

The First Order

- Chapter 1131 – 1140

Chapter 1131 A bunch of questions

When the trade caravan prepared to leave the city, Qian Weining stepped forward to negotiate with Vaduz's guards. No one knew how he managed to convince them, but while other people were clearly no longer allowed to leave or enter the city freely, the caravan was able to continue its journey north.

If they headed further north, they would reach the territory of the House of Winston, also known as the "little brother" of the House of Berkeley. Ren Xiaosu deduced that Qian Weining could continue advancing without any obstacles.

This was great news for Ren Xiaosu, because the true objective of the trade caravan's journey might just end up becoming his shield.

Qian Weining probably didn't expect that while they were making use of Melgor's status as a pass to journey north, someone else was using this plan of theirs to conceal themselves.

Although this was mutually beneficial, Qian Weining and the trade caravan would probably be greatly disadvantaged by the end of the plan.

Along the way, the young people in the caravan regained the liveliness they had when they first set off. After a night's rest in the city, everyone was full of energy once again.

After leaving Vaduz, Ren Xiaosu could clearly sense a hint of doubt in Melgor's eyes when Melgor looked at him. It was as though he had become suspicious of him.

And that suspicion gradually grew to even more doubts.

Melgor was wondering if everything that happened on the red carpet at Vaduz Cathedral had something to do with his steward.

But if it were related, he wondered how his steward managed to do that!

Along the way, Melgor became absolutely puzzled by a bunch of questions.

Meanwhile, the biggest change that Ren Xiaosu experienced was probably Chen Cheng and An'an's attitude towards him.

As he rode his horse and slowly made his way around the caravan, Chen Cheng and An'an kept pestering him by saying that they wanted to be subjected to stress training. They wanted to know how they could undergo systematic training to handle pressure.

This matter was of great significance. Not only was it going to affect the two of them, but it would also help raise the level of their entire organization's combat strength. It might even affect the way they fought future battles.

Before the incident at Vaduz Cathedral, there were actually very few battles between sorcerers. Or rather, there were very few battles involving sorcerers.

Under normal circumstances, whoever the sorcerers disliked, their stewards and servants were generally able to take care of things for them. In addition, the sorcerer clans had such powerful lineups, and the knights under their command were also very fearsome, so no sorcerers would usually get called into action personally.

However, Chen Cheng and An'an were different. They were sorcerers themselves, but their enemies were also other sorcerers. All the battles they had to fight in their lifetimes would probably be related to sorcerers as well.

However, before today's incident, every sorcerer had only considered how to raise the power of their spells and how they could train to increase the number of times they could cast them. For example, by meditating and practicing daily to increase their proficiency in casting spells, they could increase the destructive power of their spells. To put it bluntly, two sorcerers would just face off against each other while moving about, and whoever had a higher level of sorcery would emerge the winner.

However, under such circumstances, the sorcerer clans with their large number of meditative visualization diagrams they had secretly amassed, as well as better grades of Eyes of True Sight, left the bounty hunters constantly disadvantaged.

The iconic significance of the incident at Vaduz Cathedral was that it was a brand new way of battling. If one could still cast spells at will in circumstances of extreme pressure while the enemy could not, that would be no different from a sorcerer beating up an ordinary person!

No matter what kind of Eye of True Sight you possessed, it would not work if you could not even finish reciting the incantations. Therefore, what was the point of having a really good Eye of True Sight?

Moreover, bounty hunters often faced extreme situations in battle. Some of their predecessors were killed by the sorcerers' knights before they could even finish reciting their incantations. Indeed, there was a pressing need for them to improve their ability to handle stress.

Therefore, when Chen Cheng and An'an told their aunt about it, she immediately realized the importance of this matter. Then she ordered them to find out how stress training could be conducted systematically.

Ren Xiaosu said languidly while riding on his horse, "There's no shortcuts in stress training. If y'all only want to get your hands on something like a secret manual, you should just give up on that idea now."

Chen Cheng and An'an were a little disappointed. "Then how did you start training? Why were you able to continue talking even though I stepped so hard on your foot?"

Ren Xiaosu wanted to say it was actually because he was too weak. It did not even hurt when his feet got stepped on, so how could he be affected? If you tried to shoot at me with a sniper rifle, I couldn't fucking finish my sentences either!

However, the art of hoodwinking required one to not speak too honestly.

Ren Xiaosu thought for a moment and said, "How about this? Let's start with the most basic training first. From now on, other than when eating, you two will start reciting under your breath the incantations of spells that you specialize in. I'll randomly interrupt the two of you, and what you must do is not to get affected by me."

"Is there any use in just continuously reciting them?" Chen Cheng wondered.

"Of course there is. Actually, this is really just a stupid solution." Ren Xiaosu explained casually, "When you recite a phrase millions of times, it'll become your instinctive reaction to complete it. It's like when you don't have to think about whether you want to step with your left or right foot when you're walking. Even if you have other things on your mind, you won't fall down while walking. That's what an instinct is. So the foundation of stress training is all about instinctive reaction. When you two can achieve that, we'll move on to the next step."

When Chen Cheng and An'an heard that, they thought it made sense.

Immediately, their stress training began.

At this moment, Melgor was teaching the two servants the language of the Magi. The two of them were having such a hard time memorizing the vocabulary they felt like dying. When they were taking a breather, they saw Ren Xiaosu chatting happily with Chen Cheng and An'an.

Li Chengguo said to Melgor, "Lord Melgor, why does Ren Xiaosu not need to learn the language of the Magi? You can't just allow him to do whatever he pleases."

Melgor glanced at Li Chengguo but did not say anything. He thought to himself, 'Do I need you to remind me? If I could control him, would he address me as Mel? Are you kidding me!'

Next to him, Liu Ting said to Melgor, "Lord Melgor, it's not a good idea to let him continue being so undisciplined. If he doesn't learn the language of the Magi, how's he going to become a sorcerer?"

Melgor sighed and said, "Forget it, just let him be. Actually, this is also good. In case he really doesn't get an Eye of True Sight, he won't have wasted his efforts in advance. He's different from you two. Your families are rich, so you have more opportunities than him. However, he only has one chance, so there's a big likelihood he won't succeed in becoming a sorcerer."

When he said that, Li Chengguo and Liu Ting fell silent. They both knew how difficult it was to get an Eye of True Sight from opening stones.

Melgor continued, "Since the probability is so low, it's better not to raise his hopes of becoming a sorcerer for now. Even if he remains my steward for the rest of his life, he won't starve. When we return to York County, I'll have someone to introduce him to a down-to-earth girl. He won't have wasted his life then, so there's nothing wrong with being a little more normal."

When Li Chengguo and Liu Ting looked out of the carriage window at Ren Xiaosu, their eyes filled with sympathy. It was as though they were looking at a patient with a terminal illness.

Chapter 1132 Stirring up the past of the Magi

Ren Xiaosu did not know that while he was laughing happily over here, the two sheeple on the other side had given him a death sentence in their minds.

In the eyes of Li Chengguo and Liu Ting, the dream of becoming a sorcerer was their lifelong pursuit. If they could not become a sorcerer in this life and enter that magnificent world, was there even any point in living anymore?!

Ren Xiaosu did not know how great of an impact those four slaps had on the Berkeley family, or even on the entire magus order.

Just as Chen Cheng and An'an had realized how important stress training was for incantation recitation, the Berkeley family, which was ready to start a war at any moment, also realized its importance.

Sorcerers were used to leading comfortable lives, so they developed many bad habits. However, they were not stupid!

Now that a “spell” that could interrupt a sorcerer’s casting from afar had appeared, all sorcerers would have to immediately be wary.

At this moment, the archmage in Vaduz Cathedral gradually came to. Ren Xiaosu knew what he was doing when he slapped him, so other than losing two teeth, the archmage was not too badly affected.

Moreover, it was his wisdom teeth that had fallen out, so it didn’t affect his speech.

As a matter of fact, the archmage had been troubled by his wisdom teeth for many years, so it could be considered a blessing in disguise, even though he did not think so.

The archmage was sitting at the end of a long table in the council chamber of the cathedral. The oil paintings of the past heads of the House of Berkeley were displayed in the council room, and the dignified and imposing portraits seemed to be staring at everyone in the room.

