

Witch 111

Chapter 111 Battle of Eagle City (Part 2)

The first batch of freedmen who served as the human meat shields didn't meet any resistance and were able to successfully climb the earthen slope.

On top of the ramp formed from earth's slope, the defenders had built a wooden fence to block the attacking forces. The fence wasn't completely closed, instead, it had many openings for spears. During the time the attackers were busy destroying the logs of the fence, the defenders could simply stand behind it and use their spears to kill the enemy.

However, contrary to Duke Frances expectations, the defenders who should have been standing behind the fence were nowhere to be seen. The entire wall was currently in an unguarded state. So his vanguards carrying their axes were able to quickly open up some gaps in the wall. After the logs were out of the way, the rush towards the city began. A moment later, the wooden gate was also opened.

"Let's go," said the Duke, and shook the reins of his horse and led the rest of his troops to the gates. From the beginning of the siege until when the gates were opened, less than thirty minutes have passed, so what the hell was Garcia Wimbledon doing?

Frances frowned, even if she didn't have much combat experience, she should still have known that she had to leave a small group of personal guards or hired mercenaries who had been bought with a lot of money and didn't fear death behind to block the enemy's offensive for as long as possible. Only in this way could she gain enough time for the larger group to flee.

The 3rd Princess is clearly not a stupid person. Otherwise, it could not be explained why she was able to take over the South so quickly. So why hadn't she arranged for any men to defend the wall? Building a solid defense, even with well-placed traps in it, but with no one to operate it, is only a waste of money. Frances thought, it's decided now, my personal guards will be the first group to step into the city and investigate whether the situation is safe.

But later, when the captain of his personal guards came back to report, he reported that even within the city it was still the same situation, they hadn't met any resistance. However, there were indeed some wood and stone obstacles, but after his men had ordered the local inhabitants to work, those were soon removed.

Hearing this report, Frances no longer hesitated and began to lead his remaining troops towards Eagle City. He had followed King Wimbledon III on many campaigns during the years and could be counted as a veteran, so how could he let himself be scared off by a little girl? Contrary to what one might expect the time invested into analyzing the enemy's steps for mistakes was not wasted. Because if he could wait until all the gates were captured, he could directly ride through the city and save a lot of time.

When he stepped through the gate, Duke Frances could smell something with a pungent smell. It wasn't the smell of rotting corpses which often appeared on battlefields, but rather more like a mixture of pine nut oil, tangerine peel, and incense. If someone took a deep breath, they could even imagine it to be a perfume.

What is this smell? But when he observed his surroundings once more, he was unable to detect anything unusual. The only thing which didn't seem right was that the ditch for the drainage system was blocked, and the sewage was overflowing out of its channel, slowly flowing along the ground. It had accumulated so much filth that he couldn't tell how long it was that they hadn't been cleaned, but when the sun fell on these dark substances, it reflected in five splendid colors.

Probably the smell comes from this pile of sewage, Frances shook his head, clearing it of this unnecessary thought, then began to lead his unit further to the castle district.

Since they took over Eagle City, they naturally had to go to the Castle and the City Hall, and look to see if there was worth looting. Of course, it was very likely that Garcia had already plundered the city, so there shouldn't be many gold royals left, but some of the larger crafts and ornaments were also very suitable trophies. Exactly for this occupation Frances had brought his own food carriages along. Regardless of the condition of the loot, everything would be loaded on the carriages. As for those mercenaries, most probably they were already looting the shops and the surrounding farms.

Well, for now, this doesn't matter. It's more important that Duke Joey is already dead, and it's still unsure who will become his successor. So at this time it's a close battle, to decide under whose rule this city will fall.

When Duke Frances entered the castle, he thought that he had come to the wrong place.

From the outside it appears to be the castle, he thought. But they hadn't only taken all of the coins, no, they had cleared out the entire basement. They took all of the clothes and didn't even leave behind a single corn in the grain storage. The several frescoes hanging on the walls were also all taken, leaving only blank walls behind. There were no longer any books in the bookcases and they also hadn't forgotten to take the bed from the Lord's bedroom either. In short, the whole castle had been stripped clean.

Was this something that was done in a hasty retreat? Frances gradually became more uneasy. If this hadn't been planned out from the start, the castle wouldn't have been cleared so thoroughly.

Right at the moment he wanted to go to the City Hall to see if was the same situation over there, a thick smoke suddenly began to emerge through the North Gate.

"What's the matter, is something burning?"

"I do not know, Your Excellency, I have already ordered Moliere to go and take a look," the Captain of his guard answered. "Perhaps it's a fire that has been deliberately set by the enemy."

Yes, that must be the case. The Duke's first thought was that this all was a trap, but then he realized that this method of setting the gates on fire was meaningless. After all, they could easily bypass the gates, they only had to cross the slope and then they were already outside. Setting something on fire, without any additional attack was meaningless, after all, an organized team wouldn't need much time to put the fire out.

The correct use of this tactic would be to set up soldiers at the inner side of the walls, who would wait until the fire had expanded all over the city, and then when the enemy's troops started to panic that would be the time for their own surprise attack to start. If it was done like this, it can easily disrupt

the enemy's formation, maybe even force them to retreat. But as he had said before, with no one to operate the trap, it was meaningless.

At this moment, out of the direction of the three other gates black smoke also began to emerge. And when he looked back at the fire at the North Gate he could see that it was spreading at much too fast a rate; as if the whole surroundings had been filled with straw. It didn't take long until the first cries from the civilians could be heard, indicating that some of their houses were already lit.

This can't be right... Duke Frances thought, the fire is coming from the north gate, but there was nothing with which to feed the fire, there was only an open space! But if there was nothing, how can the fire spread so fast? Wait... suddenly a horrifying thought popped up within his mind, could it be that Garcia Wimbledon had secretly recruited a witch?

Frances reassuringly touched the God's Stone of Retaliation which hung around his neck, calming quickly beating heart. Hopefully, it is only a fire ignited by a witch, as long as that is the case I can directly walk through it. After all, with this stone that demonic fire simply cannot hurt me. And furthermore each member of my personal guards is also wearing this thing, so this fire can't threaten us at all. As for the freedmen, who have no money to donate to the church, I just don't have the time to attend to them.

Regardless of the fact that he possessed such a stone, the city had still become dangerous, so he decided to flee to the war camp at the South Gate. From there he could not only monitor Eagle City, but also wait for the new King to return with the cavalry. When he thought his next steps through, he immediately gave the Captain of his guards the command: "We will leave the city through the South Gate, during the ride you will blow the horn to gather all of our troops."

"As you command!"

Everyone immediately went on their way, but when their group came near the South Gate, the flames had begun to cover the whole city, already setting many civilian houses on fire. The heat emitting from the fire became so hot that they were forced to retreat. In addition, the commoners who were originally hiding inside their houses behind closed doors, were now on the streets and fleeing from the flames. Crowding the whole streets with people. They became so many, that even the sword swinging knights were unable to move forward. There was nothing which would help against this panic stricken people fleeing to the only open space available which wasn't burning yet. At this moment it seemed as if everything would be consumed by the surrounding flames and smoke.

"Everyone calm down; we have to get to the well. From it we can draw water to fight this fire," Duke Frances quickly gave some orders, "Don't try to save the houses, they are out of control. Just extinguish the burning obstacles on the streets, so that we get a path out of the city. Don't stop the horn signal, let other people know where we are!"

"Sir!" shouted a knight who came from the direction of the city center. The knight didn't even wait until his horse had stopped, instead, he immediately jumped off the horse. When he took a closer look he discovered that it was the knight sent to the North Gate by his Captain. "Sir, at the North Gate we are unable to get the fire under control!"

"What did you say?" Frances couldn't believe it, so he had to ask again, "You are unable to fight the fire?"

“The flames are burning on this black water,” she said quickly, “Not only is it not extinguished with water, it is even quickly spreading over it, and now the whole northern city is burning!”

“An immortal fire,” Frances murmured, “Yes, it has to be demonic fire.” And then the Duke shouted, “Do not panic! This is Garcia taking advantage of the ability of these evil witches! As long as you wear God’s Stone of Retaliation you’re safe! Even if these flames seem frightening, they simply cannot hurt you!”

“So that’s the reason, you were so benevolent.” Moliere subconsciously stroked her chest, “Sir, what should we do?”

“With the God’s Stone of Retaliation we don’t need to fear anything! Everyone launch, we will break through!” The Duke waved his hand, “These demonic fire as long as we wear the God’s Stone of Retaliation, it will disappear without a trace!” He paused, “Moliere, you will lead the first group of people out, I will stay here and wait for the people who are still coming.”

The female knight nodded in confirmation, “Sir, you have to take care of yourself, pay attention that you don’t!”

Then she turned around and rushed without any hesitation towards the raging fire at the end of the street.

Chapter 112 Battle of Eagle City (Part 3)

It seemed as if the King’s knights were holding a sharp silver blade when they cut into the rear of Garcia’s retreating troops.

The crowd broke into chaos and a lot of people fell to the ground while they were trying to flee, only to end up getting trampled to death by the horses.

Occasionally some of them pulled out weapons and tried to resist the attackers, but against the superior knights they were soon cut into pieces. Leading this kind of unstoppable flood was an elite knight from the camp in the Cold Wind Ridge. It was Knight Naimen who served as the spear point for this attack. Furthermore, his blue cloak which danced in the wind behind him was particularly eye-catching, wherever he went, the enemy would try to flee. Every time after his sword cut down, it would be covered in blood.

Timothy Wimbledon instead stood in the distance on a small hill, overlooking the whole battlefield. At this point, the three thousand people of Garcia’s troops were no longer able to hold together their formation, instead with every second they were falling further and further apart, which brought them to almost completely halting their march.

