

Witch 81

Chapter 81 Artillery training

Every day Van'er's group had to train for two to three hours with the new weapon, and even after the training was finished, Van'er had to return to the wall to continue his old, boring job. One of the men from Van'er's dormitory had signed up for the new firearms squad, and now he had a brand-new firearm and stood behind him to show off the weapon. If the discipline didn't forbid infighting, Van'er would have already sewn up his hateful mouth.

However, Van'er also thought that there was something fishy.

Didn't my compatriots join the firearms squad only several days ago? Yet, they were allowed to directly start their shooting training through fighting against the demonic beasts, but what about our artillery team? We aren't even authorized to shoot. Moreover, the cannons are so heavy, it's impossible to transport them onto the wall.

When he looked at the top of the wall, he could see that the wall-walk was almost full with people standing side by side in pairs. Usually, everyone was used to running on the inside of the wall-walk. Even if it was steep, it was still better than interfering with teammates' fighting movements. As for cannons... the two wheels alone were wider than the whole wall-walk, and using a cannon to shoot downwards didn't seem very practical.

Could it be... this cannon wouldn't be used to fight against the demonic beasts?

The next exercise confirmed his conjecture.

Iron Axe brought the four artillery teams to the river. There, Van'er discovered- though he didn't know when it happened- an actual, huge "ship"! No... he wasn't sure if it was right to call it a boat. The shell looked to be made out of the same gray stone that was used for building the wall, and its dimension was very wide but short. So in addition to two bare masts, was there any other similarity with a ship? Regarding this point, he and his teammates had a heated discussion.

"This is clearly a pontoon bridge," the first one who came up with a conclusion was Jop, who belonged to the team that followed the ships transporting the ore to Longsong Stronghold. Because of this, he often thought himself well-informed. "They built the deck so wide to make it more stable! During my travels into the south I saw many of them, and if this is a ship, then how can it be moved by the wind? Previously, the river was too wide to ford, and a decade ago the former bridge was washed away by a flood. Now the former bridge should be replaced with this pontoon bridge. They will just place several of them side by side and connect them with an iron chain to make it more stable!

"The furthest place you have traveled to is Longsong Stronghold, yet you call yourself knowledgeable," Rodney sneered, "If this was a pontoon, why would it have two masts? Wouldn't they need to worry about it being blown away by the wind?"

"And when you look towards the end, don't you see the steering wheel? pontoons don't need this." Nelson directly jumped into the frying-pan to help Rodney. These two brothers would take every given opportunity to vent some anger, "In addition, look at the construction between the two masts, doesn't it seem to be a cabin? it's just not finished yet. This is a ship, no doubt.

To Van'er this discussion was of little interest, he was only concerned about the next training's content. To his luck, he soon got his answer when Iron Axe asked them to drag the horses that pulled the cannon towards the Small Town – yes, this was the ship's name, personally appointed by His Highness. After listening to Iron Axe's introduction, Jop's face became suddenly stiff, while the two brothers showed a triumphant expression instead – and then they began to drag the cannon onto the deck of the ship.

On the deck were two groups of stopping poles, each group consisting of four poles. These stopping poles were located in the middle of the deck, with one group behind the other. This apparently indicated that one ship could store two cannons.

Well, with this, Van'er was sure that they wouldn't be needed to deal with the demonic beasts – the Chishui River flowed from the North to the South, and there wasn't a large river hidden in the demonic-beastinfested forest.

When they embarked for the first time, they immediately discovered the outstanding stability of the ship. Even though the river flowed quickly around the ship's hull, the ship was still motionless; it just felt like standing on solid ground. Only when the horses came on the ship did they feel a little swing.

Van'er also noted that when a team finished their firing practice, Iron Axe would count the time and note it down. When Van'er saw that there were only two places for cannons, it was clear that only the two fastest would get a place on the ship. So, Van'er secretly told his discovery to the rest of his group, which immediately gave rise to their strength, with each person putting at least 10 percent more effort into the training. If they weren't chosen for the artillery team, upon losing much face, their life would become more trifle, but the most important matter was that they wouldn't get improved pay!

Van'er had to wait until the seventh day, but he finally received his first live shooting training.

On this day, His Royal Highness the Prince also came to visit the scene, watching the artillery exercise. Everyone in the four groups walked with a broad chest and large steps.

Because of their training, his group became quite familiar with the loading of the cannon, so it didn't take long until the first shot was fired by Van'er's team.

This was the first time he saw the power of a cannon. With a deafening roar, the cannon ball was shot out and landed around 500m away in the snow, blasting a lot of snow and mud into the air, and afterwards, it bounced once more into the air. With his eyes, it was impossible for Van'er to track the iron ball.

Seeing this, Van'er wondered how the Prince, managed to create such a terrible weapon. If you had to face artillery attacks, even with body armor, I am afraid it would be to no avail.

After each shot, the group was changed and the Prince ordered someone to mark the landing position. Afterwards, he let someone measure the distance between the muzzle and the flag. After four rounds, it was finally Van'er's turn again, but then he heard the command to change the cannon's angle.

A scale marked with 0, 5, 10, 25, and 30 was placed at the cannon's end, where the cart was connected. Although Van'er saw this scale, he didn't understand what it meant, but as long as they just followed the instructions, everything would be alright. Iron Axe shouted, "Shoot at the angle of 5!" Hearing this command, Jop, who was the one with the greatest strength in Van'er's team, took the ramrod, inserted

it into the muzzle, waited for them to open the hook which held the barrel at the right angle, and pressed it upwards until the scale showed 5 and snapped the hook in.

Compared with the angle of the barrel at the beginning, where the barrel was a little low, the barrel now pointed a little higher. This showed that the scale marked how high or low the barrel's muzzle pointed into the sky.

When everything was ready, every group fired one more shot with the new angle, and after every shot, the distance was also measured.

Van'er could gradually understand what the Prince did.

He recorded the distance of every shot fired, and the higher the angle of the barrel, the higher the iron ball would fly.

This was a point where Van'er could use his experience from shooting with a bow, the higher up the aim, the further the arrow would fly. The flatter the shooting angle, the earlier the arrow would hit the ground. However, he hadn't thought about that in the case of the cannon. Just because it is faster, the flying distance would be so much further. Suddenly, he got this crazy idea- if the iron ball got faster and faster, would it be possible that it would never stop?

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At Chishui River, Little Town's testing phase was also underway.

Since Wendy would act as the ship's driving force, the ship's personnel needed to be absolutely reliable. So, Roland picked some people who already knew about the witches as the first crew of Little Town. Carter became the captain, the helmsman was Brian, the sailors who had to set the sails were Carter's subordinates, and the job of correspondent went to Titus Pyne, Nana's father. These people often came into contact with the witches, so coupled with their own mental transformation where they got rid of their prejudice against the witches, there shouldn't be a problem. In the case of Sir Pyne, it was even less the case, since his beloved daughter was a witch.

Chapter 82 Little Town's first voyage

Since Lightning was the only one who had any practical experience with sailing, she was assigned the duty of serving as navigator.

In addition, she was also interested in the barge with its strange shape and unique construction material. Although it looked very crude, it had every important part needed for a ship and was able to move, but she wasn't allowed to steer it herself. After all, for most of her time at sea, she had only been a bystander since her father had always refused her requests to steer the ship.

In accordance to tradition, Lightning smashed a bottle of wheat wine on the ship's bow for the ship's first departure, and then she gave the order to set sail. Carter, as the captain, was naturally reluctant to let the little girl snatch his position as commander, so whenever she gave a command, the knight would follow up with the same command.

The sails of Little Town were sewn out of animal skin, with cowhide and sheepskin accounting for the majority of the sails, but they were also mixed with some of Border Town's specialties, like wolf skin,

bear skin, and the like. So the sail had many different kinds of colors- brown, gray and white, just like a sail patched together out of many rags. The sails were trapezoidal, and were divided by four separate beams. At the top of the sail, a cable went through the iron rings to connect it with the mast, while the bottom just fell onto the deck. One just had to pull the cable to raise the entire sail.

In order to make operating the ship as simple as possible, Little Town only had two sails that were parallel to each other and perpendicular to the middle line. In general, if a two-masted sailboat were to be constructed in this way, it would only be able to catch very little wind, almost making the second mast irrelevant. But with Wendy's ability to control the wind, this design would let her distribute her power evenly on both sides of the center line, making it more convenient for the helmsman to change the direction of the ship.

When Lightning saw that the sail was set, she commanded the dockworkers on land to untie the rope. At the moment, the weather was very good. The snow that fell occasionally was driven by light wind just like the water as the ship slowly left the shore.

The little girl descended to Brian 's side and ordered, "Right on full rudder!

