

Witch 1361

Chapter 1361: A change of mind

Is she feeling disappointed because she was unable to kill the Oracle...

Roland did not know whether to console her or roll his eyes. Any ordinary person's first reaction should have been joy, having survived a battle against an invulnerable entity. Yet Fei Yuhan was stuck in brooding over her failure, it had to be said that a genius's thinking was always different from the common person.

The higher-ups quickly came to a consensus.

Information regarding both the Battle of Divine Will and the two worlds were classified as top secret information. The higher-ups of the Martialist Association deemed that before the Erosion crisis was resolved, all content related to either were banned from being leaked to prevent unnecessary panic.

As for Roland's background and identity, the Martialist Association took it one step at a time. If they went according to Fei Yuhan's account, his importance was even above that of the President of the Association. But the decision was not one that Prism City could make on their own; it required Sky City and the other branches of the association to have a common discussion and consensus. This process was estimated to take a long period of time.

But to not interfere with the battle against the Erosion, Prism City was to provide their full support to facilitate Roland to the best of their abilities.

After their agreement on the fundamentals, the discussion in the hall moved into details regarding the actual support.

Roland simply waited quietly for the results.

Roland walked out of the hall with Fei Yuhan and stumbled upon Valkries waiting outside for him.

Her gaze stopped at Roland after staring at the two for a while. "I wish to talk to you alone."

Fei Yuhan smiled. "I'll make a move first, Zero is still sleeping in the ward."

After her departure, Roland followed Valkries to the courtyard behind the building.

Although it was winter, the courtyard still had an abundance of greenery. The lawn around the stone slabs had unmelted snow on them with sharp green grass poking out, as though reminding the people that the cold season was nearing its end, and it was time to welcome the new year.

If it was a stroll, Valkries had definitely chosen a good location. But her motive in inviting him over was obviously not to admire the scenery.

"What do you want to say?" Roland broke the silence. "You realized you've made the wrong mistake and decided to trust me?"

“No, I am still unable to trust you.” Valkries shook her head. “The future of our races depends on the outcome of the Battle of Divine Will. I cannot make a decision without verifying the situation first.”

“You have seen it for yourself, the Oracle was trying to stop me from seeking the truth—It might not mean anything, but doesn’t that imply that we are in the right direction? Even if I had fabricated the outcome on the Western Front, the incident with the Oracle can’t be something I deliberately arrange, right?”

“Yes, I have to admit that you’re right,” Valkries answered calmly. “But my opinion won’t change.”

Annoyed, Roland stopped abruptly. “You are helping the Gods destroy your own civilization.”

“There’s no point criticizing me when there’s an imbalance of information. Regardless, the Dream World and reality are separated by the Realm of Mind.” Valkries turned around. “If you were me, will you be able to set your resolve and cooperate with enemies that you have fought against for thousands of years? Besides, the only thing I can get is a verbal promise.”

Roland opened his mouth, but ultimately couldn’t say the word “yes.”

After a long while, Roland finally sighed. “If that’s the case, then we have nothing to talk about.”

“I will not make a decision without verifying the situation first, but—” Valkries paused, “If it can be verified, I will reconsider your suggestion.”

Roland was stunned. “What?”

“While saving Fei Yuhan, the girl that drove over was a Transcendent, right? And she is different from the witches by your side, not in terms of ability, but behavior— I found the former unfamiliar, but the latter rather familiar. In the words of this world, a generation gap. After thinking about it, the ones that I am familiar with are the people from the First and Second Battle of Divine Will. After all, after the humans retreated behind the border, I no longer had any interaction with your kind. From there, I guess that this witch is rather young and might even be alive right now?

Rather young... That’s likely comparing to those demons centuries of years old. From simply meeting, she was able to judge that Scroll and the God’s Punishment Witches are not from the same generation? Roland replied in a noncommittal manner, “What does this have to do with what you were talking about? Even if you get an answer after asking her, you might think we had preplanned the entire thing.”

“It obviously matters. The life expectancy of The Union’s witches are less than a century and are bound to draw support from technology left behind in the Second Battle of Divine Will by the Underground Civilization. Ever since I fell for your trap, I have repeatedly pondered over how they are able to enter the Dream World, and the only possibility I have theorized has to do with the Underground Civilization.”

Valkries walked over to an artificial ice sculpture and looked at her own reflection. “Although the requirements are extremely demanding, this race holds a fascinating ability with magic power, allowing them to greatly decrease the difficulty required to connect with the Realm of Mind. Additionally, we know that the fact that the Union managed to excavate the legacy of the underground civilization in the Fertile Plains was no accident. I originally believed that they had given up on their bodies in reality and

transferred their spirits into a specific Dream territory. But after seeing that Witch, I realized that my theory was wrong.”

“The ability to allow a live Transcendent move freely in and out of the Dream World without any external help isn’t something the underground civilization is capable of achieving.” Valkries continued, “I do not know what methods were used, but I know this fact for sure—If existing witches are capable of using this method to enter the Dream World, I believe that it will be as effective for a higher ascendant from my race!”

“You mean you want to—” Roland’s heart skipped a beat.

“Bring Sky Lord here to see me.” Valkries raised her head, “Even if you’re the creator of the Dream World, it’s impossible for you to duplicate something you have no knowledge of. As commander of the Western Front, Hackzord will undoubtedly verify the questions that I wish to know.”

Roland blinked his eyes and couldn’t help but chuckle in anger in exasperation. “But that’s a Grand Demon Lord. If I could control him, why would I need my First Army to fight so bravely? Furthermore, Hackzord has suffered from our ambush previously and no longer dares show its face; how can I find him?”

“I will help you create an opportunity,” she enunciated each and every word slowly and clearly.

Roland frowned. “... Are you serious?”

“But you have to promise me two things. Firstly, you cannot use this opportunity to attack Hackzord. Secondly, regardless of what decision I make in the end, you have to let him go.”

“Did you even consider how big of a risk I am taking here?”

“We are all in danger!” Valkries replied solemnly, “That’s right, you think that this would expose the secret to Humanity’s legacy, but isn’t it the same for me? To allow a Grand Lord to take this risk—if you renounce your promise, what else can I do but regret? Do not assume that I made this decision on a whim!”

Sensing that her emotions were stirred, she somewhat calmed herself down. “In short, this is the biggest compromise that I am willing to make. As for whether or not you want to take on this risk, the decision lies completely with you.”

Roland stared at her for a long time before asking, “I want to know, what changed your mind?”

“To fear the future and give up on forging ahead is simply the mentality of cowards, even if we know that defeat is the eventual outcome, we should do all we can to turn that around!” Valkries coughed gently. “For a human to be able to say such words, it did surprise me.”

Those were Fei Yuhan’s words at the meeting.

She was... already standing outside the hall back then?

“Also, remember the question you asked me at the beginning?” Valkries looked straight into his eyes.

Do you think that the Transformer from a thousand years ago did the wrong thing?

Roland nodded.

“I think that it did the right thing.” She turned and walked towards the exit. “That is my answer.”

Chapter 1362: Reversal

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“Delta and Epsilon failed.” Gamma raised its head and looked at the clock hung on the basement wall. The time shown was 12 hours past the time stipulated for the mission.

It was unsurprising for the Oracles to die going up against World Creators, given the unpredictable risks involved. Dying was not an issue so long as they completed their missions. Given sufficient time, they were able to reincarnate inside God’s territory.

But after 12 hours, nothing occurred in the world.

Inside the void filled with magic power, Gamma did not feel the slightest ripple, much less any signs of the entire domain collapsing. It only meant one thing, the two failed in their mission to kill the self-cognitive being named “Zero.”

“I am sorry to say that we have our own missions to complete.” Beta merged the five last cores into its body and suddenly spread open its arms.

A red light flashed, followed by a scarlet red erosion breach which appeared in the middle of the basement.

“The situation isn’t irredeemable. As long as we achieve our goal, there’s still chance for things to turn for the better. Let’s go, the magic power here is almost drained. The overlapping state of the two worlds will restore soon, which will even allow those martial artists to have the chance of sensing our tracks.”