They won’t last much longer, Timothy thought, the moment when the second of my three teams attacks they will collapse. These people simply cannot resist the assault of Graycastle’s elite knights. Most of them aren’t even wearing any armor, the moment a sharp blade comes close to them, they immediately start losing their will to fight.

Everything happened almost exactly as he had expected, after spending one hour to bypass Eagle City, they had turned over and rode through a sparse forest, finally reaching the road. Back on the road, Timothy ordered his knights to start rushing, and finally, one hour later they were able to catch up with Garcia.

According to the advice of Duke Frances, Timothy divided his troop into three teams of around three hundred knights, and let them take turns in attacking the different sides of the enemy. Like this, he was able to hold some troops back and was always ready to send in reinforcements when it was needed. In order to avoid the possibility that they might get surrounded, his knights were not allowed to attack the center of the enemy's formation and instead they should attack its flanks. With short speedy dashes, they only cut off the leftovers, with each charge killing only dozens of people.

This tactic was obviously very successful, after a few runs the enemy already had more than a hundred casualties, while still being unable to even retaliate. They even tried to organize a counterattack with their own cavalry, but the gap between their equipment and training was just too far off. Compared to the Knights of the King, the momentary patchwork of cavalry was nothing more than a group of horseback-riding infantry. The moment when they came face to face, those "cavalry" made of the men that had been brave enough to charge into battle were simply killed, or if they were lucky they were able to scatter in all directions.

This unilateral massacre was a great blow to the enemy's morale, and soon Timothy noticed some of Garcia's troops begun to break away from the formation and flee in all directions.

The time has finally come for us to launch our main offensive, he thought. When the Cold Wind Knight came back from leading his attack, Timothy didn't order him to start the next round of shock tactics, instead, he signaled him to come over to his side.

"Your Majesty, their formation will soon come falling apart," Naimen wiped the sweat from his forehead away, whilst leaving some bloody marks on his face as he did – naturally it was the blood of his enemies, until now he hadn't received any injuries during the whole battle.

Seeing this, Timothy took his own handkerchief and handed it to him. "Well done, you can take a break now, it's finally time to deliver the deathblow."

Seeing that the next round of shock attack wasn't coming in, Garcia's troops also realized that the decisive moment was coming. Her large group completely stopped their forward march, instead, they unhurriedly gathered, until they had formed a tight formation. Every outermost soldier was holding a wooden pike, and held it up, waiting for the impact.

Discovering this, Timothy only scoffed, in his eyes, it was nothing more than an already dying man's last struggle. Without barricades, without armor, only with flesh and blood alone you want to resist the mighty impact of my knights? This can only end in disaster for you. No matter which cards you have left my dear younger sister, you won't be able to change the outcome. Naturally, it could also be true that you have already departed long ago, leaving this group to die and buying time for yourself to flee.

But he soon discovered he had been wrong.

Within the crowd, they once again put up the banner of the Queen of Clearwater. Seeing this green banner with the sailing boat and the crown fluttering in the wind, made Timothy frown. So he lifted his binocular and took a closer look at the enemy. He soon discovered standing behind the warriors who had raised the flag was the blurred figure of a woman who seemed to be shouting some orders. Even so, he couldn't clearly see the other one's face, yet her gray hair flowing in the wind gave her identity away.

Garcia Wimbledon, had not run.

Timothy took a deep breath, well, this only means that this farce will come to an end here. I don't have to follow her to Clearwater Port.

After waiting for the horses to be fully rested, the new King gave the signal to start the main attack.

The cavalry formed from the knights and squires was around eight-hundred strong, and under the leadership of the King's own knights, started the attack against the enemy. It was once more the Cold Wind Knight who was at the tip of the attack – Naimen Moor.

Just at the moment when the attack would finally hit, suddenly on both sides of the horizon, a huge numbers of troops appeared. After sending out strange war cries, they immediately began to rush into the direction of the battle.

Timothy couldn't believe what his eyes were showing him.

Without raising any flags or wearing any emblems, the suddenly emerged troops didn't resemble any known force of the kingdom. After a closer observation, Timothy saw that they were all wearing different armors and weapons. But with their high-stature and weird faces, Timothy knew, they could only be from one place.

The Sandpeople from the Extreme South!

He didn't need to guess any longer if they were friend or foe, without a doubt, Garcia was able to make a deal with them. Leading this group of damn foreigners into the Kingdom of Graycastle. Only the thought of what this meant made Timothy burn with rage, he immediately shouted: "Give the signal, break off the attack!"

But it was already too late, such a high-speed assault was impossible to be broken up with such a short notice. His knights were directly impaling into the heart of Garcia's troops, cutting through them like a hot knife through butter, with only one goal, reaching the Queen of Clearwater.

Timothy eagerly looked into the direction of the flying banner, hoping that it would break – the troops of the Sandpeople coming from both sides were each around one thousand men strong, making Garcia's forces five thousand people strong. This was a size that Timothy was unable to face. Furthermore, the Sandpeople had a strong build and were always warring against each other which had turned them into a great threat even to his knights. Only by killing the enemy's leader, cutting off their flagpole and breaking Garcia's forces, would he have still a chance of winning.

However, even so, the flagpole swayed a bit but it was still standing straight.

Finally, the Sandpeople were able to close the circle, blocking the knight's last way out and started joining the battle.

Without these reinforcements, Garcia's three thousand desperados would have been defeated long ago. But at the moment, they were still persisting, and just like a swamp, swallowing one knight after another.

Hearing the horns blowing to retreat, the knights who were closer to the edge were trying to free themselves came rushing back to the King. But many of them had ridden too deep into the enemy's forces and were now trapped, including the Cold Wind Knight.

Currently, he was fighting against a nine feet tall warrior of the Sandpeople while breathing heavily. The other side was waving around a wooden stick as long as two men causing a small area to open up around their fight. Unfortunately, Naimen's mount had already been crushed to death, and it was only thanks to his extraordinary reaction and agility that he was able to stay alive. But without a mount, his heavy armor led to a rapid consumption of his physical strength. And when he once more stepped sideways trying to dodge, his foot slipped and he was hit by the stick in the middle of his chest. The strength of the attack that came hitting against his armor was so huge that it broke into two pieces.

His blue cloak swayed once more through the wind before he finally disappeared in the crowd.

Half an hour later, the knights who were still left fighting had become less and less and when the Sandpeople turned in the direction of Timothy's hill, he grit his teeth and gave the order to withdraw. His entire group of people began their retreat northward. Compared with the huge force he had previously led into battle, the new King now merely had three hundred people still left around him.

Chapter 113 Warning

Since the end of the Month of the Demons, it has only rained for two days in the West, all the other days had been sunny days, apparently, this was compensation for all the snow during the winter. The musty air in the office had also been swept away, becoming fresh and clean as nature, and when he opened the windows the sweet smelling fragrance of spring would sometimes float into the room.

At this time, the road between Border Town and Longsong Stronghold had nearly been restored to its former quality. But with each passing day, Roland would become particularly more concerned about the matter with the stronghold.

Every year after the return of land traffic there would also be merchants coming to Border Town selling their fresh goods, but until today he had yet to see any merchant coming in from Longsong Stronghold. Lightning was by now flying two times a day to Longsong Stronghold, to ensure that they would have an early enough warning to be well prepared for the enemy's arrival.

Over the past week, the First Army has entered the comprehensive exercise stage, which included setting up the defensive line in order to welcome an enemy's attack and also trained in how to pursue and attack an enemy. For the former they heavily relied on Lightning to always inform them of the distance between them and the enemy, the artillery and gun teams would shoot according to her orders – making it much easier, regardless of whether it concerned giving orders or acting on given orders. For example: Shooting solid shelling at 800 meters and 500 meters, while using canister shelling when the enemy approached 300 meters, and firing with firearms at 50 meters and so on. As long as they saw Lightning raising the corresponding flag, the team leader would then give the signal to his team to attack.

The key for the victory on the battlefield laid in the pursuit and attacking stage. According to Roland's plan, when the enemy was defeated, they would turn around and retreat to Longsong Stronghold, for which they would also need to use three days. Even if the Duke fled on his own, leaving his militia and the hired mercenaries behind, he would still need two days for the journey, so he had to stay for at least one night out in the wild.

This gave the First Army the perfect chance to chase them. The whole process of monitoring would be done by Lightning, while the first army would always be out of the enemy's scouting distant but ready to catch up at any moment. The artillery and ammunition would be transported by the town's civilians. When the enemy had established their night camp, it was time for the First Army to completely encircle them, and at dawn of the next day they would start the attack, completely annihilating the opposition.

Even though the plan didn't seem complicated, it was almost impossible to coordinate the two troops because of the absence of any modern communication devices. Roland could only hope for the witches, to make up for the lack in communication. How the final result would end up, even he himself was unsure.

Another critical point was that his gunpowder reserves were running low, because of this the First Army was unable to use live ammunition during their comprehensive exercises. However, the main goal of the training had been to increase the Gunner Team's and Artillery Team's collaboration, as well as the coordination between the First Army and the witches. Roland has sent people to go further down the Shishui River to Fallen Dragon Ridge and Redwater City, hoping to find new sources of saltpeter. If I'm unable to replenish my reserves of gunpowder, I am afraid after two more fights, the guns in the hands of the First Army could only be used as spears, Roland thought.

Roland wrote a number of items he had to procure on paper which included saltpeter, grain, seeds and other supplies, he intended to send one of Barov's apprentice to the King's City to try his luck. That place had sufficient merchandise, it especially had enough saltpeter – with the summer approaching, the King would surely have started to gather saltpeter by now. As a city filled with wealthy aristocrats and also wealthy merchants, when the weather started to get hot, the consumption of saltpeter would become staggering. He hoped to find a stable supplier who could provide Border Town with a stable stream of the raw materials needed to produce gunpowder.

