlot Mecklenburg began his own "rapid recruitment."

In just three days, he completed a task that would typically take three Saint-rank individuals over ten continuous days of effort.

Not only Menielman, Tumisan, and Sabastine, but even the seasoned High Priest Auguslatin and Ban Lamorak, who were already familiar with Charlot, couldn't help but be astonished.

Charlot recruited everyone under the banner of the West Wind Knight Order. He also taught the Beast God Transformation—specifically the Redback Bear Warrior transformation—to a select group of "loyal and reliable" individuals.

Tumisan had once remarked: "The Beast God Transformation is a very simple little spell."

After delving into the technique, Charlot discovered that this spell was indeed a "very simple little spell."

Other transcendent paths could be pursued continuously because most extraordinary techniques originated from deities or, in rare cases, from great human philosophers such as Protagoras, or the creators of classical alchemy like Kabbalah or Hermes, who made significant contributions to the extraordinary field.

However, Tumisan was just an ordinary Saint-rank individual. The Beast God Transformation he created, despite its grandiose name, was merely a spell capable of advancing someone to the first level of transcendence.

For instance, a human could spend years painstakingly training in the Redback Bear transformation, finally mastering it and becoming a Redback Bear. This would allow them to ascend to the first level of transcendence.

But if they then trained in the Leopard transformation, spending years again to master it and becoming a Leopard, they would still only be at the first level of transcendence.

Even if they practiced multiple other Beast transformations, no matter how many forms they mastered, they would remain stuck at the first level.

Transforming from a beast back into a human...

In some rare cases, they might not even reach the first level of transcendence.

For this reason, the Beast God Transformation was rarely pursued in depth, even among the Orc Assassin Alliance. To these orc assassins, what value was there in turning into another orc? Transforming into a human might be somewhat useful for infiltrating human nations under a new identity.

But Charlot Mecklenburg turned this "little spell" into a symbol of unity. Regardless of one's background or origin, joining the West Wind Knight Order and practicing the Redback Bear Warrior transformation became a sign of loyalty and brotherhood.

It was akin to how, on Earth, people from diverse places might feel a connection simply because they studied together. Even decades after graduation, they could share a sense of camaraderie. Similarly, those who served in the military together forged bonds of unwavering friendship across vast distances.

Especially as the number of individuals practicing the Redback Bear Warrior transformation grew, some naturally summarized their experiences. Charlot consolidated these insights and openly shared them, making the cultivation of this secret technique more accessible and straightforward.

Early on, a few of the slaves who had followed Charlot in Saint Michael City and demonstrated decent talent were already capable of transforming a hand into a bear claw or growing patches of bear fur on their faces.

Even Tumisan hadn't anticipated Charlot using the technique he had created in this way.

Though the transformation didn't result in a full bear-man form and only slightly enhanced physical strength, it was enough to improve the physiques of the diverse soldiers under Charlot's command.

Anyone who showed even modest progress in their training would naturally feel a stronger sense of belonging.

It was like issuing a small membership badge; many would accept their identity as part of an organization based on this subtle psychological effect.

Menielman had always regarded Charlot as a younger alumnus who sought refuge with her. Though he had grown rapidly, she adhered to a saying from Earth: "When you've encountered too many brilliant people in your youth, it becomes harder to form friendships later in life."

She never felt that Charlot was truly "exceptional."

Could he possibly surpass that man?

Zimourman Axel Robin wasn't just extraordinary—he dominated an entire era.

He was destined to leave his name in the annals of history.

Count Victory Champagne Lamorak, with his overwhelming authority and undefeated record, wasn't remembered merely for being the world's greatest spearman or for his numerous breathtaking victories. His most notable label was that he was once considered Zimourman's equal.

But when Menielman looked at Charlot, it was as though she was observing another species altogether.

Charlot wasn't Zimourman, but he wasn't simply "not Zimourman."

It was like comparing someone who was unmatched in martial arts—undefeated across the land—to someone who wrote poetry.

Rapid transcendence was one thing; after all, Zimourman was a Saint at a young age.

But Charlot could write novels, something Zimourman never did.

While Zimourman used brute strength to become a Pirate King, Charlot lacked such physical might yet effortlessly looted Saint Michael Island.

Even Charlot himself wasn't aware that his status had subtly shifted in the eyes of the four Saint-rank individuals around him.

Menielman had come to recognize him. Tumisan now held him in respect. Sabastine had simply become Charlot's "friend."

As for High Priest Auguslatin? Charlot was determined to keep their interactions at arm's length.

After over half a month, Menielman finally reorganized her fleet. When she once again proposed attacking Saint Michael Island, there was no dissent within her ranks.

Previously, no one believed she could take Saint Michael Island.

Now, no one doubted that the Empire's First Rose could ascend her loyal Mount Michael.

Menielman spent several days holding military meetings to discuss the strategy for conquering Saint Michael Island. During these meetings, Charlot Mecklenburg remained silent.

Tumisan approached him, saying he had an important task to entrust to him.

Menielman sought Charlot's assistance as an infiltrator.

Charlot didn't think much of it; after all, infiltration wasn't particularly challenging.

As he pondered, Charlot began to consider when he might "return in glory." According to Emperor Alfred Guillaume's orders, he was supposed to be resisting the Black Phoenix Dynasty's forces in the South Seraph region. He had been away for quite some time; it was probably time to head back.

When Tumisan saw that multiple discussions had failed to yield an effective plan, he couldn't help but ask: "Charlot, if you were to devise a military strategy, how would you conquer Saint Michael?"

Charlot hadn't expected anyone to ask for his opinion.

After all, this was Menielman's fleet. While he might call her "senior," he was a civil servant in the army, not the navy, nor was he under Menielman's command. He had no desire to overstep his bounds.

An outsider meddling in others' affairs was always aggravating.

Besides, having spent so much time on Saint Michael Island, Charlot knew its strengths and weaknesses well. He didn't think it was particularly difficult to take the island.

So, he humbly replied: "Personally, I think the simplest method would work best."

"I don't know anything about complex military strategies!"

Chapter 293: Come Hit Me If You Dare

If Charlot Mecklenburg had said such a thing before going to Saint Michael Island, at least half the generals in Menielman Soumet's military council would have scoffed: "Idiot!"

Sabastine might even have pointed at Charlot's nose and bluntly declared, "Get this fool out of here."

But ever since Charlot returned from Saint Michael Island, not a single general under Menielman dared underestimate him.

Menielman had fought battle after battle, capturing over twenty ships—a feat worthy of study in the imperial military academies. Yet Charlot, without so much as raising a fuss, brought back over a hundred ships and seven or eight thousand people along with him.

Who would dare look down on him now?

What garnered the most respect from Menielman's generals was that Charlot handed over all those ships—leaving only ten for Ban Lamorak—and kept none for himself. All the rest were given to Menielman.

Still, no one believed Charlot could have achieved such a feat without complications.

Even though Herolf the Golden Ram had fallen into dire straits, this was an extraordinary world. The ingenious military strategies developed on Earth held no sway here.

