

Witch 1061

Chapter 1061: Sport Event

While blowing a steam whistle, the ship slowly left the Shallow Beach.

Joan was standing at the stern, reluctantly bidding farewell to the Exploration Group—after a whole winter, her relationship with the witches had improved a lot. This rare friendship was particularly strong probably because it had been such a long time since someone had cared for her or had missed her.

Though it sounded dry and hard, she just kept repeating the phrase "Goodbye," which she had just learned before leaving.

Lightning's expression looked quite lonely. She looked in the direction of the stern, her eyes wide open. Many times Roland came close to telling her that Thunder was on the boat. However, he thought of the latter's entrustment and eventually pushed the urge back into the bottom of his heart.

Maggie had covered her mouth, her shoulders shaking and with her eyes filled with tears. She was unable to make any sound for quite some time, probably because she was afraid of crying.

Only Lorgar remained calm. She was carrying Maggie on her tail, Lightning with her one hand and waving at Joan with her other hand—parting forever was something common for the Mojins so she had grown used to it.

In Roland's eyes, Princess Lorgar of the Wildflame clan was not the loner she was when she first came to Neverwinter. She had already started changing even though she probably had not noticed it yet.

This was also a reason why Roland decided not to tell her.

With such a group of friends, he was sure that Lightning would return to her previous energetic self sooner or later.

As for the sisters that left, for now, they would all eventually return.

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On the following day after Thunder's departure, Roland announced the news of king's city's first National Sports Meeting through Graycastle Weekly newspaper.

There was only one event. Marathon.

The starting points would be the main city areas of both Neverwinter and Longsong while the finishing point would be the center of the Kingdom Main Street—a total distance of twenty-eight kilometers. The first ten would win a prize ranging from 100 to 10 gold royals and the champion would receive a commemorative badge from the king himself.

This news instantly shook the entire Western Region!

Soon, everyone in the streets and alleys was inquiring about the event, and the fuss was no less than the release of the magic movie.

If 100 gold royals were used as a down payment, one could buy a home with water, heat, and electricity in the nearest district to the Castle District. Apart from those locals who moved at the very beginning, this was the objective for most Neverwinter citizens.

Although the new king's city did not have an inner and outer city like traditional cities, and there were no walls between each area, people still wished to be closer to His Majesty the King.

Usually, achieving such a goal would require many years of savings but now there was an opportunity to realize it instantly!

This was different from the Outstanding Contribution Award and the Combat Hero Award—the former was given to masters of their respective fields. Even without the gold royals of the prize, they still would not miss the money. As for the latter, it would require a willingness to sacrifice your own time, courage, and also luck. However, what about the Sports Meeting?

One only had to know how to run!

Everybody had two legs after all.

In everyone's eyes, this was another proof of His Majesty compassion and kindness towards his people.

In the past, all good policies were directed towards official residents. However, this time, what was more gratifying for most people was that this event was for "all citizens", exactly as it was announced in the weekly newspaper.

Not only citizens of Neverwinter but even merchants coming from other cities could participate.

So it was not surprising that this novel activity had created such a big impact.

Of course, what Roland wanted to do was not just to watch a competition and see who is the faster runner—a sports meeting was useful in strengthening cohesion, encouraging people to challenge themselves and work hard. As the aftermath of the Victory Day's celebration and the last call before the start of the war, there was nothing more inspiring than a sports meeting.

Also, he had one more small intention.

To announce the comeback of the bike.

He had always felt guilty about the failure of the product of his early policy—the proud invention of the King of Graycastle, chief Barov's advertisement presentation, as well as the posters that had filled the square everywhere at that time. Yet, after producing no more than two hundred vehicles, they had to stop the distribution due to lack of productivity. The factory was converted into the steam engine assembly plant and almost half of the finished products were given to the workers as salary remuneration.

Not only had he failed to realize the scene he had envisioned of everyone riding a bike between the city's districts, but also lost a lot of resources due to improper planning—for example, all those specific machines and equipment used for producing the bike parts were recycled and the remaining half of the bikes, because they were too few to deliver them to the First Army, were stored in a warehouse in the end.

From all the projects that he set up personally, this was the only one that didn't bring any benefit.

That's why he had to erase this black stigma.

Nowadays, the situation in the city was completely different from two or three years ago—a crazy expansion had brought a dramatic increase of the urban areas. Newly constructed districts had been built along Kingdom Main Street and the distance to major workplaces such as factories, docks, and mines was increasing more and more. Walking had become a time-consuming and tiresome activity whereas the perfection of the city streets had allowed the bike riders to easily reach more places.

On the other hand, the productivity of Neverwinter had also been greatly improved. With the application of rubber worms and new machine tools, they could produce the same results as the witches, without any impact on existing projects.

So, now it was a good time to bring up the subject of the bikes.

As long as he let the Second Army follow the group of marathon runners on their bikes and act as guides and accident rescuers, everyone would naturally realize the benefit of this type of transport.

As a result, the biggest mistake he had made since coming into power would no longer exist.

Roland thought with confidence.

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"Huh? Is this the Great Chief's city?" Guelz Burnflame walked out of the cabin and rubbed his cheeks, "This concrete ship is powerful indeed but it's too noisy. I'd go deaf if I had to stay for another two to three days.

"Father, are you really not going to hide your face tattoos and then change to some northern kingdom clothes?" Rohan closely followed him and said, "Those people at the docks...everyone is staring at us."

"It doesn't matter, let them stare."

"But..."

"Are you worried about being discriminated?" Guelz glanced at him, "If a Mojin traveler's appearance is so hard for them to accept then what kind of life my daughter is having? The great chief said that in his domain, everyone is the same. I'd like to see if he has lied to the Three Gods."

After the mention of Lorgar Burnflame, Rohan stopped talking and did not try to persuade him anymore.

The chief shook his head secretly. It seemed that his fight-adept sister was still having a heavy influence on him.

Guelz did not come all the way from the Port of Clearwater to here on a whim—the Sand Nation people who decided to move to the small oasis had finally won the revenge battle which lasted for two months, under the guidance of Brian. The masterminds behind the massacre of Silver Stream, the Wildwave clan, and the Cut Bone clan, had been destroyed and the six clan system of the Iron Sand City had since become history.

He was bringing a message from Brian.

Such a task did not have to be carried out by a family leader, but because of the war, the Wildflame clan missed the coronation ceremony of the great chief and so it was only appropriate for him to bring the news of their victory as a late gift in order to show his sincerity.

Guelz was also curious to see how was Lorgar doing.

She would never mention her troubles in her letters so it was best for him to see with his own eyes.

Had she lost weight? As there were no Firelantern Wine or grilled sandworms here.

Chapter 1062: Wildflame's information

After entering the city, the number of people suddenly increased.

Though there were still some people looking at them, it was only out of pure curiosity. Everyone seemed in a hurry and no one was wandering the streets without a purpose.

"Father, this..." Rohan said looking around in surprise.

"Yes." He slightly nodded.

It was the first time that Guelz saw such a busy environment.

He had previously traveled to many cities in the Northern Kingdom, and the biggest impression those cities left him with was their prosperity—this was also a characteristic of the Northern Kingdom: having more prosperous lands and resources than the Southernmost Region allowed them to create extraordinary cities. Additionally, their only difference was that each of them was better than the previous ones. So, at first, he thought that the great chief's King's City would also be superior in this aspect. However, to his surprise, what first attracted his attention was not the flat and long black-stoned streets under the foot, nor the uniform layout of the houses, but the people here.

No matter how big the inner city was, or how magnificent the castle was, there would always be some stray people, beggars or Rats on the side of the streets. They were like a part of a city.

Nonetheless, while walking in the streets of Neverwinter, these kinds of scenes were nowhere to be found. The expressions on people's faces were also completely different. Such high spirited expressions were rarely seen even among the newly promoted clans.

Guelz always thought that the Northern Kingdom people were not much better than the Sand Nation people, who he actually considered as more resourceful due to their less advantageous environment. The Northern Kingdom, with its abundance of resources, was indulging in overly comfortable life and thus, the courage and will of their people were inferior. If unifying the power of the clans had not been so hard, they could have broadened their place of living.

Yet, he was not so sure about that now.

This kind of pride and self-confidence which came from the heart, it could not be faked.

