

Witch 1251

Chapter 1251: Partner

“Hello, Mr. Roland,” Rock’s calming voice immediately came from the other end of the line. “I didn’t expect you to call me so early in the morning. Is there an emergency?”

Roland then suddenly realized that it was only 7:00. Feeling a little embarrassed, he faltered, “Er... sorry, did I wake you up? I do have something that needs the Association’s help. It has nothing to do with the Fallen Evils, but it’s important to me.”

“No worries,” Rock said. “Normal people tend to sleep more. However, for me, as an aged Awakened, I’m awake most of the time. What can I do for you?”

Roland had been pretty active recently in the Martialist Association. He had not only managed to kill a great number of Fallen Evils, but more importantly, he usually acted alone. Nevertheless, he killed more Fallen Evils than anyone else except the two teams led by the two Defenders and the team comprised of celebrated martialists led by Fei Yuhan. His outstanding performance encouraged all traditional martialists, which made Roland quite influential among the Association executives.

Of course, Roland did not report all the Fallen Evils he had exterminated. Most of the fallen cores had dissipated and returned to the Dream World. He always took a group of Taquila witches with him when conducting an operation. Therefore, the Fallen Evils were literally defenseless when confronting a group of combat witches with various strange abilities.

Anyhow, Roland soon made his name among the Association members. He could access any facilities in the Martialist Association and was also entitled a telephone that allowed him to directly communicate with the Defenders.

“Before that, I would like to ask you one question first. What’s the relationship between the Prism City and the Clover Group?” Roland remembered that Garcia had once told him that her father had participated in the construction of the Prism City.

“In short, we’re long-term partners,” Rock answered. “Of course, we’ve developed partnership with many corporations, as the operation of the Association requires a large amount of money and resources.”

“In other words, we’re also their big clients?”

“You can put it that way.”

“Very well,” Roland said, and he quickly told Rock what he needed.

Surprisingly, Rock lapsed into a long silence. After quite a while, he said hesitantly, “I have no issue with that, but... why is it important to you?”

“It’s also important to this world,” Roland replied truthfully. Even if Nightingale came to the Dream World, she would not be able to tell whether Roland was lying or not, for the Battle of Divine Will indeed

concerned every single person in this world. If the human race was defeated, Roland would die too. By then, the Dream World would also stop working and freeze in an eternity in the Realm of Mind.

“Alright, I see,” Rock conceded. “But anyway, I have to thank you on behalf of the Association. Without you, there would not have been so many young martialists choosing to stay, and our situation would have been even more precarious.”

Roland was somehow a little moved by the Defender’s sincerity when he heard the reply. Although the reason for him to hunt down Fallen Evils was quite different from the Association’s, he did feel that Rock truly appreciated his help. Perhaps, just like Lan had said, for them, this world was real.

Roland had wanted to say, “That’s nothing. It’s my duty”, but for some reason, he changed his mind in the last minute.

“... I’ll protect this world,” he said.

Roland then hung up the telephone and sent Zero off. Although Zero was now awakened, she still needed to go to school. Since Saint Miran, Dido and Ling were all in the same school as Zero, Roland did not worry about Fallen Evils.

After that, he went to the Rose Café.

Since his last meeting with Lan, the coffeeshop had been closed, and the roll-up door had been clamp shut. The only way to access the coffeeshop was through the side door from the warehouse.

It was always busy here.

The witches were currently preparing their breakfast. Roland instantly smelled delicious barbecue as he pushed open the door.

After he had a big breakfast and the witches were all gone, Roland drove out of the apartment building.

The headquarters of the Clover Group was in downtown, so Roland soon arrived there.

Since Roland had told the Association that he would visit here in advance, he was immediately led upstairs before he could reveal his martialist identity. The elevator stopped at the 100th floor, and Roland greeted a bright, spacious office surrounded by large French windows. Now, he had a new understanding of the financial capacity of the Clover Group.

“We met again, Mr. Roland,” Garde said as he came up to Roland and shook his hand. “I didn’t expect that you would elevate yourself from a newbie to such an important figure in the Association so quickly. Young men indeed have great potential!”

Roland was a little surprised at this warm reception. He remembered that last time, Garde had been pretty cold to him even though he had showed him his hunting license.

So it was true that businessmen cared more about a person’s background than his professional competence.

After a little small talk, Roland jumped into the business and asked, “Did the Defender, Rock, tell you the purpose of my trip?”

Garde shook his head and answered, "Mr. Rock only told me that you need some help from the corporation and asked us to assist you as much as we can. But you know that I don't make the final call in the Clover Group."

This meant that the Clover Group would proceed with the purchase of the apartment building. Even if Garde agreed to terminate the plan, the Board of Director would not easily approve this motion. Roland smiled. He knew that Garde thought that he had come here for Garcia. In fact, nobody could demolish a building guarded by the witches unless he let them do so.

Roland was also very pleased that the Defender did not tell Garde about his actual plan but leave Roland some room for negotiation. It seemed that the Defender completely trusted Roland, which made Roland like the Association even better.

"It isn't something too complicated," Roland said as he spread out his hands. "I want to found a small manufacture plant, or a machinery model factory that aims to design and manufacture some old machineries such as steam engines, old-school tractors, etc... Something nostalgic, like armored trucks and artilleries. Do you understand?"

Garde twitched his lips and asked, "Are you planning to make a movie?"

"You can put it that way, but unlike those fake props, I need real ones, and I also have specific requirements."

"As far as I know, few people need them nowadays..."

"I'm not going to sell them. I make them just for fun. I don't need an assembly line or anything, so it saves you money."

Garde was silent for quite a while. He viewed this business as a complete failure.

"I didn't know that Mr. Roland had such a peculiar hobby," Garde said finally. "In other words, you want the Clover Group to help you found a small factory and hire designers and workers?"

Roland suddenly realized that it was not going to be an easy project. Apart from the factory, the designers should have an engineering background, and it would not be that fast to recruit so many professionals even for the Clover Group. Roland thus replied, "Yeah, that's pretty much about it. Take your time. I'm not in a rush."

"I need to ask my secretary first," Garde said as he returned to his desk and picked up the telephone.

15 minutes later, the secretary called back.

Garde turned around and looked at Roland. "Perhaps, there's a factory that meets your requirement."

"Well, that was fast!" Roland said in surprise.

"It's pure luck," Garde returned modestly, although he looked pretty proud of his corporation. "I can take you there if you don't have any other plan."

Chapter 1252: The Design Bureau of Graycastle

The factory Garde referred to was situated at a construction site in the southern suburb.

Garde offered a ride to Roland, so Roland did not have to drive his battered mini van. In fact, he had a luxurious travel experience.

Roland had to admit that the car seat of Garde's vehicle was even more comfortable than his couch at home. He also loved the iced champagne in the freezer at the rear. It was such an addictive trip.

Nevertheless, Roland preferred coke to champagne.

Garde drove off the highway and onto a rutted road. At this point, Roland could hear the roars of machineries and see trucks and excavators everywhere.

Above the construction site hung a large banner which read, "Clover Construction Corporation Ltd.". A little farther on lay serried towering pile foundation.

In response to Roland's curious look, Garde explained, "The corporation plans to build a modern car dealership for alternative fuel vehicles. Currently, the construction department is responsible for this project. It'll be later transferred to the manufacture department. It took us a while to get this project approved. We just got the approval a few months ago."

No wonder Garcia did not really talk about the demolition of the apartment building anymore recently. The Clover Group had temporarily shifted their focus on something else.

"What about the factory?"

"It'll be demolished," Garde returned. "It used to be an agricultural machinery plant. Although having gone through several reforms, it eventually failed to keep up with the times. Considering your special request, I'll save it for you. Although I'm not the superintendent of this project, I've already talked to the person responsible for the demolition. He says it's OK to leave it as it is for now."

"What about the staff?" Roland asked. He cared more about the recruitment than the venue itself.

"Most of them are gone," Garde said while shrugging. "Only an old technician who is about to retire and a dozen workers are still working. They belong to my family. Once the car dealership is officially open, they'll probably switch to their new roles."

Roland could not help thinking that this plan sounded pretty unreliable, but it was better than nothing. He certainly could not open a design bureau full of top designers and experts at once. This was a good start after all.

When they finally reached the destination, however, Roland's heart sank further. What came into his view was a dilapidated plant no larger than 500 square meters. The steel plates on the wall were all rusty. The floor was incubated in thick dust. Roland's spirit was further oppressed by the dust and grit that lay thick on the machine tools. Apparently, the plant had been deserted for a long time.

