

Witch 1331

Chapter 1331: The One That Vanished

“Cough... Cough... Cough...” In the midst of the tumbling smoke, Jodel slowly picked himself up. Chippings were still falling from above him. Only less than half remained of the once tall and erect building. Fortunately, the collapsed beam formed a narrow shelter with the wall structure and he luckily survived.

“Is anyone alive?” he shouted with difficulty, but the surging dust very quickly filled his mouth.

The likelihood that his team mates had heard him was slim.

Jodel could only squeeze himself through the crack between the beam and stones and clamber upwards, heading to where there was light.

Under the dim light, he saw that there were several broken wooden chips lodged in his arms and thighs. The blood that seeped out dyed his army uniform crimson. The Delaying Agent had done its job once again; if it had not blocked out the pain, he didn't know how long he would have taken to recover from his fall.

After arduously crawling out of the ruins, Jodel suddenly discovered several demons less than ten meters away from him. They were clearly the squad that had charged directly for the belfry earlier. If the Spider Demon had attacked slightly later, he and his companions would have annihilated that squad sooner or later. Now, the tables had been turned.

It was obvious why the demons were surrounding the tower, they wanted to destroy any escaping survivors.

Jodel didn't hesitate too much.

He knew that the chance of escaping alive was one in a million. A bolt rifle could only shoot one round of bullets at one go and with the Mad Demons' abilities, they could rip him apart in the time he took to reload.

Even so, he resolutely raised his flintlock.

To Sand Nationals, death was not scary, what was frightening was not being able to see hope.

If his death could exchange for the continuation of his clan and allow his wife and children to eat their fill, then it was enough.

In the instant he fired, Jodel couldn't help but recall the moment when he, shouldering the heavy pressure of the clans of the Iron Sand City, determinedly swore his loyalty to the chief—that night, he had also charged against the Wildwave and Cut Bone clans believing that he would definitely die in the process.

With the roar of gunfire, one Mad Demon fell and the other three swiftly lunged for him.

At this distance, a sharp claw was more effective than a spear.

In a flash, a large outstretched claw reached towards him. If it had actually taken hold of him, half of his face would have been crushed!

But at this moment, Jodel suddenly felt as if his body was no longer within his control.

His body fell backwards and he dodged the fatal attack with his back bent at an unbelievable angle. Next he used the gun handle as support and propelled himself backwards, his body that was still in a backward-leaning position lifted in the air and he completed an excellent backward somersault.

And when he landed, the second round of ammunition had already been pushed into the gun barrel!

What was happening?

Jodel was utterly stunned.

Could this be a side effect of the Delaying Agent? Not only wasn't he feeling amplified pain, but his movements had also become more agile, although none of it was of his own accord.

Even though he mind was still dazed, his body did not seem to have any intention of stopping.

With a roar, the demon charged towards him. The Sand National held the gun in both hands and raised it steadily, when he squeezed the trigger the gunpoint was basically already pressed against the demon's forehead!

"Bang!"

The enemy's head exploded.

The second Mad Demon had already tore in front of him but as if it had learned a lesson from its fallen brethren. It didn't leap at Jodel instantly but pulled out his bone spear and swung horizontally at him. The only thing that Jodel could block with was his flintlock and that was what his body did. The enormous difference in strength between the two caused the gun to be sent flying from his hands and land in the ruins of the belfry with a clatter.

Just when Jodel thought that everything was over, his body once more made an unexpected movement. He moved forward straight-backed and crashed directly into the body of the Mad Demon. His right hand pulled out the bayonet from his waist.

From below, the dagger arced upwards and stabbed through the demon's helmet at the chin.

Instantly, Red Mist spurted outwards.

When the demon was about to wrap its arms around him and drag him into an internecine death, Jodel had already slipped out of the demon's grapple like a mud fish.

The Mad Demon wobbled a few steps forward and then limply knelt onto the floor.

Winning against a demon who was far superior to a human in terms of physical power in close-range battle was something that never even crossed Jodel's mind, but now, not only had he accomplished it, he finished off two in one go?

The last remaining Mad Demon finally raised its bone spear.

But the target he aimed at was not Jodel, but a broken wall in the ruins of the belfry!

Like lightning, the spear shot through the wooden window on the broken wall. A short silhouette gave a cry and leaped upright from behind the broken wall.

It was Farry!

The Mad Demon didn't care about his withered arm at all and bounded towards Farry in huge strides. Jodel involuntarily twisted around and dashed straight at the demon. Both of them arrived before Farry at basically the same time. At the moment the Mad Demon raised its arm, Jodel's bayonet had already pierced through its throat from behind.

Red Mist sprayed outwards from the injury and splattered onto Farry's raised arm.

His companion let out a shrill scream. Jodel realized in shock that he had regained control of his body.

"Don't tell me you're—"

Looking at Farry's rapidly rotting arm, realization dawned on him instantly.

"Why... are you here?"

Unlike the old Church in the Northern Kingdom, the Mojins had never regarded witches as a symbol of evil, instead, they saw them as Divine Ladies with superhuman powers. Because there was an extremely small number of them, clans that had a Divine Lady could usually be potential candidates for taking control of the Iron Sand City.

Jodel had once heard a rumor of a clan named the Sandstone Clan who, under the lead of a Divine Lady, followed the Queen of Clearwater in an expedition to the far North and never returned. That Divine Lady was called Kabala, and her ability was to be able to direct others to work for her.

But they didn't get the rewards they deserved, Sandstone was unable to recover from the departure of a large numbers of strong young adults and the women and children left behind on the edge of the southern region were annexed by other clans. It was only until the chief re-enacted the laws and rules of the desert could the clan preserve their name.

Outstanding combat skill, his uncontrolled body and the Mojin background... after witnessing these unbelievable events, apart from the Sandstone Divine Lady he couldn't find any other explanation.

But right now was clearly not the time to think deeply into it. He dug out a roll of bandages from the bag around his waist and bound Farry's arm. Then he used his knife to scrape away the festering skin, heaved Farry onto his shoulders, and ran in the direction of the permanent fortifications.

"Don't... tell anyone about this..." His teammate's soft murmur came from behind his back.

"But—"

"I beg you," Farry interrupted weakly.

After Jodel hesitated for a long time he nodded slightly. "Okay, I won't say anything."

Sounds of gunfire still rang ceaselessly around them, but the frequency had reduced greatly.

He saw half the body of the Spider Demon which had invaded the city fly into the air from the fire of a cannon and become completely paralyzed.

After he entered the inner region of the city, every so often someone would leap out from a concealed spot and cover their retreat alternately until they reached safety. When the figures of Aerial Knights appeared in the sky, Jodel knew that they had finally held off the demons' attack this time.

Perhaps the next time they battle would be the last stand for the garrison. But at least until now, victory had been theirs.

However, half an hour later, to Jodel's surprise, all the troops received a command to abandon Gust Castle and retreat through the western exit of Cage Mountain.

Chapter 1332: The Cause of All Mankind

"My lord, my subordinates have informed me that we have just subjugated Gust Castle, those lowlifes are now fleeing south!" a Junior Demon declared loudly while genuflecting.

"Good job! I'll report your contributions to the Sky Lord." Totolock nodded in approval. "Don't mind the escaping troops for now, keep cutting at the lowlifes' line of defense towards the east until their army is in a complete disarray!"

"Yes, sir!"

"This battle will give you a chance to upgrade, you need to seize this opportunity and trade their blood for our honor!"

"As you command!"

After the Junior Demon left, Totolock gave a cold laugh and looked at the map provided by the human nobles. "Lord Hackzord is overthinking things, the lowlifes are this and nothing more. Their trap might work once or twice, but it can't work every time. In the end, strength is what prevails in war. Even if their resistance has grown a lot stronger since four hundred years ago, it can't make up for the overall gap between the two races."

"But our losses are not small either." The tentacles on Siacis's chin made hissing noises. "In eight days, we have lost almost forty thousand warriors, our front line troops are down thirty percent. If we keep fighting like this, our strength might be compromised subsequently."

"So what? Haven't the lowlifes always been stubborn at first before they end up falling apart?" Totolock said indifferently. "Only strong races that can withstand losses can achieve final victory. The western side of Wolfheart is now in our hands, how much longer can the remaining two cities last? When we start attacking from all directions, they will very quickly lose the will to battle—just like now!"

Siacis didn't repudiate him.

Although the strength of the humans' resistance were beyond his expectations, he still agreed with Totolock's view deep down.

After all, he'd already seen too many stalemate situations collapse, like the seemingly solid surface of a frozen river suddenly shattering.

And the cause was usually due to one small crack.