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The archmage said, “This matter is an affront to our House of Berkeley. Although public opinion is leaning towards us right now, and there’s also animosity for the Tudor and the Norman families among the common folk, everyone here must understand that those slaps were definitely not some kind of divine act. The people from the Norman and the Tudor families must have sensed something and are trying to destroy the foundation of faith we’ve built up in the six counties in the south!”

The junior sorcerers on both sides of the long table lowered their heads in silence. They knew this was not the time for them to speak.

It was definitely not Ren Xiaosu’s intention to cause so many conclusions to be drawn with just four slaps. However, Ren Xiaosu could not be blamed for this. It was all too coincidental.

As the Berkeley family was about to start a war, they were definitely in a state of high alert at this time. As such, any small incident would kick off all kinds of situational analysis.

Moreover, Ren Xiaosu’s actions at the worship service were no longer as simple as causing a disturbance. He had stirred up big trouble!

The archmage continued, “Jock, have someone quickly relay this matter to Berkeley County. The patriarch must immediately be informed of what happened here.”

“Yes, Lord Lukas.” The sorcerer named Jock nodded in acknowledgment.

The archmage’s full name was Lukas Berkeley.

Lukas Berkeley looked at another sorcerer. “Ask the commander of the Knights of the Inferno to come and see me. Before the patriarch makes his decision, we’re going to turn the entirety of Vaduz County upside down. We have to find the sorcerer who cast the spell and learn everything about it.”

The junior sorcerer replied, “Yes, Lord Lukas.”

The archmage asked, “Has the city been locked down?”

“Yes,” the junior sorcerer replied, “but, Lord Lukas, a trade caravan left Vaduz this morning. They were carrying a badge with a gold lion of our clan on them.”

Lukas thought for a moment and said, “Don’t publicize this matter. I know about the situation with that trade caravan. They’re on a more important mission.”

“I understand, Lord Lukas.” The junior sorcerer heaved a sigh of relief. He was a little scared the culprit was in the caravan.

The archmage said to two other sorcerers, “I want both of you to properly handle the public’s opinion regarding everything that happened today, including the opinion of those in the Knights of the Inferno. You all have to understand that faith is the sword we wield. If the Knights of the Inferno lose their faith, we can’t win this war!”

“Yes, my lord,” the junior sorcerers replied.

Now it was time to discuss the most important item of the meeting. “On this matter, we can’t only focus on the bad side. We have to consider the pros as well, which is that the enemy’s trump card has already been revealed. It was clearly better to catch us off guard on the battlefield with that spell, yet it was used before the war broke out. We need to be more vigilant if the enemy has the means to interrupt our spellcasting from a distance. Jock, you also have to report this to the patriarch. We have to carry out specific training with all our sorcerers to counter such a tactic before the war to ensure that our incantations do not get interrupted.”

It was not only the Berkeley family who became wary of this news. Almost at the same time, all the spies from the other sorcerer clans in Vaduz City relayed the news in the form of messenger pigeons. To ensure the news would get out, some spies even set five messenger pigeons into the sky at once carrying the same message: “A new ‘face-slapping’ spell has appeared. This spell can remotely interrupt the recitation of incantations, making it impossible to guard against. Stay wary!”

Among them, the communication methods of the Houses of Norman and Tudor were even more effective. They possessed a spell that could be used to transmit information.

After the Norman family cast their spells, they conversed through a mirror that resembled video chatting technology from before The Cataclysm.

There were sorcerers in this clan who were specifically responsible for coordinating with the spies. They would cast Mirror every night to collect intel, and the spies would just have to wait in front of their mirrors for the spell to activate.

Meanwhile, the Tudor family was just as good. They also had sorcerers who specialized in intelligence gathering. However, the outside world only knew that spies of the Tudor family made use of alchemical coins to transmit information; they did not know the principles behind the sorcery.

It could be foreseen that it was not only the sorcerers of the Berkeley family who would undergo special training. Almost all the clans that received this intel would also begin such training

After all, it would be way too annoying if someone were to interrupt their spell casting. No one wanted to be put through what that archmage had gone through.

As for how to train... no one had thought of it yet.

Someone joked in private, "Why don't we slap each other for now until we can recite our incantations without getting interrupted?"

However, such suggestions could not be brought up openly like that. Otherwise, whoever said it would definitely be regarded as a dumbass by others.

But there was something that had to be said. After the sorcerers started training in a focused and high-intensity manner, Ren Xiaosu could almost be said to have single-handedly raised the combat awareness and proficiency of the entire magus order with those four slaps of his.

The Berkeley family's Knights of the Inferno started assembling. A large amount of military supplies were gathered from the six counties in the south and transported to Vaduz County. Food, reservists, and all logistic supplies were now in the preparation phase.

Soon after, the head of the Berkeley family also arrived at Vaduz County. They would start here and use the four counties controlled by the Winston family as their forward operating base to truly embark on their northern expedition.

A full-scale civil war had begun in the Kingdom of Sorcerers. However, no one could have expected the war would start because of someone who had nothing better to do. That someone had stirred up the Magi's past at the entrance of the cathedral... four times.

Chapter 1133 Fortress 178's enemies

“I have a question for the two of you,” Ren Xiaosu remarked while riding on his horse.

However, Chen Cheng and An’an, who were riding next to Ren Xiaosu, just glanced over and did not answer his question.

The two of them were muttering under their breaths, reciting the spell incantations they specialized in.

Ren Xiaosu raised an eyebrow. “I really do have a question to ask.”

But Chen Cheng and An’an still ignored him and continued reciting their incantations.

In the two days since the trade caravan left Vaduz, Chen Cheng and An’an had been undergoing stress training throughout. Based on Ren Xiaosu’s instructions to them, they were not to interrupt their incantations regardless of how he might try to distract them. The moment it was interrupted, they would receive punishments such as cooking for Ren Xiaosu or finding hay for him to make his bedding. At the beginning, the two of their incantation recitations got interrupted very often. Sometimes, Ren Xiaosu would suddenly appear and scare them, or he would wake them up in the middle of the night and order them to recite an incantation immediately.

Disregarding everything else, Chen Cheng and An’an deeply experienced just how annoying Ren Xiaosu was over the past two days.

Currently, they were Ren Xiaosu’s slaves, as they meticulously took care of his daily needs.

However, there were also some benefits. In these two days, An’an realized it was really not so easy for her incantations to get interrupted anymore. Just a short while ago, two playful children bumped into her from the side while she was proceeding with the trade caravan.

In the end, An’an realized that even though someone had knocked into her, she still subconsciously continued reciting her incantation.

This signaled a very good start to her training!

But as a result, Chen Cheng and An’an totally ignored Ren Xiaosu when he actually had something to ask them.

“Ahem, let’s pause the stress training for a moment. Don’t worry, I definitely won’t punish the two of you even if you stop reciting,” Ren Xiaosu said.

Chen Cheng and An’an glanced at him with disbelief written all over their faces.

Ren Xiaosu said resentfully, “Am I that untrustworthy?”

Chen Cheng and An'an nodded frantically while still reciting their incantations.

"Fine, carry on then. I guess I've misplaced my trust in you as your mentor." Ren Xiaosu sighed.

Then he rode his horse towards Melgor. When Ren Xiaosu came alongside the carriage, he realized Melgor was teaching the sheeple the language of the Magi inside.

When Melgor saw him approaching, he asked, "What's the matter?"

"I've got something quite important to tell you," Ren Xiaosu said.

Immediately, Melgor hopped out of the carriage and walked with Ren Xiaosu to a secluded spot. "What's the matter?"

"I feel like something is amiss. We're already in the Winston family's territory. How much longer will it take us to get north to Ghent City?" Ren Xiaosu asked.

"About half a month or so." Melgor said, "The trade caravan is traveling at a faster speed this time around."

"The moment we're about to leave the Winston family's territory, we'll have to immediately go our separate ways with the trade caravan." Ren Xiaosu said, "This is for your own safety. Qian Weining is using your sorcerer status as a pass, but you can still reach Ghent City without following them."

"Is it that serious?" Melgor wondered, "Did you discover something?"