It did not guess the reason for failure or the process of the battle. As Oracles, they did not feel frustrated over failure or care about being defeated. The only thing they cared about was completing God’s decrees to the best of their abilities.

Gamma nodded its head silently.

Beta turned and stepped into the rift.

This was no ordinary erosion.

It consumed a large amount of energy and cores from Fallen Evils to establish a ‘passage.’ As for another erosion rift that was connected to it, it led to the final battlefield created by the main Creator.

Gamma followed closely behind. Just as it was about to enter the rift, it heard the sound of footsteps from the stairs.

It was slightly startled and turned its head towards the source of the sound—This room had been isolated by magic power and prevented any detection means from locating it. Compounded by the numerous Fallen Evils guarding outside, it was impossible for anyone to enter.

Very quickly, a figure appeared from the darkness.

“Why is it you?” Gamma asked in confusion.

The other party was Epsilon disguised in human form.

According to the plan, Epsilon was responsible for delaying the human reinforcements and help Delta stall for time. If the latter failed, Epsilon should not have been alive.

Gamma did not receive a verbal answer, but an arm with five fingers.

This arm shot forward like lightning and pierced through Gamma’s chest!

The mask dropped and shattered, revealing the revolving astrolabe under the hood.

Gamma stared at the other party in disbelief as its consciousness turned sluggish. “You... Why...”

“There’s really a difference.” Epsilon retracted its hand and allowed Gamma to fall on it, “.....you and Lan.”

“You... want to betray God?”

After a moment of silence, Epsilon whispered, “Who is God?”

“God is—” Gamma opened its mouth, but could only repeat the same words again and again like a stuck gramophone. In the end, it never had a definite answer for this question.

“That’s right... It is a question we have never considered; which is why you are unable to answer it. After killing Lan, many thoughts sprouted in my head, as though they had always been ingrained within my mind, but deliberately sealed within. And one of the question was: Did Lan truly betray God?” Epsilon whispered into Gamma’s ears, “I do not have the answer to that. Us Oracles are the manifestations of God’s will. If we were to go against it, are we still considered Oracles?”

Gamma did not reply, or perhaps, it should be said that it could no longer make any sounds.

“The next mission requires two for completion, so anyone will do. If you get the opportunity to meet Lord God, please help me ask the question.”

Epsilon opened its robes and wrapped its companion up. After some squirming, it transformed into Gamma.

It picked up the mask lying on the floor and covered its face before walking into the Erosion rift.

After crossing through the passage formed out of magic power, Epsilon opened its eyes and welcomed a completely new scenery.

An imposing tower constructed out of reinforced concrete from the bottom to the top extended beyond its field of vision.

Inside, the tower were layers after layers of suspended paths with shuttling elevators that connected each floor.

On every path were numerous homogeneous squares. The Oracles knew that sealed inside the squares were their objective—the world's magic power cores stolen from God's territory.

They drew support from these cores to have sufficient strength in laying down traps to kill Creators.

"What's with the hold up." Beta turned back and glanced at 'Gamma', "If you're ready, we can begin."

"Of course, leave it to me," Epsilon replied calmly.

...

For the entire day, Roland spent his time sprawled across his desk, continuously moaning and groaning in pain.

The series of unexpected events in the Dream World had overwhelmed him. They continued to haunt him even after he woke up. Regardless of it being the memory fragment from the astrolabe he internalized or the conversation with Valkries, both gave him a huge headache.

Especially the former.

It was undoubtedly an important source for information before entering the Bottomless Land to meet God. Roland knew from Lan's words the importance of the messages, but after pondering over them repeatedly, it was impossible to link the content between the two scenes.

And the string of words that left him clueless.

"From this moment forth, gravity will no longer be the force which is most deserving of reverence in this world'."

Why must it be gravity?

Out of the four fundamental forces in the universe, aside from its infinite range, gravity did not have any other unique feature. Its field of utilization was inferior to the electromagnetic force and its strength was far from the strong nuclear force. The only noteworthy point of gravity was that it was the first fundamental force observed by civilization, which meant that the secrets it had was the least.

According to conventional reasoning, aside from being studied intensively and published as part of important physics, it was extremely difficult to treat it as the most revering force.

As for the latter, after the Nightmare Lord initiated a preliminary collaboration, the two returned to the expensive restaurant where they first met and engaged in substantial and frank discussion that aroused the sidelong glances of other customers once again.

According to Valkries' words, the moment it was able to confirm the situation at the front lines, it would change its goal of "winning the Battle of Divine Will" to "to completely stop the Battle of Divine Will", including convincing the Sky Lord and providing assistance to the humans to proceed to the Bottomless Land.

Compared to merely acquiring information, the benefits of this cooperation were clearly greater. But the problem laid in whether the Sky Lord was willing to be convinced. Besides, there were more than

one Grand Lord among the demons, along with the King that was above them. Hackzord's ability to decide the situation on the Western Front was another uncertain element.

Chapter 1363: A Long Time Ago

Roland had three choices laid in front of him. The first choice was to make use of the opportunity Valkries provided and kill Hackzord. This involved almost zero risk and was equivalent to getting rid of a demon grand lord easily.

Considering Hackzord's unique ability and that it was far more challenging for higher grade demons to upgrade themselves, this action would benefit the front lines greatly. He could then push the blame to external factors or accidents that prevented the other party from showing up and lie to Valkries successfully. If lucky enough, the same plan could be used to lure other grand lords as well.

The second choice was to bring Hackzord into the Dream World and allow him to talk to Valkries. As the latter had decided to take the leap of faith and agreed to collaborate, Roland knew that the crux of the matter was not on the Nightmare Lord but on their discussion. The most ideal situation would be for the Nightmare Lord to verify the truth and conversely convince the Sky Lord to lead their troops out of the Human Kingdom, and spread the information to the rest of the Demon Race that the Battle of Divine Will had to stop. This way, the path from Neverwinter to the Bottomless Land would no longer be obstructed. As long as the last Oracle was killed, Roland would be able to face God there.

If the war concerned only the humans and demons, Roland had no doubts of choosing the former—after all, killing Hackzord in such a manner was a certainty and they would earn a bigger advantage in the war in the North. The longer they stalled for time, the further they could develop their war potential through industrialization.

But looking at the bigger picture, the situation became completely different.

Besides the Demons and Sky-sea Realm, Roland was worried about the threat from God, and a single Sky Lord was simply insignificant compared to that. Even if they won the Battle of Divine Will, the human civilization would not escape the outcome of being destroyed.

Roland did not know to what extent their development needed to survive such a terrifying cataclysm.

Time was not on their side.

Valkries might have realized this point and thus chose to take the risk.

It had to be said that this method had shown enough sincerity—at least after witnessing the attack from Erosion and the Oracles, she had truly considered Lan's warning and thought about the bigger picture seriously.

The problem was that the Transformer had too much of an influence on Valkries, to the point that even before the Battle of Divine Will, it had already planted a thought in Valkries. With the big picture in mind, to be able to forgo the victory of a battle to allow the continuity of her entire civilization could be said to be a natural outcome.

But Hackzord had not experienced any of it, making it a question if he would come to a consensus with Valkries after the exchange. Generally speaking, a decision to decide the fate of the entire civilization was not something that could be determined after one negotiation. But the more they were allowed to meet in the Dream World, the higher the risks, and this was what Roland had difficulty accepting.

Based on the present situation, he preferred the third choice.

That was to maintain the current status quo and gain more time for humanity to gain sufficient strength to reach the Bottomless Land at the edge of the continent

Frankly, this choice best suited Roland's style and it was the goal he pursued from the very beginning. Regardless of what response the Demons had, for humanity to have the capability to traverse over a thousand kilometers to reach their destination was undoubtedly the most reliable outcome.

However, the problem was the continuous mountain range terrain to the north of Neverwinter. To travel to the ridge of the continent, they had to rely on the 'Fire of Heaven', at the same time possessing the ability to defend against attacks in the sky. The process from research and development to production required time. During this period, it was an unknown if there might be any changes along the front lines.