The humans were always most intense in the beginning, but as their losses increased and failures accumulated, they gradually lost confidence. Internal conflict would emerge and, in the end, they would utterly lose the will to resist. At the start, his race had more losses than humans, but as long as they persisted unrelentingly and oppressed them, the situation would be reversed.

Near the end, it wouldn't be too much to say that the humans would flee at the mere sight of them.

This wasn't simply a problem of courage but as Totolock said, the intrinsic gap between the two races.

Humans needed plenty of rest, they needed to eat, to have warm beds and shelters to shield them from the wind, and all these conditions were difficult to satisfy in a war.

He had once closely observed the humans. Right now, he didn't even need to take a look at their state with his own eyes to imagine how dire their situation was.

By using the Primal Demons like expendables, his race had maintained days of relentless attacks. Adding on his race's advantage in numbers, it was basically impossible for the humans to get enough rest. Their mental state was likely on the brink of collapse, and having sufficient food and rest was impossible.

These unfavorable conditions would gradually eat away at the humans' morale. The news regarding Metalstone Ridge and Gust Castle would spread through their army sooner or later. Under the combination of these two blows, how long could the Sand City and Sedimentation Bay last?

Meanwhile his race didn't need such things; both food and rest could be solved by the Red Mist. The more cruel the war was, the clearer the advantage they had over the humans became.

Siacis concurred with Hackzord's opinion, but he firmly believed that the final victory belonged to the demon race. Humans—not lowlifes, had already performed well enough.

"I will bring the news of victory back with me to the Sky City and leave the subsequent attacks to you," Siacis said. "Don't underestimate the humans, use the power we currently have to capture the Kingdom of Wolfheart—At times like this we shouldn't add any more pressure to our rear."

Totolock spewed out a breath of hot gas. "Relax, if our troops are not enough, I will fill in the blanks myself."

...

After they retreated to a safe area, Jodel slept for over ten hours.

When he woke up, he felt as if his body was drained of energy and his stomach was protesting in pain. He subconsciously felt at the bag around his waist for his food rations but discovered that the clothes he was wearing had been changed into new ones. His familiar rifle was also gone from beside his bed.

There were around a dozen other wooden beds inside the tent, all of which were empty.

Was this... the field hospital?

His team mates had probably sent him here because when he fainted, his expression under the intense pain brought by the side effects of the Delaying Agent was too frightening.

He wondered how Farry was right now.

In order not to expose her identity, she inflicted more damage on the injury on her arm while enduring the agonizing pain to make it look completely different. Even if it didn't threaten her life, it would need a very long time for her to recover.

When he thought about how his battle partner, whom he lived and fought together with for over half of year, was actually a Divine Lady, Jodel felt his cheeks grow hot—He had not felt this way when he was retreating from the Gust Castle.

But his agitation and nervousness was very quickly pushed away by his intense hunger.

If he didn't eat something soon he felt that he would faint again any time.

Jodel slowly got up from the bed and dragged his feeble body in the direction of the tent's exit.

To his surprise, just when he pulled apart the curtain, the strong aroma of meat filled his nostrils. The smell was so captivating it was like it came from the heavens.

"You've woken?" A nurse very quickly noticed him. "Didn't the higher-ups tell you? You can't eat Delaying Agents one after the other. If you had eaten one more, you probably wouldn't have seen the light of the day again. You're really hungry now aren't you? I'll bring you to the canteen."

After he followed the nurse and entered a huge tent, Jodel almost couldn't believe his eyes.

Seven or eight metal buckets filled with steaming food were lined up in a row along a long table, from steak to soup—it had it all. Everybody lined up in a queue and passed the long table one by one with containers in their hands. When over half of the food in a bucket had gone, someone would tip more inside—the food was unquestionably made on the spot by the services department.

But... isn't this too extravagant?

As a past Mojin hunter who often teamed up with other small clans to hunt, he naturally knew how hard it was to provide fresh food for an entire group of people, let alone in times of war! The First Army was clearly short on both men and ammunition, how could they waste their precious transportation equipment on things like this?

Jodel couldn't help but voice his confusion and the nurse chuckled. "The food wasn't sent from Graycastle, they came from the cities in the Kingdom of Dawn. And it wasn't the First Army caravans that transported them but the people you saved."

"The people... we saved?"

"Yeah." The tone of the nurse's voice was gentle and filled with warmth. "Not only are there escapees from Everwinter among them, there are also refugees from Wolfheart. A number of them went to Neverwinter and the remaining wished to stay and do something to help in fending off the demons. They sent this food over here bit by bit by pushing carts and even carrying it on their shoulders."

Jodel was suddenly at a loss for words.

He had undertaken evacuation jobs before and honestly, the refugees weren't very cooperative at the start. Often, there would be conflict among them. He had been secretly annoyed about it and even regarded them as incurable idiots. But now, it was precisely those 'fools' that brought them hot and freshly cooked food.

"It's not only the ones who were saved," the nurse's tone sounded cheerful, "the merchants in the Kingdom of Dawn have also stood on our side. Not only did they provide several horses, they even voluntarily lowered food prices, which is why everybody can enjoy fresh meat and vegetables here right now."

She raised her head, looked at Jodel and smiled. "Doesn't this prove that the battle we're fighting for all humankind is slowly being accepted by everyone? When I think of this, I feel invigorated!"

Chapter 1333: The 'Battlefield' At The Rear

Fighting for all of humankind...

Even though the chief had indeed said that this battle would determine the fate of humankind, the main reason that Jodel had joined the First Army was for his own clan; he had never given a single thought about gaining anything in return from others.

It didn't matter whether or not they appreciated his efforts, he had to complete the job anyway.

Although Jodel still thought the same way, when he recalled the nurse's smiling face and the taste of the fresh and hot food, he felt a strange surge of warmth inside his heart.

Perhaps the things he was doing were more important than he imagined.

After he finished a bountiful meal, Jodel returned to his squad.

There were some new faces in the nine Sand National groups that he served in—this was nothing new; the rear was continuously sending soldiers to the front line and, among them, there were veterans who departed later as well as new recruits. As the front line always incurred a certain loss after a battle, it was necessary to transfer and adjust numbers frequently.

To his delight, he saw two of his companions who had been guarding with him at the belfry.

"I thought you had died over there and that only Ka... Farry and I escaped." Jodel pulled them into a tight hug and patted their shoulders hard.

"We were lucky. When the belfry collapsed, we happened to be on the lookout on the bottom level and was able to avoid all the falling rocks," his comrade replied. "It was you who shocked everyone, to think you would be unharmed even though you were up on the stairs. If we had known earlier, we wouldn't have left first."

"No, leaving as soon as possible was the right choice." Jodel shook his head. In situations like that, even if they could survive, they would have most likely encountered the demons that were heading for the

belfry. If Kabala hadn't saved him, he wouldn't have escaped demons' encirclement. "Unfortunately, the others weren't so lucky."

In the end, only half of the ten-person squad survived—even though Sand Nationals had been through far too many occasions of bidding farewell to their teammates and were accustomed to seeing death, he still couldn't help feeling sad inside.

After all, after over half a year of grinding training and teamwork they had formed a new type of relationship—this type of relationship was no less close knit than his relationship with his friends and relatives among his clan.

Even though he was overjoyed to see his surviving comrades, Jodel still felt somewhat puzzled.

The importance of Gust Castle was obvious, even he understood this. It was the capture of Metalstone Ridge that had caused the two flanks of their line of defense to fall apart after all. Likewise, abandoning Gust Castle would transfer this pressure to the Sand City and Sedimentation Bay, causing them to be face the same predicament.

He had originally believed that the First Army would guard this city to the death, until it was completely swallowed by the demons.

Of course, being able come out alive deserved celebration, but he did not feel as elated as he had thought he would. If the entire First Army line was defeated, not only would all the deaths of his people become meaningless, his clan's hard-won hopes would be for naught.

But as he had to abide by the responsibility of following orders and his trust in the chief, he didn't voice his questions in front of his two comrades.

"May the Three Gods accept their souls."

"May the Three Gods protect them in their afterlife."

After silently praying according to the traditions of the Sand Nation, one of Jodel's comrades changed the topic. "Let's not think about this anymore and talk about something light-hearted. You might not know but tonight Lord Iron Axe will come and inspect the encampment, and there'll be a play performance!"

"A play... performance?"

Other than boosting the troops' morale, the commander-in-chief must have come here to deliver a new command, which was not unexpected. But something like a play seemed completely irrelevant to war... People from the Sand Nation didn't have such refined hobbies so he didn't understand why his comrades were so excited.

His comrades clearly saw his befuddlement. "Yes, the famous Star Flower Troupe will be coming!"

"So?"