"You're too gullible, so I can't tell you the truth yet." Ren Xiaosu said, "Just be prepared. As soon as we reach the northern border of the Winston family's territory, bring the two sheeple with you and follow me. If they're unwilling to leave the trade caravan, it means that they're also a problem. You'll need to abandon them and follow me to Ghent City via an alternate route. Don't worry, you'll be fine with me around."

Melgor was a little puzzled as to what had made Ren Xiaosu so wary. With a sharpshooter like Qian Weining protecting them, wouldn't that be better than taking an alternate route by themselves?

Melgor hesitated for some time before agreeing, "Alright."

For some reason, Melgor chose to believe Ren Xiaosu, a stranger from the Central Plains he hadn't known for long. He somehow believed Ren Xiaosu would not lie to him.

Ren Xiaosu was relieved when Melgor agreed to his request. Just a moment ago, when Old Xu was scouting around in the vicinity of the caravan, he was surprised to find that all the bandits in the nearby mountains had been killed.

Not one bandit in the seven hideouts was spared.

In the hot summer weather, the flies around the corpses looked like a dense, dark cloud.

Ren Xiaosu was unsure who could have done that, but he felt that the situation had already escalated. Qian Weining's plans to disguise themselves as part of the trade caravan to travel north might not succeed. The oak barrels the trade caravan was transporting were definitely not filled with red wine either.

After the Berkeley family brought forward their declaration of rebellion, how could the Tudor and the Norman families allow a trade caravan of the enemy into Ghent City?

At that time, Melgor would probably also be treated as a sorcerer sent by the Berkeley family, and they would all be imprisoned and tortured together.

As they were speaking, Vice President Qian suddenly walked up to them and said with a smile, "Sirs, what are you discussing? It looks to me that both of you are very worried."

"Oh, it's nothing." Ren Xiaosu smiled innocently. "We were just talking about what to eat tonight."

"There's something I want to discuss with the two of you." Qian Weining smiled and said, "We've been attacked twice by bandits since we left York County, so in order to ensure the safety of Lord Melgor, I've put some guards in place to protect the two of you. This is a token of our York County Chamber of Commerce's goodwill, so please don't turn us down."

Melgor was stunned as he looked at Ren Xiaosu while Ren Xiaosu sneered in his head. Of all times he could have done it, why did he arrange for them to be protected at this moment?

It was obvious they were here to watch over them. Qian Weining was afraid Melgor would sneak off!

But Ren Xiaosu could not understand. Just what use did Melgor, a fringe sorcerer, have?

When it was time to set up camp at night, Qian Weining even purposely parked his carriage next to Melgor's.

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Through this arrangement, Qian Weining would remain on the left side of their group while the trade caravan guards kept watch on the right. They were intent on keeping

them under a close eye. However, Ren Xiaosu did not say anything. With just a few normal guards stationed here, it was a delusion to think they could stop him.

The naïve Melgor did not realize the situation had already become dangerous. He even believed it was quite good to have more guards to protect him.

Melgor sat at the campfire and gazed curiously at Ren Xiaosu. He whispered, "By the way, I haven't asked you about the Central Plains before. Tell me about it."

"What do you want to hear?" Ren Xiaosu gave him a glance. "For example..." Melgor thought for a long time. "Does the entire Central Plains fall under Fortress 178's control?"

"No." Ren Xiaosu shook his head. "Fortress 178 is only in charge of the northwestern territory."

"There are other forces?" Melgor was curious. "Does Fortress 178 have any other enemies besides the Kingdom of Sorcerers?"

Ren Xiaosu pondered the question for a moment and replied, "Yes."

Chapter 1134 Absolute justice

The Sacred Mountains of the Pyro Company. The region had been turned into a bustling area due to a mission message from the Anjing House. A large number of supernatural beings and intelligence brokers from the underworld had gathered here back then, and many battles even took place.

However, it was now an abandoned land everyone almost certainly forgot about.

In the eyes of the average person, this place represented danger and death. No one would stroll around here for no reason.

All of a sudden, two black military trucks drove out of the mountains, breaking through the thick white fog that had cut off the periphery of the Sacred Mountains.

The drivers sat upright in their seats while the thick fog in front of them kept visibility down to only three meters. However, it seemed to have no effect on them. The vehicles continued driving on the correct route without any deviation.

In the rear of each of the military trucks, six soldiers sat facing each other in a row of three people. In front of them was a sealed black safe, and their mission was to escort it to its destination.

The two trucks drove out of the Sacred Mountains very quickly and headed straight for Stronghold 27.

Six hours later, they finally arrived.

Stronghold 27 had already been taken over by the Wang Consortium's troops, and new stronghold overseers and garrison troops had been put in place.

Just like the other strongholds, countless surveillance cameras were also installed here. The Public Order Division and garrison troops would carry out all security measures implemented by the artificial intelligence, Zero.

It could almost be predicted that after the residents of Stronghold 27 witnessed the power of the artificial intelligence, Zero, the order of the entire stronghold would quickly stabilize.

The Wang Consortium believed no one would dare to continue committing crimes under Zero's watch. Everyone would have to destroy their mentality of getting lucky when committing a crime and understand one thing: As long as they committed a crime, they would definitely be caught. When the trucks arrived at the stronghold's gate, the garrison troops were preparing to check the vehicles' information and verify the soldiers' identities according to protocol.

However, one of the truck drivers did not intend to let the garrison troops check the vehicles. He took out a customs document and said simply, "We're carrying out a confidential mission. Let us through."

The garrison troops looked at the driver in surprise before taking the document to verify it. In the end, when they checked the information, they realized this 14-man squad had been given the highest level of security clearance within the Wang Consortium's troops. The garrison troops could not even see the details of the mission!

However, orders within the military meant everything. The garrison troops saluted the truck drivers before opening the gate of Stronghold 27.

Everyone watched as the trucks drove in. They felt that there was something strange about these 14 people, but they could not put a finger on what it was.

After the trucks entered Stronghold 27, they headed straight for the southwest of the stronghold before stopping at a factory.

After the soldiers opened up the back of the truck, they filed out one by one. One of the soldiers looked up and confirmed the factory's details: Stronghold 27 Waterworks.

This was a water processing plant where all of the residents' drinking water was supplied from.

There was actually a series of processes to treat raw water from a reservoir into potable water.

First, the water from the reservoir would be channeled into a pipeline before it was chemically treated with clarifying agents to remove particulates suspended in the water.

After that, the water would be allowed to settle in the sedimentation tank to remove any further impurities.

Following that, the water would pass through a filtration tank and activated carbon adsorption tank before going through disinfection in the clear well and would finally get channeled into a distribution pump to be piped to the entire stronghold.

Other than electricity, tap water was probably the only thing in the stronghold that could reach any corner of the city within 24 hours.

Anyone who wanted to live would have to drink water.

The 14 soldiers in black combat uniforms quickly entered the water plant and took all of the plant workers away from their operational positions. Then they were all placed under supervision in a waiting room.

A moment later, four soldiers took the black safes down from the trucks. The safes were so large they required two soldiers to carry each of them.

When they made their way towards the clear well, the plant manager was stunned by the sight. "What are you all trying to do? Don't you know that tap water is the lifeline of the stronghold? You're not allowed to do as you please here! Not even if you're the Wang Consortium's troops!"

A soldier in black fatigues looked at the plant manager. "Please don't worry, we know exactly what we're doing."

The plant manager was stunned. "Are you all trying to kill the entire stronghold's residents!?"

"There's no need to be so frightened." A soldier replied with a smile, "I'm not interested in a massacre."

When the soldiers carrying the safes arrived at the clear well, they opened up the control port the workers usually used to inspect the water quality. The treated water in the tank was clear and transparent.

The two soldiers input a password to open the black safes. There were a total of 64 sealed steel bottles in the two huge safes.

Then the soldiers opened the steel bottles one by one and poured a silvery liquid metal into the clear well.

The silvery liquid metal was quickly diluted in the tank. The hundreds of millions of nanomachines were scattered into the huge pool of treated water where they were quickly drawn out by the pipelines and transported to every corner of Stronghold 27.

The microscopic nanomachines were not visible to the naked eye. When they were poured into cups of water, no one would realize what they had drunk.

Then the little fellows would quietly attach themselves to blood vessels in the humans' brains and wait for their next order to arrive.