Once, a so-called “military genius” in Byron attempted to use the Van Gogh Clan's **Infinite Mirror World** to move troops with unparalleled unpredictability. However, human Transcendents from the great empires united to ambush them, killing several Van Gogh Clan vampires. The Byron army was cut off, left with no escape or supplies, and met a horrific end.

It was, in the most literal sense, a total annihilation.

The stench of the burning vampire corpses was said to have carried all the way back to Byron's borders.

Even the Transcendent vampires who retreated found themselves hunted along the way by relentless human Transcendents. Not a single one made it back to Byron alive.

Though Herolf had lost all his ships and countless pirates, he was still a Saint-ranked Transcendent with a magical alchemical warship and the fortress-city of Saint Michael Island at his disposal. Even with the four Saint-ranked Transcendents Menielman could muster, defeating him in battle was no easy task.

In this extraordinary world, only Transcendents could determine the outcomes of such confrontations.

Charlot could feel all eyes on him, but he paid it little mind. He'd become hardened—he could even deliver a PowerPoint presentation before hundreds without breaking a sweat.

Calmly, Charlot said, “Before I left, I took all the grain stored on the bottom six levels of Saint Michael Island!”

“Right now, the first level of Saint Michael Island probably has only a small amount of provisions left. If it's just Herolf alone, even a little grain could last him. Besides, he can always fish.”

At the mention of fishing, Menielman's generals couldn't help but chuckle. The idea of a Saint fishing for his meals was indeed amusing.

Charlot continued, “But the first level also houses his personal guard. For them, even a one- or two-month survival would be pushing the limit.”

“Our current advantage lies in our fleet size. If we surround Saint Michael Island, we can simply wait for the pirates on the island to starve.”

“Just a bit of patience!”

“Victory is... well, just that simple.”

This plan was anything but novel, yet Menielman’s generals, accustomed to thinking within the constraints of this world, reacted as though they were hearing divine revelation. The very idea of such a siege was unprecedented—after all, the greatest strength of Transcendents wasn’t just their power but their unparalleled mobility, which made encirclement almost impossible.

But as Charlot explained the strategy, Menielman’s generals unanimously approved.

The most formidable asset Herolf had was not his magical alchemical warship but Saint Michael Island itself, a fortress-city that functioned as a colossal war machine.

Even a Saint needed food to survive!

Starving Herolf to death was undeniably easier than storming Saint Michael Island.

Menielman immediately made the call: “We attack Saint Michael Island at once. They must not be allowed to gather supplies.”

Tumisan smirked subtly, thinking to himself, *If we can take Saint Michael Island, I’ll be able to recruit even more assassins from the Orc Assassin Alliance.*

Sabastine, brimming with confidence, envisioned certain victory.

Ban Lamorak was eager, imagining the glory of participating in the siege of Saint Michael Island—a city with a storied history of never falling to direct assault except through betrayal. Adding his name to such a chapter of history would be an unparalleled honor, even greater than winning over Aurora Soumet.

The High Priest Auguslatin, meanwhile, remained unfazed. Charlot had been exceedingly generous, depositing a hefty **100,000 écus** into the priest’s account—a sum equivalent to eighteen or nineteen modest “small goals” on Earth.

The High Priest was content. He and Charlot now shared an “unshakable” friendship.

From Cappadocia to Saint Michael Island, it was only a day’s journey by sea.

Previously, Cappadocia, as a hub for the slave trade, had enjoyed a precarious peace with the Golden Rams Fleet. Later, the Golden Rams’ plans to attack the city fell through for various reasons. No one expected the tables to turn, with the seemingly weaker Cappadocia launching an assault on Saint Michael Island.

Menielman, an exceptional commander, calmly deployed her fleet to surround Saint Michael Island. The city was completely cut off.

Such a feat would have been impossible before. But now, with Menielman commanding an overwhelming number of ships and Saint Michael Island left with only a single magical alchemical warship, the situation had changed.

Upon learning of this, Herolf the Golden Ram was enraged. He leapt into the sky, preparing to deploy his magical alchemical warship. However, upon seeing four radiant figures rise to meet him, he swallowed his fury and remained over Saint Michael Island, hurling curses instead.

Menielman, as a noblewoman, and Auguslatin, as a High Priest, would not stoop to trading insults.

Tumisan, as an orc, had no such reservations but lacked the eloquence for verbal sparring. After a few clumsy exchanges, he grew furious and attempted to charge but was repelled by Saint Michael Island's guardian spirit.

Sabastine, ever bold, resorted to calling Herolf a pig and accusing him of eating dog feces—insults that, while vulgar, lacked sting.

Yet, in her characteristic cunning, Sabastine carried Charlot Mecklenburg aloft into the sky and let him do the talking.

Charlot, a refined man, wasn't skilled in verbal altercations. Weakly, he shouted, "Herolf the Golden Ram, your Queen Bee warship is mine! Your men and ships are mine! If you have the guts, come hit me!"

"If you don't, you're nothing but a puppy!"

What followed stunned every one of Menielman's generals.

Herolf the Golden Ram spewed a mouthful of blood skyward before crashing back to the ground.

Charlot touched his own forehead and, feeling it slightly soft, quickly pulled his hand back. "This must be a ploy to lure us in," he speculated.

"I'll just insult him a bit more!"

"Herolf! Come hit me!"

Though Saint-ranked, Herolf's fury had injured his very essence. As he struggled to stand, Charlot's next taunt reached his ears. His chest burned with rage, and he spewed another mouthful of blood.

Insults, after all, aren't about their vulgarity or elegance but about hitting the target where it truly hurts.

Charlot Mecklenburg had struck Herolf precisely where it hurt most.

Chapter 294: The Non-Cannibals

Sabastine paused momentarily, then reached out to pat Charlot Mecklenburg's head and said, "I don't think he's pretending."

Charlot replied, "A dignified Saint rank like him wouldn't change his expression even if cursed at for days and nights. My insults were so weak—how could they have driven him to vomit blood?"

Sabastine glanced into the distance. There was only a single ship, the empty port of Saint Michael, and the almost desolate city of Saint Michael. She remarked, "I don't think it's a matter of how strong or weak your words were—it's that your methods were too ruthless."

Sabastine couldn't help but feel sympathy for Herolf, the leader of the Golden Rams Fleet. After all, she had also suffered the loss of her base to Menielman Soumet. She even wondered if it was a trait of all graduates from Sheffield University. Could it be the university's motto?

Nearby, Tumisan, still nursing his grievance, silently used a secret orc technique to infiltrate Saint Michael City unnoticed.

Herolf had just managed to stand up when Tumisan struck, delivering a claw to the pirate leader's back.

Although Herolf had been struck twice in the chest by Charlot earlier, his battle-hardened experience as a Saint rank helped him react in time. A burst of water energy erupted from his back, and his figure wavered before vanishing.

Dozens of steps away, a turbulent jet of blue water surged forth, and Herolf reappeared within it.

Tumisan immediately realized his attack had missed. Although he extended his middle finger in time to land a follow-up hit, the force of this improvised strike couldn't compare to his initial, fully-charged claw.

Laughing loudly, Tumisan shot into the sky.