Carter also shouted, "Right on full rudder!"

"Uh, what does this right rudder mean?" Brian scratched his head and asked, "How many right circles?"

"No, you have to turn the steering-wheel left around," said Lightning, while walking away. "Come on, or do I have to come over?"

She had forgotten that it was the first time for these people to control a ship, so they even didn't understand the basics of any instructions. If this was a standard brig, I'm afraid they wouldn't even be able to roll out the sails. With less than ten people, they were still able to drive the ship offshore, which was only possible due to the ship's unique design.

Lightning took the wheel handle which was even higher than her, and with her feet off the ground, she rotated it left around – this huge transverse steering wheel was very heavy for ordinary women to turn. In the absence of mechanical power and under-equivalent power transmission, she had to overcome the entirety of the water resistance when moving the massive iron rudder. However, since Lightning could fly, this was no problem for her. She noted that there was a thin piece installed at the base of the rudder to prevent the rudder from overturning, so she couldn't help but wonder, I heard that the ship is the Prince's original design, so how can it be that he even knows this detail? Even sailors who had stayed at sea all year round did not necessarily know the structures of the various parts of the ship.

"Sister Wendy, you can start producing your wind."

Wendy, who stood at the top of the cabin, didn't know whether she should laugh or cry, so this was the true reason why His Highness had asked me if I'm afraid of heights. So now, I should power the ship with my ability? When thinking about her usual boring life, such as drying meat or clothes, this gave her a subtle feeling of contrast. She opened her hands, going into her usual practice state, and let the wind blow from her feet to her head equally, balancing the wind as much as possible when blowing it into both sides of the sail.

To be honest, Wendy did not expect that this seemingly simple task would be so difficult to operate.

Although she had awoken as a witch fifteen years ago, she had never tried to gain a deeper understanding and control of her power. Whether it was to call the wind to attack the enemy or to summon a storm to sweep the enemy away, those were one-time releases of a large amount of magic. In the camp, when doing the chores, she only had to sometimes use a lot of power, but as long as the goal could be achieved, she hadn't to use much. Now thinking about Anna, who was always earnestly using her power, Wendy suddenly felt a little ashamed.

"The first thing you have to do is to practice your ability over and over again until you can control it entirely – just like Anna."

These aren't empty words. Then from now on I will start to... Wendy took a deep breath and focused all of her attention on creating the wind.

Although the wind was not perfectly balanced, the sails were still bulging, and under the steady stream of wind, the mast gave off a squeaking sound, and the bow began to turn right.

"It's really moving!" Carter exclaimed.

"His Royal Highness was able to turn stone into a boat, and let it float on the water," Sir Pyne laughed and asked, "Is there something he can't do?"

Little Town moved farther and farther away from the shore, gradually moving towards the middle of the river.

Wendy could produce wind out of nothing, but she wasn't able to make the existing North wind disappear, so the wind came from two directions, making it impossible to have the ship move in a straight line by only using her power. So, they also had to rely on steering to adjust the direction of the ship. Lightning wasn't able to teach Brian by words only, this was something Brian had to experience himself. In order to let him master this feeling as soon as possible, the little girl's first orders were to change the direction of the ship often so that he could learn the relationship between the rotation angle of the steering wheel and the swing of the bow while she herself only made small adjustments.

After navigating for more than one hour over the Chishui River, Wendy wasn't able to hold on any longer.

It wasn't that she ran out of magic power, but instead it was her body, that had reached its limit.

Even though her body was wrapped into so many layers that she looked like a dumpling, it still wasn't able completely resist the invasion of the cold wind. A layer of snow had already accumulated on top of her cotton cap and she already could no longer feel her hands and feet while standing on the shaky roof. If it wasn't for Lightning who saw her sway strangely, maybe she would have fallen into coma.

So Lightning quickly flew towards Wendy and seized her body while shouting to Brian that he should sail back towards the docks.

The latter steered the wheel into the right direction, letting the ship slowly turn leftwards. Lightning flew down from the cabin while carrying Wendy. Down on the deck, they only had the sails to save them from the wind, but at least it wasn't as cold as before so they were able to save their body temperature. Moreover, when they wanted to reach the shore, it would need a person with fine control, and

Lightning would never dare to let a rookie take over this important task – even though she had never done it herself.

When they finally landed and the river bank collided with the hull, creating a loud sound, all the people's hearts on board began to race. Even though it sounded alarming when the hull collided with the shore, it didn't look too bad in the end. The sailor quickly folded the sails together and put up a gangplank to climb ashore.

Fortunately, they weren't able to sail in a straight line during their trial journey, so thanks to their U-turn training on the spacious river, they weren't so far away from Border Town.

Lightning flew towards the castle while carrying Wendy. Carter looked at the stone ship and loudly sighed. Without the help of a witch, he didn't want to try to sail the ship back to the docks.

Chapter 83 The Northern Coachman

Winter was the time of no harvest for most people of the North, especially near the Hermes Plateau. The Months of the Demons not only brought endless wind and snow but furthermore brought cold, hunger, and death. However, for "False Leg" White, Winter meant something different. Every winter, the Church's envoy would come to his door to let him drive several turns to the west border of the kingdom. On the way to the border, he would collect suffering orphans with his carriage and bring them to the old Holy City.

For him, this was a good deal since he would almost earn twenty silver royals for each trip to the border. What was even better was that he could also accumulate merits of doing good work. It was almost the end of this year's Months of the Demons, so this turn should be the last run of this season.

"Your honor, please go back to the carriage and stay inside. Outside, it will still snow for a long time, so you don't need to eat the wind and drink the snow every day like I do you aren't allowed to freeze."

"This is nothing," the Church's messenger contradicted White and took a big gulp out of his jug before continuing, "In the new Holy City it can be much colder than it is here. At the plateau, leather clothes and armor aren't able to stop the cold. If you are there, the cold will come through every opening and drill into every part of your body. Without the usage of cold pills, no ordinary people can survive at that place.

"What you said should be right," White nodded, he hadn't been to the new Holy City, and he also didn't plan to go there. Since only the cold and the demonic beasts existed there, why should I go there? However, as an experienced coachman, it was easy for him to find another topic to speak about, a subject that would be preferred by the envoy. "Your gloves should be made from the leather of the wolves native to the west border of the Kingdom of Graycastle, right?"

"Oh? You can see that?"

"Hey, my lord, I've been doing this work for thirty years," White proudly said, "first for the baron, then for the countess, and later even for the Wolfsheart Kingdom's little princess. If it were not for the accident when I broke my legs, maybe I would still be working for the count's house. They had nothing besides plenty of gold royals and paid excellently for Graycastles's fur and silverware, jewelry from the

Kingdom of Eternal Winter, and the fjord's handicrafts. They demanded so much that I could never deliver enough."

"So," the Ambassador nodded, "this is the origin of your nickname? In what kind of accident were you involved in?"

"Well, it was a refugee riot. The group of thugs didn't stop for anything as long as they could get something to eat from it," White disdainfully answered. He spat on the ground, "When they surrounded the carriage, I had no other choice than to urge the horse to run if I wanted to save the countess. But, it got frightened, threw me down, and turned over the carriage.

"So you broke your leg?" the Ambassador curiously asked, "but what happened to the countess?"

"She got away since there were many cushions and thick quilts inside the carriage, so she got some light bruises," White barked, "She just crawled out of the carriage and left me on the road to die. On my broken leg, I dragged my body home." He slapped his hand against the brass stick that showed from under his cut-off trousers." However, the count's house threw me out on the pretext that I could not drive anymore, those damn aristocrats!"

"What a pity," the Ambassador paused, "but God did not abandon you, now you are driving for the Church."

"Yes sir." Answered White, but inside, he thought, No. If God were merciful, he wouldn't let me do this. Instead, he would have saved me when I needed him the most.

At this moment, the cry of a young girl could be heard. "We need a little pause."

Hearing this, White pulled at the reins so that the two horses gradually stopped. At the moment the carriage had stopped, the ambassador jumped down and went to its back. Soon, a whip crack could be heard from behind the carriage.

Poor child, thought White as he sighed, you have to endure it, this is your savior. If it weren't for the Church's envoy who always supported me through the winter, I would only be an unattended corpse at the side of the road.

Soon, the ambassador came back, climbed up, and sat beside White and only commanded, "Go."

"Brace yourselves, I am driving!" shouted White as he shook his reins, removing the carriage. "Are they all from the Wolfsheart Kingdom?"

"Almost, the churches in every town in the Kingdom takes in some of the orphans especially during the winter, when there is a food and clothing shortage everywhere. We receive many times more people compared to the other seasons because of this. If we only depended on our Church's own members, it wouldn't be enough, so we have to employ some drivers with good reputations to help us to transport the orphans to the Oldy Holy City. Until now you have done very well, White. My predecessor could only praise you."