Prior to this, he had already sent out two of his personal guards, one to implement the plan called "Gathering the Witches" and another to work on the "finding the fruit" program.

The former had posed as either a traveler or a businessman, and spread out through the streets and lanes, pubs and other places the rumors of Border Town being a safe haven for witches. Of course, it hadn't been said that the host was the 4th Prince himself, instead he news that spread had been that they had been able to find the Holy Mountain, and that the Witch Cooperation Association was now looking to recruit new members.

The other had gone directly to Clearwater Port, and purchased some peculiar crops from the Fjords from across the ocean. Of course, when he found any particular seeds in any of the city's on the journey, he had also sent them back.

Having finished with his purchasing list, he handed it over to Scroll, allowing her go to the Town Hall and hand it over to Barov. After Scroll left Roland stretched out his hand to drink some water, but only to discover that his cup was empty.

Just as he was about to get up and take the kettle off from the fire, Nightingale was already bringing over the pot to the table. More than that, she even smiled while she filled up the cup, and when she put the kettle back.

Roland slowly sipped his tea, while trying to think of what would have happened to make her smile like this. Recently the attitude of Nightingale was somewhat off. In the last few days she had always had a smile on her face, and even more, she was now even taking the initiative to serve him tea, does she secretly want a raise in her wages? Previously, she would only sit on the sofa while holding a pot of dried fish and gnawing on some for the whole afternoon long.

Although, Roland had already asked her what had happened, she only laughed and refuse to answer, he simply had to let the question go.

Could playing Gwent really make people so happy? Later when he “invents” Poker and Mahjong, he could just open a casino, and the money would come in on it’s own... Stop. Roland shook his head, pushing the thought to the back of his head. Now wasn’t the time for pleasure seeking, he still had to consider what he would do after achieving his victory against Longsong Stronghold.

Should he perhaps relocate his office to Longsong Stronghold? Roland had considered this point for a long time, moving to a more prosperous land would seem to be quite tempting, but it wouldn’t in fact be a very good choice. Longsong Stronghold had more than a hundred year longer history than Border Town did, so there were many different forces that were struggling for power, while the other nobility also took a lot of power.

The territory was supervised along the principle to divide and conquer, even as the Lord of Longsong Stronghold it was difficult to handle matters in the territories of his subordinates. In the case that Roland would want to grasp all of this power for himself, it would be very hard to achieve without causing a revolution. Even more, it was a territory where the fish and dragons were mixed in together, so his own safety also couldn’t be guaranteed. He did not want to walk in the streets while always having to fear that a radical aristocrat would attempt an assassination.

Compared to this, Border Town was completely different. Here only he had the final say, the surrounding land was vast, so he wasn’t in an urgent need to expand his territory. Most of the people were either miners or hunters, or all from the same social rank, and with his success during the Month of the Demons, his reputation among the people has greatly risen. Most importantly, after the integration of the First Army and their propaganda, most of the people have accepted the existence of witches. When compared with Longsong Stronghold or other cities where the Church had a lot of influence, Border Town was much easier to turn into the witches’ safe haven. Therefore, Roland decided to use Border Town as his core area.

As for the fortress, he decided to let others manage it on his behalf and that he would only be there to provide support from afar. After all, as long as they provided him with a steady flow of work force as well as paying taxes, he would be satisfied. What he was missing the most of at the moment was people and money.

So Roland’s consideration for Longsong Stronghold was that they would provide him with the coins and the people for the continued construction of Border Town. Like this, the gold royals from the defeated nobles would return back to the hands of the commoners, who would then use it in the markets of Longsong Stronghold, from where he would get the money back in form of taxes. In addition, maybe he could through a number of preferential policies to convince some people with special skills to stay for the long term in Border Town.

But all these were still only some rough plans. Things such as who would administer Longsong Stronghold in his stead, or the specifics of the taxation system, would have to wait until the end of the battle to be considered.

At this moment, a figure in yellow suddenly flew through the window only to stop beside the prince's table – this figure was Lightning.

"You've worked hard, have a drink first," Roland took his cup and gave it to her. She took the cup from him but she didn't drink, instead she only shouted, "Your Highness, they are coming!"

Chapter 114 Thunder

The vast amount of Longsong Stronghold's allied forces were on march to Border Town.

The front of the force was comprised out of the six knight families in the stronghold. From the various armors that the knights were wearing, it was easy to determine how strong each family was when compared to the others. Without a doubt the most eye-catching amongst them were Duke Ryan's knights, their horses were a branch of the King's breed of short-tailed horses, which were exceptionally good at long distance running and had a larger body than that of other horses. Yet even with how amazing the horses seemed, the Knights sitting on their backs seemed even more powerful, their armor was created by the famous Longsong Stronghold "Hammer and Dragontooth" blacksmith which gave them a unified look. On their thick breastplates was carved a huge and shiny silver lion's head, while on their shoulders were pictured two wolves, which seemed to be opening their mouth to let out a roar. Their cloaks which were waving behind them in the wind was embroidered with delicately decorative designs, and around their waist, every one of them had also tied a red band.

These knights were not only eye-catching. Each year after the end of the Months of Demons, it was exactly these knights who were responsible for cleaning up the remnants of demonic beasts and ensuring that it was once more safe to travel through the land. Every one of them had accumulated a wealth of combat experience when fighting one on one, they weren't much worse than the Knights of the King were, they were just less in numbers – of course, as a Duke, being able to support one hundred and fifty elite knights, was already an amazing feat.

So when Duke Ryan looked at his knights, he always had a very satisfied expression. Never doubting for a moment that there was no one in the West who had enough strength to stop him.

Walking in the middle of the retinue were the mercenaries, their equipment when compared with the knights was much worse. The majority of their attire was some out-fashioned mail or plate armor lacking either the gloves or helmets. There were even some people who were only equipped in cheap leather armor and they were also wearing all kinds of different weapons. While walking along the road they didn't hold to any formation, but were rather always walking in small groups of twos or threes, often times even laughing as they went. Seeing this, one could have the feeling that they weren't on their way to battle but instead seemed to be going out on a hike during the spring.

At the end of the line, walking behind the mercenaries were the freedmen who had been pressured into service by the Lord, dragging a single wheel cart behind them which was loaded with food and tents. Due to the difference in the movement speed of the 1,500 people which resulted in a very slow moving

retinue, the knights riding at the front would have to stop from time to time and wait for the troops behind them to keep up.

“Sir,” Count Elk, Holger Medela pulled the reins of his horse so that he could directly ride side by side with the Duke, “We are half a day away from the border town, if we continue at this pace we should arrive there by 4 p.m. At that time, it would be the best if we let our troops rest for the night, then tomorrow morning we will start the attack, or do you perhaps want to attack the Prince’s castle immediately?”

“It seems you want to sleep in the wild, too,” the Duke laughed, “I myself would prefer to sleep in the castle’s bed rather than the wet mud. Of course, we still have to give the Royal Family a little respect. So, when we arrive at Border Town, I will send messengers to persuade the Prince to surrender.”

Count Honeysuckle riding slightly in front of them, turned around and said, “The cavalry has already spent a whole day out in the field, the people and the horses are tired, so starting a direct attack wouldn’t be very appropriate, right? After all, even though he only has miners and hunters, it is still a fact that Roland Wimbledon was able to spend the all of the Months of the Demons inside Border Town. I think it would be for the best if we remain a bit cautious.”

“Haha, I can understand that others don’t know it, but that even you don’t know the truth about the demonic beasts? My old friends. They are really scary when met in the wild, they move fast and nimble and have astonishingly strength, in other words they are deadly opponents. But if you’re standing behind a wall, then they are just stupid beasts” The Count of the elk family shrugged, “I was more surprised with that he could build a wall so quickly. But with that alone he cannot resist the might of our knights, correct? They aren’t mindless idiots.”

“That is exactly the case, and I have also received a message from the North,” Duke Ryan casually said, “This year in Hermes they’d had to deal with an unusually large force of demonic beasts, almost resulting in the fall of the New Holy City. So thinking about this logically, it seems that this year’s demonic beasts were mostly directed in their direction, and here at the West Border we’d only had to deal with the few that have slipped through the net.”

As the Lord of the whole western territory of the kingdom, his eyes were not only concentrated in this remote place. Through these years he had placed many eyes in all of the major cities who continually passed him all the newest information. But at the moment, the tragic war in the North wasn’t the place where his main focus laid. A few days ago he had received a secret letter from Steep Cliff City, which informed him that the new King Timothy Wimbledon and the Queen of Clearwater have held a fierce fight within the southern territory of Eagle City. According to the news, Timothy’s team should need a month to return from Eagle City.

The letter hadn’t mentioned the result of the fight, in it had only stood that after Timothy had come back to Steep Cliff City, he had lost thousands of troops, which had made it impossible for him to keep up the blockade against his sister. It also seemed that Eagle City had become a victim of the fire, the black clouds of smoke had almost covered the whole sky, this spectacle had all been witnessed by the residents of the surrounding towns.

Without a doubt, regardless of whether the Queen of Clearwater had died to the hands of Timothy or not, such a painful loss of soldiers was a serious blow to the new King. The content of the letter had

made Duke Ryan so restless that he had on that very night sent out many trusted aides to King's City and also into the Eastern territory, hoping to learn more about Timothy's circumstances. Perhaps this large battle between the two Monarchs would give him the opportunity to destroy the still unstable regime of the new King, he absolutely did not mind throwing a torch on an already prepared bonfire.

If he wanted to become an independent King, now was the best chance he would ever get. The soldiers of the North were buried under the feet of the New Holy City, the South has just experienced a war and was still lying on the ground while licking their wounds, the East Border Lords and the new King weren't in a better situation either. But he was afraid that in a few years they would come back into power. As long as he got some people to attack the North, it could easily tear the Kingdom of Graycastle in half. By then the territory and population under his rule would be comparable to that of the Kingdom of Eternal Winter in the North. With the two biggest cities in the south-east under his control his strength would be comparable with everyone else's in the Kingdom of Graycastle.