A city with such citizens, it would be best not to be their enemy even if they did not possess firearms.

"Father, are we going to search for Lorgar first or go to the castle to give the document?" Rohan's impression was not that deep. He was more curious rather than surprised.

"Don't be hasty, if the great chief arranges for us to stay in the Castle District, how are we going to verify his promise?" Guelz looked at him. "We definitely have to wait for few days and find out more about this city.

"But..."

"I already decided." He interrupted him. "Hmm? What are those people doing?"

There was a big crowd around the square, making buzzing sounds and looking very lively.

Rohan followed his gaze and looked at that direction, "Maybe they are rushing to buy discount products from merchants?"

"Go and have a look," Guelz said.

"Yes."

The latter put on his hood, and with the advantage of his big height, he quickly squeezed into the crowd.

Looking at the back of his eldest son, Guelz could not help but sigh. In terms of physique, he was supposed to become the bravest warrior in the clan. However, fighting was not naturally appealing to him. Eventually, the one to become the pride of the Wildflame clan was Lorgar, who was anything but strong when she was born. It was for this reason that Princess Lorgar was considered by all clan members as the heir, while Rohan could not lift his head from all the pressure. Though they were brother and sister, they rarely had any conversations together. They were like concentric people.

Anyhow, the chief could not help but feel a bit disappointed.

Especially when Lorgar received everyone's appraisal, Rohan still did not show any sign of protesting.

Mojins have a preference for the strong.

Even if one's ability was not good, an unyielding will could still win the respect of others, which was much better than surrendering without even a fight.

That is why even after Lorgar had left, he was still hesitating about him taking over as chief.

Rohan had performed well in other aspects but a leader who is afraid of competition would slowly lose his advantage due to his constant hesitation.

This was the reason Guelz had brought his eldest son with him.

He hoped for him to change through seeing more about the world.

Fifteen minutes later, Rohan quickly squeezed out of the crowd, his face filled with a weird expression.

"Father, they are people who want to participate in the Sports meeting."

"Sports meeting?" Guelz murmured, "What's that?"

"Apparently it's a competition that the great chief organized in order to determine the fastest person." Rohan explained, "and the first one will be able to get 100 gold royals as a reward. That's why there are so many people who want to participate."

"Ha, isn't this like the holy duel?" Only without the blood." Guelz smiled. "Looks like the great chief learned a few good things from the Sand Nation. What is the requirement to participate? If it's to determine who is the fastest then we should have the right to participate too."

"Us?" Rohan was startled. "Father, you want to participate too?"

"Of course, I used to be one of those elite warriors who could walk through half of the desert, leaving behind me even camels. When it comes to leg stamina, I never lost to anyone!" Guelz said while stroking his beard. "What, do you think I'm old now? Quickly, take me to register!"

Realizing that he could not stop him, Rohan replied, "There are too many people there, I'll go alone."

"No problem."

"Father—"

"Huh?" Guelz glanced at him. "Is there something that you didn't tell me?"

"Uhm..." Rohan paused for a moment before saying with a low voice, "I saw my third sister."

"In the crowd?"

"No," his eldest son shook his head, "she is...on a picture, wearing clothes that don't cover her entirely, with people circled around, pointing at her..."

"What!" Guelz instantly frowned. Could it be that the great chief was humiliating her? Last time, after writing to Lorgar, Neverwinter responded very quickly. So, he assumed that His Majesty was treating her very well. If Lorgar was being humiliated only for the position of the Wildflame clan, then he would rather not have all those green mountains and rivers.

While thinking about that, he walked towards the crowd with a serious face.

The painting scroll that Rohan talked about was hung on one side of the square and not only it was very eye-catching but there were actually more than one—when Guelz saw it, he immediately stopped, unable to move his body.

Was that...Lorgar?"

It was the first time that he saw his daughter being so beautiful—she was standing in the middle of a snowy scenery, wearing a white yarn and a brocade which were waving in the wind. That was a palace ceremony dress that Lorgar had never worn before. Whilst in Iron Sand City, she always wore short clothes and pants, which were suitable for fighting. At her chest and arms, she always had bandages and she was always covered either in dirt or blood. When she did not have to fight, she would always cover herself tightly and make sure to hide her inhuman features under her clothes.

This is what Rohan meant as not covered.

Lorgar was clearly exposing her fluffy ears and tail, looking as if she wanted to attract attention deliberately. In one of her long ears, she wore a crystal red gemstone earring and its bright color seemed to make the whole picture look more vivid.

As for the people around, their comments were not out of disgust and repulsiveness but rather compliments. This is what most surprised Guelz. Furthermore, through their chatting, he heard a new word: magic movie.

So that was the case.

"In the Kingdom of Graycastle, everyone is the same" — was this the great chief's way?

He turned around and gave Rohan a slap, "Don't be so shocked next time. Your sister isn't some kind of monster, she just exposed her half-wolf form.

"I didn't say that..." said the latter as if he was wronged while stroking the back of his head.

"Anyways, first go and sign up for that holy duel...sports meeting," Guelz told him. "Afterwards, find out where we can buy the tickets for the magic movie. No matter the cost, you have to buy them. Understood?"

Chapter 1063: The Game Began!

Neverwinter held the first National Sports Meeting on the Victory Day.

Roland had simplified the process of the game, so there was neither an opening ceremony nor a running commentary on the match. However, this could not stop it from becoming a major event in the city.

Early in the morning, everyone spontaneously rushed to the Kingdom Main Street with a little stool or a felt-padded cushion in hand, since they all wanted to grab a nice position to watch the game. Most of them went out with all of their family members. Such a huge stream of people attracted lots of peddlers. They carried snacks and beverages on their backs, peddling along the way.

Considering that most people in the city needed to walk at least 28 kilometers to the middle section of the Kingdom Main Street, where the finish line was located, Roland decided to start the race at 2:00 pm. By doing so, he could allow more time for the spectators to get ready. Still, beyond his expectations, he soon found out that he had underestimated their enthusiasm for this game. By noon, this place had already been tightly surrounded by about 10,000 enthusiastic spectators, and more people were still coming here.

As the king of Graycastle, he did not have to huddle together with the common people. The Ministry of Construction had built a stand next to the street a day before. There were around 100 seats on its platform, which were reserved for the senior officials of Neverwinter. Some soldiers of the First Army also were placed around the stand to ensure their safety.

"Your Majesty, here's the roster of the 1,462 participants." Scroll came up with a thick stack of papers in hand. "But due to the limited registration time, I only categorized the information and analyzed the data rudimentarily. If I had two more days..."

"That's alright." Roland waved his hand to stop Scroll. "We are holding this sports meeting to boost people's morale for the expedition. We can't afford any delay."

When he glanced through the roster, he found out that Scroll was just being modest. In such a short time, she found out every participant's address and resume and recorded all the information in an orderly way. Roland believed no one else could do a better job.

In the roster, he came across some familiar names.

One was his old buddy, Yorko.

Another one was Lucia's younger sister, Ring.

He also saw the three alchemists from the former capital city's Alchemist Workshop.

He was happy to see them approve the sports meeting's proverb, "the most important thing is to participate", as none of them had any chances of winning the game, even though there were no witches involved in this match.

The names of the participants, who were more likely to win the race, were on the first page.

Roland saw that the top two names were Ferlin Eltek and Carter Lannis. He asked Scroll, "Do you think the champion is going to be either the Morning Light or my Chief Knight?"

Scroll smoothed back her hair and replied with a smile.

"Your Majesty, it's almost time." Barov, who was in a seat below, reminded him.

"Well, let's get started." Roland put down the roster and picked up the telephone next to him.

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Guelz wore a desert-style fighting robe and was warming up before the game. He asked Rohan, "Do you know what the great chief is going to do to make all the participants in the two regions start running at the same time? The two starting lines are on the opposite sides of one another and all of us will run toward the middle of the street. Fairness is the most important thing in the holy duel. If this race is a little bit unfair, it'll damage the great chief's reputation."

"Who knows. That doesn't matter at all." Rohan complained in his heart before replying with a little embarrassment, "Father... Could you please take that headband off? And the fur around your waist..."

