

## Witch 1121

### Chapter 1121: The Most Genius Invention

"Huh?" Simbady twitched his lips, staring at Rex suspiciously. Even a clansman from a small tribe like him knew that Fjords people were notorious for their craftiness and trickery. They were all cunning merchants expert in sailing, who had an insatiable lust for money.

Many Mojins in the Iron Sand City had been scammed by Fjords merchants, so every Sand National knew they had to be extremely careful when dealing with them. Their stereotype of Fjords people was further confirmed by what had happened in the Festive Harbor. Simbady did not believe a single word Rex was saying. He said gruffly, "Are you done? I'm busy here. Go talk to someone else!"

With these words, Simbady cast Mulley a glance, eyeing her to come with him.

"Hold on!" Rex said immediately. "I'll pay gold royals to you, regardless of the result."

"Simbady, just let him finish," Mulley said, grasping his hand. "I find it very interesting. He doesn't look like a fraud."

Simbady felt his heart pumping in his throat violently as Mulley touched him. He said hesitantly, "But..."

"Ten gold royals! As long as you tell me the exact location, I'll pay you ten gold royals!" Rex said breathlessly. To show he was not lying, he produced one gold royal from his pocket and proclaimed, "This is the deposit! If you could help me, I'll pay 20 more. How about that?"

Simbady was stiffened for a second. It was unusual for a Fjords merchant to pay upfront, let alone paying 30 gold royals in total. Simbady quickly revolved the idea in his head. It would probably take him at least ten years to earn such a large sum of money with his current salary.

"I also want to buy some new clothes for the children in the clan..." Mulley said imploringly while blinking her big sparkling eyes.

Unable to turn down Mulley's request, Simbady agreed resignedly, "I see. OK then. But if you dare scam us..."

"You won't lose anything," Rex confirmed quickly and tossed the gold royal at Simbady. "You just need to answer some questions of mine, and that's it. There's no better deal than this."

Simbady now saw how Fjords merchants tricked people. He caught the gold royal and asked, "What do you want to know from me? Why are you with Mulley? What do you mean by improving the reputation?"

"I have to start from the beginning," Rex said on a clearing throat. "Let's talk as we go. First, what do you think of the sea?"

"What do I think of the sea?" Simbady echoed. "It's the mother of Three Gods, the cradle of everything, and it's... volatile."

"I find it mysterious," Mulley said brightly. "Nobody knows how broad and how deep it is. There are a lot of places in the Southernmost Region not trodden by human beings yet. It may take us more than 1,000 years to fully explore the sea."

"You're both right. However, Fjords people view it as a treasury." Rex said smilingly, "There are numerous treasures down at the bottom of the sea, including tons of gold and silver royals, and the lost ancient ruin. Nobody is guarding them. They're just waiting for us to salvage. I won't be surprised if someone gets rich overnight. That means the one who gets the treasures will be the richest person in the world!"

"You sound it so simple," Simbady shot back contemptuously. "Nobody's guarding them? The ocean itself is a huge obstacle. How can you dive to the bottom of the sea as freely as a fish?"

"That's right. That's exactly what our problem is!" Rex replied in excitement. "The mission of the Society of Wondrous Crafts is to make everything impossible possible. This time, I want to show everyone that the Society of Wondrous Crafts isn't an organization of nutters, and certainly not an organization of cravens! Although we aren't explorers, we can do just as well as them... No, we'll do better than them!"

"I don't quite follow you — "

"A great invention." Rex revealed his secret anxiously. "I call it a 'diving suit'. With this, men can stay under water as long as they want like a fish!"

"What?" Simbady exclaimed in dismay.

"I found them stay under water for quite a while when I went picking shells at the beach. They stayed there for more than a person normally can," Mulley rejoined. "That's why I went to ask him what they were doing."

"So it's Mulley who talked to him first..." Simbady thought, feeling a bitter jolt in his stomach.

"I was very surprised at the beginning, because I know Sand Nationals fear and respect the sea," Rex continued. "I've been testing this diving suit for several days. It's been working really well. Needless to say, this will change the entire salvage industry. A job that used to highly depend on luck now become an adventure everybody could participate in!"

"Since you've already succeeded, why did you ask for my help?" Simbady asked in bewilderment, trying to suppress his disappointment and jealousy.

"Ahem... the thing is, Mr. Simbady... that this diving suit just needs a little bit of exposure. We can take advantage of King Roland's campaign to advertise it. That's why I need to get some real good stuff before anyone else — something that will catch the King of Graycastle's attention," Rex said while clenching his fist. "Once I'm granted the honorary title, thousands of people will jockey for my invention!"

He broke off at this point and then continued, "But I don't know where the treasures are. His Majesty's post doesn't indicate what exactly he wants. Technically, anything strange or ininteresting is fine. Apparently, the king won't be interested in any random thing. He doesn't want to collect the crap you would normally find at the beach or in the corals, so we don't know where to go. All we can do now is to

slowly search along the beach. Then I saw Miss Mulley, and I had a ray of hope. She told me you saw a strange cave once. You saw water reflect off light on a moonless night. I want to know where it is!"

In other words, these Fjords people came here because of the chief? Simbady said irritably, "I did see it. It's at the bottom of the cliff. The cave is only visible when water recedes. Having said that, the seawater is several meters deep, and nobody knows exactly how deep it is. It might only be an ordinary cave, and the light may be just a bunch of jellyfish."

"Don't worry. I'll still pay you even if we don't find anything," Rex returned.

They had just reached a beach beyond the port.

There was a knot of people.

"Those are the sailors I recruited who have nothing to do with the test. They only run errands for me," Rex explained. "I only have two assistants: Eyemask and Tophat. They're also members of the Society of Wondrous Crafts."

Simbady thought they had really strange names. He swept over the man and the woman at the center of the crowd and finally fixed his eyes onto the strange suit in front of them.

The suit had a huge metal helmet that did not coordinate with the rest of the outfit. The top and the bottom parts were connected, making it very hard to wear. The most distinctive feature was two tubes sticking out of the helmet which reminded Simbady of two shrimp tassels. They were incredibly long, with the ends connected to a large black machine.

Simbady had seen the same machine on Neverwinter ships before. Sailors called it a steam engine.

"Is this what you talked about..."

"Ah, yes," Rex said self-importantly, "This is the 'diving suit', my most ingenious invention!"

Chapter 1122: To the Sea

Three days later.

Simbady rose up out of the sea as the basket slowly moved up.

"How do you feel?" Mulley asked in excitement as soon as he took off the heavy helmet. "Is the undersea world fun?"

It was actually not any better than the desert. Although there nestled many weird animals and plants, he did not quite enjoy the experience. Every time he sank to the bottom of the ocean, he felt as if being engulfed by a suffocating darkness that pressured him in every direction. Simbady wanted to communicate his real feeling. However, seeing Mulley's anticipated look, he swallowed his words and blurted out, "Well... the scenery down there is not bad."

"That's so nice... if only I could go down there and take a look," Mulley said on a sigh.

Looking at her hazel eyes, Simbady suddenly remembered that a year and a half ago when his clansmen had departed the Port of Clearwater for the southern end of the desert, she had been wearing the same look as she had watched them leave on the concrete ship. At that time, nobody had known what was awaiting for them. Everybody had been agitated about their uncertain future, but she had still attempted to cheer them up.

Somehow, Simbady felt uneasy.

"Good job. I'm really impressed," Rex commented as he rose up out of the water a second later. He clapped his hands as he climbed off the basket. "You have a good balance, a good vital capacity, and a good sense of direction. You're also able to stay chill. In other words, you have all the qualities an excellent diver needs. Is it because you're a Sand National or you're just a natural? No offense. Miss Mulley told me that you aren't the strongest warrior in your clan."

Mulley poked out her tongue at Simbady and went off to chat with Rex's assistants.

"There's a pond in the oasis where the Fishbone Clan used to live. When we were little, we often had competitions to see who could dive the farthest, so I sort of have some diving experience..." Simbady answered dryly. "But Mulley was right. I'm not the best diver in the clan. If Carlone did that, it would probably just take him one day."