He followed Garde upstairs and to the manager's office, from which came the voices of two people.

"Sigh, I don't know when the corporation will demolish this building. I feel like my butt is covered with mold as I sit here days after days."

“It isn’t that bad to sit here doing nothing. You won’t get a raise in the new company anyway. Perhaps, you’ll have to work overtime every day. I would rather stay here.”

“What nonsense you’re talking about,” an elderly voice cut across them. “Young men like you should be proactive.”

“Proactivity means nothing... If I could retire now, I would do it immediately.”

“By the way, Master Xie, you’ll be retiring soon, right? I’ve heard that the boss has asked you several times. I believe he wouldn’t say anything even if you stopped coming here now.”

“I like it here... I’ve been working here for nearly 30 years. I would like to stay here as long as I can before it’s torn down.”

“Do you mind me taking some pictures for you?”

“You brat! Photos can’t be the same!”

“Hang on, I just heard someone coming — ”

Then there was a rustling sound coming from behind the door.

By the time Garde’s secretary opened the door, everyone in the room was back to work. Some of them were organizing documents on the desk while others were typing in front of their computers as if they had been busy from the beginning.

“M, Mr. Garde, what wind blew you here?” Everyone was stunned as they saw Garde. Apparently, the boss they had been talking about was not Garde. It somehow reminded Roland of a governmental official who suddenly showed up at a small village unexpected.

“I came to show my friend around,” Garde replied and then cast a look at the eldest worker among all. “You’re Master Xie, right? I’ve heard you’ve been working here for several decades?”

Roland rested his eyes upon this elderly mechanist. He was around 60 years old by his appearance, his hair almost gone, with only a few thin strands of hair clinging to his scalp. A large pair of reading glasses slid off his nose bridge. He looked tiny and withered, with a discolored thermal in his hand. Except for his beedy, glistening eyes, he looked no different than those retired elders in the apartment building.

Perhaps, the only thing that this Master Xie took pride in was his length of service.

“Yes, you’re right, sir,” Master Xie said in a sort of unctuous tone as he massaged his thermal a little restlessly. “I’ve been working in the plant for 29 years, 29 years precisely.”

Roland’s heart sank to the bottom. Master Xie did not seem very reliable or professional to him. A real master, in his opinion, should be conceited and proud. He was now thinking about recruiting people online.

“You did a great job,” Garde said smilingly. “My young friend is actually interested in taking over this plant. Show him around and give him a basic idea of this factory.”

“Al-alright,” Master Xie stammered as he gave Roland a surprised look. “But isn’t the plant going to be...”

“If he likes it here, we can leave the plant open.”

Roland immediately sensed Master Xie’s burning gaze.

“How can I address you, sir?”

“Just Roland.”

“OK, Mr. Roland, please follow me!”

Master Xie took Roland down to the plant in great excitement. He was about to introduce the long history of the plant when Roland suddenly interrupted him, “Compared to that, I’m more interested in what you did in the past?”

“I did pretty much everything...” Master Xie said with a smile. “I was a fitter at first, and then I was promoted to workshop supervisor. Later, I became the assistant director of the plant. I had to take three or four people’s shifts when it was busy. During the day, I supervised the assembly line, and at night, I taught young workers how to repair machineries. Gradually, my eyesight got worse, so I stopped working at the front.”

Roland stopped and asked, “Do you have designing experience?”

Yes, naturally. Although I didn’t go to college, I learned a lot by myself. The plant used to have night school. But pencils and rulers are, after all, incomparable to computers. After the corporation founded a design department, nobody these days look at those drawings anymore.”

“If I want a caterpillar tractor that is very different from what’s available on the market, are you able to create one?”

“A tractor? Haha, I’m too familiar with it. I’m not boasting, Mr. Roland. I can make one with my eyes shut as long as you provide me with a few apprentices to assist me.”

Roland asked in surprise, “Why didn’t the Clover Group assign you to the design department then?”

“They design on computers now. I’ve heard that everything in the new plant is automatic. Robotic arms and robots do the majority of the work. The staff members in the old plant all went to sales and administration. I can’t do anything there even if they recruited me.”

There was a hint of melancholy in Master Xie’s voice.

However, Roland had now completely changed his previous opinion on this old worker.

Who cared that he looked ordinary? An ordinary worker like Master Xie knew exactly how to keep a low profile.

What did it matter that he looked a little too homely? A modest team leader was easier to manage.

It was totally fine that he did not know about computers. In this way, Roland could hire a bunch of cheap designers.

“Very well, very well,” Roland said while nodding vigorously. His lips curled up into a satisfied smile.

“Huh?” Master Xie was utterly bewildered and did not understand why Roland said that.

“The plant will remain open,” Roland said flatly. “I’ll transform it into a new design bureau, and you’ll be my chief designer.”

“A design... bureau?”

“That’s right,” Roland said as he extended out his hand. “Welcome to the Design Bureau of Graycastle.”

Chapter 1253: Things of A Wrong Age

“Um... Mr. Roland,” Master said after a firm handshake. “What’s that Design Bureau for?”

“To make everything I want you to make,” Roland answered smilingly. “For example, right now, I want you to make a brand new tractor. It must be easy to operate and manufacture, also with a great potential for future modification.”

“There should have been a lot of tractors like that on the market...”

“I certainly expect more than that. What I just mentioned is just a basic idea,” Roland said while shaking his head. “First of all, except for the engine, you must make everything else by yourselves.”

“Then it’ll cost a lot,” Master said while clicking his tongue.

“I don’t need a lot of them. It should be around the same price as those handicrafts. I have a few collector friends who’re willing to spend money on them.”

“I see...”

“Also, no automatic machine tools should be used during the manufacture process. Well...” Roland paused at these words and surveyed the surroundings. “The tools currently used in the plant look fine to me. I need the size and the manufacture method of each spare part. In other words, the Design Bureau should not only make them but also draw the floor plan for the assembly line.”

Seeing Master Xie look a little worried, Roland added, “Of course, I’ll recruit some students to assist you. You only need to give them work to do.”

“OK then... It’ll probably take more than half a year to complete the project with just pencils and paper.”

“The last thing that I’m going to tell you now is the most important one,” Roland went on. “You must have creativity.”

Momentarily stunned, Master Xie asked, “I’m sorry?”

“For example, the tractor that I want you to make is powered by steam. Therefore, technically, we need a large boiler to store fuels and water. However, in reality, there are no such parts, so you should imagine that it’s powered by nuclear energies, like those in movies.”

“...” Master Xie was now totally speechless and astounded.

“Given that, you must minimize the impact of those ‘non-existent parts’ when you make the model. Only in that way can we collect reliable data during the test. Do you understand what I’m saying?”

“Er...” Master Xie thought for a while before he asked gingerly. “You mean that we should imagine it as something that doesn’t belong to this era?”

“Exactly,” Roland said, grinning. “Do you have any technical difficulties?”

“In theory, no, but...” he said hesitantly. “But to tell you the truth, you probably can’t really use it even if we successfully produce such a machine.”

“That’s exactly what I need. My collector friends don’t really want them to have practical values.”

Profoundly relieved, Master Xie then asked, “Well... Mr. Roland, what about the salary of the chief designer?”

“Twice your pension,” Roland replied with a smile.

After Roland returned to the Garde’s car, Garde put down his wine glass and shrugged. “So, what do you think?”

“Pretty good. I just don’t know how to calculate the expenses of a factory...” Roland said courteously.

“Forget about those trivial matters. It’s an honor that we Clover Group could help the Martialist Association,” Garde said while waving his hand. “I’ll talk to the other executives regarding this project later. From now on, you’re their new boss.”

It was not hard to leave a factory that was going to be demolished open, as the land and the property still belonged to the Clover Group. All the corporation needed to provide was the salaries of the workers and the expenses for the maintenance of the old machineries. It was obviously a very good deal for the Clover Group, for they earned the trust of the Defender of the Prism City at a minimal cost.

Had Roland conducted the project all by himself, he would have needed to spend hundreds of thousands of dollars, and there was no guarantee that he would succeed.

Having said that, Roland did not want to miss a single opportunity of using the Clover Group.

“Is it really OK? I think we need to at least recruit more people to ensure the smooth operation of the plant. To increase productivity, we also need to work out a reward system, and that’ll cost a lot of money.”