"Have you actually never heard of them? Drow Silvermoon from the Osha Clan is one of the members of the troupe!"

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After circling the area in hovering mode, 'Seagull' landed stably in the airport at the western pass of Cage Mountain.

Nana stepped down the gangway ladder and immediately followed the medical staff to the medical camp.

"Report the situation of the wounded," she said while walking and throwing on her white doctor's jacket at the same time. "Order the beds according to the rules in the First Aid Handbook, those with injuries to their critical organs take priority."

"Yes," the nurse acting as her assistant replied hurriedly. "Currently the encampment has accepted three hundred and twenty-six injured, among them fifty-five are in critical state. Their beds are lined up in tent one. In order to prolong their survival, most of them have been overdosed with Delaying Agent."

"The Delaying Agent is not a problem. Be careful in administering anti-shock therapy after the drug effects wear off—if the pain is too intense, use Dreamland Water to stop the side effects first. You have already prepared the Dreamland Water that you'll be giving them later, right?"

"Y-Yes," the assistant replied.

Even though it was not her first time assisting Miss Angel, she still could not get used to the cute, petite and delicate girl that looked no different from a girl next door calmly giving out instructions like an old and experienced scholar.

"Oh yeah." Nana stopped before the number one tent. "The therapeutic devices that I asked you to prepare before, you've prepared one for every patient right?"

"Yes, but..." The nurse hesitated and subconsciously addressed her with a respectful term. "M'am, are you really going to treat so many patients at once?"

According to the nurse's experience, it would take at least several days of water treatment to treat over fifty heavily injured patients and pull them out of danger.

"Of course." Nana smiled at her. "Relax, as long as I am here, they will all live."

Looking at Nana's confident smile, the nurse felt her worry alleviate considerably.

She inhaled deeply and followed Miss Pine into the tent.

...

After Nana put on a pair of specially created rubber worm gloves, she stood in front of the first patient's bed.

Her evolution on her Day of Adulthood allowed her ability to gain a new characteristic. Her original simple summoning power could now also be attached to objects and could continuously heal the injuries around her.

Compared to directly injecting magic power to heal, the effects of her new ability was clearly not as good; at least, it could not result in visible, rapid injury healing. However, it would use up a lot less magic

power, and didn't require her to continuously use her ability, which was the biggest advantage enchantment had.

As long as the the enchanted object kept existing, the patient's injury would slowly heal, and this allowed Nana to heal multiple patients at once. More importantly, it fundamentally removed the pain caused by the repetitive worsening of the patient's injury due to the alternating treatments that occurred when there was insufficient magic power. After her High Awakening, she had performed an experiment in the campsite at the back of Sedimentation Bay. A gauze that she enchanted with her magic could maintain effectiveness for over a week; this was already enough to pull the wounded out of a critical state.

The only problem was after she used up her magic power, the object would not disappear but remain inside the body of the patient. If she wanted to get the most out of her magic power, the enchanted object must be as close to the worst part of the injury as possible. Thus, Nana looked at the medical resources in the Dream World and decided to use the suture line for internal injuries and the gauze for external.

She picked up a scalpel and skillfully cut open the bloody abdomen of the patient. She found the puncture in his gut pierced through by a bone spear and quickly sewed it together.

The thin thread made from sheep intestines could be naturally absorbed by the body, and it wouldn't need to be extracted after recovery. It could be regarded as the perfect medical material.

Of course, for hard injuries such as broken bones, the suture line would not work—but injuries like this would not endanger a patient's life immediately and she could very much leave it up to the physicians and nurses.

The development of Neverwinter's medical institution system had already progressed from emergency treatment at the beginning to a group of medical staff that could independently perform simple treatments.

"After the blood water has been drained, stitch up the wound. Next."

"Yes!"

"Place a drainage strip at the wound and monitor the injury."

"Leave it to me."

"Amputate this leg first, we will think of something later."

"Understood!"

"..."

Under Nana Pine's instructions, the medical staff were all immersed in a tense yet organized medical treatments. At that moment the medical encampment became another bustling battlefield.

Chapter 1334: The Only Compensation

When Kabala awoke, her arm had already been bound with thick gauze. She still felt a throbbing pain, but it was insignificant compared to when the Red Mist sprayed on her.

This surprised her.

The injury on her arm was not life-threatening so it shouldn't have been treated immediately—it wouldn't have been strange if it was treated last or even left to recuperate by itself. After all, every squad had been repetitively reminded of the characteristics and importance of Angel's ability, she didn't think that people from the Sand Nation would receive special treatment either—if it was in a more critical condition, it would have been more probable.

But if it wasn't because of Angel's ability, how could her injury heal so fast?

Could it be that...

She suddenly felt a hint of uneasiness.

She needed to quickly leave where she was and return to the army encampment.

"Farry right?" A nurse noticed her movement, walked over, and looked at the name tag that hung on her bed. "How do you feel?"

"There's nothing serious now, I can return to the army at any time." She turned over and got down from bed and acted indignant. "Many of my comrades have died in the demon's hands, I want to make them pay immediately!"

"My condolences." The nurse nodded. "But before then, you must first visit the main tent of the camp, Miss Nana Pine would like to see you."

Kabala jolted. "She... wants to see me? But my injury has pretty much—"

"I'm not sure of the reason either, but she told me specially to tell you to do so," the nurse said with a smile. "The other soldiers wouldn't be able to see her even if they wanted to. Come with me."

Kabala stared at the nurse's unguarded back. After a moment of hesitation, she followed after her.

After passing through several checkpoints, she saw the fabled 'Angel.'

Simply from looking at her appearance, she certainly did fit the image that was rumored among the First Army. She was petite and cute, her skin fair with a ruddy complexion and she had a pair of youthful eyes. She was obviously a daughter from a noble family, and it would be accurate to deduce that she hadn't experienced any hardship at all. Kabala thanked her luck, perhaps things were not as bad as she thought.

"Um... You wanted to see me?"

Unfortunately, Nana Pine's first sentence shattered all of her hopes.

"I'm very curious. You're clearly a witch, why did you hide your identity and enter the First Army as a normal person?"

"I... I don't really understand..." Kabala replied unyieldingly. *Did Jodel really report this to the higher-ups...*

"Your injury." Nana pointed at her arm. "Although there are many punctures, most of them were caused by a sharp weapon. A demon's claw cannot do this, I think the weapon is probably a dagger or a bayonet. Also, when I was cleaning the wound I discovered traces of erosion by Red Mist. It penetrates into the muscle under the skin and can even reach the bones, only witches will suffer such an injury. Even if you deliberately marred your injury, you cannot falsify the corrosion."

Kabala shut her mouth.

Nana didn't learn about her identity from Jodel. Her reasons were logical and clear, leaving Kabala no space for any further lies. At first she had assumed that Nana was innocent and naive, thinking that she could perhaps fool her with words or pretending to be ignorant, now she realized that her plan had been laughable.

After a long time, she asked in a low voice, "You've seen witches being corroded by the Red Mist?"

Nana curled her lip. "I'm one myself."

Kabala was stunned.

"Everybody said that the Red Mist inflicts serious damage on witches, but nobody knows the way to cure it, so I could only experiment personally," the young lady said frankly. "If one of my sisters really gets harmed by the Red Mist one day, yet I can't do anything about it, won't I regret it for the rest of my life?" She paused. "Luckily, as long as you don't breathe in large amounts of Red Mist or get sprayed in critical body parts like the head, you can still be saved within a short amount of time. So remember, next time you encounter something like this, the safest thing to do is to cut off your arm immediately."

Kabala goggled at her speechlessly. Until now, she could not forget how excruciating the pain of the Red Mist's corrosion was. Usually, one would never want to experience it again after experiencing it once; yet, from the tone of Nana's voice, it seemed like she had undergone it several times. When she spoke of it, Nana's expression did not change at all; it was completely unfitting to her nascent and soft features.

A greenhouse flower from a noble family?

Stop kidding!

She let out a long sigh. Now that she thought about it, although she was treated highly as a Divine Lady, she seemed to have never gotten the upper hand in negotiations—whether her opponent was the Queen of Clearwater, or a young lady from the Northern Kingdom.

"... My name is Kabala, I come from the Sandstone Clan, Farry is a fake name." Kabala gave up her struggle and confessed her past. At this point, it was impossible for her to stay in the First Army, and because she had once served the chief's mortal enemy, the third princess of Graycastle, Garcia, it wouldn't be unexpected if she was seized and taken back to Neverwinter to undergo questioning.

Even if Roland Wimbledon insisted in treating witches kindly, it didn't mean that he would treat his enemy's subordinates kindly.

"I'm very curious, in the battle in Wolfheart, how did you trick the Pure Witches of the church?" Nana asked.