"Carlone? Who's he?"

"The strongest warrior in the younger generation. He's an excellent hunter and combatant, and he's as good as those warriors in big clans. Yet he only worked here once. Now he should be working somewhere at the Port of Clearwater. It's too late to seek him now."

"Really?" Rex said, shrugging. "I don't think so though."

"About what?"

"I don't think he's stronger than you," Rex replied as he pulled off the diving suit. "The most important quality for a diver isn't skills but an open mind."

"An... open mind?" Simbady echoed perplexedly.

"That is, accepting the unknown and overcoming yourself. That's the difference between a pond and the sea," Rex said while gazing at the Festive Harbor. "This place is undergoing drastic changes. The man named Carlone has only been here once. From what I see, you're more open-minded than him. "If I asked him for help, I probably couldn't persuade him to dive in the first place."

Simbady rolled his eyes at him glumly and said, "If it wasn't because of Mulley, I would never have agreed to help you."

He had wanted to leave after getting that ten gold royals, but Mulley was very curious about this strange suit. Knowing that they still needed an assistant to salvage the treasures, she immediately offered to help.

Simbady thus had no choice but to explore the cave with Rex. Before confirming that the diving suit was absolutely safe, he did not want Mulley to risk her own life and deal with this Fjord person alone.

Although he knew Mulley would eventually participate in the salvage herself, it would be much safer if he checked the suit first.

"Haha," Rex laughed airily. "But you overcame yourself in the end and took a step further to the new realm, didn't you? That's probably why Mulley prefers you."

"Hang on, what... what did you say?"

"Didn't you find it?" Rex said while spreading out his hands. "That girl talked a lot about you when she chatted with me. She said you were pretty timid when you were a kid and was often bullied into crying. However, you were curious about everything, though you are now much more reserved."

A muscle in Simbady's face twitched. He said, "Well, she just told you everything, eh?"

"She probably feels more comfortable with strangers," Rex said, grinning. "But I don't really know much about Sand Nation's customs. Perhaps fighting capacity is a big factor to assess a person, but you may be too modest as well."

"You don't know anything," Simbady grumbled.

To be honest, Simbady did not hate Rex very much. It was incredible that within just a few days, he could chat with a Fjord person so comfortably, as opposed to the beginning, he had just wanted to keep an eye on Rex to protect Mulley.

Now Simbady noticed that Rex was not talking to him with an air of condescension. Instead, Simbady felt very relaxed when communicating with him. Compared to those haughty northern nobles and Fjords merchants, Rex was very different. Perhaps that was the reason why Mulley often visited the campsite of the Society of Wondrous Crafts.

After a moment of hesitation, Simbady asked Rex why he treated him as equal.

Rex said thoughtfully, "You asked why... There's no particular reason. We've suffered enough discrimination and contempt ourselves."

Simbady was a little surprised at Rex's answer. As a person who promised to pay 30 gold royals, he should be a wealthy and respected man. Why was he discriminated? When he was about to make a further inquiry, one of Rex's assistants came over and said, "Sir, all the tests are done. We can go ahead anytime."

"Do you want to have a shot?" Rex said as he turned to Simbady. "You should have been very familiar with diving by now."

He fought down his curiosity and answered, "As long as that thing you invented works."

"Of course it works. I've been doing research for nearly 10 years. To make sure it will work, I bet everything on it..."

"What?"

"Ahem, no, nothing. Nevermind," Rex said evasively, turning away. "Now, we're going to enter that cave in the afternoon and start our first adventure!"

...

He chose to dive in the afternoon simply because they could have a clear view at that time when the sun was right above their heads. By then, sunlight would reach the bottom of the pond 50 meters down the water, including the cave at the waist of the cliff.

If they took actions in the evening when the water receded, they would easily get lost.

"I'm waiting for you at the entrance," Rex said as he put on a helmet and gave him a thumbs-up. He then clambered into the basket and sank into the sea.

After around 15 minutes, Eyemask nodded at Simbady and said, "Your turn."

Simbady took a deep breath and put on a heavy helmet as well. Mulley moved over to secure the helmet on his head and then shouted, "You can do it! I'm waiting here for you."

He cast her a glance, turned away and walked to the basket.

The steam engine roared. As Simbady gradually dropped and got closer to churning waves, he had a feeling that the entire ocean was about to devour him.

For a split second, terror flooded over him.

However, he immediately regained his composure.

"Accept the unknown and overcome yourself."

He remembered Mulley's sparkling eyes and Rex's words.

Simbady breathed out a sigh and was ready to embrace the ocean.

In an instant, the whole world became a clear, transparent blue. Sun rays spilled across the water and splintered into flickers of light.

After he dropped 20 meters, the basket suddenly stopped.

A chilly, fathomless cave materialized in front of him.

Chapter 1123: Underground Coffins

Rex, who had been waiting at the entrance, stuck out two fingers and pointed at his own head then at the mouth of the cave.

Simbady signaled him that everything was fine on his end.

Rex thus nodded in approval, turned around and walked into the cave.

Simbady looked up and saw the scuba hoses suspending above him. In the past three days, he had not only learned the basic operation of the diving suit but also diving gestures and techniques. It was extremely important to monitor these two hoses, and that was why the salvage required two people.

As a device to supply oxygen, the hose was connected to an air pump powered by a steam engine, which constantly circulated the air in the helmet. If one of the hoses was broken or clogged, the consequence would be fatal. Therefore, he had to be extremely careful when changing his direction or passing through narrow, treacherous areas.

Seeing there was no nothing protruding from the ceiling of the cave, Simbady threw himself into the darkness.

The sound of foaming waves was instantly muffled. He could hear the hissing sound of the air valves and the thud of his own heart.

After he marched around ten meters, the darkness around him grew thicker. Simbady could only make out an obscured outline of a slowly moving Rex in front of him as he plunged into this abyss.

Just then, the ground underneath suddenly rose, and the path started to ascend.

In less than seven minutes, Simbady saw the sea again. This time, however, the water was not glistening with golden specks but heaving quietly.

He followed Rex out of the water while holding his breath. A huge cave appeared in front both of them, most of which silhouetted against the darkness, with only a small part at the dome lit by a ghostly blue light reflecting off the glimmers on the surface of the seawater.

Was this cave connected to the world outside?

Simbady hoisted himself up onto the bank. He was about to take off his helmet when Rex stopped him.

The Fjords merchant took out a water-proof oil lamp from his sack. After observing the lit lamp for quite a while, he took off the helmet and said, "Agh... Looks like this place isn't completely cut off from the outside world."

"There's... wind?" Simbady said in surprise, feeling a chill playing upon his cheeks as he pulled off his helmet.

"Yes. There may be other exits," Rex replied hopefully. "In this case, there's a bigger chance we find treasures here. We're really lucky!"

Simbady cared more about safety than treasures. He did not expect to find a cave underneath the desert because the rock here was just too thin to form such a humongous cave. After all, this was only 20 meters beneath the water, and he was also concerned about whether the dome would cave in.

Simbady decided to report to Graycastle what he had found after he got out of here. Although it was a little unfair to the Society of Wondrous Crafts, he had to make sure that the cave would not pose any potential safety hazards to the Festive Harbor above it.

"The wind seems to come from that direction," Rex said as he placed his helmet next to the pond and raised the oil lamp. "Let's go take a look."

Simbady drew out his knife and followed him slowly.

As they delved further into the exploration, Simbady found the cave became even more bizarre.

Soil appeared as they moved on, and grass gradually replaced moss as they marshaled further, giving Simbady an illusion that he was strolling at Silver Stream Oasis.

"Unbelievable. There are green plants here," Rex remarked in amazement. "I thought only mushroom and moss would grow here."

"Maybe... we should head back," Simbady said hesitantly. "I feel this place..."

He stopped dead.

"Feel this place what?" Having not heard anything back from Simbady, Rex turned around and asked, "Hey, what are you looking at? Wow, a flower!"

