

## Witch 1191

### Chapter 1191: Rare Element

Roland picked up a lead box and weighed the silver metal on his hand. Before it was activated, it was no different from ordinary iron. The metal was harmless as long as you did not consume it. It was inconceivable that this piece of metal contained an immense amount of energy that did not really fit its small and innocent appearance.

However, this was the very element that enabled men to convert mass energy for the first time.

This was on a whole new level compared to chemical reactions.

There were roughly fifty lead boxes in the cabinet, each containing one kilogram of Uranium-235 that was almost purified, which added up to fifty kilograms in total.

And there were more than one such cabinet in the room.

If he activated all the uranium in this room together...

Then he would probably release real "high energy".

"Can they really produce what you call 'the Glory of the Sun'?" Nightingale asked curiously. "Will they really explode upon ignition? It seems to me that they aren't combustible at all."

"Do you want to know?" Roland said in amusement. "It's much simpler than you thought. We just need to put these metal ingots together, and they'll explode as bright as the sun. The uranium in this one single cabinet will be more than enough to raze Neverwinter to the ground. That's why Lucia has a great responsibility. If she accidentally — "

The room suddenly fell into a dread silence.

Lucia covered her hand to her mouth, looking terrified.

"... There's no way." At long last, Azima spoke in sheer disbelief, "Are you saying that we might wreck the whole city if we're careless?"

Hearing these words, Nightingale immediately snatched the lead box from Roland, put it back to the cabinet, and attempted to drag him out of the room.

"Oi... wait, what are you doing?"

"Isn't that obvious?" Nightingale said desperately. "I'm getting you out of this city and ask people to get rid of these things! Lucia, call Wendy to contact the Administrative Office right now!"

"I... I'll go see Princess Tilly," Azima said. "Only she could mobilize the Sleeping Spell to take action."

"Stop! I was just joking — " Roland yelled.

It took him quite a while to calm everyone down.

"Are you sure this is just a joke?" Nightingale grunted.

"Ahem, yes... this is just a theory," Roland added quickly. "It's not that simple to activate these elements. I can't guarantee that it'll be successful to be honest even if I use all my power."

Lucia heaved a sigh of relief and said, "Your Majesty... you scared the hell out of me."

"This isn't funny," Nightingale said accusingly as she glared at Roland. "If Wendy and Scroll heard this, whether this is a joke or not — "

"They would probably move the new institute to somewhere far away from Neverwinter, right?" Roland sighed.

"I'm glad you know that, or they'll probably just get you far away from."

"Alright then. Let's just forget about this conversation..." Roland said after clearing his throat. "As long as you all keep this to yourself, Wendy and Scroll will never know."

"But someone might already hear it," Nightingale said casually as she looked out the window.

"Then I will reward you one bottle of Chaos Drinks to cut off any information," Roland negotiated immediately.

"Deal," Nightingale said and disappeared from their sight.

Looking at goggling Lucia and Azima, Roland said with a shrug, "Er... never mind that. It is also a part of the joke."

Seconds later, Nightingale reappeared and reported, "No suspicious figures were found, but the deal — "

"Remains valid."

Finally satisfied, Nightingale ate her precious dried fish while humming.

"Well... Your Majesty," Azima said gravely after a moment of hesitation. "It wasn't all a joke, was it? Because you said earlier that we must weigh the material accurately. Each lead box has to be precisely four kilograms. You also stressed that we need to weigh the material with the container together to make sure that the metal in each box has exactly the same weight." Azima paused for a second and continued, "Also, you told us that we should ask the guards to block off the surrounding area in the event of a break in or an accident before coming to see you in the castle. You said we must not investigate on our own, which shows that... these metal pieces are indeed kind of dangerous, right?"

Mildly surprised, Roland replied, "You're quite observant. Yes, most of your inference is correct. Apart from its toxicity, weight is also another crucial factor. That's why I asked you to separate them." Roland was impressed with Azima's meticulous attention to detail. She could deduce the property of the research subject based on the research protocol. Probably that was how she had developed her tracking ability. "However, if we want to turn them into a weapon against the demons, we also need another thing."

"Are you referring to those particles we stored separately?" Azima asked immediately.

"Not quite, but you are almost correct."

The composition of raw uranium was very complicated. Apart from uranium compounds, there were also many other radioactive materials, most of which were secondary daughter products that either had lost their radioactivity and become a stable atomic element, or they were elements that were still in the process of radioactive decay. Although the radiation clan had purified ores when they had built the Temple of the Cursed, the composition of these raw materials had not changed much, and this is shown by Lucia's result.

Uranium 238 had the highest percentage among other elements. Although it could not be used to produce weapons, it could be recognized by the Magic Ceremony Cube, and it had very similar properties to Uranium 235, so they were all sent to the laboratory at the North Slope.

Uranium-235 with a purity of more than 90% could be used as a weapon. It only accounted for 1% of natural uranium found in the Earth's crust. Therefore, the biggest problem for most researchers was how to extract it.

However, Uranium 235 was not the rarest element on Earth. Its daughter products, such as thorium, radium, radon, and polonium, were even rarer. In fact, Roland also needed polonium-210, the common isotope that could be found in nature, for his Radiation Project.

Roland had received nine-year compulsory education in his previous world, so he knew very well about radium and polonium. Maria Curie made her fame through the discovery of these two elements. Despite the fact that polonium-210 only had a short half-life of a hundred days with an extremely small concentration, Maria Curie had still successfully discovered it from the mineral pitchblende based on its powerful radioactivity.

Both radium and polonium could be used to produce neutron sources, and this led to the second problem: detonation.

The first generation of nuclear weapons was pretty simple. Basically, the mechanism was to let fissionable nuclides release energy. Take uranium-235 for example. When uranium-235 received a neutron, it was activated and became unstable uranium-236 that further splitted into two lighter nuclides and several isolated neutrons. The change in the mass of nuclides was thus converted to energy.

The released neutrons thus hit the nuclides again, initiating subsequent fissions, and released greater energy. Such a series of fissions was what people normally referred to as the nuclear chain reaction.

In the microscopic world, atomic nuclei were wide apart from each other. If an atom was a football field, then the nucleus was as small as an ant in the middle of the field. To make sure that the nucleus was hit, the football field had to be large enough so that the neutrons would not fly out of range. Also, this ant had to be also placed on the path of the neutrons.

To adjust the size of this football field, they had to adjust the mass and shape of the nuclides.

In fact, critical mass was not a fixed number. It also depended on the shape of the nuclides and a series of complex calculations. Apparently, it was easier to hit the ant when the football field was stacked up than when it was arrayed in a line. Roland had heard a miserable defeat in a war because of miscalculations. Nevertheless, as his predecessors had done the complicated and tedious research for him, Roland did not need to start from scratch and perform tons of experiments. He already knew that

spheres had the smallest critical mass, and that for uranium-235, its critical mass was fifty two kilograms.

That was the reason he insisted that each lead box should be no more than one kilogram.

Since critical mass was adjustable, Roland could, theoretically, reduce the critical mass by shrinking the size of the football field or providing more neutrons. High-explosive bombs were actually created using the former method. When the explosion occurred, its reactants were squeezed. The density of the bomb thus exceeded its limit. However, due to the limitation in the current technologies in Neverwinter, Roland did not think he could calculate the correct critical mass to precisely control the explosion. As such, he directed his attention to the latter method.

To use neutrons and maintain a sustained and controlled nuclear reaction.

Chapter 1192: A Wind Chaser

Neutron sources, which could be classified as catalyst, provided extra neutrons that could sustain the chain reaction even when Uranium-235 was under its critical mass.

Technically, both polonium and radium separated from natural uranium could form compounds with beryllium to serve as neutron sources. Roland did not foresee any technical difficulties, for polonium could release a large number of neutrons when colliding with alpha particles. All of the three elements were existing in nature, which saved them a lot of time to create elements artificially.

Roland preferred polonium to radium purely out of safety concerns. Although polonium-210 had a short half-life, it released very few photons upon a decay, which meant it was no more dangerous than inactive uranium. However, radium, which released radon and photons upon activation, posed a potential safety hazard. As such, polonium was a better candidate to provide neutrons.

