

## **Witch 1151**

### Chapter 1151: The Ambush Plan (II)

Roland knew what the Pearl of the Northern Region was referring to.

He had encountered many technical difficulties during the manufacturing process of the God's Stone bullet, such as the caliber and casing. He was trying to make the God's Stone as large as possible, but large stones normally generate a large anti-magic area. Also, a large caliber weapon would inevitably be heavier than normal ones and was a lot harder to hide, transport, and use.

In the past week and after numerous tests, Anna, Agatha, Lucia, and Andrea had finally nailed the parameters of this new weapon.

To make sure that an equal force was applied to the bullet, the God's Stone of Retaliation was shaped into a cylinder with a width of 30mm coated with copper and equipped with a sharp bullet head. The bullet itself had a caliber of 35mm.

This was the only way the God's Stone inside wouldn't be crushed by the gunpowder.

The "black hole" created by the God's Stone would be around one and a half meters, which meant that the barrel of the gun should be at least two meters. Due to its huge size, the parts of the gun had to be detachable to fit in the Magic Ark.

Furthermore, as the gun would have a high recoil due to its huge caliber, a special mount would be employed when using this weapon.

Because of the above-mentioned technical difficulties, the final version of the gun was abnormally colossal. It was simply impossible for a sniper to reach the bolt and load the cartridge by himself. The gun was nearly as heavy as two grown men put together and required more than one person in the Special Unit to operate. Although the gun was equipped with a muzzle brake and a buffer, the shooter could still sustain injuries from the recoil.

Fortunately, one good thing about this new weapon was that they only planned to use it once. With this in mind, these drawbacks became acceptable.

A large caliber also had a few advantages.

The biggest strength was a longer shooting range or, more precisely, a longer effective shooting range. A bullet would normally deviate from its original course beyond a certain point and become ineffective. However, Andrea could direct any bullets precisely to their designated landing spots. That was why this new weapon had, theoretically, a shooting range of over ten miles.

Now, Roland understood why Edith had chosen the jungle as the ambush location.

As this weapon required a much longer time to assemble and prepare before use than Ashes' gun, the operator had to take some cover to avoid the demons' scrutinies.

"Lastly is the retreat route," Edith said as she pointed to the map. "After the battle at Taquila officially begins, the First Army will dispatch a unit to support the retreating Special Unit at five to six miles from the left. As for when we should launch the ambush, it really depends on how the demons react. That's all for the plan."

The plan, which had taken Edith a week to finalize, was soon approved. After a brief discussion, Edith nailed the members of the two teams.

The ambush team was comprised of Sylvie, Andrea, Camilla, Margie, and Ashes. The former four would mainly be responsible for the ambush while Ashes would be the general protector. Lightning would be the scout. She could transport the God's Stone bullet that Maggie could not. The God's Stone would not affect her as long as it was hung by a rope.

Otherwise, the team had to walk to the ambush area.

There were ten people in total in the Seagull team. Maggie was the scout. Apart from Tilly and Wendy, the rest of the team were all God's Punishment Witches, of whom Zoe was the leader. Roland expected to have more people on the team. However, since the big caliber gun, grenades and armor had taken too much space, Roland had to cut down the number, not to mention that Hummingbird had already reduced the weight of these supplies.

No strategies or tactics were needed for such a direct confrontation. The only thing they needed to do was to take things slow and advance step by step.

The entire operation almost exhausted their resources, which forced Roland to rethink about their transportation facilities. Currently, the First Army solely relied on the inner river and the railway to transport supplies and troops. If they had an armored cavalry, they simply needed to send the armored cavalry to cut off the demons' supplies and envelop the enemy from the rear. In that case, the Magic Slayer would be very likely cornered due to the lack of Red Mist.

At the end of the meeting, Edith rose again and shot Roland a hesitant look.

"Anything else?" Roland asked, his brows raised.

"After the final battle begins, I hope you and the City Hall could move to the Third Border City for the time being." She paused for a second and then went on, "Also, the witches in the Castle District should do so as well."

"What do you mean?" Barov, who had been wanting to interrupt, finally seized a chance to cut in. "Are you ordering His Majesty?"

A little flustered, Anna asked, "Do you think the demons will attack Neverwinter?"

"Very unlikely, but there's a possibility," Edith replied placidly. "The Red Mist supply line doesn't necessarily equal to the exact number of the demons. For example, it could be either 3,000 demons or just 1,000 demons having an expedition. The demons have been to Neverwinter once anyway. However, this time, they aren't just going to warn us but are coming straight to the Castle District. What if they aren't Mad Demons but Senior Demons..."

There was a short strained silence.

"They won't mind abandoning Taquila?" Agatha questioned as she frowned.

"If a loss is inevitable, they won't care that much."

"I see," Roland said, smiling airily. "Let's do it. Barov, you take care of the City Hall. You know what to do, don't you?"

"Yes, of course, Your Majesty."

Indeed, even if Edith did not make the suggestion of relocating to the Third Border City, Roland was still planning to spectate the unfolding of the war in the hall. Although he could only see a small part of Taquila, this was a very rare opportunity to watch a "live" battle.

"So, everyone, I know what you're all thinking about," Roland announced as he straightened up. Beyond a doubt, everybody would devote themselves to the war that would determine their very survival on this planet after this meeting. He knew it was time for him to make a closing statement. "You're right. We're now very close to our victory. Although few people know about this war, and even fewer understand its implication, I'm sure this war will be remembered by the entire human race at one point in the future! We started preparing for it even before the Battle of Divine Will starts and have successfully kept the demons away from the Fertile Plains. Whether the demons are held up in the Sky-sea Realm or not, we'll win! I just feel sorry that I can't come with you to the front."

The hall was dead silent. Roland could see everyone was excited, their eyes glistening.

"Beat the demons and take Taquila. I'm looking forward to this battle!" Roland shouted while laying delicate stress on each syllable as he surveyed the room.

"As you command!" everyone chorused.

Chapter 1152: Persuasion

Two days later, the "Seagull" made a slow descent on the runway next to the forest terminus station.

Tilly saw Ashes waiting for her as she got off the plane.

As usual, Ashes immediately came here, although she knew this was going to be a short meeting.

Sometimes, Tilly even doubted whether Ashes had fulfilled her duties entrusted by Roland.

Yet Ashes always said to her, "Don't worry. Leaf is now in the form of the Heart of Forest, so nobody could possibly hurt her. She's always the first person to notify me of your arrival."

"How long are you going to stay here today?" Ashes asked her after the onlookers scuttled away.

"I'll be here until tomorrow morning," Tilly said heavily as she stared into Ashes' smiling eyes. She had promised Roland to persuade Ashes, but now her confidence somehow wavered. "Iron Axe and Edith came here as well. The 'Torch' project is close to its end, so there's a lot to clarify."

"So you're staying overnight..." Ashes mumbled thoughtfully. "Well in that case, let's go to the campsite first. Leaf grew some new fruit that taste really good. I'll set up a bonfire in the evening so that we could have some barbeque..."

Every time Tilly had leisure time, Ashes would instantly fill her schedule.

"Not this time. I have to do a lot of preparation work tonight and probably won't have time."

Deflated, Ashes sighed, "Alright... I see."

Tilly could not help giggling as she saw this invincible Extraordinary be subdued like a punctured balloon. She instantly felt more self-assured. "But I'm not the person who's going to be busy. It's going to be you actually. We'll work together in the next few days, so you have to get prepared."