Simbady felt his chest constrict. Next to him was a beautiful little flower with pastel purple petals and fragile, delicate leaves. "This is... the Flower of Providence..."

"Is it very rare?"

"No... they used to be everywhere," Simbady said in a low tone. "I never saw it before, but I've heard about the legend of Three Gods Emissary. It's rumored that this kind of flower is coastal. Like a splendid purple ribbon, they used to be the most beautiful flower in the Southernmost Region."

"There were flowers... in the desert?" Rex asked in astonishment.

"It wasn't a desert here in the past. This land used to be covered with trees, meadows and rivers," Simbady explained while shaking his head. "However, after the departure of Three Gods Emissary, this place gradually turned into a desert. That's not my point. My point is, there's a detailed description of the Flower of Providence in our documentation. Once these flowers settle at one area, they will never grow anywhere else. That's why you don't see them in the oasis. They should have been extinctive now..."

"I see," Rex mumbled while clicking his tongue, "Perhaps the desertification didn't spread to this underwater cave, so the Flower of Providence lives."

"Is that really so?" Simbady wondered, getting even more confused. For some reason, he had a strong feeling that this cave used to be an oasis.

Meanwhile, the purple flowers around him became denser. Simbady did not think the presence of these flowers was a pure coincidence.

While Simbady was debating whether he should proceed with the exploration, he suddenly heard a gentle "crack" underneath.

Then a jet of flash erupted from the ground, creating a haze of light around him.

"What happened?" asked Rex in surprise.

"I... I think I stepped on something," Simbady said, swallowing hard. "It seems to be a plank."

"Is it a trap?" Rex said as he bent over and brushed away the grass and flowers around him. "Well, this is... haha... hahaha..."



The laugh reverberated across the cave, making all the hair on Simbady's neck stand on end. "What are you laughing about? Oi, tell me what it is!"

"Haha, treasures! We've found treasures!" Rex said vehemently. "Look!"

To Simbady's dismay, underneath the earth lay a densely-patterned stone tablet that emanated a soft glow. The light escaped from underneath his feet, making the entire tablet as transparent and luminous as a jade. The tablet was not as hard as it appeared. When Simbady stepped on it, much to his consternation, the surface of the tablet sank a few inches.

What was more incredible was that the dent magically disappeared on its own after Simbady removed his feet. Meanwhile, the light also faded away, as though everything he had just seen was an illusion.

"Is there any more amazing treasure than this?" Rex exclaimed in exhilaration while stomping on the "stone tablet". "If I could send this tablet to the King of Graycastle, I'll be the honorary explorer for sure!"

"But... it's too big," Simbady said apprehensively. Judging from the part above the ground, the "stone tablet" might be even larger than him and Rex put together. It was definitely not an easy task to transport it out of the cave.

"We'll manage. I'm sure we can find a way to get this work. Perhaps we can look for some other exits?" Rex suddenly broke off and then said, "Hey, looks like there's another tablet here."

Rex took a few steps in the direction Rex was pointing at and soon hit another similar "stone tablet". In the soft light, more and more grayish white tablets floated out of the sea of flowers.

"There's one here, and there as well..." The two men tried to count how many tablets there were as they marched forward but soon abandoned this idea.

It was not long before they noticed that the Flowers of Providence were gradually replaced with those jade-like stone tablets. Light erupted everywhere as they proceeded.

Then a giant wall blocked their way.

"Oh God..." Rex gasped.

Feeling a little cold, Simbady slowly raised his head and saw a stone wall loom over him in the soft light. Then they found out that it was not a "wall" but a pile of numerous stone tablets.

Some of them were broken and some slashed in half. However, most of the tablets were rectangular. The random way in which these tablets laid on top of each other gave Simbady an ominous feeling.

They resembled thousands of buried coffins.

Chapter 1124: A Lair

"I think... we should go," Simbady mumbled under his breath after a moment of silence.

This cave was gruesome and suffocating, thus he would rather stay undersea than here.

The glow of the tablets mingled with the light of the oil lamp could only illuminate a small area around them. They were surrounded by an impenetrable and dangerous darkness, facing the unknown.

Neither of them had seen the edge of the cave yet.

"Go?" Rex croaked, a note of quaver in his voice. "What are you talking about? I'm sure that even Sir Thunder has not seen a scene like this before. Are they relics? No... this is definitely a ruin!"

"The ruin won't go anywhere. We can come back later," Simbady racked his brain, trying to find a way to persuade Rex to leave. "Your assistants and the Society of Wondrous Crafts are all waiting for your good news outside."

Hearing the name of his Society, Rex instantly calmed down. "You, you're right. We need to tell them this good news first."

"So let's go."

"Hang, hang on. I need to take something from here to show them proof," Rex said as he took out a dagger from his sack and started to chisel a tablet. "Don't worry, it won't take me long. You should also gather some evidence."

Simbady had no choice but to obey. After all, Rex was his employer, and since he had already accepted this job, he had to take some risks for those 20 gold royals.

He tried to convince himself that the cave might not be as eerie as it appeared to be. It was just a little bit dark, and there might not be anything at all.

"Clink, clink, clink..."

Every time Rex wrung his knife, a clink that was amplified tenfold in the crisp, chilly air rang off the wall of the cave.

Simbady also noticed that the moment the dagger cut through the tablet, the light would become brighter and even blinding.

He shook his head, trying to put these thoughts away.

He really was not in the mood for cutting tablets at the moment. Several strange stonewares lay around the tottering wall, which Simbady judged were the tools used by the workers who had initially shipped the tablets here. Nevertheless, these tools were all rotten now after years of water erosion. He picked a few and crammed them into his bag as Rex had instructed.

"Clink, clink, clink..."

Rex was still focused on cutting the tablet and he already had five to six chipped stones the size of a nail littering next to him.

"Hey, I think that's enough..." Simbady urged when suddenly, he captured a discordant note.

It was also a clink but more squeaky and sharp, as if many Rexes had been chiseling the tablet.

"Is this... an echo?" Simbady wondered.

Then he realized this was impossible because both of them were still standing in the same positions. How could an echo suddenly appear from nowhere?

"Rex."

"Just a moment. This is the last one."

"Stop for a second..."

"Give me seven more minutes — "

"I said STOP!" he bellowed.

Rex was stunned, his dagger suspended in the air. The piercing clink immediately stopped.

However, that screeching sound still existed and was now slowly approaching them.

This time, Rex also noticed something wrong. He crammed his pocket with the stones, looking around, and said, "What's that?"

Just at that moment, there was a blinding flash in the distance.

In the dazzling light, Simbady saw the intruder. It was a full-grown desert scorpion, its clamps as thick as a man's arm, its tail high up in the air, leveling their waists. The tail was filled with green venom which, once someone was stung by, they would only have seven minutes to take the antidote.

"Damn. The sound of our knives must have startled it!" Simbady drew out his knife and said, "Step back slowly and fix your eyes on the scorpion. Don't look away."

For a first-rate Mojin warrior, a desert scorpion was not difficult to deal with, for scorpions were unintelligent and slow creatures. The only thing that might pose a threat was their venomous tail; however, this was also their weak point. If the scorpion failed to hit its target, Simbady would have a chance to slash its tail in half.

The problem was that Simbady was not an excellent warrior by any means.

Although he had received training since he was a kid, he had never participated in any hunting events, nor had he ever fought a desert scorpion.

He had no choice but to attempt it.

After Rex hid behind Simbady, Simbady said in a hushed voice, "Now, look down. Don't move no matter what happens."

"I... I see."

Then Simbady turned around.

The moment his eyes met the scorpion's, the scorpion lunged at him. Although Simbady could not see the scorpion in the darkness, he could clearly hear its clamp scraping the ground.

This was how desert scorpions generally attacked people: they tended to bide their time, waiting for the moment their opponent was distracted to launch their strike.

"Stay put!"

Simbady slightly bent forward, his right hand resting on the handle of his knife on the left, which was a standard fighting stance for Sand Nationals. In this way, he would be able to monitor both the area on his right-hand side and his enemy in front of him.