“Hmm...” Garde pondered for a while and said, “I’ll send a person to help you with the finance. If there’s any extra expense, just let her know. But Mr. Roland, you know the Clover Group won’t approve if you request too much...”

“I understand that you’re not the only person who makes the decision. Don’t worry, I know what I’m doing. Thank you for your help.” Sending a finance personnel was also an effective way to minimize risks while also keeping an eye on his spending.

“That’s nothing.”

They clanked the wine glasses.

Three days later, the agricultural machinery plant became the Design Bureau of Graycastle. Although it looked as desolate as ever, the workers in there were quite enthusiastic about their new job after being promised they they would get promoted and have a raise.

Roland instantly felt a lot relieved after this matter had been settled. He could not help smiling when he thought of the prospective expansion and the grand future of the Design Bureau of Graycastle. Even his work had become more enjoyable.

With the help of the Design Bureau, Anna did not necessarily have to work day and night. She could, instead, put more of her efforts into inventions that she enjoyed much better. Overall, the project brought a lot of benefits.

The workers in the Bureau would probably never know that their drawings would one day turn into reality in the other world and become weapons used to perpetuate the glory of the mankind in the bitter war against a foreign race.

“What are you laughing at, Your Majesty?” Nightingale asked as she revealed herself and cast him a despicable look. “Having fun last night? I hope you didn’t do anything improper in the dream.”

“How come? Do I look like that kind of person?”

Nightingale twitched her lips and said, “It’s very understandable. Phyllis told me that the ancient witches don’t really care about it. They view it as something just as normal as sleeping and eating.”

“... Did she?”

“No, I’m teasing,” Nightingale said while squinting at Roland. “So, you were thinking about that, were you?”

Apparently, this was one of Nightingale’s trap.

“I’m impressed with your imagination,” Roland said sarcastically as he stared at her. “I’m happy because I solved a big problem. It’s not what you’re thinking.”

“Hmm, I detect that it’s 95% true. I take it as you’re telling the truth,” Nightingale said while spreading out her hands.

“Wow, you can round it up to a specific percentage now?”

“Yes, probably because I use my ability more often, I feel my sense become sharper.”

“Then what about the left 5%? Just a disclaimer, I didn’t lie.”

“Perhaps, you aren’t that certain subconsciously,” Nightingale sneered.

Roland was speechless. He had a feeling that he would eventually fall into Nightingale’s trap if he continued with this conversation.

“By the way,” Nightingale went on after she ate a piece of dried fish. “You haven’t been staring at the Bloody Moon recently.”

“That’s right...” Roland said and suddenly realized that he had not looked up at the sky for a long time. The crimson sphere was still suspended in midair, completely stationary however he looked at it. “Probably because I know that it’s just a hollow of nothingness.”

Just then, the telephone on his desk rang.

It was from the Administrative Office.

“Barov? What’s the matter?” Roland said after he picked up the receiver.

“Your Majesty, the increase in the immigrants exceeds our expectation,” Barov complained over the telephone. “If things go on like that, we won’t have much money left in the treasury!”

Chapter 1254: A Currency Reform

Roland passed through a few heavily guarded gates and entered the treasury in the castle district.

Back when he had still been in the Border Town, he had only had a few cases of gold royals that were sufficient to maintain the operation of the small town. Since the sale of the steam engines and other magical artifacts, his revenues had increased rapidly and soon reached a peak.

With the expansion of his territory, the expenses incurred also increased correspondingly. For the convenience of the Administrative Office, a treasury was built between the castle and the Administrative Office. Although it has heavily guarded, all the directors had access to it as long as they followed an appropriate procedure. This decision had indeed sparked a heated discussion in the beginning. It was unprecedented that a noble spent all his money on the expansion of his territory, let alone allowing other people to access it.

At that time, nobody except Barov had known that Roland did not give a damn about his treasures. All he had cared about was the urbanization of the city. For a very long time, the revenues in Neverwinter had been greater than the expenses. Barov had not had a financial issue for quite a while.

“Your Majesty,” Barov, who had been waiting in the treasury, said respectfully. “You see, we only have 12 cases of gold royals left.”

Normally, there were around 2,000 gold royals in a case, which meant that they currently only had 20,000 gold royals in total. The treasury now looked pretty empty compared to the past.

Although there were mounds of silver royals and bronze royals, they were not worth much.

“How long will they last?” Roland asked.

“Based on the current situation, two months at most.”

“It’s faster than I thought,” Roland commented as he raised his brows. “Are most of the spendings on the payrolls?”

“Yes. The payroll expenses take up more than half of the total expenses. As the population grows too fast, there’s a big increase in the payroll of the construction team and the welding unit. Plus, we have to pay the Chambers of Commerce from the Fjords 4,000 to 5,000 gold royals every month. If we stop this

payment, the Administrative Office will be able to manage until we receive the profit of the sale from the Joint Chamber of Commerce — ”

“We need people,” Roland cut across Barov.

“Then...” Barov said as he massaged his hands nervously. “I remember you said in the last meeting that there was a permanent solution. Is it true?”

“You still remember,” Roland said smilingly as he surveyed the treasury. He had anticipated that this day would come. The treasury was quite spacious and bright. It would be almost the same as an ordinary residence if without the iron bars and the shelves. Therefore, it would be a perfect place to produce notes. “When’s the next payroll due?”

“In a week.”

“Store away these gold royals. We don’t need them for the time being,” Roland said while nodding. “Come with me to my office. I need to found a new department, and I’ll discuss the details with you when we get there.”

Although it was a little earlier than Roland had expected, Roland had started preparing for this day half a year ago. He had actually conducted a pilot project by distributing notes to the Witch Union and the Sleeping Spell. The result showed that the witches had no way to forge those testing notes, which indicated that it was now time to replace metal currencies with paper currencies. He could put them into use anytime.

“Yes, Your Majesty,” Barov responded. It was obvious that this old governor feared that he would sink into poverty again. After receiving the confirmation, his face lighted up, all the wrinkles around the corner of his eyes smoothened. “By the way, Your Majesty, what’s the name of this new department?”

“Bank,” Roland replied.

Five days later, a new notice posted on the bulletin at the central square in Neverwinter created an uproar among the public. The Administrative Office, very surprisingly, sent a person to further explain the notice, which was very rare after the implementation of universal education.

The notice also made the headline on the Graycastle Weekly. According to the notice, the king was going to distribute a new type of currency to replace gold royals, silver royals and bronze royals.

For the next couple of days, everyone in the kingdom was discussing this currency reform.

So were the customers in the hotel where Victor stayed.

Victor had planned to return to the Port of Clearwater after the magic movie. However, the appearance of the Bloody Moon disrupted his original plan. Due to disorder and the unstable situation, he immediately changed his plan and decided to stay in Neverwinter for a while. He made this decision not out of his loyalty to the king but because he believed that it would be only worse in other cities. Since the Bloody Moon represented the end of the world, the safest place on this continent would be Neverwinter.

Peace was soon restored after the king and the queen came to sooth the masses. With the the police and the garrison cracking down criminals, order was quickly re-established. Victor, as the witness to the

incident at the movie theater, was summoned by the police several times for investigation purposes. When he was about to leave the soft arms of his maid and head back to the south, he heard the news of the currency reform.

The shock brought about by this new policy was far greater than that by the Bloody Moon.

The king was going to abolish the currency system that had been in use since the foundation of the four kingdoms!

As a businessman, Victor had not believed it when he had first heard the news. He had thought that they were delirious ramblings of some drunkards. Gold was the most precious metal throughout the four kingdoms as well as foreign countries. How could the king abolish the currency system all of a sudden?

Nevertheless, he later confirmed the validity of the information after reading the newspaper brought in by the maid. The rumors circulated among various taverns and pubs also further confirmed the news.

The first reform policy was that "All the old currencies shall be replaced by the new currencies. It is mandatory to use the new currencies to conduct transactions in accordance with their face values".

This meant that the king could use a piece of paper to purchase all the goods brought into Neverwinter, which was pretty much like robbery.

"I saw many people flee the city with their cargo when I came back," Twinkle, who was lying on her stomach on the bed, said apprehensively. Victor was not sure if she was worried that he would leave the city like everyone else or about the Rainbow Stone clothes.

Victor managed a bitter smile. Twinkle did not know that his fortunes had been closely tied to the King of Graycastle. Without Miss Leaf providing him with the seeds, he would not be able to expand his brand.

Whatever happened next, Victor would not abandon the business in Neverwinter easily.

