

## Witch 31

### Chapter 31 "Our friend"

Roland was sitting at his desk in a dazed state. He actually didn't expect that someone was trying to commit murder in his castle. He was afraid that if Nightingale hadn't promptly discovered them, they would have murdered him in cold blood.

Who ordered this assassination attempt? Was it his third sister, or one of his other siblings? Why were they doing this? It was a five-year struggle for the throne, but in the past few months they had already tried to kill him twice. Roland, full of irritation, banged his desk. This was simply outrageous! Couldn't they just let him face the Months of the Demons?

Footsteps could be heard from outside of the door. It was Carter, his chief knight. After he pushed open the door he said, "Your Highness, the identities of the deceased have been identified. From the eight bodies, seven were original members of the patrol, but the last one is still unidentified. In addition, there are two who are still alive and under the care of the witch... if not... After being treated by Miss Pyne, they have yet to wake up. Also the path to the sewers is being closely guarded now."

They were from the town patrol? He knew that the team raised by the former Lord wasn't reliable. Roland gritted his teeth, actually, eight from the ten people were disloyal, so not letting them join the militia was really the right choice.

"That is good, and also make sure they are always well-guarded, don't let them commit suicide like the last time!"

"Like...The last time?"

"Oh, nothing." Roland shook his head. Apparently due to Nightingale's early wake up call, his head was still confused. "Anyway, I want to know everything about them. Who is their leader? Who is their contact person? Who is their investor? You must investigate all of this and more..."

"Yes, Your Highness." Carter had gotten his orders, but he did not leave immediately, instead he went down on one knee and said, "That the assassins could sneak into the castle was my dereliction of duty. I hope Your Highness will punish me."

"Enough is enough. At that time, you weren't even in the castle, so this has nothing to do with you."

"Well ....." Carter hesitated, "Can you tell me who it was in the end that prevented this assassination attempt? I could see from the scene, that they..." the knight had to swallow, "all of them seem to be have been killed by the same person and were totally defenseless."

"That you can tell?" Roland was curious.

"If they were evenly matched, the scene wouldn't be so clean and the wounds would be in a wide range all over the bodies," Carter whispered, "Everybody was killed down in the small warehouse, in addition to blood and dead bodies there was nothing else on the ground. There was almost no damage to the goods placed down there. Those big boxes which store bacon didn't even have a sword cut. That shows that the man didn't need to use any cover, it seems as if he was taking a walk in a small clearing. With all due respect, Your Highness, this is just too incredible. "

“So that’s the reason,” Roland nodded his head, he understood the meaning of Carter’s explanation. After a theoretically strong person was surrounded, he would fall into an extreme adverse situation – real fights usually didn’t end like what was shown in movies, where the surrounded person sends one enemy after the other towards the ground. An attack from a blind spot would be particularly deadly. So to fight many, the correct approach would be to rely on the terrain and the environment so that they could always face the opposition.

But Nightingale was not one of those ordinary people.

“No matter what you do, you have to complete the mission I gave you, first. This person cannot be revealed yet, but when the time comes, I’ll tell you.”

Although he knew that the chief knight was one of his loyal and reliable subordinates and that he also knew that Nana and Anna were witches, but Roland still chose to hide the presence of Nightingale from him, because the difference between her and the other two witches was that she didn’t belong to their side. She only stayed in Border Town because of Anna. She belonged to the Witch Association Cooperation, and would sooner or later leave this town.

Carter gave a salute and retired.

Roland could understand his thoughts. As a person well versed with the sword, Carter constantly practiced a training program that was produced from summarizing and accumulating fighting techniques for hundreds of years, and in truth they were proud of their heritages. But when he saw the scene in the warehouse, he couldn’t believe it and began to have doubts – if sword play could be perfected to such a state, of which heritage were they normally so proud of?

“I thought you would tell me to come out,” Nightingale revealed herself. She was still sitting on the corner of his desk, with crossed legs.

“I also thought about it. How about it? You can just settle down here as my hidden sword. You will get two gold royals as monthly salary, the double of what Anna gets. What do you think?” Roland began to advise it further “You will get a house with a garden, two days off each week, and even paid leave every year – uh, that’s it, the rest would only be a monetary reward.”

To his surprise, Nightingale didn’t flatly refuse him. She only smiled and said neither yes or no, „I cannot abandon my companions, no matter what.”

“That would be now, but when the winter is over, Border Town will begin a time of reconstruction. And at that time, how many people will still care about it. And then... the witches will no longer have to suffer discrimination while walking in the streets. No one will see you as the devil’s spokesperson.”

“And so on... You are always talking about it,” said Nightingale indifferently.

It was time to stop. It was always better to see than to hear. This kind of thing could only be changed slowly. Roland changed the subject, “Nana has been safely sent back, right?”

“Ah yes, but she got spooked.”

Roland sighed, it couldn’t be helped, after all, it was midnight when she had been woken up by Nightingale. When she was brought to the scene and saw the battle place, she almost threw up.

Nightingale gave him a short account about the things which happened, and then he told her to get Nana. Usually, Nana had to only heal chickens. But now, when the little girl saw people covered in blood, she immediately fainted. After a short while, she woke up and began to heal the person from the town patrol with her face full of tears.

In order to keep Nana's family in the dark, Nightingale was also responsible for taking her back.

When everything was settled, it was almost daybreak.

"How was the investigation? Could you figure out which of my good brothers or sisters sent them?"

Nightingale shook her head, "They were all people of your own patrol, with only one exception, but he also didn't carry any identity-related evidence with him. With enough money, anyone could hire them. But I think that this perhaps isn't related to your siblings."

"Why?"

"Because it was extremely unorganized. During multiple occasions, the team actually had a lot infighting. And immediately after their failure they didn't commit suicide, leaving at least two people alive. And then, they had no professional performance. In general, they were just street punks. This is unlike the style of your brothers and sisters, it is more likely that it was a layman's plan. I think that even if I wasn't here there was no way their assassination attempt would have succeeded. Don't forget that Anna is sleeping downstairs."

Nightingale reached for Roland's cup, she didn't seem to care about drinking from the same cup as him, and then said, "No matter what, your knight had asked for the truth of what happened in the sewers, and I bet he will soon know the truth – compared with the former piece of your sister, that guy is much less professional. If I hadn't left, he would still kneel before me begging me to not to kill him."

"That seriously injured patrol member, it seems that he is the one I summoned not too long ago."

"Really?" Nightingale tilted her head, "I think that you'll have to reward him. If he hadn't stood up against the other guys, I would not have found them so quickly and they would have slipped into the basement of the castle. Although it is still not clear why he did that, but the enemy's enemy is our friend, right?"

Yes, Roland thought, but the important part was not if he is a friend or foe, but rather that Nightingale said the two words.

– "Our friend."

## Chapter 32 Knight

When Brian woke up, the first thing that caught his eyes was the white ceiling.

The sunlight shining through the window was somewhat bright, so he had to close his eyes a little. Then when his eyes got used to the sunlight, he opened them again, only to find the scene in front of him unchanged.

Feeling that it wasn't a dream, he thought, I'm... still alive? He tried to move his body, but soon noticed that he could only lift his fingers a little bit. It seemed that his whole body's strength was gone.

Then he heard someone shouting, “He woke up! Go and inform His Highness!”

His Highness? Brian felt like his brain was filled with paste and that his thought process was many times slower than usual. By the way, what happened after I fainted? I can only remember that Viper pierced my chest and that I was dying, and in my last moment I could see a ghostly woman who defeated all the enemies in an incredible way...

Soon a maid arrived to help him up so that he could sit in the bed. Then another maid came holding a basin and sat down next to him and immediately began to help him clean his face. In his whole life Brian had never experienced such comprehensive personal service, plus the maids were all young women, which made the situation really awkward for him.

Fortunately, the situation did not last long. As soon as the 4th Prince entered the room, everyone else left.

Brian could feel a surging heat within his heart. He had too much to ask, but then, when he tried to open his mouth he didn't know from where to begin. But contrary to what he had expected, Roland nodded and said, “I already know of all your past achievements, and Brian, you are worthy of the title of a hero.”

Hearing the word “Hero”, Brian suddenly felt his eyes begin to tear up. He began to sob and his voice choked, “No... Your Highness, my friend...is the real ...”

Roland patted him on his shoulder so as to comfort him.

It was exactly like Nightingale had predicted. After Fierce Scar was dragged into the torture chamber, he began to tell everything he knew before the warden even put his hands on him.

The one behind this group was not his sister or any other of his siblings, but Longsong Stronghold's Elk family. Count Elk got in contact with his distant relative Hiller Dmitry. Afterwards, Fierce Scar gained control over most of the town patrol with the lure of a reward. In addition, he also sent an assassin to replace one of the members in the team to prevent an accident from occurring in the course of action. The purpose of this group of people was not to assassinate Roland like he had thought,, instead they intended to burn the food reserves so that he would obediently go back to the stronghold.