When the scorpion started to move, Simbady strode far forward and drew out his knife.

There was a flash of light.

He felt his knife hit something.

The blade cut through the scorpion like a sword through a suet.

With a crunch, the tail of the desert scorpion was slashed in half.

Simbady then stabbed the scorpion in the shell at the back of its head.

The scorpion soon stopped moving after a weak struggle.

"Impressive..." Rex remarked while heaving a sigh. "Now I see how strong a Sand National is..."

"Not yet!" Simbady interrupted him. "Based on the sound, there must be more than one desert scorpion!" He surveyed the cave, fully alarmed, wondering where his enemy was hiding. The cave was filled with illuminating stone tablets, so he should be able to see it clearly when it appeared!

But it was pitch-black.

Except for the area above.

Damn! Simbady suddenly realized what he had missed. He had forgotten to pay attention to any new light sources other than the glowing tablets.

As he looked up, a dark shadow dived to the ground.

It was aiming at Rex behind him!

With no time to react properly, he powerfully kicked Rex and sent him flying into the air.

The desert scorpion brushed past Rex and landed.

Simbady flailed his knife at the scorpion almost instinctively and cut the head of the scorpion in half.

"Whooo," he breathed out a sigh of relief. "That was a narrow escape... Hey, are you OK?"

"Aargh... I, I think..."

No sooner than Rex had finished, more clinks sounded from behind the wall. At first, there were just a few, but soon the sound became louder and more frequent. In the end, the whole cave started to rock, as though a giant monster was shuffling in their direction.

Simbady and Rex exchanged looks, pale-faced.

"Run! Hurry up!" Simbady yelled as he grasped Rex by the arm and dashed toward the exit.

A moment later, dazzling light erupted from behind, and the cave was as bright as day!

Simbady then saw a colossal desert scorpion, its eyes as big as a dinner plate and its shell as hard as coral reefs. Without a doubt, this was one of the legendary sacrificial offerings to Three Gods — the Giant Armored Scorpion that dominated the continent.

The light emanated by the wall of tablets now became blinding.

He now understood the reason.

He knew why grass would grow here in this dark cave and where the light he had seen earlier came from.

The cave was actually the nest of the Giant Armored Scorpion.

Chapter 1125: An Exit

"Ah... finally," Simbady muttered in relief after they retreated to the pond.

He expressed his gratitude to Three God, the Son of the Earth and the Mother of the Ocean within himself. The cave was now completely lit up, which enabled them to successfully escape the attack of the scorpion. As the cave was narrower around the mouth, the Giant Armored Scorpion did not come after them all the way from the depth of its lair.

However, this did not mean they were completely out of danger.

Simbady still remembered the tidal waves of that gruesome clink and clunk, and believed that all the desert scorpions at the Endless Cape had probably gathered there, bidding their time to tear apart hunters who climbed over the tablet wall.

Fortunately, scorpions could not swim. Simbady sprinted up to the sea.

"Hurry up. Put on the helmet!" Simbady said as he snatched up the diving helmet on the ground and anchored it to his head.

But then he noticed Rex was not moving.

"Oj, what are you waiting for?"

"You... go first," Rex mumbled, turning his back to him.

Simbady stiffened for a second, wondering if Rex was still thinking about those damn illuminating relics.

Feeling a short surge of anger, he strode over to Rex, forced him to face him and bellowed, "Are you crazy? Do you know what our situation is — "

His growl stopped abruptly as he caught sight of Rex's bloodstained chest — The diving suit made of soft leather was broken.

"Your diving suit..."

"It's broken," Rex managed to summon a twisted smile which Simbady hoped he would rather not. "The last desert scorpion didn't get me, but its clamps scratched my clothes."

Simbady fell silent. If the diving suit was broken, seawater would seep through the crack of the suit and soak the helmet. Even though Rex just sustained a minor injury, he would have no chance to survive wearing a broken diving suit.

After a long silence, Simbady said, "If we abandon the suit and use the hoses only..."

Rex shook his head with a bitter smile and said, "That will only work when we're close to the surface of the water. Hoses won't help unless you can suck in air like a vacuum pump."

They needed two hoses to keep their balance.

Rex had told him at the beginning.

That was why he had been hesitant earlier.

Perhaps, he had already known it back in the cave.

Rex put down his bag, handed it to Simbady and said, "This is the tablet sample. Please give it to my assistant, telling him that I've discovered something that could possibly rival Sir Thunder's."

Simbady noticed that his fingers were trembling.

"Does your assistant... have a spare diving suit?"

"We've only got two. It took us half a year to select materials and make the suit," Rex said, trying to control his emotions. "I know what you are thinking. In fact, I've thought about every possible way to get out of here. It's impossible without a diving suit. Perhaps, that's my fate..."

"Your fate?"

"Members of the Society of Wondrous Crafts... could never be a real explorer," Rex said while biting his lip. "Go, before the scorpion gets here! Let people know that this is my discovery. In that case, even if I can't become an honorary explorer, my name will be permanently associated with this invention and be remembered by every Fjords citizen — "

Simbady turned away and stared at the pond. After a moment of silence, he answered slowly, "No, I can't do that."

"Huh?" Rex gaped at him, astounded.

"You still owe me 29 gold royals. If you're dead, who will pay me that 29 gold royals?" Simbady grunted.

"Only Mulley and I know our deal, and I don't think your assistant would pay me. I can tell from what they wear. They're just as shabby as Sand Nationals."

"We're just in short of money now!" Rex protested indignantly. "We went a little beyond our budget when purchasing the steam engine from Graycastle. Once people know my diving suits, the Chambers of Commerce will line up to buy my product. By that time, we won't have any financial problem!"

"The problem is, I won't have anything to do with those money, and probably nor will you by then," Simbady said as he dumped the bag and helmet on the ground. "Do you really think people will believe you're the real inventor of the suit after you die here? A little bit retelling could make the whole story awry. They could take the credit from you while reaping profits from your invention. So, not only will I lose that 29 gold royals but your ambition will never come true either."

"What... are you going to do then?"

"Accept the unknown and overcome myself."

Simbady muttered within himself and breathed out a deep sigh. He said, "Mojins don't like being owed, and nor do they like owing. A deal is a deal, no matter it's with the King of Graycastle or a Fjords person. I promised to help you, right?"

Rex was momentarily stunned. "But how are you going to..."

"Look at the pond," Simbady said while taking off his diving suit. "Don't you see it's getting smaller?"

It wasn't until then that Rex noticed that a few wet, mossy rocks had revealed from the surface of the water, which indicated that the water was going down.

"Tides are now receding, which means the distance to the bank has shortened," Simbady said, laying a delicate stress on every syllable. "If everything goes well, we only need to swim around ten meters before the rescue team finds us. It's impossible to do that when wearing a diving suit, but we can take off all our clothes, and you ought to get rid of the stones you collected as well. Now, take your clothes off."

"Take, take off my clothes?"

"Yes, we must stop the desert scorpion before the water drops to the lowest level. The most effective method is to burn it," Simbady said with a nod. "However, it's humid here and it won't be easy to set flowers and grass on fire. So, we need something combustible." He then pointed at the oil lamp and said, "The oil and the leather would do."

Rex lapsed into a long silence and said, "... Forget it. It won't work."

"Why?"

"You don't really know when the tides will recede to the lowest point. The higher the water level is, the longer for us to cross the pond. If we act recklessly, we may lose our lives," Rex said painfully. "And most of all, I can't swim! It's ridiculous, isn't it? A Fjords person can't swim. That's even worse than getting seasick. That's why I'll never become a real explorer and roam the sea like others!"

"I knew it a long time ago when we were diving," Simbady replied placidly.

"Wh-what?"

"You relied on the basket to move about undersea. You couldn't walk properly in the water. Without this diving suit, you probably couldn't even get into the water, right?"

"Why did you still suggest swimming when you knew that I can't swim?"

"You don't need to swim. You just have to hold your breath. I know it's hard and you may pass out halfway. However, as long as you hold tight on me, I'll be able to get us out," Simbady answered slowly.