"Me?"

"Yes, the Special Unit needs you to intercept the demons, so you'll have to pack tonight and go to the front with me tomorrow morning. Of course, we're going to take the 'Seagull'," Tilly said smilingly. "As for Leaf, I'll ask Roland to appoint another person to take care of her."

"..." It took Ashes a while to put herself together. She complained, "You could have told me at the beginning..."

While ignoring Ashes' protest, Tilly averted her eyes and said, "We don't have time for barbeque today, but we could still have some fruit. Do you care to take me there?"

Ashes immediately extended her hand and said, "Sure."

...

After they returned to their abode at the encampment after dinner, Tilly told Ashes the operation plan drafted by the General Staff.

Ashes seemed to have already predicted that she'll be in the sniper team. However, when Tilly mentioned about the operator of the "Seagull", her face clouded over.

"Don't tell me that you're going to operate the 'Seagull'."

After a moment of silence, Tilly looked up into her eyes and replied, "I'm the best person for this task."

"But Roland promised me that he would take care of you. He would never let you participate in the war!" Ashes flared up. "I need to talk to him —"

"He didn't agree with this arrangement."

"What?"

"Roland didn't agree on this matter," Tilly said. "I volunteered. So, how are you going to stop me? Are you going to tie me up and imprison me in the castle?"

"Er..." Ashes froze.

"Well, Roland would probably do that himself if this was a suicidal mission. But like I said, the 'Seagull' will just act as a contingency plan. Only when Andrea fails to kill the Magic Slayer will we get involved in this operation. Plus, what I need to do is simply drop the God's Punishment Witches off before the demon."

"Isn't it dangerous? This is the Magic Slayer we're talking about —"

"I knew you're going to say that," Tilly cut across her off resignedly. "Do you really think that I'll surpass the Magic Slayer and drop the God's Punishment Witches under his nose?"

"If not, then how are you going to do that?" Ashes asked, her brows furrowed. "The God's Punishment Witches can't fly. If the Magic Slayer doesn't fall for the trick, this plan won't work."

The most important task for a decoy was to convince the enemy that he had a good chance of winning. Otherwise, the Magic Slayer would retreat even faster, and the bait usually took most of the risk during an operation.

"I'm glad that Edith isn't as simple as you are," Tilly said while rolling her eyes. "The demons need the Red Mist, so they won't swagger our way as bold as brass, and we don't need to use the 'Seagull' to lure him. We simply need to cut off his supplies. The Magic Slayer will definitely recharge himself, because he won't be able to flee the plains with his tiny little gas tank. In other words, the God's Punishment Witches are awaiting the arrival of their weary visitor and dragging him into battle. So, Wendy and I will have enough time to come back safely."

Ashes lapsed into a long silence and then spoke hesitantly, "But what if..."

Tilly shook her head and said, "I'm not saying that this plan is completely risk free, but at least the risk is under our control. I've told you that the 'Seagull' is just a part of this plan. I won't put myself in danger unless I'm as silly as you. In fact, the main reason I decided to go to the front is you. I'll never feel settled if I stay at the rear watching you fight!"

"Your Highness..." Ashes said, speechless.

"Say my name!"

"Ti — "

Before Ashes announced the word, Tilly grabbed Ashes by the collar, stretched herself up to her tiptoes, and kissed her.

Ashes felt warmth wash over her.

This was the first time that Princess Tilly had kissed her.

Then Tilly disengaged herself and looked away.

In the guttered candlelight, Ashes saw a fleeting blush on Tilly's cheeks.

"Every time you went on a trip, whether we were living on the Sleeping Island or in Neverwinter, I was always the one left behind, awaiting your return which I don't know will come in a few days or a few

months. But it wasn't like this before. Back in the old king's city, we were always together. Then why do we have to part now? Weren't we also in danger when the church hunted us?"

Tilly turned around and gazed into Ashes' eyes. There was a twinge of starchiness in her voice. "I don't want to wait anymore."

From the steely gray eyes, Ashes knew that Tilly had made up her mind.

"I see, but on one condition," Ashes sighed deeply. She knew the Wimbledonons were notorious for their temerity.

"I know what you're going to say. Don't force yourself. Make safety your top priority. Roland told me all that... Well, I know what I'm doing. This is all common sense..."

"That's not what I was going to say."

"Huh?" Tilly gaped.

"One more time. This is my condition."

With these words, Ashes pulled Princess Tilly into a hug and lowered her head.

Chapter 1153: A Real Monster

The following morning, at Tower Station No. 9.

The officers and commanders, after working for more than a week, finally returned to the headquarters at the frontier.

However, Tower Station No. 9 was, technically, not the real frontier now.

Agatha noticed from the map that the railway was now just 15 kilometers away from the ruins of Taquila, and the area within a radius of five kilometers had all been converted to the green "safety zone". The biggest change this week, however, lay in the area three kilometers from the ruin, which was an alarming red color.

"You're finally here," Morning Light, Ferlin Eltek, said as he trotted up to them and administered a perfect military salute.

The army and the rest of the General Staff all rose to their feet and saluted as well, excited and relieved to see their commanders come back.

Agatha was also put at ease when she saw the smiling looks on her coworkers' faces. This meant that the newly-developed red area did not really impact the entire "Torch" plan.

"Well done, everyone. You all did a good job," Iron Axe praised while nodding in satisfaction as he tapped the map. "Ferlin, did the demons send their reinforcements?"

"No, sir," Morning Light replied. "Those are ditches dug by the demons."

"Ditches?"

"Miss Sylvie saw them first. Some demons crept out from underneath the Red-Mist-enveloped ground and started to dig the ditches six days ago. Then Miss Lightning confirmed Miss Sylvie's story and marked the area as dangerous."

Iron Axe, Edith and, Agatha exchanged looks and asked, "Are they trenches?"

"We think so too, because, according to Lightning's map, those ditches, although pretty crude, are very similar to the First Army's trenches. The horizontal ones are three to 100 feet apart and connected to several vertical ones," Ferlin explained as he unfolded a crude drawing in front of them. "The biggest difference is that the demons dug more vertical ditches for retreating purposes, and these ditches almost level, with a differential of less than two meters, so they look tidier than ours."

"They're learning from us," Agatha muttered, unable to help herself.

If what they had heard about the first Battle of Divine Will was true, then it was the second time that the demons had learned from human beings.

"Very interesting," Edith said after she studied the drawing. "Those vertical ditches aren't for retreating. They're for attacking purposes instead."

"Yes," Iron Axe agreed. "The trenches can somewhat block shells, but they can't block the Longsong Cannons. A few trenches won't change anything. The only way for them to change their situation is to attack the First Army."

"That's why they make the vertical ditches so close to us?" Ferlin said with a look of comprehension.

"That does save a lot of time when the trenches are so packed like this."

"So, what are we going to do?" Agatha asked.

"Nothing," the Pearl of the Northern Region sneered. "When they're within the shooting range of the cannons, ask the 'Blackriver' to fire. Although it's like putting fine timber to petty use, His Majesty has provided tons of ammunition for us to use in this final battle. I dare them to run right into us against the artillery fire."

Iron Axe turned to Ferlin and asked, "How's the railway construction going?"