"It is my privilege to be part of such a good deed," said White, honored. "Your excellency, will they also be sent to the monastery? I hate to ask, though they are orphans, their characters aren't the same.

Although some of them aren't so old, some of them have already done terrible deeds, so won't these people contaminate the pure and holy earth?"

"God will judge them, and even if they are guilty, they will get the opportunity of salvation." answered the envoy with complete conviction.

"Will they? That's a good thing." Wright was amazed, but soon he raised his head and looked at the sky before he continued. "It's late. Sir, shall we stay in the next town? If the weather tomorrow is good, we will arrive at the Old Holy City at noon."

"It's already this late?" asked the Ambassador, "Look for an inn, and after you bring the carriage to the yard you can prepare the food for the orphans."

"Okay!" White agreed to the plan.

This town belonged to the Wolfsheart Kingdom, and if someone wanted to reach the Old Holy City, they had to go through this town. So, it wasn't White's first time here. Thanks to this, he quickly found the inn he had previously frequented. He drove the carriage into the yard and then took some coins from the Church's envoy to buy some food for the orphans. As usual, he bought sweet potato porridge, which was the most appropriate choice since it was cheap and still had a pretty good taste. After watching them divide the porridge, White limped back to the inn, asked for some bread with butter, and sat at the bar to eat. As for the envoy, he certainly had a better place to go.

If White hadn't broken his leg ten years ago, he would have gone to the tavern to order a glass of wine, and he would also have thrown some dice – he had always had a good hand for them. But now... White took his purse and found his room to sleep early.

Later, in the evening, he heard some voices from the yard. So, he got up and lifted the curtains to control the situation. But White only saw that the Church's drunken envoy had come back. The envoy opened the door of the carriage and went into it. Soon he returned outside, pulling two orphans with him. Beside the carriage, two people dressed in aristocratic clothes were already waiting.

Seeing that it was only the envoy, White put the curtain down and went back under the warm blanket.

This wasn't the first time he witnessed the envoy doing this. Actually, it was a regular thing for him. Being alive is the greatest happiness, he thought, they have just to endure the pain for the moment. You only have to survive until we reach the Old Holy City, there you will be able to start a new life. At least in the monastery, you won't have to fear starving. Thinking until here, White yawned and soon fell asleep.

At dawn, he got the envoy and drove on. The last part of the journey went without incident, and they even reached the Old Holy City two hours sooner than expected. There were already other church's carriages waiting for them; it seemed that these poor devils still had some way to go, but all this had nothing to do with him.

"This is your reward." The envoy called to White and threw a bag toward him.

White took the coins out of the bag and counted them twice. Indeed, it was twenty silver royals. So he nodded and said, "I hope I will see you again in the coming year."

But the envoy did not answer. Instead, he waved his hand to indicate that White could depart.

White noticed that in addition to him, several other coachmen were doing the same job. Are they the from the other Kingdoms? He asked himself, but soon he noticed something strange, it seemed only girls would come down from the carriages. So when the church adopts orphans, they only adopt girls?

He shook his head, threw this problematic thought to the back of his head, and started the journey back home.

Chapter 84 The truth behind Hermes

Bishop Mayne followed the circular staircase leading into the earth.

The staircase, with a depth of at least of four times that of the cathedral's highest tower and a diameter of about twenty feet, was built in a natural doline and lead directly into a strategically-positioned and spacious castle. The beginning of the staircase was well lit by skylight pathing through the windows of the high dome above, giving the twisting and turning stone walls an icy color.

But when following the steps, the stairway quickly darkened, seemingly fusing the walls into one. But after some time at the center of the staircase, the reflection of a blue light could be seen, and the deeper one went, the brighter it would become. So even without a torch, they would never fall into a pitch-black predicament.

At the foot of the staircase, a pathway that was firmly attached to the rock wall meandered around a dark hole.

The path was cut out of granite, formed by many rectangular pieces three fingers thick. The path was wide enough for two people walk side by side. One end of each granite piece was embedded into the rock wall while the other end was in the air. In order to prevent accidental falls, there were wooden fence posts that were connected by rope at the side of the hole..

Mayne didn't count the number of steps he walked. In the end, there were just too many, but he knew that embedding every piece of stone was a tough task. The masons hired by the Church had to lean on a rope to hang down while they knocked out suitably deep holes in the hard rock. Afterwards, they had to insert the granite plates into the holes. Each action had to be done very carefully because every rope slippage or breakage lead to a fall to the bottom, which happened to more than three hundred people.

If the Church's Cathedral on the surface was a symbol for the unyielding spirit of the church, then the hidden castle in the Hermes plateau was the real core of the Church.

A piece of God's Stone of Retaliation was embedded at the edge of every step, and a guard was placed on every hundredth step. For last line of defense, there was even a squadron of the God's Punishment Army that was always ready to face an attack from intruders. Many bags of sand and gravel were buried between the Cathedral and the underground castle. This was in case every line of defense in the Holy City had failed. If every important person was evacuated, the pope could start the trap and bury everything under a deep layer of sand and gravel.

Although it wasn't Mayne first visit to the underground castle, the feeling of walking on air still made him feel dizzy. Especially after some time, he would always have the illusion of falling.

So he was a little relieved when he finally had once more solid ground under his feet.

At the bottom of the sinkhole was a huge white stone disc, with a surface as smooth as a mirror. When standing above it, someone could even clearly see their own reflection. Through a cleverly designed construction, the light coming through the windows within the dome was so reflected that it directly hit the millstone. Thanks to this, even without lighting a torch, the bottom of the doline was never dark.

When reaching the bottom of the doline, they would discover that the sun is not colorless. After being reflected by the grindstone, the light would become blue, yet when looking upwards, the blue light would let the sinkhole shine in a cool color. But when taking a closer look, someone would discover that there were countless dust particles flying upwards, just like the minute creatures recorded within the ancient book.

The holes within the wall of the mountain were caves formed by nature, and the church only opened up the entries, to further expand and built the Hermes castle. But thanks to these holes which extended in all directions, the air could flow freely, so that the air at the bottom of the doline didn't feel rotten or oppressive.

When Mayne stepped through the door into the castle's main area, he was suddenly surrounded by a strong defense force. There were five soldiers called Judges, who guarded every entryway – the Judges were the Church's most loyal soldiers, once they were accepted into this group and started their work, they would forever live in the castle, never able to return to the surface.

In fact, only he and the pope were able to enter and later exit the castle, even the two archbishops Heather and Tayfun weren't allowed to enter here.

But even Mayne didn't know how many channels the castle had. In addition to the main channel leading south, there were many side branches leading away from the main branch, and when following these side channels, they would split again into many more branches. Some were used by the Church, while others were sealed. He had heard, that during the construction of the castle, a few artisans strayed into those channels not marked as safe, which led to them becoming lost, never able to find their way back.

The vertical main channel led directly to the depths of the mountain, around every three hundred feet (about 100 meters), Mayne had to cross a checkpoint. He knew that the Church was using each segment between two checkpoints for a different task. The most outside area was used as the living area for the warriors who had to stay their whole life in the castle. The second segment was used as archives, for the storage of instruments, and fragments of ancient books. The third section was the jail area, where prisoners were housed who weren't allowed to see the light ever again... innocents included.

After crossing through the third checkpoint, Mayne stopped. Further in, was the castle's secret area. All of the Church's research materials and inventions originated from this place, and without the Pope's authorization, no one was allowed to enter. Since he became the Archbishop three years ago, he had only stepped into this area once before.

When Mayne walked closer he took the left path.

After a short walk, the way was ended by a door, with a plate at the height of the chest on it on which read "Elders!"

Mayne nodded to the guards and ordered, "Open the door."

Behind the door the corridor continued, there were burning torches hanging on the wall, like small sparks of light within a sea of darkness, continuing along the path until the end. On both sides of the road were many wooden doors and in the middle of each door hung a plate with a number on it.

One of the Judges who followed Mayne raised a torch to illuminate the surroundings. While walking down the channel, Mayne looked all the while at the numbers on the plates. When he finally saw the number 35 mottled into the plate, he stopped and pulled a key out of one of his pockets and inserted it into the keyhole, turning it lightly. At the bottom of the doline, the sound of opening the lock was especially harsh, and its echo could be heard even at the end of the channel. As if it was a signal flare, suddenly many cries could be heard through the doors, there were calls from men and women. When listening carefully, Mayne could understand some of them! "Quickly save me!" "Help me!" "Please, kill me!" and the like.

But Mayne was unmoved by the cries. He only ordered the guard standing beside the door to immediately shut it after he entered the room, leaving the chaos of screams outside.

