

Witch 1041

Chapter 1041: A Strange Wound

"A vertically integrated conglomerate..." Roland whispered.

"What?" Victor was stunned. "If you've any question about my plan, I can explain it again—"

"No, thanks." Roland waved his hand. "I think it's an interesting plan, and it seems feasible. I just want to know how long it'll take you to collect enough funds for it."

Victor's eyes shone with joy. "I knew you would understand it. Please excuse me for being blunt, Your Majesty. If you were a merchant, you'd definitely own a great Chamber of Commerce!"

It sounded like Victor was degrading the king by comparing him to a merchant, but Roland understood that for a businessman from the Kingdom of Dawn, praising someone's business talent was the sincerest form of flattery.

The business model suggested by Victor reminded Roland of modern companies that had an integrated system for production, supply, and marketing in the previous world where he had lived.

He had never expected that he would hear such a detailed commercial development plan from a man in this world. Compared to the conventional Chambers of Commerce, Victor understood more advanced concepts. He planned to include both production and sales in his business. He was willing to provide technology, employ a large number of people, and be responsible for his own profits and losses.

Roland thought that this might also be an opportunity for himself.

In the past few years, his domain had rapidly expanded, but many management problems had also emerged. Most of the industries and projects in Graycastle were directly operated by the Administrative Office. The officials had to spend lots of time managing people and funds, which made the government departments overstaffed and greatly affected the government's administrative efficiency.

Since the officials' personal interests had nothing to do with the profit and loss situation of these "state-owned enterprises", they only worked according to the king's orders and tried their best to maintain these enterprises' stability. In the early stage of development, such enterprises, under the total control of the government, could quickly meet the kingdom's demands and complete some high-risk projects, but they weren't suitable for all economic endeavors.

Given these realities, Roland had only focused on developing heavy industries. Neverwinter did not have enough workers and the Administrative Office did not have enough qualified officials to develop light industries.

It was simple to give an order, but it was not always simple to carry it out. Even if it was just an expansion project, like building another steam engine assembly plant, he would still need lots of money and many trained workers.

But now, he realized that he had another option.

He could encourage private investment and let the businessmen organize things. He had no reason to turn Victor down, who came to him even before he adopted such policies.

Although it was a "foreign company", whose profits would inevitably go back to the Kingdom of Dawn, he did not mind it very much since its production department would remain in Graycastle.

After reaching a preliminary agreement, Roland accompanied Victor to the gate of the castle. "By the time you're ready, I'll be able to provide you with the new cotton seeds. But I need to tell you something in advance. If some day someone else wants to imitate you and comes to the Administrative Office asking for the seeds, we'll sell the seeds to them at the same price. I want to see as many goods on the market as possible because I want to make prices more affordable for my people. I hope you understand that."

"I understand, Your Majesty," Victor replied, with a confident look in his eyes. "Merchants from the Kingdom of Dawn never dread competition. My father always said that from the moment we were born, the competition has already begun."

When he was about to leave, Roland stopped him. "Wait, I've another question. My minister found that you paid taxes to Longsong Stronghold six years ago. Why did you do that? It was easy for you to not pay at that time, wasn't it?"

Victor nodded. "Yes, it was, but back then, the lord promised that he would provide conveniences and protection for merchants who paid taxes. He honored his commitment and protected us when we were traveling between Border Town and Longsong Stronghold. I'm happy to pay some money for a stable environment. It's a good thing for a merchant, but unfortunately, most of my peers would rather spend large sums of money on their merchandise than pay for stability and security."

Seeing the merchant leave, Roland thought, "What an interesting person and a serious businessman. He'll serve as a good example for the private entrepreneurs in Graycastle and lead the trend in the development of light industries."

He turned around, wanting to return to his office. Suddenly, Nightingale anxiously whispered in his ear. "Your Majesty, Lightning is back, and she seems to have gotten into serious trouble—"

"What happened?" asked Roland.

"I don't know... I've just received a call from Sylvie. Maggie brought her back and took her directly to the hospital!"

Roland's heart suddenly sank. "She's hurt? Take me to the hospital now!"

"Yes." Nightingale reached out her hand and pulled him into the Mist.

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They quickly arrived at the hospital and saw the little girl lying in bed.

He felt very relieved when he opened the door. Lightning was lying there with no bruises or blood stains. She was breathing peacefully and regularly. It seemed that she was already out of danger.

Nevertheless, he quickly noticed something was off.

Nana didn't look relaxed like she usually did after completing a treatment. Instead, she seemed confused, knitting her brows tightly and fixing her eyes on her own hands.

Beside the bed, Maggie was taking care of Lightning and wiping sweat from her forehead. She appeared nervous and winced when she saw Roland, as if she had done something wrong. Lightning was in a cold sweat and groaning slightly, as if she was troubled by a nightmare.

"How's she?" Roland looked at Nana. "Where's the wound?"

Nana raised her head and slowly pointed to her own chest.

"Nightingale."

"Yes." Nightingale stepped forward, carefully picked up Lightning and took off her windbreaker. After that, she started to unbutton her blouse. When she revealed her collarbones, she suddenly stopped.

"Your Majesty, this is—"

Roland came closer to the bed and saw a thumb-sized wound several centimeters below her neck. It was particularly eye-catching on her white skin, but it was only a scratch. Normally, for a witch, such a minor injury would quickly heal without treatment.

And healing such a wound should have been a piece of cake for Nana.

However, what Nana said astounded him.

"I can't heal her..." Nana murmured. "No matter how I tried, the wound just wouldn't heal, as if my healing ability just stopped working all of a sudden."

Chapter 1042: The Magic Curse

"Your healing ability... stopped working?" Nightingale was startled and then turned to look at Maggie.

"Was Lightning injured by a Senior Demon?"

"Coo..." Maggie mumbled.

"What?"

"No..." She replied. This time they finally heard what she said. "It was me. I pecked on her chest, coo..."

"What?" Roland exchanged a surprised look with Nightingale, and then they asked simultaneously.

"What happened at the time? You'd better tell us the story from beginning to end."

After hearing the whole story, Roland knitted his eyebrows tightly.

According to Maggie, Lightning had just been terrified by a mighty demon who looked like a human being. It had looked directly into her eyes from a distance to intimidate her when she had been trying her new ability. Roland could not help wondering how the demon managed to stare at a witch flying at the speed of sound. This sounded even more incredible than the news about the demons fighting the demonic beasts on the snowfield and the new discovery which suggested that skeleton monsters were also a kind of weapon.

Maggie said that back then, she had just wanted to wake Lightning up by pecking at her. Otherwise, she would have kept flying forward until she bumped into the enemy.

As for the reason why Lightning's wound remained unhealed, it probably had nothing to do with Maggie. She was not capable of causing such an injury, and even if she was, she would never hurt her best friend Lightning.

Given that, they decided to give the little girl a thorough examination to identify the cause.

Roland sighed secretly. Before her departure, he had told her repeatedly that safety was the most important thing and had warned her that she should never take advantage of her new capability to go deep into a dangerous place. However, it turned out that as a daughter of an explorer, she just could not control the urge for exploration.

Roland knew that it was not a proper time to reproach Lightning. Now, he needed to find out where the problem was.

He asked Nightingale to fetch Wendy, Lily, Agatha and also Nightfall who could plant the Seed of Symbiosis in Lightning in case that some accidental injuries would happen during the examining process. In the evening, when Lightning finally woke up from her coma, the witches finally finished the examination and told Roland the results.

"You mean she's all right?" Roland gave a hasty glance at Lightning's pale face when she was curling up in Wendy's arms. "She doesn't look alright, does she?"

"She passed out of exhaustion caused by the prolonged flight. Nightfall can prove it. After she planted Seed of Symbiosis in Lightning, she didn't feel any discomfort. That means, her body is healthy and her coma only happened for some mental reason. She'll recover after resting a few more days."

"What about the wound?"

"This is exactly what I wanted to tell you next," Agatha said in a low voice. "Her problem is in her magic power. When I checked her power with the Stone of Measuring, I felt a hint of feedback that didn't belong to her."

"What... do you mean?" Roland was puzzled.