Further, beryllium could reflect neutrons and further increased the possibility for neutrons to interact with other elements. By combining polonium and beryllium, along with a sufficient amount of uranium-235, even the simplest gun model could be lethal.

In addition to that, beryllium was a common element in emeralds that were quite accessible in the Four Kingdoms, so Azima did not have to search for them in the wilderness.

Roland knew very well about Neverwinter's current level of technology. The principle of the Resplendent Radiation was simple, but to significantly improve the utilization rate of energy from 1% to 90%, it required tons of theoretical calculations and numerous tests. If the conversion rate was low, he would not be able to reduce the size of the weapons and would thus waste precious uranium resources. Fortunately, Lucia's ability minimized the loss arising from the uranium extraction.

Nevertheless, even with a minimal loss, creating a nuclear weapon from scratch still involved various advanced technologies. Nuclear weapons' destructive power was phenomenal compared to regular explosives. Even 1% of uranium could release unparalleled energy.

Roland had to make every effort to win this battle that would decide the fate of the mankind.

To hold the power of the Sun in your palms in this uncivilized era, wasn't it a type of romance?

He would like to give it a shot no matter how impossible it seemed.

"Very well, keep up the good work," Roland said as he patted Lucia on the head. "Once all the cabinets are filled with lead boxes, we can start on the tests."

"Yes, Your Majesty," Lucia said fervently.

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In the meantime, in the Aerial Knight Academy of Neverwinter.

The area to the west of the research institute was quite today, for all the students were on a break visiting their families, except for Good.

"Upwind, gear down!"

"Crosswind, roll over!"

Good seated himself in front of the mock flight deck, practicing according to the instructions in the Flight Manual by changing the setting of the wind directions. The wooden rod creaked like a battered, weathered watermill. The air in the training room was sultry and balmy. His back was dampened with perspiration, and sweat dripped down his chin on the shabby deck.

Gradually, his hand became so wet that he could not keep a tight grip on the lever. Good thus stopped and heaved a deep sigh.

After learning to fly for almost half a year, Good had engraved the basic instructions in the Flight Manual written by Princess Tilly in his memories. He was no longer that lay man who got easily flustered by the movements of the plane. Now, Good had memorized all the instructions and developed quick reflexes. His body would react almost automatically to his mind.

But Good doubted if he could really fly a plane.

He could not envision the picture where he actually maneuvered a plane against the wind by himself. The Manual suggested that he should "feel the wind force and wind direction, sense the movement of the aircraft and operate the plane accordingly". However, he did not understand what kind of feeling that was. The mock flight deck remained motionless all the same no matter how he shifted the gear, as though it were laughing at his futile attempts with an air of derision.

The more Good practiced, the more frustrated he became.

While he was feeling extremely discouraged, the door of the training room was suddenly flung open.

"Oho, you're really here."

"Told you. I was right, wasn't I?"

Good looked around, and very surprisingly, saw two men step into the room, who were none other than his team members, Finkin and Hinds.

"Not having fun during your break?" Finkin whistled. "Well, that's because fun is right here in the school."

"Why are you still here. You have a sister, don't you?" Hinds rejoined as he flung his arm around Good's neck. "She asked me to tell you that you should take a good rest. That's... so sweet of her."

Good's manner tightened. He asked sternly, "Hold on, did you guys visit my place?"

"Of course, otherwise where should we go find you?" Finkin said matter-of-factly, his brows raised. "Her name is Rachel, right? Do you mind introducing her to me?"

"Out of the question," Good retorted fiercely while shooting Finkin a cold glance.

"Aren't we good enough?" Finkin said indignantly. "I have a proper house near Redwater River!"

Good lapsed into a thoughtful silence and then shook his head. "No, it has nothing to do with you. My sister... Rachel has her own problem. I don't think she would like to be with you."

"Why? I think she's sweet," Hinds asked in confusion.

"Come. Spit it out," Finkin urged in curiosity.

"Drop it," Good replied gruffly. "Let's talk about something else. What did you mean by "fun is here in the school?"

Finkin did not insist but lowered his voice and replied furtively, "Do you want to fly a real plane?"

Astonished, Good said, "What did you say?"

"I saw it a few days ago when I climbed over the wall," Finkin said with a triumphant smile. "There are new planes in the hangar. Although they're covered with canvas, I could see they're about the same size of the 'Unicorn' piloted by Princess Tilly. In other words, those are our planes!"

"A few days ago? Why didn't you tell us back then?"

"Because I don't want you to be too excited and blabber about it," Finkin said while shrugging. "We're on a break, so few people are in the academy. That gives us a great chance to have a peek at them!"

"Are you mental?" Good said in disbelief. "Without permission, nobody is allowed to get in there!"

"Surely those soldiers won't let you in," Finkin said while rolling his eyes at Good. "So we must take another route and go around the airport."

"But..."

"We're just taking a look," Hinds egged on. "You should have noticed that Princess Tilly looks sulky recently and is more strict with us. So it would probably be another two months before we could actually fly them. Don't you want to know what our planes look like, or you actually prefer this stupid wooden deck?"

"If you don't come with us, we'll go without you," Finkin said as he winked at Good.

Good stared at the rickety wooden rod while savoring the sense of loss that lingered upon his heart. After what seemed to be a long internal struggle, Good bit his lip and agreed with a nod, "Alright. I'll come. Show me the way."

## Chapter 1193: A Wind Chaser (II)

The academy was empty just as Finkin had said. The three thus passed through various buildings and stopped in front of a towering wall.

"This is..."

"This is the west side of the airport," Finkin said as he brought a wooden ladder and erect it against the wall. "Follow me."

Good hesitated for a moment before he climbed up the ladder. The moment he reached the top of the wall, an involuntary exclamation escaped from his lips. A swollen red sun was sinking low over the water. The glittery ocean splintered into flecks of gold in the sweltering sunset, and the sky was awash with sheets of blue and yellow. Layers of cloud sloped down to the horizon, below which was the vast emptiness of the airport that would potentially lead them to the sky.

Sea breezes dispelled the irritation that smote upon Good's heart. He closed his eyes and, with his arms stretched, imagined himself clasping on the operation lever while waiting to take off.

"A very nice view, eh?" Finkin said while grinning. "I found this fabulous peeping spot. Just be careful not to fall off the wall."

Hinds asked behind them, "So... what next?"

"Naturally we should go there, but we have to take the ladder with us." Finkin said as he pointed at the hangar not far away. They first saw the "Seagull" parked out there. The hangar was actually not very far from them as its edge was only about two meters away from the wall.

Because of the intense balance training they had received, they could now easily walk along the top of the wall, and reached their destination within fifteen minutes.

The hangar was two to three meters taller than the wall, so they could not clamber onto the roof. However, its windows and the wall were on the same level, so they could peep through the windowpanes while stretching themselves up on their tiptoes.

"Covered planes... covered planes... I saw them!" Finkin yelled.

Good's eyes followed Finkin's, and his chest constricted.

There were four uncovered biplanes in one of the hangars. Good's eyes were glued to their smooth and elegant bodies. His heart swelled with excitement as the knowledge that he would one day operate them struck him.

Who cared about knights? They were nothing next to an aerial knight who could fly in the sky!

Finkin placed the ladder against the window and clapped his hands smugly. "Well, we didn't step into the airport, so technically, we aren't breaking the rules."

Good knew that was a pretty tenuous argument, but he could not help crawling into the hangar through the window.

To his surprise, for the first time since his training, Good felt calm.

After they landed, Finkin and Hinds rushed to the closest plane while Good sauntered behind them.

"Whoa, this is... spectacular!" Hinds apostrophized as he touched the plane. "It's metal."

"Yes, and it's as thin as skin. Look — " Finkin agreed as he pressed his fingers on it, and a dent immediately appeared on the surface. "I wonder how they made it."

"Oi, take it easy. You don't want to break it."

"Don't worry. It's quite bouncy."

"Really? Let me try..."

Good did not marvel at the plane like his two friends. Instead, he crawled into it as if led by a mysterious force and proceeded to the front of the aircraft.

According to the illustration on the cover of the Flight Manual, this was the exact spot Princess Tilly was sitting at while soaring above the continent and the sea.

Good thus sat in the pilot seat.