He knew Roland Wimbledon would soon implement this policy throughout the whole nation.

The king himself was an excellent businessman with an acute business sense. He had no reason to rob people at the moment to maintain the status quo. At this thought, Victor calmed himself down and read on.

The second and third policies concerned the livelihood of the community.

"All the salaries in Neverwinter will be paid in the new currencies."

"All the transactions in the Administrative Office and the Convenience Market, including but not limited to food and real estates, shall be carried out through the new currencies."

The fourth policy was regarding the number of paper notes distributed to the public.

"The Administrative Office will offer a long-term currency exchange service that enables residents to exchange their old currencies, namely, gold royals, silver royals and bronze royals, for the new

currencies, and vice versa. The Administrative Office will charge a 5% transaction fee for each transaction when residents exchange the new currencies for the old ones.”

Victor saw the underlying implication behind this policy.

It seemed that this policy was made to force foreign merchants to use the new currencies.

“Also, the transaction fee could be waived for merchants who have permission from the Administrative Office to run business and who have submitted the application for same.”

Chapter 1255: Graycastle “Yuan”

Below the policy was a sample application form.

Applicants not only had to provide their personal information but also their transaction records. Victor skimmed the application form through for several times, and suddenly, the truth flashed across his mind.

He finally understood the purpose of the new policies as his eyes shoveled between the fourth and fifth articles. It gradually dawned on him that the king’s true intention of making these two rules was to increase tax revenues!

Like most major cities, merchants in Neverwinter had the obligation to pay commercial taxes. However, the problem was that not every merchant abode the rule. Victor never missed a single payment, but tax evasion was actually very common among merchants. He was indeed one of the fews who paid the taxes every time.

Merchants who had real estate properties would, more or less, pay taxes partially, but those who leased the premises and traveling merchants almost never paid. Without the previous patrol team who had constantly blackmailed merchants, Neverwinter provided small business owners with a perfect, and even better tax-free zone than Valencia and Eagle City. Because of the great business environment, businesses had soon flourished in the new king’s city within a very short period of time.

But now, everything was about to change.

The application could waive the currency exchange transaction fee, but applicants would also need to provide their sources of revenues. Then the Administrative Office would deduct taxes from their earnings based on the information on the application form.

Was there no other way to evade taxes?

There certainly was. Merchants could exchange the new currencies for gold royals and sell their items bought from Neverwinter somewhere else to make up the loss.

But this was not a guaranteed solution.

Nobody could assure that the revenues would be exactly the same as the expenses. To maintain the business, one should possess more new currencies than the old ones. The only way to achieve this goal was to either exchange new currencies for gold royals or reserve the gold royals for the future.

As time progressed, merchants would, inevitably, have a certain amount of new currencies and realize that they were easier to use and carry. Gradually, merchants would exchange new currencies among themselves. They would probably exchange gold royals at first and then slowly, directly use them to purchase goods.

This meant that no matter which way merchants chose to go, Neverwinter would always benefit from them!

What was clever about this policy was that it did not really prejudice the interests of merchants. In fact, it was quite considerate of merchants' feelings.

The declaration could increase the municipal tax revenues and thereby create a better business environment. On the other hand, legal business owners actually benefited from this policy as well.

For merchants who chose to use the new currencies, there would not be much difference. They could still evade taxes and press others to also use the new currencies. Since all transactions in Neverwinter should be conducted via the new currencies, the new currencies would gradually replace gold royals and spread out to the territories beyond the jurisdiction of the King of Graycastle!

Victor also noticed that the whole currency reform, as a matter of fact, aimed to take things slow and give people time to get used to the change.

Without a doubt, the new currencies would be legally effective as long as the King of Graycastle took control of food in his domain, not only because of the implementation of the currency policies but also because Neverwinter itself was a large market.

Merchants who fled the city might not even have truly thought about the policy. It was pretty shortsighted of them to abandon such a lucrative market simply because of the currency reform.

Victor used to think that the reform was ludicrous, but now it appeared that it was not as bad as he had thought. As long as King Roland Wimbledon guided the country properly and take appropriate steps, this reform might be a great success.

Victor shuddered involuntarily.

The currency reform was just the beginning.

Once everyone gladly accepted the new currencies, the king would immediately gain immense wealth that no business could ever bring.

The nobles who were so good at business in Kingdom of Dawn would probably drop their jaws.

The only problem right now was whether someone would forge the new currencies created by His Majesty.

Victor thus asked Twinkle to purchase some paper notes from local residents at a price five times the normal price on the payday two days later.

He soon found that his fear was unnecessary after he saw the actual notes.

"These notes are... so beautiful," Twinkle exclaimed as she toyed with a brand new note.

“True,” Victor agreed. The new currency looked quite expensive, which was very different from what he had thought. It was soft and durable. Obviously, it was not made of ordinary paper.

The most peculiar part was its pattern on the face.

There were six kinds of paper notes in total, their face values ranging from 10 to 1,000. The largest value was equal to a gold royal, and one could easily tell from the golden pattern on it. The face values of the rest of the paper notes were 10, 20, 50, 100 and 500 each. A new currency unit “Yuan” was used. The colors and patterns of the paper notes varied according to their respective face values. For example, the 1,000 note was printed with the image of the king and the queen. Below printed a line that read “Royal Bank of Graycastle”. Although the font was tiny, it was pretty visible to read.

Victor drew the notes closer and discovered that the texts and the images on the notes were all comprised of tiny stripes even thinner than hairs. Each stripe was clear and separate from each other, so it was impossible to forge the notes.

Victor studied the other notes. The ¥500 note was printed with the image of the Witch Union and the ¥100 plants and workers. The other notes were printed with the Miracle Building, trains, etc. All the notes were printed with the coat of arms of the Graycastle royal family that featured a high tower and two spears on the back. Victor curled up his lips. It was evident that the notes were carefully designed and well made like artwork. Even if they did not have any practical values, Victor was sure that many collectors at the Fjords would be willing to collect them purely for their aesthetic values.

This was indeed a very clever strategy. The colorful notes definitely cost a lot, but in a way, they built confidence among the public. Nobody would have believed a piece of paper could replace gold royals. However, if this paper resembled a piece of art, then people would have more confidence in them, although essentially, they were the same thing.

Victor put down the notes and heaved a deep sigh.

“What’s the matter?” Twinkle asked curiously.

“There will be a drastic change in the business world soon,” Victor replied in a low voice.

Chapter 1256: Reception and the New Plan

“How’s the currency exchange going?”

Three days after the release of the new currencies, Roland held a director meeting in the castle boardroom to discuss the response of the public to the currency reform.

Roland had learned from the history that it was extremely hard to fundamentally change the conception of money and break the tradition that had been observed over the past thousand years. A tiny error might result in an avalanche of disasters. The failure of the currency reform would possibly jeopardize the public’s confidence in the Administrative Office and even the king himself, which had taken Roland so long to build.

“Fewer people exchange the currencies than we expected, Your Majesty,” Barov said, looking pretty relaxed. “The transaction amount over the past three days is 1,000 gold royals. Considering there will be a lot of changes at the beginning of the reform, we could use the gold royals in the treasury for the time being before everything is stabilized.”

To avoid a bank run, the amount of bank notes printed this time would be equal to the payroll expenses this month. Therefore, even if they were all replaced by gold royals, they would still have two months to print new notes. However, if that happened, it would mean that the reform had failed.

“I think your worry is unnecessary, Your Majesty,” Barov said smilingly as he stroked his beard. “Most of the subjects would not choose to use new currencies in exchange for old ones, unless it’s absolutely necessary. They don’t want to pay the transaction fee.”

“But it doesn’t mean that people accept the new currencies,” the Minister of Agriculture, Sirius Daly, replied cautiously. “I notice that the sale of food has increased a lot recently in the Convenience Market, including the sale of spices and dried food.”

Roland was a little taken aback by the unexpected increase.

He then smiled and came to the realization that the subjects did not want to pay the transaction fee, so they purchased a great number of life necessities as a backup. In fact, food had once been used as a universal equivalent in the history. Dried food and spices had a long shelf life, so naturally people would buy them in bulk to prepare for any future emergencies.

Roland somehow thought of an advertisement which said, “Paper for food. Nothing to lose. What are you waiting for?”

But Roland was relieved.

People were not likely to accept the change within a few days. The increase in the sale of goods did not really affect the Administrative Office. There were sufficient wheat, eggs and cheese for the entire Western Region. By the time the Administrative Office received the part of sales profit they were entitled to from the Joint Chamber of Commerce, he would be able to know the result of the currency reform.