"Apart from commanding other people, my command ability can also be used to command myself—if it's only one person, I can also make a person do something that exceeds the limits of their body, and death is one of those things," Kabala said slowly. "Once the command is received, both breathing and the heartbeat will stop. Back then, both the Pure Witches and the Judgement Army were chasing the King of Wolfheart so they didn't waste too much time on me."

"No wonder; the scars on your face were from that time right?" Miss Pine pondered. "I don't really understand. You mentioned that you entered the First army for the remaining people of your clan, but why did you hide your identity and not even tell your clan that you're still alive?"

"What can I say? That I brought everyone to seek an eternal oasis, but I was the only one who survived in the end?" Kabala's expression revealed a bitterness beyond words. "They had put their trust and hope in me, yet I turned them into illogical monsters. Over a thousand healthy, young clansmen died outside their homeland, and the Sandstone Clan was almost annexed, how can I bring myself to return to the clan?"

"When the First Army was recruiting people among the people of the Sand Nation, I realized the only thing I could do in return was enter the army, and then use my contributions to exchange for an oasis that my clansmen can live in. The background checks in the Sand Nation is not as strict as yours, so I fabricated an identity and gained 's trust when encircling the Wildwave and Cut Bone clans," she said with her head lowered. "You can do whatever you want with me, but... please don't release your anger onto the people of the Sandstone Clan—there are only women and children left in the clan, they have never served Garcia Wimbledon."

"I understand." Nana nodded. "You can go back now."

"Wh... What?" Kabala was momentarily placed at a loss.

"I actually asked for you to come here to ask if you wanted to get rid of the scars on your face." The young lady spread out her hands. "But from the looks of it, the answer is no. If that is so, then there's nothing more I need to say."

Kabala turned agape, incapable of a reply.

It was true, she had never gained the upper hand in negotiations—she was often rendered speechless too in the past when conferring with the Queen of Clearwater, just like now...

Yet the feeling she got from the two was completely different.

"Oh yeah, the Star Flower Troupe is having a performance tonight, it will be right in the campsite in the western pass." Nana laughed. "If you return to your squad now, you might be able to catch the ending."

Kabala bit her lip. After she bowed according to the etiquette of Sand Nationals, she turned and left the main tent.

Chapter 1335: Morale Boosting Song

“Is it okay to do so?” Nana turned back.

Wendy walked out from behind the curtains and rubbed her head with a smile. “You’ve already made the decision, isn’t it too late to ask me now?”

“Because I don’t know if I’m doing the right thing either,” she said, pouting her lips. “I’m not as smart as Sister Anna, who can do everything with complete confidence.”

“There aren’t many people like her to begin with,” Wendy said gently. “So just choose the answer you think you won’t regret.”

Watching the young lady being absorbed in thought, Wendy couldn’t help but feel wistful.

She remembered the first time she saw Nana, when Nana was still a naive and innocent lass. Nana would chirp back at birds when she saw them and she would faint upon seeing blood. She couldn’t even understand her own problems, let alone worry about others.

In the short span of just a bit over four years, she had already learned how to look at a problem from another person’s perspective and possessed her own subjective judgement. The speed of her growth was astonishing.

In reality, she was not the only one. Lightning, Lorgar, and even Mystery Moon had all changed significantly compared to before.

It didn’t matter if their choices were right or wrong; at least they dared to make the choice.

This was probably a characteristic of the younger generation...

Wendy revealed a faint, bitter smile.

As for herself... she no longer had such courage.

...

Kabala walked towards the place where the play was being held—she didn’t need to be guided by the signs on the road, since the lights and excited cries of the crowd under the night sky made the best signpost.

Her pace became faster and faster which slowly broke out into a jog. She didn’t know why, but she felt as if her body had become a lot lighter. In the past, she had never felt like that, eager to return to the First Army troops as soon as possible as she did now.

She summoned her magic power and gave herself a tiny command—find Jodel in the crowd.

Of course, she was doing this to find her squad faster.

After all, he was the only person she that could be certain had survived.

Like an agile cat, she speedily maneuvered through the crowd, her eyes constantly taking in the environment around her and matching the scenes with the memories in her mind. After fifteen minutes, Kabala saw a familiar figure.

Almost at the same time, he also noticed her.

“Jo—”

“Thank goodness, you’re okay!” Before she could react, Jodel had already pulled her into a hug.

Kabala froze.

Usually, not only would she have pulled away ages ago, she would also have slapped him while she was at it. But looking at Jodel, who seemed even more emotional than she was, the hand she raised never did land a strike.

However, after maintaining the position for less than a few breaths, Jodel reacted and panickingly released his arms, stuttering, “So-Sorry... I forgot you’re... Um, I’m just too happy, I don’t mean a-anything else...”

Kabala noticed two other familiar faces approaching them.

It looked like they were not the only people who had survived the belfry’s collapse.

She used the hand she was originally going to slap with to pull the currently apologizing Jodel into her arms.

“If we were in the Iron Sand City, a philanderous action like what you just did towards a Divine Lady is enough for you to be dragged out and be fed to the scorpions,” she leaned close to Jodel and whispered in his ear. “But right now I’m not some Divine Lady, just a soldier from the Sand Nation, understand? If you are going to play the part you have to do it through and through. Don’t let other people notice anything odd; otherwise, I definitely won’t let you off easy!”

“Yes, I-I understand...” Jodel didn’t dare to move a hair.

“Very good, don’t forget this. Speaking of which, If I pull you in first, then you should be honored and will naturally not need to be fed to the scorpions.” Kabala paused. “Now, go and celebrate with your teammates.”

“It’s great that you were discharged so quickly!”

“The wound on your arm isn’t too serious, is it?”

As they were talking, the other two had already wrapped their hands around them and the group hugged each other, sharing their joy at still being alive. On the makeshift stage, the play was already nearing the end and applause that sounded like a rainstorm rippled throughout the crowd. Nobody noticed this little interlude among the nine squads.

At this moment, the First Army commander-in-chief, Iron Axe, stepped onto the stage.

When he opened his mouth, the crowd very quickly quietened.

“I know that in the past eight days, you have all been through hell-like ordeals. There has never been a battle this harsh in the past.

“This is because they are not doing this for territory, power, or riches. The demons only have one aim, and that is to wipe us out utterly; other than that, they do not wish for any compensation.

“So the demons will not care whether we surrender or not, they will not care for their own losses, even if their casualty numbers far exceeds ours. They will definitely not stop their attack!

“Even so, you have resisted until now, and survived in this trial of hell. This is enough to prove that although the demons who are going all out are strong, there is a limit—they are not undefeatable like the legends describe! It can be said that the ordeals you have undergone over these eight days, are no less significant than the Battle of Taquila!

“Over there, we defeated one demon army, but in Wolfheart, we are facing six or seven demon armies! The enemy are coming at us in full force, they are everywhere, from the western mountain to the east coast! But even until now, we have not been destroyed!”

The crowd stirred.

Iron Axe paused for a moment and then raised the tone of his voice a notch. “That’s right, in order to dodge the spearhead, I made the command to temporary retreat from Metalstone Ridge and Gust Castle. It might be like this in Sand City and Sedimentation Bay as well, but this is not failure, but an opportunity for a counterattack!

“I know what you are all worried about, but don’t forget what I said before—this battle has nothing to do with territory or riches, the only goal is to annihilate the enemy. What we have abandoned are only cold stones and empty houses, but for this, the demons have sacrificed tens of thousands!

“You are the key to winning the war, as long as the strength of the First Army exists, taking back these cities will only be a matter of time!

“Sooner or later, the war will spread to the Cage Mountain region. This place will also become a battlefield, but before then, enjoy this night to your fullest! We relax now in order to face an even harsher challenge. After undergoing the trial of hell, we will give back hell!

“Long live Graycastle, long live His Majesty Roland, long live humans!”

After Iron Axe yelled out the conclusion to his speech, the camp followed with an uproar.

Everybody repeated the same rally cry and the worry and questions in their hearts melted away.

At this moment, an inspiring song started.

Echo walked onto the middle of the stage, delivering the play’s finale.

During the stimulating song, a vision of their army sweeping across the demons’ formation like a flood seemed to appear before Kabala’s eyes.

She knew this was a type of ability, but didn’t deliberately resist against it.

When she felt the sound of everyone’s hearts combined as one, she thought that it wasn’t too bad.

Kabala glanced aside at Jodel who was cheering beside her and a thought emerged involuntarily in her mind.

After the war ended and the Sandstone Clan had a stable place to live, she would probably be forgiven by her clansmen, right?

When that time came, she would seek out Miss Nana Pine to remove her scar.