"As you know, magic power is everywhere, but if you want to use it, you must make it your own first. We call this process cohering. After awakening, the magic power cohered inside our bodies will look like some objects, such as a cyclone. This is also true for demons. However, a demon's magic power looks completely different from a witch's. Seeing through the Stone of Measuring, a witch's power is clear like water while a demon's power looks muddy." She paused for a moment before adding, "The different feedback I received from Lightning's body looked exactly the same as a demon's power."

Roland was shocked, as this matter seemed to get quite tricky now. "Do you mean that the demon somehow eroded Lightning's magic power without touching her?"

"How is this possible?" Nightingale asked. "I can easily distinguish different types of magic power in the misty world. If she was eroded, I'd be able to see it."

"It's too small compared to Lightning's magic power, and thus can be easily overlooked." Agatha shook her head. "I just told you the test results of the Stone of Measuring. As for whether it's an erosion, I can't be sure now."

Roland quickly understood the implication of Agatha's statement. "You've never seen this kind of ability before, have you?"

"No, many demons have similar capabilities and are able to affect their opponents with their eyes, such as Fearsome Demons. It's not a strange thing that a Senior Demon has this kind of ability. After all, unlike witches, whose ability types are determined during their awakening, demons can get new abilities by absorbing Magic Stones. However, I've never heard about such an ability, which could stop the wound from healing up." Agatha thought for a while. "If the feedback came from a small amount of magic power that the demon attached to the wound, everything would make sense."

"Indeed, that also explains why Nana's healing ability suddenly became ineffective. She can heal wounds, but that doesn't necessarily mean that she's able to dispel a demon's evil power," Ronald thought and then asked, "Do you know how to remove this power from Lightning?"

"I don't know," the Ice Witch replied plainly. "Normally, a God's Stone of Retaliation can eliminate effects of the magic power, but this Senior Demon's power isn't that simple."

"Since it may work on the wound, how about we remove the wound and the flesh around it first and then heal the cut?"

"No, I suggest you don't do that. This small wound isn't deadly, but what if the demon's evil power can expand with the wound? In that case, the cut will still remain unhealed after the operation, and it'll be even more difficult for Lightning to recover," Agatha vetoed the suggestion immediately. "In the next few days, we'd better let her stay in the Third Border City and observe her changes. Pasha knows more than us. Maybe she can think of some way to dispel the demon's power."

"I see."

Roland nodded and slowly walked to the bed.

Seeing him, Lightning dropped her head and sounded as if she was about to cry. "Your Majesty, sorry...I'm..."

"You don't have to apologize." Roland touched her head. "Have a good rest. I promise I'll find a way to cure you."

Lightning sobbed and trembled, trying her best to hold back her tears. After a long time, she finally managed to squeak out a yes.

"Good."

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Three days later, Taquila witches informed Roland of Lightning's recent situation.

Right after receiving the message, he went to the Third Border City inside the North Slope Mountain together with Nightingale and Wendy.

Pasha received them at the entrance of the main hall.

"How's Lightning?"

"She feels much better now. Elena has been taking care of her these days. By telling the little girl her interesting experiences in the Dream World, she made her almost forget about her encounter with the Senior Demon," Pasha said with a smile. "Today, Lightning even flew a few circles in the main hall with Maggie. The small wound on her chest doesn't affect her actions at all."

Hearing that, Roland breathed a sigh of relief. At present, he still kept Lightning's injury as a secret, which was only known to a small number of witches. He had not even told Thunder about it, lest it caused stress and anxiety for him. However, he could not hide her forever since her disappearance would inevitably cause everyone to worry and bring even more attention to this matter.

"Have you figured out what the Senior Demon did to her?" Wendy asked anxiously.

Pasha waved her tentacles. "Celine has re-read all the literature left by Taquila but still can't find a record that matches her experience. Given that, we reckon that it must be a new ability of the demons. We've never seen this ability before but we've found some similar abilities. In fact, based on its effect, we think it resembles a very rare ability."

"What's that?"

"We call it the magic curse," Pasha replied in a measured but firm tone.

Chapter 1043: A New Challenge

"A curse?" Roland repeated the word in an ominous tone.

"Please come with me." Pasha turned around and led everyone into an adjacent cave, where the Taquila witches stored books and scrolls. They had gouged many grooves in the walls of the cave, and it seemed that this library cave had even more volumes than the Secret Temple's library. "Celine, His Majesty is here."

"I'm coming." Celine's voice rang in everyone's head before she came out. The next moment, her main tentacle stuck out from the depths of the cave, knocking lots of books off before quickly shrinking back into the darkness.

Before it retreated, it greeted Roland by giving him a nod.

"Ahem— I'm sorry, Your Majesty. Every time she spots a new study object, she'll get totally absorbed in the research like this," Pasha explained with a slight embarrassment. "The demon seemed to use a curse on Lightning, but she wasn't inflicted with any serious injury. That's indeed a rare thing."

"What's she going to do?" The moment Roland heard the phrase, "study object", he thought of mice used in experiments, who would suffer various unfair treatments in labs.

"Please rest assured. Observing and recording are the principal study methods we use in magic power research. With the help of the magic core, Celine can clearly capture the movement of Lightning's magic

power," said Pasha while picking up the books that fell on the ground. She opened a book and showed it to everyone. "Look at this here... and here."

Roland reckoned that this book was probably an ancient book passed down from the Taquila age, since most of its pages had already turned yellow with age. It was written in the witch's ancient language. Next to the two parts pointed out by Parsha, there was a note tucked inside the book, which explained the content of the ancient writings. Apparently, Celine had already translated these two parts for them. He took a closer look and found that it was about two battles.

"In a siege battle in the Land of Dawn, eight wounded witches were rescued by the reinforcements, but in the end, none of them recovered from their injuries. Their wounds just could not heal no matter what. All treatments were ineffective on them. As time went by, they became weaker from loss of blood and their wounds got infected. They suffered a lot before death, and two of them even chose to commit suicide," Parsha said slowly. "This battle happened so long ago that even the writer of the book did not know many details about it, except that this was an incredible incident. The phrase 'the demon's magic curse' first appeared in this story."

"The other part where the magic curse is mentioned was in the records of a battle that happened not that long ago. A Senior Demon fought a fierce battle against the witches' army in Lakes City, which was situated on the edge of the Fertile Plains. It could attach its magic power to black stone spears. Once a witch was wounded by such a spear, she would become feeble and wither up. The Union called this cruel monster Dementor." Pasha paused a moment before adding, "It killed three Extraordinaries, and within all three Extraordinaries, the Quest Society found a strange magic power."

"And the strange magic power came from the demon, right?" Roland blurted out.

"Yes," Pasha nodded her main tentacle. "We think these abilities are of the same type. The strange magic power can somehow remain inside the target and cause continuous damage, which can't be cured by any conventional medical treatment. And it's also hard to eliminate the strange magic power."

"That's why you call it a curse," said Wendy, sadly. "It's terrible..."

Nightingale understood Pasha's implication and asked, "You said it's hard to eliminate it. Do you mean... there's still a way to erase it?"

Pasha turned to the next page and answered, "Yes, if what we've inferred from these records is correct."

Roland skimmed through the rest of the story. "When Lakes City was at stake, a witch named Samantha stood out to fight Dementor. In this battle, she went through a high awakening and became a Transcendent. After she cleaved the demon in half, the curse on her somehow disappeared and she miraculously survived. Samantha tried her best to defend Lakes City, but one year later, the city still fell, since the Red Mist was already too close to the city. Fortunately, she gained enough time for the people to withdraw from the city. After that, Samantha forced a radical change in the Union and successfully built the Three Chiefs system. She herself was among the first batch of Three Chiefs."

Now, Roland understood what Pasha meant.

If Lightning was really affected by the magic curse, the only way to save her was probably killing the demon who exerted this effect on her. It was not an easy thing. The previous battles in the snow

mountain camp and in the Northbound Slope had already proven that Senior Demons were exceptionally difficult opponents. If they went head to head with the First Army, human beings would have a better chance of winning the battle. However, if they deliberately avoided head-on confrontations, it would be very difficult and risky to chase and fight them.