Just as Roland had realized before—facing the threat of the Divine Will, choosing a reliable option was a form of risk as well.

The only difference between the third and the former two choices was that the degree of risk more or less relied on humanity's efforts to make up for their deficiency.

I should look for the Association's support regarding this in the next trip to the Dream world.

Roland thought to himself.

After dinner, Anna entered the office with a roll of design plans and sat at the opposite end of the mahogany desk. This was the time for their routine interaction and was the only period of the day where they felt relaxed and happier. So long as the research institute did not work in the night, Anna would stay in the office for two to three hours, where the conversations included the day's work to sudden enlightenments and ideas.

During this time, Nightingale would appear and relax by the side table with snacks on hand, browsing through the comic books illustrated by Scroll that depicted things in the Dream World. During this period, Nightingale would occasionally speak up, making the surrounding mood rather placid and warm.

After resolving the technical problems, Roland talked about the Dream World's problem that was troubling him.

"So that's why you were sighing incessantly..." Nightingale curled her lips. "Is it a must to have a connection between both worlds? What if the images you saw in the Dream World were assembled randomly? The more you think about it, the more white hairs you will have. No matter what, some things will never be understood."

Roland rolled his eyes. "The brain will degenerate if unused; if everyone's like you, this world is doomed."

“But the more you think about it, you’ll die much faster than the world.”

“...” He decided to retract the thought that Nightingale looked placid and warm.

Anna did not immediately give her opinion. She pondered and muttered to herself for a very long time before speaking up. “I’m afraid that Nightingale is right.”

Both Nightingale and Roland were stunned. “What?”

Anna could not resist laughing. “I’m not talking about not thinking, but she’s right on this matter... maybe the link between both scenes isn’t as complicated as you think.”

“Did you discover something?” Roland asked curiously.

Anna shook her head. “I’m not certain, just some wild guesses.” She pulled her hair to the back of the ears and gazed upon her notes. “For example... the sequential order of the two, or should I say—time.”

“The link is... time?” Roland frowned and thought about it before exclaiming in surprise, “If the second scene occurred before the first...”

“Then it depicts a complete story.” Anna finished his sentence.

“This is the price.”

The price was not about upgrading like the missing Radiation People.

Or about the tsunamis and storm that devoured all the survivors.

The two were on the time scale separated by more than ten thousand years... hundreds and thousands of years... or even further.

The price was pointing to something else.

The outcome was that gravity was no longer worthy of being a revered force, and a gigantic and red cavity appeared in the universe.

And if the string of words was subtly hinting to magic power, the phrase “From this moment forth” pointed to an astonishing conclusion.

Roland and Anna looked at each other.

“—Magic power did not exist in this world before.”

The two of them said in unison.

The absence of magic power meant that living beings that relied on it would no longer exist.

For example, demons.

And... witches.

Chapter 1364: Cooperation

“Absence of magic power in this world?” Nightingale had her doubts. “Will the world still be the same as it is? Why do I feel that the two of you are overthinking it?”

“... Indeed.” Anna recovered from her daze. “The effect of a force is easily felt, where the simple addition of an unremarkable component force into a balanced system will definitely induce change to the system, let alone magic power that exists everywhere. If magic power truly appeared out of nowhere, then the world before its existence ought to be completely different. But from your description, our world here sounds really similar to that world, where water flows, snow melts, the sun provides warmth and where mother earth provides life. Aside from magic power, it sounds exactly the same.”

“That is why it is worth revering—I think this is what that line was referring to.” Roland suppressed the slight chill that ran down his back. “It isn’t one of the four fundamental forces, but wields the ability to seamlessly enter the system and bring about a comprehensive change to the world, as though it is above everything else.”

“Is that really possible?” Anna frowned.

“It’s just a conjecture.” Roland grabbed his own hand. “And I believe the appearance of magic power did bring about some change, but it might not be what the other party had anticipated.” Roland paused for a moment. “—That is why he called it a price.”

“That sounds rather... terrifying.” Nightingale covered her mouth.

“No, it is instead a good thing.”

“Huh? Why?”

“Our current world is still filled with magic power. This means that even God is powerless to retrieve this price. If that is the case, magic power can continue existing forever,” Roland explained earnestly. “And if magic power exists forever, none of you will disappear out of the blue.”

“Ahem—” Nightingale tilted her head. “That sounds reasonable.”

“But we are already in the third month of the Months of Demons, and we have yet to see a new Witch appear. Who should we blame for this?” Anna spoke with a faint smile.

“Well, about that—” He was stumped for words.

“Alright, enough joking.” Anna chuckled. “In light of these inferences, the Battle of Divine Will and upgrades of races came about from the appearance of magic power, and ultimately turned into the present world which we are familiar with?”

“We can assume so based on this logic. Since the legacy shards and Realm of Mind are definitely related to magic power and all the evidences we have excavated, it proves that before we appeared, other civilizations used to exist.” Roland relaxed his tone of speech. “I am currently more worried about two things, the first being the red cavity that is gradually taking shape and annexing a part of the world; the second being the pursuit of liberation as spoken by the Oracle that betrayed God.”

“For the former, are you suspecting that it is affecting our planet?”

He nodded. "If we can only fly up there and take a look... a pity that it is still too difficult with Neverwinter's current technological advancements. As for Lan's liberation, it is definitely related to stopping the Battle of Divine Will. But as to what it signifies, I am afraid that we can only find out after entering the Bottomless Land."

...

Roland originally believed that a gargantuan organization like the Martialist Association would take an extremely long time to go through the necessary procedures, even after achieving a preliminary consensus, and might not even have finalized a set of statutes even after two weeks. Instead of waiting for the higher-ups to produce concrete results, why not raise a few requests himself? For example, focusing on providing Scroll with technological information, as well as carrying out specialized training for Saint Miran, Dido, and the other Taqulia witches.

However, reality went far beyond his expectations.

In just a single day, which meant going back into the Dream world that same night, he received a call from Garcia.

"Mister Rock's secretary wants me to inform you that the first support plan has been negotiated and passed by Prism City and the implementation of the plan requires your participation. The meeting will be held at Clover Group's modern car dealership's projects department. If you have no other arrangements, we can head over there immediately."

"Wait, us?" Before Roland could even react, the other party hung up.

Knocks were heard immediately from the living room door.

Roland immediately donned his jacket and opened the door.

It was none other than Garcia.

"Why was it necessary for Rock's secretary to inform you to inform me?" Roland did not understand. "Can't Mr Defender just call me directly? He even had to trouble you to make your way over."

"You still don't get it, do you?" Garcia said sourly, "This means that you have gained the approval of the Martialist Association, and is the standard channel of communications from the higher-ups. Besides, there will be many public figures participating in this coming meet. If you were to go alone, isn't that throwing the Association's face? And yes, in the future, let me handle all future contacts for such meetings. If you're ready, let's go."

"Well... I haven't showered."

She rolled her eyes. "Then go!"

Seeing that the other party had no intentions of leaving, Roland could only comply. It was only when they reached the ground floor did they both realize that Garcia's luxurious sports car had been wrecked from the rescue.

In the end, the two boarded a vehicle and drove out of the neighborhood, still in Roland's familiar SUV.

“About that... I will compensate you for your car.” He sat in the front passenger seat awkwardly. “But are you sure driving this vehicle will not affect the Association’s prestige?”

“Shut up.” Garcia snapped; her expression livid.

Roland tactfully moved away from her line of sight.

After driving out of the city, her expression got better. “About that—since it was to save a person’s life, we can only consider it as a collateral and I can let you off for the time being. As for what exactly went on there, I will comply with the Association’s discipline and hold off asking you about it.”

Roland was startled and did not know what to say. After a moment of silence, he replied, “Yes, thanks.”

“But this doesn’t count as you writing off your debt to me, understand?” Garcia’s tone immediately took a turn as she emphasized. “After this secret order is lifted, you have to tell me everything in its entirety—including who Zero is, and the true background of those relatives of yours.”