He had never expected that a magic movie, *The Wolf Princess*, would've influenced his father so deeply. They had spent a large sum of money to watch the movie, and since then, his father had become obsessed with the *Wolf Princess*. Recently, he had repeatedly praised Lorgar's beauty and reproached himself for asking her to cover her wolf parts to avoid criticisms. The movie made him realize how stupid and cowardly he was and regretted that he had not done his fatherly duty which was to accept and protect his daughter.

Rohan understood his father's feelings, but he felt really uncomfortable seeing him dressed like this. Guelz wore a headband with a pair of toy wolf ears stitched on it. He also wrapped a strip of fur around his waist as a wolf tail.

"You're the chief of the Wildflame clan! If someone from the Port of Clearwater were to see you dressed so silly and if they were to pass it on to the Mojins, how would you face the other clan chiefs in the future?" Rohan yelled in his heart.

"This is my compensation for her. Don't ask me to take them off again," said Guelz seriously. "The courage she displayed in the magic movie made me feel ashamed. Stick to the road of your choice and never let anyone else's opinion shake your resolve. That's what I taught her, but I myself failed to do so. The best way to cope with criticism is to confront it. If more and more people are willing to accept this look, they won't think of Lorgar as a monster."

"..." Rohan opened his mouth only to find out that he was lost for words.

"I heard you question the credibility of this match." Suddenly, a voice came from behind. "You aren't from here, right? You've no idea how talented His Majesty is. He's invented something called the telephone to exchange instant messages with people from far away. And did you notice those things above?"

Rohan turned his gaze toward the place the man pointed at and saw two big black cylinders up there. He could hardly think of how they were going to pass messages to the race participants.

"It's called a loudspeaker! It can magnify the sound by several dozens of times. There's another loudspeaker near the start line in Longsong District. They are both connected to His Majesty's telephone. In this way, he can give an order to all the participants at the same time," the man explained proudly.

"Oh! That's great!" Guelz said while clapping his hands. "As long as it's a fair game, I'll try my best to win the match!"

"By the way, uncle. Your body's really strong... The winter's just ended so it's still quite chilly. Aren't you cold in that short robe?" The man looked at Guelz with interest. "And this headband with wolf ears—"

"Oh no, here it is..." Rohan closed his eyes in embarrassment. He assumed that the man was going to ridicule his father's outfit and that his father was going to feel awkward or furiously beat the man up. If that were to happen, they would inevitably make a bad impression on the great chief.

"You're cosplaying the Wolf Princess, aren't you? I like your outfit..." The man said. "Can you tell me where to buy it?"

What! ?

Rohan could not believe his ears.

"Hahaha, this outfit..."

When Guelz was about to answer the man, a harsh sizzling noise suddenly came out from the loudspeaker—

"Good afternoon, everybody... sizz... I'm Roland Wimbledon."

All the people in the street fell silent.

"I'm sure you already know the rules of the game well. I just want to remind you that the result of the race is not the most important thing. You came here to challenge yourselves. As long as you do your best, you'll be your own hero, whether or not you make it to the end. Remember not to disturb your opponents or play any other tricks in this race. Just focus on your own journey and try to win a prize with your own strength."

"I'll wait for you at the finish line. Wish you all do well in this game."

"Now, please get ready."

"Set, go!"

Chapter 1064: Ten Years of Persistence

In Border District, hundreds of race participants started to run!

They were greeted by cheers all along the Kingdom Main Street as they were running toward Longsong Stronghold. Some police officers who wore uniforms and bright ribbons, bicycled on both sides of the street, following the participants all the way. They worked as judges and relief workers for this long-distance race.

The same situation occurred in Longsong District.

For the first time in this world, more than a thousand people were running toward the same place at the same time. Not out of fear for their lives but to show their strength without any concerns. Undoubtedly, Neverwinter would gain a worldwide reputation for such an unprecedented event.

Soon, everyone on the continent would know that the new king's city of Graycastle organized the first long-distance race in the world.

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At the finish line, on the grandstand, Lance was bending over the handrails, shouting and cheering. Cole turned toward Edith and asked, "Sister, why didn't you join the race? If it's just about endurance, shouldn't you also be able to win a prize?"

Cole noticed that after Lance came to Neverwinter, Edith seemed to be in a better mood and became much more talkative. Most of the time, she would not even tease him in front of their youngest brother. Otherwise, he would never dare to disturb Edith with such a trivial question.

"Oh?" Edith glanced sideways at him. "Why do I have to win such a prize?"

"Uhm— Didn't you really like this kind of competition before?"

"If you hadn't stood out from the competition, you would've never become the Pearl of the Northern Region," Cole thought. In his view, Edith was a super competitive person. Back in the Northern Region, she practiced fencing with knights in the daytime and shone brightly at banquets in the evening. She defeated countless knights single-handedly and attracted lots of admirers on social occasions. Even Timothy was attracted to her.

After winning many fencing matches and outshining numerous ladies at banquets, she finally became a well-known figure in the Northern Region. Cole really could not understand why she suddenly started to keep a low profile and refused to join this long-distance race held by His Majesty.

"Because our family needed me to do that." Edith shrugged. "If I hadn't tried my best to increase the influence of the Kant family as quickly as possible, our father would've never got the duke title. I had to do that, even if I needed to act like a clown in front of those idiots to win their favor." She sneered before adding, "Do you think I enjoyed it?"

Cole could tell it was a threatening tone.

"No, I just..."

"But now, I don't have to rely on this kind of competition to grab the king's attention," Edith continued, seemingly not minding what Cold previously said, which made the boy feel quite relieved. "And... I'm not alone anymore."

Cole was stunned. "What do you mean by that?"

Edith looked at Lance and Cole. "I now have you guys, don't I?"

Hearing that, Cole immediately thrust out his chest. He felt that he should say something at this moment, but he did not know what to say.

Edith smiled at him and then turned her gaze toward the upper part of the grandstand. "Do your job well. That'll be the greatest help to me."

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Guelz wheezed violently and began to slow down. "How long... do we still have to run?"

"The sign that we've just passed reads fourteen. That is to say, we've only run half the distance." Rohan felt worried and asked. "Father, are you alright? You're panting heavily. How about we stop here and rest for a while. Anyway, there are many people behind us now."

As Rohan had expected, not many people could keep running for more than an hour. The participants started running as a crowd, and then the crowd gradually turned into a line. At this moment, it was probably a dotted line.

Guelz and Rohan were among the leading runners. Since the beginning of the game, only several participants had surpassed them. Given that, Rohan thought even if they were to take some rest here, they could still do well in the race. He did not care much about the prize.

He was more worried about his father's health.

Guelz had not taken any strenuous exercise for a long time, and this long-distance race turned out to be even more consuming than traveling across a desert. In a desert, they did not need to run very fast. They just followed a planned route and could get food and water from the oases along the way. In this race, however, they needed to use lots of energy to keep a certain speed.

"You want to give up again?" Guelz glared at Rohan. "Because you're not the last one?"

"I..."

"Lorgar would never say anything like that. When are you going to become like her? Try your best to fight for a goal and never give up. Have you ever thought of winning the first prize?"

Rohan usually chose to keep silent when he heard this kind of talk, but today he felt somewhat irritated. He complained in his heart.

How can I defeat Lorgar?

Should I put some poison in her cup? Or publicly expose her half-animal look?

Otherwise, how else can I defeat a Divine Lady favored by the Three Gods?

I can not even defeat our family's Chief Bodyguard!

In order to maintain Wildflame's rank in the Iron Sand City, the clan worshiped outstanding warriors. That was why everyone thought Lorgar was the best successor. Faced with such a reality, Rohan chose to back down to avoid intra-clan conflicts. He did this for the entire clan's interests, but his father did not seem to appreciate it.

He really could not understand why his father always neglected his contribution to the clan.

He had felt oppressed about this for a long time, and now, he thought he really had enough of it. Besides, he was quite embarrassed by his father's wolf girl outfit. Under such circumstances, for the first time in his life, Rohan cried out to his father, "I'm worried about you! If it wasn't for you, I would be at the lead now!"

He felt regret as soon as he finished saying this.

It sounded like he was reproaching his father for dragging him down.

When he was about to say something to make up for his mistake before his father flew into a rage, Guelz said, "Well then, you can run by yourself."