"The demons fought back but didn't cause much damage," Ferlin reported. "The Mad Demons know that they can't approach the encampment, so they rarely come close to us. It was mostly the Devilbeasts. However, only 10 to 15 Devilbeasts come at a time, so I guess there aren't many Devilbeasts left in Taquila now. We could have detained more Devilbeasts if the Senior Demon didn't get in our way."

"Did the Magic Slayer come?" Agatha asked as her brows drew together.

"More than once," Ferlin confirmed and nodded. "The battles unfolded pretty much the same way every time. The anti-aircraft machine gun squad first fired at the Magic Slayer, and then the Devilbeasts joined the battle." Ferlin's face turned one shade darker. "Every time I saw him, I felt... I was fighting a real monster."

"What do you mean?" Edith asked in curiosity.

"He always appeared where we were most unguarded. Then we would go into a sort of trance the moment he landed. Now, it should be noted that the soldiers were all wearing a God's Stone of Retaliation at that time," Ferlin said slowly. "If we didn't have a God's Stone to protect us — for instance, those who hid in a bunker, too curious for their own good — we would have panicked outright. The closer we are to the Magic Slayer, the more susceptible we'll be to his influence. When the encampment sank into complete chaos, the Devilbeasts in the sky would dive and attack. Although Sylvie would always notify us beforehand, it's not easy to stop a plummeting Magic Slayer that can't be killed with just one or two shots. The best we've done so far was break one of his arms."

"It looks like that he isn't always lucky," the Pearl of the Northern Region said with a faint smile.

"But the thing is, when he showed up a few days later, his broken arm was healed as if nothing had happened," Ferlin said with a bitter smile. "Well, the demons may have a special treating method as we have Miss Nana, but..."

"But what?" Iron Axe pursued heavily.

"Many soldiers reported to the General Staff that the Magic Slayer becomes increasingly sneaky. It's like he has gradually got the hang of the battle. Before, one machine gun would be enough to block him, but now, we need two or three squads. If we didn't have the God's Stones of Retaliation and the weapons created by His Majesty, he would have... killed all of us just by himself."

"They were like that in the Union age," Agatha said through her teeth. "As long as they're alive, they'll get upgraded in the next battle."

"As long as they're... alive?"

"Senior Demons upgrade through battles. The more severe their injuries are, the more powerful they'll become next time in terms of magic power and combat techniques. They've killed many Extraordinaries. In a way, we helped them improve," the Ice Witch said as she closed her eyes. "Nevertheless, not every demon survived their injuries. He must have some special abilities to heal himself!"

"Are you saying... that he's a Senior Demon with both the cursing power and a self-repairing ability?" Iron Axe asked tersely.

"Very likely," Agatha said resolutely with a hint of steel in her eyes. "Ferlin's right. This is a real monster. If we let him go, we'll have great trouble in the future. So, we must destroy him in this ruined Holy City!"

Chapter 1154: A Repeated Fate

Agatha, Iron Axe, and Edith departed for the front by train after they disclosed the operation plan finalized in Neverwinter.

The double-track railway had now forked out into four branches for both operation and transportation purposes, with exactly the same setting as the various stations. There would be much more work for the construction team, but headquarters understood that the terminus station, Tower Station No. 10, would probably not come into use for the final battle.

The commanders knew that once the construction of all the stations were completed, there was nothing the demons could do to turn the table. First of all, it was extremely hard to destroy the "Blackriver" made of steel. Even in the event of a disruption of the transportation system, the army could still sustain themselves with the military supplies at each station while the railroad was amended. Given such circumstances, the demons could no longer defeat human beings by cutting off the supplies, and they certainly could not directly clash with the fortified stations and their firearms. The only way left for the demons was to stop the First Army before the completion of Tower Station No. 10.

In other words, the decisive battle would break out at any time rather than on a specific date.

The railway was now strictly protected by various bunkers, trenches, and fortresses.

Also, as Agatha had noticed, the railroad facing the Holy City had turned at a small angle, which enabled the train to parallel Taquila. Roland suggested that this was the optimal firing angle for the train-mounted guns.

The two armored trains, the "Blackrivers" were now standing magnificently at the end of the railway.

Like two moving fortresses, the armored trains were equipped with four revolving gun turrets that would instantly fire when the demons attempted to approach the railway. The 152mm-caliber Longsong Cannon mounted on the top was pointing at the sky in the direction of the Taquila city.

As Agatha ascended the lookout tower at the center of the encampment, she saw the city ruin half-buried in the thick, dense bushes around it.

Forlorn ran through her when she saw the dilapidated city lay woefully below her.

Even though it had been over 400 years, she could still make out the faint outline of the old Holy City from this desolate relic.

"Were you born there?" Edith asked.

Agatha nodded. The memories of the past flooded back to her.

"Congratulations. From today onwards, you're officially a member of the Union."

"You're really the youngest High Awakened in the history of time. Welcome to the Quest Society."

"Wow, you're so amazing!"

...

"Do you know what you're doing? They're all valiant soldiers who devoted everything to the Union. They're just in a coma, and you want to conduct tests on them?"

"You know how slim the chance is for them to wake up. They sustained head injuries! I'm sure they'll prefer offering their bodies to dying in their sleep."

"I can't accept it."

"This is an order signed by Lady Alice. If you can't accept it, then you're free to leave."

...

"Your ladyship, the city is breached. I'm afraid the allied forces couldn't hold up any longer! Let's get out of here!"

"But my sister hasn't come back yet."

"She's a member of the Defending Army and she'll never abandon her post. If you end up dying here, she sacrificed herself for nothing!"

...

"Now, run for your life!"

"But... your ladyship, where can we go? Taquila is gone."

"Never give up. There's still a hope! Climb over the mountain, cross the river, and head to the Barbarian Land... Go re-establish the order!"

...

"Why did you stay? You've still got a chance to live if you leave now."

"I don't have magic, but I know that it's my duty to protect you."

...

"Your Majesty, she's awake."

As the miserable past floated out of her memories, Agatha felt as though she had lived her old life once again.

Agatha had been an outcast in the Union. Although people called her a genius, she had been marginalized by the other witches in the Union due to her attitude toward common people. She had later been further renounced by the Quest Society because of her objection to the God's Punishment Army plan and forced to conduct experiments in secret in the Misty Forest.

Nevertheless, Agatha still deeply loved Taquila.

It was the last human city that had witnessed numerous heroic moments. Thousands of witches and common people had been killed during the battle against the demons, one of whom was her sister, who had taken her perpetual rest beneath one of the fallen city walls.

Agatha, however, did not feel much comfort in her survival. Instead, she felt a surge of heavy guilt weigh down upon her.

Every time she closed her eyes, she heard her dying companions call for help.

Agatha tried to convince herself that she was not a deserter. She survived to avenge her sisters and retrieve the land that had once belonged to the human race.

It was her relentless belief in the God's Punishment Witches that kept her moving forward.

She was living for them.

Two giant skeletons loomed through the ruin. They were the demons' new weapons and also the start of her nightmare.

Agatha looked toward Iron Axe and said, "I have a request."

"Yes," Iron Axe replied while nodding.

"If the First Army could move ten more kilometers toward Taquila, I hope the God's Punishment Witches and I could fire first."

Nothing but thunder and flame could end her nightmare. The roars of the cannons would raze the ruin of the Holy City to the ground, and the relic, along with the remains of her fellow witches, would once again return to the Fertile Plains.