Indeed, she had noticed their peculiarities.

But all of that was within expectations. While saving Fei Yuhan, Garcia had stood by the side and naturally witnessed the process of reviving Fei Yuhan. Regardless of it being Scroll who brought the magical sutures, or the unsurprised God Punishment Witches, all of them were obviously not ordinary people.

Even so, she was still willing to wait for his explanation. This trust caused Roland’s heart to feel warmth.

And there was Fei Yuhan and Rock... With the help of so many people, the Dream World was indeed moving towards an unknown future.

But it was this unknown that made it worth protecting.

“When everything is over, I will tell you everything,” Roland replied solemnly.

Roland immediately noticed that the eye-grabbing signboard belonging to the new modern car dealership had disappeared after driving into the factory district. What replaced it was a brand new gold-plated signboard.

His eyes opened wide in surprise.

The words were clear as day. ‘Design Bureau of Graycastle’.

Chapter 1365: The new Design Bureau

It was not the only change in the area.

Roland noticed many workers tearing down and changing the billboards on both sides of the road, and the usual bustling construction sites were all extremely quiet, as though the entire modern car dealership project had disappeared in the blink of an eye. The short wall used to divide the construction space had a new scaffolding in place, looking as though it was being used as a base for new exterior wall.

Even more ridiculous were the heavily-armed police on alert as they cordoned off the projects department with sentry posts. Any entrance and exits required identification and vehicles were prohibited from approaching the main building.

After having their credentials verified, the armed policeman saluted them with a standard military salute and opened the guarded entrance.

“Oh my god...” Garcia whispered, “What did you make the Association do?”

“To be honest, I am as clueless as you are.” Roland shook his head helplessly. “I haven’t even made any requests yet.”

As the two walked towards the main building, Garcia suddenly stopped in her steps and frowned.

Standing at the doors and welcoming them was her father, Garde, a member of Clover Group’s board of directors.

“I’ve waited for you for a long time.” The man nodded at his daughter first, then initiated a handshake. “Mr Roland, although I’ve known that you were special the first time we met, I’ve never thought that you’ll be far more special than what I imagined. From this day on, this factory is yours.”

Garde’s words were clearly filled with good wishes, but his tone did not have the slightest bit of joy—the look on his face was complicated, like an ensemble of contradictions. During their first acquaintance, this middle-aged man showed an obvious contempt towards Roland, a feigned friendliness on the second due to Roland’s relationship with the Defender, while the current and third meeting was one of fear, most probably his true emotion.

“Isn’t the modern car dealership originally an important development for the Clover Group? Are you guys really that nice to gift it away so submissively?” Garcia mocked, “And here I thought that the Clover Group would be slightly more unyielding, with how all of you were ready to demolish the apartments in spite of public opinion.”

To her surprise, Garde did not reveal any anger and merely chuckled ruefully. “The Martialist Association gave the family terms that they couldn’t refuse. Although I’m a member of the board of directors, I was unable to stop the decision. Aside from that, the Clover Group has officially terminated the plan to demolish and rebuild the apartments. We will be announcing it at the reception later—there is no longer a need for you to rally for the residents, my daughter.”

Garcia was frozen with shock.

“The demolishing and relocation plan has been... terminated?”

“Yes, it has,” Garde replied slowly. “I know that even if this passes, you will not forgive me that easily, but at least we are no longer enemies. In the future, if you wish to meet your brother, feel free to come home anytime. Of course... you can bring him along as well.” He looked towards Roland.

After leading the startled duo into the main hall, Garde waved before leaving the projects department building.

The secretary responsible for bringing them in led them to the conference room even before they came round to.

Seated around the approximately 100-square-meter room were about 40 to 50 people, all dressed in formal attire. It did not appear anything like a construction site meeting. Placed around the center table were four chairs arranged facing each other. Apart from Defender Rock, there were two others sitting there—one about 40 to 50 years of age and resembled a veteran of war; the other had graying hair but had eyes brimming with vitality.

The last chair was obviously left for him.

Garcia finally jolted out of her reverie and gently nudged him on the back.

Roland nodded, calmly walked over, and proceeded to sit beside Rock.

With the experience of being a King, he naturally did not suffer from stage fright, but instead felt even more curious—from the looks of it, the Association had obviously planned to surprise him.

But after the secretary's announcement of the start of the meeting, every single person in the room were given an introduction, leaving Roland in suspense. Despite knowing that the Martialist Association had a long history and its great influence over the government, the 'surprise' greatly exceeded Roland's expectations.

From metallurgy to materials, from machine designs to automatic controls, every single subject matters expert were present. Among them was an existing laureate from the Nation's Academy of Sciences as well as another leading technical expert from a private corporation. More critically, every single person here was merely a representative. Behind them were enormous teams, each completely capable of undertaking the entire process from research and development to production.

As for the two men seated to his right, one was the overall-in-charge of the technological department, President Wu and the other Executive Manager, Head Liu. The former took charge of all research development while the latter was responsible for the allocation of resources. The professionalism of the entire system was evident and was not something the original small group of the Design Bureau of Graycastle could compare to.

This was the sole reason for the Association to take over the entire land—without the space, they could not have research work happen in parallel.

Aside from that, the two were also representatives of the government; they were sent to assist in the situation and gather information.

The entire project was assigned the name 'Project Nüwa.' It was rather fitting to use the legend of her patching up the sky to describe the resistance against Erosion. Information of the other world was limited to only a few government officials and as a result, the official documents explained that the undertaking was a 'complicated drill' designed to simulate the final destruction of the human race due to Erosion and how the survivors would utilize resources after the war and rebuild civilization from the ruins.

One of the crucial points listed was that some Awakened Beings underwent rarely seen evolutions due to Erosion. They evolved and displayed completely different abilities from what the Force of Nature had; thus, the researchers were required to study all relevant elements around the phenomena. As to what

this special abilities were, Chief Hunter Roland was designated by the Association as the overall person-in-charge with full authority to make decisions.

At this point, Roland almost spat the tea that he had just imbibed.

In other words, the main content of the meeting was to listen to the abilities announced by him and investigate their applications. Even if he were to make things up, it was a requirement to take him seriously and consider how the abilities could influence the rebuilding of their civilization.

It was fortunate that the Martialist Association was the one doing such a thing. If Roland had to announce the conditions to this matter that seemed to border on child's play by himself, all the professionals on site would have left immediately.

"I wonder if Mr Roland is satisfied with the proposal?" Rock smiled towards him and said, "When you raised your request to me previously and mentioned its severity to the world, I thought you were exaggerating then. But now, I have finally understood the true meaning behind your words. Taking into account that the magic power manifested from both worlds are different, no matter how absurd or weird your requests are, they will not disagree with you."

Roland raised his eyebrows. "You believe... in everything that I've said?"

"To be honest, I don't know." Rock retracted his gaze. "But as long as we can prevail over Erosion by working together, we will have the opportunity to verify them in the future, is that not? And this new Design Bureau is only the beginning."

Chapter 1366: A Fork in the Story

...

The battle ended as quickly as it began.

After it stabbed its evolved stinger into the center of another Eye of Branch Nest, victory became an instant certainty. The quick diffusion of its neurotoxin destroyed its target's will, causing it to lose control over its "blade" and "foot."

It looked at the collapsed Eye of Branch Nest and retracted its stinger in satisfaction.

It used to be like these pitiful creatures, aimlessly gathering repeatedly, waiting for the Mother of the Nest to determine their fates. But while the latter had yet to evolve, it had already become a hunter of the Nest Eye.

Compared to its initial appearance, its evolved state was a complete overhaul.

It exploited the pheromones that some deep sea fishes had, separating its eyes from its internal organs and attached them to its skin, at the same time evolving its ribs into a carapace brimming with magic power. This exponentially heightened its defensive capabilities, and if it encountered the despicable two-legged lowlifes again, the latter would no longer be able to easily intrude into its body.