Herolf, though furious, could only give chase. However, Tumisan, a veteran leopard-man warrior, prided himself on his unmatched speed. Before Herolf could activate the island's spiritual defenses, Tumisan had already escaped their range.

Herolf reluctantly halted his pursuit, seeing four other Saint ranks watching him from afar, their predatory gazes unnerving. Suppressing his anger, he returned to Saint Michael Island.

Tumisan let out a deep sigh of regret. "If that old man's reaction had been just a bit slower, my *Ten Thousand Leopards' Heart-Piercing Claw* would have landed. That alone would've reduced his combat strength by at least ten percent."

Menielman smiled faintly. "Take your time. We've got patience."

Up in the air, Charlot was the only one among the group who wasn't flying independently. Instead, Sabastine carried him like a noblewoman with her pet. His discomfort was evident as he muttered under his breath, "Can you just let me down? I'm afraid of heights!"

Sabastine bore a slight resemblance to Wonder Woman, save for her notably fuller figure.

Charlot wasn't so much afraid of heights as he was feeling... overwhelmed by proximity.

He dared not act out of line toward a female Saint rank. He simply wanted to end this ordeal as quickly as possible.

Sabastine patted his head again and said, "You'll get used to it. I can carry you like this often if you'd like."

Charlot hurriedly declined, "That would be too much trouble."

Sabastine smiled gently. "No need to be so formal with me."

Meanwhile, High Priest Auguslatin thought to himself, *Charlot is someone best approached politely. When he drops the pretense of courtesy, he's truly ruthless. To this day, Baron Febollet still doesn't know where his wealth vanished to.*

Herolf, though trapped on Saint Michael Island, remained unconcerned. As a Saint rank, he had never experienced real hunger. Food had always been an afterthought for him, especially with Saint Michael Island being a bustling hub of trade. Supplies were abundant—until Charlot and Menielman looted the entire island, leaving it barren.

Initially, Herolf was too distraught to notice the dwindling provisions. But as time passed, the lack of food became apparent. Menielman neither attacked nor issued challenges. Instead, he simply maintained a blockade. Occasionally, passing ships were intercepted. Only vessels from the Fars Empire or the Ingrima Empire were allowed to pass—but even they were forbidden from approaching Saint Michael Island.

Apart from the remaining guards, the island still housed the alchemical warship crew, totaling two to three thousand people. The lower levels of Saint Michael City contained Herolf's amassed wealth, but precious little food. After over half a month of consumption, supplies were

nearly depleted. Now, after another seven or eight days of siege, Saint Michael Island was truly on the brink of famine.

Charlot, sometimes flying with Sabastine to observe from above, noticed something horrifying: the people of Saint Michael City had begun slaughtering pirates for sustenance.

As someone from Earth, he found the sight unbearable. Sabastine, however, seemed accustomed to it. She whispered, "So, you're also a non-cannibal?"

Charlot, taken aback, asked, "What do you mean by 'non-cannibal'?"

Sabastine pouted slightly and explained, "It's a philosophy originating among orcs, advocated by another leader of the Orc Assassin Alliance, Septimius. He believed that orcs should neither prey on their kind nor eat other intelligent species—including humans."

"He argued that orcs should adopt civility, morality, and so on. Anyway, it's a very rigid ideology. Tumisan happens to be a non-cannibal. He probably respects you somewhat because you show no prejudice against orcs, and because he adheres to that principle."

"Septimius and Tumisan want to make non-cannibalism a doctrine of the Orc Assassin Alliance, but not all the leaders support them."

"Some humans, including vampires, have embraced the concept. The most extreme adherents among vampires even insist on consuming only the purest blood, rejecting the practice of devouring life energy entirely."

Charlot was astonished. "There's such an enlightened movement?"

Sabastine remarked, "There are very few non-cannibals among pirates. I don't eat humans either, but I don't belong to their faction."

"I always thought non-cannibalism was a joke. It's just a set of ideas, and they don't even teach any extraordinary techniques. Who could truly remain faithful to it?"

Suddenly, Charlot felt a glimmer of hope for this world.

Looking back at the cruelty unfolding in Saint Michael City, he found it... slightly more bearable.

Not acceptable, but bearable.

Drawing a deep breath, he shouted, "Pirates of Saint Michael! If you escape, you can survive! Stay in Saint Michael City, and one day, the cruelest fate will befall you!"

"Herolf is not a good leader. He's finished!"

"Come! Join us!"

In response, Herolf hurled a knight's lance at him in fury.

The lance, however, traveled too far and was easily intercepted by Sabastine, who caught it with a playful grin. "Not bad. This is a fine weapon."

Charlot glanced at it, noted that it wasn't a transcendent weapon, and couldn't help but think of Zhuge Liang borrowing arrows with straw boats...

Chapter 295: Charlot Borrows a Sword

Charlot mustered all his strength and shouted, "Ha, good thing it's not a transcendent weapon, or I'd be dead for sure!"

Sabastine, momentarily stunned, hurriedly reminded him in a hushed voice, "Don't shout so loudly! Herolf the Golden Ram might hear us."

Charlot didn't respond, his gaze fixated intently on Saint Michael City.

After a moment, just as disappointment crept onto his face, a rapier streaked through the air toward him.

The sword's intent surged like a raging sea, locking firmly onto Charlot.

Faced with such a ferocious strike, Charlot showed no fear. Instead, he whistled excitedly, wrapped an arm around Sabastine, and opened the Mirror Gate.

The rapier was lightning-fast but still a fraction too slow. Charlot slipped away with ease, leaving the weapon to shoot past his previous position and vanish into the distance.

Tumisan, the old leopard-man, let out a long howl and dashed forward, displaying incredible agility. Just as the rapier was about to plunge into the sea, Tumisan reached out and snatched its hilt.

This wasn't just any transcendent rapier—it was a high-grade magical weapon. Its blade shimmered like the blue depths of the ocean, encircled by swirling magical elements. Truly a rare masterpiece.

Meanwhile, Charlot and Sabastine stepped quietly out of another mirror. Sabastine quickly caught on, and with a magician's flourish, produced a magical pistol. She fired several shots at Herolf the Golden Ram, who had risen into the air.

By Saint rank, anti-magic armor-piercing rounds no longer packed enough punch. Sabastine now used energy bullets, each with the power of her full strength, though they were exhausting to produce. Compressing even one bullet required a full day of focus, and she could only manage twenty or thirty per year. These bullets were precious treasures she rarely used.

But this time, Sabastine fired at least seven or eight shots—nearly five or six months' worth of effort—all directed at Herolf.

As she fired, Sabastine conjured a rapier in her hand and launched herself into the air, aiming straight for Herolf the Golden Ram.

Herolf, enraged, hurled his personal weapon and suddenly realized he had fallen into Charlot's trap. The crafty youth had outwitted him.

Regret consumed Herolf as he recalled the weapon he had just thrown—his personal armament for decades, a renowned transcendent weapon of the Seven Seas.

Unfortunately, Herolf didn't possess Bloodflame Aura and couldn't recall the weapon.