Behind iron rails the bishop saw an old man sitting on his bed – perhaps he was not so old, but now his hair had already turned white, and his face was covered by wrinkles. His beard looked like he hadn't groomed it in a long time, almost reaching up to his neck. Since he hadn't seen the sun for a long time, his skin had become terribly pale, and his hands and feet were as thin as bamboo.

Mayne glanced at the food plate behind the rails, which looked like it hadn't been touched, registering this he sighed, "You should treat yourself better, the Church doesn't lack for food. And the meals are even made according to a king's standard, except for the wine. Even the fish, it's first-rate Cod coming from Port of Bluewater. You should be familiar with its taste, right Your Majesty King Wimbledon?"

Chapter 85 Thorny Road

It took a moment before the old man showed a reaction, he slowly lifted up his quilt, moved it to the bedside and looked in the direction of the Archbishop.

Then he opened his mouth and asked: "If it were you who was locked up in this damnable place, do you think you would be able to eat?" His voice wasn't easy to understand, it sounded like his throat had been blocked by something, "Half a year, I'm already trapped here for six months, without any news... Tell me how are my sons and daughters doing?"

When taking a closer look at the cell, Mayne noticed, that it seemed like one wall was scored with a nail. Is the old man using this method to calculate the date?

He moved to a chair facing the King and then asked in return: "Why ask about things that will only make you unhappy?"

"..." The King kept his silence for a long while, but eventually spoke, "It doesn't matter to me, after all, you will kill me anyway, right?"

Mayne only answered with one word, "Yes."

"Then as a dying man, what does pleasure mean to me, before I die, I just want to know their situation!" The longer Wimbledon spoke the more his voice resembled a growl.

In the end, what else should I expect? Mayne thought, after all, as a king, he had learned to have a strong spirit and demeanor. When the King had been kidnappted and replaced by a devout, on the road to Hermes, he had repeatedly tried to break free. Then when he was imprisoned, he wasn't corrupted by madness, instead, he had always tried to negotiate his freedom. Even during all the abuse, he never released a scream, which was very rare in this jail. If it wasn't impossible to change the plan, Mayne really wouldn't want to waste such a person whose only bad point was being on the wrong side of their conspiracy.

Perhaps since I have already personally come, I should just inform him about the status quo, the Archbishop thought, otherwise, I could just voice the command, and the next moment one of the Judges can come and end his life.

So Mayne finally slowly said, "Your eldest son, Gerald is already dead. He was beheaded by your second son, Timothy, on charges of treason. Your third daughter Garcia has declared the independence of the southern border region, conferring herself as the Queen of Clearwater, so a war between her and Timothy is inevitable. As for your fourth son and your fifth daughter, we do not get much information about them. Well... they are still alive.

"What are you talking about, rebellion? Independence? What did you do?" asked the King enraged.

"We let them fight out who would become the next king," explained Mayne with pleasure, "we spread your children through the whole kingdom, and declared whoever governed their territory the best would become the next king."

Hearing this, Wimbledon closed his eyes in pain, trying to shut out the world. After a long time, he finally whispered, "Why do you do all this? You took advantage of the prayer day, brought me into the compartment to pray in isolation, there you stripped me of my clothes... and also took my God's Stone of Retaliation. Then you used the ability of a witch to replace me with another person. So with this replacement, you could have obviously slowly taken over the country, let the Church gain control of every town. So why did you need to give out the order for the Battle of the Throne?! I, I cannot... Keke", because he got more and more enraged, he began to cough severely, shaking throughout his whole body.

"We just couldn't issue the command which would lead to massacring your children one after another!" Mayne continued his verbal attack to finish off the former King. "Maybe you wouldn't have worked against us, but your children mostly wouldn't act the way you want them to. They would grow up, develop, and have their own thoughts. Just like you see from your third daughter, Garcia. She already started her project to take over the Port of Clearwater five years ago, so even without the Battle of the Throne, at the point when you would naturally die, do you think she would just stand at the side and look how Gerald would ascend the throne? But the most important reason for us to act, was that we don't have the time to wait for the natural cause to get rid of you, you should have already noted that the power of the witch isn't permanent."

"Damn you, what would the Church get from the fight between my children? The Church will also sink into a sea of fire, many of their believers will get killed during the war, and the kingdom will become a total mess..." talking until here, Wimbledon suddenly got a distracted look, not believing his upcoming thought "Do you want to —" another burst of severe coughs interrupted the king's speech once more.

When he was finally able to speak again, his voice became as thin as a gossamer, as if that array of coughing had consumed all his remaining energy, "You... want to destroy the royal family!"

"Exactly, but it would be more accurately to speak about the royal power." Mayne couldn't help himself from praising the king within his heart for his keen judgment. Even after staying for six months in the completely dark dungeon, by not losing his consciousness he could already be regarded as strong willed, but he has even managed to keep his intelligence. The only other people who would be able to do this can be counted on one hand,

"The monarchy will always be a hinderance to the development of the Church, no matter how weak it becomes, it will always rise again just like weed. So only by completely eradicating it, will the Church be able to 'genuinely' control the Kingdom."

"..." suddenly Wimbledon looked a lot more aged, previously only his outer appearance seemed to be old, but now it seemed that his spirit had left him and his eyes dimmed.

"The Kingdom of Graycastle is the kingdom with the largest territory in the mainland, it has also the largest number of soldiers, so in the case of a full-frontal war, my church can only be at a disadvantage. We had already planned all this for a long time now. During a civil war, your kingdom will lose a lot of soldiers and mercenaries, after waiting for only two to three years, our God's Punishment Army will be able to easily take over the whole territory of your Kingdom. But you don't need to be sad, your kingdom isn't the only one we are subjugating. The other three kingdoms are all facing the same situation. Soon the mainland will no longer have the four kingdoms. Instead of the "Wolfsheart Kingdom", the "Kingdom of Eternal Winter", "Kingdom of Dawn" and the "Kingdom of Graycastle", there will be only one regime, "the Church", ruling over all the countries."

Wimbledon turned completely silent, the man who had won the throne from his brother by force of arms was now like a man who had lost his life, even for Mayne it was hard to bare, but in his mind, he hadn't the slightest thought of regret. The Church had also invested a lot into this plan – a large number of outstanding believers had been willingly used as pawns, regardless of the danger to themselves.

For example, the man who had played Wimbledon III was a devoted member of the Judges. He was a strong believer and absolutely loyal to the Church, and would have originally received the transformation ceremony, becoming a member of the God's Punishment Army. However, in order to complete the mission, he got his appearance changed by a witch into that of you. So when he died in the castle he didn't receive any honor. Before the mission, he could have carved his name on top of the Church's monument on Hermes, but now the Church could only bury his name forever.

When Mayne came to the conclusion that Wimbledon wouldn't speak any further, he took a small porcelain bottle out of a pocket and gave it to him to drink.

When Wimbledon had collected himself and drank the potion, he spoke his final words, "Curse..."

"Yes?" asked Mayne, waiting for the King to continue.

"I curse you... I'll be waiting for you in the depths of hell." Wimbledon's voice grew fainter with every word, in the end, Mayne had even to concentrate if he wanted to understand what was said.

“It’s a pity that there is no hell in this world. Even if there is one, it isn’t a place where I belong to. Everything we are doing is for the continuing of humanity. Only by unifying the four Kingdoms, are we able to get enough power to confront the true enemy, or else...” The Archbishop stopped his speech when he saw that Wimbledon’s hand had lost all of its strength and had fallen to the ground, his head twisted to one side, and his chest stopped to move.

This was the end of a king, but it’s our beginning, he thought.

Mayne took up the bottle and put it back into his pocket. Then he opened the door and stepped into the quiet corridor, which gave the feeling like there had never been any cries. He only explained to the member of the Judges how to deal with the aftermath, and then he left the castle without looking back even once.

TN: Please no spoilers! I will delete every comment which contains spoilers!

Chapter 86 The Choice of the Witches

Leaves didn’t know how long she could still hold on. Her return to the camp in the Impassable Mountain Range from the wildland took her nearly half a month. In order to avoid detection by demonic beasts, she carefully hid inside the thick and solid trunk of a tree to confirm that there were no demonic beast activity within the vicinity before running to the next place to hide. Despite her worry of the slow marching speed, she had no other choice. Once she was detected by demonic beasts, she wouldn’t be able to survive alone.

More than a dozen sisters had fallen under the attack of the Devils, and the sisters who survived weren’t good at fighting. During the time when Ironhand jumped into the crowd and started his massacre, they had scattered in all directions, but in the end, there were only a few who were still alive and able to come back to the camp. Thinking of all the death, the pain within Leaves’ heart didn’t stop.