And this was virtually impossible for the witches in the Taquila age.

Senior Demons usually acted together with their armies. As military leaders, they were often surrounded by many demon soldiers. Back then, it had been extremely difficult for the Taquila witches to win a battle against the demons, let alone completely annihilating the enemy soldiers and getting close to the Senior Demons.

Roland could not help thinking of the unknown witch and her last words in her letter to Natalia.

She probably also died from this kind of magic curse.

Since she had been able to write directly to one of the Three Chiefs, she must have been at the upper levels of the Union. But even she had not been able to do anything about the curse except accepting the final outcome of it.

To save such a cursed witch, the Union would have to find and kill the Senior Demon who had inflicted the curse upon her from amongst the numerous demons. During this process, they had to sacrifice even more witches. Apparently, for the Union, saving a cursed witch was not worth the risks and sacrifices.

Nightingale gradually clenched her hands into fists while weighing the gains against the losses.

After a moment of contemplating, Roland said, "Indeed, it's difficult to kill the demon, but I'll never give up any chance to cure Lightning."

"..." Pasha remained speechless for a moment. "If this is what you want."

"Before we take action, I need to sort some things out. The Senior Demon Lightning encountered has the ability to lay a curse upon anyone without direct contact. If it curses a common person, what will happen to that person?"

"The outcome will be even worse." Celine suddenly interrupted. "The magic power gives witches better immunity and greater healing abilities, so we won't be affected by the demonic plague, which was bacterial infections mentioned in your book. As for common people, they'll quickly die from the infections since their wounds can't heal up."

"Can God's Stones of Retaliation protect them from the curse?"

"Of course, they can. If Dementor hadn't been a match for an Extraordinary in strength, it would've never caused such huge losses to the Union. However—" Celine paused a moment before continuing, "Based on Lightning's description, we cannot rule out the possibility that the demon she met is a Magic Slayer. If it is, wearing God's Stones of Retaliation won't be very helpful."

The more powerful a demon was, the more it would resemble a human being. This rule was verified by the Union in the previous two Battles of Divine Will.

Roland took a deep breath.

He had to agree with Celine on this point. According to Lightning's description, this Senior Demon might be stronger than all the enemies they have encountered in the past.

Given that, to kill the Senior Demon, he would have to plan the expedition to Taquila very carefully.

Chapter 1044: An Unsteady Mind

Lightning and Maggie slowly descended from the sky and landed on the roof of the Witch Building.

A cold wind was howling, but after they entered the building and closed the door, they could only hear a slight whistling noise caused by the wind blowing through the crack between the door and its frame.

"Whew, my hair is all wet." The pigeon shook off the snowflakes and began to transform back into a little girl. Her plumage swelled and then changed into ankle-length white hair. Her hair looked and felt very soft, but it would never get messed up in the wind. Now, it wrapped around the little girl, making her look like a cotton ball.

But since her hair was damp with the water from the snow, it looked bleak and was not as fluffy as usual.

"You'd better go to take a shower first, otherwise, you'll get a cold." Lightning took off her goggles and looked outside. The weather during the Months of Demons was extremely unpredictable. Not long ago, it had been just a light snow, but now, it had turned into a snowstorm. She had to suspend her recovery training in such a heavy snow.

"Aren't you coming with me?" asked Maggie, surprised

"His Majesty told me that I should try my best to keep the wound dry and avoid unboiled water. Do you remember?" Lightning shrugged. "So I'll just wipe myself with warm water. Besides, this coat is waterproof."

"I see." Maggie smoothed away the hair from her face and grinned. "After my shower, I can scrub your back. Ashes enjoyed it very much. And I don't even need a towel!"

"Uh... how did you scrub her back without a towel?"

"Like this." Maggie used her hands to grab some of her hair and made circular motions.

"No, thanks." Lightning rolled her eyes. "If you use a towel, I'll think about it. Go to take a shower now, Maggie."

"Oh!"

Maggie walked towards the castle with a basin balanced on her head. Lightning turned around and walked into her bedroom alone.

She locked the door and leaned against it.

She stretched out her right hand and found that she could not stop her fingers from trembling.

She smiled mirthlessly.

Every time she closed her eyes, she would see the demon charging towards her. Even after these last few days of training, this fear still followed her and it even seemed to take root in her heart. Lightning had never faced this kind of situation before.

When she was in front of Roland and her Exploration Group, she pretended that she was not affected by the small wound. Even Nightingale did not perceive anything wrong with her when she was discussing her injury with others. However, she could not lie to herself. She knew how miserable her current situation was.

As an ambitious explorer, she was afraid to let anyone see her being so weak. She was afraid that Maggie might notice something wrong with her, so she sent her to take a shower alone.

In the next moment, she gradually slid to the ground and buried her head in her knees.

Phyllis had told her that the Senior Demon might have just evoked a sense of fear in her by making eye contact with her like a Fearsome Demon would do to its opponent, but she did want to fool herself with such an excuse. It had happened long ago and a witch should be good at resisting this kind of emotional influence. Back then, Maggie had been there too, but she had not been affected by the Senior Demon at all.

Lightning could accept the fact that she was terrified.

After all, this was not the first time for her to fear something.

People were naturally afraid of the unknown. No person was omniscient, so no one could avoid fear.

What counted was how a person responded to the fear.

Most of the time, such a feeling would never bother her too much. On the contrary, it would ignite her interest in challenging herself, since she wanted to prove that nothing in this world could really scare her.

But this time, however, she felt empty in her heart.

She was afraid to think about her encounter with the Senior Demon, not to mention overcoming the fear she felt.

In today's recovery training, she kept flying on the east side of Neverwinter and never dared to fly over the city wall. It was not because of health reasons but because of her fear of the vast snow field. For her, the white land below looked like bottomless cliffs and the horizon looked like a cleft which would swallow everything. Every time she looked into the distance, she would feel her heart trembling.

Before she got a chance to fight against the demon, she was already shocked by its strong evil spirit. It was like prey being terrified by a predator. This fear caused great harm to her and even affected her flying ability.

Lightning held her knees tightly.

I am such a coward! I'm not qualified to lead the Exploration Group.

She could not help wondering what her father would do to get rid of such a fear. She believed that Thunder, who had explored many dangerous waters, must have been able to tackle this problem.

"Father..."

She whispered.

"What should I do now?"

A weapon test was about to begin in the Misty Forest.

The test location was Forest Station No.1, the starting point of the railway in the Barbarian Land

In the next year, when the steam locomotive was put into use, Neverwinter would better utilize the forest's resources, such as food and lumber, and would be able to exploit the coal mines near the snow mountain. At that time, this vast, trackless forest would become a real treasure trove.

But, for now, the railway only served one purpose.

It was dedicated to the war effort.

The First Army had already sealed off the station for the weapons test.

Iron Axe also attended this event.

He could not help thinking of the mind-blowing black powder trial blasting that occurred four years ago. Back then, when he had been a humble hunter, he had been deeply shocked by the explosion and had taken it as the Fire of God's Punishment. That trial was a revelation to him and had completely changed his fate.

Now, as the commander of the First Army, he actively participated in the weapons test. He had already known what His Majesty was going to test today before he even came here. Actually, it was more a creative combination than a brand new invention. It consisted of two parts: cannons and a train, both of which had been displayed before. Given that, he believed he would be able to witness the whole test process peacefully this time.

He should remain calm the whole time.

As a high-ranking military official, he needed to look comfortable and in command even in front of thunder and fire, just like His Majesty.

However, Iron Axe was still stunned when the armored vehicle slowly pulled out of the garage.

Its appearance could hardly evoke the image of the train he had seen previously since it was completely covered by black steel plates, except for certain parts of its wheels. If it was looked at from the front, it was square and angular, with a cold, commanding force.

It looked fierce.

Anyone who saw it would immediately reach this conclusion.

In the past, Iron Axe had not quite understood why His Majesty often described a machine as an enchanting thing, but now, watching this armored train proceeding on the railway in the snow, he suddenly understood. White smoke kept billowing out from the funnel of the engine and then gently blew over the train, which had many orderly-arranged rivets on its surface.