"Father, I mean..." Rohan turned his head to look at Guelz. To his surprise, he saw a smiling face.

"Is this the first time you took the initiative to reveal your thoughts?" Guelz sighed. "You're right. I'm too old for this race now, no matter how strong I used to be." He paused for a moment before adding, "You can leave me alone and do your best. You're really good at running, aren't you?"

Rohan was frozen with shock.

"There's an old saying in the clan. If you practice a thing for ten years, you'll excel in it, no matter how stupid you are." Guelz paused and then added slowly, "Don't worry. I'll walk to the finish line."

Rohan clenched his fists. After a brief silence, he said in a low voice, "Then I'll go first."

"Wait," Guelz stopped him as he was about to speed up. "Put these two things on."

"Father—"

"Even though Lorgar had already left the Southern Territory, she's still a part of the Wildflame clan and your little sister. We should try our best to help her." Guelz put the headband on Rohan's head and continued, "Go ahead, show the great chief what we Mojins can do."

Rohan looked at his father quietly and then sped off.

As he was picking up the speed, he felt that the wind blowing past him was getting stronger and stronger.

At first, he could hear the spectators exclaim in admiration, but now, he could only hear the wind whistling.

He did not feel tired at all. He thought he could run even faster.

At the moment, he felt full of energy.

He was delighted to know that his father has always kept an eye on him!

In order to guarantee Lorgar's status, he suffered countless criticisms, both inside and outside of the clan. Whenever he felt overwhelmed by the pressure, he would leave the Iron Sand City to run in the small oases alone. He did this not only to vent his resentment but also to prove himself. He was not good at fighting, but he thought he might be able to outshine his sister in hunting, which required endurance rather than strength.

Unfortunately, he never got a chance to do it.

Rohan thought that no one noticed his attempt at proving himself, but now he knew he was wrong.

"You're really good at running, aren't you?"

"If you practice a thing for ten years, you'll excel in it, no matter how stupid you are."

His father's words reverberated in his heart.

Father, you knew it from the very beginning, didn't you?

Feeling encouraged, Rohan ran even faster.

He still remembered the day when he had first started running in the oases.

Ten years had passed since that day!

Chapter 1065: The Champion

"Look, that's him, Morning Light!" shouted someone at the roadside.

"Where is he?"

"He's the one there in front!"

After a girl pointed out where Ferlin Eltek was, the crowd started to get excited.

"It is him! I thought I would never see him again after he left his teaching job."

"Wow, he looked at me!"

"Come on, Mr. Eltek!"

Many people cheered for this tall handsome man, Ferlin Eltek, who still maintained a steady pace during the final leg of the race. Although he looked tired, he still smiled back at the people who cheered for him along the way, and he even waved to his former students. All his fans were completely smitten by him.

Seeing this, Honey, who followed the Border District participants all along way, started to think about her race report.

Ferlin Eltek, widely known as the Morning Light, works in the General Staff Department. He was a very popular knight and then a very popular intermediate teacher. Now, it seems that he's about to become the champion of the long-distance race. If that happens, how should I write the report title?

"Today, Thousands of Girls in Neverwinter Fell for a Man', how do you like this title?"

"Ugh... Are you asking me?" Vader, who was riding a bicycle, carrying Honey, panted and said, "Thousands of girls? Doesn't that sound too exaggerated?"

Though Honey looked like a little girl, Vader dared not to look down upon her, since she was in charge of the Ministry of Public Relations and Communications and reported directly to the king. He also knew that she was a close friend of Wendy, the manager of the Witch Union.

He had worked at the bottom of a patrol team for several years and had learned his lesson. He would never offend a person in such a high position.

Given that, he had warmly received Honey and had immediately agreed to her request to take a ride on his bike. Since Carter took part in the race, Vader was in charge of security for the race. He often acted on Carter's behalf to handle matters in the police force when the Chief Knight was away.

As an experienced policeman, he clearly understood the importance of intelligence. If the Security Bureau wanted to eliminate all the hidden dangers and threats to His Majesty and the kingdom, they needed the best information service in the country, which could only be provided by Honey.

Therefore, he decided to try his best to impress this witch.

"You don't worry too much about the details," Honey smacked her lips and said. "Would you want to immediately read the whole story if you came across a title like that?"

"Yes, I would," Vader replied honestly.

"So that's why," The little girl said and then whistled cheerfully.

At that moment, they heard different voices cry out from the crowd.

"Don't you think the second runner is also very... handsome?" a lady said while covering her mouth with a hand.

"You noticed him too? I think he looks even better than the Morning Light." Another woman echoed and so did lots of people around them.

"I know him! He's the king's Chief Knight, Carter Lannis! Look at the royal emblem on his cloak!"

"Oh, the king's Chief Knight! No wonder he looks so great!"

"But he's cold toward everyone, as if we owed him a big debt..."

"Alas, you're just too young to understand it. Cool and talented men are more attractive."

"Look, he's catching up!"

"Come on, Chief Knight—"

Carter Lannis had served in the knightage of the old King's City. He followed Prince Roland to Border Town and was among the founding members of Neverwinter. It was said that he could compete with an Extraordinary witch. Scroll thought this outstanding warrior was one of the favorites to win the race.

Honey wrote down all the messages brought back by her birds.

Carter increased his pace, rapidly shortening the distance between him and Ferlin.

The cheer he received was as loud as any given to Morning Light.

Honey found that she needed to change the title of her report.

After a moment of thinking, she began to write cheerfully.

—"Who's the Final Winner? The Battle Between Two Handsome Men"

...

Carter had a burning feeling in his chest.

In order to let May spot him easily, he had put on a bright ribbon and a knight's cloak. He had thought that these things were as light as a feather, but now he felt that they were as heavy as a mountain. He felt as if they were pulling him backward while was running against a wind.

Despite that, he still refused to take them off.

Because they were hand-made by May.

Carter hoped to cross the finish line in this outfit before Morning Light.

He had heard some rumors about Ferlin and May from the troupe members. Morning Light had become a household name in the Western Region long before Prince Roland came here. Back then, everyone had thought that he and the Star of the Western Region could not be more perfectly matched. It was said that May had feelings for Morning Light, but Ferlin had already fallen in love with a new actress, Irene.

Carter had never heard May mention it, but he somehow still held a grudge against Ferlin.

What's so great about Morning Light?

May liked you just because she didn't have a chance to meet me back then.

Carter wanted to prove to everyone that he was the best for May!

That was why he wanted to overtake Ferlin Eltek so badly.

Carter tensed his muscles and quickened his pace. Ferlin was only half a step ahead of him.

And he could see the stand beside the finish line now.

It was time for a final push!

Suddenly, he heard someone else rapidly approaching behind him.

Is there someone who can catch up with us?

How is this possible? In the first hour of the race, Ferlin and I left all the other participants in the dust. No one should have been able to catch up with us. Even if he deliberately saved energy at the beginning of the race, he should've started to speed up little by little a long time ago.

Sprinting consumes much more energy than running at a consistent pace!

Carter could not help looking back.

"Wait... What's that?"

He saw a strangely dressed man approaching him at an incredibly fast speed. From the man's skin color and tattoos, he could tell that he was a Mojin, but he had never seen a Mojin man with a tail and a pair of long ears on his head.

Is he trying to gain strength by imitating some wild beast?

He shuddered at the thought, and then dashed toward the finish line as fast as he could, as if a dreadful monster was after him.

Ferlin, Carter, and Rohan crossed the finish line at almost the same time. The spectators burst into cheers.

Did I... win?

The Chief Knight thought while panting heavily. Because of inertia, he continued to run several dozens of meters before he finally stopped. After he stopped, he immediately looked up toward the stand.

Roland Wimbledon stood up.

"Congratulations! You've successfully completed the long-distance race and achieved great results!" the king spoke to all the people through the loudspeaker. "The game is not over, but we've got the top three runners now. They are—"

Carter swallowed hard.

"Carter Lannis, who finished in third place."

Hearing that, the Chief Knight closed his eyes in great disappointment. Oh, hell, was I still a little bit slower than Morning Light?

"Rohan Burnflame, a Mojin man, who finished in second place."

Roland paused for a moment, giving the spectators a moment to cheer. When the crowd quieted down, he raised his voice again.