But Taquila would be reborn from the ashes.

...

In the evening of the third day, Sylvie noticed the demons' movements when the construction team managed to extend the railway to around 12 kilometers from Taquila.

A large number of Mad Demons crept out of the Red-Mist-corrupted ground underneath the giant skeletons and swarmed toward their trenches. Then two enormous "shadows" materialized in front of the ramshackle city wall and ambled over to the encampment.

Sylvie immediately realized that they were two huge God's Stones of Retaliation very similar to the God's Stones of Punishment Pillar in the battle at the North Slope. These two humangous stones were as large as some raw ores in the mines and cast a 150-meter-long shadow on the ground, which completely blocked the vision of the Magic Eye.

Instantly, two blind zones in the scouting area were created.

No matter what the demons' intention was, Sylvie knew this must be a desperate struggle from the enemy, as they had dispatched over 1,000 Mad Demons at a time.

This was unquestionably a sign of the final battle.

Sylvie called the underground headquarters at once.

A few seconds later, a shrill, piercing alarm cracked like a whip through the air above the encampment!

Chapter 1155: The Battle of Taquila (I)

As the alarm went off, the soldiers at the frontier immediately entered the state of high alert according to their contingency plan.

"Hurry up! Drop what you're working on and go to the exit closest to you!" The soldiers responsible for evacuating the encampment yelled as they directed the construction team to the shelters. "Don't push and don't look around! Remember, no matter what happens outside, don't leave the shelter!"

"Shelter No. 6 is full!"

"Same here in Shelter No. 7!"

"Get going. Go to the next shelter. Don't block the passage. All of you, move!"

This was not the first time that they had to evacuate the railway stations. Although the air was filled with the exasperated, short-tempered hollers of the soldiers, nobody was panicking.

Around 2,000 workers ebbed away into the underground bunkers through the exit passages. These bunkers at the rear of the encampment, all built by Lotus, were plastered with steel plates. They could not only provide the soldiers accommodation but could also shield them from spears and machine guns. Even if the outer ring of the defensive line was broken through, the shelters would still remain safe.

After the tidal waves of people receded, darkness soon closed in upon the construction site which had been alive with flickers of light just a moment ago.

"The evacuation is completed. Lights are all off. The First Army is now filing into the encampment," Sylvie informed the other units while casting a quick glance at the surroundings. The observation room above the headquarters was currently the busiest place of the frontier. A dozen telephones lining the table rang continuously. As there were so many messages, the staff only forwarded the most important ones to Sylvie.

Meanwhile, the officers collected information and translated it onto the map to provide references for the headquarters staff.

Sylvie, as the "eye" of the army, had now become the central information hub of the observation room that facilitated the efficient operation of the First Army.

"OK, I see. Miss Sylvie, this is Van'er from the artillery battalion. I hope you could provide us with the demons' location and firing parameters."

"Same request from the 'Blackriver I' and 'Blackriver II'!"

"Hold on a second," said Sylvie as she swept a glance to the front. The "shadows", which were slowly edging toward the army, had just entered the shooting range of 10 miles away from the encampment. Based on their current rate, it might be another five to six hours before they reached their final destination. Therefore, the most pressing issue at present was to learn the operation intention of the demons. What were they plotting and why did they create the blind zones with the God's Stones of Retaliation?

When magic power ceased to work, they had to resort to human eyes for observation.

She picked up the Sigil of Listening and asked, "Lightning, Maggie, can you hear me? Where are you?"

"We just took off. Maggie is above me." Soon, a voice came from the other end of the line, mingled with the shrill alarm. "What happened? Did the demons attack us?"

"It looks like it, but the demons obscured the majority of my vision. I reckon they've used giant God's Stones of Retaliation again."

"Noted. I'll go take a look."

"Leave it to us, coo!"

Compared to what Sylvie saw in the observation room, Lightning viewed the battlefield as something completely different.

She saw firelights gradually shrink as the night pressed on. The distant land was engulfed by a velvety darkness and looked both serene and unfathomable.

The Fertile Plains was still deep in its slumber, without noticing, in the slightest, the upcoming war.

It was almost unbelievable that the demons had already taken actions had Sylvie not warned them.

"Maggie, turn on night mode!"

"Coo, coo, coo!"

The white pigeon immediately expanded, and her body turned into a furry ball. A massive head poked out of the gigantic sphere with two large, glassy eyes that were about to burst out from their sockets.

"Transformation complete. I'm now in the form of an owl, coo!"

"Then, let's go — "

Lightning steadied the "giant owl" perched on her head and flew toward the northeast.

However, Sylvie's voice came out of the Sigil of Listening in a rush as they neared Taquila. "Come back, you guys! The Magic Slayer is coming!"

Lightning shuddered as terror paralyzed her limbs. She managed to suppress her fear before replying with gritted teeth, "Even if he's coming for us, he won't find us that fast. Plus... if we go back now, we won't be able to know what the demons are hiding behind the God's Stones, right?"

"But..."

"Don't worry. He can't get me with just a Stone of Flight. As long as I avoid the anti-magic area, I'll be safe."

Lightning clenched her fists. Her hands started to sweat, but she knew she could not run away from the battle anymore. Over the past half a year, she had slowly come to realize that she would never become a brave person like the God's Punishment Witches. Even that train conductor had more guts than she did.

Nevertheless, she was not fighting the enemy all alone. She knew Maggie, Lorgar, Joan, and many other friends had her back. They had helped her to overcome her fear and start all over again.

Gradually, she had recovered her power. After what seemed to be a long and arduous journey, she had finally returned where she had fallen half a year ago.

Now, she only needed to overcome two more obstacles.

One was to fly past the Magic Slayer, and the other was to...

Strike back as a retaliation!

"Maggie, I'll leave him to you," Lightning unbuttoned her flight suit, stuffed the owl down the front, only leaving its head poking out of the collar, and then accelerated. She could definitely manage to fly at the speed of sound for ten kilometers.

"Be... be careful, the Magic Slayer... s-saw you..." Sylvie's voice came out from the sigil inarticulately as the reception went in and out because of the synchronization of magic power.

Lightning knew that she had exposed her trait. The Magic Slayer could definitely hear the popping and crackling sounds of her passing through the sound barrier.

But she was faster than sound, which meant by the time the Magic Slayer heard her, she was already way ahead of him.

A few seconds later, Maggie spied the Magic Slayer.

"That monster is at your front right, coo!"

Before Lightning could see the Magic Slayer in the dismal moonlight, a haze of black light suddenly overcast the sky!

Without a doubt, the Magic Slayer could see better in the darkness than Maggie. He had not only spotted her but also tried to cut her off. Upon realizing Lightning was way faster than him, he generated the anti-magic area.

Lightning instantly raised her speed to its maximum and started to dive.

For a split second, Lightning felt the grimy and chilly black haze brush past her ankles. The next moment, she had shaken the Magic Slayer off. As she was no longer threatened by the anti-magic area, she straightened up and zoomed across the demons' encampment. The whole encampment then slid into her view.

At the moonlit encampment, Lightning saw the demons were pushing two large God's stone cylinders forward. Like two gigantic bell towers on their sides, the pillars were at least 20 meters long and three meters tall. Behind each pillar were seven or eight neatly lined Spider Demons which were hobbling slowly in the direction of the First Army.