The giant steel ship was already impressive enough, but even it could not compete with this armored train.

This was because it was more than just a vehicle.

It was a deadly weapon at the same time!

Chapter 1045: A Black River on the Plain

When the armored train stopped in front of the crowd, Iron Axe finally got a chance to take a closer look at it.

It had only five train cars, so it was much shorter than the first train he had seen during its debut. However, as it was armored with steel plates, it looked much bulkier than the first train. Its black opaque surface made it look like a crouching wild beast.

The first and the fifth cars were identical. Both of these steam locomotives had a rotatable machine gun on the top and many small holes in the steel plates for soldiers to observe and shoot.

Iron Axe began to imagine what would happen when demons charged toward this thing.

When spears rain on the steel plates, making successive clangs, the train still remains intact and keeps moving at a steady pace. At the same time, a dozen of guns starts to fire through the holes on its side, riddling the enemies with bullets.

Both demons and demonic beasts will find themselves in a passive position under heavy attack, but they have no countermeasures. This new weapon is like a moving city wall, protecting the soldiers inside all the time.

What a marvelous invention!

Meanwhile, the soldiers around the station also began to whisper excitedly.

None of them expected that this new weapon was going to bring them even more surprises.

The First Army had to drastically increase their firepower for the upcoming war since they planned to eliminate skeleton monsters and destroy the demons' outpost in the Taquila ruins. To achieve those goals, they needed large-caliber cannons.

Such weapons were installed in the second and the fourth cars.

They were 152mm Longsong Cannons, but according to the king, these two cannons were specially made. Their barrels were longer and their chambers were larger. Each cannon would take up the entire interior of a train car. Everyone could clearly see that neither the second nor the fourth cars had extra space even for a machine gun.

Each cannon had a protective case around its barrel, which was even wider than the car and could protect the artillery units from aerial attacks.

Iron Axe had to admit that this design guaranteed safety but at the same time, he worried that the protective cases might be too heavy for the train. He wondered whether the train could withstand the impact when the cannons were firing and rotating.

"Your Majesty." A soldier jogged all the way to the king and saluted. "Everything is ready. Please issue an order!"

"This armored train is not yet operational. Now, the Ministry of Industry is solely responsible for the operation and maintenance of this equipment." Roland shook his head smilingly. "Given that, you should report to the Minister of Industry. She's in charge of this weapon test today."

Iron Axe did not notice that the queen also attended the test until this moment. Different from the other witches, she dressed in work clothes. That was why he did not recognize her in the first place.

"Your, Your Highness..." The soldier saluted Anna and stuttered. "Everything is rea-ready..."

"I know," Anna replied calmly. "Let them start the test."

"Yes!" The soldier replied and then shouted toward the armored train. "Start the test!"

Everyone revealed an understanding smile to the soldier. Right after he gave the instruction, a siren rang throughout the forest.

"Woo—Woo—"

Iron Axe immediately returned his gaze to the train and heard some creaking noise made by a capstan. The next moment, he was amazed to find that the train somehow transformed.

The steel plates on both sides of the second and the fourth cars suddenly expanded and stretched out like two sturdy iron legs. Iron Axe had thought they were just protective plates, but now he realized that they were some supporting devices. On the end of each iron leg, there was a flat iron plate. These flat plates were like feet of the train. When they stepped in the snow, the cars were held firmly in position. From a distance, it looked like a giant spider with long legs.

Iron Axe was stunned. This... looks just like the deformed creature created by the demons!

Did His Majesty get inspired by the demons' creation and adopt their design?

Different from the demons' deformed creatures, this metal thing did not look evil. When all its legs were put in place, the fierce cannon opened fire for the first time.

Although the recoil was very strong, the black armored train remained motionless during the whole process, as if it had been fixed on the ground.

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"It works." Roland took out his earplugs and nodded at Anna.

Although this was the first test of the armored train, he was not surprised by the success at all, since each equipment on this train had been tested many times.

Compared to the firearms and the train, he was delighted to see the iron legs more.

They were the first batch of hydraulic equipment manufactured by Neverwinter.

According to Pascal's principle, a pressure change occurring anywhere in a confined incompressible fluid will be transmitted undiminished to all points in the fluid. Given that, applying a little pressure on the smaller end of a sealed U-tube, which is filled with such fluid, will exert a much greater pressure against the entire area of the larger end of the tube. This principle can be applied widely, such as hydraulic jacks and hydraulic machinery.

Producing such hydraulic equipment required precision manufacturing and sealing technologies, both of which were no longer a problem for Neverwinter.

An electro-hydraulic support system was installed in this armored train.

Apart from the two cannon cars and the two steam locomotives, there was a bigger train car in the middle. It carried ammunition and a Dawn I, which could power everything in this train, such as electric bulbs and hydraulic pumps.

In Roland's design, the five above-mentioned cars would form a basically equipped armored train.

The train had a locomotive at both of its ends. When one locomotive was pulling the train forward, another one could push the train from behind. Given that, a basic five-car train could travel at more than 40 kilometers an hour. When he did not need speed, he could connect more cars to the train to carry soldiers or to further enhance its firepower. Different train cars could be combined according to the demand, which was an inestimable advantage of this train.

When everyone else was marveling at the armored train, Edith stepped out of the crowd and walked toward Roland smilingly.

"With this train, our plan to conquer Taquila will be successfully carried out," She bowed to the king and said. "Your Majesty, may I ask, does it have a name?"

Roland thought for a moment and replied, "Let's call it the Blackriver."

"Black River?" Edith's eyes shone with excitement. "It sounds like a counterpart of the demons' red lines."

Roland felt his lips curling into a smile. "...You're so brilliant, the Pearl of the Northern Region. That's right."

The red lines, namely, the red mist supply lines, were demons' lifeblood. In areas which were not shrouded in the Red Mist, they had to build numerous red lines across the land to transport the Red Mist. In the past, the extension of red lines had been a severe problem for the Union, but now, a black line appeared on the Fertile Plains.

Black armored trains were going to carry numerous soldiers and ammunition deep into the vast Barbarian Land. This black river of trains would become a lifeline for mankind.

Chapter 1046: A New Recruitment Notice

"Thump, thump, thump."

Uncle Bucky and Sanko, who lived next door, came to Good's mud hut at dawn and knocked on the door.

"Good, did you get up? We should go!"

"I'll be ready in a moment!"

Good gobbled down his porridge and wiped his mouth. "I've got to get going," he said to a girl who was busy making the bed.

She looked up and asked, "Why don't you want me to go with you?"

"I've told you many times. You're too young to have a job here," Good said impatiently. "Stop talking about how you worked back in the Kingdom of Wolfheart. Do you still want to do those kinds of things? Stay at the house and I'll bring you something delicious for lunch."

The girl's eyes shone with excitement. "Popcorn—"

"It's too expensive. I think an egg pancake is tasty enough or are you saying you don't like the taste of a nice pan fried runny egg?"

The girl felt her mouth watering.

"So just stay at the house, do you understand?" Before leaving the hut, Good asked the girl, "What's your name now?"

"Rachel."

"And what should you call me?"

She replied after a little hesitation, "Bro-Brother."

"Very well, don't forget it." Good wrapped a linen cloth around his neck and pushed the door open. A cold wind blew across his face. It was a freezing cold morning, but the temporary residential area was already full of vigor and vitality.

Rows of mud huts stretched throughout the snowfield like rolling waves. Wisps of smoke continuously rose from the huts and people were busy with all kinds of preparations. Through the smoke, he could just make out the vague shape of the city on the other side of the river. When the temporary residential area began to hum, the city was still so quiet that it seemed as if it was sleeping.

Uncle Bucky and Sanko, who stood a few dozen paces away from Good, yelled, "What're you looking at? Come on!"

"I'm coming!" He closed the door of his hut and ran towards them.

A new stone road along the Redwater River had been opened to traffic recently. Now, people from the temporary residential area only needed 15 minutes to walk to downtown Neverwinter, which was about 2,000 meters away. This was different from taking a mountain path covered by snow as they did not need to take cautious steps walking on this road in the winter. But since Good and his neighbors wanted to get to the central square before the release of the new recruitment notice, they still set off early.