Chapter 1336: Starting The Counterattack

After Iron Axe returned on 'Seagull' to the Cage Mountain command post the following day, the first thing he did was walk into the General Staff office.

"How was your journey?" Edith was sitting in front of the mahogany desk, calmly sipping on some black tea.

Although everybody had often worked until dawn and so busy that their brains were bursting the past few days, Edith still somehow maintained a refined image, as if she was naturally born with more energy and time than other people. Even Iron Axe admired her ability.

"The morale is encouraging." His answer was brief.

"Then we can now begin the next step of our plan." The Pearl of the Northern Region revealed a slight smile. "Speaking of which, the defending armies of Sand City have also retreated from the defense region yesterday night."

"Then only Sedimentation Bay is left..." Iron Axe looked at the large map on the wall.

"I suggest to get them to evacuate as soon as possible and send out a squadron to receive them, we don't need to wait until there is a break in the defense."

Iron Axe nodded, agreeing with the judgment. There was very likely over fifty thousand demons gathered in the east from the west now. It wouldn't be a problem for such a large number to surround the entire Sedimentation Bay. As soon as the demons' troops gathered, it would be very difficult for the First Army to find another chance to retreat.

Since the aim of the war had never been focused on cities and territory to begin with, giving up Sedimentation Bay in order to preserve their troops was the obvious decision.

Ever since the enemy began their massive attack, evacuation processes had never ceased. The citizens and merchants that kept the city running were the first to be evacuated out of the city, following them were the noble families and aristocrats that chose to serve Roland. The current city was nothing more than a huge empty shell. As long as the command was given, the defending troops would move immediately.

"I... don't understand..." Agatha who was flipping through the newest battle report suddenly muttered.

"Did something happen?" Iron Axe walked to her side.

"The difference between the death statistics... the demons' losses are as much as thirty times as ours, how was this done?"

The four cities had all been attacked by enemies in the past week so the reports were sent over separately, and needed to be collected and summarized. In order to avoid miscalculation, she had looked over the calculations in her hands numerous times, but the answer still remained the same.

According to the statistics, over one thousand and five hundred people had died in battle in the four cities, while the deaths of the enemy were as much as fifty thousand; this could be entirely described as unbelievable.

If this was in the times of The Union, Agatha would immediately think it was an intentional fabrication by someone in a bid to falsify military achievements. But she had followed the First Army in battle several times, and with their system of having several parties examining the report, the likelihood of falsification was tiny. Even if they threw away ten or twenty percent of the difference, it wouldn't change anything.

After all, when the First Army was in the Fertile Plains on their northern expedition, they had only faced a twenty-thousand-strong demon army! At that time, they achieved victory in the Battle of Taquila only by relying on the hundreds of kilometres long railway and constructing one fortress after another, which took almost a year.

This time, the plan of the General Staff was simply to keep retreating, how did they cause losses double that of the Fertile Plains in eight days?

Even though she was filled with confidence with the current humans, she was still astounded.

Agatha had originally thought that this battle would be extremely difficult.

"No wonder." After looking at the Ice Witch's statistics, Edith chuckled. "Honestly, the effects of this plan did surpass my expectations a little, but the credit can't all be given to the First Army, the demons' cooperation was also vital. The ambush on Hackzord probably left him with some serious injuries, causing him to have no energy to care about the details of the Front Line."

"Only for that reason?" Agatha said disbelievingly.

"I know what you are confused about." Edith waved her hand. "It looks like we got this result just after a few retreats, and our battle plan seems incredibly simple. But in reality, that is not the case. When you were in The Union you usually stayed at the rear so it's not strange that you don't understand—to put it simply, only the current First Army is able to execute this battle strategy."

"The First Army that journeyed far to the Taquila Ruins can't either?"

"At least, they wouldn't do better." The Pearl of the Northern Region explained, "The difference between retreating and being defeated is often as thin as paper. Just being able to maintain strict order under huge pressures is extremely difficult, let alone retreating orderly. If it had been those nobilities' armies, I'm afraid that scattering apart upon command is the best that could be expected out of them. If the First Army hadn't undergone the Taquila night raid, and the previous separated squads hadn't demonstrated such zeal when executing commands, I wouldn't have dared to take the risk and put this plan into motion."

"Also, the effects of the new weapons are very obvious. In the streets of the city, without the support of Longsong Cannons, they were able to oppose the enemy just relying on general-use machine guns and cannon fire. And the biggest advantage to these weapons is distance, as soon as the the entire army can be moved, the advantage would be within our hands the whole time, and it would be logical to achieve such a result in this battle."

Edith paused. “But it is the truth that we have lost our peripheral defense line, so our next step is the key part to our entire plan. As soon as the demons seize all four cities, they will definitely start planning the next attack. Cage Mountain is both a protective screen and the production site for the raw materials for the Glory of the Sun; thus, we can’t keep using the retreating tactic. We must take a step and decrease the enemy’s strength before they recover.”

“Red Mist...” Agatha said in a low voice.

“Correct, these four cities are all outside of the Red Mist region and the demons’ reliance on their supply lines will increase substantially, the reappearance of the Red Mist supply line is very likely. The battle front is now basically stretched across the entire Kingdom of Wolfheart, I don’t believe they will be able to reach everywhere.”

“Before the storage towers were constructed, the only thing that the demons could rely on were the the obelisk-like Fortress-like Monstrous Beasts and manpower for transportation,” Iron Axe added. “Before, the attacks they launched from the side flanks all started from the beasts, but according to Lightning’s and Maggie’s observations, their protection of the Fortress-like Monstrous Beasts dramatically decreased after large numbers of Mad Demons perished. Also, when they were attacking the four cities, the support line of the main force was all hidden inside the Red Mist. Now however, they will all be exposed under the eyes of the First Army.”

“The problem is that this means we need to take the initiative to strike,” Agatha said hesitantly. “The Fortress-like Monstrous Beasts can move around by themselves, and aren’t really scared of the attacks of the Aerial Knights, we can only send out land troops in order to destroy them. But if we can see the enemy, then the enemy can see us as well. Even if the protection of the Monstrous Beasts decreases, they can send out last minute reinforcements—adding on the journey to and back, we are very likely to lose the advantage of distance. If we were chased and caught by the demons...”

In the entirely exposed battle of their encounter, even if the First Army could defeat the demons, their own losses would be severe.

“Thus, speed is key.” Edith raised the corner of her mouth. “All we have to do it complete our counterattack before the enemy has a chance to react.”

But how could they do this? Agatha looked at the map and tried to find a path from Cage Mountain to the four cities. There were quite a number of paths between the two, among them were trading paths as well as the hard roads that were constructed later for speeding up evacuation. They were spread around like a spiderweb in between the four cities and Cage Mountain.

But these paths did not have the ability to decrease the distance. The First Army didn’t have a cavalry troop, even if they had large numbers of horses, it was doubtful whether they could catch up with the Fortress-like Monstrous Beasts. What’s more, there was a limited amount of weapons one could bring while riding, and this would not be enough for confronting those behemoths.

“Of course, it won’t happen now.” The Pearl of the Northern Region seemed to notice her puzzlement. “This plan still lacks a key element; only when it is in the right place are all conditions fulfilled. According to the plan though, you will be able to see it very quickly.”

Chapter 1337: Road Transportation Line

Three days later, the defending troops of Sedimentation Bay successfully evacuated the encirclement before the demons had regrouped.

By now, eighty percent of the Kingdom of Wolfheart's territory had fallen into the demons' hands.

The First Army had gathered in the western pass and central pass of Cage Mountain, which were the only two natural passages between the Kingdoms of Wolfheart and the Kingdom of Dawn.

On the same day, the construction of the road that connected the north and south was finally finished, and the cement road that came from the two sides combined together in the middle of Cage Mountain. This meant that Neverwinter had a dedicated road that directly reached Wolfheart.

When the first "Hump" vehicles slowly appeared along the horizon, cries of surprise came from the surrounding crowd.

"What's that? They're like small mountains!"

"They have wheels, I think they probably count as vehicles..."

"Even the outer shell is cast with iron; how much would that have cost..."

"If it were pulled by horses, perhaps even ten horses might not be able to move it."

Hmph, ignoramuses. Sweeping his gaze over his coworkers immersed in discussion, White revealed an expression of contempt. If even this astonished them, their eyeballs would probably fall out in shock if they saw the iron bird which could fly in the sky.

He came here naturally to celebrate Graycastle's opening of this road, and like most coachmen, in order to get his hands on a good commision—ever since the demons attacked Wolfheart, he didn't dare to take a single step out of the region controlled by Graycastle. After all, being saved once by an iron bird was already a blessing from god; he didn't believe that his luck was so good that he could coincidentally encounter people from Graycastle every single time.