The action of having to always hide herself during the escape consumed a large amount of magic power, thus she was only able to cover a distance of ten miles daily. In particular, she always had to save enough power to survive the night. Since all of the rations she had at hand were eaten, she also had to look for wild fruits to sate her constant hunger. In addition, the heat spell within her Witches Cooperation Association emblem had also run out of power, so she could only use bark to wrap tightly around herself. Every time she thought about the deaths of the young witches, who weren’t even allowed to mature and who she had promised to protect, she couldn’t stop her tears from falling.

And as if all of this wasn’t enough, during one night, when she was wrapped in her tree trunk she was constantly attacked by the demon’s bite – after the constant attack of mental and physical blows, she had completely forgotten about this. Suddenly, she felt as if her chest was torn open, and the pain quickly spread throughout her whole body. The pain attacked her so suddenly that she almost instantly lost her consciousness. She was only able to fight back when she bit her tongue tasted the blood flowing in her mouth. Under the constant torture, Leaves thought of giving up several times, but the thought of the possibility that more than twenty fleeing sisters, with serious injuries which only she was able to heal, were waiting in the camp for her return gave her the power to fight against the bite.

Fortunately, she didn’t have to suffer for a long time under the demon’s bite. When she finally broke out from the suffering, she discovered that the tree trunk surrounding her body had a huge gap. Even

worse, it was wet with her blood. So in order for the smell of her not to be discovered by demonic beasts she had to fight against the pain and exhaustion and take off her clothes before fleeing to another tree. At the same time, she grew some green leaves on a bare branch and sewed warm clothes out of them. Under the guidance of her magic, the branch became a needle and the leaves veins became her thread.

During her escape, she couldn't eat either cooked food or drink warm water. When she finally entered the Impassable Mountain Range, she even added two additional layers of leaves to her clothes, tightly wrapping both her hands and feet, but all this wasn't enough against the rapidly falling temperature and the ankle-deep snow, resulting in frostbite at her toes. So with this way of stopping and dragging on, with no feeling in her feet, she finally managed to return to the camp.

At the moment she saw the familiar figure of one of her sisters, Leaves fell to the ground, unconscious.

When she woke up two days later, due to the long time that her feet had been exposed to the low temperatures, her injuries had become so serious that even her own herbal medicine couldn't stop the spreading gangrene. They had no other choice than to take the last resort and cut off two toes from both her right and left foot.

These sacrifice didn't bother Leaves much, since she was able to survive. Compared to those sisters who had never come back, she was very lucky. However, when she saw that her surviving sisters' arms were all wrapped in white clothes, great sorrow spread out uncontrollably from the bottom of her heart.

At the moment of departure, there was already only forty-two sisters, but now there were only six survivors.

When Leaves was finally able to calm down, she asked the others how they they fared.

As she already knew, during their fight with the devils, the witches with abilities incapable of combat took the opportunity to escape to the camp in the Impassable Mountain Range. During their first night, they were attacked by demonic beasts – a group consisting of wild boar species. Everyone who was unable to fight had to flee once more. The fact that they were already attacked again by a group of demonic beasts was clearly a bad omen, but there was nothing they could do against it. The next morning, after a new attack from wolf-like shaped demonic beasts, only eight witches were able to escape. Fortunately, after they had entered the Impassable Mountain Range, the demonic beasts weren't able to keep up.

When they had finally reached the camp some days ago, two sisters were attacked by the demon's bite. Maybe it was because the traumatic experiences of the last few days were too great and the future prospect was too dark, but they didn't have the will to fight and weren't able to survive the demon's bite. Since there was no battle witch who was able to come back, everyone had thought that they had died under the hands of the devils, so no one had expected that Leaves would come back.

Finally, someone asked, "So... what happened to our other sisters? Scarlet, Windseeker, and furthermore our mentor Cara, did they survive like you?"

Leaves shook her head and whispered, "I am the only one who survived."

“Do you...” Scroll quietly began to speak, but since she could already guess the answer she said instead, “Then you have a good rest. Also...” She hesitated for a moment, “Leaves, there is one more point.”

“What?” asked Leaves, exhausted.

“When you were in a coma, we sisters had talked and come to the conclusion that in the case that Cara doesn’t come back, we hope that you will take the position of our mentor.”

Suddenly being asked this question, Leaves became distracted so she closed her eyes to think. Well, yes, our Witch Cooperation Association has suffered such a fatal blow, if we do not immediately select a new leader, I’m afraid we will soon fall apart. But the purpose of our society was to seek the Holy Mountain and obtain freedom and peace. Now the search for the Holy Mountain is over. No, the “Holy Mountain” itself is a hoax. It does not exist in the Impassable Mountain Range, nor in the wild lands. Then, why should our society continue to exist?

Leaves’ mind was in total chaos. Even so, she wasn’t looking at them, but she could still feel the eyes of her sisters, waiting for her answer. Her sisters needed a person to lead them and guide them forward, someone who hadn’t already given up.

After long silence, Leaves finally spoke, “We... will go looking for Nightingale.”

Hearing her decision, the other sisters began to shout in disorder.

“What, why should we go looking for her?”

“Do you mean we should also go to Border Town?”

“What if she lied to us?”

“Wendy is there too.”

“She might have died long ago.”

Having enough of the chaos, Scroll clapped her hands, let the others quiet down, and then she asked Leaves, “What should we do if what Nightingale said is also a hoax?”

“You can wait outside of the town, far enough to be safe,” answered Leaves as she opened her eyes, “Let me find out the situation first before determining if Nightingale had lied. So, for now, I will take the post of Mentor, but if... if I die in town, Scroll will take over command and lead the sisters to safety.”

“But I...” began Scroll, but she was soon interrupted by Leaves.

“I know your ability is not suitable for fighting, and your ability is not much help for the daily operation of the camp. But now I understand that the strength of the ability isn’t important for the rank of leader.” The Mentor should be a guide, instead of being the strongest, but unfortunately, it is too late for us now. If the cautious and patient Wendy was our Mentor, wouldn’t the outcome have been complete different? “You and Wendy were the first to join the Witch Cooperation Association, so you are already an elder sister. You crossed the whole kingdom on your march from the east to reach the Impassable Mountain Range, so you have a lot of experience. You are cautious, and you don’t think you are better than everyone else. So, there is no one who is better suited to be the mentor of us sisters than you.”

Afterwards, Scroll was silent for a moment until she said, "...What if what Nightingale said is true?"

"Then there is no reason why our Witch Cooperation Association should exist any longer," Leaves slowly explained, "after all, that would mean Border Town is our 'Holy Mountain'!"

TN: Please no spoilers! I will delete every comment which contains spoilers!

Chapter 87 Winter Twilight (Part 1)

"Ready –! Strike!"

Hearing this command, Van'er put all of his strength into striking at his target with his pike. He held it with both hands, and as he hit the wolf's head, the pike gave off a cracking sound. The wolf had fluffy fur and its eyes were copper-red. When it opened its mouth, Van'er saw two rows of fangs in which the largest fangs were as big as his thumb. It was the first time that he had come so close in contact with a demonic beast, while it was trying to hit him with its claws, it was even throwing snowflakes at his face.

Van'er felt like his brain had gone blank and he was acting on instincts learned during training, like subconsciously gripping the pike tighter continuing to drive the pike further. Van'er suddenly got the feeling that time was flowing slower; he saw that the pike had bowed to its maximum. However, the pike wasn't able to penetrate deep enough into the demonic beast's belly, giving Van'er the thought that the wolf's sharp claws would tear his cheeks open.

Suddenly a "bang" was heard. The pike wasn't able to withstand the momentum of the wolf, and finally broke into two pieces. At the same moment of the breaking sound, the time flow turned back to normal and the wolf fell down – its claws landed on the city wall, scraping a series of marks into the debris. The other half of Van'er's pike smashed onto the city wall along with the wolf.

"Guns, loading is complete!"

"Fire at will!"

Suddenly a gun barrel was extended on each side of Van'er. Seeing this, Van'er stepped a half step back as fast as possible and raised his head to avoid the smoke and debris that would hit his eyes. As for saving his ears, he had no time for it.

Soon after the gunfire subsided, Van'er stepped back to the front, where he discovered that a number of demonic beasts at the wall's base laid, slain. The one Van'er had stabbed laid also between them. When he turned his head, he could see his roommate proudly grinning at him.

One only needs a week to learn to use your weapon, so there is nothing to be proud about. Van'er took only a glance, then he switched his line of sight back to the battlefield. In a situation like this, His Highness' artillery team would come in handy, but at this time they still had to rely on these crutches.