Right behind the Spider Demons were tons of Mad Demons, which were apparently using the pillars as some sort of mobile bunkers.

Chapter 1156: The Battle of Taquila (II)

After Lightning crossed the encampment, she climbed higher and paused in midair.

"What's the matter, coo?" Maggie asked while raising her head.

Lightning did not answer but turned around and peered down at Taquila. The visibility of this impenetrable blackness was less than 200 meters, and it was a rather hopeless attempt to look for the Magic Slayer under this condition.

But that did not matter.

Lightning knew the Magic Slayer could see her.

Her back was currently facing the moon, so the Magic Slayer would instantly spot her when he stared up.

Nevertheless, he did not come after her.

He knew he could not catch up.

So, he decided to let her go.

In a way, she won!

Lightning took a deep breath, outstretched her right hand with her finger tips still trembling, but she mustered her courage and gave him the finger.

That was the gesture Roland had taught her — a gesture of victory!

Then she whipped around, headed to the First Army's encampment without casting one last backward glance, and told Sylvie everything she had seen.

"A neatly-cut cylinder made of God's Stones of Retaliation? Noted," Sylvie said as she wrote down the approximate size of the pillars and then handed the sheet of paper to Agatha, who quickly figured out the exact location and shape based on the size of the God's Stones. The data was soon transmitted to the observation room.

Although there might be errors in this calculation, at least they had something to rely on now. Sylvie thus made a rough estimate of the location of the pillars and called the Artillery Battalion.

A moment later, there was an earsplitting roar from the Longsong Cannons at the encampment.

Firelights erupted from the muzzle and flitted across the sky like fireflies and pierced the darkness.

As more cannons joined the battle, the encampment became vaguely visible. Sometimes shells streaked in the air like plummeting comets and left long tails behind them.

A long echo of the explosions rent the air and awoke the Fertile Plains from its deep sleep.

"So beautiful, coo..." Maggie mumbled as she stared at the artillery encampment in a daze.

Lightning stood against the wind with her hands clenching into fists.

Now, there was only one more obstacle to overcome.

...

Ursrook hovered in the air and watched mounds of earth rise and fall with an air of detachment. This was the most powerful weapon human beings had invented so far. One projectile could kill a dozen junior demons instantly without even physically contacting them. The iron shards ejected by those projectiles could penetrate armor and sink into flesh even from dozens of meters away.

Even for him, he was not completely sure whether he would survive a direct blow.

In the report submitted to the Sky Lord, he called this weapon "fiery rain".

Apart from that, human beings had also invented individual weapons such as "fire bolt" and "fire fork". Apparently, the evolution of the human race largely relied on fire. The lord believed this was a kind of upgrade, but he was more inclined to viewing such progress as a coincidence. Witches obviously possessed more diverse abilities than common people. Perhaps a singular witch, whose ability was fire control, had finally awakened after several hundred years and helped the human population to master this natural element.

However, even if human beings developed in a direction he did not wish to see, it did not mean there was nothing he could do about it. He could create boulders out of God's Stones to block the fiery rain. Ursrook noticed that God's Stones seemed to be impervious to the impact of explosions. When these projectiles brushed past the stone pillars, they bounced off, without leaving the slightest trace on the pillars.

The real danger lay in the fiery rain that penetrated the pillars and reached the symbiotic demons inside. Their impenetrable armor appeared to be impotent under the attack of the fiery rain and was instantly cracked and collapsed in one blow.

Ironically, the king seemed to have great faith in those pillars that could not feel pain and believed that it was the most epochal breakthrough their kind had obtained so far from the "legacy shards". The stone pillars not only provided far more supplies to the front but also more strategic options. The king believed that 100 such pillars would be sufficient to annihilate the entire human race.

Therefore, 100 pillars was exactly what the lord had given him.

Nonetheless, over the past half a year, not only did he fail to exterminate the human race but their grip on Taquila seemed to have loosened as well. Less than 40% of the pillars were now left at Ursrook's disposal.

If the Sky Lord had not so blindly trusted the king, Ursrook would not have found himself in such a disgusting dilemma.

If those stone pillars were destroyed halfway, he would have nothing but junior demons to fight the enemy.

That would be almost like suicide. Even the stone pillars would break upon the tremendous force of the fiery rain, let alone those unarmored junior demons.

However, Ursrook did not care.

All these sacrifices were for the final victory.

And human beings would have to pay for them.

...

At 10:00 at night in the underground headquarters.

The battle had lasted for three hours. Every five minutes, Iron Axe heard a magnificent crash coming from above that was followed by a cloud of dust showering down from the ceiling.

He heard no sounds other than the roaring cannons from the encampment. It was as though the demons were not participating in this battle at all.

This was so unusual compared to the previous battles he had partaken.

To save ammunition and preserve the cannons, Iron Axe had asked the Artillery Battalion to refrain themselves from shooting too frequently but to aim at the area exclusively behind the black shadow. The problem was that they were unable to see whether the attack was effective through the Magic Eye.

The only thing he could confirm at the moment was that the 152-caliber Longsong Cannons could not destroy the God's Stone of Punishment Pillars. Although the hailing shells significantly slowed down the stone pillars, Iron Axe knew those pillars would eventually recover. He wondered how the Spider Demons mobilize such gigantic monsters.

"Damn it," Iron Axe snapped irritably as he punched the table. "If this occurred during the day, those monsters wouldn't stand a chance!"

The biggest problem for the First Army now was that they did not know where their shells landed, which meant that the soldiers were aiming blankly at the blind zones that stretched around 150 meters, with no feedback to rely on to correct their firing angles.

According to Sylvie, the Magic Slayer was hovering outside the encampment, apparently on the alert for Lightning. Although Lightning was fast, it was essentially very energy-consuming and also dangerous to fly at such a high speed while at the same time infiltrating the demons' encampment to provide information on the landing spots for the First Army.

Yet the soldiers must have some feedback to continue with the operation.

If such information was not provided in a timely manner, they would find it hard to effectively kill the demons.

Of course, the First Army could have directed all the shells to the blind zones to keep the demons at bay. However, if the demons chose to retreat, all their ammunition would be wasted.

Furthermore, it appeared that several Mad Demons that flanked the blind zones and attempted to launch a pincer attack. They were clearly visible to the soldiers, but Iron Axe felt reluctant to waste the ammunition on just a few demons.

"That was why the demons chose to fight at night," Edith said serenely. "This is actually better than I thought. Thanks to Sylvie, we can at least see the enemy in the darkness. Why do you look so restless? It's the demons who should worry."

"I just don't want to waste the ammunition that took us so long to produce," Iron Axe grumbled while frowning.

"Don't worry. They can't go on like that forever. I think the demons know that as well. They'll probably fight back once they are within shooting range of the mortars," the Pearl of the Northern Region said while curling up her lips. "Unfortunately for the demons, they don't know that things will soon change. The moment they enter the shooting range of the flares, we'll have a clear winner of this battle."

Chapter 1157: The Battle of Taquila (III)

When the two stone pillars crossed the median and were five miles from the encampment, the First Army launched the Detection Balloons and stopped firing.

The Magic Slayer also noticed the change but he could not figure out the intention behind this movement. He knew that the balloons must be used for scouting purposes, but he did not understand how that was supposed to work when it was pitch dark on the battlefield.

When the fiery rain finally stopped, the Magic Slayer instructed his army to accelerate.