So this was the world in an aerial knight's eyes.

The wings above and the carriage on both sides obscured half of his vision, which forced Good to look straight ahead. He could even smell the leather chair. The flight instruments were encased in clear glass. Both the operation lever and the pedals were made of metal, the top part of the lever was wrapped in soft fabrics that afforded a nice, comfortable touch.

Good grabbed the lever and geared down. The lever creaked.

Unlike the wooden lever he had been practicing with, Good did feel he was pulling something. The quivering steel string and the increasingly heavy lever told him that the sensation was real.

"Good Lord, what are you doing?" Hinds' voice cracked through the air like a whip that jerked Good out of his musings.

"Er..." Good stammered and instantly relinquishing his grip. "I'm just..."

"Practicing?" Finkin jeered. "Who said we were mental earlier? Now who has sneaked into the cockpit? Didn't we agree to just take a look?"

"Sorry, I couldn't help..."

"Rest assured," Finkin interrupted. "I don't think you'll break it because we're told to do so during the training. But be fast. I want to try it out too."

"Hang on," Good said, a little reluctant. "I just geared down. Do you want to sit in the backseat first?"

"And what about me?" Hinds protested as he climbed up the wing.

While they were fighting for the seat, there was suddenly a screech of an open lock.



Good's face turned white with great trepidation.

Terrified, Hinds said, "Why... why would they come here at this time?"

"What should we do?"

Finkin was the only one who seemed to be composed. He said, "We don't have time to run. Hide first!"

However, there was not a single hiding place in the large hangar, and the pilot seat was too small for three grown-up men. Before they could get off the plane, someone had already arrived.

"Who's there?"

"Freeze!"

With several clicks, Good found himself surrounded by the First Army.

Petrified, the three were soon pinned to the ground.

"What happened?" a voice came as they saw a familiar figure approach them. It was none other than Princess Tilly Wimbledon. "Invaders?"

Finkin shouted in exasperation before the guards could supply an answer, "Your Highness, we're sorry. We are all students at the Aerial Knight Academy. Out of curiosity, we came here to have a look at the planes. Please have mercy on us!"

Apparently, Finkin also knew that they were not supposed to be here. Good had a feeling that they were in big trouble.

After hearing the full account, Princess Tilly nodded expressionlessly and said, "I see. According to the school rules, you'll all receive detention of at least 15 days and be disqualified from becoming an aerial knight. You can choose what you want to be in the future between a busboy and ground staff. Let your officer know."

"As, as you command..." Finkin and Hinds replied while screwing up their faces.

Good's heart sank to the bottom. Suddenly, courage seared through him as the guards began to shuffle them out. He raised his head and shouted in earnest, "Your Highness, please! I want to be a pilot. I would do anything if you could spare me this time! I'm at a loss in the training sessions, so I came here to feel the actual thing, not only out of curiosity!"

"Really?" Tilly said, her brows raised. "Are you referring to... a feeling?"

"Yes, my actions didn't coordinate with the instructions in the manual. Although I was flying, I couldn't sense the wind... Well, that isn't quite accurate. It's something..." Good explained as he tried to find a proper word to describe his feeling. "I can't put it into words. I only know that I didn't feel it right..."

"He's blabbering. It's all nonsense."

"Is this guy crazy?"

"Get him out of here. He annoys Princess Tilly."

The guards conversed with each other.

Tilly took a searching look at Good and said, "You're Good, right? Eagle Face told me that you're doing pretty well in all subjects. You were the first to get used to the training and are also very hard-working."

"I..."

Tilly cut across him haughtily, "So what do you think of riding on a plane?"

"Huh?" Good said, flabberghasted.

"Didn't you say you needed to feel it? So what now? Do you think you could fly?"

Good hesitated for a second, his hands clenched, and replied, "Your Highness... I think I can."

"Then try it out," Tilly said as she turned around without looking at him. "In fact, I'm planning to train you guys on a real plane tomorrow. For other students, they're allowed to fail but you aren't. If you fail, I'll expel you. Of course, you could also choose to be punished. That's up to you."

"I want to fly," Good replied decidedly.

"Very well," Tilly said. "I'll also let the other two choose what way they want to go."

Chapter 1194: The Only Request

After dinner, Tilly told Roland what had happened at the airport.

"Because of... a feeling?" Roland said, a little surprised at the reason Tilly had changed her mind.

"What? Not a good reason for you?" Tilly said while folding her arms.

"Well, you made all the school rules for the Aerial Knight Academy, so you're the boss," Roland denied while waving his hand. "I'm just curious about what that feeling refers to."

"It means talent. You really don't know anything about flying," Tilly said while shrugging. "For ordinary people, they simply follow the instructions in the manual mechanically, but some people could visualize their action. These people could foresee the result of their actions beforehand."

"Er... that sounds really amazing," Roland commented indifferently while twitching his lips. He admitted that he had no knowledge of flying. If it was not for Tilly, he would probably never be able to train so many aerial knights. Tilly helped him a lot to build, test, improve, and finalize the plane and train new pilots. Normally, it would take a few decades to build an actual plane based on the blueprints collected from the Dream World and apply it to military operations. Having said that, a plane was essentially a machine. Wouldn't it be enough to follow the instructions and keep practicing if someone wanted to learn how to operate it?

"Because I have that talent too," Tilly said regretfully. "The fact that you can't visualize it means that you don't have the talent. If you were a student of the Aerial Knight Academy, you would probably be knocked out of the school, brother."

"Ahem..." Roland almost choked as he heard Nightingale stifle her laugh behind him.

"Are you under the impression that we could be pilots as long as we practice?" Tilly said as though seeing the thought in Roland's mind. "It's true that some people could develop reflexes after numerous practices, but being able to feel is also a talent, although it's not as fast as the former method. Most people probably would never develop such an ability. Flying would be the most they could achieve. Between the two, who do you think will have a higher chance of surviving a battle?"

Roland fell silent.

Without a doubt, the gifted ones would have a better chance. They normally learned much faster than ordinary people, as they possessed the ability to learn from their experience. However, common people could barely survive. In other words, it took talented students less time to learn and absorb new knowledge.

"But that's not always the case," Roland said after a short pause. "Maybe he was just lucky and happened to have the right answer."

"So that was why I asked him to fly," Tilly said casually.

"... What about the other two?"

"They chose to fly too."

"Really?" Roland said while blinking in surprise. "I'm impressed with their bravery. Don't you think it's a pity to expel them?" Being expelled from school was a severe punishment, especially when this particular school was managed by the princess. This meant the expelled students would have a record, and it would be a lot harder for them to seek other employment in the future. Busboys and ground staff were actually paid well, and they were relatively stable jobs. The academy also offered them medical and housing benefits.

There were less than 200 pilot trainees in Neverwinter, so Roland cherished every one of them.

"The Aerial Knight Academy doesn't need untalented students. Bravery would only lead them to an early death. It's better for them to leave now than later," Tilly said in a low voice.

There was a strained silence. Roland got two drinks for both of them, and Tilly changed the subject. "By the way, I came here for my new plane. Any update on that?"

Roland's heart skipped a beat. He knew Tilly must have some important business to discuss. "I think we should take this matter slow. We need you to build the air force. You'll pose a greater threat to the demons if you stay in Neverwinter — "

Tilly did not respond but her eyes were glistening with inflexible determination.

Roland breathed out a deep sigh.

Tilly was not referring to the "Unicorn" but a more powerful military aircraft. After Tilly had cried hysterically in his chest like a defenseless child that night over Ashes' death, she had told Roland the next morning that she wanted a plane that could kill the demons.

She was going to seek revenge.

Apparently, Roland's evasive promise had not changed Tilly's mind.

"Are you sure that's what you want?"

"You weren't so indecisive when you planned to ambush Ursrook."

"That's because logistics is completely different from fighting at the front."

"Not really. In both cases, I use my ability for those in need," Tilly denied while shaking her head. "It was I who agreed to send Ashes to the front. You know very well that aerial knights won't stand a chance to win against the demons in the sky. There are too many demons and the aerial knights are too weak. Only I could change the situation."

"But the academy..."