Soon, they picked up many companions along the way. These people were also immigrants living in the temporary residential area. This area was so large that Good could never see the end of it. According to his neighbor, these mud huts for immigrants used to be built inside the city, but, after a while, the city had not been able to accommodate all the new comers and had decided to move all the mud huts to this area. Every year, the government would build new huts for the new immigrants, so no one knew exactly how many immigrants lived here at the moment.

The only thing that Good knew for certain was that most of the people on this road were heading for the central square, wanting to find jobs.

"Have you thought about what kind of job you want?" asked Uncle Bucky.

"I want an easy, simple job, such as the snow sweeping and the de-icing job..." Sanko replied while rubbing his head. "I prefer to make some quick cash to support myself this winter, so I like part-time jobs. If I get that kind of job, the money that I earn in a day can buy enough food for two days. Of course, I'll also consider some other jobs if there are suitable positions in the special recruitment program."

The special recruitment programs usually offered better pay and had specific prerequisites. Actually, the city was full of various kinds of prerequisites, all job recruitment notices were issued by the Administrative Office instead of some individual. Every week, the office would update the notice and it would include hundreds of positions. Good was really impressed by their efficiency.

But compared to the other fascinating things in this city, these timely and detailed recruitment notices were nothing.

There were three kinds of recruitment programs: the special recruitment program, part-time job recruitment and full-time job recruitment. A full-time job could provide higher pay and a more promising future, but an immigrant, who did not have an ID card or a diploma in primary education, was not eligible to apply for these kinds of jobs. Most newcomers could only choose to take part-time jobs to support themselves.

Sanko was taking elementary education classes at night. If he passed the assessment, he would be able to become an official resident and get an ID card. Given his situation, he intended to find a part-time job. It did not pay well, but it would not take up too much of his time. .

"What about you?" Sanko looked at Good.

"I need a well-paid job." Good shrugged. "I don't mind hard work."

Good needed to support Rachel.

They had come to the city during this winter. They already felt lucky enough to have a mud hut. For them, it was still too much to hope for a nice residence or eating one meat-based meal every week.

The only thing that disappointed Good was that Rachel was only 14 and did not meet the minimum working age requirement of 16. But since they had exerted a great deal effort to get out of a difficult situation, he did not want her to lead a hard life anymore.

"Don't get too tired," Uncle Bucky said. "It's easy to get sick during the winter. Medical treatment is expensive."

"Relax, I'm in good health!" Good patted his chest. He was not bragging. If it had not been for his humble origins, he would have become a squire to a knight a long time ago. "What are you going to do, Uncle?"

"I just came to accompany you guys."

"What?" Sanko was startled.

Good quickly thought of something. "Did you already..."

"Aha, that's it." Uncle Bucky laughed out. "The foreman of the sixth engineering team has agreed to hire me. The contract will be delivered to me in two days."

"That's really... awesome!" Sanko exclaimed. "It's a full-time job. Your salary will be doubled! And soon you'll have enough money to pay the down payment. After that, you'll become an official resident of Neverwinter and get your ID card!"

"Yeah, that's the only way for me to get an ID. I'm too old to learn how to read and write." Bucky waved his hand. "And I've been here for almost two years before I got this chance. I can only say that I'm too stupid. In this city, you young guys will get many more opportunities than me."

Some people around them heard their conversation and came over to congratulate Uncle Bucky as he was going to become a subject of the king very soon.

Good felt a little confused seeing this.

In his opinion, obtaining an ID card was just a way to find a better job, but these people seemed to care more about the identity than the job. It sounded as if all of them thought it was a great honor to become a subject of His Majesty.

They chatted all the way to the central square.

A group of people had already gathered in the square, but most of them were residents of the city and they didn't usually compete with immigrants for jobs.

A new recruitment notice was put up in the south side of the square. Every now and then, a child would come to them and ask, "Do you need me to read the notice to you? Only ten bronze royals."

"No, thanks. We can read," Bucky replied with a smile. In fact, among the three men, only Sanko had learned how to read and write, but even he still had a hard time reading.

"Why are these guys peddling in this place? They can read, so they should be able to get real jobs," Good mumbled. "They can earn much more by doing that."

"They must be students from the school that haven't reached the working age." Sanko looked around and explained.

"What?"

"Yeah, I've heard about it in my night class." Sanko lowered his voice. "To show the students the importance of knowledge, the teachers often encourage them to use what they've learned to make money. By doing so, the teachers attract even more students to the school. I also want to try when I don't have to work in the daytime."

"Ugh... if this is okay, maybe I should let Rachel come here to make some money. She can read," Good thought while glancing at the children.

"Hey, look there!" Uncle Bucky suddenly pointed to the southern tip of the square. "There are a lot of people!"

"Is it a special recruitment program?" Good exchanged a knowing look with Sanko.

"Hurry up. Let's go there to have a look!"

The three men immediately ran to the southern side of the square. There was a person with a tent behind him, who came to explain the program to everyone.

Good felt thrilled after hearing the person describe the program.

It was indeed a special recruitment program and it seemed to be unprecedentedly easy. It did not require a diploma or an ID. It only needed men in good health, who could pass a series of assessments. The names of the assessments sounded so strange that Good could not understand any of them, but he was confident that he could meet any physical fitness requirement.

The most surprising fact about this program was that it was actually a military recruitment.

Chapter 1047: Tests

A noise came from the crowd.

The army had always recruited soldiers from the official residents, and the qualification requirement had steadily become increasingly tighter. The last open recruitment to all the residents was carried out during the fight for the throne. Why did Roland suddenly do it again?

Even the new immigrant Good had heard from his uncle about the favorable treatment given towards those in the army.

If he could get enrolled into the First Army, he wouldn't have to worry about his livelihood anymore—not only were food and clothing supplied by the army, his family could also get the benefit of a sum of pension if he were to, unfortunately, pass away. And the food served to the soldiers consisted of not only oatmeal and pancakes, but other rare food like fillet, jerky, and butter would be served without limitation! Except for the disadvantage that one might lose their lives in the line of duty, it could actually count as a perfect job.

No, it is a perfect job!

If I could get so much, isn't it already worth more than the value of my life?

During his exile from the Kingdom of Wolfheart to Graycastle, Good had witnessed far too much suffering and adversity: whole groups of people fell dead on the roadside just like animals; crows danced on the bodies happily, enjoying their rich meals... Sometimes, a human life wasn't even worth as much as the grass growing by the roadside.

Besides, even the Church of Hermes, which had once conquered the greater half of the Kingdom of Wolfheart, was defeated by the King of Graycastle. If he could join this powerful and mysterious army, it might be safer than being a squire under a knight.

It was also not a bad choice to join the Second Army. Although the overall conditions might be a little poorer than that in the First Army, and he might be dispatched to another city, at least it was much safer, since he had not heard of the Second Army being involved in any major battles.

In other words, if he could join an army, no matter which one it was, it would become the best path forward for an immigrant like him.

Good and Sanko were both excited. They looked at Bucky and said, "Uncle!"

Bucky hesitated. He pondered over it for a while and said with a bitter smile, "I think I'd better not go... In order to hire me, I guess the foreman must have had to go to a fair amount of extra effort. I shouldn't break my agreement with him."

"Today is only for signing up our names. It doesn't mean we'll pass." Sanko tried to persuade Baji, "You can decide when the result comes out."

"Perhaps then I won't have enough willpower to refuse." Bucky shook his head. "Go ahead. I'll wait for good news from you in the square."

Sanko wanted to say more, yet was held back by the shoulder by Good. "Let's join in the queue."

Sanko looked back and finally nodded. "Let's go to apply first."

A lot of the applicants could neither read nor write, which made the situation a bit chaotic. Those who finished signing up were taken to another location by the black-uniformed guards, to be separated from the crowd. After hearing the news, more and more city residents came to sign up. The swarming applicants almost flooded the corner of the square. The organizer finally had to close the passage to the registry and announce that the recruitment would continue the next day. Even then, it took a long time for the crowd to disperse. Many remained around the tent as they wanted to see how the test would be carried out.