"Just by yourself?" Rex asked in disbelief.

"I've told you that there was a deep pond in the oasis where I lived when I was a kid. My friends and I liked having a competition with each other to see who could stay underwater for the longest," Simbady said while holding his head a little higher. "I was never the best in the clan, because I never put all my effort into it. I was scared."

"Scared?"

"Yes, I feared that the water would suck me in if I dived a little deeper, so I always came up a little earlier than I should. I pretended to be exhausted and out of breath. Slowly, I convinced myself that this was the best I could do," Simbady said while staring right into Rex's eyes. "You said I constantly look down on myself. Perhaps you were right. That's why I want to give it a shot and test my limit this time."

"Likewise, are you sure this is all you can do? Are you sure you can't swim?" Simbady shouted at him. "Are you not looking down on yourself as well?"

Rex balled his hand into a fist.

"At least you aren't afraid of the ocean. Compared to me, you're way much better," Simbady said as he curled up his lips. "What do you think? Are you willing to take a bet? You're an explorer. How can you be a real explorer if you don't take any risks?"

...

Two hours later, thick smoke almost filled the entire cave.

The water in the pond gradually went down and levelled the mouth of the cave.

They could hear the scorpions scuttle behind them.

Their clinks swept over the cave.

Rex and Simbady exchanged looks and knew this was their last chance.

"Let's go, Mr. Honorary Explorer," Simbady said after taking a deep breath, carried Rex under the crook of his arms and submerged himself in the water.

Instantly, he was fused with the ocean.

The memories of his childhood flooded into his mind.

However, this time, there was no Carlone or any other clansman.

He only needed to compete against himself.

Chapter 1126: The Status of the War

...



Five days later.

Rex saw Simbady again.

In the hospital at the encampment of the First Army.

Coming with Simbady was a bright, dainty Mojin girl.

"How are you feeling?" Mulley said as she placed a bouquet of seaweed on the windowsill. "This is the only thing I can get here. There are no pretty flowers, but at least they are plants, which is better than muddy sand, isn't it?"

"Ah... thank you," Rex said as he straightened up. "I feel... much better."

"That's good. You scared me when you came out of the water. Your face went livid, your body spasmed violently, and you kept coughing out water," Mulley said, smiling. "Then you got a fever after arriving at the encampment. Simbady and I came to visit you twice, but you had yet to regain your consciousness when we paid the visits."

Rex said with a bitter smile, "I'm too weak."

"But you made it and went beyond your limit," Simbady encouraged, grinning. "Mr. Explorer, in fact, your desire to live is even stronger than I anticipated. I was about to shut down when we were almost there, but you clutched me with your arms and forced me to keep going." With these words, Simbady lifted the bottom of his clothes and said, "Look, I got bruises from your grip."

"Sorry," Rex said, a little embarrassed. "I don't remember what happened after we got out of the cave."

"You must be thinking about something at that time. Otherwise, you wouldn't have held Simbady so tight after you blacked out, right?" Mulley remarked.

"Probably..." Rex muttered while nodding. "A lot of things came to my mind before I passed out, such as my invention, the Society of Wondrous Crafts, and my two wives who were waiting for me at home..."

There was suddenly a strained silence.

After a while, Simbady asked testily, "What did you say?"

"Two wives..." Rex answered with a look of dawning comprehension. "Ah, I forgot to tell you. The customs in the Fjords Island are different from each other. On the island where I grew up, you can marry as many people as you want. It's perfectly normal that you didn't know about that."

"I suddenly regret taking you out of that cave," Simbady replied, a muscle twitching in his face.

"Same here," Mulley rejoined with an expression of utmost seriousness.

"Oi, you don't have to be that straightforward..." Rex protested in a bit hurt tone and immediately changed the subject. "What about... that ruin?"

Simbady instantly tightened his manner into formality when they started talking about businesses. He said, "Nobody is allowed to enter that area anymore. The First Army put out sentries near the cliff to keep an eye on the Giant Armored Scorpion. I went back to the cave when the water was low at their

request and retrieved your bag." His voice lowered to barely a whisper. "But I handed it in to the First Army... Sorry."

"No, you did the right thing," Rex said while shaking his head after hearing the account of Simbady's story. "Since the First Army took me to the hospital, they would eventually know about the cave. Plus, I've never thought of keeping the entire ruin to myself. I just feel a little sad about that two diving suits. Even if you tell people the diving suit does work, few would believe it now. But there's nothing you can do about it... You did that to save me."

Simbady was silent. He knew how much time and effort Rex had put into these two diving suits. It had taken him half a year to make one and probably more time and money to conduct research before he had succeeded.

The loss must have given him a heavy blow.

Simbady asked quietly, "What are you going to do then?"

"Return to the Fjords and come back later," Rex answered quickly.

Both Simbady and Mulley were slightly surprised.

"Well, do you think that I'll lose heart because of the loss?" Rex said smilingly while looking at the bemused couple. "I probably would have quitted this job had I not escaped such a narrow death." He clenched his fist and then spread out his hand, in an attempt to feel something. "But now I understand I can do better than this. I don't mind spending another half a year making a new diving suit. At least, this time I know what I'm doing, and I'm sure it will be a great success!"

"Rex..."

"Don't worry. I'll come back with brand new diving suits within two years," Rex said slowly. "By that time, you and I —"

Simbady was now positive that Rex was fine. He was about to reply when the door was suddenly thrown open and an officer-like man strode in.

"Rex? Simbady?" he asked inquiringly.

"Yes, we are. Is there anything we can do for you?" Simbady said immediately.

"New instructions from Neverwinter with respect to your discovery," the military officer replied curtly with a nod. "His Majesty wants to see you."

"Are you saying the King of Graycastle?"

"The, the chief?"

The two men blurted out almost together. It was unbelievable that within five days, the news had spread from the Festive Harbor to the new king's city of Graycastle, and it was even more incredible that the king had summoned them. He could have just sent for a messenger to inquire about their discovery. Did that mean that the ruin carried more significance than they had initially anticipated?

"That's right. His Majesty will dispatch a ship here, which will be arriving at the Festive Harbor two days later," the officer said, smiling. "Before then, please take a good rest at the barracks."

In Neverwinter, Graycastle.

Roland was sitting behind his desk reading a report sent from the front.

The "Torch" project seemed to go well. No demons had been lurking around since May. The railroad was steadily stretching on toward Taquila. Based on this rate, Roland judged the Holy City would be within the shooting range of the First Army by mid June, more than ten days earlier than planned.

However, the news did not make Roland feel any better.

The demons were the mortal enemy of the mankind. They had slaughtered the human race during the first two Battles of Divine Will and forced human beings to retreat to the Land of Dawn. The only territory the demons had yet to conquer was the Fertile Plains. Once the demons erected their Obelisks, the Red Mist would soon prevail the whole continent.

His eyes darted from the report to the map, straining to find some sort of clues but to no avail.

After the night raid, Roland had perfected the defense of the railway stations. It would be now a lot harder for the demons to destroy the encampment. Although the railway seemed to be the most dangerous place at first glance, the First Army actually had a greater chance to win if the demons chose the railway to launch their battle.

The railroad that stretched hundreds of miles was the demons' second major obstacle. In fact, the report showed that this was where most battles had occurred. There had been 46 battles in total so far around this area. Had Roland not read the report, he would have thought the demons had abandoned the idea of harrassing the Ministry of Construction and withdrawn from the Fertile Plains. Nevertheless, it was essentially not easy for the demons to completely cut the First Army's supplies right under the witches' noses and the scrutinies of the armored trains, as the "Torch" project was designed to keep the demons away from the railway. In fact, after the third "Blackriver" came into use, even demonic beasts had ceased to approach the railroad.

The last possible point of contact was the terminus station at the forest, which was also the one he worried the least. As long as Leaf did not provoke the demons, there was little the demons could do about it. The forest was too far away from Taquila, so it was impossible for just a small group of demons to hinder the construction. Plus, the forest had just caught a fire, so the First Army was now paying extra attention to that area.