"Your pike is broken, so take this new one." Cat's Paw handed Van'er a new pike, "Is this group of demonic beasts crazy? They've been attacking us for two to three hours already, right?"

"Yes, they are crazy," answered Van'er, taking the pike and stepping back into place to wait for the next wave of attack. "How late is it?"

“It’s almost noon.” Cat’s Paw sighed. Taking advantage of the Hunter overseer’s lack of attention, he took on both sides, “What’s with Jop and the Rodney Brothers?”

“Don’t look for them. Do you want to be killed by the wolves?” Van’er snapped. “They were assigned to the other walls; they are probably in the third or the fourth group. How were you able to change into group one?”

“I belonged to the replacement team,” Cat’s paw laughingly answered, “Whenever there is a need I will come and help. In the last wave, an uncle was wounded and now it’s my turn -“

“Make ready -!” sounded the Hunter overseer’s voice, interrupting Cat Paw’s words.

When looking down the wall, a dozen of quickly approaching demonic beasts could be seen, they were already so close that he could discern the various kinds of demonic beasts. This wave only had two wolves. The others were wild boars, a species of fox and a species of bear, which were no big threat to the wall.

“Pierce!” Nevertheless, he still obeyed the instructor’s orders, carrying out a unified pike attack. Sure enough, this time, his pike thrust only hit the air. But when he recovered his pike, Van’er saw that the two wolves were already shot down by a group of other hunters. Since this wave of demonic beasts was slower, the hunter team had squeezed between the strike team, and shot as they pleased.

They had been undergoing this cycle of fixed action already from dawn until the present. When the first horn was sounded, most people were still asleep. Van’er yawned. This time, the attack of the demonic beasts was more intense than ever before. Usually they had to maintain this kind of battle for only one or two waves, but today, the demonic beasts were piling up at the base of the wall. They had already been replaced by the second militia team halfway so that they could eat something, rest for a short moment, and then return to the wall.

But unexpectedly, Van’er found himself much calmer than he had previous thought he would be, so when he heard that the gun team had to step back, he let them through, just as rehearsed in the previous weekdays. At first, they seemed like strange rules and regulations, but now they came in handy and were incredibly effective.

The others looked almost the same as Van’er. They all firmly grasped their pikes and had a serious look on their face, but some of them looked very nervous. However, everyone stood still with a straight body, and no one stepped a step back.

However, Van’er knew that the biggest push to the morale hadn’t come from the daily training, instead, it came from His Highness. At the moment after the firearms team shot, Van’er secretly glanced at the middle of the castle wall – it was the position where His Highness stood, overlooking the battle.

Shortly after the horn sounded for the first time, His Highness had stepped onto the top of the city wall. Since then, he had stood on the wall, continually holding the defense line without any rest. Even when it was time to eat, he didn’t step down. Instead, His Highness remained on top of the wall and sent his chief knight to personally get the breakfast.

When Van’er recalled the behavior of the last lord, he remembered that the lord had withdrawn by boat as quickly as possible at the beginning of the Months of the Demons. The lord was followed by the other

nobility, and then by the whole civilian population. As long as they had some silver royals they would flee by boat, but if they had no money, they could only use their own feet to flee to Longsong Stronghold. Thinking back at this, Van'er felt completely refreshed.

Yes, the army from the Lord of Longsong Stronghold and the prince's Border Town militia team was completely different. The former group completely relied on their armor and weapons, and often tyrannized the area within the new and old districts, even suppressing and blackmailing foreign businessmen. But in Van'er's view, apart from the captain from the second militia team, there was no difference between rogues and them. Led by His Royal Highness, the militia was such a powerful team that they weren't even afraid of blocking the demonic beasts outside of Border Town, making it impossible for them to advance. In the past, only Longsong Stronghold was able to do this.

Just look at Fish Balls, he was a former gangster in the old district. He was often the object of ridicule, but after joining the militia team and picking up the pike, he became a role model as a good citizen. There was also Fermi; his head was too big and he was a little slow, so he was often beaten up laughed at by the people of the old district. But now, when fighting with a pike, not only did he become extremely fast and ruthless, but also more skilled than most people. Every time when the others had already finished their training, he would still thrust out a hundred slashes, because His Highness had once said, "If the inflexible bird wants to overtake the more nimble ones, it has to catch up with their pace and then do even more."

In the beginning, it was obviously only for the second egg, but now the soldiers were glad that they had joined the militia. Every day there were subtle changes in everyone, and every day they could train harder than yesterday. Van'er thought that he wasn't the only one who felt this way. Rather, he thought everyone would feel like this. He did not know how to describe his feelings. Perhaps it was best described by the words often used by His Highness – they were a team like never seen before.

"Woo – woo –" suddenly, two short horn blows could be heard. This was the early warning system for an approaching mixed species. So, Van'er looked into the distance and discovered a mixed species with wings and a lion's head, which was very similar to the beast that broke through the last time. Today this is our second meeting, he thought, but this time, it isn't the same as last time. In addition to the gun team, we also have help from other forces.

When he turned his head to the side and looked towards the middle of the wall, he could see a little girl with blond hair floating beside the Prince.

Chapter 88 Winter Twilight (Part 2)

"Don't be so hasty, now isn't the time to act," said Roland. He could only sigh when looking at Lightning who was eagerly flying around.

God only knows why she is so interested in fighting against that demonic beast. It's obvious that she isn't the fighting type. But, compared with ordinary people this little girl doesn't even show the least bit of fear.

"Just follow the same pattern we used when dealing with the last one, don't try to be brave, you're just a lure so that it will focus its attention onto you. Always maintain a high degree of awareness! Even though it cannot fly, when it jumps up, it's still a very serious threat!"

"I already know about that," Lightning spoke with a voice full of confidence, "It isn't my first fight with something like this. Rest assured, I already know my limit. This time, it won't even be able to touch my clothes."

During their talk, the mixed species had come even closer to the wall. It had already crossed the barriers, and leaped in the direction of the unguarded area, trying to climb the wall. But this time, it was ignored by the militia members. They just kept defending their own sector, always waiting for the Hunter Captain's next stab command.

"Then, we begin the special operations mission against this mixed species!" shouted Roland.

Hearing this, Lightning who was already flying out stopped for a moment and looked back to Roland.

"What's up?"

"That phrase of your's..." Lightning thought it through once more, then shook her head, "It seemed slightly strange. Well forget it, I'm off."

Seeing the little girl's small figure flying quickly away, Roland turned towards Anna and Nightingale and asked embarrassed, "Did you also thought that it was strange?"

"Well," they both nodded.

All right... it seems even in this place these two lines were strange, "You both can go now as well. Be careful!"

"Your Highness, take care," Nightingale bowed to Roland, then she took Anna's hand and pulled her off into the fog.

Roland put his arms behind his back, standing straight while facing the wind, trying to imitate how a BOSS would look like. He knew that many soldiers, when they had the time to catch their breath, would secretly glance at him. Because of this, even though his feet were already numb, he stood stoically at the highest point of the wall, clearly visible to everyone – demonstrating that the Prince was always on their side. Since he couldn't put himself into combat, this way he could still serve to inspire them.

This time, the intensity of the demonic beast attacks had exceeded all attacks previous. According to Iron Axe, during last year's Month of Demons, there would always only appear one or two mixed species. But this year, there were already four attacks of them on Border Town. The duration of these attacks was also unusually long, even now, groups of twelve or even larger would emerge from the forest, always continuing to dash towards the city wall.

Fortunately, the flintlock production has increased in the last month, and I'm now able to send out a team of one hundred armed with flintlocks. Without them, I would have never been able to guarantee such a high killing speed. If we had to use crossbows, I'm afraid killing all of them would have been very difficult.

In the long run, the advantage of guns, which needed less physical exertion, will become even more apparent.

Of course, the large consumption of gunpowder was enough to give Roland a headache, he had already ordered more than twenty packs of explosives from the warehouse, which tore a huge hole in his reserves, so he was already thinking about rationing gunpowder.

At the same moment, Lightning was already flying around the mixed species's head. She fished a stone from her pocket and threw it at the beast's head. The stone accurately hit the target's head, startling it so that it jumped forcefully back, only to discover that the attack actually come from the sky.

To provoke it further, Lightning flew always at a low altitude and directly in front of its head, slowly luring it towards the town center. Although the mixed species certainly had the ability to think, but seeing this annoying little girl flying around in front of it, it didn't feel any threat. So it immediately pounced up, opened its wings, and in a few jumps it quickly crossed more than a hundred meters. Lightning seeing it prepare for a jump, immediately flew a bit higher and turned around, always keeping a few cottages and a street between herself and the beast.