"I certainly will fulfill my responsibilities. I'll train some qualified instructors so that they could further expand the academy." Tilly paused for a second, her eyes fixed on Roland, and said slowly, "I know I'm being selfish, but this is my only request."

Roland gazed into Tilly's eyes. At long last, he sighed, "I see."

Tilly unclenched her fist and said, "Thank you."

"By the way, any specific requirement on the color of the aircraft?" Roland asked when Tilly was about to leave.

Tilly stopped, a little perplexed, and answered, "No, not really..."

"Then how about red?"

"Does it make any difference?"

"Normally, the party that dominates the sky is in that color," Roland explained gently.

"Really?" Tilly said while curling up her lips. "Then red it is."

After Tilly took her leave, Nightingale said to Roland, "Her Highness is... serious this time."

Roland replied while massaging his forehead, "That's what troubles me." When Tilly said "this is my only request", Roland sensed her perseverance and eagerness behind her words. Roland understood no other person except him could help Tilly avenge Ashes. If he had turned Tilly down, her hope would turn into poignant despair, and dimly, he had a presentiment of losing her.

"She's also changed," Nightingale remarked. "But I understand her. If it was you — " Nightingale broke off and shook the idea off. "No, I can't even imagine it."

Roland fell silent. He suddenly realized that a war could alter many people and things, but the war itself would continue to bring destruction.

To prevent tragedies like this, there was no way other than ending this Battle of Divine Will as soon as possible.

Chapter 1195: Things I Want to Do

Good could not even remember how he get back to his residence.

By the time he arrived at his house, it was around nightfall, and everyone was on their way back home. Smoke curled up from the chimneys, and he could hear people greet their families. The air was soaked with sweet aroma of porridge and the salty odor of sweat. The neighborhood was so lively and energetic that nobody would believe that this place was actually a residential area for refugees.

Good could smell the hope that empowered the energy and liveliness of the refugees. Residents here would be well fed as long as they worked hard. Within half a month, people could afford eggs and pork. Everyone was hopeful about their future, with their voice confident and their spirit high. Although the residential area was untidy and raucous, it was by no means dismal and miserable like a slum.

Everything here was colorful.

Except Good.

As he saw his neighbors smiled at him broadly, his eyes started streaming, and a scathing voice kept ringing around his ears, "Look at what you did, you thickhead. You ruined everything!"

Had he not been so headstrong to request a trial from Princess Tilly but instead accepted the punishment, he would have still been a student of the Aerial Knight Academy. Even if he could not become a pilot, he could still have a decent job in the future, much better than being homeless.

His courage had soon ebbed away after Princess Tilly had agreed with his proposal. Now, he only felt fear and despair.

If he failed, he would lose everything.

Good pushed open the door and entered as he was crestfallen.

A silvery voice greeted him brightly, "Good, you're home. See what I made for you."

Rachel ran up to him in excitement and settled him in his chair. She uncovered the lid of the plate and pronounced triumphantly, "Tada — egg pancakes! Looks good, eh?"

The so-called egg pancake was divided into two layers. It looked more like a pancake topped with scrambled egg than an egg pancake. Nevertheless, it still looked delicious. Its egg white thin, and its golden rim slightly furled, with an orange yolk right in the middle while yolk was still runny. The melted butter trickled down to the plate, giving off a rich and devilish smell.

Obviously, Rachel had put a lot of efforts into this meal.

Stunned for a split second, Good said, "You bought eggs?" Eggs were not particularly expensive in Neverwinter, but we still could not afford to have them everyday.

"Yes," Rachel said as she handed Good a wooden fork. "Uncle Bucky took me to the marketplace today. Don't worry. I still have savings. You rarely have a break, so it's okay to have eggs occasionally. Plus, once you become an aerial knight, we'll soon have more savings. I already thought this through!" Rachel patted her chest in confidence.

Good took the fork stiffly and mumbled, "Y-yes, you're right."

"Now, eat it and see if you like it," Rachel urged.

After a moment of hesitation, Good slowly put a morsel of the egg pancake in his mouth. Instantly, the flavor of the yolk mingled with the butter permeated his entire mouth.

Memories started to flow out from the deepest part of his mind.

He and Rachel had suffered a lot on the way from the Kingdom of Wolfheart to the Western Region of Graycastle. In the past, he would have never dreamed of having such tasty food. However, things turned better miraculously after they arrived at Neverwinter. They were fed and clothed in this city, and probably, in the near future, Rachel could eat this "egg pancake" every day, only if he continued to study at school.

Good did yearn to soar the sky, but was it really worth him to bet with his life?

He had nothing to lose before, but it was different now.

Good had to take care of Rachel.

Then why did he make such a selfish choice?

He had never thought of Rachel when he had agreed with Finkin to take a look at the planes.

He could not forgive himself for being so selfish!

"Do you like it? It shouldn't be... that bad, right? I haven't cooked for a while, and I'm not sure whether my cooking skills have got rusty or not," Rachel said with uncertainty. "Oi, say something. Is it okay? Hang on, why are you crying? Is the food that bad?"

"No..." Good replied, his face glazed with tears, as he gulped down the pancake. "It's good, really good. I'm just... I couldn't help..."

Startled, Rachel walked up to him, patted his head and asked quietly, "Did something happen?"

"I'm sorry... I probably couldn't continue to study in the academy..."

Good then told Rachel everything.

"I see," Rachel said at length. "I just have one question for you. Do you... like flying?"

"I — " Good broke off, groping for words that did not come. He found it hard to lie in front of Rachel's face, so he nodded.

"Then there is nothing to worry about," Rachel smiled. "This is your first time finding something you like, right? You've done so much for me on our way here. I asked you to leave the Kingdom of Wolfheart, and you could have refused, but you still did. So how can you be a selfish person?"

"But I..."

"The worst scenario is to start all over again, right?" Rachel suggested with her head tilted on one side. "And I'm literate. Even if I don't... well, I could find jobs by myself. So, just do your best."

"R-really?"

"Anyway, you don't have time to regret. It's better to think about how to pass the trial than worrying about our future. Just make sure to keep your temper next time."

Good stared at Rachel for quite a while until he said, "Sometimes, I feel you know much more about the world than me."

"I'm older than you, so naturally I know more. You insisted me to be your younger sister, remember?" Rachel mumbled and smiled at Good. "If you're expelled, then let's switch it up. I'll be your elder sister."

...

The next day, in the airport for the aerial knights.

Sixteen students stood out in a line at the end of the runway. As these students passed the exam first, they got the chance to have the trial first.

Four brand new planes gradually glided over the runway and came to halt in front of them.

Mumurs instantly swept over the crowd. Everybody was studying attentively at the four beautiful machines with great interest.

Except Finkin and Hinds whose face was screwed up.

Good closed his eyes.

He felt the cool breeze blowing at his face, trying to revisit his training, memorize the instructions of the officer, and visualize each move. Gradually, a blur of images showed up in his mind.

When Princess Tilly appeared, everybody kneeled down on their knees. Finkin tugged Good's sleeve to remind him.

"Your Royal Highness!"

"Rise," Tilly said expressionlessly. "It's your first time seeing these new planes, but you should have been familiar with them by now. All the materials in the textbook are based on the 'Unicorn', and these planes are the upgraded versions of the 'Unicorn', so they function better. Therefore, as long as you follow the instructions received in your training, you should be able to pass the trial. Considering it's your first time flying a plane, I'll sit you through the process and supervise you. I'll also mark your performance. Of course, I would rather you not needing my instructions."

Tilly paused for a second and went on, "However, in consideration of possible errors you would make in this test, I invited Miss Nana here. As long as you don't die on the spot, you'll survive, but it also means that you'll get a really low mark. If you can't improve yourself in the subsequent training, you'll be expelled. So, I hope you'll do your best. Also, if the plane sustains substantial damage, you'll get a zero mark because we don't have enough planes for you to crash. Understand?"

"Yes, Your Highness!" the sixteen students chorused.

"Now, let's begin. First examinant, Good." Tilly announced solemnly.

Good took a deep breath, walked up to the plane, and crawled into the cabin.

Chapter 1196: The Reason to Fly

A soldier started the plane and turned on the valve. The aircraft immediately started to shake violently, the engine began to roar, and the propeller spun at a tremendous speed.