As the frontier kept expanding, Lightning was now able to see the Taquila ruins. There had been no sign so far that showed the demons would send for reinforcements. Instead, their Red Mist seemed to be fading into thin air.

Every piece of evidence was now pointing to a fact that human beings would gain the eventual victory of this battle and have a chance to dispel all the demons from the Fertile Plains before the arrival of the Bloody Moon.

Chapter 1127: Preparation for the Final Battle

Roland put down the report and remembered what Kabradhabi had told him.

The demons had an enemy from the Sky-sea Realm.

Were the demons too busy dealing with that enemy from the Sky-sea Realm to monitor the status on the Fertile Plains?

The General Staff was also inclined to this theory. No matter what the demons were playing at, at the end of the day, the party with greater power dominated the war.

The Magic Slayer had come all the way to the forest and caught Leaf offguard. However, this had also exposed his traits and ability. Sylvie could now sense him even without the Magic Eye. She could see a "red fleck of light" hover around the ruin and feel the slightest fluctuation in magic power immediately.

In short, unlike Neverwinter where the soldiers and witches were still continuously upgrading, the demons at Taquila had put all their cards on the table.

Since there was plenty of food, the Administrative Office started another round of conscription to recruit soldiers from all parts of the country. The consolidation of the administration institutions in Graycastle significantly increased public productivity. Based on Barov's initial estimate, the number of new recruits might very likely exceed 5,000 this time, which was the total number of the First Army soldiers two years ago.

Calvin Kant was very proactive in responding to this campaign.

After the officials at the secondary City Hall were trained and became comfortable enough to rule a territory, they would be able to recruit more soldiers.

Meanwhile, bolt rifles were gradually replacing revolving rifles, thanks to increasingly skillful workers. The new rifles were very similar to the weapons used by the sniper team, with the only difference being the lack of a scope.

Although the revolving rifle was fast, its speed, shooting range and firing accuracy were quite limited due to its mechanical structure. A revolving rifle would be a perfect weapon to kill a knight, but it was definitely not ideal to kill a Mad Demon who could spear at 100 to 200 meters. The bolt rifle, on the other hand, fixed that problem, enabling soldiers to fire from a distance.

The research and development for the anti-demon rocket-propelled grenade designed to kill the Senior Demons and the Spider Demons was now close to its end, and they had just started with the mass production. There was no technical difficulty in manufacturing this type of simple and cheap weapons. In fact, it was even easier than manufacturing bullets. Based on the current production rate, they would have ample time to produce tons of grenades before the final battle.

Although the First Army lacked related training on how to use a grenade, unlike a cannon, a rocket-propelled grenade was pretty user-friendly. It was indeed a very common practice to test them out directly in an actual war. Therefore, Roland was not too worried about whether the weapon would work.

No noticeable change had been found in the demons. Agatha and Phyllis judged that the number of the demons would be between 3,000 and 5,000 based on the amount of Red Mist, which was definitely a big number for the Union. However, for the First Army, the demons were exceedingly outnumbered.

Since the Red Mist was the lifeline of the demons, Roland believed this estimate was truthful and accurate.

This was also the information the General Staff relied on to make their analysis.

Roland trusted the judgement of the General Staff. There was no point of overestimating or underestimating the enemy, for evidence spoke for itself. He would rather place the matter in the professional's hand than issue commands himself.

Roland knew he was by no means a commander. That was why he felt a little unsettled.

He thus decided to wait as things came, quite sure that his every question would be answered when the war broke out. At these thoughts, he heaved a deep sigh, his hand uncontrollably reaching for his throbbing forehead, when a pair of hands gently rested on his temples. Nightingale started to rub his head with just the right amount of strength.

He instantly felt much better.

Over the past four years, Roland had reached a mutual understanding with Nightingale that transcended words. Such an understanding constantly reminded him that he was not fighting alone.

As a king, he used to picture a life of debauchery. However, when he really had a right to have a corrupted lifestyle, he realized his work just piled up. He worked way much longer than eight hours a day, and sometimes, even sleeping became a part of his routine. He did complain about overworking but rarely took a real break. Perhaps, this was because someone was always looking over him.

Obviously, he was working toward his personal goal.

But he was also working toward everybody else's dream.

After a short massage therapy, Roland's eyes traveled to another report on the desk.

This was regarding the discovery of the Giant Armored Scorpion and a mysterious ruin.

Although the information had yet to be further confirmed, from the enclosed strange stones, Roland thought the news was true.

He was intrigued by this report. He had anticipated that there would be some sort of relics of an ancient civilization around the Endless Cape according to the murals in the temple, but he had not expected that they would find them so quickly.

The tablets in the cave reminded him of the piles of corpses depicted in the murals. If that was really a ruin of a civilization thousands of years ago, these corpses should have been reduced to ashes by now. It was not likely that people would monumentalize the defeated party. So, why were there so many tablets?

All the samples had been sent to Celine for a safety test. Considering the enemy of these dead people had used radioactive elements as a weapon, Roland had to make sure there was no safety issue.

Apart from that, he was also very curious about its discoverer. The discoverer was not a Fjords merchant or any explorer but instead a member of the so-called Society of Wondrous Crafts.

Roland remembered the killed pilot Margaret had told him.

He thus immediately instructed the garrison at the Festive Harbor to bring these two people to Neverwinter.

Roland was burning with curiosity.

As for the Giant Armored Scorpion, Roland suspected it was just a type of hybrid demonic beast, which was the exact reason it was so humongous. As the chief of all the clans, Roland did not care much about the sacrifices to Three Gods. He would simply leave the scorpion to the First Army.

Just then, he heard a shuffle of footsteps, and then the office door was flung open.

"Is that the test result? Give it to me..." Roland said as he looked up, his words caught in his throat. Roland thought it was the guard who sent Celine's report, but much to his surprise but only to find a raging Tilly Wimbledon, her eyebrows slightly raised in quite a dangerous way. Apparently, she looked very unimpressed.

"Um..." The next moment, Roland knew the purpose of her visit. "I have a few new Chaos Drinks here. Do you want to try — "

"Well... His Majesty, you have used this trick on her before," Nightingale whispered into his ear.

"No!" Tilly snapped as she walked up to the mahogany desk and leaned forward threateningly, her fingers splaying across the desk. "You promised to give me a glider in half a month. Now, how long has it been since you said that?" She stood on her tiptoes and laid a stress on every syllable. "Where's my plane, brother?"

Chapter 1128: The "Unicorn"

Gazing at a reproachful and exasperated Tilly, Roland somehow felt his little sister was pretty cute in a way. Tilly rarely called him brother when she was in a good mood. She only did so in the presence of others or when she was really annoyed like now. Roland suddenly had an urge to tease her.

"Ahem, this isn't right," Roland thought, hastily turning his lack of attention into a hacking cough. "The plane isn't complete yet. Anna and Soraya have to make every part manually. As the war is around the corner, they have a lot of work to do. You should know it better than anyone else. I did draft the plan a long time ago, but I can't suit the action to the drawing just by myself."

As the railway continued to extend, it now took the "Seagull" three to four days to fly to the front instead of one or two. He could not really blame Tilly and Wendy for being slackened, because it was really hard to complete all the preparation work within one day. They had no choice but to wait.

As the pilot of the "Seagull", Tilly obviously knew everybody was busy. Many witches actually fell asleep straight away after they boarded the plane. For this reason, they had even added upholstered cushions to the chairs. Realizing that their most important goal at present was to defeat the demons and recover the Fertile Plains, Tilly deflated resignedly, her hands back to her sides. "I just want to test the plane sooner so that the Aerial Knights can do their jobs..."

"Don't worry. The main body of the plane is almost done. We just need a few auxiliary parts. All I need is just a little patience from you — "

"Hold on," Tilly interrupted. "You said the main body is completed, which means I can still fly without those parts, right?"

"Well..." Roland hesitated, realizing he had just slipped the information out. Princess Tilly was now not so easy to be deceived anymore, for she had learned a lot about planes. "Well... you still can, but this new model is very different from the 'Seagull'. If anything happens, Wendy won't be able to fix it in time..."