After the stone pillars were within four kilometers of the encampment, the Artillery Battalion loaded the cannons and prepared the flare projectiles.

After the first night raid, Roland had instructed the workers in Neverwinter to produce some rudimentary illumination devices. These illumination devices were essentially the same as mortars, except that there was a miniscule parachute attached to the tail of the shell and the gunpowder at the front end was replaced with a mixture of powdered magnesium and aluminium that could burn for a long time. Roland had intended to use the same projectile used to eject mortars to project flares. However, during the test, he had noticed that small-caliber bullets were neither bright enough nor had a great lasting power. Therefore, he had decided to use large-caliber shells instead. Although those shells were still not as bright as sunlight, they were sufficient enough to illuminate the battlefield.

It was actually the First Army's first time using flares in a real battle, which was obviously another suggestion from the General Staff.

When the demons were only three kilometers away from the encampment, Iron Axe ordered the soldiers to fire.

"Yes!" Van'er hung up the phone and shouted, "Shoot flares at the largest firing angle. Ready, go!"

A few explosions filled the air, and soon dazzling orange light dispelled the darkness that had weighed heavily upon the battlefield.

Then more flares rose into the air, ignited, and plunged downward.

Like numerous tiny suns, these flares spilled light across the area within a radius of three kilometers and outshone the moon and stars strewn across the sky.

Now, the soldiers saw the giant stone pillars, the Spider Demons, and the Mad Demons that were once hidden in the darkness!

Even though the flares only illuminated a small area, it was enough for the soldiers to find their targets.

Shells streaked toward the demons behind the stone pillars. It was like the shells knew where they were going! For a split second, the demons were rooted to the ground in shock.

Within the blink of an eye, the demons' encampment erupted in deafening explosions.

...

Ursrook gazed at the "light balls" drifting down from the sky. His expression finally changed.

Now he understood why the humans launched the balloons.

They were no longer flustered and defenseless like they had been six months ago during that night raid as they had learned how to cope with a night battle. The fact that they waited for this moment to implement their new tactic told Ursrook that human beings were no longer the low lives that they used to treat with contempt.

Ursrook, for the first time, realized that human beings can rival them.

He must inform the king of this new development!

This was the decision he made at that moment.

At the same time, Ursrook further confirmed his belief that he must exterminate this army at once and leave it no chance to disrupt their development plan.

He rested his eyes back on the battlefield. Through the fiery rain, he saw a huge gap between his army and the stone pillars that were supposed to be within their shooting range. The junior demons, which were supposed to close in from either side of the encampment, had fallen far behind and failed to provide quick assistance to those pillar-shaped symbiosis.

Apparently, the junior demons were thwarted by the fiery rain. Instead of shielding them from shells, the lit blind zones had become a narrow death zone for the demons.

Was he supposed to destroy those light balls? No... human beings could produce as many of these light balls as they wanted. Plus, he was being watched.

Ursrook accelerated abruptly and tore toward the human encampment!

He dodged a series of fire bolts darting toward him, skidded to a halt in front of a balloon suspending in midair, and grabbed the lookout in the basket by the neck before the latter could escape.

Ursrook's face split into a nasty, contorted smile as he stared down at the horror-struck man. Then he ripped the man apart.

He dropped the body and uttered a sharp, piercing wail.

That was the order to launch the general attack.

Encouraged by Ursrook's power, the junior demons below growled as they came out of hiding and swarmed toward the human encampment.

The entire battlefield was stirred!

...

The First Army had totally controlled the pace of the battle.

The flares in the air lit the area within a radius of three kilometers. As the demons emerged from behind the blind zones, both the mortars and heavy machine guns produced earth-shattering roars.

Since both parties understood that this was the final settlement between the two races, the battle became the fiercest and bitterest they had ever experienced. The Fertile Plains was thus turned into a sort of butcher house as the two powers clashed.

The Mad Demons continuously sent out spears until their arms gave away. Many of them crawled across the battlefield and left a long trail of blue blood as they were indifferent about their broken legs and penetrated torsos.

The same applied to the First Army.

Bullets rained down. Wounded soldiers were soon replaced by new ones. It appeared that nobody cared about the pelting stone needles from the Spider Demons anymore. The only time they ceased to fight was when they reloaded their guns.

This ferocious battle lasted from midnight to dawn.

When the first faint hint of sunlight was visible in the east, dozens of Devilbeasts joined the battle.

This was evidently the demons' last struggle.

The machine gun squads raised their guns and collaborated with the anti-aircraft squads to defend against the demons.

The Magic Slayer rushed into the encampment and attempted to stop the soldiers from firing, but was repulsed by a rain of shells.

It appeared that human beings were now very close to their victory.

By noon, the roars of the guns had stopped.

Agatha and Iron Axe stepped out of the underground headquarters and strolled to the frontier.

The air was impregnated with the pungent smell of gunpowder, but Agatha, for some reason, liked it.

The demons' bodies littered the ravaged meadow that had been, at one point, green and thick.

Their blood trickled down to the ground and soaked the earth. A sheen of ghostly blue light glazed off the bushes and grass the demons had once trodden on.

The Giant Skeletons in Taquila were still standing erect in the distance, but Agatha knew after this battle, the demons could no longer impede the progress of human beings. Men would soon recapture the Holy City.

"We won!" Somebody broke the silence. Agatha did not know whether it was a soldier, a witch, or one of the Taquila survivors. However, this did not matter anymore, because, in the next moment, the encampment erupted into a loud wave of cheers.

This was a victory that belonged to the entire human race!

Chapter 1158: The Defeat

The celebration did not last long, and all the soldiers soon resumed their work.

The First Army immediately attended to some of the most pressing matters such as treating the wounded, making a statistic report on casualties, mending the railway, and cleaning up the battlefield.

The headquarters knew very well that the victory of this battle did not mark the end of the "Torch" project by any means. Although it now seemed certain that they would recover Taquila and that the demons were very unlikely to renew their effort after this failure, they could never let their guard down. This war would keep going until humans permanently eliminated the Magic Slayer who was now still at large.

Mankind had to leave their jubilant celebration until the final moment when they erected the Graycastle flag at the top of the ruin and when the army safely returned to Neverwinter.

After a heated discussion, the executives at the front reached a mutual understanding that there should be less than 500 demons left in the ruin of the Holy City after this battle, which implied that the demons no longer posed a threat to the First Army.

Their focus should now shift from the construction of Tower Station No. 10 to the ambush operation that specifically targetted the Magic Slayer, as the First Army currently did not need Sylvie to maintain constant vigilance against raids from the demons.

To avoid any new complications concerning this battle, the First Army resumed the bombardment the next day.

As shells showered down, the demons had no choice but to slowly retreat from their trenches to the ruins of Taquila.

In the end, only the Magic Slayer managed to stay close to the defensive line. Nevertheless, as their main target, he could now barely approach the encampment and certainly could not stop the First Army from advancing.

After several fruitless attempts, the Magic Slayer gradually stopped showing up.

On the fourth day of the war, the railroad was finally within shooting range at 10 kilometers.

Agatha, Phyllis, and the other hundred witches were waiting to fire the Longsong Cannons as Iron Axe had instructed.

As the number of the cannons was very limited, Van'er, the commander of the artillery battalion decided to tie the fuses together with ropes so that the witches could fire at the same time.