And he, Osmond Ryan, would become the first King in this new country.

After he thought everything through, the Duke smiled in satisfaction. He wanted to end this farce with the Prince today and tomorrow he would immediately go back home. Fortunately, three days later I will be able to welcome my trusted aides back to the castle, hopefully, they will have some good news for me.

As the sun gradually went downwards, approaching the top of the mountains, Duke Ryan could finally make out the outline of Border Town... and outside of the town, he saw a number of densely packed silhouettes.

"Father, Duke," Rene, who was in charge of the leading the front, came back to report "The people in front of us should be the guards of the 4th Prince, they are all armed, clearly showing that they don't intend to welcome us.

"Well, at least we don't have to bother with going to the castle to ask him to surrender," the Count laughed, "Inform the knights they should slow down and should stop at a distance close enough for a charge."

"Yes, Father," after receiving his orders, Rene turned around and left.

Duke Ryan raised his view and looked at his opponents. The guards in front of him all looked very strange, they were also holding strange weapons, they stood side by side in two lines. If you were to call their weapons pikes that would mean that the pikes did not have the correct ends, and the grip was also too short. Moreover, his counterparts adopting the disposition of trained troops was also against any common sense... their line of defense was so thin, weren't they running with open eyes into their own death?

This made the Duke a little confused. Even if the Prince has no common sense or any battle experience to speak of, he still has some knights and also his personal guards by his side, aren't they able to prevent him from making such a mess? Thinking about for a moment, the Duke decided that he would let the mercenaries lead the charge, while the cavalry would stand aside, and remain ready to start their charge at any moment.

Of course, he would still send out a messenger, to try persuading the prince. “Go over and tell the Prince that I don’t have the intention of hurting him,” Duke Ryan said, “but I still have an obligation the new King’s order, they won’t be harmed if they put their weapons down without resistance. On his way back to the King’s City I will treat him according to the treatment of nobles.”

Getting his army into formation was a very slow process, first was the cavalry, they went one after the other onto their positions, while the mercenaries were slowly taking their position at the fore. But at this moment, Duke Ryan suddenly saw four short flashes of fire in the enemy’s camp – first came a flash of light, then there appeared some smoke. He frowned, thinking that there might be something wrong. He even thought about taking out his binocular but then suddenly a series of thunder like noises exploded near to his ear!

Chapter 115 War for Border Town (Part 1)

When the enemy finally entered his field of vision, Van’er immediately noticed the heavily armed knights who were riding on huge horses, wearing bright and dazzling armor and slowly riding towards Border Town. It was usually the case that the rank of a knight was much higher than that of the common town’s people, and when he was suddenly confronted with about one hundred of these, he had to take some deep breaths to calm himself.

Van’er felt how his palms became sweaty, it was just like the time on the wall when he had to face the demonic beasts for the first time, but this time he faced creatures that were the same species as himself – the joined forces of Longsong Stronghold’s Nobility.

No, That’s wrong. He angrily spat out and threw his former thought aside, You think they’re the same as yourself? When have the nobles ever treated you as if you were of the same species as themselves? He asked himself mockingly.

The only goal of their trip is to snatch Border Town away from us and bring the Northern Slope Mine back under their control. More importantly, they even intend to drive His Royal Highness out of the western territory, as a member of the First Army I cannot simply allow this.

During yesterday’s pre-war lecture, His Royal Highness had made it clear that Timothy Wimbledon, the brother of His Royal Highness, had conspired against the throne and in the end even killed his own father King Wimbledon III for it. Originally these happenings between the royalty and aristocracy, hadn’t mattered that much to him – Is there any difference for me if the King was to change?

But now that Duke Ryan wanted to grasp this opportunity to take His Highness’s territory away, this he now found totally unacceptable!

When he thought about it, just how had his life been before His Highness had come to Border Town? If he was remembering correctly, the former Lord was actually a Count who had rarely shown himself. The acquisition of the furs was done by his personal guards who often used their weapons to lower the prices. And when the Months of the Demons arrived they would all flee to live in the slums of Longsong Stronghold and end up suffering during that whole time.

But today, under His Highness’ control the life in Border Town had become better and better, with changes being visible for everyone to see. Van’er thought, for example, when the miners had achieved a higher output they would also receive a higher payment. And even after His Highness put this black

machine into the North Slope Mine, the additional output had still counted for the miner's work. Whether it was when building the walls, or mining gravel everyone was paid on time. During this whole winter, there wasn't even one person who had frozen or starved to death.

Of course, the biggest change was the implementation of the militia – no, now it's called the First Army.

Having them guarding the town, we commoners don't need to huddle together in these wooden sheds begging for others to give us food. If the Prince isn't here any longer, would the Duke still allow for the First Army to keep on existing?

Van'er took another deep breath and wiped his palms against his clothes. No, he certainly would not allow it. The nobles of the stronghold don't care for the lives of us commoners, it is exactly as His Highness had said before: Only an army composed of the commoners will be willing to fight for the lives of other commoners.

Van'er raised his head so that he could keep the left part of the sky inside his field of view, there in the distant he could see a small black dot circling around, when one was only taking a casual look, anyone would think it was actually just a large bird. But in truth, it was the artillery intelligence commander – Lightning, who was using the trees growing on both sides of the road as cover while constantly observing the enemy's movements. When she flew back, Van'er also noticed that as long as she did not take the initiative to fly over open areas, the people on the ground would only be able to see tree branches if they were to look upwards, so it was nearly impossible for them to detect that there was a witch that was flying over their heads.

After a quarter of an hour, Lightning flew closer to their frontal position while flashing a green ribbon.

This was signaling to them that the enemy had entered a range of 1000 meters and that they should prepare to start shooting. Van'er didn't know how far the distance His Highness called "1000 meters" was, but when he saw the green signal, he just subconsciously followed the rules of the comprehensive exercise, giving the command to load the cannon and adjust the angle.

It didn't take the four groups of gunners a long time to complete their tasks, the canon angle was adjusted to the third setting while the gunpowder and the solid artillery shell were also inserted into the cannon's barrel.

He had thought that after he had stood on the wall and fought against the demonic beasts he could regard himself as an experienced fighter and also thought that he was talented, but today he came to discover that there was still a huge distance between himself, Iron Axe and Brian.

During the afternoon assembly, he'd had great problems trying to calm his heart. But these two men, when they led their groups to the appointed area, they not only looked as if there was nothing special about today, no, he could even hear from Brian's voice just how eager he was to fight. But he himself until now was unable to calm himself. With a bit of shame in his heart, he had to acknowledge that even the Rodney brothers seemed to be acting better than his own performance. This thought made Van'er feel very depressed.

He nervously licked his lips and checked Lightning's position once again.

But at this moment, the enemy's movement slowed down by a lot.

“What are they doing?” Rodney asked.

“That’s currently unknown,” Cat’s Paw answered. “For me, it seems like they are adjusting their formation? But they still look a little chaotic.”

“They are waiting for the other troops,” explained Jop with a slightly trembling voice, “It’s impossible for knights to fight alone, they always need a large number of people to follow them.”

“How do you know all this?” Nelson wasn’t convinced.

“I have already seen it! A knight will always take along at least two squires, while there will be another dozen serfs who have to handle their foraging,” he began to count it off on his fingers, “First, there is the Duke, as the Lord of Longsong Stronghold, he has at least a hundred knights, right? Then there is the light cavalry, who are at least three hundred people. Plus, the counts and viscounts who have their own territory... Many more! And don’t forget the mercenaries, they have all already tasted blood themselves, so they won’t even blink as they kill you! They will do anything for money! While we only have three hundred people.”

Actually, less than three hundred people, Van’er corrected in his mind. We only have two hundred and seventy soldiers armed with weapons, according to His Highness’s explanation it is because we lack in the area of production capacity. Now those who did not have guns of their own were sent to the artillery teams, they were to handle preparing the ammunition for the four cannons. When Van’er discovered that they were a lot slower than his own group, he also felt a lot better.

“The mercenary, they’re coming!” Jop cried out.

Van’er looked towards the enemy, there he could see a group with various kinds of armors taking the front in their battle formation, they did not ride, nor did they march in line, they just walked in small groups of twos or threes to the middle of the field. While the knights scattered to both sides, it seemed as they were giving up their position for the mercenaries. After a quarter of an hour, the Duke’s allied forces were finally ready.

At this time, a knight came riding out of the enemy’s camp into the direction of Border Town. Van’er became so nervous he almost gave the command to fire.

What should I do? Van’er looked once more at the sky, but he was still unable to discover Lightning, while the enemy was constantly coming closer while waving a white flag.

“He is the messenger sent by the Duke,” Jop muttered, “He should be coming over, trying to persuade the Prince.”

“It’s none of our business,” Rodney squatted down behind the canon and aligned his line of sight with the centerline of the barrel. “Leader, we need to adjust the canon, most of the knights have left the impact zone.”

During their previous practice with live ammunition, they were repeatedly taught, that the canon attack range was represented by the centerline of the barrel, so if they wanted to hit their target, they had to make sure that the target overlapped with the barrel’s centerline. So the five men began at the same time to turn around the canon until the canon once more pointed in the direction of the knights.

The messenger who had come in alone was then escorted by Carter to the back of their defense line, but Van'er knew that this move of the Duke was just a waste of time, the Prince would never agree to surrender.

Suddenly, Lighting abruptly flew in the direction of the defensive line, wildly waving a yellow flag in her hands.

The yellow signal meant that the opponent had entered the 800m range, at this distance, they had the chance to hit the target with a solid projectile. It also meant, that as long as the gunner captain didn't prohibit firing, the gunner teams could fire at will.