His voice trailed off in the end.

Tilly's eyes were glistening with daring and excitement.

He just could not resist her.

Nightingale giggled behind him. It appeared that she really loved to see Roland lapse into an awkward silence.

After staring at each other for quite a long time, Roland breathed out a sigh and said, "Alright. I'll ask the airport staff to get ready for a flight."

"That's the spirit," Tilly praised, her raised brows back to their normal positions, grinning.

Roland picked up the phone and said, "Remember, if anything happens during the test or you lose your control, you must abandon the plane immediately. Do you understand?"

"Of course. We can always make a new plane but can never have an excellent pilot like me again," Tilly said confidently while folding her arms. "That's what you're thinking, right?"

...

At the Neverwinter Airport.

There had been nothing but two tracks at this clearing before, but now this place had become a real pilot training base, which was also the forerunner of the future air force academy.

In the enclosed testing field, a silver plane was transported from the hangar and placed at the end of the tracks.

Tilly took a deep breath and said, "So this is... the plane for me..."

"Yes," Roland said while nodding. This is the 'Unicorn'. It's powered by a radial straight-five engine and can fly more than 150 kilometers per hour in theory. Even the fastest devilbeast would not be able to keep up with it."

As the first man-made self-powered aircraft in this era, the "Unicorn" looked very different from the "Seagull" the glider. The biggest difference was its huge head. To house the engine, the head of the plane was in the shape of a barrel rather than in a sleek aerodynamic shape, as though its top had been chopped off.

Also, it had a two-blade propeller attached to its head at the front, which the "Seagull" did not have. Since this was literally the first plane powered by a piston engine, it was still quite a basic model despite that the extensive research Roland had done. He believed a two-blade propeller should be sufficient considering the power was relatively low.

Finally, the plane was small in general. As the "Unicorn" was a fighter rather than a passenger aircraft, it was only nine meters' long, only half as long as the "Seagull". Nevertheless, the internal structure of the plane was much more complicated. Apart from an operation system, it was also equipped with some power units such as a gas tank and a fuel pipe. There was also room for a firing system and a second seat.

"The 'Unicorn'... You sometimes do come up with creative names," Tilly said as she rushed to the plane, but soon noticed something unusual in the flight deck. "That is where the missing parts should go, isn't it?"

There were two holes where the cockpit control panel should have been. It was obvious that the plane was not complete yet.

"That's right," Roland said with a nod. "These parts were used to show the speed and the altitude of the aircraft, which were the two most important flight dynamics parameters. We used to have Wendy to control the plane, so we didn't necessarily need them. But now, it's all on you the pilot, so you must monitor these two parameters from time to time..."

"Don't worry. I don't necessarily know how to make a plane, but I'm definitely the best pilot in Graycastle," Tilly said as she crept into the plane and settled herself into the pilot seat self-assuredly.

The "Unicorn" was technically exactly the same as the "Seagull", except that it had an additional gas pedal. Even the power levels were positioned in the exact same location. Tilly had done many mock exercises earlier, so Roland did not think there would be any problems. However, since this was essentially a brand new plane very different from the "Seagull" in terms of weight, flexibility and speed, and its mechanical system had yet to be tested, there was a chance that something went wrong.

That was what Roland feared. If the plane crashed at the onset, even an outstanding pilot like Tilly might not even be able to know how well the plane performed. Roland had wanted to create several similar models so that Tilly could gradually get familiar with the aircraft and learn on the go.

But now it was too late.

"Your Majesty, it's ready to go," the hangar manager reported.

"OK. Let's begin," Roland said and left the tracks.

"Yes, Your Majesty!"

Two workers soon inserted a crankshaft into the engine launcher and started to spin it.



Roland felt like this was more like operating a tractor than the latest weapon created by human beings. He decided to invent storage batteries and electric helper motors once they started mass production.

As the piston gradually accelerated, one worker closed the pressure-relief valve, and the oil in the cylinder was instantly ignited. The engine erupted a few loud explosions. Within a second, a few inarticulate blasts became a series of thunderous roars.

The two-blade propeller blurred into shadows and light. The plane glided along the tracks for a mere 30 seconds and took off. Under the scrutinies a group of awestruck spectators, the "Unicorn" soared into the azure of the sky.

Chapter 1129: "The Mysterious Stone"

"Her Highness' ability... isn't flying, right?" Nightingale muttered.

"No, but she can fly with a Stone of Flight. However, when she's carrying heavy objects, even a Stone of Flight won't help much," Roland answered as he looked at the "Unicorn" hovering in midair. "What's the matter?"

"Although you talked about planes many times and also showed me the drawing and the internal combustion engine, I still feel it incredible... Men can fly like a bird with just a little bit of extra help," Nightingale remarked impressively. "The plane, to be honest, is none other than a bunch of metals and wood."

"Yes, it's made of metals and wood, but it's us who pieced them together," Roland said with a faint smile, "We used our hands, magic power, and knowledge. So, we don't, technically, completely rely on external forces."

"Everyone can fly like her, right?" Nightingale asked quietly. "Including me — "

"Yes, everyone, including you," Roland said positively. Nightingale was familiar with the sky. She had ridden on a hot air balloon and traveled with Maggie before, but these past experience was nothing next to a flight where you could have full control over where you were heading. Even Nightingale, a witch with magic power was awed by the plane. Roland could imagine how the mass would react to this new invention. Men's ambition to be free from the pull of gravity had started the moment they had stared up at the canopy of the sky.

The member of the Society of Wondrous Crafts killed in a testing flight was the best example.

The "Unicorn" landed magnificently on the tracks 30 minutes later.

"How did it go?" Roland asked Tilly who trotted to him in excitement.

"This plane is awesome!" she said breathlessly, her eyes sparkling. "It's way more flexible than the 'Seagull'. Wendy's wind control isn't bad, to be honest, but she can't always manipulate the aircraft into the way I want. This is different. I can control everything, including its speed, diving angle and turn, like it's completely fused with me!

"Fused with you?" Roland was mildly taken aback. Although the "Unicorn" was inspired by various biplane models, it was essentially a very crude testing plane. The pilot had to use her instinct to adjust its flying speed and control the aircraft manually. Roland was actually worried whether this plane could successfully take off. However, in Tilly's opinion, this rudimentary plane was as advanced and high-tech as a modern fighter equipped with a fly-by-wire control system and a flight control computer.

That was probably the difference between a genius and a person of mediocrity.

"So... are you satisfied now?" Roland asked as he waved at the hangar manager. "That's it for today — "

"What are you talking about, brother?" Tilly interjected. "How could 30 minutes be enough?"

"Then why did you land?"

"To let you know that I'm going to be here for a while. You have a lot of work on your plate, don't you?" Waving airily, she said, "Off you go. You don't have to wait for me. I still want to try some other flying methods."

Watching Tilly scurry off, Roland shook his head in amusement.

The plane had passed the test, and he was sure Tilly would learn everything about the "Unicorn" in no time. Since Tilly could leave the plane anytime, there was no need for him to monitor the subsequent testing flight anymore.

"It seems you were dismissed," Nightingale gloated.

"Shut up," Roland said gruffly while rolling his eyes. "Let's get out of here."

Nightingale disappeared into the Mist.

...

As soon as Roland returned to the castle hall, the guard trotted up to him and said, "Your Majesty, a message from the Third Border City. They've completed your task."

"Really?" Roland said, his brows going up a fraction of an inch. "Where's the report?"

"They hope you could see it in person."

It appeared that the discovery at the Festive Harbor was more complicated than he had thought. After a moment of reflection, Roland said, "I see. Let's go now."

Celine had been waiting for him at the underground hall.

"Your Majesty, you were right. There are materials used to make the Magic Cube at the Endless Cape," Celine said as she stretched out her auxiliary tentacle. "The magic power in that grayish yellow stone on the left are pretty similar to that in the Magic Ceremony Cube, though not completely the same. If we have a sufficient amount of the materials, I can start to create the replicate now."