The rear services transportation team created by the refugees had inspired White. Although the pay was not as good as the main transportation members, it was better because it was safe. What's more, no matter how skinny and weak his horse was, and no matter how old and rundown his caravan was, it was better than the handcarts of the refugees.

But clearly, he was not the only one to notice this point, as the demons closed in further and more civilians evacuated, more coachmen went to the rear like him, and the original self-created team suddenly became a lot larger and stronger, to the point of beginning to become an industry itself.

When he thought of this, White became even more annoyed. He was clearly the one who came first; yet, he had to compete for work with these young men. If Smarty was here, he probably would have already monopolized the situation with his own transportation team.

In just a while, those huge behemoths were already moving in front of everyone.

Even though they looked heavy and awkward, they were not much slower than horses. Especially when the machine's figure was completely exposed, even White, who proclaimed to have seen many things, felt an overwhelming pressure.

There was no other reason except the huge sizes of these vehicles.

Just the wheels were half as tall as a person, and the thickness was thicker than a body. The periphery of the steel wheels was wrapped in a layer of pitch black rubbery material and when it pressed against the road it gave off a sense of indescribable stability. When he looked back at his own caravan that he had originally viewed as his treasure, White couldn't help but feel a sense of inferiority.

When he gazed through the see-through glass window at the front of the large vehicle and met eyes with the 'coachman' looking down at him inside, this feeling intensified.

White couldn't help but wonder how many times his caravan had to transport goods to match the goods transported by this behemoth in one instance. It would probably number more than ten. According to the way Graycastle priced it, that would be ten times his pay...

"They're announcing the commission!"

Someone said and everyone immediately stopped their discussions and rushed toward the inside of the encampment. Although the transportation power of these never-seen-before vehicles far surpassed carriages and handcarts, they still needed to rely on the latter to send the goods into the various encampments and mountain regions.

White was no exception.

But there was a thought in his mind that he couldn't get rid of.

How good would it be if he could have a steel vehicle like that?

...

Farrina pulled the hand brake and jumped out of the driver's seat.

She didn't expect that she would be returning to Wolfheart in such a manner. Even though she had made up her mind, she was a member of the Church in the end; even if she passed through the selections, the Administrative Office might not permit her venture to the front line.

But nobody had reminded Farrina that she was once a criminal. The routes the drivers took were purely dependent on skill. She learned all the tricks in driving the steam-powered truck in only a week, and passed the final test with full marks. When she mentioned that she wanted to take up the transportation job on the path from the Windswept Ridge to the Sparkling River, the officer responsible agreed immediately on the spot.

It wasn't her first time passing this checkpoint—although the scenery around her was still the same as she remembered, the overall appearance was completely different. There were several makeshift houses and tents near the checkpoint, and dark and hard paths could be seen everywhere. Road blocks, towers, and metal wire fences separated the entire encampment into distinct regions, and in every region, several people could be seen bustling about.

Even without asking, she could feel that the place was filled with the scent of war.

This scent was extremely familiar to Farrina. so much so that she fell into a daze for a moment.

“What’s wrong?” Joe’s voice interrupted her surging thoughts.

“No, nothing.” Farrina shook her head. “I think I have already gotten the answer.”

As a member of the Judgment Army, her feelings about Graycastle’s power was deeper than most people. If the opponent was a noble, the First Army didn’t need to put on such a front. If everything before her eyes was created to trick her, she was probably overestimating herself.

Only the fabled demons can cause Roland to face off with his full power.

“Then next we...”

“Let’s first help the King of Graycastle clinch victory.” Farrina drooped her eyelids, “This will be the beginning of my atonement.”

“I will be by your side until the very end.” Joe lightly held both of her hands.

“Is this Farrina and Joe of the second caravan group?” A voice behind her suddenly interrupted their meeting of eyes.

“Yes, is there something you need?” Farrina coughed and then turned around and replied a little sheepishly.

The male who looked like a military officer made a salute and then said, “The commander-in-chief of the First Army, Lord Iron Axe, wants to see all the drivers of the ‘Humps’. He’s in the Cage Mountain command post now, please come with me.”

The vehicle members had already been notified during their training that the rear services transportation was also a part of the military movements. Obeying the army calls would be more important than following the pre-established transportation schedule.

Farrina exchanged glances with Joe and then nodded.

...

The moment she saw the crowd of people when she entered the Cage Mountain command post, Farrina realized that this meeting was probably not so simple.

At least, it wouldn’t be a simple condolence and welcoming meeting.

Because the woman standing in the middle of the crowd had a head of beautiful gray hair, which was a symbol of the Graycastle bloodline.

When someone stepped forward and made an introduction, she knew her judgment was correct.

The Graycastle princess, Her Highness Tilly, First Army Commander-in-chief Iron Axe, Cannon Master Van’er, Firearm Master Brian, Witch Union Operational Commander Agatha—it could be said that all the high-ranking officers of the entire front line were all gathered in this hall.

“Welcome to Cage Mountain.” Iron Axe went straight to the point. “I have a mission for you.”

Chapter 1338: Attack From Multiple Fronts

“Although I know none of you are soldiers, and that there is currently a group of people from the First Army reserve force and the Second Army undergoing steam-powered truck driving training, time does not wait for people.” Iron Axe’s stable gaze swept over everyone. “As you are the first group to pass the test with outstanding results, you are likely excellent yourselves, and should be more than qualified for taking on this mission.

“The objectives of the mission is very simple.” He walked before a map laid flat on the table, and moved a pawn from the Kingdom of Dawn to a black line in the eastern region of the Kingdom of Wolfheart. “The central checkpoint is about one hundred and fifty kilometers from here, all you have to do is drive the people and goods on the truck here, wait until they finish their attack, and then bring them back. You will stop for about half an hour, if you’re lucky, they might not even encounter the enemy.”

Iron Axe paused.

The crowd stirred.

After all, his final sentence also meant that if they weren’t lucky, they would encounter demons.

After a waiting for a moment, the commander-in-chief continued, “Of course, the First Army will still be the ones responsible for the fighting, all you have to do is concentrate on driving. Ten trucks in total have arrived at Cage Mountain, according to the plan, only four to five trucks are required for the job, thus, we will select members through recruitment as per the tradition of the Administrative Office.”

“For each return trip from the front line, the convoy will receive an additional remuneration of value that is triple their salary. This remuneration will be handed out by the First Army and is unrelated to the salary given out by the Administrative Office. Now then... those who are willing to undertake this job please take a step forward.”

Farrina took a step forward without hesitation.

To her surprise, all the truck units chose to undertake the job, only that they did not make the decision as quickly as she did.

Her original aim of coming was to go to the front line and see demons for herself. Because she was once a member of the Judgment Army, she was already used to going onto the battlefield, but the others were different—not taking their identities as drivers into account, most of them were just free civilians from Neverwinter.

They undeniably had great trust in the First Army to make such a decision.

Iron Axe very quickly selected five vehicle units according to who stepped out first. The No. 2 Vehicle unit that Farrina was in was also selected.

“We’ll leave them to you.” The commander-in-chief looked at Van’er. “After sunrise tomorrow, the battle officially begins!”

...

"I keep feeling uneasy," Agatha said in a low voice after all the drivers had left the command post. "The number of people setting out is small yet they would need to have the perfect cooperation of the entire army. Most of the drivers are also normal city folk, and only had less than a day to practice, isn't it too hasty to make such arrangements?"

At least she now knew what the Pearl of the Northern Region meant by 'ultra fast.' Just by looking at the schedule, there certainly was an extremely high chance that their plan would succeed.

The simple hard road that they had repaired previously for migration had now become the foundation of their counterattack. Even if its width, thickness and construction quality couldn't compare with the construction of main roads, it was far better than the gravel or dirt paths. If they took a step further and limited the load on the trucks, the vehicles could go very fast.

And in the two hundred kilometer return trip, the cube-powered truck's average speed was far higher than any cavalry—even if the rider ignored the expense of the horses and alternated between two horses as they traveled, they would still take two days. On the other hand, the trucks would be able to do it in six to eight hours, and they could carry the heavy equipment needed by the counterattack unit.

The only problem was, that not only did they need to hide First Army soldiers in it, they also involved normal non combat civilians, and something unexpected could happen.

"This battle certainly does harbor more unpredictability, but this is insignificant when you take the benefits in to account," Edith said frankly. "The demons can reallocate the Fortress-like Monstrous Beasts at any time. Compared to continuing to wait for the right time, it is better to take advantage of the present."