Every single God's Punishment Witch, born in Taquila, were determined to avenge their fellow companions and rebuild the Holy City. They understood that this was going to be a historical moment that would become a part of human history, although they might not necessarily survive this Battle of Divine Will.

"I have to apologize to you," Phyllis said to Agatha softly as she held the ropes, "400 years ago, I thought it would be a disaster to entrust important tasks to mortals and more than one time, I laughed at you behind your back."

"Yes, many people thought like you back then," the Ice Witch replied smilingly. "And how do you feel about it now?"

"Now..." Phyllis said thoughtfully while curling up her lips. "It's actually not too bad to fight along side mortals."

"Ready — Go!" Just at that moment, Van'er raised his flag.

Everybody pulled the fuses back toward them, and soon thunderous roars reverberated across the encampment. A dozen shells rose, hurtled across the field, and pelted down at the Holy City.

Shockwaves rippled as the explosions took place, swept over the relic of this old city that had witnessed the past 400 years, and blasted the demons hiding in it to smithereens.

...

"It has started," Sylvie muttered.

"Yes," Andrea said indifferently, who could feel the ground quivering even at seven or eight kilometers from Taquila.

It was hard to imagine what suffering the demons had gone through after being continuously bombarded by the Longsong Cannons for a night.

"It has been five days now, right?" Margie grumbled. "Will the Magic Slayer come today?"

"Who knows?" Ashes said, shrugging.

"I want to have hot pot and potstickers in Neverwinter."

"Grrr..."

Somebody's stomach groaned in mild protest as soon as Margie finished talking.

"Well, I'll be also happy to have roast meat and ice cream bread... Aw..."

Ashes thrust some rations into Margie's mouth and said, "Have some rations if you feel hungry. Although it doesn't taste very good, it will, at least, fill you up."

"And please don't forget that we're still on a mission," Camilla Dary added. "You can think about food as much as you like when you're back to Neverwinter. Now, concentrate and get your job done."

"She was tempted, too. She just never understands jokes," Andrea thought to herself while shaking her head, and then rested her eyes back on Taquila.

As the First Army started to strike back, the Special Unit also, as planned, left the encampment, went around the ruin, and crouched down in the jungle to the west of the Red Mist supply line. Since they did not know when the Magic Slayer would retreat, they had to wait in ambush and wait.

The witches were used to living in a harsh environment. To avoid unwelcome attention from the Devilbeasts lurking in the sky, they neither pitched tents nor made a fire. Everyone wrapped themselves up in a thick blanket and spent the night in trees. As for food, they ate wheat cakes to sustain themselves.

Andrea suddenly started to miss the life in Neverwinter. To be honest, when she had moved to Neverwinter with Tilly, she had thought the so-called "home for witches" was just another empty promise made by the ruler, another city in which they were going to take refuge just temporarily. She had been determined to leave with Tilly if the latter decided to relocate again. However, now she was not so sure whether she would stick to her original plan.

In Neverwinter, she slept in a soft bed and had the liberty to try numerous delicacies. There was a constant supply of hot and cold water for a bath, as well as an excellent heating system that allowed her to walk barefoot in winter. She had never lived so comfortably even when had been a noble. Such a leisure lifestyle had nothing to do with extravagance or self-indulgence but was more of a refined and sophisticated culture. Andrea knew Neverwinter had pretty much won her over.

Fortunately, Roland and Tilly got along well at the moment, so she did not need to make a decision anytime soon.

Andrea thought she should request a huge reward from Roland after this mission was over.

Ideally, she hoped the Magic Slayer would stick to Taquila and be blasted into pieces by the cannons. If the Magic Slayer chose to flee, Andrea would then hope she could kill him with one shot of the God's Stone bullet. The worst scenario would be that the Magic Slayer noticed their ambush and zigzagged across the field to dodge their bullets, in which case, they had to resort to their last solution: the "Seagull".

Andrea did not really think that the Magic Slayer would be blasted to pieces or successfully killed in the ambush. Over the past five days during the night battle, the Magic Slayer had kept changing his position above Taquila, which made it extremely hard for her to take the aim. Andrea was not sure whether this was a pure coincidence or that the Magic Slayer was deliberately avoiding her.

"Awwwwww — "

Suddenly, there was a piercing scream that filled the air.

"What happened?" Ashes asked.

"One shell hit the Giant Skeleton!" Sylvie exclaimed. "There's a big hole in the back of the Skeleton. Goodness, that thing... is howling!"

"It can actually feel pain! I didn't expect it to be a living being."

"Red Mist came out of its wound like it's bleeding," Sylvie said while gazing upon the southeast. "The Magic Slayer is charging at us too."

"I wish someone could just shoot him down," Andrea said while spreading out her hands.

"Hang on... No, the Magic Slayer turned around halfway!" Sylvie corrected herself, frowning. "What's going on? The Skeletons are retreating as well. Some demons are attempting to stop them and are being stomped to death. They've lost control..."

After a long silence, Sylvie asked tentatively, "Are the demons killing each other?"

Andrea and Ashes exchanged looks. This was a sign of an utter rout in every way. Did the demons finally break down and lose their morale as they were unable to continue to fight under pressure?"

Their suspicion was soon confirmed by Sylvie.

"The Magic Slayer has fled Taquila!"

Chapter 1159: The Ambush

"Andrea!" Camilla yelled.

"I, I got it — " Andrea said as she quickly grasped the gun, closed her eyes and concentrated her mind. She muttered to herself, in a hope that the Magic Slayer did not spot her, and then her eyes snapped open!

In a second, her vision contorted, and everything seemed to overlap with each other and elongate indefinitely. She knew she now possessed the vision of the Magic Eye. As numerous trees and the vast land stretching ahead gradually slid into her view, she felt the surroundings instantly light up.

At the same time, she was connected to Sylvie's mind.

By the time the images around her slid into focus, her eyes had been somewhere several kilometers away. A familiar armored figure rushed into her sight, and Andrea could feel the Magic Slayer brimming with heaving power. His power was so thick and strong as though it had condensed into a physical entity.

Unguarded, the Magic Slayer zoomed through the air. Andrea was not sure whether he was too shocked at the loss of Taquila or at the fled Skeletons.

"How's it going?" Ashes asked darkly.

"The Magic Slayer... isn't aware of our presence!" Andrea said in excitement. "He was flying toward the Red Mist supply line, a little east to our shooting range! Load the gun. This is perfect!"

Ashes gave a curt nod and loaded the gun with that huge God's Stone bullet. The bolt produced a gentle click.

The target was at eight to nine kilometers, not surrounded by any other demons. The wind was coming from the northeast. Out of all the shooting conditions Andrea had thought of, this was the most ideal one. She thus took her aim at the Magic Slayer while holding her breath.

Thousands of lines stretched away toward the Magic Slayer, some of them swirling and some twisting. However, most of them immediately faded out, leaving only one silver curve shimmering before her.

Andrea knew that she had located her target.

She felt her magic power inside her dropping rapidly. Andrea knew this would be her only chance to kill the demon!

Andrea clenched her teeth and pulled the trigger.

With an earsplitting explosion, Andrea felt something bludgeon her shoulder heavily and started to sway backwards when Ashes caught her just in time in her arms.

"I really don't like you holding me like this," Andrea protested airily while twitching her lips. Her shoulder was now numb and swollen with pain. Andrea knew she had to seek Nana later for treatment.