While Herolf hesitated about whether to retrieve his weapon, Sabastine's bullets struck him multiple times. Though he managed to shield himself with combat energy, each of these Saint-ranked attacks inflicted considerable damage.

This time, Herolf's fury wasn't feigned—Sabastine's magical pistol had dealt him serious internal injuries.

When Sabastine attacked with her rapier, Herolf mustered his combat energy, turbulent as the sea, and extended a single finger to counter the incoming blade. He successfully repelled the female pirate but exacerbated his own injuries, coughing up another mouthful of blood.

Forced to retreat, Herolf transformed into countless streams of water, scattering in all directions.

Sabastine, fully aware of Herolf's formidable strength—both as a combat energy master and a rare practitioner of marine magic—didn't pursue. Instead, she grabbed Charlot and soared skyward.

Herolf, suppressing his injuries, gave chase. The faint image of Saint Michael City's Holy Spirit began to manifest as he vowed not to let this pair of troublemakers escape—especially Charlot.

Charlot tried activating the Mirror Gate again but was horrified to find it unresponsive. He glanced skyward, unsure if the Holy Spirit's power or some secret technique of Herolf's was blocking it. All he could do was pray Sabastine was fast enough.

However, Sabastine, a pirate by trade, couldn't match the speed of Tumisan, who was an assassin. Though they stayed ahead of Herolf, they couldn't shake him off. The two sides exchanged bursts of energy mid-flight, their skirmish slowing Sabastine further.

Charlot abandoned thoughts of using the Red Viper. Though he had retrieved his equipment upon returning to Cappadocia, including a fingerless glove that served as a magical holster with dozens of anti-magic armor-piercing rounds, these tools were useless against someone like Herolf. Drawing a deep breath, he shouted, "Senior! Now's your chance—attack from behind!"

Herolf, though he sensed no danger, couldn't resist glancing back. Sabastine chuckled and used the opportunity to surge ahead, finally breaking free of Herolf's pursuit. By the time Herolf resumed the chase, it was too late—Menielman, Tumisan, and High Priest Augustatin had arrived to intercept.

When Herolf saw Tumisan holding the gleaming blue magical rapier, his composure crumbled. Roaring furiously, he lunged at the old leopard-man.

Tumisan, relying on unparalleled agility, evaded Herolf's attacks while wielding the newly acquired rapier. The two clashed for seven or eight exchanges before Tumisan, seeing the Holy Spirit fully materialize, retreated from its range of influence.

Herolf dared not pursue beyond the boundaries of Saint Michael City, left seething in futile rage. His roars echoed like those of a deep-sea leviathan, chilling to the core.

Now safe, Charlot shouted, "Herolf the Golden Ram! Come fight me!"

"If you don't, you're a cowardly mutt!"

Extending his hand, he glanced at Tumisan, who hesitated briefly before reluctantly handing over the rapier. Charlot held the blade aloft and waved it tauntingly. "Your rapier is in my hands! Want it back?"

"Come and get it!"

Herolf, unable to contain himself, spat blood in fury. Clutching his chest to stabilize his worsening injuries, he stormed back to Saint Michael Island.

Charlot continued hurling provocations to no avail. Finally, noticing the strange looks on the faces of Menielman, Tumisan, Sabastine, and Augustatin, he scratched his head and muttered, "I told you, I'm no good at taunting."

"Besides, now that Herolf's prepared, this trick won't work anymore."

High Priest Augustatin remarked, "I've never seen someone insult their way to acquiring a high-grade magical rapier. This is a first."

Tumisan, the old leopard-man, couldn't help but ask, "Will you sell the rapier?"

Charlot raised the weapon and replied, "Let me see if I can use it."

Though Charlot possessed many transcendent weapons, high-grade ones were rare. Apart from the Red Viper, he typically wielded the Blood Rose. Occasionally, he used the Unicorn Griffon, but he wasn't keen on replacing his favored gear.

Chapter 296: Treading the Seas

Sabastine said, "The sword wielded by the Golden Ram Herolf, known as *Treading the Seas*, is renowned across the Seven Seas."

"This magical rapier has only one attribute: controlling seawater!"

"The higher the transcendent rank of the wielder, the greater the amount of seawater they can control."

"With Herolf's transcendent rank, a single thrust of this sword carries the force of several giant whales. Even among the Saint rank, few can withstand such power."

"We've faced him several times. With *Treading the Seas* in his hand and the support of his ancient magical warship, he could even hold his own in a one-against-three battle. However, when using another alchemical warship, his advantage diminishes significantly."

"Such a unique power exists?"

Charlot was greatly intrigued. He activated *Blood Glory* and swung *Treading the Seas*. As expected, he felt an immense surge of seawater, as if millions of tons were flooding forth, their force as immovable as a mountain. However, he quickly noticed that the magical rapier rejected *Blood Glory*. When he switched to *Stardust Battle Energy*, the weapon still didn't respond. Charlot then tried *Bloodflame Aura*, but again, there was no effect. Disappointment welled in his heart.

The attributes of transcendent weapons must align with their users to unleash their full power. Clearly, *Treading the Seas* was best suited to ocean-based combat energy, which was incompatible with the vampiric powers Charlot had cultivated.

He turned to Menielman and asked, "Senior, do you need a weapon?"

Menielman replied calmly, "I already have *Dark Moon*, which is on par with *Treading the Seas* in quality."

Sabastine chuckled and said, "No need to ask me. I'm not particularly skilled in swordsmanship. Besides, I'm short on funds right now and wouldn't consider buying a high-grade transcendent weapon that I can't make full use of."

In truth, Sabastine omitted a key detail: Menielman had recently raided her hideout, and her entire fortune had been confiscated by this so-called “First Rose of the Empire.” Sabastine was not merely short on funds—she was arguably the poorest Saint rank contender in history.

Being someone who valued her pride, Sabastine would never admit to such a predicament. Nor did she expect Charlot to gift the weapon outright; she knew their relationship wasn’t that close.

Charlot didn’t bother asking High Priest Auguslatin if he wanted it. The High Priest, having recently come into a large fortune, could undoubtedly afford to buy the magical rapier. However, Auguslatin didn’t practice the knightly arts and rarely engaged in melee combat, so the weapon would be wasted in his hands, serving only as a collectible.

If it was going to be a collector’s item, Charlot figured he might as well keep it himself. He wasn’t strapped for cash, and while a high-grade magical rapier was expensive, he could afford to leave it idle.

Charlot’s modern sensibilities told him the team needed to secure Saint Michael Island as soon as possible to avoid unnecessary delays. Keeping *Treading the Seas* for himself was wasteful—it would be better to hand it to a Saint rank ally who could maximize its combat value.

He was well aware that Menielman didn’t need it; the fact that she owned *Dark Moon* was no secret. Charlot wasn’t trying to curry favor with her or barter for a better deal.

Menielman had once mentioned that Tumisan could help resolve the Agmirlas crisis. But wouldn’t it be better to have someone seek his help rather than the other way around?

Charlot hadn’t expected Sabastine to interject with a sly remark, which served as the perfect setup. Tumisan, itching with anticipation, immediately declared, “*Treading the Seas* matches my *Bloodfire Combat Energy* perfectly!”