Their conspiracy resulted in the death of an innocent person – Greyhound. He tried to stop Fierce Scar when he heard of his criminal intent, but he was stabbed to death with a dagger by one of his own subordinates. The whereabouts of the patrol member who was replaced by Viper was unknown. When he didn't see fire on the castle ground and noticed that Fierce Scar failed to come back, he probably realized that the plan was discovered and fled..

To help stabilize Brian's mood, Roland promised him, “Your friend Greyhound, he'll get a funeral fitting for his sacrifice, and his family will be properly cared for, they will no longer need to worry about food in the future.”

“Thank you, Your Highness,” Brian took a deep breath, “I have to know. Fierce Scar... is he dead?”

“No, he is still alive.”

Brian painfully closed his eyes. He would rather have had them not rescue Fierce Scar so that he would have been dragged to hell than both of them staying alive. But now, the chance to fulfill his wish became

slim... There was no doubt that Fierce Scar was guilty, but the sins committed by nobility could always be redeemed with money. As long as his uncle was willing to protect him, it was very likely that Fierce Scar wouldn't die. It was most probable that he wouldn't even need to go to prison.

Roland could naturally guess his thoughts, "Hiller Dmitry, the uncle of Fierce Scar, is also a distant relative of the Elk family in Longsong Stronghold. The head of the family is Luke Dmitry, a vassal under Duke Ryan, but the fact that he is the distant uncle of Fierce Scar..." here he paused for a little moment, "will not affect the final verdict. Fierce Scar has been sentenced to death by hanging, and there are only three days left until his execution. If you can restore your body by then, you're invited to witness it if you wish to. "

Brian became startled, "But... But Your Highness, members of the nobility can have their freedom bought, this rule you cannot offend -"

Roland waved his hand dismissively, indicating Brian shouldn't concern himself with it, "He is a Noble? Maybe for you, he was born in a branch family of the Elk family, so the status you and he have are as much apart as heaven and earth. However, it's a fact that he has neither a title nor any land, so he simply cannot be considered as nobleman. In addition, even if he were a nobleman, to lead an invasion into the prince's temporal royal residence and attempt to burn the food stocks, ignoring the fate of the two thousand people in Border Town, carried enough guilt. Adding these three sins together, he could simply not be forgiven."

At the time when Roland ordered the death of Tyre, he felt a little hesitant within his heart, but Fierce Scar belonged to the entirely inexcusable category. If he were successful, all of Roland's own future plans for Border Town would be destroyed, and he would never get a chance to turn his situation around. This was more hateful than a direct assassination attempt at Roland himself.

As for the possibility that his action would annoy Longsong Stronghold? Who cares! Since the other party did not want to cooperate with him, of course he would not compromise with them, they even tried choosing underhanded tactics to entrap the entire population of Border Town. At the same time this incident also taught Roland a lesson – this world's political struggle was different than what he knew from his former world, there they would mostly concentrate themselves on competing under the table, but here they were more inclined to set the table aside and use a much bloodier method. "Rest well. You lost too much of your strength, so don't leave the castle. I have arranged for other people to take over your patrol's work, and at the end of the Months of the Demons, I'll hold your canonization ceremony. "

"Your Highness," after hearing the words 'canonization ceremony', Brian looked at the prince with disbelief, "You mean..."

"Yes, you will become one of my knights, Mr. Brian," replied Roland with a smile.

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"Prepare – stab!"

Van'er stabbed a wooden dummy with a pike, and on both sides his team members also did the same, with the same force and also from nearly the same angle.

This time, it was already his one-hundredth stab.

He only had a tingling feeling left in his arms and he already thought that he would never survive this training. Despite the fact that he began to have this thought after his fiftieth stab, he still endured. After one week of conditioning it was already his natural reflex to obey every given order. Honestly, he himself was the most surprised that he could still endure.

“All – rest!”

After Iron Axe shouted his command, Van’er could suddenly hear the sound of exhaling from everywhere around him. Van’er let also exhaled, and then he put down the pike as he sat on the ground.

Now, he finally realized that their own militia was not responsible for being the errand troop for the guards or the knights. After one week of eccentric training, the training changed more to the fighting portion. For example, now they were standing on the city wall and were thrusting out their pikes according to the captain’s orders – although these pikes were replaced with wooden poles, anyone could imagine their roles in the future.

The logistics team would never do such exercises, so this also meant that they would confront the evil beasts on the wall. Naturally thinking about this, Van’er felt fear. He had even thought of sneaking away, but he didn’t know why, seeing his teammates around himself with the thought of three meals a day and a good salary slowly changed his mind.

TN: uncle Hill was changed into uncle Hiller

Chapter 33 Gunpowder

Not even a quarter hour rest later, Iron Axe clapped his hands and shouted, “Everyone stand up, His Highness, the 4th Prince is coming.”

Van’er soon returned to his place, due to the special training he had before. He had learned to follow orders almost subconsciously, so he took his pike dummy and assumed the ready position for stabbing with his wooden staff.

The Prince and his followers were walking behind them on the wall. Van’er noticed from the corner of his eyes that the prince had slowed down his steps when he was near Van’er.

Roland sighed silently, the sayings ‘a late evening will destroy the morning’, and ‘to get up too early will ruin the whole day’ were really true. Just when he had finished processing the aftermath of the raid on the castle, he was reminded that he had to inspect the militia’s training results. Roland pitied himself. He hadn’t slept the whole night, so now he was sleepy the whole day. But he had to come, since now the team had been transferred to the stage of combat training, and he, as the highest commanding officer, if he didn’t show himself for a long time, the morale of his team would become unsteady.

Well... What would someone usually say when reviewing the team? Roland thought for a bit, ‘Are we only comrades only during good times or are we also comrades during hardships’? If he did not get an answer after shouting this slogan, the whole atmosphere would be very awkward. Maybe it would be better to just pull someone aside and talk with him, asking him for his impression and earning a good reputation.

So he began to implement his new plan, and patted a young man who looked fairly sturdy on the shoulders.

“Is the training too hard and do you feel tired? Is eating three meals a day enough?”

Based on his past experiences of watching the news, his response to his questions should be a loud shout, “Not tired, and very good!”

But the result was completely different than what he expected. The man turned directly towards him and went down on one knee, which really shocked Roland.

Van’er felt that he had been blessed, His Royal Highness the Prince actually cared for him and even cordially asked him if he was tired from the training! When talking about the royal family or even only ordinary nobles, they were usually all reluctant to speak a word with their soldiers. He unconsciously imitated a knight’s salute to honor His Royal Highness. Regardless if this ritual was appropriate for him, he only had one thought: later when he returned to the streets, he could be considered a new person.

When he was asked to stand up, his brain was still a mess, so he couldn’t even remember what he had answered.

In the end, His Royal Highness had asked all of them. If someone had any comments or suggestions about the training, he would step forward. Suddenly Van’er’s mind was completely clear once again – this was a good opportunity! If his thoughts were true and His Highness’ militia had to guard the walls alone, they couldn’t afford the heavy responsibility. Maybe my worries of running away or staying are unnecessary, right?

He carefully thought about how to phrase the sentence, “Your Honor... Your respected Highness, the current numbers of the militia is too small. If we line up in the same way that we have trained during training, when the demonic beasts strike, we will only be able to defend one-third of the whole wall and won’t survive... “

Even if the prince began to recruit several groups of militia now, Van’er was afraid that the training time wouldn’t be enough. In addition, the weapons used by these people would also be a big expenditure, it was already difficult to supply for the 100 soldiers in the time left.

Even now they were still holding their wooden staffs to train.

If His Royal Highness Prince could also realize this point, maybe he would recruit a group of mercenaries from other towns as their main defense. At least they would not need training and could be directly sent on to the battlefield, and they were already carrying weapons and armor, but the price to hire them was relatively high.

Roland thought for a moment, nodded and said, “Yes, you’re right, with our current militia force to guard the whole city wall, isn’t very realistic.”

Van’er felt very delighted, His Highness actually... agreed with his view?

But he did not expect the next words the prince said, “Demonic Beasts are in a sense only a variant of normal beasts, they don’t become more intelligent, right?”

“Yes, Your Highness, their base forms are only ordinary animals, so the demonic beasts are still the same, even their habits are basically the same as they were before the change... but I have not seen many of them, so I’m not sure that this is true for all of them.”

“That’s what I wanted to hear. Although there are nearly six hundred feet between the Shishui River and the foot of the Northern Mountain Slope, we could lure them to attack a specific area which we prepared beforehand.”

“You mean by using traps?” asked Iron Axe.

“Yes we could use traps, but not the kind commonly used by hunters. Common traps are used to capture prey by camouflage, but I intend to do the opposite. We will set up roadblocks in the direction away from the city walls, such as fences, slopes, and ditches, forcing these mindless demonic beasts to walk around them. Continuous barriers will guide the prey to a designated place, at which we will place our main defense.” when Roland came to this point he directly looked at Iron Axe, “As for how to lure these monsters, I think nobody knows more about it than you. “

After a short moment, Iron Axe answered, “It’s no problem to guide them, the wolves have hydrophobia, the wild boars have photophobia, and the other demonic beasts also have their own fears. But Your Highness, this way we would need to face all the evil beasts at one small point, will that not be too dangerous? “

“If we only rely on pikes and bows, that would be true.” Roland took a deep breath and said confidently, “But now we have a new weapon!”