"And the champion is Sunflower from Longsong District! Let's give them a warm round of applause!"

"Huh... who's she?"

While everyone else was shouting and clapping their hands, Carter, Ferlin, and Rohan stood agape.

On the side of the street, Honey closed her notebook and hopped off Vader's bike. "I've finished today's report. Thank you very much."

"Did you decide on the headline?" Vader asked.

"Yeah, I did." She smiled before adding, "I'll just directly write out the results."

It was already eye-catching enough.

—"The First Victory Day Games Concluded Successfully: A Twenty-year-old Girl, Sunflower, Won First Place."

Chapter 1066: The Prewar Speech

"Wow, it's fantastic," Barov exclaimed while stoking his beard. "I never expected a long-distance race to be so thrilling!"

"Indeed. I felt my heart racing when those three guys were running neck-and-neck toward the finish line," said Petrov, the governor of Longsong District. "Unfortunately, only the champion can get the souvenir badge. What a pity."

"Is it really a pity for you?" The City Hall Director smiled before adding, "The champion is from Longsong District. If I were you, I couldn't have too many regrets like that."

"Come on, Ms. Sunflower was just lucky. If nothing else, you'll get what you want at next year's Victory Day Games."

"Really? I'm a little worried that something unexpected will happen."

"Aha, if it happens all the time, then it's not an unexpected thing."

Hearing these two veteran politicians, who had a 20-year age difference, having a nice chat with many subtle jabs woven in, Roland thought, "Well, well, you guys are so well-matched. Both of you are amazingly skilled at debate."

After Roland announced the top three runners of the race, all the spectators felt more relaxed. They continued talking about the match in low voices, while waiting for the other participants to cross the finish line. Apparently, everyone was deeply attracted to this sports competition, which catered to their desire to see people push themselves to the limit of human endurance.

Even the witches, who had superhuman abilities, were caught up in the competition.

Seeing the girls so excited, Roland could not help smiling.

Considering that their magical powers might discourage regular people from participating, he forbade them and the God's Punishment Witches from taking part in the race. But now, he was thinking that he should hold a special game for the witches.

What will happen if I organize a special sports competition for them?

"Is this what sporting events look like in your previous world?" Anna's voice interrupted his thought. "In the first half of the race, you seemed a little bit distracted."

"Because I couldn't see or hear what was happening in the race," Roland sighed.

"Are you saying that there was a way to instantly let people know what was happening during a match in your previous world?" Anna's eyes shone with excitement. "How did you do that?"

"That's a little bit complicated," he replied with a smile. "Do you remember the television that I told you?"

Despite the race not being broadcast live on television or having someone to give a running commentary, it was still a successful event. It was exciting and suspenseful, with its result being totally unexpected. It attracted lots of spectators and many participants in this game had their own unique style, such as Carter, who wore a knight's cloak, or Rohan, who cosplayed the wolf girl, both of whom were among the most talked-about figures today.

As for the champion, Sunflower, she also seemed to have legendary life experiences. According to Scroll's roster, she had been a Rat on Black Street, and then she became a mail carrier after Roland took control of Longsong Stronghold. Since then, she had been running in the streets and lanes of Longsong District every day to deliver mail. Because of this, she outshone all her opponents and won this long-distance race.

She was not as strong as Ferlin, Carter or Rohan, but she was the champion. This result was completely outside of everyone's expectations, but it pleased Roland. Her victory embodied the hope of many ordinary workers and made them believe that hard work could really change their fate.

...

When the sun began to set, the first National Sports Event was drawing to an end.

The spectators flocked to the stands to watch the award ceremony.

For Roland, this was the most important part of today's event.

He stood up and nodded to Echo, then stepped forward to stand at the front of the stage.

Neverwinter was going to wage a war against demons in the Taquila ruins. To boost his people's morale, he decided to give a prewar speech to them at this ceremony.

He looked down and saw a sea of faces. Seeing the king, the crowd gradually quieted down.

"Citizens of Graycastle, you've just witnessed a miraculous race. In less than four hours, many participants ran 28 kilometers, which is exactly half the length of Kingdom Main Street."

"I want to remind you all, especially the new residents, that in the past, it took us at least three days to travel from Border Town to Longsong Stronghold and we had to travel day and night to do so. Back then, if someone told you that he could run to Longsong Stronghold in a day, you would think it was a joke. But today, you've witnessed it!"

"Citizens of Graycastle, you've already created many miracles. You're able to run 28 kilometers in less than four hours. You're capable of building roads through mountains and many other great projects in this city. For you, anything is possible and nothing can stop you from achieving greater success!"

The crowd burst into cheers.

Roland paused to give the people a sign to quiet down. After that, he continued, "Now, we're faced with a brand new challenge, demons. We've arrived at a crucial juncture in our war against them. Soon, the First Army will go deep into the Fertile Plains and wage war against the demons at Taquila once again."

"Demons are the most brutal and greedy invaders we've met. They've destroyed many thriving kingdoms and massacred millions of people. Wherever they have been, cities and towns crumbled into ruin, and bodies were piled up like hills!"

"So we must fight before such a disaster strikes!"

"We will fight them on land; we will fight them on the sea; we will fight them in the sky. We will fight until demons no longer exist in this world. And then, no one will threaten our survival anymore!"

"I'm so glad to spot some Mojins and people from other lands among you. I enjoy seeing you dispel prejudices and barriers and to form a close-knit community. I promise you that this is going to be the new normal! Demons intend to eliminate all human beings, men, women, and children, no matter where you come from or how old you are. In this war, we fight not only for Graycastle, but we fight for the entire human race!"

"My fellow citizens, when you feel fear in front of dreadful enemies, think about today's miracle. As long as we have faith in each other and stick together to the end, we will certainly win!"

"Now, let's welcome the top 10 runners to the stage to receive their awards!" Roland announced loudly.

The crowd burst into cheers once again, and this time, the people cheered much louder and longer. The ceaseless cheers and applause reverberated around the stands.

"The great chief is such a good speaker..." Guelz, who stood beside the stand, took a deep breath and said, "I can't wait to go into battle after hearing his speech." He looked at Rohan and asked, "Are you ready to go on stage and receive your prize?"

"Father, but I..." Rohan bit his lip and looked sad.

"But you didn't win first prize?" Guelz grinned and rubbed his son's head. "You tried your best. That's enough. Go up there and stand tall. Let everyone marvel at what the successor of the Wildflame clan has achieved."

Rohan was startled. He looked at his father quietly and then nodded his head vigorously.

He strode toward the stage and did not feel embarrassed to be wearing the wolf girl outfit anymore.

Guelz watched his back in the glow of the setting sun. He found that his son looked tall and confident now, just like Lorgar.

Chapter 1067: 1067 The Person Pursuing Miracles

...

"Good gracious, it's really you!"

When Sunflower stepped down from the stands with a bag full of gold royals in her hand, she heard a familiar voice.

She turned around and a smile fluttered over her face. "Hey, Tigerclaw!"

"Haha, it has been such a long time, Sunflower!" The big man gave her a big hug and patted her on the back heartily. "When His Majesty announced that name, I thought it was someone else. I didn't expect you would defeat the Chief Knight and Morning Light. You really surprised me! Hang on... you look plumper, don't you?"

Sunflower pushed Tigerclaw away and punched him in the chest smilingly. She immediately shot back, "Oh, shut up! I'm just a little plumpy. Do you actually like the skinny me better?"

"No, I like you to be a bit plumpy." Tigerclaw whistled. "At least, you look more like a girl." With these words, he studied Sunflower up and down and said, "But you did change a lot, to be honest... I wasn't even sure if it was really you on stage earlier."

"Really?" Sunflower shrugged. "My hair has gotten longer, and I eat more, too. Didn't you get bigger as well?"

"I work out at the construction site every day!" said Tigerclaw as he lifted his arm triumphantly.

"Sun...sun... Sunflower, wait for me." Dawn pushed his way through the crowd, completely out of breath. "Hey, isn't it Tigerclaw?"

"See? This guy hasn't changed much. He's as skinny as he used to be." Tigerclaw also gave him a crushing hug and said, "Don't tell me you ran all the way here."

"Ahem... be gentle," Dawn replied with a bitter smile. "The caravan offered me a ride. If Sunflower didn't force me to come with her, I wouldn't have bothered taking such a trip."