In this way, after seven or eight turns around, she was finally able to lure it to the town center, which was the ambush location on which Nightingale and she had previously agreed on. As a former lion, its sense of smell was naturally very sensitive, it should even be able to discover Nightingale even when she was in her world of fog. Because of this problem, they had to pull the demonic beast's attention away from them, before Nightingale and Anna could start their surprise attack.

For this kind of job, Lightning was perfectly suited. She was able to enrage the mixed species so much, that it jumped around like a maniac, with an opened wide mouth, always trying to get at this annoying fly. But Lightning who didn't have to bear any weight, was always a small distance away from it, always flying up and down teasingly, making each jump fruitless.

At the same time and from another direction Nightingale also arrived at the town square – compared to Lightning, in her world of the fog she could ignore all houses and fences, always moving in a straight line towards her goal. Since Anna's flame was only able to cover up to ten steps (5 meters), she had to get close to the mixed species, so she closed on it from behind, hoping to not be discovered.

When they had to face the mixed species for the first time, this part was very troublesome. However, now it was already their second run against this kind of mixed species and Nightingale had already gotten fully familiar with Anna's attack. So when they still were thirty feet away from the beast, she raised her speed to the limit, covering the distance in an instant, as if it was in only a single step. When Anna was able to see again, she discovered that the mixed species' tail was already directly in front of her face.

"Attack, now," cried, Nightingale.

Around Anna, the black and white world swapped away like a wave. Within the blink of an eye, she was back to the familiar towns square. Directly releasing her green flame from the tip of her finger and expanding it into a great fire cage, covering the whole demonic beast.

Facing this flame, Nightingale had to hurriedly retreat, even only feeling the heat wave, was already enough to make her feel like she was burning.

Enclosed by the cage of fire, which was even able to melt steel, the mixed species did not have any time to struggle, it instantly turned into a ball of flame and crushingly fell to the ground.

“It seems they were already able to solve the problem,” Wendy informed him when she discovered the green flame in the distance. In the absence of Nightingale, it was her turn to protect Roland, “It seems like I won’t get any part in the play...”

“If possible, I would like it if it could stay this way,” Roland answered, still maintaining his straight stance, pretending like he was riding along an easy road. Having said that, he still knew, that without the help of the witches defending the town, the jumping mixed species would have thrown the militia once more into chaos.

But today, even Nana had come to the walls, giving fast treatment to the injured soldiers. Her father was always at her side, protecting her. Today was the first time that Roland publicized the power of the witches in front of all the militiamen, and he was very pleased. Within the ranks, the love for their angel Nana rose to new highs, but when Anna and Nightingale killed the mixed species together, the crowd also began to cheer loudly.

Of course, he clearly knew that not everyone wouldn’t mind them, such a situation like with the militia was very rare. But when they were fully accepted by the militia, he would still try to get them accepted by the whole town.

Suddenly, the sound of gunfire began to taper off, and Roland noticed that the demonic beasts began to evacuate the wall. Are they finally retreating? He couldn’t believe his eyes. But just at this moment, a beam of light broke through the thick clouds, covering the ground, followed by a second, then a third... Soon, tens of thousands ray of lights broke through the holes within the clouds. Then all the light beams merged into one, becoming dazzling and unable to look at. The earth had suddenly brightened up.

“The day when the sun rises again is the end of all evil.”

There was a short moment of stillness on the wall, but then, a wave of cheering swept across the wall, towards the direction of Border Town. Gradually, the townspeople came out of the houses and also started to cheer. Welcoming the long missed sunshine, celebrating their surviving of the winter, or in order to thank the Prince. In the end, all the cheering merged into a flood, resounding throughout the entire Border Town!

Chapter 89 Victory Celebration (Part 1)

This year’s winter was completely different than the previous year’s. In the previous years when the Months of Demons ended, Border Town’s residents had to stay for one more month within Longsong Stronghold’s slums. They waited until the snow had completely melted, only then would they head back home.

Back at the town, they always saw a complete mess. After a few months with no one taking care of the houses some of which had already become dilapidated. Some of the less sturdy huts had been overwhelmed by heavy snow and some of the townspeople’s houses had been used by the demonic beast’s as hiding place.

Everything was broken and in disorder. For example, the cupboards and the tables were full of bite-marks and the remains of their meals still lay within the corners. Obviously these houses had been used as shelter from the snow and as their lair.

They often had to spend a week repairing the houses. Replacing all the moldy furniture, cleaning out the lingering smell of rot and so on. This was the procedure to which the residents were already accustomed to. But this year, it could even be said that Border Town seemed completely new, the snow was quickly swept away, and the prince provided to each family home's door a multi-colored banner. From afar, the previously monotonous and dilapidated town had become colorful. When the colors mixed together, it looked like a sea of flowers.

The castle also spread the news, that on the first day after the Months of Demons, his royal highness would hold a grand celebration ball in the town square! Everyone was invited, and if that wasn't enough no one had to pay a coin and would also be given free food!

What is a ball? It is a social occasion that only the upper nobility was allowed to attend. The townspeople only knew of them from the stories of the influential, experienced and knowledgeable merchants. Yet even then, they were never allowed to attend. If what the merchants had been telling them was right, then even with all their money it still wouldn't be enough to receive an invitation. But now His Highness would allow anyone to attend?

"Your Highness. You wouldn't do that, right?" Carter asked disapprovingly, "There will be neither a band nor will there be any lead dancers! So who will control the rhythm of the ball? Besides, in this kind of remote place, even the nobles aren't necessarily able to dance, so citizens will only mess everything up."

During Carter's time in Graycastle, he had only ever attended one ball. It had been hosted by a marquis to celebrate the birthday of his daughter. The music played was graceful string music mixed together with passionate drum beats, while the dancing contained many rotations and tapings. But if the instruments were played individually, the ladies would dance to the melodious string music, while the men displayed afterwards a fast and powerful dance in rhythm with the sound of the drums. During breaks, attendants would shuffle through the crowd and hand out drinks and snacks. Up till the last song, the men still had time to find and invite their favorite woman to a dance, and if they were lucky they would not only be rewarded with a dance, but also with some sort of romantic interaction.

Carter sighed, although he was still too young to invite his favorite girl, he could still remember the aftertaste of that elegant and romantic atmosphere. The nobilities are trained daily in maintaining their elegant demeanor, can the villagers who had to instead fight with the demonic beast daily compare with them? God, he could not imagine such a scene within Border Town.

"Lead dancer? Yes, well," Roland had commanded the militia to remove the stone sculptures and the gallows from the town's square, "Iron Axe and the militia member will take over that part."

"That sandman?" Carter was stunned. As the captain of the Hunter Team, and with his performance during the Months of demons, Iron Axe had finally gained the recognition of the Chief knight. Even his alien appearance wasn't mentioned any longer, however, the other one was still from the Moji Tribe, how could he know the etiquette of the Kingdom of Graycastle?!

Yet Roland only mysteriously smiled and said: "Because I'm the one who is organizing the ball, it won't be the usual kind, you will understand it when you see it."

He didn't have much preparation work to do, his biggest job was to remove the obstructions placed in the town square, and instead to put a pile of wood at the center. In addition, they had built tables out of

stone, used to carry the barbecued food. Yes, this was the plan Roland had come up with – a combination of campfire with a wild barbecue.

Roland had long thought about the problem, how to increase the people's sense of belonging to Border Town. After a long life working under their previous lord, the concept of status and nationality was set too deep within these rural and illiterate villagers. Only their property and the lives of their family were of their concern. The more backward the people were, the more short-sighted they would become, this was a law for the development of civilization, "Civilization can only be as big as the greatest ideas of its people," Roland thought deeply.

But this does not mean that lifting their spirits could be ignored, and this victory celebration was one of the methods he had figured out to transform their thinking.

In fact, he found it hard to understand that there was no general celebration after the end of the Months of Demons. Facing the invasion from the demonic beasts once in a year was just like a natural disaster. To overcome such evil was naturally worthy of remembering.

So he had decided to name the first day after the end of the Months of Demons as "Victory Day". So that within all of the territory belonging to him, this day had now become a public holiday, on which many kinds of celebrations were held. As long as he was able to do it for three to four years, this kind of celebration would become a tradition and would even later carry on without Roland. And with time the people would gradually feel that their own and other people under the governance of the Lord was indeed differently.

Even so, it wasn't noon yet, the square was still full of people. The members of the militia were lined around the pile of wood so that no other could come near it.

It seemed that the free distribution of food was quite attractive, I think that at least half of the town's inhabitants had come, Roland thought. In the end, more than one thousand people stood side by side, filling up the complete square beside the woodpile, there was no place for any other activities. He even discovered that some children had climbed up on the roof of the surrounding buildings so that they had a free look of everything.