His other team members also noticed the signal, so they all looked into his direction, and after he nodded once he took a deep breath then shouted, "Fire!"

Chapter 116 War for Border Town (Part 2)

It was not the case that the knights could charge from the beginning at their fastest speed, after all, horses were limited by their physical endurance, so they were only able to maintain their fastest speed for a short period of time. At a thousand or eight hundred meters they would begin to gradually increase their speed until they reached five hundred meters away from their mark, only when they came within two hundred meters would they would start galloping.

While in theory, the twelve-pound Napoleonic cannon had an effective range of up to 1,300 meters if it used solid shells. Maybe because it only had half the diameter than normal, Roland's cannon only had an effective range of a thousand meters. As a result, the furthest distance his artillery group were allowed to open fire at was at eight hundred meters. At this distance, reaching the target area could be guaranteed, while at the same time the cannon balls would also bounce forward after hitting the ground. Resulting in line damage, with a high chance to kill multiple targets with a single shot.

In order to let the mercenary attack first, Duke Ryan had ordered his knight to step to the side – letting them wait in an absolutely safe area, meaning an area where bows and crossbows were unable to reach the knights, but this distance was still close enough for an effective knight charge to be launched. Knowing of the low efficiency of the mercenaries, the knights were always ready to pull the horse's reins, waiting for any resistance in one place. However, like this, they became an almost fixed target, for the artillery group.

But the Duke certainly did not realise that by the time he ordered his troops to step aside, that they had already stepped onto Roland's prepared battlefield. While the middle of the road might have been flat and spacious, both of its sides were crammed with leaves and with other vegetation. What seemed from afar to be just ordinary grass, was in truth actually thick vines covered by a knee-deep layer of weeds, it was like a road plastered with natural tripwire. If the cavalry wanted to start a flanking assault on the defensive line, they would only be able to move forwards with a very slow degree of progress. The thousand-meter distance was clearly marked on the ground, it may not have been visible for the people on the ground, but to Lighting flying in the sky, it was clearly visible. The battlefield was precisely divided into several segments, and every differently colored mark represented a different distance – the enemy was now just a ruler moving about on a chess board, which permitted the artillery group to shoot without having to calculate the barrel's angle. They only had to go through the steps as they had implemented them during their training.

The cannon of Van'er's group was the first to roar with fury.

A large amount of gas generated by the detonation of the gunpowder pushed the projectile outwards, and at the moment it flew out of the muzzle, it had already reached a speed of more than four hundred meters per second, so after two seconds, the shell had already almost reached the knights. Directly flowing through the group of knights and boring itself into the ground beside the road. Splashing soil and gravel into every direction and creating panic amongst the horses, one knight reacted a little too late and fell from his horse.

The following next two shells also missed their target and only created a lot of dust.

But the last group was able to get a lucky hit – originally there was no one in its flight path, but a knight who was unable to gain back the control over his frightened horse happened to pass right into it. In front of this huge amount of kinetic energy, his armor existed in name only. The cannonball simultaneously pierced through the thin iron and human flesh, and after it bounced off the ground, it then hit another knight, cutting off his calf. Furthermore, it ended up penetrating through the horse's chest under the knight's hip and spreading its internal organs all over the ground.

If the Knight were in their normal phase of attack, the artillery group would need to adjust the angle of their shot, but the sudden blow had apparently shocked the whole coalition of the Duke's forces. They didn't know what had hit them, how could they – the shell was too fast to be seen with the human eye. So the knights didn't receive the command to attack, instead, they were still pacing back and forth in their original location, trying to appease their skittish mounts.

It was once more Van'er's group who was the fastest to complete the reloading process, starting the second round of shelling.

The new weapon exposed just how fragile and soft the human body really was, once hit by a passing iron ball, could cause injuries which were unable to get ever be healed. But when the rider was directly hit by it, in addition to him losing several limbs, it would also splash blood everywhere. Only when they were hit by the second round of artillery shells, were they finally able to make out a vaguely black shape, while it was taking the lives of their companions.

After the second round of shooting, the Duke was finally able to connect the fire and roaring sound in the enemy's camp with the indescribable strike against his unit. It seemed the other side had gotten its hands on an incredible weapon, with a range much farther than a crossbow, almost like one of the strongholds' trebuchets. Realizing this, the Duke immediately gave the order to sound the horns – thinking that as long as they were able to come into close range, these long-distance weapons would also become useless.

The knights, however, when hearing the horns, showed several kinds of reactions. Some of them really rushed into the direction of Border Town, but others were still fighting with their own horses, while a small part of the knights was retreating toward the rear of the battlefield. Together with the mercenaries swarming around, the whole scene quickly turned into chaos.

When the attacking knights returned to the road, the artillery group suddenly became frantic, in addition, to clean up the barrel and reloading its ammunition, they also had to adjust their cannon. At this time, Lighting flew once more in the direction of the defense line, holding a red ribbon in her hands.

The red signal meant that the enemy was approaching the five hundred meters line, at this distance, the artillery hit rate would reach more than eighty percent.

Van'er shouted: "The shooting angle is correct! Quick, light the fuse, light the fuse!"

When the deafening roar could be heard once more, he didn't even look to see if they had hit anything, instead, he immediately turned toward the ammunition distribution staff and shouted: "canister, send in the canister shelling!"

During the artillery training, His Royal Highness has repeatedly stressed the point, that when the red signal was hissed, even if the barrel was already loaded with solid shells, they should immediately shot and then reload with canister shells. In case that the barrel wasn't loaded, they should immediately fill it with canister shells, and then wait until the point where the enemy reached the three hundred mark.

The canister shells looked like a tin filled with thumb-sized balls and sawdust. To produce the canister shells, they first bore a hole into the tin, then they filled it with balls and sawdust, and then they stopped it with a thin piece of wood.

When Lighting finally showed the purple ribbon, the four artillery groups fired almost simultaneously.

This was also Van'er's first time using the canister shells – according to His Royal Highness, the wounds induced by canister shells were very difficult to heal, so they only practiced the loading procedure. So today it was also his first time seeing the amazing killing potential of these special shells.

Because of the huge pressure difference, the tin fractured into many pieces after it left the muzzle. The small iron balls inside of the tin fell like raindrops on the enemy, placing the knights three hundred meters away into the middle of a deadly metal storm, and turning the people and the horses into a bloody mist resembling the falling wheat as it was cut down. Some iron pellets after penetrating the knight's bodies still had so much kinetic energy left that even the knights standing behind them weren't able to escape either.

The knights lucky enough to survive the storm finally entered into sprinting distance, while only having one thought in their mind – that was to break through this thin line of defense, and massacre those cowards who were only able to hide behind those cruel weapons. Only a short amount of time was needed to cover the last hundred and fifty meters, the knights were already lowering their bodies, pushing the horses to reach their highest speed.

However, this seemingly short distance of one hundred and fifty meters, turned into an uncrossable distance, the last round of firing of canister shells completely destroyed the last bit of their fighting will. In the range of one hundred meters, the solid iron balls were able to penetrate through as many as two to three people, turning the area in front of the cannon fire into a field of death. From the twenty knights riding at the forefront, almost none had been able to survive, the only difference between them lied in the amount of iron balls by which they had been hit.

The knight's assault had completely collapsed.

Because the fear created by the collapse of the knight's assault was so huge, the knights following attempted to turn around their horses wanting to flee the battlefield.

When they saw the knights scatter the mercenaries weren't willing to take another step forward. They had always only been working for the money, but they immediately turned around when they saw how much they would have to pay. Now, at the moment of their retreat, they ran even much faster than they had during their attack.

When the wave of their crushing defeat swept over the dukedom's allied forces, the situation soon became impossible to control. The crowd had only one thought left, they had to flee. There were people who fell and were trampled to death, no one took the time to care for others, they only hated themselves for not being able to grow another pair of legs.

At this moment the melody of the Guerrilla warfare song resounded through the battlefield, and the lines of the infantry began to march in step, sweeping across the battlefield.

Chapter 117 Chase (Part 1)

It was Carter's first time that he seeing a battle.

A lineup of more than three hundred knights was unable to even scratch the edge of their defensive line, instead, they had been totally crushed.

Until the end, they had failed to even enter into a range of fifty meters – it was the hunter team's fire line, only when the enemy had come closer than fifty meters were they allowed to open fire.

The four cannons had brought the enemy's assault to a complete halt at merely one hundred meters. Along the range of one hundred and fifty to one hundred meters, laid an orderly row of twenty bodies, it was as if they had run into a wall. And these men, like himself, belonged to the strongest category of fighters, Knights; otherwise, they would have never been able to control their horses under the sound of gunfire.

In the end, Carter was glad that he wasn't one of them. He felt a faint hunch that the battles in the future would become very different, and it was only a matter of time, until Roland Wimbledon the master of such a powerful force would aspire to the throne and aim for kingship.

When the members of the First Army saw the bloody battlefield, they became dizzy and began vomiting or had other adverse reactions. But this wasn't the reaction they would show if they had personally killed the enemy during close combat, the sense of deterrence brought on by killing someone over a long distance was much less when compared with killing someone with a knife, their reaction couldn't be counted as critical. Carter picked a set of people from his own team to pick up the severed limbs and put them back with the dead bodies, while still searching for the living people.

The sun gradually fell behind the mountains, and when Carter looked at the blood-red sky, and the distant woods with its crying crows, he was suddenly hit by a dull and dreary feeling.

The era of the Knights was over.

...

Even until now Duke Ryan was still unable to recover.

He couldn't understand how it was possible that he had lost, even more to a line of defense as thin as a slice of onion skin, normally it would have been enough to poke it with just a finger to run through it,

but today, it was his knights who fled like they had come face to face with the Devil. In truth, he couldn't even blame them because the assault was under the command of his elite knights.