When it was time for the prince’s departure, he once again came to Van’er, “Your observations were very good, what’s your name?”

“Va-Van’er, Your Highness.”

“I will propose for you to be a vice captain for one of the teams to my chief knight, Mr. Van’er, I’m very satisfied, good work.”

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Next to the house for the production of cement, Roland built a new house. It was for the production of snow powder – or more precisely, gunpowder.

It only had one big room which had an area of three hundred square meters and only one entrance. He also implemented the most stringent security regime. Two knights were always guarding the door, and anyone who wanted to enter were required to register first and go through body search, looking for something which could light a fire. Indoors, any source of fire was prohibited, so it was only possible to work during the day. In order to even prevent Nightingale from sneaking into the room, he hung up a cotton curtain above the door.

“This is what you called the new weapon?” Carter was summoned to take a look at the new invention, he took the powder in his hand and took a sniff, “This is not snow powder, right?”

Perhaps Iron Axe didn’t know what snow powder looked like, but Carter had often participated in royal ceremonies, so he naturally knew how snow powder looked. It was the alchemic workshop’s finest



creation. The recipe was a secret to outsiders, but if the prince desired to know it, he would certainly be able to get it.

“It’s snow powder, but not entirely,” said Roland, “It’s the alchemic workshop’s last product improvement, I call it gunpowder.”

Gunpowder can be described as a product that was perfect for mass production. It didn’t need any exotic materials. As long as you had charcoal, sulfur, and saltpeter and mixed them at a ratio of 1:1:7.5 it could be produced without any technical barriers.

In this time period, snow powder was mixed into a ratio of 3:1:1 and it also sometimes contained some strange materials (such as mercury, butter, honey, etc.) which were sometimes mixed into it at a 2% ratio, but with the result of slower combustion and less gas release this held no advantage for the gunpowder. However, Roland knew that the alchemist would constantly test other ratios, and he predicted that they would only need 30 years until a recipe close to the original gunpowder’s recipe would appear.

In the history of Roland’s former world, gunpowder was invented a long time before the production of the first cold weapon. The reason for this was because the recipe and the corresponding weapon manufacturing process didn’t work in unison.

However, what many people ignored was the fact that one did not need to rely on guns, the gunpowder itself was a very formidable weapon.

#### Chapter 34 Trial explosion

At the beginning, when Roland started to build the cement creation house, he had already created a follow-up plan for future building projects. They were mostly centered on the northern mining area so that they could be easily guarded together – the construction of the brick cottage with a wooden ceiling was very fast, and didn’t affect the building of the city wall.

The vast amount of purchased saltpeter from Willow Town was transported to a nearby warehouse storage, and only helpers for grinding or weighing the saltpeter were allowed to enter the warehouse. The same procedure was implemented for the charcoal and sulfur as well, and the entire handling process for each of the materials was done by an entirely different group so that the risk of leaks was as minimized as possible.

Roland weighed out twenty pounds of already produced gunpowder and slowly poured it into a good cut-out bag of sheepskin.

This gunpowder had to go through a strict processing plan. It had to be compacted, air dried, broken down with a hammer, screened, and filtered. If all of the powder was a uniform granular size, only then was it guaranteed to have an outstanding combustion performance. To prevent accidents produced by static, the entire production process was done without any metal products. Instead, they used ceramic and wood products.

After pouring all of the gunpowder into the sheepskin, Roland stacked three more layers of sheepskin on top of the bag and then tied them together with a rope..

“That’s all?” asked Carter. Can this packet in front of him be called a weapon? Although it’s a modified snow powder product, with sound alone, you can only scare someone, right? A peasant who has never been on a battlefield can affect a battle too, even if only a little. However, any trained soldier or mercenary would never look at them or respect them. But... the chief knight carefully reconsidered once more, the recent doings of His Highness seemingly had no reason at all, but the effects were always very alarming. If the demonic beasts have similar intelligence to that of an average animal, maybe this stuff can be unexpectedly useful? For example, I heard that a loud explosion could frighten animals which would then flee, thereby reducing the pressure on the defender’s side.

Roland gave the wrapped-up gunpowder to Carter, and then he took a pouch with tools to burn the powder, “All right, we have to go outside of the city wall. Iron Axe should already be waiting for us.”

To the west, about two miles from the city walls and located between the forest and the mountains was their designated testing area.

Iron Axe and several other hunters had been waiting here for a long time. In addition to Iron Axe himself, the others were the best local archers. When they had heard that the tasks given to them were from His Royal Highness, they couldn’t wait and immediately followed Iron Axe.

At present, everyone knew that the new lord of Border Town was never stingy regarding the remuneration of his employees.

According to Roland’s orders, they built a fence out of wooden poles and ropes, which were surrounded the whole testing area so that no one would trespass it. In the direction of the city wall, he had arranged his knights to prevent anyone from accidentally approaching.

Roland checked all the preparations once more and then asked, “Have you brought the prey with you?”

“Your Highness, it is here,” Iron Axe dragged a cage with him and stepped forward. Carter, seeing the cage, noted that it was filled with a few pheasants and rabbits.

“Good, put a tied-up animal every five steps away from the center, until you reach thirty steps from the center “

Carter unnoticably shook his head and tried to propose an improvement, “Your Highness, I am afraid that you chose the wrong animals. You can’t test the effect with them, they are very timid and only a little sound needed before will flee. So if you can scare them, it doesn’t necessarily mean that you will be able to scare the demonic beasts.”

“Scare away demonic beasts?” for a moment Roland slightly hesitated and answered, “I do not intend to frighten them, although the sound of the explosion will be an amazing thing.”

He took the bag with the gunpowder from his chief, went to the center, and put it down. Then he cut a small opening into the bag with his dagger and let some powder leak out. With that done, he took out bottles containing gunpowder and sprinkled a small trail of it starting from the tear in the bag while continually stepping backwards.

Today the weather was calm and was very suitable for the first gunpowder explosion ever.

He stopped after he was nearly 100 yards away from the bag.

“Well, here it should be far away enough,” he once again calculated the distance and after the confirmation, he ordered Carter, “Go and get the hunters.”

At the moment, Roland’s heart beat faster as he was full of expectation. He had already done a small test before, so he wasn’t worried about the test results. But what he cared about was that this would be a historical moment. Starting today, thermal weapons will have officially stepped on the stage, and he will forever be remembered as the inventor of this milestone.

After everyone had been gathered together, Roland ignited the gunpowder.

Carter, while lying on the floor, looked on as the distance between him and the sparks rapidly increased. In his heart, he could not accept this as correct..

They were so far away that they wouldn’t even hear a bronze bucket full of snow powder, so didn’t speak ever about producing any damage so far away, but His Royal Highness the Prince just had everyone lay down on the floor. But since the 4th Prince ordered it and did it himself, it wouldn’t be good if he said anything.

The ground was frozen over from the cold temperature, across the chain armor, he could feel the chill spreading up. Carter shifted his body in preparation to save his chest from the cold when he suddenly heard a earth-shattering sound of an explosion –

Since their distance to the gunpowder was too close, the sound of explosion and shock wave reached them at almost the same time. Carter felt his ears ringing and then the world suddenly quieted down. When the earth tremors began to lessen, he looked up and saw a black cloud slowly rising into the sky, followed by gravel and mud which fell like rain.

For Roland, the impact was much smaller than for the chief knight. Even if it was only a little firecracker, he would block his ears immediately when igniting the explosive powder, so he was naturally well prepared. The explosion was not like how explosions were in the movies, where they would always produce big fireballs. In the explosion, a lot of sludge was blasted off the ground, even reaching a height of more than 10 meters into the air. When the dust had firecracker settled down, the only feeling Roland had was that the sound was much louder than a loud firecracker.

As for Iron Axe and the several other hunters, they had been stunned. They only knew from Iron Axe that this trip was to test a new weapon, but they had never expected that the momentum of the new weapon would be so fantastic.

Perhaps it could only be compared to the sky’s punishment, lightning and thunder!!

Roland stood up and took everyone back to the center of the explosion. Here, the ground became a half yard deep pit, and the rabbit nearest to the blast center had completely disappeared, leaving only the short wooden stake at which it was tied to in the ground.

He checked the other animals one by one . The pheasants placed at the distance of ten steps and fifteenth steps were lying motionless on the ground, apparently dead. Although there was no visible trauma, Roland still knew that they died due the shockwave.

The only survivor was a gray rabbit thirty steps away, but its thin eardrums were destroyed, and blood was flowing out of the ears. Seeing someone coming close to it, it didn't try to struggle any longer and died, just as if the loud sound had taken its soul.

Carter had to swallow, his constantly ringing ears slowly began to function normally again. He slowly came to realize what His Royal Highness the Prince meant when he said, "I don't intend to scare them". Was it really modified snow powder? With this kind of a result, I'm afraid that the power of the alchemic workshop will become much superior to the astrologers.