Since it was their first time with this celebration, there were still some shortcomings. Roland thought that it was now the right time to enter the stage and to hold his speech.

This was now his second public speech he had held on this square, thanks to this his attitude was much calmer than the last time.

"My people, good afternoon. I'm the fourth Prince of Graycastle, Roland Wimbledon." He still used the same introduction as last time, but today its effect was completely differently than it was the last time. His voice hadn't fallen yet, but the crowd already cheered, "Long live the Prince, His Royal Highness!" "Long live His Highness!"

Roland suddenly felt a kind of warmth spreading through his chest, this time, he hadn't arranged for any propaganda from his own people. So when he heard the spontaneous cheers from his own militia and the townspeople, he felt a sense of accomplishment and satisfaction in his heart.

When their voices finally calmed down a little, he continued, “The Months of the Demons is finally over! Thanks to the militia’s heroic struggle, the demonic beasts weren’t able to cross the wall one step. This year Border Town had only to pay a very small price to fight off the demonic beasts. This proves that, as long as we unite, even if we don’t rely on the power of Longsong Stronghold, we can still get a foothold here! They wanted to threaten our town with food, the fear of hunger and cold, trying to force us to yield. But today’s victory told them, that all this was futile! “

“Right, I do not want to go back to that place anymore!”

“With His Royal Highness, we don’t need to fear a day of hunger during the winter!”

“At last they cannot blackmail us any longer, His Royal Highness is too kind!”

“Let us celebrate this splendid and glorious triumph together,” Roland shouted, taking advantage of the rising emotions within the crowd.

“It is a day to be remembered, and I declare that from now on the first day after the end of the Months of the Demons will be known as the ‘Victory Day’! The celebration today is precisely for this purpose! My people, enjoy this day to the fullest! Now, let the dance begin!”

With this a torch was thrown into the pile of firewood, the flames jumped up, instantly setting the whole atmosphere on aflame.

TN: Please no spoilers! I will delete every comment which contains spoilers!

Chapter 90 Victory Celebration (Part 2)

Six marinated cattle were transported next to the bonfire by carts – if they weren’t escorted by the militia, Roland suspected that on its way through the crowd, the whole cattle would have already been carved up by the masses.

This was all of the food reserves the castle had left within the basement. So they wouldn’t have any meat to eat until the arrival of the next merchant ship. Thinking of this, Roland’s heart began to ache. In order to run this celebration, he had even used up all of the reserves he had.

The master chefs brought over from Graycastle were only responsible for wiping the meat and controlling the heat. In the end, the task of barbecuing was handed over to six people from the militia team. An iron bar was inserted into the cattle’s body through its mouth and then placed in front of the fire on a brick station. The flames were wildly burning so that even separated by two to three meters the heat waves were still clearly felt. Soon the whole cow’s skin issued a sizzling sound, oil began to emerge out of it’s pores, emitting a seductive scent.

Of course, the barbecue couldn’t be the only attraction, so on Roland’s signal, Iron Axe together with a team of militia entered the stage.

Since those gorgeous and complex court dance didn’t apply to such an occasion, and there wasn’t much time for training; they couldn’t even remember all the essentials steps, let alone show such a beautiful and complex dance. To ensure that it was an easy to understand dance which was still enjoyable, the dance of the sand people was clearly more in line with the interests of the civilians.

The dance started with Iron Axe and the others placing both of their hands on their hips, always putting the right arm through the partner's left arm, forming a two rings around the bonfire. They were accompanied by the sounds of horns and began to move clockwise, with each step, they would throw the other foot to kick forward while shouting "Ha!

"Is this the lead dance you talked about?" Carter asked startled. "Can you even call this a dance?"

"Of course, it is very easy to remember, the militia had only needed to practice half an hour last night to master the pace," Roland answered laughingly. "Do you also want to try?"

Carter shook his head and refused the offer. He just felt as if something in his heart would soon break out with a bang – don't, she was just a girl with an appearance which made men's hearts beat faster. Don't, she is just a sad memory from my youth.

The other militia members were clapping with their hands in the pace of the all the dancer's footsteps, accompanying each round with faster applause. The extremely fast rhythm moved the masses, they one after another reached out with their own hands to clap in accordance. As the applause got faster and faster, Iron Axe and his teams dancing speed also became faster and faster. Soon the ring began to show signs of coming apart. It didn't take long until one of the dancers accidentally fell, taking more of the dancers with him. Seeing this the crowd became shocked, but the militia did not stop the applause, instead it got wilder and changed into a storm.

Iron Axe propped himself by a militia member, stopping his fall and then he turned to the crowd and shouted: "Did everyone understand it? Who would like to try it themselves? Until you fall just like us! If you join the dance, you can afterwards dive into the sweet and delicious honey barbecue, the longer you dance, the more meat you get!"

If the nobility or the rich families were to invite them, the normal townspeople would never have been involved – subconsciously, giving them the feeling that they were superior compared to themselves. It was also common for the nobility to go back on their promises. But when they saw the militia members, which came from the usual crowd of civilians now beckoning them to dance with them, they were unable to hold themselves back.

After the first round of people joined, they were soon followed by a second and then a third round. So soon, a new dance started, but this time most of the dancers came from the masses. Although this was a very simple interaction, it still made them very happy, in addition with the reward of the honey barbecue in their sight, the participants tried their hardest to show the best possible performance.

This was exactly the scene Roland wanted to see.

In addition to the barbecue, there were also bread, fish-cakes, and ale that was distributed to the masses. The celebration was planned to continue until evening, but Roland didn't plan to stay until then. He arranged for Carter to be in charge of the town square's safety, and the assistant minister was responsible for the closing speech, then he left.

He instead attended a private party at the castle's back garden.

When the evening came, the backyard was still brightly lit.

Just like in the town's square, they had also started a bonfire. The difference was that they used chicken for the barbecue which were cut into pieces. The seasoning and oil were of their own configuration, completely imitating the atmosphere of a barbecue in the wild. This kind of novelty of self-service style was loved too much by the witches, that they could never part with it. Of course for Roland's eyes, this was a rare spectacle – for example, Anna directly wrapped the chicken into her green flame after seasoning it, which soon gave off a delicious fragrance. Nightingale instead showed off her incredible knife work, one moment the knives were hidden and a second later the chicken was hung upside down, completely peeled and with all of its bones fell down.

And of course, for the wine, it came from Willow Town and was much more suitable for the tastes of women than ale. Actually, Roland wanted to say that minors were prohibited from drinking, yet Lightning had already emptied half a bottle by herself and since she was floating in the air, it would be difficult to persuade her Roland thought.

After around one hour within the barbecue, Roland was slightly tipsy. He leaned against a chair and watched the group of happy laughing girls. Seeing this Roland felt very pleased. This is the perfect life for a prince, he thought, and also for the witches. With their extraordinary abilities and appearance, they shouldn't be the object of hunting. If they were born in my previous life, I'm afraid they would have become the dazzling focus of many people. But now, here in my territory, they can live a normal life.

At this moment, Lightning suddenly fell down, directly landing on Roland's lap, and even before he had the possibility to react, she already had planted a kiss on his cheek.

Although this action was done very quickly, it was still captured by many witches.

When Lightning grinningly flew upwards again, she could see that Anna, Nightingale, and Wendy looked very surprised, so she waved her hand explained: "According to the rules of the Fjords when they hold a banquet to celebrate a victory, the woman can take the initiative to kiss the leader. Dad would let me kiss him every time. Isn't this also a habit in Graycastle?"

"Of course not," Roland instantly woke up from his half-drunken state, "uh... cough cough, Lightning you're drunk, quickly go back to the castle and sleep!"

"How can that be," Lightning protested, "When I was sailing, I had many drinking battles with the crew and I never lost."

Roland recognizing that she would follow the order turned to Wendy, who nodded and then used her power to kindly blow Lightning to the earth. When Lightning was close to landing, Wendy took two steps forward, approaching the girl and catching her within his arms. Disregarding of Lightnings shouting and struggling, she walked in a straight line towards the castle.

"Don't worry about her, she just drunk too much. Please continue to celebrate, soon the dessert will be delivered." Roland suddenly felt that the atmosphere had turned a little strange, especially when he looked into Anna's eyes, he felt a chill rising up from his feet. The only one who was completely unaffected by what happened was Nana, she was still concentrating on eating her chicken wings, like nothing had happened in general.

After the bonfire was gradually extinguished, Roland requested Nightingale to escort Nana home. Then he went to the well and washed his face with cold water, already ready to go to bed. Roland didn't take the former episode to heart, in his view, Lightning was still a minor child.

But when he arrived at the third floor, his heart suddenly began to race.

He saw Anna who was leaning against his door.