Charlot mused aloud, “Actually, I’ve also cultivated *Bloodfire Combat Energy*.”

“When I was undercover in Saint Michael City, I couldn’t reveal my true identity. Out of sheer boredom, I trained in *Bloodfire Combat Energy*, and I’ve since advanced to the first transcendent rank.”

Tumisan took a deep breath and said, “I’m willing to trade something for it.”

Charlot smiled faintly, remaining silent. Tumisan continued, “Agmirlas’s sinister power grants control over certain labyrinth forces but comes with significant risks. Ultimately, it sends those who wield it straight into Agmirlas’s clutches.”

“I once explored the New Continent and was fascinated by Agmirlas’s power. During my journey, I visited over a dozen Saint rank experts and uncovered a secret.”

“If one can breach the labyrinth’s fourth layer, they can break free from the trap Agmirlas has set, escaping His control to truly master the labyrinth’s power.”

“I have a scroll of *Agmirlas’s Labyrinth*. Its original owner is long deceased, and you can use it to forcibly breach the labyrinth’s limits!”

Charlot was thrilled but kept his expression neutral. “I see. But I already have a scroll. A ‘friend’ gave me one as a gift.” He feigned a casual demeanor, as if such a “friend” truly existed.

Tumisan gritted his teeth and said, “Two scrolls! One is sixteen pages, and the other is nine pages—both are incredibly rare treasures. On the New Continent, a single scroll rivals the value of a high-grade magical rapier.”

Charlot recalled how, at the Duchess of Mesu’s auction, a painting depicting the true visage of an overseas evil god was purchased by Yanmills for 507 écus. That ancient painting contained forty-six pages of *Agmirlas’s Labyrinth*.

The value of a high-grade transcendent weapon was at least ten times higher. When Sean Connor of the Blue Magpie Workshop offered the *Red Viper* and *Blue Viper* for sale, their combined price was 16,000 écus. Though the final deal included a baron’s blood core and 5,500 écus, the total value exceeded one billion in modern currency.

Clearly, two scrolls of *Agmirlas’s Labyrinth* weren’t worth a high-grade magical rapier.

Yet Charlot trusted Tumisan wasn’t trying to swindle him. The probability of such deceit was low, indicating one thing: on the New Continent, the value of *Agmirlas’s Labyrinth* scrolls far exceeded that of ancient paintings depicting evil gods.

Charlot shook his head but then had a sudden idea. “Do you have any paintings of Agmirlas’s true visage?”

Tumisan replied, “I do—over a dozen. But they aren’t valuable.”

“An ancient painting of a labyrinth god typically converts into just one or two pages of *Agmirlas’s Labyrinth*.”

Charlot decisively said, “Include those paintings.”

Tumisan agreed easily. He had once attempted to bridge the Old and New Continents by establishing a labyrinth network for convenient travel, but the endeavor failed. To date, no one had succeeded. He had since lost interest in the project.

Transforming a city into a labyrinth required extraordinarily stringent conditions, including complete control over the city. Even a Saint rank expert couldn’t achieve such a feat casually.

Even if a city were conquered and labyrinthized, the effect would fade without the master’s frequent presence. If others took over, the labyrinthization would vanish entirely...

In short, maintaining a labyrinth was incredibly challenging.

Charlot remained unaware of these difficulties because, from the start, he had never faced such issues.

Chapter 297: Candidate for the Evil God

Tumisan was elated after acquiring Daohai.

The Orc Assassin Alliance was quite profitable, and the old leopard-man's wealth was substantial. However, extraordinary weapons like this were largely dependent on luck. Tumisan had traveled across the New Continent and the Old Continent, visiting countless places, yet he had never come across a weapon that suited him.

As a member of the leopard-man race, Tumisan possessed unparalleled speed but lacked strength. With Daohai, he could compensate for this weakness and elevate his combat prowess to the next level.

After completing the transaction, Tumisan dove into the deep sea to familiarize himself with his newly acquired weapon.

Charlot Mecklenburg also secured a ship and prepared to study the Agmirlas Labyrinth he had obtained, as well as the ancient paintings depicting the true visage of the Labyrinth God. Initially, he had planned to ask Menielman for assistance. After all, the only method he knew to absorb these ancient paintings was to destroy them and let his Diary handle the rest.

However, Sabastine came aboard for a visit. Noticing Charlot spreading out two copies of Agmirlas Labyrinth and a dozen ancient paintings, she couldn't help but ask, "What kind of labyrinth transformation are you attempting here? We're on a ship surrounded by the vast ocean, with no city nearby to transform into a labyrinth."

Charlot smiled faintly and replied, "I want to conduct an experiment, but I need a Saint-level guardian. Would you mind lending me a hand, Sabastine?"

Initially, he had intended to seek out Menielman, but with Sabastine, a Saint-level pirate, conveniently showing up, how could he not make use of her?

Sabastine had sought Charlot out for a different reason. She had always found him intriguing and wanted to strengthen their relationship. It seemed helping him wasn't a bad idea.

Smiling, she said, "I can help! But when we visit Strasbourg, you'll have to treat me to a meal."

Charlot beamed and responded, "Not a problem at all."

"I want to test whether the power of the Labyrinth God can achieve something else. It might get dangerous, so if it does, be ready to save me."

Sabastine sat cross-legged, drew her rapier, and set it beside her. With a smile, she assured him, "No problem at all."

With her reassurance, Charlot felt confident. He picked up the nine-page Agmirlas Labyrinth, tore out three pages, and pressed them against his forehead.

Sabastine was slightly surprised and thought to herself, "The Agmirlas Labyrinth isn't rare in the New Continent, but I've only ever heard of it being used to labyrinthify a city. What is Charlot trying to do?"

Charlot, recalling Tumisan's words, wasn't thinking about labyrinthifying a city. Instead, he wanted to see if it could enhance his Infinite Mirror World.

As the three pages of the Agmirlas Labyrinth touched his forehead, Charlot indeed felt a sinister power invading his body. He activated Blood Glory, merging it with the new power. Countless silver runes emerged, forming a third mirror.

Before he could fully comprehend his newly acquired ability, an all-too-familiar sensation struck him.

Charlot faintly sensed a labyrinth passage opening. At its end, an unsettling aura loomed, accompanied by the faint growls of monsters. The rampaging power of the Labyrinth God was separated from the world by a flimsy barrier, ready to burst through.

Without hesitation, Charlot tore off three more pages from the Agmirlas Labyrinth, but nothing happened. He tore off another two, still no response. Frustrated, he pressed the last page to his forehead, but still, there was no reaction.

Gritting his teeth, he took the sixteen-page copy of Agmirlas Labyrinth and pressed all its pages to his forehead.

This time, four pages disappeared, and the Labyrinth God's power broke through the barriers of time and space, surging into Charlot's body. Countless silver runes appeared once more, forming a fourth mirror within the Blood Glory vortex in his eyes.

As this fourth mirror took shape, Charlot sensed the birth of a new ability—Mirror Palace!