His personal guards had even to chop down several people so that the blindly fleeing mercenary didn't come close to the Duke's position. But he was unable to do anything else, no matter how much he shouted, he couldn't unite the defeated men once more. In desperation, even Duke Ryan had to retreat with the flow of fleeing people, and their mindless escape only stopped after they had crossed nearly ten miles.

When the night came, the Duke chose a place close to the river bank to camp. Even after setting up torches to lead the separated knights and mercenaries back to their camp, most of their people were still missing. To make matters worse, the freedman had without any hesitation left in the carts with the food, so tonight they had to slaughter a few horses to serve as rations.

The five nobles huddled together, within the camp's largest tent, looking with a fearful expression towards Duke Ryan, however even he wasn't in any better constitution.

"Who can tell me, what kind of new weapon it was that they had used? They are far better than crossbows, and they don't seem to be throwing the stones like with a catapult," the Duke began to speak, while glancing at Rene, "You also stood at the forefront, tell me what did you see?"

"My Lord, I... couldn't see anything clearly," Rene answered, "I only know that every time this roar could be heard, our men would fall in batches, especially when it sounded for the last time, it seemed like the rushing knights had been hit by an invisible wall. Furthermore I also saw how their heads and arms were split from their bodies, it was just as if ..." he thought for a moment, "we were like an egg dropped from the height of a city wall."

"Was it the power of a witch?" Count Earl whispered frightened.

"No," answered the Duke, "My knights were wearing a God's Stone of Retaliation, so the power of a witch couldn't have hurt them! We weren't attacked by witches, in front of those stones, they are nothing more than an ordinary woman."

"Oh, that's right, sir," Rene suddenly spoke up, as though he was remembering something. "Before I heard the loud bang, I saw how carts which stood in a row, they had a huge iron pipe, it emitted a red light and a cloud of smoke."

"An Iron pipe? What red light and what smoke? Doesn't that sound like the ceremony barrel?" Count Elk asked with much doubt in his voice.

The Duke, of course, knew what a ceremony barrel was. Previously they were only used by the King at the beginning of major celebrations, but today nearly every Lord would use them. Even he had two ceremony barrels made out of bronze in his castle, they were used to light up snow powder. But that sound when compared with today's breathtaking thunderous noise, couldn't be further apart.

"The ceremony barrels would never be able to kill knights," Count Honeysuckle said. "No matter what the Prince used, it was powerful enough to defeat us all. So what should we do next?"

Hearing this, Duke Ryan glared in his direction, the sound of the word "defeat" was especially ear-piercing. "We haven't lost," he insisted. "A battle alone doesn't decide a war. We only have to reach the

stronghold, there I can put another force together, while at the same time I will also cut off trade from the Shishui River.”

Without any food supplement, Border Town wouldn't be able to survive for another month, and as soon as he dared to bring those villagers out, my knight will rush at them from all sides and in the end, defeat him.

Eventually, the victory would become his, just as had he wanted, but the loss he had already suffered couldn't be made up with just such a small town... his dream of taking over the North turned out to be only a bubble. Damn! If I will ever catch that Roland Wimbledon, I will have to make sure to cut him into a million pieces!

“But my Lord, the fleets crossing over the Shishui River aren't only coming from us, there are also ships from Willow Town, Fallen Dragon Ridge and Redwater City. If we cut everything off, wouldn't...” Count Honeysuckle clearly wasn't convinced.

“I will buy everything; it doesn't matter to whom they sell. As long as they receive their money they will be satisfied,” said the Duke with a frosty voice, “Now everyone should head back to their own tent's and go to sleep, tomorrow morning we have to rise early and ride further down the road with the knights. Everyone who doesn't have a horse will stay behind to lead the mercenaries.

No one is able to march during the night, even if the 4th Prince intends to pursue us. He can only start at dawn, the first enemy he will encounter will be the mercenaries, he thought, even if that group of trash collapsed on the first encounter, I still have many people left who will fight for me.

During the whole of next day, the Duke didn't receive any news of the 4th Prince having caught up. In order to confirm the news, he sent his trusted aides to expand the search range, but they all returned with the same news. This finally let him feel a little relieved, most probably this new weapon has the same problem as our trebuchets, they are too heavy to be transported and can only be used in defense. Relying on only his bunch of miners with their sticks, he doesn't dare to act so reckless.

By three o'clock in the afternoon, the Duke had ordered his knights to stop for the day, waiting for the people behind him to catch up. Close to dusk, the mercenaries and freedmen were finally able to catch up with his remaining 66 knights. And they then all became busy setting up a circle of hastily erected tents.

He only had to survive for the night, tomorrow he could rush and reach Longsong Stronghold – then he would finally be safely behind his 30 feet high limestone walls, his hundreds of guards and the naturally formed moat. Even if the other side could use their new long-range weapon, he could just use the trebuchets placed behind the wall to counterattack. Against all this, the Prince couldn't win.

But all day long the Duke had a constant feeling of discomfort, he constantly had the feeling that someone was staring at him from afar.

Most probably it is just an illusion, he thought, I'm might just be a little too nervous.

The next morning, the Duke was awoken by the sound of gunfire.

When he rushed out of his tent, he could see people everywhere who had covered their heads and were trying to sneak away like rats. Yet, from time to time he could still see a fountain of blood or sail splash

into the sky. When he looked to the West, he could see the enemy lined up in their strange uniform, quietly standing outside his camp. At the moment there was only one thought in the Duke's head – how had they caught up to us?

How come they weren't detected by the knights that I've sent out yesterday?!

"My Lord, you have to flee!" shouted a personal guard who was leading another horse at his side.

This awoke Osman Ryan from his blanked state of mind, he immediately jumped on the back of the horse and followed his guard to the East. However, not long after they had left the camp, they saw another line-up of this strange force.

Wearing the same kind of leather uniform, holding the same strange short stick in their hands and also standing in two neat rows, even their facial expression was nearly the same.

Then the Duke once more heard that cheerful tune with its extremely rich rhythm, at the same time the Prince troops began to march at a neat pace, directly towards his direction.

Chapter 118 Chase (Part 2)

Even though Roland had let the First Army train for two times a day, he had never let them march during the night.

It was dangerous for an army to march during the night, they wouldn't be able to see the road, there was also the change that they could get attacked by wild animals or snakes, it was easy to get lost and if they used a torch they would become a natural target. So he had to wait until dawn the next day before he could let his army march, trailing the Duke's forces.

In order to ensure the smooth succession of operations, the Prince decided to follow the First Army on the battlefield. Of course, compared with riding on a bumpy road and getting a sore bottom, he chose to rather take a ride on Little Town.

After half a month of training Hummingbird was now able to lighten and transport a twelve-pound cannon for a fixed distance. Roland also took into account that the heavier the object the longer was the enchanting longer the process would take so he arranged for her to begin with the transformation at dawn. He also had to take into consideration that the first cannon had to be enchanted for the longest, and the remaining cannons would be enchanted in a descending duration order to ensure that the four cannons would lose their enchanting as close together as possible.

Thanks to Hummingbird's ability, Little Town was now capable of carrying four cannons in one go as well as the corresponding members of their artillery teams. The huge cement boat was now full of people – in addition to the artillery team and Roland, there were also Anna, Nightingale, Nana, Leaves, Echo, Hummingbird and Lord Pine on the boat. Lastly, there was also Wendy, she was responsible for providing the power and Brian acted as steering man.

It could be said, that with the exception of Scroll, Soraya, Lily and Mystery Moon, who were all witches who couldn't fight, almost the whole nest had come out. Originally it hadn't been necessary for Anna to join them on the battlefield, but under the firm will shown in her eyes, Roland couldn't find it in his heart to let her stay behind in Border Town.

Six troops of the First Army's gunner team were under the leadership of Carter and Iron Axe following the marks created by Lightning, who alone was responsible for keeping track of the enemy. This group of people was quietly marching behind the enemy, always keeping exactly outside of the scope of the enemy's scouts. At the moment Lightning became aware of the enemy's scouting activities, the army would immediately stop its forward motion. Along their road they were also able to capture a lot of scattered mercenaries and freedmen, but at the moment they weren't able to deal with the surrender of the enemy. So they had no other choice than to disarm them, so now there were other guards who didn't belong to the gunner team following together with them on the road.

This was Roland's first time to guiding his "Army" on mission of conquest, he was standing on Little Town's bow and feeling the morning breeze, while at the same moment also feeling enormously proud of his own success.

"What are you laughing at?" Anna suddenly appeared by his side, and was directly looking into his eyes she asked.

"Uhh..." Roland quickly put his smile away, "Nothing."

"Really?" She took out a handkerchief and gave it to him, "You have saliva on your face."

"..." Roland had the sudden impulse to jump into the water, "Thank you."

When Lightning reported about the enemy's camp, the sun was already set. According to the information she gathered during her investigations, the enemy apparently showed the signs of walking away from a heavy defeat which resulted in the drop of their moral to the freezing point. When they set up their camp at dusk and sent their knights to scout, they couldn't wait to end their investigation and return to the camp, out of fear of not finding their way back in the dark.

Roland's troops were stationed on the shore, two kilometers away from the Duke's army.

All along the road, they didn't meet with any enemies, so the plan to wipe out the enemy was already half way successful.

Now he only had to wait until the first light of the next day, and then while the enemy was still in the preparation phase their siege could begin.

This was Roland's first time he was spending the night in the wild, and he was more inclined to sleep on Little Town than to meet all the reptiles which would run through the camp. The cannons parked on the ship and the inventory in the shed had already been emptied out and brought into the camp so that Little Town could become the temporary residence of the Prince. In addition to Roland, the other witches also stayed on board for overnight. The floor was covered by mattresses, and everyone was lying down shoulder to shoulder.