"How much do you think you'll need?"

"A few thousand, I think."

Roland thought this was actually quite a lot. A couple of thousand stones could possibly fill a room. It seemed that he had to extravacate the Endless Cape as soon as possible. "I'll arrange it. So what about the other one?"

"The other type of stone is absolutely extraordinary. First, I can assure you that its radiation won't cause any harm to animals. From what I see, it's just some regular light, not the type you are worried about..."

"Radioactive rays."

"That's right. Of course, there is a chance that the radiation is too weak to be detected. However, if that is the case, I won't be too worried about its lethality." Celine picked out a chipped stone from the bottle on the right and handed to Roland. She said, "I asked Miss Lucia to break down one of the stones. Its ingredients are very similar to sand's."

"Sand's?" Roland echoed in surprise.

"Very strange, right? But it looks like a stone — or rather some bigger gravel. It's flexible and will glow when being compressed. I've never seen anything stranger than this in my entire life."

"Hmm..." Roland fumbled the sample thoughtfully and said, "That's not quite accurate."

"You know what this thing is?"

"Not really, but it does remind me of something else..." Roland replied slowly. "Substance is comprised of elements. Apart from elements, its structure also plays a big part in determining its properties. You don't understand it because you haven't seen many materials yet."

Take carbon for example. When carbon atoms had a tetrahedral molecular geometry, they would become hard diamonds. However, when they had a layered, planar structure, they became crispy, fragile graphite. One layer of graphite was called graphene, which had really great conductivity. When two layers of graphene formed a certain angle, however, they would become a perfect insulator. When they were cooled down to a certain temperature and were injected electrons, they would transform into a superconductor.

These three materials were all made of carbon.

That was the beauty of physics.

In fact, the exploration to the microscopic world was just a tip of an iceberg even by modern standards. In this unknown realm where men could only rely on theories, they were doing exactly the same thing that ancient people had done thousands of years ago. They reorganized and restructured elements to create new materials and inventions.

They found the "glowing tablets" and Soraya's coatings mysterious probably not because they contained magic power.

But because human beings just knew too little about the world they were living in.

Chapter 1130: A Presumption

"We know too little?" Celine dropped her tentacles, looking a little distressed. "You're right. The longer I stayed at the Quest Society, the more ignorant I felt I was. The book you brought from the Dream World just blew my mind. I shouldn't say that the stone is incredible, because there's something even more incredible than that."

"What is it?"

"Us," Celine said with a faint smile. "According to that book, everybody is comprised of elements. Like a tree, we're also constituted of carbon, nitrogen, hydrogen, etc. However, we can laugh, weep and think. That's more amazing than just being able to illuminate."

"I read that book too, but I still can't believe it," Nightingale remarked on a sigh. "As much as I hate to admit, our skins aren't a lot different from scaly tree bark."

"That's probably what His Majesty refers to as the beauty of structures."

Celine looked at Roland, who did not respond.

"Your Majesty?"

"Hey, are you OK?"

Roland finally came out of his reveries. He asked blankly, "Celine, what did you say?"

"We're more of a wonder than the illuminating stone tablets."

"That's it..." Roland muttered, feeling something dawning on him. "The so-called stone tablets are not some sort of monuments, but they are people who got killed."

"Are you saying — " Celine said in surprise.

"The tablets were those people's bodies," Roland said slowly with a shudder. They were indeed a type of new creatures entirely different from carbon-based lifeforms — they were actually silicon-based.

As the thought struck him, Roland soon found a reasonable explanation for the "illuminating tablets", and the murals in the temple immediately made sense to him.

First of all, why were the tablets so densely patterned? Not only the surface of the tablet was patterned, but its inner part was engraved as well. If this was an artifact, even Anna would find it hard to cut it so deep in a short period of time. According to the two explorers, those tablets were carved in exactly the same way.

However, if he viewed this matter from a different angle and regarded those tablets as creatures, that would explain a lot of things.

These engravings were probably "blood" veins. Under the blood pressure, silicon oxides produced a piezoelectric effect. Those electrical signals thus intertwined with each other and gradually formed thoughts. In the meantime, electric currents transformed into visible light through some mechanism so that these creatures were able to communicate.

Roland thought of the giant man and the huge pool of blood depicted in the murals.

Oil was actually more stable than water.

There might be a specific reason that the enemy of those dead people worshipped radioactive weapons.

Strong radiation would interfere electricity and might even render "electronic devices" ineffective. That was probably why the "radiation clan" put their faith in radioactive weapons.

Roland saw in his mind's eye how the war had begun.

Two entirely different civilizations had fought a fierce battle at the Southernmost Region for the relic. The blood of the defeated party had formed the underground river and the Choke Swamp. As their bodies did not decay, they remained underground for thousands of years in the form of tablets. The party who had gained the victory had disappeared, leaving the slightest trace behind them, except the ruin and the Magic Ceremony Cube at the Cage Mountain. Roland could now only trace this distant history via the murals that survived years of frost and winds.

This was so unbelievable!

"The illuminating tablets are living beings like us?" Celine asked meditatively. "Forgive me, but I can't believe that this is actually true. It just doesn't make sense to me that those tablets had consciousness and could move about at will. Do you have proof of any of that?"

Roland managed to remain his composure. He shook his head slightly and said, "This is my personal speculation. The truth might be very different, because from the perspective of evolution, it's almost impossible for such things to happen."

Environment determined how lifeforms came into being. Demons and demonic beasts were, after all, the offsprings of the same biosphere. However, a silicon-based living being evolved in a completely different way. It was not likely that there would be two fundamentally different creatures living in the same natural environment.

"But according to you, that fits the stories on the murals..." Celine said after a moment of silence. "Let's put it aside for the time being. I believe as long as we continue to do our research, we'll find the answer. Only in this way will human beings continue to progress."

"Sounds very convinceable..." Nightingale said while twitching her lips.

"This is also one of the rules at the Quest Society," Celine replied with a smile. "By the way, I conducted some tests on the illuminating tablets. I was thinking perhaps it could replace the illuminating Magic Stones, but it seems that doesn't work."

"No?" Roland said, frowning. When he had read the report, the first thought that had come to his mind was to use the tablets for illumination. Due to the limitation in power generation, lightbulbs were currently only used in the plants and a few residential areas nearby. There was still a long way to go before the mass could enjoy the convenience brought by electricity. If the tablets could be used for lighting, it would definitely make the life in Neverwinter a lot easier.

"Well, you can make it work, but it's too much hassle. Your Majesty, please look at this." Celine then picked out two samples. One was as thin as paper and the other the size of a block of tofu. They were both further sliced into smaller pieces. Celine applied some strength to both of them. Two jets of light

erupted from her auxiliary tentacles. The light from the thin fragment was more dazzling than the other. Soon afterwards, the light from the former gradually faded away and stopped illuminating while that from the latter continued to illuminate for another half a minute. Ceine said, "I applied exactly the same amount of strength to the two fragments."

Roland immediately took the implication. "Its illumination intensity and lasting power have something to do with its size and the extent to which it's deformed."

"Exactly," Celine said while tapping her main tentacle. "The light from the tablet fragment will extinguish eventually. The smaller the fragment is, the faster the light goes off, and it will take a very long time to recover its power. If we want to illuminate the whole underground hall, we will probably need hundreds of tablets and place ton of iron on them. When the light goes off, we then need to remove those iron. That's going to be a huge project."

Roland thought he might be able to use an assembly pulley to transport heavy objects if he wanted to use the tablets as stationary lights, though it was a little complicated process. He stared at the lusterless fragment and sank into thought. The smaller the stone fragment was, the easier it would be deformed, and correspondingly, the shorter the light would last. It would be almost like a flash —

"Hang on, a flash?"

An idea suddenly flashed across Roland's mind.

He immediately had a perfect idea to make the best use of those "tablets", although that might involve a lengthy production process.

This had been a historical problem for the First Army, which would just further impede their operations in the future if not solved in a timely fashion.

However, he now found a possible solution.

He could use the tablets to produce tracers that pointed soldiers directions.