When the roar turned into a steady buzz, Good slowly pushed the gas lever, and the plane, as if being pulled by an invisible force, started to slide on the runway.

"Wow..." the crowd exclaimed impressively.

Good felt greatly encouraged, as he had not expected that it would really work. He was now truly operating this giant steel beast!

Good turned his head toward Princess Tilly who was sitting on the left side of the wing, her gray hair streaming behind her, a twinge of smile in her eyes. Was the princess... content with his performance? Good became more confident, believing he should have no problem passing this trial as long as he followed Tilly's instructions.

However, the princess did not say anything.

Good cast glances at Tilly numerous times, but Tilly was determined to maintain her silence, with faint yet playful smile lingering on her lips. When the plane crossed halfway through the runway, Good suddenly came to the realization that he would probably not receive any instructions during the entire trial.

"Considering it's your first time flying a plane, I'll walk you through the process one step at a time."

Princess Tilly's promise did not apply to him who had broken the school rules.

The other students would have a second chance, but he would not.

His enthusiasm was instantly quenched by a surge of disappointment and regret.

"If you don't make me say anything, then it definitely would be your best performance."

Good somehow comprehended what Her Highness had meant. If he could not fly the plane all by himself, he would be expelled, which was a price he had to pay for breaking the rules. If he proved his talent to the princess, then he would have some value for further education.

Could he really fly the plane on his own?

Now he had already used up two thirds of the distance, and a patch of grass gradually swam into his view, followed by the wall that encircled the airport. If he ran directly into the wall, even Miss Nana would not be able to save him.

There's no time.

Good wanted to pull back the gas lever, as this seemed to be the only way to slow down the plane and avoid a direct clash.



However, the next moment, he felt a hand pat on his head.

"Do you like... flying?"

Rachel's voice reverberated next to his ears.

Flying...

Yes, if he were a bird, there should be another way.

Which was to fly over the wall.

If he slowed down now, his journey would end here.

It was a second that contained eternity. Good grasped the lever and pushed it forward.

The engine instantly roared like thunder.

The wall streaked toward him!

Good jerked the plane up ten meters in front of the wall. As the plane shook violently, the runway sank below him and slid out of his sight. The patch of grass flitted below him. For a moment, Good felt weightless. The ground plummeted as he soared into the air!

"Faster! A little faster!" Good's eyes widened as the top of the wall pressed in. He was ready to embrace the crash.

But the crash never happened.

It shot up into the sky. All the obstacles in front of him disappeared, and Good saw a view he had never beheld. The academy, the coastline, and Neverwinter far away spun below him, his mind clearer and his heart lightened as the truth of operating a plane dawned on him.

Good wanted to whoop.

It was so wonderful that human beings could finally fly.

...

After he landed, Good knelt down before Princess Tilly.

"Thank you for giving me this opportunity. I saw something that could only exist in my dream."

During the trial that had lasted half an hour, Good had completed the basic flight maneuvers, including climbs and hovering, although with some difficulties.

There was nothing more he could do about his marks.

Even if he failed, the memory of this flight would be engraved in his heart. From now on, whenever he closed his eyes, he would remember this unique experience.

"Why did you join the Aerial Knight Academy?"

Tilly's voice came from above.

Good hesitated for a moment before he replied truthfully, "Your Highness, at first I just wanted to earn some income. Later, I wanted to be a successful man. Now, I've fallen in love with flying."

"I can give you money and fame, and also offer you a pilot job, provided that you promise to kill as many demons as you can," Tilly said coolly. "Fight for Graycastle and kill every demon that comes into your view. You have to exchange everything I give you with their blood. This is the duty of an aerial knight, the purpose of building this school. If you could do that, then report to Eagle Face."

Good looked up in excitement and said, "Your Highness, do you mean — "

"You passed," Tilly said and whipped around without looking back.

The trial did not end until 5:00 in the afternoon. Two out of sixteen were knocked out.

Finkin and Hinds also passed the trial.

After the students were dispersed, Finkin and Hinds grabbed Good by the arm, pulled him next to them and said, "Are you mental? Princess Tilly told us we only needed to take off and land properly to pass. Not only did you almost run into the wall, but you also flew out of the academy and hovered above the sea. Weren't you afraid that you would crash the plane?"

"That was an accident," Good thought to himself while rolling his eyes, then he said, "Didn't Her Highness say that all of us should do our best? I didn't know that you just need to take off and land to get a pass. I thought a few more moves would boost my mark."

"You lucky dog," Finkin said while shaking his head.

"You guys did well, too." Good said while twitching his lips. "You took off so well without instructions."

"What? What do you mean by 'without instructions'? Didn't Her Highness tell you when to pull the lever?"

"Yeah, but she gave fewer instructions to us than the other students," Hinds assented, "because we're wrong-doers."

Good was rooted to the ground. Was he the only person who did not receive any instructions?

While confused, the three of them returned to their dormitory.

An icy Eagle Face was waiting for them there.

The three shuddered. The trainees were actually afraid of their instructor more than Princess Tilly. They were constantly under the impression of being X-rayed under Eagle Face's piercing scrutiny.

"S-sir..."

"I'm very impressed. I didn't expect that you could make trouble even on your break," he said as he surveyed Good, Finkin and Hinds coldly. "Princess Tilly has told me everything. You're very lucky not to be expelled. Well, this isn't the jurisdiction of the First Army, otherwise..."

"S-sir, we're sorry!" the three immediately apologized in earnest.

"Since Her Highness has already punished you, I won't inflict more punishment. However, if you become an aerial knight, you'll become a member of the army," Eagle Face jeered. "To make sure you won't make the same mistake again, you'll have to clean the washroom for the whole month coming next. You got it?"

"What..." Both Finkin and Hinds screwed up their faces.

Only Good administered a salute.

"As you command, sir!"

Chapter 1197: The Torch of the Civilization

The trial that had lasted a week not only indicated that the students at the Aerial Knight Academy had taken the first crucial step but also marked the official beginning of their training program. The trial, as a matter of fact, had stirred the entire city.

Several citizens spied a "giant kite" hover above the southern part of the city. Although Tilly often flew the "Unicorn" around the castle, most of the time she confined her activity to depopulated areas. As such, the public had never truly witnessed a real plane.

Onlookers rushed toward the southern city, hoping to catch a glimpse of the plane when it darted out of the yard. In the beginning, only residents at the Shallow Port and the industrial area knew about the trial. Nevertheless, within three days, the news was spread out throughout the entire city, and the academy was besieged by curious spectators. Whenever a plane slid into their view, the crowd erupted a loud cheer as if it were them riding the plane.

Honey took advantage of this opportunity and soon published an article entitled "A Recurring Miracle", detailing the trial for the pilot trainees. The article was supplemented with two close-up shots of the biplane, which immediately brought the sales of Graycastle Weekly to a new peak.

Many merchants beyond Neverwinter sniffed a business opportunity and started to purchase the papers at a high price from the locals after they were sold out. Those who were not financially capable of doing that hired people to copy the article and the photos. Such a movement further raised the paper price in the city.

Aerial Knights, therefore, were known to everybody in Neverwinter overnight.

Roland received Tilly's report a week later.

150 out of the 197 trainees passed the trial, which meant that 47 students crashed the plane due to major errors. As there were only four planes used in the trial, each plane crashed around 11 times on average.

It appeared that the crashing rate was pretty high, but Roland understood that the plane was lightweight and had a simple structure. As long as the engine remained intact, it was easy to fix them. Most of the crashes, as Roland noticed, had occurred during the process of landing due to speeding or slow operation. Roland was certain with a little bit of repair here and there, the biplane would recover its splendor.

Of course, the refurbished planes would obviously not function as well as the mint ones. In fact, two planes were so battered that they could no longer satisfy the need of the students. To make sure that the students received adequate training, at least 12 to 15 biplanes were required for the subsequent advanced training program.

This was also the number required for a large fleet in his previous world.

Roland concluded that the whole reported only conveyed one piece of information: "The air force and I need funds, and you shall give me money."

Roland put down the report in amusement. He had to admit that Tilly did have some talent, for she had already grasped the nature of the air force when it was still in its infancy. In fact, a competent fleet not only required manpower but also a large number of planes for training purposes.