"Are you a merchant now?"

"Just an errandboy." Dawn scratched the back of his head in embarrassment.

"He knows how to read and write." Sunflower cut in while twitching her lips. "As he was a fast learner in the elementary school, a Chamber of Commerce hired him right after the exam. Now, he deals with accounting books every day and is living very comfortably."

"I see. it's good that you came. I'm happy to see you guys." Tigerclaw laughed. "Let's have a sip in Neverwinter tonight. We should celebrate Sunflower's victory!"

"Sounds good, but..." Dawn looked around and asked, "Where's Snaketooth? Didn't he come for the competition?"

Sunflower's heart suddenly started to pound in her throat.

She had wanted to ask the same question for a long time, but she tried not to look so eager. So, she turned to Tigerclaw and tried to sound as airy as possible. "I hope he's not annoyed that you totally ditched him and went back."

"Oh him... He went to build the railways at Misty Forest." Tiger said drawly. "Although it's well paid, the work is too dangerous. What's the point of trading your own life for money? I don't understand him. He used to be happy even with just living down in the drainage. Now he's fussy about a real dwelling and insists on a double-roomed house."

"Because a double-roomed house can provide a cozy home for a family rather than just a shelter," thought Sunflower bitterly. Then she said, "He did so obviously for Paper."

"Paper?" Tigerclaw asked blankly.

"Hey, how can you forget Paper?" Dawn nudged him in his ribs. "She's our friend."

"I know, but what does it have to do with her?" Tigerclaw was confused. "Paper has joined the Witch Union and is now living in the Castle District. She doesn't need an extra house. And silly Snaketooth... he saw Paper many times but didn't even have the guts to say hello to her. He even pulled me aside to dodge her. Now Paper doesn't even know we're here."

"What?" Sunflower was stunned. "Haven't you met Paper yet in the past two years?"

Tigerclaw shook his head off-handedly.

"Hahaha." Sunflower grinned broadly. "Then he's silly indeed!" For some reason, Sunflower felt much relieved as if a heavy burden had been lifted from her shoulders. She had to fight the urge to jump into the air and whoop.

"Sunflower, keep your voice down." Dawn reminded her while feeling a little uneasy. "People are watching us."

But Sunflower did not care about it at all. She waved at the crowd who smiled back.

Everybody undoubtedly viewed her as Ms. Champion.

"It feels so good to be a celebrity..." Tigerclaw remarked impressively. "Two years ago, I would have never thought we'd be famous one day."

"I'm more interested in the 100 gold royals than fame." Dawn apparently had a different opinion. "We can invest the money in some businesses. We would definitely earn more than working for others. Even if we know nothing about starting a business, we can partner with a member of the Chamber of Commerce. If it works out, we can practically earn money by doing nothing..."

"No, I want to buy a house." Sunflower interjected. "In the Border Area."

"Huh?" Dawn was astonished. "This is a perfect opportunity! Do you know how long it would take to earn 100 gold royals if we start from scratch?"

"I know, but I've made up my mind," Sunflower said resolutely.

"Then what about your job?"

"I'm also planning to purchase a bicycle," Sunflower went on. "You see, it's so convenient to have a bicycle. It would only take a day... no, half a day to ride to the Longsong Area from here. Plus, many people from these two areas write letters. I can probably earn more with a bicycle."

"You..." Dawn gazed at her for a long time. At length, he sighed resignedly and said, "Fine. I've never managed to persuade you anyway."

Sunflower gave a faint smile. She remembered what it had been like two years ago.

It was on the day of their departure.

They had been at the dock when she had asked Snakestooth if he and Paper would ever come back, but nobody had given an answer.

At that time, she had the impression that she would never see him again.

Longsong Stronghold was so far away from Border Town that she felt there was a world between them, even though the two cities had merged into one.

They had never been anywhere farther than the landfill outside Longsong Stronghold.

And Border Town was somewhere even farther away.

Tempted by the huge reward given to the champion of the sports meeting, Sunflower had finally made her decision to come to Longsong Stronghold. It was actually her first time setting foot on the Kingdom Main Street. To inject more courage into herself, she had also asked Dawn to join her.

Sunflower was actually more surprised at how close the two cities were to each other than her winning the championship. The distance was absolutely shorter than she had anticipated. It was a straight flat road without any curves, twists or potholes like many mountain roads. For the first time of her life, she had realized that it really was a city.

So, why did she have to wait for Snakestooth to come back?

She could just go there herself.

Just as His Majesty had said.

People needed to break through the impossible because no one knew whether there would be a miracle unless they tried.

"Let's find a tavern and have a drink," suggested Sunflower as she patted her money pouch.

"Yay!" Tigerclaw wrung his fist out in excitement. "Too bad Snakestooth isn't here. He'll miss all the fun."

"Remember to store the money away in the hotel." Dawn reminded Sunflower. "Just take four or five gold royals with you!"

"Got it," said Sunflower smilingly.

She didn't know the outcome but she was willing to give it a shot.

She started to like the feeling of pursuing a miracle.

Chapter 1068: A Torch Run

The next morning after the sports meeting, Roland entered the parlor and met the officials who were waiting there. They all rose as Roland came in.

"Please take a seat," said Roland as he seated himself in the host chair. He surveyed the room before speaking solemnly, "You've probably all learnt about the reason for this meeting. I now declare that the war has officially begun!"

"This isn't something you just throw onto the armies. As of this moment, I require every governmental body and every department director of the Administrative Office to have a basic understanding of the war as well as the future political and military trend. I require every one of you to work hard and fight this prolonged battle together!" The whip was in Roland's voice. "We've had many great achievements since the establishment of Neverwinter. However, nothing would last if we lose the Battle of Divine Will. If we fail to take the Taquila ruins, the Red Mist will spread throughout the whole continent in no time. By then, nothing would be able to stop the demons. Therefore, we must win. We lose, we fail!"

"Yes, Your Majesty," Barov and the others shouted in a chorus.

"Very well." Roland then turned to Edith and said, "Now the General Staff will talk about the detailed tactics and strategies."

"Yes, Your Majesty," the Pearl of the Northern Region replied as she stood up. She placed her hand on her chest gracefully and continued, "I'll have to use the big map for my presentation."

She walked to Roland and tapped the map of the Western Region on the wall behind her. After numerous amendments and additions, the map portrayed more than half of the inhabited Barbarian Land, and Neverwinter had become a tiny dot on the edge of the map rather than in its center. Anybody who looked at the map would soon realize how small a thing a man was. This was also one of Roland's primary goals while drafting the map.

He wanted his ministers and officials to understand the littleness of human beings and thus focus on the long-term goal instead of immediate gains.

Edith went straight to the point. "First of all, we need you all to know that this upcoming battle will be different from any of the ones we've had in the past. I want everybody to understand that this will be a prolonged war."

The vision blocking tactic used in the battle at the North Slope would not work anymore. Since the Taquila ruins were much farther from the Misty Forest than the destroyed outpost, it would take months to build the railways there. As such, the demons would definitely notice what they were doing.

As the demons had an absolute positional advantage on the vast continent, Roland decided to take the advantage of his military strength and have a direct fight with the demons instead of launching a surprise attack.

Beyond a doubt, this was going to be a battle between the attacking and the defending.

Nobody was surprised at Edith's proposal, as they had all known the plan beforehand.

Only Barov raised a question. "How long do you estimate this war will take?"

"That depends on how fierce the counterattack is," Edith answered nonchalantly. "The General Staff has asked the Taquila witches to conduct several maneuvers. Suppose the demons fight in the same way they did during the Battle of North Slope and attack us once a week, we would be able to slam the Longsong Cannons in their faces within three months."

"But they aren't stupid, and they certainly won't make the same mistake over and over again."

"Exactly. I anticipate that the demons would soon realize what the railways are used for. Perhaps, they would even detect the railways at the rear of Misty Forest. But we are also taking precautions. Since there are a lot of variables in a battle, I hope the Administrative Office will allocate the resources based on the worst possible scenario."

"And the worst scenario is...?" asked Barov as he drew his brows together.

"From spring all the way to winter, until the arrival of the Months of Demons," said Edith flatly.