"I think the enemies wouldn't expect humans to launch a sudden counterattack less than a day after they lost Sedimentation Bay. The most likely result of failure is returning without accomplishing what we wanted, while success will cause the following movements of the demons to suffer a constant setback; the right choice is clear. Moreover, war is full of unpredictability itself, sometimes a plan that looks utterly safe can be broken apart upon a tiny coincidence." She smiled. "So... let's pray to the goddess of luck to stand on our side."

...

There was light wind and snow at seven o'clock the following morning.

Under the dull and gray sky, five steam-powered trucks lined up in a long line and slowly drove out of the silent campsite toward the east.

Different to when they were transporting goods, a grayish-white cloth covered the trucks' trunks. From afar, they looked like moving mounds of snow. Among them, two trucks were dragging 152mm Longsong Cannons, the long black barrel blended into the truck, and only if one went closer would they notice the faint cool light refracted outwards from the hydraulic buffer.

Two hours later, twenty-five biplanes rose into the sky from the Thorn Town landing field, and under the lead of 'Seagull' headed towards the target battlefield. Unlike their normal battles, the Aerial Knights

didn't choose the lower skies where it was easier to locate the enemy, but entered the clouds from the very beginning, flying through the gaps of the clouds.

This meant that they lost a large portion of their view, and apart from a compass, the only thing they were guided by was the figure of 'Seagull' which occasionally disappeared and reappeared among the clouds. Once a biplane was lost, it would be basically impossible to find the group again. In order to avoid getting lost, everybody paid full attention, and apart from the roar of the engine, there wasn't the sound of a single conversation within the passenger compartment.

At the same time, Lightning and Maggie appeared in the sky above the battlefield and searched for potential scouting demons.

Two hours and fifteen minutes after the mission began, the first accident occurred in the convoy. Because of the poor road conditions, the No. 4 Truck unit broke down when crossing a ditch. After the passengers switched vehicles, the convoy continued on their way, only leaving behind the fault crew to fix the malfunction by themselves.

Half an hour later, an accident also happened to the Aerial Knights. When flying above a layer of clouds two biplanes lost sight of the planes in front of them, and could only change direction and return according to the instructions that were given before they set off. In the return journey afterwards, they all had no choice but to leave the clouds.

Fortunately, everything went well afterwards.

After three hours and six minutes, the steam-powered truck convoy was the first to reach the destination.

"My god, Farrina..." Joe leaned forward and muttered.

"Ah, I see it." Farrina stopped the truck stably and calmly stared to the side of the driver's compartment—through the windshield, she saw a scaffold that looked like a skeleton erected on the mountain top in the distance. From her view it was only a third of the size of her fingertip, but when taking the distance into account, she could imagine what an enormous monstrosity it actually was.

Dense crimson mist enshrouded the skeleton, almost covering the entire mountain peak, starkly contrasting with the snow scenery around it.

That was certainly not something created by man.

Just by looking at it, she could feel a something cold rising in her stomach.

Farrina involuntarily squeezed the steering wheel.

Without question, demons had already entered their world.

Chapter 1339: Furious Flames of Counterattack

"Everybody get out of the trucks, now! Move as we practiced. Quick, quick!"

The yelling from the cargo hold from truck snapped Farrina to her senses.

“Let’s help too!” she said to Joe. She pushed open the door and jumped out of the driver’s seat.

Within the span of a few breaths, the passengers started getting busy, writing and sketching in their books while erecting some strange equipment. From their conversations, the equipment seemed to be for helping the soldiers locate their target.

At this point, even if Farrina was slow, she knew the First Army’s intention.

They were planning on bombarding the enemy that was kilometers away!

Although she knew that the people of Graycastle were the best at using artillery to attack enemies over long distances, knowing was vastly different to seeing. A shred of awe arose in her as she gazed at the scene before her eyes—all projectiles were affected by their own weight and wind. The further the distance, the bigger the influence. Even a small, tiny disturbance could dramatically affect the result, so how was it possible that they could guarantee that the projectiles fired by these weapons over such a long distances would land where they wanted it to?

It couldn’t be that these simple looking equipment had the ability to predict the future?

If that was really the case, the terrible defeat suffered by the church in the battle at Coldwind Ridge wasn’t strange at all.

Farrina couldn’t help much at all with such technical work. She walked to the back of the convoy, hoping that she could lend a hand with the unloading.

For the purposes of maintaining secrecy, drivers weren’t informed beforehand who or what would be carried by the trucks, but the convoy had definitely carried quite a lot of things. At times like this, an extra helping hand could at least speed up the preparation, Farrina may not be good at other things, but strength was something she was certainly not lacking in.

But what she saw at the rear stunned her.

At the rear, a group of brawny, strong men were carrying long wooden boxes with high efficiency. Those weighty trailer firearms didn’t seem heavy and awkward at all in their hands. After removing the couplers, they surrounded the long steel pipe and dragged it from the hardened road.

What shocked Farrina even more was that among the group, she recognized some familiar faces.

Wait... isn’t that the God’s Punishment Army?

Even though they weren’t wearing armor, from their power, movements and appearances, she could tell that they were clearly the the once formidable warriors of Hermes.

“Hey, we meet again.”

Suddenly, someone patted Farrina’s shoulder.

Farrina jerked around at the familiar voice. “Zo... Zooney?”

“I didn’t think that you’d actually still remember my name,” Zooney laughed.” I thought that you’d still call me Army Commander Enova first.”

Farrina exhaled deeply. "Then these people are all..."

"Yes, they're all Taquila witches." Zooley spread out her hands. "See, I didn't lie to you, right?"

"There are several hundreds like me in Neverwinter. We use the bodies donated by the church, so don't be too flustered if you see someone you know."

Zooley's words resounded in her mind once again.

For a moment, Farrina didn't know how to reply.

Joe lowered his head towards Zooley. "Miss Zooley, I've always felt extremely regretful that I didn't get the chance to thank you last time, it's great that we meet once again. Thank you for rescuing Miss Farrina."

"Miss Zooley? Mortal, you know your stuff, I'll accept your thanks." Zooley shrugged. "We'll talk about the other things later, right now, we should focus on dealing with the demons."

"Um..." Farrina couldn't help but utter as she watched the back of Zooley who was about to leave.

"Hm?" Zooley stopped.

"Thank you. And... I feel extremely sorry... for the mistakes that the church once made..."

"You are not in the wrong. You're only a person who got deceived, that's all."

She waved her hand and walked toward the site where the equipment was being set up without looking back.

Farrina opened her mouth, but could only release a soft sigh.

But what she didn't see was when Zooley left, the corner of her lips was curled slightly upwards.

The result was as Iron Axe described—as a driver, Farrina didn't manage to help out on anything. In less than fifteen minutes, the First Army had finished the shooting preparations.

"Reporting No. 1, 2 and 3 cannons have finished loading!"

"Fire!" The commander ordered without hesitation

After a loud noise, a gauze of snowy fog flew up at the bottom of the cannon instantly. The sound of the explosion echoed continuously in the mountain, like thunder rolling across the horizon.

The searing hot shell cases that were lined up in the snow made sizzling noises. New rounds were very quickly loaded in them, in preparation for the next firing round. The entire process went smoothly and the teamwork of the Artillery Squad was so good they seemed to move as one person. The extent of their training could be seen just from this detail.

Farrina noticed that the difference between the First Army and other armies laid not only in their firearms.

After about thirty seconds, she finally saw a column of snow rise in the mountain peak in the distance!

...

“The ground forces have begun firing!”

Sylvie saw it everything from on top of ‘Seagull.’

After flying through a long projectile trajectory, the three rounds of artillery fire all landed near the Fortress-like Monstrous Beasts, with the closest one being less than three hundred meters away. The sudden explosion threw the stationed demons around them into a disarray. Some Devilbeasts flapped their wings and flew into the sky.

After she informed the cannon commander of the trajectory adjustment information, Sylvie placed all of her attention onto the enemies’ movements.

“How did the demons react?” Tilly asked.

“There are no traces of the main target moving. Currently only a small number Devilbeasts have risen to the sky, it shouldn’t be too long before they discover the truck convoy.”

“Our luck’s not bad.” Andrea whistled.

Indeed, their luck was not bad. Sylvie nodded her head indiscernibly. According to the plan set by the General Staff, the counterattack unit had already prepared themselves to keep firing despite the scouting demons’ attempts to stop them if they were discovered before the approach of the Fortress-like Monstrous Beasts. The plan was based on the experiences accumulated during the battle with the demon vanguard army on the Fertile plains. If the enemy had been Ursrook, twenty to fifteen kilometres away would already be counted as a dangerous region.

Although they just experienced a major battle, the majority of the forces were all sent to Sedimentation Bay. But as an extremely important ‘moving obelisk’, there were still many monsters and guarding soldiers stationed near the Fortress. But their security perimeter wasn’t completely impermeable—no Devilbeast had flown over this region for an extended period of time.