At present, all the industries in Neverwinter were severely short staffed. Apparently, they could not build an air force in a short period of time.

Apart from Tilly, Edith Kant, the Chief of the General Staff, also handed him a report.

The report was short but quite interesting.

Edith believed that the aerial knights had a potential to change the situation of the war and would even play a decisive role in the outcome of the battle, provided that they were properly used. Therefore, she wished to establish a research committee and send them to the academy to learn more about the planes for future strategic studies. She also conceived a few tactics specifically for the aerial knights, which she wished to discuss in detail with Roland at the earliest.

Edith was probably one of the few executives who truly cared about the planes. Roland admired her remarkable perspicacity and the ability to quickly associate the planes with potential war practices.

While Roland was planning to summon Edith to discuss aerial knights, his guard reported, "Your Majesty, the Minister of Construction, Sir Karl Van Bate, wishes to see you."

Roland withdrew his hand from the telephone and said, "Send him in."

"Yes, Your Majesty."

"Your Majesty," Karl saluted as he entered the office. "The construction of the Miracle Building is completed."

...

Roland marveled at the towering building as he stared up at it from the bottom.

It took them two years to build this magnificent edifice. The construction cost them tons of gold royals and a large amount of steel and concrete that was more than enough to build three Redriver Bridges. Thanks to Lotus, Hummingbird and the other witches, they managed to complete the construction with relatively little manpower and few resources.

Contracting an expensive habit of squandering national resources and developing an addiction to extravagant architecture would definitely weaken national power. However, the impact this building

brought upon civilians was also phenomenal, which could be evidenced by the reaction of the spectators.

The striking contrast between the two or three-story residential buildings and the Miracle Building that stood 50 to 60 meters tall exhilarated Roland.

As Neverwinter's new landmark, the Miracle Building not only astonished the masses with its ineffable grandeur but it was also a manifestation of the most advanced technologies currently available in this era. For example, its drainage system was comprised of various water tanks at different levels to ensure that water could be drawn efficiently.

Further, four outdoor "elevators", driven by the steam engines at the basement, could transport dozens of people at a time between different floors. Although the elevators were quite rudimentary compared to modern ones and they required attendants to manually control the operation, they were unprecedented in this era. Passengers could have a birdview of the city through the french windows installed to the elevators.

"Your Majesty, please say something," Karl suggested while placing his hand on his chest after they reached the podium. "Your subjects are waiting for you."

Roland nodded and waved at the thousands of heads below.

A tidal wave of cheers swept over him.

"Good afternoon, my subjects."

"This is the day when the Miracle Building is officially open to the public. It's a building that sets numerous world records. Today will be remembered by our descendents. However, I'm not dwelling on its degree of magnificence but on what you're most concerned about, that is, who will be living here and for whom it was built."

"Is it nobles? No, Graycastle has stripped nobles of their power. Is it the royal family? Of course not. I don't need such a large building to place my bed. The answer is simple. This building is for the residents in Neverwinter, that is, you all."

"You built the Miracle Building and are therefore entitled to this miracle!"

"Every room in this building will be listed for sale. You don't have to be a noble to buy. Just bring your identification card, and you'll become a resident of this building that is destined to be a part of our history!"

As soon as Roland finished, another wave of cheers flooded over him.

"Long live the king!"

"Long live Neverwinter!"

After the chorus died down, Roland continued, "Now, let's ignite the torch at the top of the building. From today onwards, this torch will be lit every night and dazzle the whole city!"

In the deafening roar, Roland and some officials of the City Hall entered the elevator and climbed to the top floor.

A huge stone basin was placed at the center of the roof, brimming with black oil. This thick heavy oil, which had been specifically processed beforehand, had a long lasting power. It would not emit a foul odour or produce smog either. Therefore, it was the optimal fuel for a long-burning flame torch.

"Your Majesty," Nightingale said as she handed Roland the torch.

Roland nodded, took the torch and ambled over to the basin.

He suddenly remembered a song he had once listened to, its familiar lyrics came floating out of his memories.

"The moment there was the first sign of life underwater... you've come a long way..."

A smile curled Roland's lip, and he ignited the torch.

This was the flame of the human civilization, and he hoped that it would burn forever.

Chapter 1198: A Foreigner

At the Sedimentation Bay in the Kingdom of Wolfheart.

As one of the two port cities in the Kingdom of Wolfheart, the dock here was always busy. Merchants from the interior loaded and unloaded their ships before they set off for their next undertaking from this harbor. Alternatively, they traded their commodities with local marine tradesmen. As such, the dock area was essentially a big marketplace where all kinds of transactions took place, from furs all the way to slaves.

White settled himself in his coach, languishing at the raucous coachmen while gazing upon the ocean.

Ever since the outbreak of the war between Graycastle and Hermes, local churches had stopped sending orphans to the Holy City. Having lost the main source of income, merchants in the Kingdom of Wolfheart struggled to live. What was worse, because of the friction between local lords, peace was not restored after the regime of the church was overthrown. Coachmen like White, being financially unstable, thus had to come to the Sedimentation Bay to seek new employment for a living.

Although the war had also somewhat affected the life in the Sedimentation Bay, the nobility still led their previous extravagant lifestyle. As the passage leading to the Cage Mountain was now under the control of the Token Family, it left other lords no choice but to rely on sea shipping to transport their luxurious goods, which, in a way, sustained the economy here.

Of course, the temporary prosperity was also partially attributed to the fact that the baron in the Sedimentation Bay maintained his neutral position.

This was one of the reasons that White chose to strike root here.

He was old and did not want to wander about anymore.

White planned to carry cargo for a few more times and purchase a property with the money earned before starting his own small business.

"Hey, man, any work for you today?" Suddenly, a young worker clambered onto White's coach and jeered at him.

"Get out of my way. It's none of your business," White said gruffly while waving his hand in the same manner as he dismissed an annoying fly. "Don't you get on my carriage. You can't afford the repair of these beautiful wheels."

"Don't say that. Look at me. I'm tiny. Am I going to crush your wagon?" the young man protested as he patted his stomach and slumped against the compartment. He picked up a straw on the floor, sucked it between his teeth and looked around. "What did you carry last time? Why does it smell so funky in here?"

"Get off, or I'll kick your ass," White grunted. He did not know the young man's name, but all the other workers called him Smarty. White did not see any smartiness in him. To him, this young man was simply an unacquainted coworker.

"Really? With your artificial leg? I bet it hurts on rainy days, doesn't it?" the young man said casually. "It looks like it's going to rain soon. Your joints and bones should be hurting now, right?"

Speechless, White glowered at him, wondering when he had found out his secret.

"Haha, don't stare at me like that. I'm here to help you," Smarty explained while spreading out his hands. "There are so many people looking for work. You're an old man and certainly couldn't compete with young guys."

"What's your point?"

"Very simple. My coworkers will help you get a good spot. Are you interested in collaborating with us?"

"And in return?" White asked.

"A comission of 10%. A good deal, eh?" Smarty said, smiling.

White fell silent. The sky above looked sullen. Sea breezes whipped his clothes, preludeing a heavy rain. It was true that his fake leg might hinder him from getting any business from his competitors, and employers would probably not entrust their cargo to a limped laborer.

Hearing no response from him, Smarty snapped his fingers and said, "Well, I take it as a yes?"

"You aren't... just helping me, right?" White asked at length as he stared at him.

"Ahem, if everyone comes to seek me for help, that'll save me a lot of time," Smarty answered evasively. "By the way, can't you switch the straw to cushion? The most popular products in the Sedimentation Bay are the Chaos Drinks from Fjords and perfumes. Although nobles would normally bring their own carriages, you never know what will happen. They would always need a spare carriage. Your wagon is so smelly. Even if I bring business to you, employers probably wouldn't like to hire you..."

White cast a glance at the eloquent young man and finally understood why people called him Smarty. Yet as an aged and experienced man, he had also seen a great deal of life. He thus said, "Did you just ask me what I carried last time?"

"Yes?"

"Cow dung that is used for fuel," he answered slowly. "They were sun-dried, but still it can be wet here and there."

Smarty stiffened. He spat the straw and started to retch.

White grunted triumphantly. A kid was essentially a kid. He rested his eyes back on the ocean and suddenly stood framed to the spot.