This new ability allowed him to conjure four magical mirrors and create a small labyrinth, albeit with limited range. It could, at most, encompass a building the size of 58 Elysée Avenue, but it had the advantage of instant formation, providing the perfect battlefield.

Harnessing the power of the Mirror Palace, Charlot roared and activated Infinite Mirror World, forcibly halting the infusion of the Labyrinth God's power and shutting the mysterious passage.

Charlot even heard the angry roars of the Labyrinth God from the other side. Just a little more, and Agmirlas might have materialized in Saint Michael Island.

Beads of cold sweat covered Charlot's forehead. The situation had been dangerously close.

Charlot hadn't realized how perilous this endeavor would be. He had assumed Sabastine would at least be able to rescue him if things went awry.

With the passage closed, Charlot no longer heard Agmirlas' roars, but he noticed the twelve remaining pages of Agmirlas Labyrinth had also vanished. His diary grew warm, transmitting a thought:

Charlot Mecklenburg has forcibly closed the passage to the true Agmirlas Labyrinth, severing ties with the Labyrinth God Agmirlas and officially becoming a candidate for an Evil God.

To proceed, you must create and master ninety-nine labyrinths and travel to the Aggras Sea to challenge Agmirlas. Failure to complete ninety-nine labyrinths within the allotted time will result in your soul being devoured by Agmirlas Labyrinth.

Failure to challenge Agmirlas will lead to forced entry into the Evil God Arena.

Countdown: 133 days, 2 hours, 9 minutes, and 17 seconds.

"Candidate for an Evil God?"

"How did I end up as a candidate for an Evil God?"

"What exactly did Tumisan teach me?"

"Sure, I closed the passage to the true Agmirlas Labyrinth, but this result..."

"Doesn't seem like a great deal!"

For a brief moment, Charlot considered confronting Tumisan, but realizing he was now an Evil God candidate, he decided against it. This enormous secret could not be revealed. If it became known, followers of the Nine Orthodox Gods would see him as an enemy.

Charlot would no longer have a place in the Four Great Empires unless he went to Byron, the land of the vampires who didn't worship the Orthodox Gods.

However, Charlot was quite comfortable in Fars and Ingrima and had no desire to go to Byron. Moreover, a practitioner of Blood Glory entering the vampire domain would essentially be courting death.

Charlot retrieved his diary and flipped to the Agmirlas Labyrinth section, noticing it had gained twelve more pages.

For now, Charlot decided not to tempt fate. He stored the remaining ancient paintings and thanked Sabastine.

Sabastine seemed puzzled. "You haven't done anything yet!"

"What did you feel just now?" Charlot asked.

Sabastine hesitated before replying softly, "It's a bit odd. Thinking back, it feels like you pressed the two copies of Agmirlas Labyrinth against your forehead and disappeared for a moment..."

"But it's like something interrupted my memory. I can't recall that moment clearly."

"What on earth were you doing?"

"The Agmirlas Labyrinth isn't supposed to be this sinister."

Charlot shrugged. "I have no idea. You know I've chosen Blood Glory. Once, I used Agmirlas Labyrinth to practice and accidentally unlocked a new Blood Glory vortex, acquiring the Van Gogh Clan inheritance."

Sabastine was shocked. "So that's how you gained Infinite Mirror World? I mentioned it to Menielman, and she told me not to ask."

"I thought you had some dealings with Byron."

Charlot smiled wryly, thinking to himself, "Well, that's partially true. I learned the Arthur Clan scroll from Baron Leo and the Arsilo Family's secret techniques from Julian, but I have no ties to the Van Gogh Clan."

Such matters were among Charlot's deepest secrets. He hadn't even told Annie, much less Sabastine.

...

Chapter 298: The Forbidden Code

The Magical Alchemy Warship had no strict requirement that only a golden ring could operate it.

Whoever became the captain could control it effortlessly. Especially since this vessel was constructed by the Fars Empire, its basic concepts had been taught in imperial universities to prepare some students for potential naval assignments after graduation. This way, they could directly participate in military operations without additional training.

Universities on the Old Continent prioritized practical education. Graduates were expected to be workforce-ready, capable of immediately stepping into various roles. Useless subjects and skills were relegated to electives, leaving students to explore them as personal interests.

That Magical Alchemy Warship was docked in the harbor of Saint Michael Island. If Charlot could seize it before Herolf and his Golden Rams Fleet, there was a 70 to 80 percent chance that Sabastine could take control of it.

Sabastine was stunned by the idea. She couldn't fathom how Charlot's mind worked. While Herolf charged towards them with overwhelming force, Charlot's first thought wasn't about how to fend him off but instead, "This is our chance! Let's try stealing that Magical Alchemy Warship when he gets here."

The audacity of the plan was undeniable, though its slim feasibility bordered on madness.

Charlot silently calculated distances and shouted at Sabastine, "We're taking to the skies. Have the Wellington Steak dive immediately!"

Sabastine obeyed without hesitation. Grabbing Charlot, she launched skyward, diverting all of Herolf's attention. The Blue Whale, realizing it couldn't withstand a single casual strike from a Saint, swished its tail and dived into the sea.

Charlot calculated the optimal distance and then wrapped his arms around Sabastine. Activating the Infinite Mirror World, he stepped through the Mirror Spirit's portal and emerged from a mirror somewhere else on Saint Michael Island.

Without needing further instruction, Sabastine transformed into a streak of light and sped toward the harbor, heading straight for the docked Magical Alchemy Warship.

Charlot fully activated Swiftstep Technique $\times 10$, moving as fast as lightning, racing towards the harbor. The lower levels of Saint Michael City were now almost deserted, and Charlot encountered no obstacles. When he arrived at the harbor and saw the warship anchored quietly, his heart surged with joy. Running across the water's surface, he leaped onto the vessel.

Although Herolf had left a crew to guard the Magical Alchemy Warship, these pirates were no match for a female Saint. By the time Charlot boarded the ship, Sabastine had already taken care of most of them. Charlot didn't waste any time—he didn't even check whether Herolf was already on his way. Every second counted.

Instead of storming into the cabin, Charlot immediately located the control room. Peering through the large magic crystal window at the front, he roughly extended his hand and grabbed the Mirror Spirit, which let out a silent scream before disintegrating into ash.

The control room's large magic crystal glass window was a fortunate design. If there had been multiple smaller windows, Charlot would have had to waste more effort. After eliminating the Mirror Spirit, Charlot climbed through the window, entering the control room and leaping onto the Magical Alchemy Warship's console.

Almost all Magical Alchemy Warships required a “Forbidden Code” to obtain operating permissions. Once the Forbidden Code was entered and identity verification completed, the ship’s full controls would be unlocked.

This particular warship originally belonged to the Fars Empire, meaning its initial Forbidden Code followed the empire’s universal system.

Herolf must have acquired the Forbidden Code to seize control of this warship.

Charlot, however, had no idea what the warship’s original Forbidden Code was, nor did he know whether Herolf had changed it. Yet, his prior profession in his past life as a mathematics teacher...

Well, that was irrelevant. No mathematical knowledge from Earth could crack Fars’ Forbidden Code.