Roland thus said to Sirius, “That’s fine. Let them buy as much as they like, but you have to keep an eye on them and make sure there’s no shortage of food. As long as residents don’t exceed their personal limit, they can buy whatever they want.”

The Convenience Market mainly supplied life necessities. It was a store directly controlled and supervised by the government. Residents had to show their identity cards to make the purchase. It was highly unlikely that the city would run out of food, provided that no merchants interfered with the market.

“Yes, Your Majesty!”

“By the way, what’s the merchants’ reaction?”

Barov replied quickly, "Your Majesty, the merchants in Neverwinter are roughly divided into two groups. Traveling merchants are on the fence about it. Many stores are shut down. Do you think we should..." he broke off and made a gesture that suggested driving those merchants out of the country.

Roland shook his head. It appeared that many business owners resisted the new currencies by closing their shops. He said, "Let them be as long as they don't break the law. Their lease has not expired yet anyway. It's up to them to decide whether they should continue with the business. What about the other group?"

"There was not much feedback from the big Chambers of Commerce at the Fjords. Many are still running their businesses. They asked whether they could use the new currencies to purchase steam engines and paddle steamers. I gave them an affirmative answer as you instructed."

A flurry of whispers swept over the boardroom.

Apparently, everyone was surprised at this reaction. They were mortified to see that foreign merchants gave more support to the king's policy than domestic tradesmen.

Roland did not really mind that, however.

It seemed the Fjords people were more willing to accept new things. For example, Margaret was the first person who had shown an interest in the steam engines and provided financial assistance for the industrialization of the Border Town.

"There's an exception though," Barov said on a cough. "A clothing store named Rainbow Stone remains open. The owner even put up a banner celebrating the currency reform and offers discounts. I've heard that residents lined up to buy their clothes."

Roland blinked and chuckled. He knew that was Victor Lothar who had requested to collaborate with Leaf.

Was it just a bold action or he actually understood the importance of the currency reform?

"Very well," Roland said as he looked toward the Minister of Publicity, Honey. "Make a report of that. Trust is now more important than gold."

"Got it," Honey said with a nod.

"That's right, trust is more important than gold, Your Majesty," Edith, who had been silent, suddenly spoke. "Please beware of upcoming rumors. I believe it'll be not long before we hear them."

"What do you mean?" Barov asked, frowning. "Is there going to be someone attempting to sabotage the currency reform?"

"That's very normal. Everything has two sides. Merchants who don't like the paper notes or who simply want to destabilize the government would spread rumors. Do you really think the nobles would submit to His Majesty's ruling in just two years?"

"Er..." Barov was at a loss for words.

They certainly would not. In fact, they were just bidding their time to overturn his sovereign.

They did not care whether the demons had invaded the city or not.

“Don’t worry. Honey and Summer will look after it.”

“Also, the mining area in the Western Region always needs people,” a cold voice said in the boardroom. Although nobody new who said it, everyone could tell the person was serious.

Roland surveyed the room and said, “Alright, this is just the beginning. I believe the new currencies will be spread out throughout the whole nation in a few months and replace gold royals. It’s very important to the Battle of Divine Will. Everyone must keep working on it!”

“As you command!” everyone chorused.

“Your Majesty,” Barov said hesitantly, “Can we print so many notes within a few months?”

“The amount currently available is just enough to pay out salaries, but we can definitely print more. You don’t have to worry about it,” Roland returned.

Although a note was just a piece of paper, it contained the most advanced technologies in Neverwinter. Considering there was a huge number of gold royals and silver royals that had been accumulated over the past thousands of years, Roland was not going to ask Soraya to take the workload all alone. The pulp used to make bills was mixed with a certain amount of rubber worms’ slimes to enhance the durability of the finished products.

The number on the face of the note was actually pre-printed on foils and served as an anti-counterfeiting mark. Only Neverwinter could produce extremely thin foil paper.

A new rolling press machine was used to print notes, and the ink used for printing was jointly produced by Darkcloud and Broken Sword. The color was very pigmented and long-lasting, much better than the pigments extracted from plants and minerals. Roland believed that they could last for a very long time before the next printing.

Overall, a large part of the manufacture process was completed by ordinary people, whereby the witches only provided raw materials. The production was highly efficient, which made mass production possible.

Roland was relieved that he finally carried out this currency reform. Now, he had both men and money, so the problem next was how to utilize these resources and increase productivity.

“I have a new project that requires approximately 20,000 to 30,000 people, which is about the population of a major city,” Roland said to Barov. “You and the other directors shall work together and draft a plan.”

“Yes, Your Majesty.”

“First of all, the Ministry of Chemical Industry — ” Roland broke off and looked at Kyle Sichi.

Apparently, it was time to produce more ammunition.

Chapter 1257: A National Machine

"I need an additional ammonia plant and a saltpeter plant. You knew that, didn't you?" Roland asked.

Agatha and Paper had been working on these two materials, but the production rate was not satisfactory due to the lack of catalysts. Although their method was much better than the original acid-making method that involved saltpeter, they could not further increase the production as a result of limited manpower and magic.

After Roland obtained a copy of the complete periodic table of elements, the chemistry laboratory immediately started to make sample elements. With Lucia's help, the Ministry of Chemical Industry was now able to create a sample for every element on the table, including many rare elements such as platinum and rhodium that were normally used as catalysts in chemical reactions.

As long as there were enough people, they could build as many plants as they wanted. Mass production might not be the most efficient way to produce war materials, but the original acid-making method was solely reliant on Agatha's and Paper's abilities.

Kyle said slowly, "Your Majesty, we've already verified the theories through experiments and simulated the acid-making process in a small reaction vessel. As long as we have sufficient manpower, we can start working anytime."

"I can offer you all the literate immigrants. You can start after this meeting," Roland said. "Also, I plan to create a new production line for lead-acid batteries."

Kyle nodded in comprehension. Perhaps, not many people knew what those things were, but he had learned elementary and intermediate chemistry by heart and certainly understood what Roland was talking about.

Lead-acid batteries were also known as storage batteries. It was not even that hard for the Alchemist Workshop to make them, since the only materials required were lead, lead dioxide, and dilute sulfuric acid, let alone the current Ministry of Chemical Industry. Plus, the experiment on electrolytes with a light bulb was a classic experiment in high school chemistry.

The strength of storage batteries was that they could be recharged by supplying water regularly. There was no technical difficulty whatsoever in producing lead and lead dioxide. The reasons that he had not produced them earlier were that they rarely needed storage batteries and had insufficient manpower.

"How many do you need approximately..." Kyle asked as he produced a notebook.

"Around 100 per month," Roland replied.

Storage batteries would be mainly used to start off piston engines for the biplanes. As the biplane was the most advanced industrial product in Neverwinter, it was unacceptable that it took so long for the plane to take off. Roland attributed this drawback to the lack of manpower. However, with the influx of a great number of immigrants, they could now eliminate this defect.

With so many additional people, they could literally do whatever they wanted.

"We would only need around 10 people to finish this small project," Kyle commented sagely as he stroked his beard. "Of course, we still need Queen Anna's help to manufacture other parts like lead plates and shells."

“If you could provide me with detailed drawings, the Ministry of Industry has no issue with that,” Anna said while nodding.

“Then please give me a few days to think it over, and I’ll send you the drawings shortly.”

Roland sipped his tea in satisfaction. After years of education and training, there were now many talented people in the Administrative Office. It was very common that a project involved various departments. For many projects, Roland only had to provide his advice here and there in the very beginning, and his ministers would finish the rest.

“Now, the Ministry of Industry shall — ”

After the war of Taquila, Roland realized that there were a lot of things that needed to be improved. Now, he finally got an opportunity to do so.

First was the fighting capacity of the infantries.

Roland called it the “General Purpose Machine Gun Plan”.

The basic idea was to produce a lighter version of Mark I type HMG with a simpler structure. The barrel and rack should be separate so that the weapon could be more portable. A cartridge should be used to enable soldiers to open fire immediately in the event of an attack. In that case, soldiers would be able to suppress the Senior Demons and earn time for the anti-demon grenade unit.

Since there would not be much change in the gun structure, the only way to reduce the weight would be switching over to a lighter material, aluminium alloy and plastic made from the slimes of rubber worms, for instance. Both of the two materials were not manufactured on a large scale, but the production of the biplanes required a lot of them. Therefore, they would not produce many new machine guns.