Aside from that, it had deemed that long distance combat was far safer than close combat. It could now produce raw silk possessing explosive elements, and use them to fire gallstones and bone spears. Although it referenced it from the bodies of other lowlifes, it was a lot more effective. It did not rely on magic power to attack and was not weak towards God's Stones. To accommodate these organs, its entire body had expanded three times and any typical "blade" was incapable of harming it.

Lastly, the evolved stinger that produced neurotoxins was both capable of fatally wounding a large target and preserving its intact body for the monster to absorb its pheromones. It was a multifaceted weapon.

Without a doubt, it could not be regarded as the same species as those Eyes of Branch Nest.

For the sake of distinguishing itself from its previous form, it learned from the lowlifes and gave itself a name—"Devour".

To devour everything and evolve.

And all the scattered Eyes of Branch Nest harvesting pheromones in the sea were undoubtedly the most valuable prey.

The next thing to do was to enjoy the moment.

"Devour" opened its carapace and unleashed countless tentacles that pulled the carcass into its own body bit by bit.

Right at this time, it suddenly sensed an extremely peculiar undulation—

The degree of the undulation was so immense it felt as though the world was howling in unison!

"Devour" gazed up to the sky, and aside from the dark clouds and Bloody Moon, the vast sky did not seem to be experiencing any changes. But in its eyes, endless ripples were undulating incessantly across the dusky sky, spreading out into the distance.

An intense sense of unease enveloped "Devour".

Regardless of it being violent eruptions of undersea volcanoes or earthquakes, these natural events produces all sorts of wave motions, but none of that could compare to what "Devour" was feeling. The ripples were too pure and filled with a cadence which made it even more terrifying.

The ripples dissipated quickly into the horizon, but before "Devour" even recovered from its bewilderment, a familiar sense surged through its tentacles into its body.

It was the Mother of the Nest issuing its evolution command!

The command was received by the Eyes of the Branch Nest, and a new connection was established with "Devour." After losing the connection with the Mother of the Nest for so long, it never expected to once again hear the echoes of its species.

But it did not stop there, upon deciphering the content of the command, Devour's subconscious mind immediately had the desire to obey!

No!

It was no longer an ordinary nest eye!

It was a unique individual!

It spat out the remaining carcass of the Eye of Branch Nest and rolled left and right on the ground in an attempt to resist its remaining instincts. The “blades” and “feet” guarding by its side were so afraid they remained stationary until they were smashed into meat patties after being struck by a sweeping stinger. Its actions stirred up waves through the surrounding waters. It was practically doing its utmost to be able to suppress the urge stemming from the bottom of its heart and inhibiting the allure by force.

Devour gradually calmed itself down. After hesitating over and over again, it finally allowed the ‘feet’ to drag the nest eye back. After all, Devour gained the knowledge of where the eyes were moving towards and felt that its future hunts had become even more convenient.

Devour carefully inserted its tentacles back into the center of its prey and immersed itself in the willpower of the main nest, recording all the commands accumulated within the pheromones.

But the end result shocked it beyond words!

There were... too many orders!

The process of evolving was an extremely serious affair. It was impossible for every single recomposition to be flawless, like how flexibility and firmness are inversely correlated, a sudden spike meant a weak continuation. To achieve perfection, one had to consider the balance of the whole entity. It was because of this that every command issued out were constant repeats of analyzing and filtering all pheromones before a decision was made. It basically did not accept more than two strains of pheromones, and placed emphasis on extraordinary evolutionary constructs.

However, Devour had received and read many evolutionary constructs that were acting on many Nest Eyes.

For example, the ‘ability to endure pain,’ ‘rapid regeneration,’ ‘rapid reproduction rate,’ ‘sharp carapace,’ etc... to the point that some of the pheromones came from unfiltered sources and went against the Mother of the Nest’s former modus operandi! It did not stop there; some of the orders included pheromones that belonged to primitive beasts, and these were orders that showed no regard to the consequences!

Indeed, the mass of evolutionary constructs were capable of strengthening the species in a short span of time, but at the same time, it limited its prospects as a species. Devour faintly remembered the direction of the carved blood vessels—their ultimate evolution goal was not for survival, but to fly higher than the sky.

But once an evolution was completed, the flaws brought about by the inferior pheromones were difficult to be mended and the price to pay was too large.

Devour was unable to understand why the Mother of the Nest would make such a decision.

Fortunately, Devour’s fate had been severed from the species, so regardless of what their evolution signified, it had nothing to do with Devour.

After finishing up its prey, Devour dived deeper into the ocean and disappeared amongst the waves.

...

Is it too late...

The Guardian stood at the calm seashore and looked into far north.

The waves gently washed up the shore, producing gentle and monotonous rustling. But she knew that this was most probably the last tranquility the sea would have.

The distant sky had been dyed a deep red with the occasional arc lights formed by magic power flickering away, just like a large storm gradually taking form. Not long later, the blood-red clouds would befall the Land of Dawn and become a part of the battle of destiny.

And further into the distance, black 'tides' rose out of the water surface that extended several hundred kilometers like a moving island.

Under the guidance of the Divine Will, they were all finally converging.

This was a scene she had witnessed countless times.

But this might possibly be the last.

But it did not mean the end. To the world, it only meant a brand new beginning. But this beginning was merely a repeat of a ten million year cycle, and the Guardian of the next cycle would no longer be her.

No one knew if the young lady found her way home. She turned to face the south and thought, *'If only we have the chance to meet again.'*

'Let it be soon.' She prayed from the bottom of her heart.

Chapter 1367: The Essence to Upgrade

The meeting on the 'Project Nüwa' lasted for a few days and the professionalism displayed by the participants left Roland gasping in amazement. What made him even more surprised was their abundance of energy.

The entire meeting consisted of disputes and debates that went on in unbroken succession from nine in the morning till seven at night. When they encountered issues that were difficult to come to a decision, it was not rare for the debates to last till midnight. Although the participants were dressed to the nines, none of these professionals relented when it came to a technicalities. The intensity of the arguments were in no way less than outright war. They were not limited to only the middle-aged backbones of their respective industries, but even the white-haired seniors acted in the same manner.

An average person that hit such an age would usually be inarticulate and have slower train of thoughts, but aside from their looks, none of these common factors were present in them. Their voices were loud and clear, their eyes bright and full of expression. They were still capable of suppressing their successors in debates. This scene convinced Roland that the brain was truly an organ that developed the more one used it.

In the Dream World, he was able to rely on the Awakened ability to maintain his heightened concentration, but after waking up in reality, he would feel the exhaustion clearly. To accommodate the content of the meeting, he had no choice but to increase the hours of sleep and use the time in reality to replenish his energy.

Of course, the atmosphere within the projects department did not kick start from the get go. In the beginning, no one showed much interest, and the majority of disagreements were concentrated on Roland's 'plans.'

For example, the idea that after the destruction of the world, the humans killed by the Fallen Evils would turn into another 'competitor', as well as the mutation of the pure Force of Nature and Blackfire that went against science... Although no one publicly called into question Roland's words seeing that the Martialist Association and the government were in spearheading the entire project, signs of disagreements and conflict appeared, either through their silence or on the pretense that it was 'for the job'. Roland knew that their mentality and the process of repeated questions and beating about the bush led to nowhere.

If not for Roland's signals towards Ling, the Taquila Witches might had taken action.

Only until they reached the conclusion at the end of the first night did the conflicting views of both parties reach its peak.

A chief master in mechanics stood up and spoke bluntly that regardless of how much they discussed, it was useless if no one remembered the content. Just a single day worth of decisions required the Martial Artists a few weeks to digest; thus, they decided to end the meeting earlier. Roland clearly remembered that Scroll, having maintained her silence for the entire day, had suddenly slammed the table with her hand.

The meeting room immediately became her stage.

Scroll not only listed the content discussed in the meet, but even the questions and doubts raised by every single individual, and all the valuable contributions made on each topic from the beginning to end—everything were listed out to the smallest detail. Her fascinating memory shocked everyone present, leaving even the chief master that challenged Roland speechless. At that moment, it was as though all the professionals had turned into students, and Scroll was the only teacher.