The view with which Iron Axe looked at the prince had completely changed, "Your Highness, if the militia really would get such weapons, I think Border Town no longer needs to be afraid of the threat of the demonic beasts. I do not know myself, but can it or be mass-produced?"

Roland thought about it, "Probably not, until the Months of the Demons begins, I believe that we will only be able to produce twenty or thirty of them." The primary ingredient was saltpeter. In this era, the means of the production of saltpeter was very primitive, they would use the sewerage of the people and their livestock together with a lime mixture to separate out crystals of potassium nitrate. In addition to the upper nobility and the alchemic workshop, there was no great demand because there was almost no purpose for it, so there was not much of a production. If all of the saltpeter was used to make bombs, then it would soon be exhausted.

They would need to use weapons like guns, bows, and crossbows as the main killers of the demonic beasts.

Chapter 35 Home

Nightingale was walking through the 'fog'.

When she was looking outside from inside the fog, the outer world was only bicolor, black and white.

The lines which were originally the borders of things were no longer very clear. The borders of straight lines, broken lines, and curved lines became ambiguous, like a picture painted by a child..

This kind of feeling was somewhat hard to put into words; Nightingale took a long time to become familiar with how to distinguish between the borders. If Nightingale used her power correctly, she wouldn't be bound by anything while walking through the fog. Even for something like a wall, just looking at it from a slightly different angle would be enough to find a way through, but when looking at it in the real world, there would definitely not be an entrance.

In the fog, up and down, front and back were no longer a fixed concept, they transformed into each other, or you could even say they overlapped. For example, what Nightingale was just doing. She entered the castle, which was under the watchful eyes of the guards, without being noticed. Then, within a step, the lines around her changed unpredictably, and she stepped through the ceiling out of nowhere, arriving in Anna's room.

For her, this was an entirely free world without any rules.

Nightingale was able to relax only in the world of 'fog'. Even though it was silent and lonely, she would never encounter any threat there.

Most of the time, the world in the fog was black and white, but occasionally she could see other colors. For example, when she was looking at Anna.

The difference between a witch and an average person was their magic powers. Nightingale could see this force flowing and fading in a witch; this was the only color in the world of fog.

She had never seen anyone like Anna before, with such a full and intense color – an aquamarine luster surging within her, in its center it was close to incandescent, she was almost unable to look at it. All this made Nightingale very confused, because in general, the color would show the witch's ability and magic power. In her time in the Witch Cooperation Association, she had seen a lot of witches with the fire ability when they used magic. The luster within them was always the color of orange or red like the cloud of a living fireball, but regardless of size or brightness, other witches couldn't be compared with Anna.

If this wasn't already difficult to understand, another point was even more incredible.

Within her was such an enormous amount of magic, how could she still be alive?

Within the whole Witch Cooperation Association, Nightingale had not found anyone with such an astonishing amount of magical power. Even if it were an adult witch, she would be a dwarf in comparison with Anna. If Anna were to become an adult...

No, Anna would never have this opportunity. Nightingale had to sigh, because the stronger the magic power was, the stronger the bite would be. She could not even imagine what would happen when the time came for Anna to face her trial; she would likely face a terrible ordeal. The pain of feeling that her organs were torn from the inside out didn't let people lose consciousness until they gave up their resistance, accepting their death. They would be repeatedly subjected to constant pain.

She walked out of the fog, letting her temporary depressed feeling fade away, and cheerfully said, "Good morning, Anna."

Anna had already become accustomed to the other side's unwanted behavior of suddenly appearing. She nodded her head, but did not answer, and continued practicing her flame instead.

Nightingale rubbed her own nose and then went to the side of Anna's bed.

Nightingale had already seen this kind of practice many times. She had even been watching when Anna had just started practicing. Accidentally igniting her clothes in the back garden shed, she always had a bucket full of clothes beside herself into which she could change. Later, she was able to make her flame skillfully dance at her fingertips; then, even Roland no longer supervised her practice, but instead tore down the shed in the garden and turned it into a place to enjoy afternoon tea and sunbathe.

Even so, according to the prince's orders from before, Anna continued to carry out her practice for one to two hours every day – but now in her own room.

"I brought fish cake, do you want to eat it with me?" Nightingale took out a cloth from her bosom, opened it and divided the fish cake into a piece for each of them.

Anna nodded after she smelled the fish cake.

“Go wash your hands before you eat it,” Nightingale laughed. Fortunately, Anna didn’t hate Nightingale, after all, it would not be good for Nightingale to speak to herself. All in all, Anna was obviously very concerned for Nana but didn’t express her concern very much. In fact, when she was not in front of Roland, she rarely spoke.

In contrast, Roland talked too much. He always had a lot to say. For example, when eating a meal, he would have so many rules – such as ‘wash your hands before eating.’, ‘don’t eat too quickly.’, ‘Don’t pick it up and eat it after it has fallen to the ground.’, and so on... he could give a long statement for everything .

At first, she was very impatient, but later she learned that it didn’t matter because here she was the peasant and he was the master. After all, it was the 4th Prince’s castle, since she lived here and ate his food, she reluctantly began to listen to his speeches. Now, she was also getting used to these rules. She didn’t know why, but when she herself, Anna, Nana, Roland and Carter would compete for places in line for hand-washing, she would feel an inexplicable hint of fun.

Anna reached into the bucket filled with well water and cleaned her hands, and then she lit a flame to dry them. After that, she took her piece of fish cake and sat at the table, cutely taking a small bite into her little mouth to slowly chew it.

“You really don’t want to go back with me?” Nightingale asked her once more. “There, we will have a lot of sisters; they will take good care of you. Here, you can only live and do something within the range of the castle, don’t you feel bored? Although they are called the Impassable Mountains, you can find lots of material to survive, and there we would all be one big family, everyone there has gathered together for the same purpose. Your magic power is so strong, they will happily welcome you. This winter, I’m afraid this winter will be your last...”

When she spoke until there, Nightingale trailed off. perhaps it was already too late, she thought, even if they were back in the camp, for Anna to have such strong magic power, it would be almost impossible for her to get through adulthood. The only thing Nightingale could do for Anna was to stay by her side when she died.

“How was your life as a child, before you joined of the Witch Cooperation Association?”

Nightingale was startled by Anna’s question, after all, she rarely asked any questions. “I... used to live in a big city in the eastern part of the Kingdom. Actually, it wasn’t far from the capital.”

“Did you have a happy life?”

Happy? No, she was unwilling to remember her daily life at that time, she had to depend on others, and was despised and mocked. When they found out that she had turned into a witch, her life became even worse than that of a cat or dog. She had a chain tied around her neck and was forced to work for them. So remembering this, Nightingale shook her head and whispered, “Why are you asking this?”

“I lived in the old town areas.” Anna once more told her own story. “My father sold me for 25 gold royals to the church, but since His Highness had let me out of the prison, I’m living a very happy life here. “

“But, you cannot go out of the castle, and except Roland Wimbledon, the other people outside still hate witches.”

“That isn’t important for me, and he also said that he would change all this in the future, can’t he do that?”

“That will be tough. As long as the church hasn’t fallen yet, they will always speak of the witches as evil.”

Anna didn’t refute immediately and became silent for a long time. It was even so long that Nightingale thought that Anna would never talk about this point again when she suddenly asked, “Where did you have a better life? When you were with the Witch Cooperation Association or living here with us?”

“You... What did you say ah?” this question caught Nightingale totally off-guard, “Well, of course...”

It would be with the Witch Cooperation Association, right? To tell the truth, she wasn’t really interested in the search for the Holy Mountain, but was interested in the place where all her friends were living.

As for Border Town? If she hadn’t heard that a witch was in danger, she would never have come to this town!

So the answer should be very obvious, but why couldn’t she say it the first time?

Then, Anna begun to smile. Nightingale had rarely seen her smile, her eyes were shining like a lake in which the morning sun was reflected, glistening. Inexplicably, she felt at ease – even if she wasn’t in her own world of the ‘fog’.

“I heard Roland saying that the Witch Cooperation Association was looking for the Holy Mountain in the Northern Mountains and that the Holy Mountain was a secure home for all of you, but for myself I think I have already found my Holy Mountain.”

This castle was her Holy Mountain. Nightingale realized that although Anna wouldn’t live for much longer, her soul already arrived at the place where most witches longed to be.

At this moment, from the other side of the door, running footsteps could be heard. Nightingale listened carefully, they belonged to a panicking Nana.

Then the door was opened, and it was really Nana Pine who rushed in.

While tears ran down all over her face, she jumped into Anna’s arms. “Wh-What should I do? Sister Anna, my father has found out that I have become a witch!”

#### Chapter 36 Negotiation

Roland was dragged out of bed by Nightingale.

After he had heard that Nana’s father came for an audience, he was surprised at first. Soon he realized that this was a rare opportunity – If he wanted the girl to stay during the Months of the Demons and help fight against the demonic beasts, he would have to find a reason for the Pine Family to remain in Border Town during Winter.