But it was better than nothing. Plus, the Aerial Knight also needed machine guns, so this project was very necessary.

As far as Roland saw, the First Army could still remain in a superior position in the Kingdom of Everwinter and the Kingdom of Wolfheart without upgrading their guns. Only the elite unit, who usually took on special missions such as scouting, covering and rescue, would need such an advanced weapon.

Also, the semi-automatic rifle invented by Van’er was in the process of mass production. Every five soldiers would have a “Van’er Rifle”. The reason that Roland did not change all the bolt rifles was logistics. Since the linkage was left in the air, the rifle was not actually very durable. It could easily get jammed after multiple shots.

However, the “Van’er Rifle” could effectively increase the firepower.

The next project that Roland had in contemplation was the biplane. After four months of intense tests, the first generation of biplanes was finally put into use and was named the “Fire of Heaven”. Although this new model was very similar to the “Unicorn”, and its structure was not extremely complicated, it was still unrealistic to ask ordinary workers to manufacture and assemble it. As for the production of the engine, it was still reliant on Anna’s ability.

Having said that, Roland still planned to gather the top workers in the industrial zones to tackle these potential problems. These people had elevated themselves from apprentices who used to flail hammers

to excellent machine tool operators. It was also a good time to test how far the industrialization of Neverwinter had gone in the three years after the establishment of the first steam engine plant.

The only way to suppress the Devilbeasts was to dominate the sky.

The “Fire of Heaven” was obviously just the beginning of this magnificent endeavor.

The last project Roland had in mind was regarding the new Spidery Monstrous Beast. Roland planned to create a small-caliber cannon larger than the mortars but smaller than the Longsong Cannons to repel the Monstrous Beasts. The caliber should be around 75 milimeters. It could be easily carried on horses and by soldiers, and Hummingbird did not necessarily have to reduce its weight.

It was not difficult to make such a cannon. Roland only needed a few workers from the cannon plant. However, before that, he had to first create a sample cannon and test it out.

He had discussed these prospective projects with Anna numerous times in private. They soon reached a mutual understanding without any unnecessary explanation.

This would be the grandest manufacturing project in Neverwinter in the history of time, for the project involved nearly 10 plants and a workforce of 20,000 and 30,000 people.

With the implementation of the immigration campaign, the industrialization in Neverwinter would become even more intense and rapid.

A machine titled “nation” was set in motion.

Chapter 1258: Air Combat Maneuver

The students in the Aerial Knight Academy were busy training.

All the trainer aircrafts were spreading out in a line at the end of the runway, and the 30 official trainees were listening to Princess Tilly’s instructions. A little farther on, students who had not passed the exam or those who had recently joined the team were sitting near the runway, waiting to watch the next round of trial flights.

“From today onwards, your training will enter a new phase!” Tilly proclaimed as she paced back and forth in front of the students who were a lot taller than her. “Now, tell me what you’ve learned over the past one month! Start from Patter!”

“Lifting, Your Highness!” the students named Patter replied in excitement.

“Next.”

“Hovering!”

“Magic Movie!”

“What?”

“No...” the student faltered. “I mean balance training, Your Highness!”

“Strange...” Finkin muttered. “Princess Tilly seems to be nicer these days.”

“Really?” Hinds said under his breath. “She won’t exempt you from punishment if you make a mistake. Don’t you remember? We just cleaned the bathroom for a month.”

“I’m not saying that,” Finkin mumbled as he looked toward Good. “What do you think?”

Good nodded and said, “I have the same feeling.” He could sense that Princess Tilly had been somehow very anxious for a long time, possibly because of the poor performance of the aerial knight trainees. There were only 30 people out of 200 students who had passed the exam.

Another reason was that there were only six usable planes in the hanger. The rest of them were all crashed during the training. Like the instructor Eagle Face had said, one plane was even more expensive than a ship, which normally cost thousands of gold royals. No wonder Princess Tilly were so sulky and ill-tempered.

Nevertheless, the situation seemed to have changed a bit. Although Princess was still quite strict with them, she was less sullen.

But they still crashed a lot of planes every day.

Finkin, it’s your turn,” someone reminded him.

Finkin erected himself and said, “Discipline, Your Highness, I learned the importance of discipline!”

“And also responsibility!” Hinds shouted.

There was an uproar of laughter.

“I told Princess Tilly a long time ago that we should send these guys to the army and tame them first.”

“Suck it up. They’re all civilians.”

The other students exchanged murmurs. Apparently, the news that Finkin, Hinds and Good had been ordered to clean the bathroom for a month as a punishment had been spread throughout the whole school. However, students who used to be civilians simply made fun of them. Those who despised them most and would like to send them to the North Slope Mine were mostly soldiers from the First Army.

Tilly did not say anything but continued, “Next.”

Good replied solemnly, “Passion.”

Another flurry of whispers swept over the crowd.

“What nonsense he’s talking about?”

“Perhaps he couldn’t think of anything else...”

Good had thought Princess Tilly would not be satisfied with his answer, but she quickly turned away from him to the next student after a short pause.

After everyone supplied an answer, Tilly nodded and said, "You haven't received much training, but you did learn a lot! Now, what you need to do is to apply what you've learned to the subsequent training. You have to be strong and use the flying techniques you've learned!"

"Yes, Your Highness!" everyone shouted together.

"Now, I'm going to divide you into two groups of three units to have a mock battle! The rule is very simple. If you could successfully confine the activity of the opponent party to your shooting range for 10 seconds without being shaken off, I take that you hit the target. You only learned firing at a fixed target on the ground before. Now, you'll learn what an aerial battle looks like in reality!"

Everyone got excited about the news.

"Your, Your Highness!" a student yelled while raising his hand.

"Yes?"

"The gun is... unloaded, isn't it?"

"What a fool," Finkin laughed.

"Of course it's unloaded," Tilly said while shaking her head. "Actually there's no gun... The one mounted on the plane is just a model, so you don't need to worry that you'll shoot your schoolmates after you pull the trigger."

All the students guffawed.

"Plus, it's far more complicated to shoot in the air than on the ground. Taking the aim doesn't necessarily mean you'll hit the target. Even with bullets, you'll most likely miss the target," Tilly said while shrugging. "Any other questions?"

Good now confirmed that Princess Tilly did have changed. She would not have had such a relaxed look in the past.

"I, I have a question," Finkin said as he raised his hand and cast a look at the students from the First Army after he got the permission. "Your Highness, how do we know that we win? What if the other party doesn't yield even if we successfully hold them back?"

The students had never fought a real aerial battle, but they had learned its basic idea in the class. If an aerial knight wanted to defeat his enemy, he should make every effort to take the aim and hold him back. There were machine guns at the rear. Yet due to the limited shooting angles, these machine guns were simply used to help the aerial knight to shake off enemies.

"I'll make the judgement accordingly," Tilly said and brought in two women. "They're my special guests. They'll watch your every move, so don't you think you could cheat."

"... That's Ms. Sylvie."

"The other one seems to be the butler of the Sleeping Spell.." Good heard the students from the First Army murmur behind him.

“The trainees over there are not only watching,” Princess Tilly continued. “Do you see the flags they’re waving? We have six planes, each marked with a number. Once you take off, they’ll use the color flags to indicate your status. Green means normal and red being shot down. If you see your number turn red, then you should leave the battlefield and return to the airport. Do you understand?”

“Yes!”

“Very well. Now, I’m going to divide the group.”

Surprisingly, Princess Tilly had already drafted a list beforehand. Good and Finkin were on the same team. Their number was two.

“This is it. I’ll leave you to decide who operates the aircraft and who fires. Team 1, 2 and 3 shall take off in 15 minutes. Don’t hover in the air. Then Team 3, 4 and 5 take off. Once all the teams are in the air, the mock battle officially begins!” Tilly said while clapping her hands. “Show me what you’ve learned!”

Good clenched his fists.

His heart was pounding frantically in his chest.

“Did you notice that?” Finkin said as he drew close.

Good exclaimed. Princess Tilly did not divide the group randomly. The first three teams were all constituted of civilians while the other three were comprised of students from the First Army.

Apparently, Princess Tilly wanted to know who was better!

“That’s perfect,” Finkin said as he rubbed his nose. “I’ve had enough with them. Since we’re aerial knights, let’s fight it out in the air!”

Good did not really care about the outcome of the mock battle. He only hoped that he could fly as much as he could so that he could enjoy the flight a bit longer. Good peered down at his trembling hands. They were resonating with him. He felt a warmth lance through his body as he thought that his hands would soon reach onto the lever.