Roland wanted to show modesty, but in the end, the witches were much less concerned about this matter than he was. With the exception of Anna, they had all faced a lot of hardship during their life, fleeing from place to place, so sleeping in the wild had become common for them. Soon, everyone was able to fall asleep, only Roland and Anna had difficulties sleeping. The former was so used to a soft bed, that he had some difficulties adapting to the deck's hard surface, while the latter didn't know what she should think, she ended up just turning to the side and watching Roland. However, when the Prince

turned his head, Anna would always quickly close her eyes, pretending to be asleep, but in the moonlight, Roland could still see her eyelashes slightly jitter. If he wasn't afraid that the others would wake up from the noise, Roland would really want to pinch the tip of Anna's small nose, forcing her to open her eyes and then afterward hold her in his arms.

In this manner, they both ended up being unable to sleep for very long.

When the sky was still not light up, Roland began his plan to encircle the enemy's camp: He divided his army of two hundred and seventy into two teams, each group of them would be supported by two cannons. One of them was sent to the rear of the Duke's camp, around one kilometer down the Duke's path. Lightning was still responsible for monitoring the Duke's movements, but in addition to this, when the cannons were set in position, the little girl also had the instruction to inform Roland. The moment he received the signal, he would send Carter out together with the rest of the First Army to start storming the Duke's camp.

To prevent the cement ship from drifting away from the correct route, Nightingale would step into her fog. After all, her black and white vision could also be used as night vision, so with her instructions, Brian was able to maneuver the ship as if it was still the middle of the day.

This process had been repeatedly practiced, and now everyone was able to do their part even with closed eyes. Wendy was once more in charge of the powering the sails, under her effort it was almost as if Little Town had become highly ambitious. In merely one hour all the troops had been placed into their positions and Iron Axe had taken over command of the interception team. Seeing this, Lightning flew above Carter's team, and showed them an orange flag.

At this point, the first lights of a new day could be seen.

And now the plan of encirclement and annihilation had finally stepped into its final part.

Since Carter's team was only responsible for protecting the two cannons they didn't need to move forward, so Echo was assigned to work under Iron Axe's command. When Carter's team reached the camp they quickly moved the cannons into position and directed them towards the enemy's camp – at this moment most of the enemies were still sleeping.

With the typical roaring sound of the cannons, solid's shells crashed into the enemy's camp. This woke the knights and mercenaries who came rushing out from their tents, but they were already awaited by Carter's team, who were all quietly standing there in formation. With their former day's experience of defeat, no one even dared to challenge this seemingly thin line of defense, they only flocked together and tried to flee towards the East.

Directly into the arms of the already waiting Iron Axe.

When the enemy appeared his field of vision, the final stage for the moment of the Duke's annihilation had been set in motion.

Echo began to play her music, and under the sound of her drums, the two neatly arranged lines started their move forward to the enemy – in order to put some pressure on the Duke, Iron Axe had to take the initiative to attack and intercept the Duke. If they just stuck to their former place, the enemy would likely spur their horses and bypass them then escape into the woods.

Duke Ryan had fallen into despair, he was unable to understand how the others were able to catch up and even overtake them.

Should I just confess my failure and surrender? He wondered what Roland Wimbledon would do to a Duke who dared to draw his sword and attack a member of the royal family. Would he imprison him, would he send him into exile, but more than likely he would just send him directly to the guillotine. No matter what, the future of Longsong Stronghold would certainly have nothing to do with him.

Seeing how the enemy had come closer step by step, as well as how from time to time the roaring sound and red fire of this fearful weapon would once more spread terror within his men, he knew if he didn't flee at this moment, he would never again have the possibility to escape. He only had thirty people left, so this really was his last chance.

"They cannot stop us," the Duke shouted, "as long as we cross the road, they won't be able to catch up with us, after all, they only have two legs, furthermore we are only half a day away from the stronghold!"

The Duke then began to push his mount forward, unfortunately, not everyone had such a desperate spirit as himself. In the end, except for his personal guards, only some other people followed his assault.

The Music stopped.

The other side stopped at exactly the same time, as well as standing in a neat line like a wall.

He then saw how the other side began to rise their strange sticks.

When there was only around one hundred steps remained between the Duke and the human wall, he could hear one banging sound following after another. He then felt a piercing pain in his chest and abdomen, giving him the feeling like he was hit by a warhammer. Then came paralysis and the feeling of helplessness. His body began to fall backward, finally falling down from his horse.

While falling, the Duke opened his mouth trying to say something, but no clear sound came out, he was only able to cough twice, then a strong sweetly smell entered his nose, and his throat was blocked by a sticky liquid. Then darkness began to surround him.

Chapter 119 Ransom (Part 1)

Petrov Hull sat in front of his desk Subconsciously, he was playing with a piece of parchment he held in his hands – it was the weekly delivery of the theater's afternoon program. If this were peaceful times, he would have chosen a good drama and let his housekeeper pay the deposit, afterwards sending an invitation to Aurelia.

But he was unable to read even one word that was on the parchment.

Today was the seventh day of the expedition, if everything had gone smoothly, his father should have already come back yesterday alongside the retinue of the Duke. Perhaps they were delayed during their journey, perhaps the horses had gotten tired and they'd had to rest, or they might have taken an extra rest day in Border Town, right? He tried to comfort himself, but the feeling of uneasiness in his heart was slowly growing.

The 4th Prince Roland Wimbledon had left a deep impression on him, Petrov couldn't understand why such an outstanding prince, would have received such a terrible assessment by the King. Bad character, dandyism, incompetence, ignorance and without having any learning or skills... any of these evaluations didn't fit the Prince that he knew.

Because of this, his anxiety only became stronger.

He feared that the Duke would lose against the Prince.

"Master Petrov," his housekeeper shouted, "there is a letter that has just arrived from the stronghold."

A letter from the stronghold?

"Bring it to me," Petrov ordered.

Even before he had opened the cover, he was already stunned by the identity of the sender.

This letter had been written by the 4th Prince!

"Duke Osman Ryan used military forces to attack a territory under the King's rule, trying in vain to start a rebellion. Furthermore, the Duke was already executed on the battlefield, and now the Longsong Stronghold is once more under the rule of the Kingdom."

Had the duke lost? His heart sank when he began to read further.

"With exception of the die-hard members of the Duke's guard, the most of the others had pleaded guilty. Normally treason against the royal family would be punished by death, but because of the His Highness' kindness, only the leader was put to death for his evil crimes, however the others still cannot be pardoned. So the rest of the rebels will be handled in accordance with the war customs and will be held until their freedom can be bought. The Longsong Stronghold's castle will be used as exchange point, the following people on this list's freedom can be bought."

The document was extremely awkward phrased. It was not written with the diplomatic turn of phrase, but it was still able to express its meaning clearly – the Duke's rebellion had failed, and if they wanted to free the prisoner they would have to offer money in exchange.

When Petrov's read the names on the following list, he saw that his father's name was impressively written in the first line.

"Hedee!" He shouted the housekeeper's name, "Prepare the carriage, I'm going to strongholds' castle!"

...

The territory of Count Honeysuckle laid to the east of the stronghold, so when Paul arrived at the castle area, it was already half an hour later. The Lord's castle was full of the members of the "militia" who he had never seen before – they weren't wearing any shiny armor, neither were they wearing any cloaks or bands, instead they held a strange baton in their hands, with a kind of spear on the top. They just stood there in two neat and tidy rows, with their heads high and their chests out, simply expressing their power in their imposing manner.

After he identified himself, Petrov was allowed access to the gardens and he was then led by a guard towards the castle's Grand Hall.

This was a place he had already visited many times before, but when he entered it today, it was like he was entering a completely new territory. All the guards standing in the corridors were ones he had never seen before, no one smiled at him after he greeted them, they just stared back blankly. He was stopped by a knight before the entry door of the hall.

"State your name."

"Petrov Hull," Petrov answered slightly unhappily, he didn't like the other one's interrogatory tone, and so he emphasized, "For you, it's Lord Hull."

"I see," it seemed like his counterpart didn't accept that statement as being the truth, instead he just looked at the parchment in his hand, "Shalafi Hull, Count Honeysuckle is your..."

"Father."

"I'm Carter Lannis, The Chief Knight of the 4th Prince. Please come with me to the side room first, we need to check if you have any weapons hidden on your body."

After a thorough search, only Petrov's God's Stone of Retaliation was taken away by the guards.

"That's not a weapon," Petrov reminded.

"Of course not," the knight nodded. "We will return it to you after the meeting."

He opened his mouth, but in the end, he didn't say another word. They really will give me the stone back? His God's Stone of Retaliation was one of the strongest kinds, with a worth of at least fifty gold royals, so he couldn't believe that the other side wouldn't replace it with a defective stone. That isn't important, he thought, I will just take it as part of the ransom.

When he finally entered the hall, he saw the 4th Prince sitting on the throne writing something down. When the prince raised his head, he had a startled expression on his face, but then he laughed, "We met once again, Mr. Ambassador."

It was still the familiar face and tone, letting Petrov feel a little more relaxed, so he gave him a bowing salute, "I present my regards to you, Your Royal Highness."

"Sit down," said Roland, raising his hand to offer him his seat, "In all likelihood, you want to know what happened. I can tell you that your father was not hurt, he was the first to surrender."

"Thank you for your kindness, Your Highness," Petrov said quickly. "I do not know how much ransom Your Highness will want, as long as my father can be let out, I will immediately send all of our money to you."

"I do not need money," Roland shook his finger. "I want livestock and people."

It was normal to want livestock, and even fifty years ago, when the conflict between the Lords had ended, most of the time the loser had to pay for cattle and sheep, stories like this was something he had

often times read in books. But... People, what would that mean? "Your Royal Highness, cattle, sheep, horses, of those the Honeysuckle territory has a lot of, as for people..."