Originally, this was a very tricky situation. After all, the 4th Prince’s popularity among the nobility had plummeted, and he had a strained relationship with the stronghold. This were the reasons why most of

them nobles leave Border Town. However, from the beginning, Roland hadn't considered working together with the nobles. They may have a lot of power, but they weren't suitable for a joined work.

He quickly washed his face and dressed himself, then immediately went into the reception hall.

Mr. Pine was already brought into the reception hall under the guidance of the guards. When Mr. Pine saw the prince, he immediately stood up, enraged, and asked, "Your Highness, where is my daughter?"

This was the first time that Roland saw Nana's father. He had a muscular build, but wasn't too tall, and with his beard he had a very rough image. With his cotton coat that reached his waist and his leather pants that had very large pockets his dressing style looked more like that of a person from the Orient, rather than someone of noble rank.

"She's fine, Mr. Pine -"

"Why was she directly let through by the guards, while I was stopped at the door?" Nana's father interrupted him out of anger. "I need an explanation, Your Highness! Please bring my daughter out and let me see her!"

What was happening? Roland was full of wonder. He was convinced that Mr. Pine was clear about the situation that his own daughter had unfortunately become a witch. So it would be normal if Mr. Pine humbly asked him to hide the message, or he would just allow Roland to solve the problem. But Roland had really not expected that Mr. Pine would be so aggressive and wouldn't act according to aristocratic etiquette.

As to why the guards let Nana come in without questions was only because of Roland's standing orders. Nana would come every few days to play with Anna, so the guards were already used to her coming.

After considering for a moment, Roland gave the order to have a maid bring Nana over to them.

No matter how rude the other side behaved, he was still Nana's father so it was only right to let the two meet and talk. If he showed any intention to send his daughter to the church or generally to abandon her, it wouldn't be too late to take measures against him.

Nana and Anna both came together into the hall.

At the moment Mr. Pine could see his daughter, the impertinence seen in his eyes immediately vanished. He opened his arms wide in the direction of Nana and shouted loud: "Dad is here, so come to me!"

But the little girl was just hiding behind Anna, only exposing half of her head, "I'll be sold to the church by you, right?"

"Oh... You silly girl, what are you talking about? Naturally, I would never take you to the church, so let us go home together."

This reaction somewhat confused Roland. According to Nightingale's story, Nana was seen by her father when she was using magic. Breaking out into a panic, she immediately fled to the castle in search of Anna. All along the way, she was followed by her murderous looking father.



But as it now seemed he was only looking with eyes full of love and care at his daughter, completely unlike the usual feelings of hate with which witches were typically confronted with.

So, had it only been a misunderstanding?

For a moment Roland hesitated, but then he decided to take the bull by the horns and said, "Mr. Pine, your daughter became a witch, you surely know that."

"Your Highness, what are you talking about? I don't understand you." Mr. Pine angrily stomped his feet and then went toward Nana, trying to grab her hand. However, Anna stepped in front of him, blocking his view of Nana.

"Father, I have become a witch... I'm so sorry..." whispered Nana.

Hearing Nana mention it once more, Mr. Pine became somewhat anxious, "Don't talk nonsense! How would you become a witch? What has that guy Karl taught you? I shouldn't have ever let you go to the college, there they only teach that rhetoric church shit!"

Hearing him talking like this, Roland suddenly began to understand the situation. It seemed that Nana's father tried to cover everything for his daughter up. Did he misunderstand Roland's intentions?

So because of this, he was so restless until he could see Nana.

"Anna." he gave her a sign with his eyes. Anna understood and nodded. Then she stretched out her right hand, in the direction of Nana's father who still tried to reach his daughter. Flames began to spew out from her palm, direct near Mr. Pines head, nearly burning him.

Mr. Pine was shocked as he immediately stepped away from Anna. Nana also began to panic and hugged Anna's arm trying to stop her, "Sister Anna, don't attack my father!"

"Your Highness, this is a -!"

"As you can see, she is also a witch, just like your daughter," Roland spread out his hand and said, "The reason why Nana has free access to the castle isn't what you think. Can we all calm down and talk about the future?"

At this moment, Mr. Pine felt like he had awakened from a dream-like state, "Ah" he needed to start twice, "Your Highness, I ....."

"Sit down first and then we can speak," Roland pointed to the table nearby, "also have a cup of tea."

Well, he sighed, my reputation was so bad, they even fear to let their children be near me. Now Roland fully understood Mr. Pine's rude behavior at the beginning, he had only shown his concern for his own daughter. When he had seen his daughter run into the prince's castle, and the guards were already used to her appearance, he couldn't think of any good reason for it.

In case Roland was in Mr. Pine's position, he was afraid he would have tried to tear down the castle empty-handed.

As for why he had denied back then that his daughter was a witch, his intention was very apparent – he feared that the prince would say ‘Nana has fallen, so she needs to be purified.’ So he tried to convince himself and everyone else, that his daughter wasn’t a witch so that no one would care about her.

Mr. Pine hesitated for a long time, but in the end, he still sat down and drank a whole cup of tea at once. After that, he wiped his mouth and looked a little embarrassed, “Sorry, my behavior was coarse. Excuse me, since when do you know that my daughter has turned into a \*hic\*... witch?”

“Since before the winter. I wasn’t the first one who had found out that she has awakened, it was her teacher Karl van Barte. Due to her and Anna being friends, he sent Nana to me, so that I could look after her and that I could protect her.” Explained Roland carefully, “the last one and a half month, she came to the castle to learn her ability without fear of discovery. By the way, your daughter’s ability is to heal. “

“Is that right...” Mr. Pine scratched his head, “So that was the reason why the cat could suddenly run and jump again.”

“Cat?”

“\*cough\* \*cough\*, in fact, it doesn’t matter. When I came home, I saw a boy who was sitting in the doorway with a cat which was hit by a carriage in his arms. I planned to hide the cat from Nana’s view so that she wouldn’t be frightened. I didn’t think that she had seen me and would immediately run to me looking for the cat. It was very obvious that the cat had been hit, and her leg was broken,” he looked at Nana and Anna, “So you were friends? “

Anna didn’t say what she thought, but Nana quickly nodded her head.

Mr. Pine seeing his daughter’s reaction his expression softened a bit.

Upon seeing this Roland asked: “You do not seem to think that the witches were people tempted by the devil and had become his spokesperson.”

“My daughter is undoubtedly not a wicked person!” He categorically denied this possibility, “No matter what she has become, I have no doubt about this!”

Anna’s father and Nana’s father were entirely different kind of people. Roland couldn’t help but feel that he now could somewhat understand why Nana was always so carefree, always having a smile on her face. Such a family, for a child it was just like a warm cradle.

“I also do not think so, Mr. Pine,” then Roland said bluntly, “Your daughter’s ability to heal other people is of great significance for me. I want her to stay in Border Town, helping me to fight the demonic beasts during the Months of the Demons.”

Hearing this, Mr. Pine hesitated, “Your Highness, I am afraid I will have to refuse your request. When the demonic beasts come, it will become very dangerous in this town. I cannot leave her in this small town.”

Since the Pine Family didn’t belong to the territory under the jurisdiction of Border Town, so even he as a prince, couldn’t directly command them to stay. But as long as Mr. Pine was willing to sit down and talk, Roland was sure that he could convince him.

Chapter 37 Family History

“The danger isn’t as great as you think, Mr. Pine. If something is dangerous it will also always offer some opportunities.” In his head the 4th Prince went through all the information his assistant minister had collected once more “I heard that you inherited your title from your father? He became a Knight through merits gathered from battle, awarded the rank of Baron and given his own territories.”

“That is true.” confirmed Mr. Pine.

“It was at the time of the Months of the Demons. A small group of demonic beasts unexpectedly broke through the stronghold defense near the Shishui River and were running rampant. When Nana’s father was on patrol, he encountered the rampaging demonic beasts. Instead of avoiding them like most people would do, he notified the stronghold, asking for reinforcements, and began to siege the demonic beasts to save the nearby town – even though he had no relationship with the town.” While speaking, Roland observed the expressions of the other people, “But Mr. Pine, you should know the things which happened at that time better than me. Your father called for the militia from the town. Then, with his attendants and the militia he fought the demonic beasts and won. That large battle was fought to stand up for the innocent.”

“Yes.” his tone was a bit agitated, apparently full of longing for his own family history, “There was also an unusually big one, some parts resembled a deer’s and some parts a bull’s. It was a fusion of both of them. Its legs were thicker than my father’s torso, and when it was ran, the ground trembled. If I were in his position, I really wouldn’t have known how to beat the monster.”

“But he did it. My father stood near a shallow trench, luring the furious demonic beast over. It accelerated and was trying to take advantage of its speed at the moment of their collision. My father laid down in the shallow trench and wedged his sword between two stones so that only the sword tip was visible. The seemingly unbeatable idiotic beast couldn’t stop, and its belly hit the tip of the sword. The entire stomach was cut open; Black blood and some intestines flowed out of its belly. It was so much that my father almost drowned within the trench. Even today, the spoils of that battle, the great horn of the demonic beast, hangs above my family’s fireplace.”