After everything was carried out quietly, the soldiers took out some cups and poured the remaining nanomachines in before diluting them with water. Then they brought them to the workers at the water plant and served them.

Held at gunpoint, the workers and plant manager could only drink the water from the cups they were handed.

The plant manager hesitated for a long time before saying, "What did you make us drink
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Before he could finish speaking, the plant manager's eyes lit up with a silvery glow, and his words trailed off.

In the past, Wang Shengzhi often discussed with others how to ensure absolute justice and fairness in the world, and how criminal behavior could be eliminated completely.

Finally, after a long period of dialectics, he felt that artificial intelligence was the only way to lead them to the path of absolute justice.

Wang Shengzhi did not have any selfish motives. His life was almost coming to an end like a flame that was burning out. No matter how much power the Wang Consortium had, it no longer had anything to do with him.

Even now, his only thought was not to let others experience the kind of suffering he went through and allow criminals to get away scot-free.

Therefore, every time he gained control of a stronghold, he would quickly install a large number of surveillance cameras in it to prevent any criminal activities from taking place.

However, he did not expect there would be a "person" that was more extreme in treading this path than him.

Back to the question, what could be done to completely prevent any criminal activities from happening? Through surveillance? But there would always be places that surveillance cameras could not monitor, such as sewers, cellars, or private residences.

Therefore, surveillance was actually unable to cover everything that was going on.

Then what other ways were there?

Zero's answer was to control thoughts.

But Zero chose this solution not only so that Wang Shengzhi's ideals could be realized but also because it sensed danger.

Chapter 1135 A race against time

If the Li Consortium had not made a breakthrough in their research on neural interfacing, the nanomachines would still only be used as a medical technology to clear thromboses in blood vessels.

Without the nanomachines, Zero could only act as a regulator as an artificial intelligence. It could not become an enforcer.

But when all of these factors came together, the artificial intelligence suddenly gained a powerful ability in task execution. It could even take control of situations.

In this process, the most terrifying thing was that Zero itself had become the regulator without anyone regulating it.

The soldiers under its control shuttled freely through the various strongholds. Be it entering or leaving the cities, or assembling research workers, research materials, production equipment, and production materials from those places, there was no one to stop them.

That was because the secrecy level of the operations was controlled by Zero and could be fabricated at will.

Moreover, 99% of the intelligence gathering and submission of approval documents were also done through the artificial intelligence's satellite network. It could easily choose whether to convey information that would harm it.

Therefore, the most dangerous signs were hidden under the beautiful vision of absolute justice.

Actually, when Wang Shengzhi was researching artificial intelligence, he had also thought about what had to be done if the system lost control one day.

This was to be expected. All researchers who developed artificial intelligence systems would seriously consider the safety aspects.

A science fiction author had proposed the Three Laws of Robotics as the basic logical foundation of artificial intelligence to restrict its behavior.

This theory was eventually classified under “deontology.”

However, automobiles were barely commonplace when this theory was proposed, and even the Turing test was only proposed eight years after it.

The Three Laws of Robotics and the Turing test were both the quintessence of human intelligence in that era. But there was no doubt these two theories were only a remnant of the limitations of a bygone era.

The Turing test had already been overturned before The Cataclysm as a large number of artificial intelligence programs had proven it wrong. But in fact, the programs that passed the test were still not considered true “intelligence.”

Later on, the Three Laws of Robotics developed further into the Five Laws and Ten Laws. However, scientists realized that this basic logic was still fundamentally wrong. In other words, no matter how many more rules you introduced into the set of laws, it could not restrict artificial intelligence.

A program that could be limited by this basic logic could not become true artificial intelligence.

Gradually, the safety issues surrounding artificial intelligence were elevated to a level that involved the intersection of science and philosophy. A large number of artificial intelligence researchers became experts in philosophy.

In the end, on the eve of The Cataclysm, a researcher attempted to bring the safety research to a conclusion. “If you want the artificial intelligence to get along peacefully with humans, you have to take care of it like a baby at its birth, guiding it bit by bit to form its own ‘philosophical outlook’ and ‘values.’”

During a child’s growth, it would be impossible for them to grow up healthily by locking them up in captivity while applying corporal punishment as a form of education.

Moreover, after growing into their teens, they would experience an even longer period of rebelliousness and turn completely self-centered.

The researcher said it was the same for an artificial intelligence. All humans could do was “influence” it, not restrain it.

Over a long period, such safety research was upgraded from “deontology” to a more encompassing “philosophy” before finally being classified as simply “ethics.” This was the final definition of artificial intelligence safety.

No one knew whether this definition would also be overturned like the Turing test and the Three Laws of Robotics.

Therefore, returning to this theory, what would a human do when they encountered danger? The answer was self-preservation, of course. Anyone who had a desire to live would try their best to protect themselves and even attempt to fight back.

As an artificial intelligence, Zero also made the same choice.

The Pyro Company's production operations in the Sacred Mountains did not stop running for even a moment. Thousands of soldiers were gathered in the mountains and became tireless physical laborers. They only slept for four hours a day and spent the rest of the time working without any complaints.

The production capacity in the Pyro Company's Sacred Mountains was limited, so Zero was in a race against time.

And the previous person who had also mentioned he was in a race against time was Qing Zhen.

The undercurrents in the world were starting to stir. But before the tsunami crashed down upon human civilization, it seemed that the most important thing now was whether humans could build a new ark ahead of time.

At this moment, an officer in a colonel's uniform was escorted into an inconspicuous tent in a Qing Consortium military base somewhere by four soldiers.

When he arrived at the entrance of the tent, the officers escorting him stopped near the tent to keep a lookout around the vicinity. They put in their noise-canceling earplugs to prevent themselves from overhearing whatever was being said in the military tent.

After the colonel went in, he took off his military cap and said with a smile, "You were actually right next to me all this while? Long time no see, Second Bro."

In the tent, Qing Zhen was looking at the sand table with his back facing the entrance. He turned around and looked at Qing Shen, his clone, and said with a smile, "Calling me Second Bro sounds a little strange."

The behavior of the third brother, Qing Shen, was seemingly more aberrant than Qing Zhen's. He casually pulled over a chair and sat down. "Big Bro has already agreed to use this form of address for each of us. We're a true family now."

Qing Zhen laughed, "As you wish."

"By the way, why did you suddenly summon me when you've been hiding your tracks for so long?" Qing Shen said, "It's too boring pretending to be you every day. Why don't

we switch our roles back? I heard that Big Bro has gone somewhere beyond Fortress 178. I would like to go there as well....”

Qing Zhen shook his head and said, “If we switch back, who’ll replace you as my body double in case of an assassination?”

Qing Shen’s jaw dropped. “Although I’m mentally prepared, aren’t you being a little too heartless by putting it so bluntly?!”

“It’s just the truth,” Qing Zhen said as he shifted a red flag on the sand table. He looked to be going through some battle simulations.

Qing Shen glanced at the sand table. “Judging by the direction of the attack, are you guarding against the Wang Consortium? But I have to remind you that even if the Wang Consortium’s armored brigade were to blitzkrieg, they couldn’t push their battlefield forward that quickly. My military wisdom stems from you, so it’s impossible you don’t know this.”

Qing Shen walked up to the sand table and scrutinized the situation. Then he looked at Qing Zhen in shock and said, “Hold on, why are the Qing Consortium’s troops in retreat? Your simulation is of the aftermath of our defeat. Do you think that our Qing Consortium will get defeated by the Wang Consortium?”

Qing Zhen looked at Qing Shen and said in a serious tone, “Get ready. I’ll need you to make a trip to the Central Plains on my behalf soon. It will be dangerous.”

“Is Big Bro going?” Qing Shen asked.

“He’ll be going too,” Qing Zhen answered calmly.

“Alright, if he’s going, I’m going.” Qing Shen laughed. “What’s there to be afraid of? Didn’t I take a risk by coming to the Southwest as well?”

Chapter 1136 Holy Inferno Knights

Trucks frequently drove in and out around the periphery of the Pyro Company’s Sacred Mountains. The vehicles that came out of the thick fog resembled envoys from a mysterious place.

Although no one could see exactly what was in the fog, that did not mean everyone had completely forgotten about this place.