“I’ll be the pilot. You do the firing,” Finkin said as he patted Good on the shoulder.

“You know I won’t accept that,” Good returned instantly.

They stared at each other for quite a while before Finkin said resignedly, “Alright. We do the old way.”

There was a very popular method to resolve a conflict. Nobody knew where it came from. Somebody said it was invented by the Witch Union while the other believed it was a creation of His Majesty. Regardless, this method worked pretty well.

“Rock, scissors, paper!”

“I won!” Good said triumphantly as he withdrew his hand.

Finkin looked at his fist in disbelief and finally conceded gruffly, “I’ll let you fly this time. We’ll have a lot of opportunities in the training.”

The two men thus walked up to the biplane and boarded to the corresponding plane.

"You can do it!" Hinds said as he eyed them in a pretty ostensible manner on the runway. He was not listed, so naturally he wished them good luck.

"You'll soon see that we didn't train for nothing," Finkin said as he pulled on the goggles and gave him a thumbs-up.

The stairwell were soon removed, and the propeller was set in motion as the handle started to spin rapidly

When the piston started to move and was connected to the gas, Good felt that the whole aircraft was injected into life.

"All clear. OK to take off!" the ground staff saluted.

Good raised his arm and returned a perfect salute. "Aircraft No. 2, go!"

The biplane slid onto the runway, accelerated, and soared into the sky against the sea breezes.

Chapter 1259: A Battle in the Air

In the roar of the machineries, the three planes of Team No. 1 took off in succession.

"Who do you think will win?" Tilly asked.

"... Well, do you want to make a bet? One bottle of Chaos Drink for the winner," Sylvie asked hesitantly.

"That's fine. Just make a guess."

Sylvie looked profoundly relieved. "I bet on Team No. 2. They're all from the First Army, right?"

"That's right," Tilly said with a nod. "Camilla, what about you?"

"I don't really care, Your Highness," Camilla Dary sighed. "Although these aircrafts look amazing, we need 30 aerial knights to fight 10 Devilbeasts. Even if we have twice the students we currently have, the result won't change much. I don't think you should put too much effort into it."

"It's just the beginning," Tilly replied smilingly. "When I first came to Neverwinter, there were only a handful of plants along the river. Now, these plants stretch all the way to the Shallow Port. Plus, the Devil beasts haven't changed a bit compared to 400 years ago, but these artifacts have upgraded a lot of times over the past half a year. Who knows what they'll become of in the future?"

After a moment of silence, Camilla said, "You always have your reason, but you also have to take care of the Sleeping Spell. I've been here for too long."

"Sorry. I made you worry."

"No, Your Highness — "

"I know," Tilly said sincerely. "You should have left Neverwinter after the war up in the north, but you stayed because of me. Thank you, Camilla. I'm OK now."

The two witches stared at each other for a few seconds, and then Camilla broke the silence and said with a nod, "I see. But I can't manage the Sleeping Spell all by myself. Please pay them a visit when you're available. Those witches are still waiting for you."

"... They still don't want to come to Neverwinter?"

"No. Some of them suffered too much, and they're afraid to come."

Although only a few witches chose to stay, it indicated that their dark memories of the past still had a certain influence on them.

Perhaps, they would never forget about this pain.

"I'll go back after we win the Battle of Divine Will," Tilly confirmed.

"What if we lose?"

Just then, the planes of Team No.2 flitted across the runway.

Tilly didn't answer but simply gave Camilla a faint smile. "The battle has started... Come!"

...

"Hey, do you think Princess Tilly can really watch over the six planes at a time?"

Finkin yelled. Air currents seared through the plane and whistled around his ears. He had to shout at the top of his lung to ensure that his words were heard. Because of the wind, the cabin was extremely noisy.

"That's Her Highness' business!" Good hollered back as well. He noticed that four numbers out of the six had turned green, which meant that Team No. 2 was taking off.

Since they were not allowed to hover above the academy, the three planes of Team No. 1 all flew toward the sea. Good could not see where the fourth, fifth and sixth planes were at the moment, but undoubtedly, their opponent must have figured out where they were heading. They certainly would not follow them immediately, as it took time to rise and accelerate. It was not advisable to recklessly enter the territory of the planes that had taken off first and get shot.

"I feel so nervous at the thought that Her Highness is watching me! If she knows how to take aims, she'll look in the same direction as me. Doesn't it mean that she's right in my — "

At that precise moment, the plane plummeted.

Finkin, who had been interrupted, bellowed, "What the heck are you doing? Can't you fly better?"

"I'm saving you, you idiot! If Her Highness can aim the target as well, she can also see you gossiping behind her. Then you'll feel very lucky to work in the mine!"

Finkin immediately shut up.

Good surveyed the surroundings through the crack between the wing and the body of the plane. He could only see a distant black dot drifting along the horizon. The other plane on the team was completely out of sight. Apparently, everyone was acting on their own.

Princess Tilly actually did not teach them how to fight in the air except for a few basic theories. He had to rely on his own judgement. Perhaps, even Princess Tilly did not know how to conduct an aerial battle, since this was entirely new, and they needed to start from scratch.

As there were no rules, he could fly to a spacious area and wait for his enemy to make contact with him.

After a moment of reflection, Good changed the direction and flew toward the Shallow Port.

“Oi, where are you going?”

“To the west. I’m going to fly round the plants!”

“Fly around? Why not just wait for them here?”

“Then we won’t be able to control the pace of the battle!” Good yelled as he made the turn. “Think! How are they going to fly?”

Good did not care about the result, but he knew that the winner could fly longer.

“How? They’ll rise and speed up, and then they’ll come after us!”

That was right. As they did not know when the second team would be ready to launch an attack, they had to defend themselves and get prepared, just like soldiers at the front waiting for their enemies to charge.

There was one way that could ensure him to get an advantageous position.

That was to draw the opponent’s attention to the ocean.

It was easy to spot the target running on an open field.

However, things were different in the sky. He could run in all directions.

“If they can’t see us but we can see them, then we can break the tie!” Good shouted. “You don’t think they’ve received less training than us, do you?”

“Haha, I see!” Finkin said as he patted Good on the shoulder heartily. “I thought I was clever. I didn’t expect that you play even dirtier than me! But I like it. Let’s do it!”

Good rolled his eyes. “Play dirty...” He was not sure if he should take it as a compliment. He thus started to descend while at the same time accelerating. The plane dropped behind the cliff, and its wheels brushed past the ships’ masts. The sailors on the ships all stared at the plane in astonishment.

When the plane streaked past the Shallow Port, a loud wave of cheers broke over the dock.

Those immigrants, however, all goggled at the sky, terrified. There was even a commotion when the refugees got off the ships.

“Don’t fly too low, otherwise the police will make a complaint, and we’ll have to clean the bathroom for another month again!” Finkin reminded.

“Don’t worry. I think that would do,” Good said as he slowly pulled the lever, and the plane gradually left the horizon and headed toward the industrial zone to the west of the airport. The industrial zone was enveloped by smoke all the year round, so their opponent was not likely to rise from there.

“Hmm?” Tilly, who was watching through the Eye of Magic, exclaimed in surprise.

“Did they... escape?” Sylvie asked since she also noticed something unusual.

“They probably don’t want to wait any longer,” Tilly said with a faint smile playing upon her lips.

Through the Magic Eye, Tilly could see everything clearly in the sky. The three biplanes of Team No. 2 had all taken off. Unlike Team No. 1, the students from the First Army did not fly to the sea to look for their opponent but continued to hover in the north before they headed to the south together.

It took them a long time to assemble but the three planes all stayed close to each other.

“Interesting,” Tilly muttered to herself. She did not teach the students how to fight in the air, nor did she remind them of the airspace and formations. In other words, they made their own decisions.

Beyond a doubt, no matter who won today, she would have some useful information regarding air combat to add to the Flight Manual.

“Just as I thought, they aren’t here,” Good said after he confirmed it was all clear. He pressed hard on the gas, and the plane crept up with an earsplitting roar. After the howl of the wind died down, he flew straight ahead toward the southeast.

There was no landmark in the sky. Even if the second team spot them, they would think that the tiny black dot they saw was but an eagle.

Plane No. 2 flew in a circle and returned to the Aerial Knight Academy.

However, just at that moment, the three planes of Team No. 2 entered the territory above the Swirling Sea and dashed toward the target closest to them!