Good could not help but feel lucky for arriving early for the registration.

On the other side of the registration desk, a few more candidates came into the tent under the guidance of the guards.

Good noticed that even though the tent was almost 100 steps long and wide, which was big enough to take in almost all the applicants, not more than 10 applicants were allowed to step in at one time. It meant that the test might be much more complicated and difficult than he had imagined.

Sure enough, not long after, shrill cries came out of the tent. Hearing that, the facial expression of the applicants waiting outside of the tent turned solemn.

"This..." Sanko shrank his neck and said, "This isn't a test to see how many beatings we can endure, is it?"

"If they were being beaten, the cries should be repeated at regular intervals," Good said in a low voice. "Since these cries are random and sporadic, I guess they were only frightened."

"Is, is it? You seem to be familiar with this..."

"That's because I'm experienced at both beating and being beaten." Good sighed slightly. "I've only heard of it from others."

After a while, the sound of someone vomiting could be heard.

The crowd's faces turned ghastly pale.

"What is this test about?"

"Um..." Good went into silence. "It would be a miracle if I knew what it's about."

When the first batch of testees was finally brought out, Good was startled. "Only one of the 10 is left inside, which means the failure rate is 90%? Besides, why do they all look so weak, as if they can't even stand still? Judging from their figures, they should be physically strong."

Yet there was no time left for him to wonder why it was like that.

A guard called out his name, "Good!"

"Yes!" Good clenched his fists and strode inside the tent.

The space inside wasn't too big, and it seemed to have been divided into several areas using curtains. According to their sequence of walking in, the line of testees sat in order in front of a man in a military uniform. The stools they sat on were a little strange, as if they were designed to make people uncomfortable, because people had to stand on tiptoes in order to sit on it. To Good's relief, Sanko was in the same batch as him.

"I'm in charge of this test," the man in uniform said. "You don't need to know my name because most of you will soon be weeded out. Even if you're lucky enough to pass this test, it's merely the first step. In order to join the army, you still have much more to learn."

"Is this a recruitment for the Second Army... or for a reserve which is newer than the Second Army?" Good thought to himself. "Whatever it is, as long as the payment is enough to offer Rachel and me a better life, I'm going to try it."

"Here are the rules," the guy in uniform said. "All of you put your feet on the footboard and keep that posture for five minutes. No matter what you see, you're to stay on the stool. Of course, if your feet touch the ground, it also means you fail the test. Now prepare to start."

The testees looked at one another. "So simple?"

The officer sneered. Without replying, he pulled aside the curtains around them.

Suddenly a streak of bizarre white light overwhelmed Good.

When he came back to himself, he found that he was floating high in the middle of the sky.

"Ah——ah——"

Shrill cries sounded again, and at the same time some toneless thuds were heard. It aroused a burst of panic. Subconsciously, Good wanted to struggle with his limbs, in the vain attempt to escape from being smashed into pieces, but the slight touch of shivering under his butt immediately brought him back to reality.

He was still sitting on the stool!

But what followed was even more terrible.

He did not keep floating for much longer. Soon the surrounding clouds began to rise, which meant he was falling—the sensation that the rapid fall brought to him was beyond description. Good felt his heart almost rise to his throat. His brain warned him of extreme danger, yet his reason told him that under his butt was an invisible stool! Under these two contradicting thoughts, Rachel's face appeared in his head eventually...

...

The white light disappeared, and what appeared in his field of view was the tent again.

"Not bad." The officer clapped his hands. "You've passed the first test, and your performance was much better than the previous batch. Anyway, there are still several tests awaiting you. I hope you can stick to the end."

Is this only... the first test?

Good swallowed his own saliva. He found that his hands were trembling heavily and his back was icy cold. It was like he just got out of a pool of water.

Damn it!

That fall was not the end. Afterward, through his view, he saw himself climbing a few more times, and he even skimmed over steep cliffs along mountain ridges. He felt that he might crash onto the rocks at any time!

"Simple?" Good remembered the sneer on the officer's face when he entered the tent... "No, God must have blessed me for me to still be sitting on the stool at that moment!"

Good tilted his head and looked both sides—half of the stools were empty and Sanko was nowhere to be found.

Chapter 1048: The Surprising Presiding Officer

Has he fallen on the ground out of fear or was he hit off the stool by somebody else?

Being disorientated, one could hit somebody off the stool in panic. After all, they were not very spread out. To sit still on the stool until the end required a little bit of luck too.

Good did not know whether to celebrate or be disappointed—of course, the fewer competitors, the better chance he could win, but he had to take the following tests without Sanko. Before he could think more about it, he was taken to an adjacent compartment.

The space for the second test was not big either. Again, 10 chairs were put in the center of the room, yet their arrangement was different.

They were arranged in a circle and were combined together with an iron ring. Under the iron ring, there was a support to enable the ring to rotate freely.

"Sit according to your arrangement." The tester said coldly. "The rules for the second test are the same as the first one. Sit steadily, stick to the end."

Nobody dared to call it "simple" this time.

Everybody climbed carefully onto the iron ring and sat on their chair in accordance with the arrangement.

As the officer ordered to begin, the two guards came forward, grabbed the handles behind the chairs, and pushed to rotate the iron ring—as Good had expected, the chairs began to rotate.

At first, the testees did not respond much. With the acceleration of the rotation, they began to feel discomfort.

Yet, the soldiers did not intend to stop. Under the order of the presiding officer, they exerted more effort at pushing the ring. Immediately, the tent was filled with the creaking sounds of the chairs. Good's vision became more and more blurry.

The sky and earth are spinning round!

That was the only sensation left in his head.

Good has not fully recovered from the influence brought by the first phantom; the intense dizziness brought by the second phantom heavily turned his stomach, which almost drove the acid water to his tongue.

What kind of test is this? Is the army recruiting monsters?

Good clenched his teeth and tried to look at those soldiers as a diversion, but he found that the soldiers were looking up at the roof of the tent to avoid directly looking at the iron ring while their hands were only repeating the simple pushing move, not being affected by the rotation at all.

This, this isn't fair!

Good cried silently. The officer only told them to stick to the end, yet he did not tell them when the end was. "What if the rotation lasts for an hour? I will probably pass out in this chair!"

His attempt to focus his eyesight aggravated his dizziness. Not being able to hold the acid water in his stomach any longer, Good gushed it out!

"Ou——!"

The sour stench suddenly rushed into his nostrils.

Like a chain reaction, his vomiting led to the others vomiting too. Immediately, the smell in the tent became extremely horrible. Some flying fluid and half-digested food even stuck on Good's face.

"I, I can't take it anymore!"

"Stop, stop it! Ou—I'm done!"

Good finally understood why they had heard the vomiting sounds outside the tent.

This is too harsh. More importantly, what's the point of this test? Is this really a recruitment for the army, other than a hoax to torture us on purpose?

Every second was a torture. Good felt like giving up at any moment, yet he did not loosen up his grab on the back of the chair until the iron ring stopped rotating.

Three testees were left.

The officer showed a rare expression of praise. "Well done. Now you're one step closer to being qualified. Rest for five minutes. From the second test on, the test difficulty will decrease. Just treat them seriously and you'll be fine."

However, at that moment, the testees stopped trusting the tester. They were prepared for any eventualities. Casually wiping their faces with sleeves, they solemnly walked into the next compartment.

To his surprise, Good found the officer had not lied.

The third test required the testees to go into a hollow ring and roll to the other end of the tent on all fours.

Nobody was weeded out.

The fourth test required them to browse a set of weird pictures filled with lumps of similar colors and point out the hidden animal patterns.

Again, everybody passed.

Yet the doubt in Good's heart grew stronger and stronger.

The fifth test required a nude check-up. The sixth test required them to point out the directions of the arrows on a luminous glass.

Although everybody performed differently, the result came out fine.

While Good and another two testees were waiting for the following test, the officer took them out of the tent. Good found another smaller tent to the back door of the big tent. Black-uniformed guards closely surrounded that area. It seems that somebody important is inside.

"Sir, are we...?" someone could not help asking.