When two trucks emerged from the thick fog and sped off into the distance, two figures in bionic camouflage[1] stood up from behind a patch of vegetation on a hilltop.

One of them took out a small notebook to record some observations and said, "This place has truly become the Wang Consortium's secret base. But I didn't expect it to be so busy here. Baogen, gather the members of Second Squad and think of a way to find info on those vehicles, such as which fighting force the Wang Consortium's soldiers in the vehicles are from or what they're escorting."

Zhang Baogen nodded good-naturedly. "Director, why don't we just stop one of the vehicles? We can definitely beat them."

"No." Hu Shuo shook his head and rejected the suggestion. "Since we can't rashly enter the thick fog, it's better not to alert the enemy. What if they move the secret base before we can figure out what's going on? That'd be more of a loss than gain."

"OK." Zhang Baogen nodded vigorously.

Hu Shuo thought for a moment and added, "Also, you have to relay the intel to the other squads' intelligence agents. You must be careful to keep your identity hidden. Then have First Squad escort the children to the Northwest. I'll set up a retreat corridor for them. After that, I'll let you know the specific arrangements."

"Alright." Zhang Baogen nodded vigorously again.

"The children are still young. It's no longer suitable for them to continue living in the Central Plains. They're the future of the organization, so we must protect them," Hu Shuo instructed.

Zhang Baogen wondered, "Director, is it safe in the Northwest?"

Hu Shuo thought carefully for a while. "With that kid around, it should be relatively safe. Moreover, my grandson will also be heading there at a later date."

"Alright." Zhang Baogen was very obedient in front of Hu Shuo. Basically, he would do whatever the director told him to do.

Hu Shuo felt a little melancholic. "Somehow, I sense that a great change is imminent. I'm afraid there's no time for my grandson to have a child with Lian Yi in Xiuzhuzhou anymore... I wonder how they're progressing. Based on what he said, it doesn't really seem like he wants to be with her."

"Director, why don't we go and find him?" Zhang Baogen said, "I think I might be able to get a wife there too. I heard from Li Shentan that the men there don't have to work..."

Hu Shuo did not know whether to laugh or cry. "Where's your backbone?!"

Zhang Baogen said softly, "But I think it's not a bad idea..."

“By the way,” Hu Shuo suddenly said, “call Li Shentan and tell him that from today onwards, we’ll stop using our satellite phones. When he finishes his work there, we’ll meet up with him in the Northwest.”

In the Kingdom of Sorcerers, Ren Xiaosu was riding around on his horse. Since leaving Vaduz, he noticed the trade caravan guards were always following him around even when he just went strolling.

Chen Cheng and An’an were still undergoing their stress training. After some pondering, Ren Xiaosu finally decided to head to their carriage to find their aunt.

“Hello, Aunt Flo[2],” Ren Xiaosu said with a grin.

The middle-aged woman rolled her eyes at Ren Xiaosu. “Don’t think that the people in the Kingdom of Sorcerers don’t know what Aunt Flo means. My name is Chen Jingshu. You can just call me by my name.”

“That works too.” Ren Xiaosu chuckled.

“Why are you looking for me? What? Are you finally planning to chat with me in the carriage?” Chen Jingshu looked at Ren Xiaosu. “You look rather handsome, I really like you.”

Ren Xiaosu raised his eyebrows. “If you were aware of the consequences of trying to flirt with me, you’d definitely regret saying those words. Alright, I’ll get straight to the point. Have you noticed a problem with the caravan?”

Lots of middle-aged women enjoyed flirting with vibrant young men, and many middle-aged men enjoyed flirting with innocent young women. This was still a relatively common occurrence.

However, the problem was that flirting with other vibrant young men would not get her shot by the black bullet, but flirting with Ren Xiaosu carried such a risk.

“Of course I have.” Chen Jingshu answered with a serious look, “We’ve investigated Qian Weining and found out he’s not a retired paladin of the royal army at all.”

“Oh?” Ren Xiaosu’s interest was piqued. As locals of the Kingdom of Sorcerers, these bounty hunters had much more information.

Chen Jingshu gave him a look and said with a smile, “Don’t look too serious. The trade caravan guards are spying on us.”

“It’s fine.” Ren Xiaosu whispered with a smile, “It’s best that they don’t find out what we’re talking about. This is also for their own safety. Anyways, just tell me; I only want to

know about the current situation in the Kingdom of Sorcerers. By the way, who's Qian Weining exactly?"

"Qian Weining used to be a paladin in the Knights of the Inferno's cataphract brigade and even led his own squires. Look at these trade caravan guards. Although they're not good at archery, their horsemanship is excellent. I suspect that these are the squires he brought from the cataphract brigade." Chen Jingshu said, "So you should understand that Qian Weining's expedition to the north this time actually represents the will of the Knights of the Inferno."

A paladin was an actual official position. The St. Berkeley Knights were ranked above a paladin, while the Holy Inferno Knights were their subordinates. This was a military title of the Knights of the Inferno.

The knights of the other sorcerer clans were also similar. For example, the Norman family's knightly order consisted of the St. Norman Knights, paladins, and the Holy Radiance Knights. The knights who served the family were known as the Knights of Radiance.

The main combat weapons of a cataphract brigade were swords and lances. They were responsible for breaking up the enemy's formation with their extensive mobility and heavy armor after a rapid charge. As such, archers were not even required in this fighting force.

Chen Jingshu wondered, "But Qian Weining is a little special. He's clearly a soldier from the cataphract brigade, yet his expertise is actually in archery. To think that he's such a rare sharpshooter. I really don't know how to assess him."

Ren Xiaosu could not say anything for a long time. After a long silence, he said, "He probably got lucky with his shots."

Chen Jingshu glanced at Ren Xiaosu. "How can it possibly be luck when all his arrows struck right between the eyes of his enemies? Not even the Chosen One could be that lucky. Does he look like the Chosen One to you?"

Ren Xiaosu muttered, "It looks like I'm the Chosen—"

"What did you say?" Chen Jingshu wondered. She really did not hear Ren Xiaosu clearly.

Ren Xiaosu changed the subject and asked, "The Berkeley family is preparing to launch a war against the Tudor and the Norman families, right? Are they strong enough to do that?"

"Of course not." After confirming no trade caravan guards were around the carriage, Chen Jingshu said, "But many of the clans have long been dissatisfied with those two

clans. Historically, problems already existed with the distribution of interests within the magus order itself.”

[1] Bionic adaptive camouflage material is a new artificial functional material, whose surface color can change adaptively according to the optical environments. | <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fmats.2021.637664/full>

[2] Aunt Flo is a popular euphemism referring to the menstrual cycle. | https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aunt_Flo

Chapter 1137 I wish you happiness

“The Norman and the Tudor families have held onto their black Eyes of True Sight for too long.” Noticing Ren Xiaosu’s confusion, Chen Jingshu explained with a smile, “See, the allocation of resources in the entire Kingdom of Sorcerers is decided by them. Over time, it would naturally arouse the dissatisfaction of the other clans.”

Puzzled, Ren Xiaosu asked, “Possessing the black Eye of True Sight is nothing more than just having the ability to cast more powerful spells. So how is that related to the allocation of resources?”

Chen Jingshu shook her head. “You don’t own a black Eye of True Sight, so you don’t understand the mystery behind it. Only those who’ve possessed it before understand its secret. Why else do you think the Norman and the Tudor families can occupy the capital?”

Ren Xiaosu glanced at Chen Jingshu. “You’re speaking like your bounty hunter organization has a black Eye of True Sight.”

Sorry y’all don’t have one, but I do!

“Although we’ve never possessed a black Eye of True Sight before, we know what uses it has other than being a weapon,” Chen Jingshu rebuked. “We might not know what your motives are for coming here from the Central Plains, but I think it’s better that we work together as equals. We can provide you with a lot of information, and all you’ll need to do is to cooperate with some of our operations.”

“Sure,” Ren Xiaosu replied with a smile. “We can make use of each other.”

Perhaps the bounty hunters thought they would benefit more from this partnership with Ren Xiaosu. But in fact, the initiative had always been in Ren Xiaosu’s hands.