Chapter 1260: Passion

Tilly noticed that the first team dispersed as they saw their opponent approach. Plane No. 1 and Plane No. 3 flew in two different directions in an attempt to flank the second team.

Team No. 2 managed to maintain their formation and continued to approach Plane No. 1, which was the one closest to them.

As a consequence, Plane No. 1 was besieged by the three planes all at once.

Through the Magic Eye, Tilly could see the nervous look on the pilot’s face.

Under such circumstances when the second team was flanked, the pilot of Plane No. 1 could have shot down one of the three planes before the second team shot him down. However, the pilot was apparently in a panic, for he pressed upon the left pedal after a moment of contemplation and tried to

avoid the upcoming attack. At this point, the two parties were only 500 meters from each other. The second team immediately changed the direction and started the chase.

The pilot of Plane No. 1 exercised all his efforts to shake his opponent off. Like Tilly had said in her opening statement, the pilot applied everything he had learned to this maneuver. This pilot must have worked very hard, for he seemed to have become quite proficient in plane operation after just one month of training.

Nevertheless, the students from the First Army were not bad either. They managed to stay close to the other team after Plane No. 1 dived and made a sharp turn. Since they outnumbered their opponent, they did not have to keep an eye on the other party constantly. The other party, however, had to watch every move of the three planes. As a result, Plane No. 1 dropped and slowed down. Seeing there was no way to escape, the pilot turned about abruptly and streaked toward the oncoming Plane No. 3.

The second team, in the meantime, found a perfect opportunity to shoot Plane No. 1. Plane No. 6 plummeted and zoomed toward the tail of Plane No. 1 at a downward angle of 30 degrees.

The machine gunner of Plane No. 1 had seen that the opponent plane was coming, and the pilot had tried his best to avoid the shot, but he could not escape the attack anymore.

It only took 10 seconds.

Tilly nodded in satisfaction and said, "Red flag for Plane No. 1!"

It was not until then that Plane No. 3 joined the team.

Plane No. 6 was still climbing, and the other two planes, Plane No. 4 and Plane No. 5, were both in a superior position.

It appeared that the first team had run into a disgusting dilemma.

— if, though, they excluded Plane No. 2 aloft in the air from the team.

Tilly rested her eyes on the area above.

"I saw them!" Finkin exclaimed as he poked out his head from the seat and leaned dramatically against the body of the plane. "Hang on. Plane No. 1 is down!"

"Are you sure?"

"The number on the airport has turned red, but they're still fighting!"

"That's because they haven't noticed it yet," Good replied, frowning. It seemed that his team members were weaker than he had anticipated. "What about Plane No. 3?"

"If I'm correct, that black dot coming this way should be it!" Finkin hollered. "Mate, they're in a mess. It's time to join them now!"

"Just a minute... Turn around. Do you see the sun?"

Finkin looked backward and was instantly blinded by the sunlight. "I was right! I knew you'd bean excellent pilot. We're right in the sun. I can't open my eyes!"

"That's because you lost the game," Good thought to himself as he shook his head and pressed down the lever. "In that case, let's go!"

"Yayyyyy!" Finkin howled in excitement.

The roar of the radial engine overpowered the whistling wind. The plane shook violently as it zoomed against the air currents. Good felt his whole body tremble in exhilaration.

He was now a charging knight!

The whole sky was beneath him!

As the pilot of Plane No. 3 had directed all his attention to the slowest plane in Team No. 2, the other two opponent planes started to come after Plane No. 3. It was not until they darted toward their prey in the golden drops of sun rays that they realized there was another plane cracking through the air behind them. They should have ditched their team members and shot down Plane No. 3 first, but they hesitated, which earned Finkin time to take the aim.

By the time the two planes in Team No. 2 realized it, it was already too late. Good brushed past Plane No. 4 and swiftly turned to Plane No. 5. He had been aiming at Plane No. 4 when he was plunging, although he was not certain whether he could successfully shoot it down. Nevertheless, Princess Tilly made the rules, and he trusted her completely.

Good knew his team members could be knocked out of the team anytime, so he must be fast.

Four biplanes thus threw themselves in a bitter and intense battle, and the situation became precarious. Good could even see the livid face of the machine gunner on Plane No. 5. Although Good had exposed himself, he was much faster. After several rounds of chase and run, Good finally found time to take aim. While he was about to ask Finkin to fire, Finkin blurted out.

"The number for Plane No. 5 turned red!"

Almost at the same time, Plane No. 3 was shot down too.

Now, there were only Plane No. 6 and him left on the battlefield.

Perhaps, the pilot in Plane No. 3 was too nervous when flanked by the two planes from the other team and thus let Plane No. 6 slip and catch up with them.

"What the heck are those guys doing? They didn't shoot any of the planes down!" Finkin complained gruffly as he turned the machine gun. "Now, it has become one against three!"

"We used them as a decoy in the first place," Good said airily. "Well, there's also another possibility, that is, that Plane No. 6 is a hard nut to crack."

His prediction was confirmed.

No matter which direction he chose to go, Plane No. 6 immediately caught up without giving him a single chance to escape. He had to move constantly, otherwise the opponent would shoot him down before Finkin did.

"Damn it," Finkin muttered irritably. "Can't you fly a little faster?"

“I’m doing what I can!”

“We’ll be killed if things go on like this. Do something! How about flying to the port? We can take refuge from the sailing ships!”

“If we crash into the ships carrying refugees, what do you think will happen?”

“Er... we’ll be executed,” Finkin said, deflated. “Then forget it. At least, we aren’t the first ones that get kicked out. We’re doomed, unless there’s wind sending us up.”

“Wind...” Good muttered in a daze and suddenly came up with a solution. “You’re right. I know how to get our way out!”

“Huh?”

“Do you remember the upwind near the cliff?”

The wind from the Swirling Sea changed constantly, especially the one close to the beach. Because of the cliff, the air currents went around the precipice and turned into a gust of upwind. One could hear it whistling rhythmically upon the cliff.

Finkin stiffened for a second after realizing what Good was talking about. “Are you crazy? You never know if there’s an upwind or not. If you get too close to the cliff, you’ll easily crash the plane!”

The upwind only confined to a certain area. Beyond that specific area, they’ll dissipate into the sea breezes. Due to the bumpy surface of the cliff, the wind could go in any directions. Therefore, it was even harder to maneuver the plane through the upwind than passing through the ships.

“I have to give it a shot. Just a little bit of wind and we’ll be able to shot up in the air!” Good said as he quickly dropped and zoomed toward the Aerial Knight Academy.

Plane No. 6 hesitated for a moment and also accelerated.

“How do you know when the upwind will come?” Finkin asked incredulously.

“The ships carrying refugees will tell me!” Good returned as he continued to drop. The plane was getting closer and closer to Plane No. 6. After a wide turn, it almost leveled the horizon. Many students would think that he had lost the game at this point, although the plane was still running at a tremendous speed. It was clear that he had nowhere to go.

He was now within the shooting range of his opponent.

“Clock the time!” Good bellowed.

“I think we still have eight seconds! Six, five, four — ” Finkin counted through his teeth.

In the meantime, Good was also keeping an eye on a ship coming toward the Shallow Port, yet he was not looking at the flag or the sail but the birds perched upon its mast. The flag and the sail were rippling in the air, so it was impossible for him to tell the wind power from them. However, the birds could capture the slightest change in the wind.

As though sensing something, the birds flapped their wings and descended from the mast before they flew toward the cliff. For a moment, they strongly resembled a gliding "Seagull". Good had noticed earlier that birds liked to travel between ships and the cliff. It seemed that they could soar in the sky without necessarily flapping their wings!

The moment the birds reached the edge of the cliff, Good rose abruptly.

It was actually a very dangerous move because of the dramatic elevation angle. However, at this moment, the birds suddenly surged as though an invisible hand had been supporting them.

There came the wind.

In an instant, Good heard a piercing whistle.

Against the gust of wind, the plane shook tremulously. It again accelerated and, miraculously, shot up into the air and reversed.

The whole world turned upside down.

For a split second, time froze. Good saw Plane No. 6 flash below him, totally unprepared. The pilot sitting in there looked up at him in astonishment.

Somewhere in the distance, a pack of birds leaped out of the horizon, their white wings forming a stairwell leading to Heaven.

He had not lied to Her Highness.

His passion for flying grew every day after he joined the Aerial Knight reserve. He was addicted to flying.

This was what impressed Good most among all he had learned.

Now, the situation had changed.