Roland, who was sipping his tea leisurely said: “It was an admirable fight, he followed the knight’s code of faith, compassion, and bravery. Later he got his knighthood and a manor in the fiefdom of Joe Kohl, who was still the Lord of the Longsong Stronghold at that time. Twenty-five years ago Joe Kohl was promoted to the rank of a Duke by his Majesty Wimbledon III, becoming the part-time guardian of the southern border. With this, the whole southern border territory was placed under his jurisdiction. Unfortunately, after his promotion, Joe Kohl became an eyesore to his former supporter Duke Ryan. “

“Your Highness, you might know well that,” Mr. Pine’s voice sounded somewhat frustrated, “even when the ranks of Duke Ryan and Joe Kohl were different, their levels of power were already even. Kohl’s blood could be traced back to a branch of the royal family, so his ancestry wasn’t worse than that of Duke Ryan’s. “

This was a political scheme. Roland sighed, Wimbledon III actually tried to check and balance their level of power.

In order to understand this complicated relationship, Roland had to call for his assistant minister for explanations.

The noble and feudal jurisdiction were extremely confusing. In theory, the higher nobility has the right to issue orders within the territory of the lower nobility. But the actual situation was much more complicated. Duke Ryan and Joe Kohl were an example of this. Although he was placed in the western border territory under Duke Ryan, Joe Kohl, as the king's directly announced count, he had no less prestige and power than Duke Ryan.

When Joe Kohl became the Duke of the southern territory, his power in his old territory became even stronger. This was a method of the royal family of Graycastle to hold the power stable.

"But when you inherited the territory of your father, the trade, and the agricultural production gradually faded" Roland slowly said, "But now, there is a new opportunity in front of you."

"What is this new opportunity...?"

"Surely you had heard of the famine two years ago. The stronghold was withholding the food for the next months because of the reason that the amount of ore mined by the inhabitants of Border Town was too small. This year, we are faced with the same dilemma again. The unexpected collapse of the Northern Slope Mine didn't leave any route of retreat for the people of Border Town. We must block the demonic beasts at the new city walls. Perhaps the fight won't go smoothly, but as I said before, facing this dangerous task also means a new opportunity for us."

"....." Mr. Pine had to first understand the meaning of what the prince said, so he only frowned and didn't immediately give his answer.

"To be honest with you, you do not really resemble a typical noble." Roland gently smiled, "No noble would go out dressed like you, and your hands are full with crusts and calluses. Mr. Pine, you didn't let your father's inheritance down, right? You're a knight with excellent fighting skills. "

He certainly did not let his father down, Roland was very sure of this, or Mr. Pine wouldn't have trained and ran through the woods for a whole day. According to the information provided by Barov, in the last week, Mr. Pine had spent at least three days training in the forest. On each visit, he was always fully equipped, and if he couldn't afford it for his attendants, he directly hired some helper from the town of Orion. Some people were just born for battle; Mr. Pine was obviously such a person.

"If you will stay in Border Town, I will provide you with the opportunity to let you regain your father's glory. Just like he did, you will get the chance to obtain honor and outstanding achievements with only your sword and your courage. I'll also reward you with a territory in the east of the Border Town, and you will become a Viscount appointed by me." Although this would be a rare situation, the commitment would be valid. As an adult Prince, he was able to legally canonize Viscounts, Barons, and Knights. However, he could only seldom confer such titles to other people. One, it would undercut the regional system of aristocracy, and two, if the other side refused the offer, it would become more awkward. Roland didn't care about the opinion of the local nobility, he just wanted Nana to stay in Border Town. As for refusing Mr. Pine, Roland wasn't too worried. After Joe Kohl had become the guard of the southern border guard, his relationship with Mr. Pine's father didn't carry on. He had entirely abandoned the Pine Family.

When hearing this, Mr. Pine finally began to talk again, “Then... Your Highness, if I stay, can I still send Nana back to the stronghold? Until now, no one had ever tried to resist the demonic beasts in this place. If we fail, I do not want my daughter to be buried here.”

“As I already told you in the beginning Mr. Pine, the danger in staying here is relatively low. Have you ever thought about what would happen if Nana was found to be a Witch in Longsong Stronghold? There it would be entirely different than here in Border Town. The stronghold is completely in the possession of the church. They have already grown their roots in the city for a long time. Their believers and overseers are everywhere in the city. At the moment she is exposed, even I won’t be able to save her. “

Roland paused, then added, “Border Town will definitely not fall! When the Months of the Demons arrive and the demonic beasts come, I’ll be on the wall to lead my people and fight alongside them. Our opponents are nothing more than a group of mutated beasts, they are not invulnerable. Your father had no cover and was able to win against them in an open surrounding. However, we have the new city walls. If. instead.. I really only mean, if an accident does happen, I’ll take measures to guarantee that Nana will immediately leave the town,” he paused for a second, “and naturally, Anna will also move. I will prepare a boat for them at the dock beforehand, so I can promise you that they will be safe.”

“So... I will believe in you, Your Highness,” when saying this, Mr. Pine stood up and went directly down on one knee to give the standard knight salute to the prince, “and I am willing to fight for you.”

.....

After Nana and her father had left, Anna rolled her eyes at Roland

“What are you talking about?” She firmly said, “I’m not going anywhere.”

### Chapter 38 The Era of Hot Weapons

Iron Axe became aware of the fact that they were now under watch.

The hunters who had participated in the test explosion moved together into a two-story house near the castle. Looking through the window, he could see that the house was encircled by stone walls and guards were stationed at the entrance.

He did not mind this regulation, and the fact that His Highness only sent two guards to oversee them showed that he trusted them.

Until now, Iron Axe continued to repeat the roaring explosion within his head – until now, there was never a weapon that could bring him such a strong shock. In the extreme south of his homeland, he had seen how orange fire erupted out of the ground, and this fire could continue to burn for decades; he had seen endless storms with monstrous waves... however awfully unpredictable these powers were, they were the will of Mother Earth or the god of the sea. They were the iron whip that disciplined all living things.

But now, His Highness began to challenge the power of the gods, obtaining a power only seen during heaven’s punishment – although when compared with the real lightning and thunder, the difference was still great; reaching such a realm of power wasn’t possible for humans.

In the Sand Nation, anyone who would participate in such a demonstration or later use it would normally get their tongue cut off. Of course, this was not the safest way to keep secrets. Only the dead could keep secrets from spreading. As a foreigner? They would only see him as blasphemer, and it was forever impossible for a foreign clansman to get into the core hierarchy.

The Prince knew that Iron Axe was only a half-blood, but he still allowed him to witness the curse of fire. Even more, he also let Iron Axe be responsible for the formation of the hunting squadron. The trust His Highness had within him was burned deep into Iron Axe's heart.

During his time in the Sand Nation, he had experienced countless betrayals of friends or family who framed him for their wrongdoings. When he fled to the Kingdom of Graycastle's south border, he still had to suffer discrimination because of his half Sand Nation and half Graycastle lineage. He eventually arrived in Border Town, disheartened. Here, he intended to rely on his hunting skills to spend the rest of his life in peace. However, he had never expected to meet His Royal Highness, the Prince, here. And of all things, he had never expected that the prince would even trust him.

He had no doubt that with this new weapon, the one who would win the battle for the throne would be Roland Wimbledon.

When he thought about fighting for the future king and the promising opportunities he would get, Iron Axe became wholly excited.

"Everyone, come down to gather!"

When Iron Axe heard this shout, he took a quick look through the window and saw Roland's chief knight Carter and four other knights coming.

Iron Axe first finished dressing himself, then walked down the stairs to stand at attention in front of Carter. Since he had participated in the militia training, he knew that His Highness preferred discipline, since he would adjust them to a unit of uniformity. The other members of his hunting squad were a lot slower. It took about six to seven minutes before they lined up as a team.

"Everyone, follow me to the old place." Carter didn't care much about how the hunter squad lined up. Instead, he went straight to the city wall.

It was still the same place as the explosion test. But this time, His Highness didn't set up a safety area.

In addition to Roland, there were already four knights waiting for them – they were all Carter's subordinates. Iron Axe noted that His Highness had begun to play with an unusually shaped iron stick while explaining something to the knights.

When Roland saw the hunting squad, he came to them and asked, "How is living at the new houses? Have you already become used to it?"

"Thank you for Your Highness' care." everyone bowed and stated that the new homes were comfortable.

In fact, the new houses they moved into were many times better than the old homes. At least they had no air leaks, and the roofs were also not made of translucent straw bedding, but were made of neat and tidy tiles instead.

“This is good,” Roland nodded, pleased, “The current arrangements are needed out of security reasons. But you will only need to live there until the end of the Months of the Demons, then you will be able to move back to your former living places. In addition, the salary for the first month has been paid to your families, and every weekend you will be allowed to see them face to face. Of course, you will be accompanied by guards. “

“Thank you for your kindness, Your Highness.” Said the hunter squad cheerfully.

This was really a bit surprising for Iron Axe. Leaving aside the law of Sand Nation, even the military management of Graycastle shouldn't be this lax. Could it be that this was because of His Highness' kindness? Iron Axe became somewhat worried, if His Highness wanted to compete for the throne, he needed to be ruthless – this he knew well from his life in Sand Nation.