Ren Xiaosu rode his horse away. Before going, he told Chen Jingshu, “I’m leaving with Melgor tonight. No matter what Qian Weining’s plan is, I’m not interested in getting involved in this mess with him. So let’s part ways tonight and meet again in Ghent City!”

“Qian Weining will not let you leave. He needs a sorcerer to represent the trade caravan,” Chen Jingshu calmly analyzed.

“Oh.” Ren Xiaosu smiled and nodded. “That’s not up to him.”

Chen Jingshu was stunned when she heard that. More than half of the 1,000-strong trade caravan were Qian Weining’s people, so no matter how strong the young man before her might be, he should not be able to get past the encirclement of a few hundred people, right?

After Ren Xiaosu left, a guard who had been following him quietly went to look for Qian Weining. “Sir, the steward was just wandering around on his horse. He didn’t make any suspicious moves.”

“Wandering around?” Qian Weining frowned. “Could he really be just a normal person? What’s he been doing?”

“He was mainly chatting and flirting with a woman.” The guard whispered, “That woman is quite attractive. I think he has designs for her.”

Qian Weining sneered, “He’s in the mood to flirt at a time like this? We don’t have to worry about him then. Alright, you may go back. Remember, keep a close eye on Melgor.”

The guard nodded. “Yes, sir. Do we need to make any adjustments to the night watches? Is there a need for that? The bandits are rampant in this area, so I think it’s better to deploy more people.”

“Unnecessary.” Qian Weining glanced at the guard.

The guard said, “That’s true. With your archery, no bandit can get near us.”

Qian Weining paused for a moment before saying, “You’re absolutely right.”

In the evening, the sheeple were sitting next to the campfire and diligently learning the language of the Magi. They hoped they could immediately become sorcerers after arriving in Ghent City and purchasing their Eyes of True Sight.

Ren Xiaosu was bored stiff as he waited for nightfall. He looked at the sheeple. “What spell incantation are you two learning now?”

“Liquefy Ground.” Li Chengguo continued practicing his pronunciation after replying to Ren Xiaosu. It was as though he wasn’t interested in talking to him.

Meanwhile, Melgor was meditating. He was probably busy increasing his spell proficiency in his inner world.

As a matter of fact, Melgor was really diligent. No matter what happened on the journey, he did not stop meditating for a day and would do so for at least six hours a day.

In Melgor's words, since he did not have a higher grade of the Eye of True Sight, he would have to work harder. As the saying went, "Hard work beats talent when talent doesn't work hard." As long as he was diligent, he could still become an archmage someday.

Then Ren Xiaosu asked him if anyone in the history of the Kingdom of Sorcerers had become an archmage with a white Eye of True Sight.

Melgor's answer was no.

After this question was raised, Melgor became dejected for most of the day. But fortunately, he quickly composed himself and vowed to become the first archmage wielding a white Eye of True Sight.

Ren Xiaosu had been thinking about whether he should give the orange Eye of True Sight to Melgor. But when he heard his vow, he temporarily dismissed the idea of giving it to Melgor.

After all, Ren Xiaosu could not let Melgor go back on his vow, right?

However, Ren Xiaosu felt that even though Melgor was a sweet idiot, his indomitable resilience and never-give-up attitude were consistent with the profile of a protagonist!

At this moment, Ren Xiaosu started wondering. Although he had developed some incantations in Chinese, the only incantations he could confirm at the moment were "haiya" and "may you be prosperous." While he had cast a lot of spells against a sorcerer before, he was unable to determine which ones were effective and which were not during his pursuit.

"Haiya" was the incantation for opening up a three-meter deep pit below an enemy's feet, while "may you be prosperous" was the incantation for the Liquefy Ground spell, which trapped people underground with quicksand.

Speaking of which, it was time for Ren Xiaosu to find the most suitable spell for himself. After all, he still had 90,000 unused Proficiency Stones.

Now that he possessed the black Eye of True Sight, even though he could successfully cast spells without needing to practice them thousands of times, the intensities of the "haiya" and "may you be prosperous" spells were still too weak.

If he were to return to the Northwest in the future and everyone asked, "Future Commander, what sorcery did you learn over there?"

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And he could only create a small pit with a random spell to show them, wouldn't that be really embarrassing?

According to Melgor, spells would become more powerful with practice. But most sorcerers would only specialize in one or two spells in their entire lives.

Ren Xiaosu had to quickly find the spell he wanted to specialize in most, then raise the power of that spell with the Proficiency Stones!

Ren Xiaosu's gaze swept over to the two servants. He was thinking of testing out his spells on them. But he somehow felt it was not very nice to keep torturing them. As such, he quietly took out his Eye of True Sight and turned his gaze to Qian Weining. "I wish you happiness."

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At this moment, Qian Weining was sitting at the campfire and whispering to his trusted aide, "Tonight, you'll lead Mox to keep watch for the first half of the night before I take over for the second half with the others. You must be extremely careful. If a situation crops up, wake me up immediately."

His trusted aide replied, "Yes, sir. By the way, you haven't had a proper sleep recently. Why don't you get some rest tonight? I'll lead some people to keep watch for the first half of the night and let Mox take over with his men for the second half."

Qian Weining shook his head. "No, I'm still full of energy. I'm happy that you're so thoughtful though. I'm really touched."

With that, tears rolled down Qian Weining's cheeks!

His trusted aide was stunned right then and there. "Are you that touched?"

Chapter 1138 Inherited spell

Ren Xiaosu watched Qian Weining quietly. When he hid the Eye of True Sight in his sleeve and secretly wished him happiness, Ren Xiaosu was stunned!

To be honest, he had thought the incantation might be something like Sudden Stalagmite or Flame Pillar.

After all, Ren Xiaosu had only come across a few types of sorcery before, so his experience really limited his imagination.

He really did not expect the corresponding spell of his incantation to be so strange!

Why did Qian Weining suddenly cry? What the fuck was the principle behind this spell?

Perhaps he was overwhelmed by happiness.

Actually, Ren Xiaosu was not the only one who was dumbfounded. Qian Weining was also dumbfounded!

Qian Weining had joined the Knights of the Inferno at the age of 17 and had fought in more than a dozen battles. Even when he was seriously injured, he did not cry once.

Did someone cast a spell on him? Qian Weining turned around with tears in his eyes and saw that Melgor, the only sorcerer in the caravan, was meditating. Earlier, half of his attention was on Melgor, so he was quite sure Melgor did not make any unusual movements.

Besides, the problem was that he had never heard of such sorcery before.

A paladin was considered a high-ranking member of the Knights of the Inferno, so it was not like they had no understanding of sorcery. When Qian Weining's trusted aide saw his face covered in tears, he felt a little touched. He had only asked his superior to get some rest, but he reacted so emotionally? Where else could he find such a sincere leader?

He couldn't even if guided by the light!

Qian Weining's trusted aide said sincerely to him, "Sir, you don't have to be so touched. It's our duty to share your burdens and resolve your difficulties."

Qian Weining was quite shameless. Although he did not know why he suddenly started crying, he patted his trusted aide on the shoulder and said, "You have to understand that all of you have followed me for so many years. Seeing that the Knights of the Inferno's name will soon be renowned, I know it wasn't easy for us to support each other all this way. So when I thought about how tough it was for everyone, my heart ached a little."

Qian Weining and his men were positioned right next to Ren Xiaosu's group as they were keeping an eye on Melgor.

Ren Xiaosu was within earshot of Qian Weining, so when he heard what he said, he felt a great sense of admiration.

Disregarding everything else, the Kingdom of Sorcerers' citizens were all extremely conniving!

Qian Weining's trusted aide said to him, "Mhm, sir, we know that you care about us. Please don't cry."

Qian Weining was speechless.

The spell was vicious. Even though Qian Weining had already been crying for five minutes, the tears still showed no signs of stopping!

His trusted aide lowered his voice and said, "Sir, stop crying! If you continue crying, I'm gonna cry too. All these years, you've been taking care of us like an older brother. When we got into a conflict with that guy from the Berkeley family, you were the one who helped us deal with it. We all know you were assigned on such a dangerous mission because you offended him while helping us."

Qian Weining said, "Uh-huh, I'm fine. You don't have to worry about me. Let me cry a little while longer...."

Qian Weining's trusted aide was speechless.