Several three-masted ships slowly came into his view, all from the Chambers of Commerce at Fjords, their masts almost 100 feet tall, their golden flags rimmed with black. He did not know what Chamber of Commerce that was.

Whatever ships they were, White only cared about the cargo on them. With such colossal ships, he was certain he would have some business even without Smarty's help.

White got off his coach and untied his horse. He was about to ride to the dock when Smarty suddenly pulled him from the back.

"Hey... it seems something is wrong there."

White turned around impatiently and started at what he saw.

More masts appeared behind the three main ships, their sails forming a "white wall" over the sea.

"God almighty..."

Those grayish-black ships covered every inch of the ocean. White attempted to make a count but soon abandoned this idea after he saw 50 ships come into his sight. As more and more ships followed, White found it hard to catch up with the count. There were probably 100 or 200 ships in total, and maybe even more!

There were giant three-masted ships but also numerous steaming paddle steamers. White had seen these new boats before, but it was his first time seeing so many of them. He was positive even sailors living at the harbor had not seen such a huge fleet.

All the pedlars, sailors and laborers stopped what they were doing and gazed at the approaching fleet.

The dock suddenly became incredibly quiet.

As the ships drew close, they could now see the flags more clearly. White could barely make out the coat of arms on those flags, which featured a lofty tower and spears. All the flags on those ships bore the same coat of arms. Hundreds of banners streamed against the wind and formed a new horizon that awed the spectators.

Smarty gasped.



"Is it... the Graycastle flag?"

White muttered in disbelief, "Are you saying... that the King of Graycastle came here?"

As the Sedimentation Bay could not accommodate so many large ships, most of the ships lowered their sails outside the harbor while the ten steam-powered boats came straight to the dock area.

As soon as the ships disembarked, a group of uniformed men filed out onto the trestle and the dock area, all as expressionless, frosty and reticent as seasoned soldiers.

White swallowed hard. For some reason, he was afraid of these men whom he had never seen before. White had the impression that all the people on the dock felt the same way. Soon, these foreigners occupied the entire trestle but nobody dared to raise an objection.

White realized that this fleet was not here for trading goods.

The air above the dock became thick and heavy.

The leaden clouds in the sky seemed to be even lower.

Chapter 1199: The Commotion in the Kingdom of Wolfheart

"What damn weather," the baron, Jean Bate, muttered as he stared at the overcast sky by the window. "It's raining again."

It rained a lot in the Sedimentation Bay, particularly in summer and fall. Unexpected storms visited this city often, so the city was equipped with a well-developed drainage system. Unlike the Broken Tooth Castle and Graystone City where roads instantly turned muddy after a heavy rain, the rain here would only affect the cargo transportation. The impact of the weather was indeed minimal to the urban area.

Jean was actually more frustrated about himself than the upcoming rain.

The sky would soon clear out after the shower, but his mood would remain gloomy.

"Sir, have you figured out how to reply to them?" His clerk, Zum, asked gingerly.

"Reply?" the baron sneered. "What would you say if you have to pick between being hanged and being burned?"

"Er..." The clerk fell silent.

"You can't make a choice either, right? So, let's just keep them waiting."

"But..." Zum broke off, trying to formulate a proper answer.

Jean Bate knew very well that playing for time was just a temporary solution. Like the prospective storm that would come no matter merchants liked it or not, he had to solve this problem regardless.

Everything started with the war against the church.

After the fall of the king's city of the Kingdom of Wolfheart, dozens of lords, all of a sudden, claimed that they were the bastards of the King of Wolfheart. These alleged royal blood formed cliques and factions

to fight for the throne. After numerous fierce battles, the kingdom was divided into three major territories, each dominated by the Token Family in the northwest, the "Redstone Gate" Family in the south, and the "Tusk" Family in the mountainous area in the east.

Since the Tokens were relatively far from the Sedimentation Bay, they had never come to bother Jean. However, both the Redstone Gate Family and the Tusk Family were trying strenuously to win him over to further expand their territories.

The baron had been taking a neutral position during the war. His disinterest in political gains soon brought huge profits to his city. Since the two dukes relied on the port to transport food and gold royals, and because they had been busy with conquering other surrounding cities and towns, the two families had not extended their power over the Sedimentation Bay as yet.

However, as the expansion progressed, the Tusk and Redstone Gate Families gradually became two of the most competitive candidates for the future sovereign. Since the Tokens suddenly extended a full reign over the Cage Mountain, the Tusk and Redstone thus again rested their eyes on the baron's domain, the Sedimentation Bay.

Jean knew exactly what they aimed at.

They wanted to seize the Sedimentation Bay and banned commercial trades of their opponents as a way to overpower the other. To this end, both dukes sent their ambassadors, along with dozens of knights and mercenaries, in an ostensible attempt to lobby him.

The port was only guarded by a patrol team and several of Jean's own guards. Those guards could cope with savage pirates but definitely not fully-equipped knights. Jean Bate did not plan to resist. He would pledge alliance to whoever that ascended the throne, and he did not care whether this succeder was the true blood of the late king.

Unfortunately, however, the Redstone Gate and the Tusk Families were powerful in equal measure.

Under such circumstances, he could join neither of them.

Whichever side he picked, he would suffer virulent vengeance from the other party. Losing the right to trade meant they would have to produce food and other military supplies by themselves while the other party would be entitled to a constant supply of resources. Neither of the two families would like to put themselves in such an unfavorable situation.

Therefore, a war would be inevitable.

There was no fortified city wall or deep moat protecting the city, which meant that Jean had to pick a side to defend against the invasion.

However, would the two families support him?

The baron could not take a chance.

Shrewd as the two dukes, they would probably sacrifice the subjects of the Sedimentation Bay to reduce the casualties of their knights and then cut the retreat once their enemy entered the city, for they cared only about the land not the people.

Perhaps, it would be better to abandon the Sedimentation Bay to the two families.

That was why Jean said this was a decision between being hanged and being burned.

Jean sent the two emissary delegations to the same campsite, hoping their acrimony against each other would earn him time to think over the matter. He rather hoped the two parties engaged in a physical altercation. To this end, Jean had even sent women and strong liquor to inveigle them into fighting, but other than a fierce verbal argument, neither of the two parties made the first move.

"Tick, tick..."

The rain finally pounded against the garden of his mansion, draping a misty curtain between Heaven and earth.

Watching flowers swaying gently in the rain, the baron lapsed into silence. He knew it was not wise to play for time, but he could not think of any other way to get out of this dilemma. His grandfather used to advise him that nobles tended to always waver between interests and power. As long as he took advantage of their indecisiveness, he would never lose. Perhaps, it was time for him to stop playing games but start to think deeper and more strategically.

Just then, a pattering of running footsteps interrupted his thought.

"S-sir, bad news!"

"What's the matter? Now, now, take it easy!" Jean Bate said as he shot the guard a glance. "What happened?" He stared at the guard's quivering lips, hoping to hear words like "knights" or "campsite" that hinted a fight between the two families.

"The fleet of the King, the King of Graycastle took the port. They not only took over the dock but also forbade anyone to approach that area!" The news was so shocking that for a moment, Jean stood rooted to the ground.

"What did you say? Gray, Graycastle?" the baron stammered. "Do they want to sell anything here? Hang on... you said they blocked off the dock?"

"Yes!" the guard blustered frantically. "They drove away the boats around the trestle for their own ships. They say they're going to borrow the port for a while and assure that order will soon be established. The patrol team attempted to stop them but was immediately disarmed. It's reported that there are hundreds of Graycastle ships outside the harbor!"

Jean Bate asked incredulously, "Are you sure it's the fleet of the King of Graycastle, not any lord?"

"Yes, I saw them through my telescope," the guard replied with some difficulties. "I confirm that the coat of arms on the flags does represent Graycastle. It has a tower and spears."

Jesus, did Graycastle intend to invade the Kingdom of Wolfheart?

Why did Wimbledon not pick his neighbor but him?

Even if the King of Graycastle desired to expand his territory, he did not necessarily have to launch an attack on the sea. Could the Token Family resist the army of Graycastle who had once defeated the church?

No, this did not make sense...