It was most probably her verification regarding the unlimited possibilities existed within the Force of Nature—that not only could limbs be strengthened, or have the intellect of engineering elites heightened—along with her outstanding temperament and features which resulted in the reversal of the subsequent situation.

In the following days, despite arguments still happening, the focus shifted from the setup to 'Project Nüwa'.

Not only that, under the situation where money and manpower were no longer an issue, any 'contentions' were immediately conveyed to the research and development team, where experiments were immediately carried out to test on their feasibility.

To Roland, it was no doubt the best days in which he reaped the most in the Dream World.

Under the suggestion of President Wu, their focus on improvements moved onto instruments.

In his words: “We clearly have cutting-edge technology and high quality materials, but our usage of such simple and crude machines and instruments is truly a waste. Even if we lack electric control technology, we can use machines to automate and regulate precise control. If you had raised it up earlier, we would have stopped accepting such defective products.”

Roland did not know whether to laugh or cry to this. The ‘defective products’ mentioned by the President were the best designs he had spent his lifetime working on. But Roland completely agreed with the President’s assessment.

Before the proliferation of electronic technology, pure machinery and equipment had once developed to what could be deemed ‘a work of art.’ Examples included the mechanical calculator, as well as its subsequent development which eventually ended as the theoretical difference engine. Anyone who laid their eyes on the overlapping gears and interconnected screws would feel a sense of pure beauty. However, the advancements of electronic technology in history was simply a powerful current that instantly swept all of these large and complicated machines into the gutters of history. Even if he flipped through textbooks, it was impossible for him to find any design information on the corresponding equipment.

With a specialized team to improve the tools he had and reproduce all the technological materials that had long disappeared, he naturally couldn’t wish for more.

The improvement of the tools brought about an increase in production efficiency and decrease in manpower demands, signifying that Neverwinter would be able to use the same number of people to accomplish even more work. This was extremely significant for his Kingdom that had limited manpower.

Aside from producing machines, the new Design Bureau supplied many things that included simpler calculators, typewriters, automatic printing press, etc... All these did not require electronic components and only required a few units to greatly enhance the rate of administrative work.

These details constituted the foundations of ‘Project Nüwa.’

Building on top of this establishment, the content expanded tremendously.

The majority of the professionals acknowledged that strengthening themselves to protect the human race from extinction was the main priority. They required the ability to resist the Fallen Evil’s power of degeneration before having the capacity to develop the next step, which was mainly focused on weapons.

After considering the conditions laid out by Roland, none of the participants produced any proposals that had an answer to everything. Instead, they divided the proposal into three steps—quarterly plans, yearly plans, and five-year plans.

The past wars in the Dream World provided optimal answers for certain problems, but the targeted approach in terms of the number of ‘survivors’ made it difficult to establish a concrete industry system. With historical numbers no longer practical, the specialists leaned towards focusing on fighting the enemies and developed further into the specific projects targeting this goal. This was also their original

intention—to be able to bring about a metamorphic change in humanity’s ability to battle within three to twelve months.

The very first thing mentioned, something which was also the easiest at enhancing, involved the various high-energy explosives and propellants.

This was coincidentally Neverwinter’s largest shortcoming.

Reproducing nitro-explosives could be learned from chemistry books, but simple explosives such as TNT and RDX had very few references, much less to say the composition of modern gunpowder. But with the government spearheading the project, this gap had finally been filled.

Chapter 1368: Going Hand in Hand

The next in line was advancing the ammunition production line.

Although Roland’s design of the production line could be considered streamlined, it was nothing in the eyes of military specialists, or to put it bluntly, terrible. In their own words: “Such a framework and process are relatively too simple and 95% of it could be automated with machines. By relying on machines, production can basically be increased to non-stop 24 hours a day.”

The new military proposal did not require much investment for the early stages of the new production line but was capable of starkly reducing manpower. Simultaneously, it also increased the production of bullets by more than ten times. Provided that personnel involved in the production remained constant, the production rate was estimated to increase further.

Once ‘Project Cornerstone’ for Project Nüwa was set in place, the equipment needed by the new production line no longer faced any theoretical technical challenges. Once the propellant was enhanced, precision and lethality of the firearms would automatically be upgraded.

Looking at this segment of the report caused Roland to gasp with admiration towards the other party’s accurate foresight.

Ammunition had ultimately been the main problem for the First Army.

Although the number of workers involved in production moving to the Fertile Plains had been increasing, it did not alleviate the lack of ammunition. The expenditure of the Aerial Knights solely from training alone was enough to deplete a majority of the ammunition, but training was an essential process. Iron Axe had raised the complains from the frontlines many times to Roland because of that.

If the amount of ammunition could be increased, the possibility of Demons relying on numbers to break through the First Army’s defense line would further decrease. Or in other words, the stalemate at the frontlines would come to an end.

As for light weapons, the specialists did not provide further comment. It was not because there was no room for improvements, but the practicality to price ratio was not high. The combination of using general-purpose machine guns, bolt action/semi-automatic rifles were sufficient in dealing with the threat from inferior Fallen Evils. With regards to offensive capabilities on the battlefield, the consensus was to rely on artillery and heavy weapons.

In other words, so long as they could flatten their enemies to death first, the infantry soldiers could occupy territory with ease.

Rather than pouring resources into enhancing firearms, why not manufacture more cannons, since cannons were required to clear the way—regardless of going on the offensive, retreating, reinforcements, or to be defensive. Unleashing a few artillery shells to plow the enemies first was considered the safest option.

With the priority placed on the quarter year plan, their main concern was targeted towards fast and effective results.

In the Five-Year Plan, light weapons were considered an extremely major project.

But Roland was most interested in the Annual Plan.

Its benefits were lower than gunpowder and ammunition and the required investment was much higher, but it was crucial at determining the outcome of the war.

The plan comprised of Neverwinter's current heavy weapons, including two improvement projects and two brand new projects. The Army and the Aerial Knights took up half each.

Firstly was the old topic in Graycastle's Design Bureau—the caterpillar tractors and the subsequently developed armored tanks. This was the only chance for Master Xie to make an appearance as well. Unexpectedly, the specialists did not criticize the plans at all after seeing the design sheets; instead, they felt that the designs deserved merit under the circumstances where little technology was available. Compared to the armored vehicles, the specialists were more focused on how its “nuclear-powered core”

When Roland revealed the Magic Cube, the entire mood took an unexpected turn. Even the government officials that had knowledge of the true story were dumbstruck.

Till date, he could still vividly recall the entire scene.

At the beginning, everyone revealed their complicated expressions upon seeing the seemingly ordinary ‘stone cube’. After all, every single one of them came from intellectual and professional backgrounds. Out of respect for Scroll, everyone remained took the entire presentation seriously. To be frank, the action of taking out a rock and calling it a nuclear power unit was indirectly calling the professionals fools.

When Rock suddenly signaled to Head Liu a few times, Head Liu decided to call for a temporary adjournment and prevent the awkwardness from continuing. After all, they had built up the collaborative atmosphere through great difficulty.

But under his insistence, a dynamics professor reluctantly took the cube and sent it to the test laboratory for his team to conduct a simple test. His lab assistant left with an ineffable and contemptuous expression, but returned back agitatedly half an hour later to the point of not being able to say a word.

The entire meeting room plunged into mania.

Under the indisputable reality, Roland discovered that everyone's eyes seemed to burn when looking at him, and even President Wu had to pull Head Liu out of the room directly. No one knew what they talked about, but the change in viewpoint was immediate. The security around the factories was beefed up by several levels the following day. The armed police were replaced with real army troops, so much so that the gates were replaced with sentry posts and military walls. If not for Roland's identity as a martial artist which left ordinary means against him useless, he would have had a private lane, personal bodyguards, and other top notch services wherever he went.

This entire event was suggested by Anna, and not Roland's intent to show off deliberately.