However, when the 4th Prince began to talk about new weapons, based on the development of the gunpowder, he put his worries into the back of his mind. Iron Axe stared without blinking at the two iron bars which the prince had placed in front of them.

“These weapons are called ‘guns’,” Roland said, “Next, I'll tell you how to use them. “

.....

In the next half hour, they had to learn how to use the new weapons.

Take the black powder which was the cause of the explosion and fill it into the barrel of the gun. Then, a lead ball was stuffed with a poker into the barrel, straight to the end. After that, they had to pour the gunpowder into the igniting chamber, aim, and then pull the trigger.

Iron Axe had considered himself to be a master of many weapons, whether it be swords, knives, hammers, axes or spears. He was well trained with all of them, but he had also needed long years of training and combat skills to master them. Learning how to use a new weapon in only thirty minutes, he was afraid that the speed to master this weapon could only be compared to the crossbow.

The other gun was handed to Carter.

The chief knight was also full of interest in the novelty of this weapon, and he didn't want to put them down.

After several rounds of simulation, Roland set up two targets to let them see the power of the guns. The first target had wooden armor in front of its chest. The wooden armor was held up by two knights standing at a distance of about thirty feet away.

The Prince led Carter and Iron Axe through the shooting technique. Then, they aimed and pulled the trigger.

When they heard the loud sound of fire, every person present jumped up out of shock. Iron Axe was no exception, but soon only surprise was left on everyone's face.

Looking at the targets' wooden armor, they could see a small hole. The lead ball had cleanly shot through the chest armor's thickest part.

Before shooting, Iron Axe had carefully observed this armor. It was clearly not a handicraft workshop's inferior product built from bad materials. The marks of the hammer and anvil on the neckline proved that this was a product of Graycastle's blacksmith standard. The thickest part was half a finger thick and was strong enough that it could ward off a direct hit from a crossbow, fired at the closest distance. To deal with this kind of armor, a heavy crossbow or a warhammer would be a wise choice.

So comparing it with a crossbow, the difficulty to use the weapon was the same, but the power of a gun was far better than that of a crossbow. In addition, the gun's loading speed and the loading speed of a crossbow were nearly equivalent, so... looking at the target which was thirty feet away, Iron Axe couldn't see a problem.

"Your Highness, how many weapons do we have of this kind?" asked Carter.

"Currently, only these two and until the Months of the Demons, we can only produce two more at most."

Iron Axe could see that hearing this, Carter was clearly relieved. He was able to guess Carter's thoughts. If this weapon was easy to manufacture, then with only a few days of training, everyone would be able to train a large number of 'express warriors' who were bringing guns to battle. Then people at any age, with any strength and even any sex – even a fragile woman, could be a significant threat to the knights.

Although the shock he got from this weapon was smaller than that of the curse of fire, it still was a powerful weapon. Iron Axe thought, with this great power they could easily kill a large number of rugged-flesh demonic beasts from high up on the wall. Even if they would face a mixed species, with these firearms, maybe the outcome would be not so embarrassing.

But the real significance of such a weapon was clear to Roland.

He personally opened the door to the time of wars with hot weapons.

Chapter 39 The Winter is coming

Roland was standing on the city wall, facing the north. This past month, he repeatedly checked the castle, the mine, and the city walls in a kind of three-point loop. He checked them for every possible detail so that he wouldn't miss anything.

The militia became very adept at handling their weapons. Due to Carter's repetitive drills, they were able to stabilize the pike until the Militia Captain loudly gave the command to slash with their pikes.

Standing behind the Militia was the Hunter squad. Every hunter who remained in Border Town and was good with either the bow or the crossbow was incorporated into this squad. These seasoned hunters were the backbone for killing the demonic beasts. Standing only twelve feet away from demonic beasts on the city wall, it was nearly impossible for them to miss their target.

The last line of defense were Iron Axe, Carter, and two hunters from the elite team who were under Iron Axe. The parts manufactured by the blacksmiths were enough to let Anna weld four flintlocks. They would only shoot the flintlocks when a mixed species attacked or the hunters with crossbows were unable to penetrate the skin of the demonic beasts. Their location on the wall wasn't set, so the four of them had to patrol the whole 200 yard long defense line. If there was a need for them anywhere, they would appear.



As for the explosives, they were kept under heavy protection next to the wall in the warehouse . To keep everyone safe, the gunpowder was stored in its three components, and it would only be put together on the city wall when needed – after all, if the powder detonated at the wrong time, the self-inflicted damage would be even greater than the damage from the demonic beasts. The teeth of the demonic beasts may be able to crush the cement, but if the explosives went off, the whole wall would be destroyed.

So far, Roland had organized two test runs, both including the use of the explosives. Thanks to these two exercises, the militia was used to the loud roars of the explosions and were no longer so scared that they threw their weapons away. The other advantage was that when the defenders discovered that the prince held such incredible weapons in his hands, the team morale suddenly began to skyrocket.

“Your Highness,” Barov tightened his collar, “We have already spent most of the ore income in the last half month, so if the Months of the Demons actually goes on as long as the astrologers have predicted, I fear that the food won’t last till the end of winter.”

“Then I want you to fill up the entire vault,” Roland said without hesitation, “Make another deal with Willow Town and don’t make it the only one. The first steam engine has already been transported to the mine, and the gravel from the collapse has already been completely cleaned up. During the entire winter, we can still get a little yield from the mines. Rough stones are especially in demand. Do not emphasize on price. Instead, sell them as soon as possible so that our wheat and meat storages are always as full as possible.”

Barov nodded, “I’ll give out the orders immediately, Your Highness. Just...”

Seeing the hesitant look on his assistant minister’s face, Roland certainly understood what he wanted to say. “Do not worry, I have already arranged a boat. If the line of defense is broken, I will leave the town immediately.”

“That’s excellent to hear.” said Barov, relieved.

Roland smiled at him and said, “You can go. After all, you have enough to do. I have to look for someone else.”

After Barov left, the Prince slowly stepped onto a watchtower. This place was at the center of the city walls and was their highest point. From here, he could overlook the whole front line, parts of the jungle, and the nearby hills. At such a eight, the wind was blowing quite strongly but Roland didn’t care. Only on this high and open platform could he somewhat calm down and forget the coming war.

“You lied to him,” someone next to him suddenly said, “You don’t intend to leave this town.”

“Life is already so difficult, keeping a few secrets sometimes is good for everyone.”

“You’re talking nonsense and don’t understand the situation. If you already consider the identity of a prince as a difficulty, what would you see us as?” Nightingale emerged out of the fog. “Even if you will not be the king, you still have to live through the five-year-long struggle for the throne because you’re one of the main parties. Compared to worrying about such unimportant matters, you should better accompany Anna. I’m afraid... she doesn’t have much time left. “

For a moment Roland remained silent, "I don't think that she will die during the Months of the Demons."

"Why?"

"She said that she will not lose to the devil's bite," he paused for a second, "And I believe her."

"You actually believe what a witch says," Nightingale shook her head, "but we are cursed by the devil."

"Are you? Well, I also believe you."

"....."

\*

Brian was wearing his civilian clothes and was standing in front of Greyhound's tombstone.

He gently stroked the surface of the new stone, it was a pure white stone and on its surface were engraved the words: "In memory of one of the silent heroes of Border Town."

"Greyhound."

"I've already realized my biggest dream. At the end of the Months of the Demons, His Highness the 4th Prince will hold the canonization ceremony for me. But, I don't want to sit on the bed waiting for my canonization. My wounds have already healed, so the city wall is the place where I should be. The Months of the Demons is near, and the demonic beasts may be strong, but they will have to go through the line of defense the militia established, and will no longer be able to advance. I will also take over your part in defending the town, and brandish my sword in your name. All this will not be the end. Your murderer is still alive... But he will not live much longer, His Highness already promised this to me. The next time I come to you, I'll bring good news."

Brian bent down and placed a bouquet of flowers at the gravestone.

"So goodbye, my friend."

\*

"Sister Anna, are you scared?" Nana, who was lying on Anna's bed, asked her this.

"Afraid of what?"

"The devil's bite we have to face this winter. I became a witch during the autumn of this year, so it will be the first time I have to face it..."

"Well, the first time," Anna thought, "will be very painful, and sometimes you think that you can't wait any longer and wish that you could finally die."

"Ah!" Nana began to shout out of shock, but she immediately covered her mouth.

"But you will survive, just like me."

"I do not know..." whispered Nana, "I'm not like you, so strong, and afraid of nothing."

"I'm not really that strong," said Anna as she closed her eyes. The scene when she met Roland for the first time emerged in her mind. Down there in the cold and dark dungeon, Roland's clothes were draped over her body. He softly said that he would hire her – until now, she still got goosebumps when remembering this. "Sometimes you will encounter situations or things that will give you the will to live on, even if you need to struggle hard to survive."

"Such as...?"

"For example, meat marinated in soy paste," Anna sighed, "How should I know what you dream of? – Ah"

Seeing that Nana was entirely staring at her, Anna wiped her face with her hand, "What are you looking at? Is there some dirt on my face?"