Tilly got Sylvie to keep guiding the trucks forward precisely because the enemy hadn’t discovered the counterattack squad early on. Only until their distance was eight kilometres from the target did they change into the artillery firing position.

This could only prove that the enemy had slackened after seizing the four cities!

After a moment, the second round of artillery firing boomed.

After adjustment, the second round of firing was a lot more accurate—two of them passed through the Fortress-like Monstrous Beasts’ skeleton and landed at its feet one after another, killing several Mad Demons in its explosion. The third shot directly shot into the Monstrous Beast’s enormous back, sending snow and bloody meat residue flying.

The Monstrous Beast made an ear splitting scream, at the same time it took two steps forward.

More Devilbeasts flew from all directions, and gathered into a group in the sky.

But after they determined where the attack came from, five minutes had already passed—in past battles, it was not considered slow, but when facing the Longsong cannon eight kilometers away, five minutes was enough to fire ten rounds, and that was including the time taken to adjust the shots!

The battle this time was not like the Taquila battle, ending the battle with the super accurate “short leg attack”. But to the enemy, their end would be far more terrible. Under the bombardment, the skeleton body was damaged. The top was peppered with holes due to the artillery rounds. Through the layers of cracked bones, the vibrating heart and the flowing blue blood could be seen. Even if it tried its best to escape, compared to the speed of the artillery fire, its attempt was not very effective.

When another artillery round penetrated the body of the beast, it made a tragic roar. A streak of blue light flashed across its huge body before it exploded entirely! Organs and blood sprayed down like a waterfall, dyeing the snow on the mountain in an eerie color. The empty limbs seemed to lose their support and insipidly snapped apart, collapsing onto the demons who failed to escape in time, squashing them into a pile of twisted, battered skin.

“Be careful, they’re coming!”

At the same time, Sylvie warned the convoy that the demons were closing in.

Chapter 1340: Hunters At The Rear

“The enemy has discovered us! Quick, everybody pack up your things and get on the trucks. Evacuate in the direction we came!”

Although she wasn’t clear why the First Army seemed to know the demons’ movements so well, Farrina leaped onto the truck as soon as she heard the command.

She familiarly closed the exhaust valve and pushed the gear sticks that controlled the magic cube back into the starting position. The front of the truck began to vibrate and the needle on the pressure meter moved rapidly to the right, reaching the desired spot in seconds.

This meant that as soon as she released the brakes, the truck would move.

She poked out her head and looked towards the direction of the mountain. The mountain peak that had been enshrouded by mist before was now a lot clearer. The miasma-like Red Mist was rapidly dissipating, and many small black dots the size of sesame seeds came into view on top of the pure white slope. They surged down the side of the mountain, charging towards the truck convoy, like a swarm of ants leaving their nest. Dozens of flying demons spread across the sky, giving off a feeling that they were definitely not going to let the convoy off easy.

The scene involuntarily reminded Farrina of the city wall at the Hermes Plateau.

There, tens of thousands of demonic beasts had charged at the Judgment Army’s defense line in the same manner.

“Set off!” A God’s Punishment Witch patted the door of her truck hard, a signal that everyone was prepared to leave.

Farrina breathed in deeply, and pulled the brake lever.

The steam-powered truck began to slowly move.

The other truck convoys also started their trucks.

Everybody turned around and drove away from the launching site flawlessly, even better than during the test. But even so, the distance between them and the enemy didn't widen. Even when the convoy had accelerated to their maximum speed, the pursuers in the sky were had actually become closer.

"Oh... Oh no, they're too fast. At this rate we'll be caught!" Joe yelled in panic.

Farrina gripped the steering wheel tightly and remained unfazed. Those with wings would always be faster than those on the ground, this was common sense. Since the enemy even had a flying squadron, they would have been caught sooner or later. The people of Graycastle was likely aware of this, considering that they had crossed swords with the demons for so long. Currently their only hope was that they had long taken precautions against such a situation.

No matter how the First Army planned to deal with this, it was not something she could intervene.

Thus, her most important job at the moment was maneuver the truck properly and not be a burden to the others.

"Ignore our pursuers and help me look at the road ahead. Warn me ahead of time if there is a ditch!" she said, her expression unchanging.

Joe swallowed before nodding vigorously. "Understood!"

...

After a whole hour, the only thing that Good could see was the tail of 'seagull' and the flickering waketlights.

Being in the clouds for so long had caused him to lose his sense of direction and height. It was both mentally and physically exhausting to fly under such conditions. He had to focus all his concentration in order to maintain the plane's position.

From the changes in the compass, apart from flying towards the north from the very beginning, the Aerial Knights had been circling the sky, clearly waiting for the enemy to appear.

As for the location and situation of his other companions, Good didn't have a single idea.

Apart from the unshirkable feelings of pressure and not knowing anything, the terrible environment in the clouds was also a big problem. The wet fog created a layer of frost on his windshield, and although the coldness was insulated by the rubber lining of his jacket, the moisture still carried away part of his body temperature, encumbering his hands and feet like they were pieces of wood.

If he didn't have Finkin at the back seat to make conversation with him, he probably wouldn't have held up until now.

Tilly had once informed him that His Majesty was currently developing a type of messaging device which allowed two people in different locations to communicate with each other wirelessly. His biggest hope at the moment was that this object could become a reality as soon as possible.

"Look, the lights have changed!" Finkin suddenly yelled.

Good looked toward 'Seagull.' The yellow light that hung from its tail had somehow turned into a bright red.

He felt a rush of adrenaline!

Red was a signal for attack. As soon as the wakelight emitted red light, this meant that they were to immediately fly down and out of the clouds and launch an attack on the enemy!

Nobody cared who the enemy was.

Whoever they were, it would be better than going around in circles in the labyrinth of clouds!

Good pushed the control stick down without hesitation.

Instantly, he was engulfed by pure white clouds.

As soon as his vision returned, Good felt his body lighten all over. The black and white earth and gray sky seemed to combine to become a stunning and breathtaking view. At the same time, he saw a group of Devilbeasts flying in staggered formation—they had not noticed the sudden emergence of Aerial Knight from the layer of clouds at all. They were less than three hundred metres from the ground, and clearly their target was the convoy of steam-powered trucks that were dragging long wheel-ruts in the snow.

The nose of their planes were coincidentally pointing toward the direction that enemy was heading, this was the ideal combat angle. Just by quietly controlling the planes tilt, the bullets shot from the machine gun could penetrate the enemy's formation lengthwise. What's more, the Aerial Knights were in at an absolute advantage in terms of height. After a barrage of gunfire, it didn't matter how the demons reacted, it would be difficult to escape the biplanes' subsequent pursuit.

It was as perfect as a textbook example.

The discomfort he felt previously when he was hiding in the clouds vanished instantly. Good swooped the plane downwards while pressing the firing trigger.

Finkin, who was sitting at the back, let out a strange yell.

Instantly, over ten streaks of silver light appeared in the sky, all from different angles. They shot at the group of Devilbeasts, going from the front to the back. Against the sudden attack, the demons were unable to react in time. Several blobs of blood blossomed in the sky and the Mad Demons and Devilbeasts that suffered fatal hits dropped to the ground like stones.

Only at this moment did they realize that they were not the only hunters on this battlefield.

The demon group scattered apart, a part of them continued to charge toward the truck convoy, and the other changed direction, as if deciding to initiate a fight to the death with the Aerial Knights.

Good very quickly counted their numbers, there were twenty-six of them.

In a sense, the enemy had basically equal numbers. Apart from the few sporadic encounters with some of the Devilbeasts, this probably could be counted as their first large-scale aerial battle.

"Signal Hinds with a flag for him to follow behind us!" Good hollered.

In a short span of twenty seconds, the Aerial Knight squadron had already flown over the heads of the Devilbeasts, ending the first round with their complete victory.

Using the speed of his dive, Good very quickly completed a turn back in his original direction on his 'Fire of Heaven', completing a perfect arc to appear right above a Devilbeast who was attempting to fly higher. The distance between the two was less than two hundred meters, he even saw a Mad Demon trying hard to turn around in attempt to find the best angle to throw its spear.

But obviously, he wasn't going to give the demon a chance.

A tongue of fire spat out from the barrel of the gun—as it emitted bright light, the tracer shot through the Devilbeast's back like a shooting star. The sudden fall of its mount doomed the Mad Demon's attack attempt. Even if it was not fatally shot by a machine gun, the result was no different if it fell from this height.

Finkin couldn't help but let out a whistle.

His other teammates were all locked onto their targets, and the two sides were very soon at each other's throats.

The second round began.