After running through the events that day with her, Anna got angry, frowned and worked up a 'revenge plan,' which was to use magic power to remodel the professionals' world view. The result was far better than what Roland had anticipated. Not only was everyone rather respectful of Scroll, but they also acceded to every request of his and hoped to receive a portion of the Magic Cube to conduct tests. Due to that, the outcome of the meeting was adjourned one day after another.

To modern scientists and technological groups, wielding tangible research objects would allow them to propose and conduct feasible plans with much more ease.

That was how the tri-tank Magic Cube was phased out.

The replacement was an even more reasonable and high-pressured Magic Cube. Not only was its theoretical output doubled, but its volume and vibrations had also dropped by nearly 30%. It only required a week for the prototype to be trialed and tested on trucks and tractors before being confirmed as the final product.

Besides the enhancements of the Magic Cube engine, the projects team supplied a design plan for a small-scale truck with only 20–30 horsepower and used a diesel engine that was capable of running on diesel oil. Diesel oil was a byproduct from refining fuel oil for biplanes. With a loading capacity of one to two tons, it had an extremely simple structure which didn't even have an operator cabin and looked like a four-wheeled square headed tractor at first glance.

Roland quickly realized the usefulness of the small-scale truck. In terms of production, it was far easier to manufacture as compared to steam trucks, and they were capable of manufacturing many units in a short period of time. Using the former for short distance transport was no doubt a waste, but the latter was just perfect. It boasted higher efficiency as compared to animal-drawn vehicles and was the best choice in overcoming routes with different elevations.

The last portion of the Annual Plan was the true core.

It constituted of two parts—improvements for the current 'Fire of Heaven,' increasing its advantages over the Devilbeasts in terms of flight and power, while developing child versions over its base foundations to adapt to different combat requirements.

The second was to manufacture and develop a new model of long distance bombers.

Chapter 1369: Overlord of the Sky

The projects team did not mention any plans for new planes. Under the circumstance where electronic components were absent, the upper bounds of a monoplane were higher than a biplane. Even so, the final Annual Plan remained focused on enhancements.

The final decision maker was the Technology Department's overall-in-charge, President Wu.

Roland also learned a new concept from the meetings: time efficiency.

All manufacturing projects focusing on streamlining will improve in efficiency with time. Even if few changes happened, this was a natural phenomenon bound to occur. The reason lies in the process—workers would gradually familiarize themselves with the production line which included the interaction between man and machine as well as the teamwork between the workers themselves. This was completely unrelated to one's upbringing, but more of an innate laziness in the workers that made them find the easiest ways and shortcuts to complete their work, to the point that they themselves would voluntarily sort out the imperfections to the process.

As a result, the efficiency of production at its later stages not only exceeded the early phases but manufacturing costs would decrease.

To form up a team of Aerial Knights, the production line that had started up with much difficulty had to maintain the status quo. This helped in familiarizing the workers with the further processing of the machines and the workflow processes so as to prevent the equipment from hindering the war effort.

The improvisation towards the 'Fire of Heaven' was mainly geared towards improving the engine and weapon systems.

The first point spoke for itself; the 'Fire of Heaven' was a complete masterpiece created completely from antique blueprints Roland obtained in the Dream World and a product of trial and error. Although aerodynamics was not an issue to a biplane that had a peak speed of less than 150 km/h, it did not mean that there were no benefits for having an improved engine. On the contrary, it was the easiest and cheapest to improve with the support of wind tunnels and simulations.

The engine was obviously the most important part of the biplane. As the saying goes, as long as you have sufficient power, even a brick can fly. With an upgrade in power ratio, the rest would fall into place. But under the most miserable of conditions, it was not simple to even design a durable and functional basic piston engine. It was reported that the relevant department produced seven to eight prototypes at one go, but time was required to run tests for all the prototypes so as to choose the most optimal design.

For the weapon systems, there were not many considerations.

In truth, the technological skills were insufficient; the military had plenty of matured yet phased out plans, for example the 20mm autocannons, removable bomb racks, etc. The questions were what weapons to install and how to install them. With these two questions in mind, the relevant department was able to provide these addons as and when they liked.

According to the technical specifications provided by the team, the Mark II biplanes were capable of 250 km/h cruise speeds and carry two additional 100kg oil tanks while being capable of sustaining flights

over a thousand kilometers. It also boasted a much higher climbing speed compared to the 'Fire of Heaven.'

The significance of this biplane was the ability to travel from the rear to the frontlines in a day, or to fly from the frontlines to the great rupture at the ridge of the continent. Taking into consideration the rugged topography of the Impassable Mountain Range that prevented ordinary troops from passing, this parameter was definitely an important feature.

The last were the bombers.

It cost the most and was the most controversial project.

It took half a day just discussing over whether the bombers were required to handle the inferior Fallen Evils. The reason for those against it was simple—the bombers' targets were on the ground that biplanes were capable of hitting as well, only that more fuel was required. But a large-scale bomber required specialized taking off and landing, more protection, and therefore, bound to bring about more pressure for the logistics team.

Although a bomber was capable of bringing about greater destruction, it required a fighter for escort and would instead lower the advantage of the aerial units. Flying Devilbeasts were weak against agile and mobile flying units, but a clumsy bomber could be considered a double-edged sword as long as a single Devilbeast disregarded its life to ram into one.

Besides, the enemies possessed unique Fallen Evils that were similar to martial artists that added to the indeterminable risk.

After all, the price of losing a single bomber far surpassed that of a single biplane.

And the resources left for the survivors was an unknown factor as to how many bombers they would be able to produce.

In the end, it was still the research subject Roland insisted on preserving.

Under the circumstances of having low technology, it was definitely lacking. It could not deliver the goal of coming and going without a trace while being both capable of offense and defense. However, he had his own considerations.

It was an entity required by Neverwinter for long and difficult journeys, and was essential for the attack on the Bottomless Land.

No one knew how far the Dream World was separated from the Erosion, and God probably would no longer remain passive. According to Lan's words, Roland needed to take action at the time when both worlds entered the Divine Domain. In the event that Dream World suddenly opened the passageway to Erosion, he would have no other means to quickly reach the Bottomless Land, then all the efforts from before would be for naught.

Of course, being subjected to the demons' attack while charging into enemy territory could be considered a last resort, but having a choice was better than having none, and bombers were the only possible answer for the present technological conditions.

The other was Project Glory of the Sun.

With 'Fire of Heaven's load capacity, it was impossible for them to shoulder such a huge responsibility even after improvements. Even if they were able to produce a detonator, without the means to drop the Glory of the Sun, its usage was still limited. Of course, the Seagull coupled with the Hummingbird's reduction in weight could cause the drop to happen from high altitudes, but even so, the bomb could not be fitted with a God's Stone of Retaliation. In that long and arduous journey, it could easily be destroyed by Senior Demons.

If the Skylord Hackzord knew about it and used his ability to transport the Glory of the Sun elsewhere, that would be troublesome.

Therefore, the most reliable method was to directly build a strong anti-demon body and rely on the Aerial Knights to drop the Glory of the Sun.

This meant that they had to build an even bigger plane.

The project department's initial plan was to build a single bomber with four engines. The team responsible for manufacturing the engines had to build four units for redundancy. In the event that one or two planes were malfunctioning, the plane would still have the ability to make a safe return. Just based on visuals, the bomber would look like a behemoth, with over 30m long wingspans. Its rear tail were divided into twintails to stabilize the aerodynamic design of the entire plane. Although the design reduced the nimbleness of the bomber, it increased the plane's ability to travel further and provide for easier controls.

Flying with full tanks, the bomber would have the ability to carry an estimated four tons worth of ammunition for more than two thousand kilometers. Without considering the return flight, this number could double, enough to satisfy Roland's requirements for the battle at the ridge of the continent. But, with its complexity far surpassing that of the 'Fire of Heaven', it could not be produced in the production line even with expert guidance.

In other words, its production output would definitely be low.

But at least, it gave humanity the capital to use the Glory of the Sun.

Chapter 1370: Returning Home

When the meeting ended, two government officials kept Roland behind, promising him that the government would take the next step to push for more supportive projects, with the first generation nuclear weapon test data included in the consideration.