"Then doesn't that mean we've failed already?" Barov the chief grimaced. "This doesn't meet His Majesty's requirement."

"As long as we don't retreat, the battle isn't over. We are just deadlocked." The Pearl of the Northern Region smiled faintly. "The battle will continue after the snow melts." Seeing all the directors from the Administrative Office look a bit apprehensive, Edith comforted them, "But this is highly unlikely, for we produce bullets way faster than the demons reproduce themselves. This is just the worst scenario."

Barov said meditatively, "In that case, I'll need to collect food from all the other regions of the country for a war reserve stock. As Golden Twos are currently grown in all parts of the kingdom, I believe there will be a lot of excesses this year. These excesses would sustain the First Army for a year."

"That won't be a problem," Sirius Daly, the Minister of Agriculture replied. "I'll let all the local city halls know."

"The plan for the Ministry of Chemical Industry needs a bit of adjustment as well," Barov continued.

"We'll need more gunpowder and explosives."

"We only have this many people. The production of gunpowder and explosives won't go up unless we decrease the production of perfumes and soap." Kyle Sichi, the Minister of Chemical Industry said off-handedly.

"Perhaps we can loan some alchemy apprentices from the neighboring country to support Graycastle..." Kyle suggested as he looked at Roland. "I've heard that there are many alchemical workshops in the Kingdom of Dawn, although none of them are in the City of Glow. But if Your Majesty requests, I'm sure the King of Dawn would fully support you and allow you to have these people as long as you need them. Besides... there are over 100 soldiers from the First Army stationed around Cage Mountain. You may also get some alchemists from the Kingdom of Wolfheart and the Kingdom of Everwinter."

"Sounds like a plan." Roland nodded in satisfaction. "I want a proposal from you."

He was very pleased with Kyle's answer.

Roland had initially thought that it would probably take two to three years to see the result of his political reform when he had united the kingdom. After all, it was very hard to change a person's mindset. For decades, these officials had been used to submitting to the rule of their lords and sticking to the tradition that no lords should interfere with the affairs of other domains. All of sudden, however, they had been given the opportunity to manage all the other regions in the country. Such a drastic change must have been overwhelming.

Yet he had underestimated the magic of power.

When a person was suddenly granted considerable power, he would naturally attempt to exercise it even though he might not be able to see the implication behind it. The best example was Barov.

Not only did he think of the Kingdom of Dawn, but he also planned to obtain more resources from farther locations with the help of the military.

After everybody finished their discussion, Edith continued, "It's not enough just to destroy the demons' encampment. Due to some reasons, we have to exterminate them. Therefore, we need to cut off the enemies' retreat before the general offensive, including their air force and ground force, and only the witches can do that."

"Some... reasons?" Barov sounded confused. "It would put the witches in great danger if they stayed at the rear."

"Because of the curse." Roland cut in. "There's a Senior Demon among the enemies who can put magic curses on us from a distance. I haven't figured out how it does that yet, but it might be very similar to Blackveil, the Church witch. If it escapes, the First Army would be doomed. Even if we do win, it would be just barely."

Everybody in the hall sucked in their breath.

The witch, Blackveil, was notorious for her incredible but powerful killing method. She could put a person to death instantly with a mere eye contact. More than 700 people from the First Army had been killed upon her fatal stare. It was the biggest loss the Army had suffered since its establishment.

If the demon could also kill people through eye contacts, needless to say, they should eradicate this threat as soon as possible.

Roland cast a glance at Lightning at the end of the long table who hanged her head miserably before he let out a silent sigh.

He completely understood how she felt.

Lightning was mortified to see that all the other witches would have to risk their lives for her sake.

But they had no better choice.

Roland rose to his feet and said, "Anyway, the purpose of this expedition is to eliminate the threat posed by the Obelisk before the Battle of Divine Will while at the same time weakening the demons. The operation code is 'Torch', which not only represents our hope to destroy our enemies but also the light that brightens up the Fertile Plains. Please do your best to expand the territory of Graycastle!"

Everybody stood up and bowed respectfully.

They shouted in a chorus, "As you command, Your Majesty."

Chapter 1069: In the Name of the Aerial Knight

Inside the pilot training school in Neverwinter.

"Hurry up! Hurry up! Keep your balance!"

"Your legs are even shakier than a baby's!"

"Keep straight. Watch where you're heading!"

"Hey, where are you going? Do I really have to put some braziers on either side of the walkway to make you all be more careful!"

"Not here, not on the plank, otherwise I'll have to make you lick your vomit off it!"

"Next, Good!"

"Here!" Good shuddered when he heard his name being called. He took a deep breath and seated himself in a swivel chair.

The stern face of Eagle Face, the instructor, came into his sight.

Good could not even stand having mere eye contact with him. It was rumored Eagle Face had once been the commander of the garrison in the Northern Region before he had returned to Neverwinter. He had immediately taken the internal military assessment and became a member of the reserve Aerial Knights. This meant that Eagle Face had not only participated in the war against the church but had also sacrificed his vacations for the new trainees.

In other words, he was strict to both others and himself.

Good felt very uncomfortable under his penetrating stare.

As soon as he sat down, his two friends, Finkin and Hinds grouped up.

Good saw them cast him a sorrowful look.

The next moment, the chair started to spin rapidly.

This was the most painful training session for the reserve pilots. There was a plank five meters long, as wide as a palm, in front of the chair, which Eagle Face called a "footbridge". All the trainees had to walk the "footbridge" as steadily as possible after spinning in the chair for half a minute.

Due to the loss of balance, the whole world became a swirl of color after he slid off the chair. He could barely stand still, let alone crossing the "footbridge". Eagle Face would usually train ten people at a time, and the person who got the lowest grade would be subject to punishment such as "cleaning the washroom" and "weeding the yard". Sometimes, he would pick a weekend and have the poor guy sit in the spinning chair for a whole day as a way of disciplining.

Unfortunately, Good had once been that unlucky person.

As a result, he had ended up throwing up in his dormitory at dinner time.

He did not want to experience this for a second time.

"Stop!"

The chair immediately stopped as Eagle Face announced the magic word. Good struggled to get off the chair.

"Hurry up! Don't dawdle. Walk!"

Good raised his head with his teeth clenched. He stepped on the plank shakily and started to walk toward the other end of the "footbridge". After more than ten days of practice, he had found a little trick to succeed in the task. He noticed that he would be more likely to lose his balance if he constantly watched his steps. The best way to cross the "footbridge" was to look ahead and use his body's memory to control his strides.

In fact, his feet touched the solid ground before he realized it.

"That's, that's amazing..."

"He didn't miss a single step!"

"He's the first person who did it, isn't he?"

The crowd behind him broke into a loud buzz.

He turned around and looked at Eagle Face. There was a rare smile on his gaunt grim face. "Well done. It seems that you aren't completely hopeless."

"But—" he paused for a second and his tone instantly dropped, "there has been only one person who passed the test up to this date, which means this group is the worst of them all. Princess Tilly said the Aerial Knights should be one in a million. If you don't want to be an errand boy for the rest of your life, put yourself together and train harder. Take a five-minute break and we'll start again!"

Everybody wailed at the announcement.

"Hey, how did you do that?" Finkin asked Good while winking.

"Just walk the way you normally do like when you aren't dizzy."

"Really? How?" Hinds rejoined. "Are you saying to live the lie in your head?"

Both Finkin and Hinds had passed the initial assessment and joined the reserve together with Good. As the three were in the same training group, they had soon become very close friends.

"Just do what I said. We just need a pass." Good tapped Hind's head. "This method probably doesn't work for the smart ones, but I think it should work for you guys."

"Get over yourself," Finkin retorted with a little irritation. "You just succeeded once. Stop bragging."

"Do you want to make a bet? I bet I'll walk over the bridge for another three... no, five times!"

"If you do, I'll do all your laundry this week!"

"Including my underpants?"

"Um..."

"Hey, you guys stop arguing," Hinds cut in. "What I really care about is— can we really become an Aerial Knight after this training program?"

Good and Finkin instantly fell silent. In fact, this was the very problem that bothered all the trainees. All the training they had received so far, including walking the footbridge, passing the rotating wheel, and learning wind directions, were more like an acrobatic show than proper military training. Furthermore, Princess Tilly was supposed to teach them in person, but in the end, she had simply taught some senior officers from the First Army and asked those officers to teach them.