The baron dealt hurriedly with crowding thoughts.

Then his clerk Zum came up to him and whispered something in his ear.

The baron's face lighted up.

Yes, this was what he was exactly waiting for!

The army of Graycastle definitely had the capability to break the deadlock between the two warring families. If this fleet did plan to wage a war here, they would need the help of local nobles no matter how invincible they were. With just a little guidance, they would be able to conquer the entire land. Jean did not have specific preference over any lord, but apparently, the King of Graycastle could offer him more than any of the nobles. Possibly in the near future, he would become a governor of some jurisdiction if he chose to pledge fealty to the King of Graycastle.

Even if Wimbledon failed his attempt, Jean would not lose anything.

Just at that moment, another guard burst in. "Sir, the Graycastle fleet sent an ambassador on behalf of King Roland Wimbledon, who wishes to speak to you."

Jean Bate exchanged a look with the clerk before he said with a nod, "He's our guest. Tell the ambassador that I'll come out to meet him."

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"Now?" the guard asked blankly. "Right away?"

"Yes."

Usually, according to common practices of the nobility, he should let the ambassador rest for a few days and welcome him with a sumptuous banquet. At least, he should have set up a meeting time beforehand, possibly at night. After all, the ambassador represented the King of Graycastle, and thus should be treated with formality to some degree.

However, Jean couldn't wait any longer. Had it not been rainy outside, he would have rushed to the dock and met this ambassador himself. Such a huge fleet would definitely draw the attention of the Tusk and the Redstone Gate Families. If either of them got in touch with Graycastle before him, things would become very complicated.

With this thought, Jean Bate said to the guard, "By the way, tell the Graycastle delegation that I'm the sole authority that governs the Sedimentation Bay."

"Yes, sir."

Yet after the guard left at his bidding, Jean suddenly regretted his impulsive action.

He should not have said "right away". What if the ambassador wanted to follow and observe the tradition first then call him a few days later?

Jean blamed his own vanity at the bottom of his heart. He should have been more straightforward.

And why did it rain right as he wanted to go out?

The baron felt miserable.

But surprisingly, the guard returned within an hour and brought him a good news.

"Sir, they're coming."

Jean Bate stood bolt upright and said, "Take them to my parlour immediately."

...

The baron soon met the ambassador from Graycastle.

There were only ten people who came, and half of them were soldiers that were guarding outside the door. The rest were all formally dressed, whom Jean gathered were assistants and clerks. The one in the middle was apparently the ambassador himself. He noticed that the coats they were wearing were waterproof, as all of them were dry despite the pouring rain outside. The material of their coats had a bright, fresh color. It was, however, neither fur nor leather.

It appeared that the rumor which Graycastle did produce many curious items was true.

However, Jean squeezed his eyebrow as he looked on the ambassador. The ambassador was definitely a Mojin by his look. Why could a Mojin, who usually served as a slave here, be a noble in Graycastle?

Even though he was shocked, the baron showed a hearty smile and completely hid his emotions. He spread out his hands and said, "I'm the lord of the Sedimentation Bay. As you can see, this is a beautiful and bustling city, a wonderful place for you to take a rest. May I know what brought you here today?"

The baron was speaking in such a humble courteous manner, and he was confident that even a duke would receive him with some civilities.

But the Mojin remained expressionless. He replied flatly, "My name is Iron Axe, the commander of the First Army and also the supervisor of this expedition. Let's save the small talk. The Kingdom of Everwinter and the Kingdom of Wolfheart will soon become a battlefield. I came here on the order of the King of Graycastle, Chief of the Mojin clan, and ruler of the Fertile Plains, King Roland Wimbleton, to save your all."

"What the heck?"

Jean Bate could not believe what he had just heard, wondering what the Chief meant and where the Fertile Plains was. Was the ambassador making a war threat against the Kingdom of Everwinter and the Kingdom of Wolfheart? Why did he threaten him outright without negotiation?

"Er..."

Instead, it was Zum who replied first, "Is the First Army the army that defeated the church?"

"Yes," Iron Axe affirmed with a nod.

"Sir Iron Axe, we obviously don't want to see a war here, but we can't make the decision on our own. There will always be someone who will attempt to resist. If you could persuade them, then we can avoid this war." Zum retorted.

Jean nodded vigorously, and he was glad that Zum did a good job. In that case, the Redstone Gate and the Tusk had to fight as well. He looked at Iron Axe triumphantly but was surprised to see a hint of sarcasm in Iron Axe's eyes.

Iron Axe said placidly, "You don't have a choice. The entire human race will have to fight when the enemy comes. In fact, this war has already begun in a place you don't know. I think you've heard about some rumors about the church, the Divine Will, and the attack of a foreign race."

Jean Bate gaped. As the lord of the port city, he had indeed heard about such things from marine merchants. However, these groundless rumors could only serve as the subject of public discussion but not a proper diplomatic topic at the negotiation table. Nonetheless, judging from the ambassador's tone, Jean realized he was serious.

"Yes, these are all true," Iron Axe said slowly and firmly.

Thunders began to roar outside the window.

"Wow, are they all made out of iron?" Smarty asked as he leaned dramatically on the stable fences.

"Even iron will rust. In my opinion, they aren't human," White answered as he wiped the water off the horseback and fumbled his wet clothes. "Will a reasonable person stand in the rain? Only a lunatic will do that."

Within an hour, hundreds of people exited from the ships and took control of the whole harbor. Pedlars were dispersed by the storm, but these men put up tents in the middle of the square. A few moments later, dark green sheds filled half of the dock.

In addition to the tents, Graycastle men also set up tube-shaped obstacles on the crossroad and some higher parts of the road. These metal tubes did not look like weapons, but they glinted in the rain, giving White a queasy feeling in the pit of his stomach.

Each "tube" was guarded by soldiers. Although everyone was wearing a waterproof cloak, it was impossible to stay completely dry in this weather. Gusts of wind were so furious that they sent rushes of rain in every direction. White could envision how water trickled down through those soldiers' collars and soaked their clothes.

It must be awful to stand out there.

The Sedimentation Bay was wet and rainy all year round, so the local lord had built many temporary sheds in the dock area. However, these soldiers took no notice of them. They stood straight in their gleamy cloaks like rocks.

"Men from Graycastle are crazy..." White mumbled to himself.

"Hmm, weird," Smarty muttered.

"What now?" White said gruffly.

"Look at those cargo ships, then look at those outside the harbor," Smarty said. "The ones outside the harbour are three-masted sailing ships, but they're shallow on the draft."

"What's a draft?"

"Just view it as a measurement for the cargo weight," Smarty said dismissively. "Even though these cargo ships have been unloaded, they're still much deeper on the draft than the sailing ships outside. I don't understand. What are the Graycastle men up to? Are they bluffing about their forces?"

"What are you talking about?" White said impatiently.

"My point is... that these ships might be empty!" Smarty replied in a subdued voice.

...

Jean Bate did not pull himself together until Iron Axe finished.

He had just heard about the long, distant history of the wars between humans and demons, that this war took place every four hundred years, and that this time, the demons were very likely to invade the interior from the Impassable Mountain Range!

"Are you... sure?" Jean remembered that the north of the Kingdom of Everwinter was girdled by endless mountains and steep cliffs. How could the demons invade from there?

"No, I'm not sure. That's why I brought my scouts here," Iron Axe said while shrugging. "However, whichever direction the demons come from, it won't make a difference. We have to unite together and defend this continent. Otherwise, mankind will be exterminated."

The baron suddenly had a queer feeling as if he were walking in his dream. He knew his clerk and guards all felt the same way.

"Ahem, alright then. Let's suppose that what you said was all true," Jean said after clearing his throat. "So why did the King of Graycastle send you here? Isn't the Kingdom of Everwinter where you are suppose to be?"

"It is, and don't you worry about that. What we want here is very simple, that is, to save as many people as possible from this war, including freemen, slaves, refugees and vagabonds," Iron Axe paused for a moment and then continued, "except nobles. Nobles shall make their own choices. If you cooperate with the First Army, we'll return your properties, land, titles and so on when we depart. If you try to stop us..."

Jean swallowed.

"You'll be the First Army's enemy," Iron Axe finished his sentence coldly.