What Charlot relied on was the Infinite Mirror World, which could reflect the external world and even record certain events and people to a limited extent. Charlot knew that the Infinite Mirror World could only reflect individuals at or below his rank, as it was essentially an extension of his own abilities. Naturally, Herolf, a Saint, wouldn’t appear in the reflection.

Charlot didn’t expect to rely on Herolf. Inside the control room’s crystal window, countless figures had come and gone, and Charlot quickly locked onto a Fars military officer—the ship’s original captain.

Soon, Charlot found the moment when the former captain had entered the Forbidden Code.

Charlot’s hands flew across the console as he re-entered the code. Though he could hear the thunderous roar of combat energy explosions outside, he ignored them and focused entirely on completing his task.

Once the code was fully entered, Charlot’s eyes lit up. The warship began verifying his identity. He activated Blood Glory, waiting for the warship to recognize its new owner.

The enormous alchemical masterpiece began roaring to life, initiating the process to validate its new master.

In the skies above, Sabastine fiercely battled Herolf. Though her strength was far inferior, Herolf had suffered numerous injuries recently, leveling the playing field. Their clash ended in a stalemate.

Herolf was both furious and alarmed. He hadn’t expected Charlot to be so audacious as to target his Magical Alchemy Warship. Still, he refused to believe Charlot could actually take control of it. Even as he engaged Sabastine, he attempted to activate the Saint Michael Spirit aboard the warship.

To his shock, every attempt to start the warship failed.

“What’s happening?”

“Could that despicable, shameless scoundrel have somehow learned the Forbidden Code? Impossible! I killed every Fars military officer who knew it!”

Herolf tried multiple times to storm the cabin, but Sabastine held him back at the cost of great effort. Silently, she cursed, “Charlot, you’d better succeed with this ship. If not, we’re doomed.”

The figure of the Saint Michael Spirit began to manifest, preparing to unleash an earth-shattering blow.

Sabastine knew she couldn’t withstand such an attack. Not the Saint Michael Spirit, not even the Magical Alchemy Warship if Herolf managed to regain control. This was a fight they couldn’t afford to lose.

Herolf tried again to activate the warship. This time, the vessel responded, rumbling to life...

Herolf’s joy was palpable as he shouted, “This time, you two will die by my hand!”

Chapter 2900: From Today Onward, It Shall Be Named the Imperial Rose

The magical alchemy array on the alchemical warship began to hum as it activated.

Herolf, the Golden Ram, roared arrogantly into the fray.

Sabastine steadied herself, her focus unwavering. Though she knew their current situation was dire, surrender was not in her nature. The infamous pirate queen, who had once dominated the Seven Seas, was no stranger to adversity. Even though she had crossed paths with exceptional figures like Zimourman and Menielman, suffering defeat at every turn, her resolute spirit remained unbroken.

After all, it was this same defiant will that had led her to defect from the Fars Empire’s navy and return to the life of a pirate queen.

But the radiant glow of the magical array did not descend upon Herolf as expected. Instead, it enveloped Sabastine.

Herolf froze in surprise, while Sabastine let out a long, triumphant howl. With the magic-enhanced rapier in her hand, she unleashed an unprecedented and devastating flurry of attacks.

Herolf managed to block three strikes but could not evade the fourth. Sabastine's blade, strengthened by the magical array, pierced him. Yet, the veteran pirate leader was no ordinary foe. Even while wounded, he soared into the skies, summoning the projection of Saint Michael, whose sacred light illuminated half the heavens.

Charlot, observing from the magical alchemical warship, knew that even such a formidable vessel stood no chance against the Saint Spirit. He had already ordered the warship to advance toward Menielman's flagship, aiming to create enough distance for the Saint Spirit's power to wane. Outside its divine influence, they would be safe.

Menielman, Tumisan, and High Priest Auguslatin had been closely monitoring the battle. Fearing for Sabastine's life against Herolf, they soared into the sky to assist.

As they approached, the trio saw the alchemical warship's magical array activate. A chill ran through them—they assumed Sabastine was doomed. Yet, to their astonishment, the array's power aligned with her instead.

Tumisan couldn't help but exclaim, "How did they manage to seize that alchemical warship?"

"This must be divine intervention!" replied High Priest Auguslatin.

The old Leopardman warrior snorted coldly, brandishing the enchanted rapier *Sea Strider*, and surged ahead.

Charlot, still maneuvering the alchemical warship, lamented his inability to simultaneously control the ship's alchemical cannons. He had no choice but to concentrate on providing support to Sabastine.

The Saint Spirit of Michael descended, its wings unfolding to form a forcefield that immobilized the alchemical warship. Without the warship's assistance, Sabastine would not last more than a minute. Even as she fought with everything she had, she silently cursed, *Charlot is even bolder than Zimourman ever was. He... he might even dare to summon an Evil God.*

The Leopardman surged forward, *Sea Strider* glowing with water magic. Its blade was imbued with an overwhelming oceanic power, combining both weight and speed.

Even Herolf had to retreat momentarily. His heart ached as he saw the weapon—his former enchanted rapier. To this day, he could not fathom what madness had possessed him to hurl it in an attempt to kill Charlot. A high-tier enchanted rapier for Charlot? It was utterly unworthy.

With Tumisan's help, Sabastine found a brief reprieve. Gaining her footing, she extended her hands, and an invisible arrow shot forth, striking Herolf's defensive battle energy.

Sabastine refrained from using energy bullets—they were too precious to waste. Regardless of rank, transcendent beings never fought with full power at every turn. Energy conservation was a key principle of all extraordinary combat. Efficiency—achieving the greatest results with the least expenditure—defined the essence of a battle among transcendent beings.

Full-power attacks were rare, typically reserved for three to five crucial moments in a battle, and even then required long recovery periods. While energy bullets didn't necessitate recovery time, they involved significant energy loss during compression. For a transcendent, crafting an energy bullet equivalent to their full-power strike required nearly a full day's effort.

Sabastine, lacking an abundance of such bullets and aware that her attacks couldn't fatally wound Herolf, refrained from wasting resources. This time, with reinforcements arriving, the pirate queen was unwilling to deplete her reserves.

Though skilled with the rapier and proficient in magical firearms, Sabastine's true strength lay in her archery. Her technique, *Ethereal Bow*, paired with her enchanted arrows, represented her primary combat style.

Every invisible arrow Sabastine released carried one or more magical effects. If her target couldn't resist the magic, the consequences were severe.

Herolf, well aware of her capabilities, remained cautious. As one of the Seven Seas' most notorious pirates, Sabastine was a force to be reckoned with. Before Zimourman's rise, both Herolf and Sabastine were ranked among the top ten pirates.

Though Sabastine's rank was slightly lower than Herolf's, her abilities demanded respect.

Activating his oceanic battle energy, Herolf dispersed the magic of Sabastine's arrows. However, this defensive maneuver consumed an additional thirty percent of his energy.

Sabastine's strategy was clear: wear down Herolf's battle energy. She knew full well that this terrifying pirate, a master of both magic and combat energy, was far too powerful.

Among the four Saint-rank fighters, only Menielman could hold his own against Herolf. Tumisan, Sabastine, and High Priest Auguslatin were no match for him individually.