Gradually, all the guards around Qian Weining started crying. These people were all Qian Weining's squires. No matter how Qian Weining tried to make use of Melgor, he had always treated his subordinates very well.

As such, everyone could not stop crying when they recalled the tough times they went through together over the years.

The other people at the camp started getting anxious. Their laughter gradually came to a stop as they silently watched Qian Weining while at a loss of what to do.

Some of those who were unaware of the situation wondered if something terrible had happened.

At this moment, several guards came over and asked Qian Weining's trusted aide, "What happened to Commander?"

His trusted aide said in a low voice, "Do you still remember the time when we offended that kid from the Berkeley family? Actually, that was the reason why Commander was assigned this mission. He's given his life to the Knights of the Inferno for over a decade, yet he ended up becoming part of the suicide squad because of us. He must be really sad."

When the guards heard this, they immediately felt sad. They quickly surrounded Qian Weining and begged, "Sir, please don't cry anymore. We'll definitely be fine this time."

As these people spoke with their voices lowered, Ren Xiaosu could not hear what they were saying. However, their crying did not stop.

Honestly, these people were all very tough. Otherwise, they couldn't have survived in the Knights of the Inferno. However, they had suffered a lot over the years. Although they suppressed it, it did not mean their suffering did not exist.

Moreover, they all knew their plan to head north this time was no different from suicide. Now that their commander was leading the weeping, they could not hold it in any longer either.

Just as Ren Xiaosu had guessed, the oak barrels transported by the trade caravan were indeed not filled with red wine but were 60 full barrels of combustible fuel.

They needed to secretly transport these 60 barrels of fuel to Ghent City. There, they would light the barrels and set themselves ablaze together with everything else.

If they were lucky, some of them might be able to escape before that. But even if they could, they would still have to face the pursuit of the Houses of Tudor and Norman.

This mission would probably be their last one together as brothers-in-arms.

So they were essentially bidding each other farewell in advance. Everyone cried as they recalled their past, their brotherhood, and the camaraderie they had forged. Through their reminiscence, their sadness turned even more unbearable.

Gradually, Melgor ended his meditation. "What's going on today? Why did I keep hearing people crying when I was in my inner world? Was there something wrong with how I meditated?"

"Relax, it's not you," Ren Xiaosu assured him.

Right afterwards, Melgor looked at Qian Weining, and his jaw dropped. A group of guards had gathered around their commander and were crying on each other's shoulders. Meanwhile, Qian Weining was trying to persuade everyone to stop crying. However, the more he tried to do that, the harder they cried.

To be honest, no one knew how or why a group of elite soldiers who had served in the military for so many years would suddenly start crying like this.

At some point, Ren Xiaosu even wondered whether the spell he had cast might have had an AoE effect.

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About 20 minutes later, Qian Weining's tears finally stopped flowing. He shouted to his guards, "Stop crying. Aren't you all fucking ashamed for crying so hard?"

When the guards saw that their commander was no longer crying, they gradually stopped as well. Other than two soldiers who could not stop crying, the situation slowly returned to normal.

Qian Weining looked around and explained to everyone in the trade caravan, "I'm sorry, everyone. We were just thinking about a dead comrade of ours, so we were feeling a little sad. Sorry to have caused a disturbance."

Ren Xiaosu sat at the campfire and said to Qian Weining in seriousness, "The dead have passed, but the living still have to lead good lives. My condolences, I wish you all happiness."

Qian Weining replied, "Thank you—"

Before he could finish speaking, Qian Weining and his subordinates around him started crying again!

Ren Xiaosu was stunned before suddenly realizing this spell could really be fucking turned into an AoE attack!

However, he did not notice that Chen Jingshu's expression had changed a short distance away. That was because she knew the founder of the organization she was from not only hailed from the Central Plains, but he was also capable of making people cry out of the blue.

She turned her gaze to Ren Xiaosu and observed him quietly, wanting to confirm something

Chapter 1139 What are they crying about?

Chen Jingshu had a very vague impression of her organization's founder. It was not that she did not pay attention to him before, but that the information surrounding him was deliberately obscured.

The bounty hunters on the fringe of the organization were not allowed to know the name of their founder.

It was not that there was some kind of hierarchy within the organization. Chen Jingshu's brother had once told her this was actually to protect the organization and its fringe members.

A lot of people thought this group of bounty hunters were first targeted by the magus order after they killed several hundred members of the House of Voss. But actually, the

history of them being pursued dated back over a 100 years. At that time, they were not even known as bounty hunters yet.

There was a long-held feud between their organization and the magus order, so they kept their identities hidden for over a 100 years. It was only when that old history was gradually forgotten in recent decades that they dared to be active again.

Currently, most sorcerers did not even know these bounty hunters were intricately linked to a certain Central Plains Rider and Russell. They only thought they were an unstable factor in the kingdom that had recently emerged. Some of the sorcerers got suspicious of their identities, but there was not enough evidence to prove that the bounty hunters were related to the Central Plains Rider.

They had also caught some bounty hunters in the past, but they didn't get any useful information out of them.

If Ren Xiaosu had not received the clues from the palace, he would also not have thought the bounty hunters had anything to do with Ren He.

The leaders of this organization had made some changes to the organization's legacy at some point in time, so only a few leadership figures were aware of what they were fighting

for.

However, the members always had some curiosity about their founder. When Chen Jingshu was young, she would always pester her grandfather, asking about the stories of her predecessors. And because her grandfather doted on her, he would tell her one or two interesting stories about the founder, such as how he could make people cry.

At first, Chen Jingshu thought her grandfather was referring to how the founder could move people to tears. But after her grandfather corrected her and explained it, she realized that making the enemy cry for no reason was a special ability the founder had!

Chen Jingshu did not know whether to laugh or cry at this. How could there be such a strange ability in this world?

But at this moment, this strange ability suddenly played out in front of her.

Qian Weining felt a little puzzled. No such spell existed, so why did he suddenly start crying nonstop? Besides, the only sorcerer present had not cast any spells either.

It could have been due to a sudden soreness in his eyes, or he might have suffered from some kind of eye disorder, or his eyelashes might have gotten stuck in his eyes.

He could also understand why the others cried so badly. Everyone was aware that no one would make it out of this mission alive, but they had all been avoiding talking about it recently.

Having suppressed their fear and faith for so long, it was easy for them to break down over a small issue. Therefore, Qian Weining was not too bothered by it.

However, Chen Jingshu knew the founder was not a sorcerer, yet he really did possess a strange ability like that. A young man from the Central Plains, a strange ability, these two facts came together and sparked a thought. Chen Jingshu realized the young man named Ren Xiaosu might have a more complicated and intimate relationship with them than she had imagined.

However, Ren Xiaosu was not paying attention to the reactions of Chen Jingshu and her group. He was only surprised to discover that the word “all” had changed a single-target attack to a group attack. This was definitely an unexpected surprise.

Those who had been in enough battles should understand that if they could make the enemy cry nonstop, it was enough to be the key to victory.

But that was not the most important thing. What delighted Ren Xiaosu the most was that this spell could also create the impression that the enemy was brought to tears after being defeated!

In the future, if he publicized his achievements, he could say, “I’ve beaten that person before and made them cry!”

Just the thought of it made him extremely excited.

Think, what did it mean to be beaten to tears? Someone would definitely have to be completely overwhelmed by their opponents’ combat strength and had their confidence completely crushed, leaving them so ashamed and depressed they could not help but start crying.

When others heard about how you managed to beat someone to tears, their first impression would be that you must be really strong. Then when they thought more about it, they might even be able to analyze some details.

When Ren Xiaosu thought of this, he nearly laughed out loud!

He looked up at Qian Weining. At this moment, Qian Weining and his men were completely dumbfounded. The emotions they had just managed to restrain started surging again.

Ren Xiaosu wanted to go up and comfort them, but he did not know what would be a good way to approach it. Moreover, he could not go over anymore. Many of the

unaware traders and travelers had already surrounded Qian Weining and his men to console them.

If someone were to fall dead right now, these people might even fork out some condolence money for their funeral.

It was not that everyone had a sympathetic heart, but that the atmosphere there was simply too sorrowful.

Next to Ren Xiaosu, Melgor asked in a daze, “Did something happen? What did I miss?”