Of course, it was not merely a one-sided exchange where only the Martialist Association did as promised; the miraculous magical objects were the important catalyst that made the government so enthusiastic. In short, it was as what Defender Rock had announced, the meeting was only just the beginning.

In just a few days, the Design Bureau of Graycastle fixed all the flaws in Neverwinter's developments it had single-handedly embarked on. As the Battle of Divine Will no longer determined the fate of one world, every department had several hundred to more than a thousand members to ponder over the problems and improve the developments. For the first time, Roland deeply felt the survivors were not

struggling alone; there were all kinds of non-negligible forces behind them. Even if the two worlds had never truly interacted, their fates were intimately tied together.

Roland relied on the surge of technological reforms and recruited even more people for the Administrative Office. In one go, he proposed more than ten new factories, from high-performance explosive compounds to various semi-automatic testbed machines. After resolving the manpower and economic limitations, Neverwinter, in its high-speed development phase, was able to construct and develop itself at his will. With the alleviation of conflicting views, this momentum did not stop at all.

With the widespread development of the technological revolution, Roland suddenly received an unexpected and pleasant surprise.

After being missing for close to a year, Joan had finally returned.

Roland immediately rushed to Neverwinter's first hospital with Nightingale upon receiving the news. After expanding King's City education and medical field from the previous winter, three medical treatment facilities were built by the Administrative Office at the south bank of the Redwater River, Kingdom Main Street and Longsong Stronghold that were responsible for simple diagnosis and disease prevention. And being the first medical facility built and Nana's permanent residency there, it naturally earned the name of 'first hospital.'

Upon entering, Camilla Dary gave him a slight bow.

Wendy and Tilly had returned to the front lines, while Scroll was busy with restoring materials, so the Chief Butler of Sleeping Island took up the mission of taking care of everyone. Additionally, she had seen Joan disappear with her own eyes and felt guilty about it. Now, Joan's reappearance impacted her the most, apparent from her bow towards Roland.

After all, she had always saw Roland as someone who 'stole' Tilly away and was the main reason for Ashes's sacrifice. If not for the reports that Sky-sea Realm might directly threaten the Fjords and Sleeping Island, she would never have shifted to Neverwinter.

But Roland did not mind that as he waved and asked softly, "How's she?"

"I guess... I can only say that she's fine."

"You guess?" Roland was perplexed. From his point of view, her safe return was already considered the best possible outcome.

"She... is back to her old self." Camilla gently combed Joan's hair and sighed.

It was only after her explanation did Roland understand what she meant.

Joan did not swim back to Shallow Port herself.

A resident fisherman of Neverwinter was the first to discover Joan. According to the report, while out in the sea to haul fish in, a heavy object had rammed into the aft of his boat and awoken him late at night. It was followed by nibbling sounds. Thinking that he had encountered a sea ghost and was about to prepare himself to fight to death, he saw a 'big fish' shaped like a human.

He caught her cupping cooked fish in her hands, nibbling away as though she hadn't eaten for days. Seeing the panicked fisherman, she merely produced a few weird sounds instead of attacking him, then retreated to the corner of the deck and fell asleep.

Having stayed in Neverwinter for a long time, the fisherman had long been influenced by its teachings and public announcements. The fisherman held an open mind and returned the boat to port—the rewards of saving a Witch was far higher than a boat of fish. To encounter such a special entity in the vast sea, he knew for sure that she was either a sea ghost or a Witch.

This 'big fish' was Joan.

"Lily has given her a check up. There are all sorts of parasites and infections on her, and some of them can't be removed, even with her abilities." Camila reported while her heart ached. "To eliminate any potential damage, I injected some Dreamland Water into her while she was asleep, then used a blade to cut out all the shell worms under her skin. In theory, these worms will only appear on old boats and very large whales."

"You mean to say, Joan didn't swim back from the Shadow Islands?"

"It is unlikely for her to be infected with them at that distance." She shook her head. "With Joan's speed, it wouldn't have taken her so long to return to Neverwinter. What I'm worried about is... the terrible ordeals she might have gone through which caused her to return to her original state."

She never had the time to remove the parasites and starved all the way until she got onto the boat for food before losing consciousness due to fatigue. All of these pointed to her arduous and dangerous journey. The long and excessive circumstances might have caused irreparable psychological damage to her, just like Maggie.

Camila had the ability to communicate with the mind and was not afraid that Joan couldn't speak. She was worried that Joan wouldn't recover and had to live the rest of her life like an animal.

Roland fell silent.

Indeed, the state of her body did not mean that everything was fine, regardless of Nana's magical bandages or Lily's Cleansing Water, none of them were capable of curing mental problems.

A rhythmic knock on the door suddenly broke the silence inside the ward.

Nightingale turned and opened the door in puzzlement, to see Mystery Moon's head poking out.

"Erm... I heard that Joan is back? Wait, hey, stop pushing me—"

The door was forced open as a few girls stumbled and crashed into the room. Besides Mystery Moon, there was Summer, Sharon, and Amy. The last to walk into the room was Lily.

"I didn't have a choice, they noticed something amiss." Lily shrugged helplessly.

"Ahem! First off, I only heard that Joan was sick, that's why I'm here to visit her!" Mystery Moon insisted. "Although she belongs to the Exploration Group, Lightning and Maggie aren't around. So we are the only ones to accompany her, we are definitely not thinking of taking the opportunity to rope her into the Detective Group, much less—mmm—"

Summer had extended her hand to cover her mouth.

"It's just her wishful thinking; it has nothing to do with the rest of us." Sharon spoke up righteously.

"Sigh, is having another member not a good thing?" Amy scratched the back of her head.

"Hush!" Lily gestured for them to be quiet.

Roland could not help chuckling as he watched the internal strife between the Witches. He looked to Camilla Dary, threw his hands up and shrugged. The latter was faintly startled, but her expression loosened up greatly.

Perhaps Joan had truly encountered something terrifying, but with the group accompanying her, Roland believed that Joan's recovery would fall back onto the right track.

...

"Hey, what do you guys think this is?"

"It looks like some sort of silk fabric..."

"How can there be silk fabric in the hospital? And its texture seems like it's of superior quality."

"Why don't we ask Aunt Camilla."

"... Why don't you ask her?"

"I don't dare to."

"I can hear everything." Seated by the bedside, Camilla Dary facepalmed herself. "That is the cloth used to wrap Joan's wounds. As we didn't have the time, we didn't throw them away. Be careful of the germs on them, the books from His Majesty had mentioned them before—do not casually touch with any sources of infection, didn't it?"

After Roland and Nightingale's departure, Camilla Dary was left alone with the Detective Group. The group surrounded the bed and busied themselves, but were unable to help much. It was nice for Joan to have such passionate friends, but the only problem was that they were slightly excessive with their talking.

"Are there any germs here? Lily, can you sense them?"

"Take it. Away. From me—now!"

"Hey, stop tearing it. What? It can't be torn... Sharon, help me out."

"It's really quite difficult to tear... Summer, why don't you try it?"

No. Camilla Dary corrected herself, it wasn't slightly excessive, it was just too much! Just as Camilla Dary made up her mind to tell them it was already late and that it was better for them to come tomorrow, Joan's eyelids trembled.

She immediately held her breath.

A few seconds later, the sleeping beauty gradually opened her eyes.

“Ya...”

Joan opened her mouth and released a weak exhale.

This caused the room to turn quiet immediately.

Indeed, she can't speak anymore...

Camilla resisted the pained emotions and extended her hand and placed it on Joan's chest.

In that instant, countless memory fragments surged into her mind! The moment she posed a question, she immediately received an answer—the power of Mind Resonance!

She saw the illusion of her being lengthened and distorted in the pitch-black seabed.

She saw the sky and ocean turn upside down as the seawater poured down in torrents.

She saw monstrosities scattered across the ocean floor, terrifying waves that surged towards the continent.

She saw the many layers of tablets in the mist, and the white-robed lady walking towards her.

The last thing she saw was an unfathomable circular pit that stretched out endlessly across the horizon