"Very simple, I'm in need of bricklayers, masons, carpenters, farmers, serfs and so on," the Prince handed him a scroll, "You can pay us according to the numerical conversion above, as long as you can reach the total number of three thousand it will be enough." He smiled, conveniently, it was this Count from whom he had caught the most knights, so he also had to pay the highest ransom."

Petrov spread the scroll at the table.

Written on it were the names of all kinds of domesticated animals and the profession of people, followed by a number, such as: cattle 3, sheep 2, mason 10 and the like, he immediately understood the meaning of all this.

A value of three thousand was the same as a herd of one thousand cattle or 300 masons were only enough to redeem his father. Of course, his territory wasn't able to provide so many cattle and masons. But with this paper, he had so many possible combinations of items, so many choices. As a noble who had to work daily with trade, Petrov instantly realized, how much finesse had been put into this list. Just a few days would be enough to calculate the optimal solution for the minimum costs for his territory which would still meet the requirements of three thousand points.

"Your Royal Highness, I can..."

"One day, you only have one day," Roland stretched out his index finger, "This only means that you have to make your choice in one day, after all, you can't gather so many people and animals in three to four days. But I can't always stay here, at most I will stay here for a week, then I will leave."

"One day it is..." Petrov suddenly got so shocked that he stared at Roland with large eyes, "Wait, you just said... that you want to leave?" What does this mean? If the Prince didn't lie in the letter, then the Duke has already died on the battlefield. With this Longsong Stronghold now belonged to His Highness. But now he was actually saying that he wanted to leave, why would he want to return to that small and broken down Border Town? No, that was beside the point! The key point was that if His Royal Highness went away, who would manage this magnificent city? His mind became a stormy sea, would one of the Duke's children inherit the throne? When he thought through everything that he knew, this didn't seem to be a possibility, after all, it would only be a question of time until they build up a new force to avenge their father? In addition to the Ryan family and the other five noble families, were there any others who could take over?

"Yes," Roland nodded. "I'll take the ransom and then I will return to Border Town."

Petrov's mind was suddenly filled with an outrageous idea, and the moment he had thought of it, he was unable to suppress it.

"Your Royal Highness," Petrov began, then he had to swallow and was only able to whisper. "Excuse me, is there also a numerical value which can 'redeem' Longsong Stronghold?"

Chapter 120 Ransom (Part 2)

Hearing this question, Roland looked at Petrov in interest, and then laughingly said: "You're the first person to ask me that." He then took his cup and drank from it, afterward stated explaining in a casual

tone, "There is no doubt that Longsong Stronghold belongs to me. It's still mine, even while I'm not here. But, I do need a man, or a family, to supervise the stronghold for me, so you should not be asking for a ransom, but rather for a 'Representative's Fee.'"

Representative... Petrov was no stranger to this word, as a sharp-eyed businessmen they would always fix their aim on increasing the output of their territory, but all the peddling nobles didn't really have the time or would express disdain for this sort of work, so in the end they could look for others to sell their goods to. In order to obtain that right, the merchants had to pay a sum in advance, as a deposit.

"How many gold royals would you want?" After asking, he took a deep breath to trying to calm himself down.

"This would be a long-time deal, so it wouldn't be over with just one payment," Roland paused, "Every Month you have to pay 30% of the stronghold's tax revenue, as well as a material worth of 1000 points, everything else would be for yourself."

That doesn't sound excessive, Petrov thought, as long as I could get complete control over Longsong Stronghold, so it seems that even the Prince can be fair. But first I have to confirm that the Prince isn't actually joking, that he really is willing to go through with this.

This would really be a golden opportunity; Petrov was completely hooked. I and the Prince aren't mortal enemies, since the Duke has completely failed, his children will also be deprived of their right of inheritance. Even the coalition of six noble families can't defeat the Prince, who can prevent him from taking over the Western territories? To join the stronger side is one of the basic principles of the continuation of one own nobility, if I can gain the approval of His Highness before the other four families even know of it, House Honeysuckle will become the strongest family within the Western territories.

"Your Royal Highness, why don't you want to stay in Longsong Stronghold? The castle has so much more to offer than Border Town does."

"What you really want to ask is, why I don't want to manage Longsong Stronghold myself, right?" Roland looked slightly embarrassed, "There are many reasons, for example, the power structure would get so entangling that I would have to spend too much time and effort trying to straighten out the relationships between each of them. Furthermore, don't forget the profit, as a local nobleman, I think you or the others would know better than I do how to really govern this territory, so this would become a win-win deal. Besides, there a plenty of other reasons, you may start thinking about it when you go back." The prince played with the silver cup in his hands, "Oh that's right, in the case that I would select you as a representative, I also won't have to fear that you will come to build a force trying revenge the Duke, right? "

"Of course not, Your Royal Highness!" although the last question came a little unexpected, Petrov was still able to answer it immediately.

Since the Duke is gone, the first thought in the other five nobles' minds will be how they can come to take over his territory, regarding matters such as revenge, who cares?

But Petrov also knew the reasons the Prince had given him weren't his actual reasons. 'The power structure would be too complex', 'it would be difficult to straighten them out'? In face of his overwhelming force, he could just use his power to destroy any idea of building a resistance. But even

so, in just one or two years, all the other nobles will already have forgotten the loser's name, the same will happen to Duke Ryan. But during this period of two years, it's absolutely impossible to transform Border Town into such a big city like Longsong Stronghold.

His Royal Highness must have a deeper intention.

"That's good to hear, then the city..."

"I am willing to act as your representative, Your Highness," blurted Petrov out, but not much later his expression became hesitant once again, "But, King – no, I mean your brother does not necessarily agree with this result. In case he assigns a new Duke to this territory, I won't be able to fight against the King.

"There is no need for you to fear a confrontation," Roland said and threw two letters in front of him.

"Look at this, these documents I'd found in the former Duke Ryan's study."

When Petrov quickly swept his gaze over the content of the letters, he couldn't help to gasp in shock.

The first letter looked like it was sent to the Duke by a spy, it seems like the new King and the Queen of Clearwater have fought a big battle in and close to Eagle City, and the result ended up as a major loss for the King? The second letter was even more horrifying, even so, it was only half written, it was still clear that Duke Ryan wanted to annex the North. The idea of becoming independent was clearly revealed. The letter wasn't finished and it was furthermore unknown to whom he wanted to send it.

But Petrov still understood immediately what His Highness wanted to tell him – there was no need for him to resist because the new King had already enough problems on his own. Otherwise, the Duke would have never dared to declare his independence. With his elite knights, he was already invincible in the Western territory, the only difference to the King's Knights laid in their numbers.

The secret letter could have been forged, but the second parchment was indeed written with Osman Ryan's handwriting, so unless the prince found a witch that could mimic the writing of others... For a short moment, he thought about this possibility only to immediately dismiss this speculation again.

The Prince had no reason to try to deceive him, implementing someone as his representative wasn't one-sided, if his representative was unable to rule over the stronghold, the Prince would also not profit from the deal. Moreover, every Duke assigned by King Timothy would become an enemy of the Prince.

If he wanted for House Honeysuckle to stay above the other four noble families, he had to rely on the support of the Prince, and on the other hand, in order to ensure that everything was handled in his interest, the Prince would also have to make sure that the Hull Family wouldn't get challenged.

When he had thought everything through, Petrov slowly stood up and bowed towards Roland, "The Hull family is willing to serve you."

"Well," the latter nodded, "but it's not up to you to decide, I'll have to ask you some questions first."

"Your Highness, please."

"What are you going to do with those who are against you?"

"How much do you estimate the monthly tax revenue will be? Also, how would you guarantee that you can pay a thousand points each month?"

“In the case that I request you to vigorously expand the trade and commerce sector, what would you do?”

“...”

Petrov had thought that His Highness would take this opportunity to gather as much information about the other Lords of the Western territory, he had never expected that the other side would ask such weird questions, in the end, this were almost all only questions about his policy, means, and his general business knowledge.

After he having all of these questions asked of him, Petrov put his mind into answering them one after another, along with his answers, His Highness' expression also became more and more satisfied. Finally, the Prince clapped his hands and said, “Well, that will be enough for today. When you have calculated how to redeem the value of 3000 points, you can come back and free your father, rest assured, during these days I will properly entertain him.

“Your Highness, that representative...”

“Will be announced another day.” Roland gave one of his knights the signal to see him out.

When Petrov left the hall, he had much to think about, he got his God's Stone of Retaliation back from Carter – it was still the same brightly shining blue stone, it seems the value of fifty gold royals wasn't much.

*

“What can you tell me?” Roland turned his view to Nightingale who stand beside him.

“Oh, basically everything he said was the truth,” she shrugged, “he was much more sincere than the several Ladies and Gentlemen you have previously talked to. That said, is it right to tell everyone the same story? Furthermore, showing them those letters, all of them are confidential.

“Not to everyone,” the Prince looked down at the list in his hands, “They were all from the five noble families, only those big nobles are suitable to manage Longsong Stronghold in my stead. If their power is not strong enough, even if I was to give them this position, they wouldn't be able to run this stronghold, in the end, there would only be a lot of infighting. As for the news that Timothy Wimbledon was defeated by Eagle City, that's not really a secret so to say. Sooner or later the news would spread through the whole Kingdom of Graycastle, for me it's even better that it spreads a little faster.

But the content of this news was just perfect for me, he thought, if the 2nd Prince wasn't defeated, I'm afraid that I would have to spend a lot of time to hold him back – and even if he tried to use force, the results may not have been so beautiful.

“So... will you choose him?”

“If nothing else happens,” Roland said with a smile, “he was the first one who took the initiative to ask by himself, the subjective initiative has always been the most important quality of the employees. Furthermore, I would never expected that there would be someone within the five families who is so well versed in the field of administration and trade. I have thought that they would only know how to ride and kill.”

When he found the name of Petrov Hull on the list, he gently scratched a circle around him.