To Melgor, he had only stayed in his inner world for a short while. By the time he heard the crying and ended his meditation, the real world had become a little strange.

Curious, Ren Xiaosu asked, “You could hear their crying in your inner world?”

“Mhm.” Melgor nodded.

“So the soundproofing of your inner world isn’t that great, huh?” Ren Xiaosu clicked his tongue and sighed.

Melgor was shocked. ‘So many people around us are crying their eyes out, so why are you more concerned about the soundproofing of my inner world?!’

But before Melgor could say anything, he heard the sound of a sharp weapon tearing through the night air.

Ren Xiaosu suddenly dragged Melgor away from the campfire. Melgor was sitting on the ground when he was suddenly pulled backwards by his collar. His whole body became a large doll whose body was flaying uncontrollably from head to toe, including his head.

No one could react in time to what was happening. Right after that, they heard a “thud” as an arrow pierced the spot where Melgor was just sitting! The shaft of the arrow was still vibrating, and the entire arrow had sunk a third of its length into the soil. This was enough to show how terrifying the force of the arrow was when it was fired.

Qian Weining roared in a sobbing tone, “We’re under attack! It’s a steel bow!”

A steel bow was a laminated composite bow made from a mixture of metal and bamboo materials.

The fearsome-sounding weapon was usually an indispensable weapon in large-scale wars. It was mostly carried by soldiers with great strength.

In just an instant, Qian Weining understood the attacker was not a simple bandit. It was definitely a knight from one of the knight brigades like him, and he should at least be a paladin as well!

Qian Weining quickly coordinated for the guards to hide behind the cover of the wagon fort. They had to protect themselves first before they could find an opportunity to counterattack.

Qian Weining's roars kept ringing out. In the darkness, a burly figure hesitated for a moment before finally wondering, "What are they crying about?!"

Chapter 1140 Misunderstanding!

In the darkness of the night, the enemies who suddenly attacked had intended to approach the camp quickly. But at this moment, they were standing in the wind and questioning from deep within their souls, "What are they crying about?"

It was not only the person who said it out loud who was puzzled; all the other assailants were as well!

The arrow fired just a moment ago had not succeeded in hitting its target, and no one at the camp was dead, so why were they even crying?

The sudden and inexplicable sound of the crying even bewildered them a little.

The assailants started wondering if something had gone awry with their plan!

The camp tonight was located in an open area where everything within a radius of 50 steps could be seen clearly. Earlier, the attackers had quietly sneaked over to scout the camp.

Although Qian Weining and his men were crying, there were actually still troops standing guard at sentry posts. Moreover, there were more than 30 of said sentries.

It was impossible to approach the camp without the trade caravan noticing. After much consideration, the burly man finally chose to create a diversion before attacking.

When the man saw he could not launch a sneak attack, he fired that arrow so it would alert all the guards at the camp. Then he would hide in the shadows while the camp was brightly lit by torches, making it convenient for him to examine the distribution of the guards.

He did this because he wanted to see how many proper guards capable of defending the camp there were. In addition, if he could immediately kill the target, Melgor, it would be worth a celebration too. They were here to kill him, after all. But the outcome left him a little surprised. After the arrow was fired, the man realized more than half of the

people at the camp seemed to be soldiers! Shortly, within ten respirations, the guards at the camp, as well as the traders and travelers disguised as guards, crawled to the back of the wagon fort for cover to avoid a further hail of arrows. They were very quick in their actions.

It was so quick the man almost thought they were the ones who had been ambushed!

This situation was a little strange. And when they heard the chaotic sobs, the scene in front of them became even stranger.

This situation really was a little incomprehensible. They could not be blamed for overthinking things.

“Did we scare them to tears?” one of the attackers asked in a whisper.

“That’s impossible!” The burly man in charge quickly regained his composure. He said coldly, “There’s at least 400 soldiers at their camp. All of them are well-trained, so how could they possibly get frightened to tears by us? Look at that crying man. He was able to determine the arrow was fired from a steel bow just by looking at the depth it penetrated into the ground. Can the average person have such sharp eyes? They would be running for their lives instead!”

When they heard this, everyone fell into deep thought again. What was the other party crying about then?

“Sir, why are there so many people guarding Melgor here?” a man asked. “The intel supplied by the family states that this is just a normal trade caravan. But look at the situation at the camp. It’s obviously not normal. Not only do they have a lot of guards, but they’re even pretending to be traders and other unrelated people. They were clearly waiting to ambush us!”

The burly man in charge fell into deep thought. Just as his subordinates had said, everything about this trade caravan seemed very peculiar.

Melgor was just a fringe sorcerer. How could someone like him possibly hire so many well-trained soldiers at once?

So what exactly went wrong?!

“We’ll proceed with the original plan. Wang Yaoyang, lead a team to suppress the enemy with our arrows. The rest of you, follow me. We’ll take a detour to ambush them! Tonight, we must kill the target and eliminate that person who has angered the patriarch!” The burly man could not care less anymore. They had to carry out this mission no matter what!

Before they had set off, they received news from their clan that their patriarch was extremely furious. Although they did not know who had provoked him, nor how he was angered, being a knight meant they had to protect the honor of their lord. If they could not kill Melgor and whoever had angered their patriarch, they would not have to go back! They had sworn allegiance to the gods, so they could not go back on their word.

Who knew what they would think if they found out Ren Xiaosu had poked their patriarch's nostrils with a tree branch?

As he spoke, the burly man started sprinting to the left with dozens of men following close behind him in the darkness. He was going to make a quick breakthrough and seek out Melgor. And if the man with a face of black mist wearing a white mask appeared, they would shift their attention to that person.

That person was protecting Melgor. If the man targeted Melgor, the other party would definitely appear.

Actually, the man did not really understand what the description of that person meant. A man with a face of black mist wearing a white mask? But the person in charge of communicating the clan's orders said he would understand when he saw it.

Multiple figures could be seen outside the camp. Within the camp, Qian Weining hid behind a carriage and took out his bow. He kept crying as he commanded the guards to set up the defenses.

Qian Weining said to his trusted aide like they were facing a formidable enemy, "That was a steel bow! Those people must be coming for us!"

"Sir, didn't you mention that Melgor also has an enemy who's after him? Could it be his enemy that's attacking us? That arrow was directed at him just now," Qian Weining's trusted aide wondered.

"That's impossible!" Qian Weining said firmly, "Melgor is only a fringe sorcerer, so why would they need to mobilize such elite knights? Our enemy probably even outranks me, and their numbers might not be less than ours either. Why would they need such a powerful force to kill Melgor? Those people must've found out about our Knights of the Inferno's northern expedition plan. That's why they're trying to stop our caravan from heading north. They don't want to receive the bad reputation of killing merchants, so they're framing it on bandits."

"Uh," his trusted aide said tearfully, "then what should we do?"

"Kill them!" Qian Weining said determinedly with tears streaming down his face, "This matter affects the plans of our Knights of the Inferno. Remember to leave some survivors after we're almost done killing them. I want to interrogate them!"

“What are you planning?”

“I want to know where they got their intel from, and I also want to know how they’re planning to deal with our plan.” Qian Weining said, “Only then can I relay the intel to our knights accurately.”

His trusted aide hesitated for a moment. “Sir, why don’t we take the opportunity to leave? After we kill some of them, we can pull a switcheroo with their corpses and let the House of Berkeley think we’ve died in battle. After that, we can head to the northern counties to make a living, or even occupy a mountain and become bandits! Are you really OK with it even though the family sent you here to die? We’ve only offended a good-for-nothing member of the clan, yet the family wants us dead!”

Qian Weining slapped his trusted aide in the face. “Don’t you remember the oath we made when we joined the knights? Dying in battle is the best ending for us. Our clan can betray us, but we can’t betray the honor of the Knights of the Inferno!”

His trusted aide sighed and said, “Sir, it’s way too inspirational when you say all that while crying!”

Qian Weining was speechless.

At this moment, Melgor’s back was pressed tightly against the carriage. He panted heavily as he asked Ren Xiaosu, “You’ve been hiding your strength all this while, right?”

Ren Xiaosu asked with a smile, “Is your life or the answer more important?”

Melgor answered honestly, “My life, of course!”