The officer smiled. "Forgot to congratulate you. The tests are over. You've all passed the preliminary filter. Just wait here. You'll be received later."

"Is this only the preliminary filter? About the treatment mentioned on the notice—" Good suddenly stopped in the middle of his questioning. "Damn it. The army would certainly not welcome those who came for the treatment, much like those knights who keep on mentioning honors. Since I asked about the treatment so hurriedly, the officer will most likely take me as a greedy person."

Despite that, the officer did not show any sign of dissatisfaction. Instead, he carefully looked at Good and asked, "Are you in serious need of money?"

"I..."

"It's nothing. After all, the high treatment of the First Army is well-known in Neverwinter. Actually, that was also my original intention of joining the army." The officer shrugged and said, "The answer is yes. The education subsidies, living allowances, and payment mentioned on the notice will all be realized in full. The following tests are to decide how far you can go, other than offer excuses to cut your welfares. As I said, in order to become a real soldier, you still have much more to learn."

Good was instantly overwhelmed by a huge sense of happiness. "Am, am I chosen, with a payment more than that of uncle Bucky, subsidies enough to support Rachel and me? All of that has become true?" Immediately, he felt what he suffered inside the tent was nothing. While thinking back, he even tasted a hint of sweetness.

"Thank, thank you Sir—" Good hurriedly bowed with excitement. "I'll do my best to join the First Army as soon as possible."

The other two testees were also very excited and bowed following Good's example.

"But there is one thing I want to tell you. Indeed, a lot of people join the army for the high treatment, yet what made them stay isn't the pay." The officer smiled carelessly. "In the army, there are things much more worth pursuing. One day, you'll find that what you pursued in the beginning wouldn't even be worth mentioning in comparison." He paused slightly as if thinking of something worth remembering. "Alright, there are still many waiting to be tested. See you another time."

It turns out that the other party is not an indifferent, silent and ruthless person.

Good was a little startled. "Sir, since we've passed the tests, may we know your name now?"

"I'm Van'er."

Then the officer went back to the big tent.

...

Afterward, other qualified testees were gradually coming out of the big tent and joining Good in the queue.

The recruitment had not come to an end until the late afternoon.

After calculating, Good found that 16 "preliminary soldiers" were filtered on the first day.

The guards came over, sandwiched them in the middle and escorted them to the last tent.

The furnishing inside was quite simple—there was nothing except for a long desk. Good found that the guards appeared very nervous and that the other testees beside him were breathing heavily.

"Oh? Are those the knight candidates they selected?" A tall man standing beside the desk looked at them up and down with a keen interest, as his eyes showed that he meant to survey the testees.

Good was startled. What did he say? Knights?

Could it be that what the First Army recruited are knights?

How can this be possible?

That's a title only the descendants of the nobles could have.

With my status, I can't even be chosen as a squire!

"Air knights? I'm sure it's a title my elder brother came up with." A euphonic female voice sounded.

"They're far from getting there. Take it easy. Right, all of you go to the sides and leave the central space empty for them."

"But..." the leading guard said hesitantly.

"It's alright. Someone behind me is protecting me."

"Yes, Your Highness."

Your...Highness?

Before he could figure out what was happening, Good saw the people in front of him moving away and a girl with astonishingly beautiful appearance showed. Her eyes were as bright as gemstones and her face was even more innocent than white snow. Anyone who laid their eyes on her would not forget her. If possible, Good wished he could just gaze at her from then on.

Still, he forced himself to look away and bow down respectfully.

Her beautiful long gray hair indicated her identity.

Even as a new immigrant, Good knew what that hair color stood for.

It was the symbol of the Graycastle royal family.

In Neverwinter, there was only one girl who was of this descent.

She was His Majesty Roland's sister, Tilly Wimbledon.

"Respects to Your Highness!"

Everybody knelt down orderly.

Chapter 1049: The Princess's Reward

"Rise," Tilly said placidly. "I know that you must be puzzled at this moment. Why does the military recruit unofficial residents? Why are the screening conditions so weird? And... why do I explain these to you? In fact, these issues are hard to explain, but you'll find them easy after you experience them in person. Therefore, I won't elaborate here. I'll simply mention a few points."

"First of all, you're joining neither the First Army nor the Second Army. It's a new army that my brother intends to establish. It's different from any other army, so the screening will also be more special."

Her words caused a stir among the crowd. Undoubtedly, the new army offered a wider promotion route and it was less likely for them to be marginalized. For those who had no background at all, it was obviously the best choice to develop in a brand-new army.

Even a fool could realize it.

"But you can only be counted as reserve members now," the princess continued. "It's so different that I don't have any reference. This means that everything must be started from scratch, and the difficulties will definitely be beyond imagination. Compared with it, what you encountered earlier is nothing. There are 16 people here, but, I'm afraid that only one or two, or none of you can become the Aerial Knight."

Good could not help gasping at her words.

What surprised him was not how difficult it was, but the first half of her words.

It was indeed a knight!

Although he did not know the difference between the "Aerial Knight" and the traditional knight, it was inconceivable that ordinary people from poor families could get this opportunity.

As for its difficulty?

That is only natural!

He felt his heart started to burn.

He was even more shocked at what she said next—

"In addition, in this city... no, in the world, only my brother and I truly understand what the new army is, but the king is too busy to put too much energy in it. Therefore, I'll be responsible for teaching you in the future."

Her words struck Good like a thunder.

Her Royal Highness would personally teach them?

In other words, they would have the opportunity to become the knights conferred by the Graycastle Princess?

Even if they would not be conferred with domain and noble title, it was still a great honor, especially for new migrants like him who had nothing.

Others also could not calm down.

If it was not for fear of being rude to the princess, they would have surely cheered long ago.

The best evidence was the rapid breathing around him.

"All qualified trainees will be trained together in the Shallow Beach New District. You'll get new residences and official identities, and become a member of the new king's city from then on." Tilly stretched out her hand and pressed down, "Remember, though you're just trainees, you're also a member of the army. Your actions will be restricted. If you quit halfway, it'll be regarded as defection. Any violation of military orders will result in severe punishment. Do you understand?"

"Yes... Your Highness!" Although they were shocked by the princess' solemn warning and their answers were not loud, no one showed their regret.

"Very good. Finally, take an oath to the King of Graycastle." Tilly turned to the tall man at the table, "Vader."

The latter nodded his head while pressing his chest and then took out a sheet of white paper from his pocket, "Now repeat every word I say."

The content of the oath was very easy to understand.

Even too straightforward.

For example, "I will never be disloyal to King Roland and I have no hostility to the witches."

Who dares !

Thinking that Her Highness was also said to be a witch, Good unconsciously raised his voice to the maximum as if that could show his loyalty.

After the oath was completed, the guards stepped forward and distributed packages to their hands.

"From this moment on, you are a member of the army." Tilly smiled, "The first round of recruitment is expected to last for a week or so, and then the training will officially begin. The things in the package are my personal reward and also what you must master."

...

When Good returned to the Central Square, it was already dark, and most of the people who had come to the recruitment had long left. Uncle Bucky and Sanko also disappeared.

This was not unexpected. No one had thought that the assessment would take such a long time. They had to take care of their family, so they could not stay on the square for a long time.

At the moment, he couldn't care much. He held the package tightly in his arms and rushed toward the temporary residential area.

He was filled with joy and felt that he was full of power. He did not feel any coldness even in the cold wind. The snow under his feet cracked and the road trodden by the passersby was like a dark-brown beacon. It might be covered by white snow tomorrow, but for now, it guided him back home.

He walked into the low but warm mud hut and found that Rachel was cooking oatmeal.

"Sorry... I came back late, today—"

"I know," the girl interrupted lively. "Uncle Bucky next door had already told me. You found a good job, right?"

Without waiting for him to answer, she extended her right hand to him.

"Where is the tasty food?"

"Er... What?"

"Hey, you promised that you would bring me a chicken pancake!" Rachel curled her mouth in dissatisfaction.

Hell, he actually forgot the whole thing. He quickly promised her, "Next time, you can eat one pancake every week! No, two!"

"Two?" Rachel asked doubtfully, "Really?"