Sabastine's relentless barrage of magical arrows, combined with Tumisan's extraordinary agility and the unyielding force of *Sea Strider*, allowed them to gain a slight advantage. Even the forcefield created by the Saint Spirit Michael seemed unable to constrain the old Leopardman.

As the skirmish continued, Menielman and High Priest Auguslatin arrived at the battlefield.

Meanwhile, Charlot focused solely on navigating the alchemical warship. With the Saint-rank fighters sharing the burden of the Saint Spirit's suppression, the warship—powered by its formidable engines—began to inch forward.

After half an hour of relentless effort, Charlot suddenly felt the ship lighten. Overjoyed, he shouted in triumph. Moments later, Menielman, Tumisan, High Priest Auguslatin, and Sabastine descended onto the deck.

Charlot emerged from the cabin with calm poise, offering a graceful imperial salute. “Senior Menielman, please allow me to present you with a small surprise.”

“A magical alchemical warship, crafted over twenty years by the Fars Empire’s finest artisans, once known as the Black Moon.”

“Forget its former name,” Charlot declared. “From today onward, and for all eternity, it shall be called the Imperial Rose.”

Chapter 300: Charlot Mecklenburg, You Let Your Guard Down

Menielman Soumet’s heart was filled with surging emotions. When she was sent to the Imperial Navy, she knew it would be a challenging journey. She was also aware that, due to Zimourman Axel Robin, she had become a thorn in the side of many noble families who had lost their sons. Menielman had mentally prepared herself for the difficulties ahead.

But she had never imagined that her dire situation would unexpectedly turn around because of a casual favor she had offered to a junior schoolmate.

Back then, when Charlot Mecklenburg told her he was about to be promoted, Menielman knew he was lying. Nevertheless, she gave him a small opportunity. As the First Rose of the Empire, she didn’t expect much in return for this modest gesture of kindness.

At most, he would be another young admirer.

Menielman had never lacked admirers.

But she never expected to encounter a young man who could rival Zimourman Axel Robin—an individual so exceptional that even the harshest standards could not find fault in him.

When Charlot said, “Menielman, senior sister, please allow me to present you with a little surprise,” she momentarily thought she was looking at someone she never wanted to see again—that man.

Charlot's eyes lacked Zimourman's rebellious arrogance but were equally filled with wisdom and confidence. At times, there was even a subtle trace of aloof indifference, as though nothing in the world could truly faze him.

This was the hallmark of a transmigrator.

Every transmigrator carried an innate psychological advantage over the "natives," regardless of whether the latter were heroes, famed beauties, kings, or even evil gods.

Menielman could not comprehend this transcendent "indifference" that exceeded earthly bounds.

Charlot casually offered her a magical alchemical warship.

It wasn't for show, nor was it to flaunt his elegance—he genuinely didn't care about the ship.

Even Zimourman Axel Robin, in his heyday, might not have been capable of such disregard.

Menielman took a deep breath, suppressing her emotions with reason, and said, "I do need it. Thank you, my dear junior."

Charlot smiled faintly and was about to hand over the ship's magical restriction codes when Menielman added with a subtle air, "But are you sure you want to name it *Imperial Rose*?"

"Not *Queen Anne*?"

Charlot was instantly flustered.

He awkwardly replied, "Senior sister, you must be joking."

Charlot had, indeed, considered giving Annie Mecklenburg a grand gift, but Annie was clearly not in a position to accept something like this yet.

Charlot could easily guess that if he gifted a magical alchemical warship, it would undoubtedly end up in Earl Bretagne's hands. Moreover, he urgently needed Menielman's full support, while Earl Bretagne would prioritize his family's interests.

A transmigrator calculates benefits over emotions.

Their precarious existence doesn't allow for sentimentality.

Menielman smiled faintly and said, "Like my cousin Dolores Soumet, I sometimes enjoy seeing others squirm."

"Charlot Mecklenburg, you've let your guard down!"

Charlot's cheeks flushed faintly red—he actually felt slightly embarrassed.

...

Herolf, the leader of the Golden Rams Fleet, watched from afar as the *Imperial Rose* joined Menielman's fleet. His heart bled. Obtaining that magical alchemical warship had been no easy feat for him. While it was inferior to the *Queen Bee*, it was still his most prized possession.

He had thought his position was unshakeable—with an impregnable island stronghold, two magical warships, tens of thousands of followers, and the implicit respect of even the Ingrima Empire. Many Imperial Navy officers were secretly in league with him.

But Herolf never imagined that his power would crumble in an instant.

First, the *Queen Bee* was stolen. He deeply regretted his negligence, realizing he shouldn't have stayed on Saint Michael Island and left the transaction on Britain Island to his subordinates. After all, it had been a routine deal, one they had done countless times. Who could have anticipated such a disaster?

Then, Menielman lured him into losing his main fleet. Although it pained him, he had believed that as long as he returned to Saint Michael Island, he could quickly rebuild his forces. Little did he expect that the island city had been thoroughly plundered.

Even the ruthless Van Gogh Clan wouldn't go to such extremes.

And now, even his last magical alchemical warship had been seized.

When Herolf saw Menielman rise into the air, her body radiating with the glow of a magical array, he felt the stark reality of the warship's transfer of ownership. Tears streamed down his face.

It was both agony and despair.

This pirate lord, who had once dominated the Aggras Sea, had never been in such a dire state.

Clenching his fists, he murmured, "I still have Saint Michael Island!"

"As long as Saint Michael Island remains under my control, no one in this world can truly defeat me. Give me a few years, and I will rebuild the Golden Rams Fleet."

"Menielman, Charlot—you treacherous couple. Just wait. I will have my revenge."

...

Herolf returned to the first level of Saint Michael City. Drowning his sorrows in alcohol, he awoke the next day with a faint sense of unease but brushed it aside and drank more.

Seven or eight days later, he suddenly shouted, "Why is there no more wine?" Only silence greeted him.

Herolf stepped outside, only to find the entire first level of Saint Michael City eerily empty. There wasn't a single soul left.

A chill ran down his spine. Sobering up instantly, he took to the air and surveyed the island. Sure enough, it was completely deserted. It finally dawned on him—over the past few days, all his men had fled.

Without ships, even transcendent beings couldn't cross the ocean unaided.

But not far from the island, a fleet hovered. Most pirates were adept swimmers, and even those who weren't could improvise with floating debris to reach the fleet and surrender to the enemy.

Menielman hesitated about accepting these surrendering pirates. While they were elite fighters and included dozens of transcendent individuals, their unruly nature posed a constant risk of rebellion, potentially destabilizing her fleet.

Balancing old and new subordinates had always been a challenging task.

Sabastine, observing Menielman's hesitation, suggested leaving the matter to Charlot. His handling of recruits during their last integration had been swift and effective, proving his talent in such affairs.

Charlot, meanwhile, had been enjoying a relatively relaxed few days, spending his time in seclusion, honing his skills, and delving into *Agmirlas's Labyrinth*. His goal was to achieve yet another breakthrough, but he hadn't expected to have a new challenge dropped into his lap.