The training was pretty intense. They had to go through physical training during the daytime and learn to read and write at night. Although Princess Tilly had made her promise to all of them, they still doubted the credibility of her words.

However, nobody dared raise the question to the sulky, unapproachable instructor.

"Who knows?" Finkin said with a shrug, after a short silence. "At least, the food here is good. We have meat every day, with an extra meal on weekends as well."

"I think... Her Highness is not likely to lie to us," Good said thoughtfully. "Didn't we get a bag of books? My sister told me one of them is called something like "Aircraft Operation Manual", which was drafted by Her Highness herself. Once we learn how to read and write, we would probably know the reason for these trainings."

"You are pretty optimistic, aren't you?" Finkin beamed at him.

"If I thought negatively, I probably wouldn't have survived the trip here."

"Alright, time's up!" Just then, Eagle Face's voice rose abruptly above the murmurs of the crowd. "Line up here. We're going to do it again in the same order in which we did last time!"

"OK..." responded everybody weakly.

But something unexpected happened.

The door of the training room was flung open and a uniformed man strode in. He whispered something in Eagle Face's ear.

Eagle Face nodded. After administering a salute, he wheeled around and swept over the trainees with a cold glance.

"Good news for all of you. The subsequent training is cancelled. You can continue to take your break now."

Finkin and Hinds heaved a sigh of relief, but Good did not. He clearly saw a calculating smile break across Eagle Face's shrewd face. It was a smile which contained a little bit of sarcasm, jesting, and even... gloating.

"Not here though." As Good had expected, Eagle Face went on at once, "I know what you're complaining about in private. I didn't bother explaining to you because I know your thick skulls wouldn't understand a thing. You're indeed lucky. Now, there's a chance for you to see what an Aerial Knight truly means with your own eyes."

The true meaning of... an Aerial Knight?

Good's heart was pumping insubordinately.

"Follow me." Eagle Face surveyed them slowly and said, "I hope you don't wet your pants when you see it."

Chapter 1070: The Glider (I)

They filed out of the training room and marched along the pavement toward the south.

There were brand new red brick houses along the road, some were just completed and some were half-done. According to Finkin, it had been a coastal wasteland here just a year ago, with nothing but a few tree trunks here and there. Now, the construction team had turned this place into a "city within a city".

The city was walled. Although the hedge was not high, it was tall enough to set a boundary between the city and the rest of the world. A warning sign which read "No climbing. Offenders will be shot down" was hung on the wall, keeping those who attempted to climb over the hedge away from this area.

There were several dormitories, cafeterias, playgrounds, training rooms and classrooms in this enclosure. It had actually taken Good a full day to completely understand what those weird words meant. In short, they lived and studied in here, cut off from contact with the outside world, leading an exclusive lifestyle which their instructor referred to as a "closed system".

The enclosure was pretty big. Good had been here for several weeks, but he still did not know where the edge of the hedge was. One of the reasons for this was that the trainees were confined within the area between their dormitories and the playground. They were forbidden to go anywhere else unless given special permission.

It should be noted that the construction of the school had been completed within just a year.

Good had known a long time ago that Neverwinter was famous for its monstrous speed of building houses. However, he had no idea how fast it actually was until he moved to the "city within a city" in the Western Region this winter.

It had only taken them one week to complete a red bungalow on the south side of the playground.

Compared to other cities, the work efficiency here was phenomenal.

After they crossed the playground, the group suddenly erupted into a loud murmur.

This was a restricted area normally forbidden to the students.

For the first time, they saw what this area looked like. Their view was filled with nothing but a vast open field. All they could see was the blue sky above dotted with puffs of white clouds. A short way farther on, they saw the endless Swirling Sea. A cold sea breeze brushed upon Good's cheeks, instantly reviving his spirit.

Used to the familiar view of dense red brick houses, Good felt the whole world instantly expand in front of him.

"Strange... I thought there would be something marvelous here," Hinds mumbled. "Isn't it just a clearing?"

He was right. It was a clearing with nothing but a few blackstone tracks, wider than the main street in Neverwinter, which stretched away to the east and west.

No wonder Hinds did not understand why it was a restricted area.

"Probably because they feared we'd be too absorbed in this beautiful view to pay attention to the road underneath and fall into the sea." Finkin grinned. "But I think I'll be more willing to learn if our classroom is here."

"But you have no desire to learn at all in the first place," someone jested.

"Hey, do you want to make a bet?" Finkin stared back. "Let's see who had a higher grade in the past exam?"

"Drop it. Look over there!" Good raised his brows. "Someone's already here."

"They're from the other class..." At these words, the whole group fell silent. Although they had not talked to the other class, they had heard a lot about them from their instructor, who constantly spoke highly of their performances. They not only completed all the tasks assigned to them during the day but also requested for more in the evening. Some of them insisted on sitting in the chair even though they had vomit all over. They were the so-called top students who simply beat them in every subject, making them look like a bunch of dunces.

They thus automatically viewed the students from the other class as their rivals.

"Raise your head."

"Stare right into their eyes. We don't want to lose to them!"

They started to encourage each other.

Meanwhile, the other group of students looked just as intense as them.

Sensing the glares, those students all gazed at them coldly, long-faced, looking nothing like model students.

The tension between the two groups was not reduced until they had parted.

"Alright, you all wait here," Eagle Face bellowed as he stopped at the blackstone track. "Remember, you're not allowed to leave your spot no matter what you see. Both His Majesty and Her Highness will be here. Any frivolous action would be viewed as a potential danger, and you know very well its consequence."

"The king... will come as well?"

"No, he should be here already," thought Good, as he noticed the shed on the other side of the clearing had been surrounded by soldiers from the First Army and the police. Apparently, only the presence of the King of Graycastle would require such seamless security.

It seemed that the king did highly regard the Aerial Knights.

Good started to look forward to the unfolding of the event.

For a second, he put Eagle Face's meaningful sneer out of his mind.

...

In the hangar, there was completely a different scene.

The first glider, the "Seagull" was ready for her virgin trip.

This was also the very first manned glider after Tilly learned how to operate the testing glider. Compared to the testing glider, this one was larger with wider and thicker wings. The frame of the glider was covered with skins. It was equipped with various supplementary facilities such as portholes, chairs, an airtight door that could be opened from the back, etc. In short, the "Seagull" was a real plane.

The traditional gliders in modern society were used as a supplementary transportation tool to cargo aircrafts. They were made of low-quality materials such as wooden frames and holey canvas. However, the "Seagull" was the exact opposite of her shabby predecessors. It was made of aluminum alloys and steels with high tensile strength. Most of her major parts were integrally molded, with minimal bolts and welding. As for the non-structural parts, there were numerous small holes in it to minimize the weight of the aircraft. The magic coating ensured no gas would leak upon a huge air pressure difference. The bottom of the aircraft was armored for force landing purposes. As long as the plane maintained its stability, the armor would protect the crew and passengers from injuries even if the plane crashed.

The glider would be used to carry witches.

As the "Seagull" would be the only plane in Neverwinter, Roland had to make sure it was absolutely safe.

"Well then... I'm boarding." Anna pressed a gentle kiss to Roland's cheek. "See you tomorrow."

"Stay safe. Don't force yourself," Roland reminded her. "If you encounter the demons, remember to protect yourself."

Anna smiled. "I know. You've said the same thing to me over and over again."

"Please don't worry. I'll protect her," said Phyllis, the God's Punishment Witch, solemnly.

Roland let Anna go reluctantly. After quite a while, he disengaged Anna and nodded slowly. "Off you go. I'll wait for you right here."

The First Army had actually built an airport at the edge of the forest, where the railways took a turn. Since there was no transportation tool that could complete a trip of over 500 miles within one day except Maggie, Roland had to invent a glider as an alternative.

The "Seagull" could carry 20 people at most. So, other than the pilots Tilly and Wendy, it could take 18 additional passengers in total, or cargo of 1,000 kilograms (when the chairs were removed). The speed of the glider depended on Wendy's magic power. Even if it flew at a "low" speed of 200 miles an hour, it could at least complete two round trips between Neverwinter and the front within a day, which was the fastest they could achieve at present.