"Of course, it's not an ordinary job. I have seen Her Highness!" Good took off his wet shoes, rolled up half of the trouser legs, sat down by the fire before he carefully took the package out from his pocket.

"Look. This is what she gave to me."

"What's inside?" The girl's curiosity overwhelmed her dissatisfaction.

"I don't know, either. Let's open it," said Good, unfolding the package. He was a little shocked and said, "This is..."

"A book?" Rachel said.

He took all the things out and found that it was a pile of books. Each cover was printed with different pictures and it looked very delicate. Unfortunately, he could not understand a single word.

"Can you...help me read it?" At this time, he could only ask for Rachel's help.

The girl smiled proudly, "I can't guarantee that I'll recognize all of them. Em, this is Reading and... Writing Skills, and that one is Common ... Quick ... Vocab, and the third is..."

Were these things what Sanko learned? The picture on the cover turned out to be a summary of the content. For example, a quill was printed on Reading and Writing Skills, and stereoscopic letters of all sizes on Quick Vocab ...

Somehow, Good was slightly disappointed.

He had thought that it would be a reward from Her Highness to the qualified person. It did not have to be valuable. Even a scroll or a document would at least be a symbol of honor.

If it were known by other people, they would definitely begin to laugh at him for daydreaming. How could Her Highness put the primary education textbooks which could be seen everywhere into his hands as a reward?

However, Good soon recovered.

That was right. Since he wanted to be a knight, naturally he could not be illiterate.

He indeed had many things to learn.

Just then, the cover of a book attracted Good.

He had never seen the thing in the picture before, which was like a huge kite and a large bird flying high. It had two pairs of wings many times larger than a man, and the woman sitting on it was like the Princess. The sea sparkled under her feet and the continent, which was supposed to be vast, became a small slice.

This perspective was exactly what he had seen in the first round of assessments!

He could not help holding his breath.

"Rachel... What's written in this book?"

"Oh, let me see," Rachel approached and said, "Flight... and Operation... Uh, that's right!" She clapped her hands and read it again, "It's called Flight Principle and Operation Manual. "

Chapter 1050: A Difficult Puzzle

A week later, Tilly put the list of the names on Roland's office desk.

"How was the recruitment? Did it go well?" Roland poured a cup of tea for her and asked carefully. He has always felt a lingering sense of guilt when facing this nominal "sister" of his. Except for Anna to whom he told the truth on his own initiative, Tilly was the first one to discover that he was not Prince Roland. When the flying demons attacked Neverwinter, Tilly's protective actions made him realize that she had completely accepted their alliance but the guilt in his heart has not relieved at all.

After all, it was he who occupied the body of Prince Roland.

At the very beginning, he had planned to occupy the identity of her brother without giving any explanation. However, when he found out that she did not blame him, he, instead, became uncomfortable.

Of course, he just kept that in his mind, but would not repeatedly mention it. Most of those people who insisted on getting an answer would die for it, which he knew well.

"It went well, except for the number of the trainees." Tilly took the teacup and blew lightly before drinking it, "I selected 124 people from the migrants, and 73 from official citizens. Less than 200 people... I'm afraid such a small group of people may have little impact in our fight against the demons."

"It's always difficult to start," Roland read the list. "After you set examples, you'll surely attract more people in the second round of recruitment. Then it won't be limited to Neverwinter."

Though different people had different visions, humankind's longing for the vast space was engraved in the bones. From the moment the civilization was born, people had begun to look up at the starry sky. Whether it was imitating the birds or making balloons, the exploration of the sky was not unique in the era of aircraft. The explorers from the Society of Wondrous Crafts were the best example. Therefore, Roland was not worried about the attraction of Air Force to people.

The first thing to do was to cultivate a team that could fly.

Anyhow, he knew that training of pilots was by no means an easy task.

In an era when the flight control system was still immature, the most important quality of a pilot was... talent. No fear of height, resistance to dizziness, and physical coordination were just basic requirements. The sense of spatial orientation, understanding of the plane, and even the reaction speed all determined whether a person was qualified to be a pilot.

The obedience and reliability of the veterans of the First Army were extremely high. It was okay to select a few outstanding soldiers as core military officers, but it was impossible to transfer all of them into the Air Force.

This was why he decided to select from the new migrants.

Knowledge could be acquired by learning, but the talent was inherent. It would be better to find more qualified people than forcing those who were not.

According to the report, nearly 3,000 people signed up within a week and nearly 200 of them were qualified. From this point of view, it was indeed a wise move to include temporary residents from the very beginning.

Turning to the last page of the name list, Roland was surprised and asked, "Six people failed to pass the oath part?"

"Their thoughts were different from the things they said, so they were taken by Vader to interrogate," Nightingale answered. "Two of them were official citizens of Neverwinter."

Roland frowned. In theory, this was not something worth a fuss. People's fickleness was ordinary, and it took an instant to change from good to evil. He had never expected those people would remain the same forever. Yet, when he really encountered it, he still felt a sense of disappointment.

They could have followed him into a better new era.

They had even seen the threshold of the new era.

In spite of that, they gave up in front of the threshold.

"Did you find out the reason?"

"I have planned to report to you after doing a thorough investigation," said Nightingale carelessly.

"They were bought by a foreign tradesman, hoping to infiltrate into the army so as to get more information about the firearms. The police department acted but only caught the tradesman's assistants who stayed in the hotel. Then I asked Summer to create flashbacks and discovered a letter from the old king's city. From the content, the mastermind behind it seemed to be a nobleman. Anyway, we have known his whereabouts, appearance, and identity, and his portrait painted by Soraya was sent to Theo by the Animal Messenger. I think he won't be able to escape for a long time."

Hearing this, Roland could not help laughing, and the previous unpleasantness was driven away. In the face of such an unreasonable investigation model, the revolted were really miserable.

"Er... what's the problem?" Nightingale blinked.

"No, you did a good job," Roland pressed down his smile. "Since they are reluctant to give up, the North Slope Mine area still needs more hands."

It seemed the former nobles did not completely give up. As long as they found any chance, they would try to recover the noble system. He was not surprised by it. After all, the feudal system had lasted for nearly 1,000 years and still existed in the other three kingdoms. It was impossible to make it disappear overnight.

"Well," Tilly cleared her throat, changing the subject back to business. "The problem of trainees is solved. Where is the plane?"

"Well... By the way, Evelyn has recently made a type of Chaos Drinks with excellent taste. Do you want to have a try?"

"Oh? Great—no!" Tilly soon recovered, "We're talking about the plane. You haven't even made a prototype plane, have you?"

Bingo!

"Anyway, they have to start from learning to read and mastering basic theory. If it's just for demonstration, then a glider..."

"No," Tilly interrupted seriously, "Even if we used a glider, a modified version would be totally different from the original one in practice, not to mention a new plane. If I did not operate it in person, how could I instruct others? It's indeed early for the trainees to drive the plane, but I have to spend at least a month in advance so as to thoroughly understand its performance and make an adjustment to the Flight Manual. Not to mention the following modification. Since you asked me to take charge of it, I'm naturally responsible for urging you to do what you should do."

It was the first time for Roland to see the serious aspect of Princess Tilly.

Apparently, she was indeed fond of this "big toy" which could fly and match her ability.

The only problem was that Roland underestimated the difficulty of making a complete plane. He intended to make a biplane which only had a set of power and fuel equipment more than a glider, but

its complexity had already multiplied, even if he could look up the various materials in the Dream World. If he had to design it alone, he probably would not finalize the prototype plane in a few years.

"I know," he shook his head helplessly. "In two weeks, I'll give you a finished prototype that can fly."

"Then that's a deal," Tilly smiled slightly. "By the way, where is the new type of Chaos Drinks with great taste? Please let me have a try."

...

"Strange..." After Princess Tilly left with a full bottle of Chaos Drink, Nightingale muttered in a low voice.

"What's the matter?" Roland asked.

"She addressed you as brother several times in public before, but when she sees you in private, she rarely does... Isn't it strange?"

"Is it?" He was surprised, "But... why?"

"I don't know either."

They stared at each other and stroked their chins, pondering over this difficult puzzle.