"No ..." Nana shook her head, "I'm just a bit surprised, you've never talked to me so much ... Sister Anna, the appearance you had when you just closed your eyes and thought about the past, you were so beautiful."

Anna rolled her eyes, jumped out of the bed, and went to the window.

Nana followed directly behind her, "What are you looking at, do you want to flee into the forest?"

"The forest is in the West," answered Anna snappily, "Here you can only see the Shishui River."

"Sister Anna, look!" The little girl pointed at the sky.

Anna was startled, then opened her window. A surge of wind mixed with little snowflakes came into the room.

She held out her hand, catching the flower-like sparkling snow. She could feel a chill coming from her fingers.

"It's snowing."

\*

"....."

After long silence, Nightingale opened her mouth and began to speak once more, "You actually didn't lie."

"Of course," Roland laughed, "I had very little reason to lie."

Nightingale said nothing. She only tilted her head, and an unknown look emerged in her eyes.

Suddenly, she felt something cold on her neck, and she couldn't help herself from shrinking away. She looked up only to find that unbeknownst to her, the snow had begun to fall on the walls. Under the gray sky, there seemed to be an uncountable number of snowflakes. They danced in the wind, flying all over the place, accompanied by the shouts of the militia.

...The Months of the Demons had begun.

Chapter 40 Letter

The firewood was burning violently, but Gerald Wimbledon didn't feel much of the heat.

Although he was in a large tent made of stitched leather, and the ground was also completely sealed without any air leakage, he still felt cold. His toes were especially cold, they were almost frozen to the point that he couldn't feel them any longer.

"This damn place, even the urine freezes when you take a piss." he spat and stood up. He grabbed the table on both sides with his hands. When he used all his strength, so that even his hand became red from the effort, the six-foot square wooden table became lively and left the ground.

After he put the table at the edge of the fire pit, Gerald felt a lot more comfortable. He took off his shoes and put his feet next to the fire, warming them in the heat. He spread out the text scroll with his hands once more and continued to write the unfinished letter.

"Dear lovely Olivia."

"It has been already a month since I came to Hermes, but of course, the Church prefers to call this place their new Holy City. If it wasn't for the Months of the Demons, I wouldn't want to stay here for even a moment. I just want to get back to you and share the warm bed with you once more."

"Faithful to the convention, the church is monitoring us with their own forces instead of supporting us. It's kind of ironic, isn't it? Speaking about the church, I have to admit that what they were able to do is really amazing. I can still remember the time when I was here for the first time. It was around twenty years ago. In addition to the mountains and rocks around Hermes there was nothing here besides a little church at the bottom of the mountains. But now, they have not only opened up a road for a carriageway up the mountain peak, but they have also established a large-scale fortress city."

"During the summer, you really should come and take a look at this city with me. The new Holy City is even grander than our Graycastle. Do you remember the theater in Graycastle? You and I had gone there to watch "The Revenge of the Prince". You were so impressed with the theater's architecture; the interior was so spacious that it was unbelievable."

"But after you see the Holy City's new Hall of Military Affairs, you will think that the theater in Graycastle was only a shack. It is hard to call it a building, I think it's more like a piece of exquisite art. It's so spacious that it could swallow five theaters. However, not a single pillar supports the exterior walls. The walls are held up by eight behemoth-like demonic beast bones. Between the curved bones are many smaller bones which are connected by hemp ropes, and the roof hovers in midair as if it were on a pole. How could they think off a building like this?"

"And those bones, if they were stripped from a demonic beast, I bet that guy's size was certainly more than a hundred feet. Probably only in Hermes will you be able to encounter such a monster. But honey, please do not worry, even if the demonic beasts are massive, they are still the devil's minions."

In the presence of God's Eye of Retribution, no evil can escape God's jurisdiction! Whether it is a demonic beast, a witch, or the devil himself, their only fate is to turn into ashes!"

When he had written until here, Gerald Wimbledon put down his pen and loosened up his tingling hands. This was really strange, normally he could hold his 15 lbs. heavy two-hand-sword all day, but

while holding the pen he was only able to write a few sentence before he felt so tired. He smiled in a self-deprecating way and thought that he really was made for a yokel's life.

“When speaking of demonic beasts, I suddenly think of my fourth brother. He was assigned to Border Town, such a miserable place. I'm afraid he has already turned tail and fled to Longsong Stronghold – even there, the demonic beasts will not be able to reach him and the stronghold's defense is comparable to Hermes. But I think this is not his fault, even if I went to that place, I would only be able to take refuge in the stronghold. Here it can be seen how unfair my father is. Just because our younger brother performed exceptionally intelligently from an early age, he decided to let him inherit the throne. Father forgets that he himself didn't win the throne with calculating means. Since our mother's death, it has become more and more difficult for me to find out what father is thinking. “

Gerald hesitated before he began to write the next part of his letter, he did not know if he should tell his real intentions to Olivia or not. He paused for a moment, but then he decided to write it down. If his plans went well, he should already have arrived at the Palace in Graycastle before she received his letter.

“My dear, Astrologer Ansgar was right. If I do nothing, ultimately the throne will not end up in my hands. Ansgar observed the stars and what he said was, “The Star of the Apocalypse will burn for the next four months before it leaves its orbit again.” This tells me that I obviously have little time left and cannot wait in vain any longer like this.”

“After today's battle, I will quietly return to the capital and meet my father, and I will take my loyal soldiers with me. Here maybe I have much less opportunities to get riches like in the City of Golden Harvest, but instead there is no shortage of brave warriors here. I just have to throw some coins around and make some promises, and they will follow me like hungry wolves, and help me reach my goal. Of course, I do not want to start a revolt. I just want to personally ask my father why he gave the orders to start the battle for the throne. In the end, what was it that let him forget that I, as his eldest son, have the right of inheritance?”

“Ansgar has already arranged everything for me. Olivia, my love, you will only need to wait a little longer. The day when I become the King is the day that I will marry you as my Queen. If I fail miserably... you shouldn't come back to the capital, but instead, you should stay in the Kingdom of Eternal Winter. “

“Love you, Gerald.”

He carefully folded the letter and put it in an envelope, then sealed it with wax. After checking it a few times, he knocked on his table and his personal guard quickly entered the tent.

“You have to deliver this letter to the hands of the Rosefamily in the Freezing Wind Mountain Range. You do not have to travel all day and night. Don't even take a horse, just travel dressed as an ordinary traveler, as a passenger on a wagon from town to town. You only have to remember one thing; this letter must be hand-delivered.”

“Yes, Your Royal Highness!”

“Good, you may leave.” After Gerald waved his guard away, he simply sat down at the table once more, letting his feet hang over the fire pit.

If something happened, he would have no way out.

He closed his eyes, recalling scenes of his childhood. At that time, he was playing hide and seek with his second brother and his third sister in the King's Garden. When his third sister fell down, she needed her two brothers to take care of her. Exactly when had it began that the three of them became more and more like strangers?

Gerald shook his head, putting his confusing thoughts aside. It wasn't suitable for him to become sentimental, he thought, there was only one possibility to end this – he himself had to sit on the throne.

At this moment, the dull sound of a horn could be heard in the tent.

“Ohh ohh ohh ohh ohh ohh—-“

“I'm coming!” He jumped up from the table and put on his shoes. Stepping out of the tent, he saw that the whole camp was a riot. Everywhere, soldiers were running and waving flags, merging into one big chaos, getting into battle formation. From the distant mountains a muddy echo came in continuous stretches.

When the horn blew, it meant the demonic beasts were attacking.

“Come with me!” He rode on his warhorse, taking his guards with him.

Only one person remained standing on the walls of the Holy City, in order to experience its grandeur – it was like an insurmountable natural moat, standing across the path through the impassable mountain range. The pass to the top was flat and wide, it was wide enough for dozens of people to pass through side by side. At the beginning of the path, there were cliffs formed by a glacier on both sides, but the later part was a plateau.

This was why the church desperately wanted to build the new Holy City to the top of the mountain.

Using this terrain, they built a line of defense that was almost impossible to break through.

However, Gerald Wimbledon looked at it more in long run. They were able to transport so many stones and timber from the foot of the hill to the top. In just twenty years they were able to build a city in Hermes, the power The Church had exhibited was astounding.

But regardless of how tired he was of doing business with The Church, Gerald had to admit that they also had their strong points. If they didn't build the stronghold in Hermes, all countries on the continent would have had to face a catastrophe. They were also responsible for the convention against the Demonic Beast Horde.

Every year during January when the demonic beasts attack, the four Kingdoms which border Hermes must send troops to support The Church and fight together under The Church's verdict.

Their four banners were floating in the wind. A snake wrapped around the scepter of the “Kingdom of Dawn”, the shield and sword of the “Wolfheart Kingdom”, the icerose of the “Kingdom of Eternal Winter” – as well as the tower and pike of the “Kingdom of Graycastle”.

Looking at the black spots appearing in the distant sky, Gerald Wimbledon clenched his great sword.