One drawback of a large-caliber weapon was its high recoil, which was unavoidable no matter how many buffers installed to the gun. Andrea had already realized during the test that this weapon could only be used once, despite that they could produce tons of God's Stone bullets. The operation was physically and mentally demanding, and the weapon itself was so heavy it was almost all that the Magic Ark could carry.

Nevertheless, Andrea was confident in her superb shooting skill.

Only savages preferred a ferocious close-range combat.

For example, the one who was now pulling her back belonged to that category.

"I hold you back only because of Sylvie," Ashes said gruffly while rolling her eyes. "How did that go? Did the Magic Slayer — "

"Just a minute," Andrea said as she pressed her finger to her lips. "The bullet is still en route."

The silver thread was shrinking rapidly. It was not attached to the Magic Slayer but brushed past him and formed a tiny angle, as though the bullet and the demon were vying with each other for the same destination.

The God's Stone would not deviate from its course once it escaped from the muzzle. The only variable was the target. If the Magic Slayer changed his direction, then all their effort would be in vain. It took 25 seconds for the bullet to reach the Magic Slayer. The only thing she could do now was to pray that the demon would stay where he was.

Gusts of winds continued to push the bullet from the east to the west, making sure that its speed did not drop. Andrea held her breath as the bullet drew close to the demon. For a moment, she even broke her silence.

"Don't move. Don't move. Don't move..." she muttered out loud.

Just at that moment, the Magic Slayer turned around abruptly, and their eyes met!

Andrea was frozen to the spot.

The next moment, the falling bullet landed precisely on the demon's back.

The God's Stone crumbled under immense pressure and splintered into numerous tiny pieces, but the damage was nothing next to what the Magic Slayer sustained.

Andrea had not expected that the small stone would generate such enormous power. The demon's thick armor was ripped open, and his blood and inner organ gushed out like a muddy waterfall from the large hole created by the bullet.

As the hole was too huge, the body of the Magic Slayer snapped in half. The demon rolled over in the air and then plummeted to the ground.

It took Andrea a while to come out of the trance. She swallowed hard and then said, "The Magic Slayer is... dead."

"We did it?" Margie asked jubilantly.

"Yes," Sylvie said on a deep sigh. "The bullet slashed the demon in half. Even Nana wouldn't be able to cure him in such severe condition."

"Good job," Ashes said as she patted Andrea on the shoulder and then instructed over the Sigil of Listening, "Lightning, ask the 'Seagull' to come over here. We're done. Let's head back."

"Got it," Lightning replied quickly.

They immediately disassembled the giant gun and waited for the return of the other unit from the east, ready to pack up and go home. Everyone was glad that the war was finally over.

Except Andrea.

The whole ambush went just as they had planned, except for that last sinister glance the Magic Slayer cast her.

Andrea could still feel a chill lingering on down her spine.

Did he spot her?

How could that be? The Magic Slayer had been eight or nine kilometers away from her, his vision obscured by the jungles between them. It was almost impossible for him to find her. Plus, the demon had not, particularly, attempted to seek her but simply locked his eyes on her directly as if he had known she was there a long time ago.

Further, why had Sylvie not noticed anything unusual when she had seen the demon look backward? Did she think that this incident was too frivolous to have her attention?

Regardless, the Magic Slayer was now dead. Whether it was a coincidence or not, there was no need to further probe into this matter.

Andrea rubbed her forehead and suddenly stopped dead.

She remembered Ashes had been wounded by the Magic Slayer when she had tried to protect Leaf.

"By the way, how long does it take you to heal up minor injuries such as a shallow cut?" Andrea asked while turning to Ashes.

Ashes answered with a shrug, "One to two hours approximately. Why?"

"In other words, you'll feel better in just ten minutes, right?" Andrea pursued while gazing at Ashes avidly. "Are you feeling better now?"

Ashes was mildly taken aback for a second, her hand reaching for her cheeks involuntarily, and said, "That's strange... It still hurts a bit."

Sylvie was the first to realize something went wrong. Horror-struck, she forced herself to reopen the Magic Eye, and fear leavened her exhilaration. "Watch, watch out!"

Ashes yanked out her sword immediately and swung it upwards.

With an almost inaudible clang, a shadow brushed past the blade with such enormous strength it collided with Margie and sent her flying through the air.

No sooner had the other witches realized what had happened than a slender, blue-skinned, manlike demon ambled over.

"Found... you," he drawled complacently.

The very word chilled Andrea to the bone.

To her astonishment, she had not sensed any fluctuation in the magic power since the demon presented himself.

Her heart sank to the bottom as a surge of despair stole through her.

Chapter 1160: A Trap

"Margie!" Ashes screamed and stepped between the Magic Slayer and the other witches.

Margie responded with a series of hacking cough.

She was still alive, but barely.

"You're pretty fast, Extraordinary," the Magic Slayer said in a calm voice, casting her a sorrowful look which did not usually appear on a demon's face. "If you didn't try to block me, she could have died painlessly. You're only making her suffer."

At this point, Andrea suddenly came to the realization that it was not by a pure coincidence that the Magic Slayer targeted Margie. He had taken everything into consideration before this move, including Margie's limited fighting capacity and her unique ability of maneuvering the Magic Ark. As Margie was the key to their transportation, eliminating her was pretty much cutting off their retreat.

Andrea bit her lip and stole a backward glance at Margie. A bone spear had penetrated her shoulder, blood oozing out of her wound and trickling down the corner of her mouth. Apparently, the spear had hurt her lung. Had Ashes not blocked the demon in time, Margie would have probably died on spot.

Given such circumstances, Margie definitely could not operate the Magic Ark anymore.

But how did the Magic Slayer know Margie's ability?

"You're the 'eye' of human beings, right? You really created us a lot of trouble by directing that fiery rain." The Magic Slayer pointed at Sylvie and then at Andrea, whose heart dropped even faster as the demon continued, "And you must be that genius shooter. You probably wouldn't be able to do much harm to us 400 years ago, but things become different now. You appear to be more difficult than Transcendents. It's good that you've finally met each other."

At this words, he placed his right hand over his chest and then said, "Please let me introduce myself. I'm Ursrook, the commander of the Expedition Corp, as well as the very person who'll give you eternal rest."

Beyond a doubt, this was a well-planned, carefully-calculated trap.

Andrea's face turned a nasty shade of green.

When did they start to associate the Magic Slayer with great magic power?

Right... After Leaf had been attacked in the north of the Misty Forest, everybody had the impression that the Magic Slayer possessed extraordinary power.

In fact, they had started to think that way even before that incident had occurred.

When Lightning had encountered the Magic Slayer for the first time, she had sensed his stupendous magic power, so powerful that everybody just naturally believed that the Magic Eye could easily detect it.

They were thus further misled by their predetermined impression, firmly believing that the Magic Slayer was continuously upgrading himself and that Sylvie had everything under control.

Nevertheless, everything was a false illusion created by the Magic Slayer.

He enticed them out of hiding.

Had he known their plan all along?

But this did not make any sense! Even if the demons noticed Sylvie and Andrea and decided to set up a trap to eliminate them, this Senior Demon named Usrook did lose Taquila and sacrifice thousands of demons on the Fertile Plains! He might not care that much about the lives of his subordinates, but how could he just abandon the ruin? Without the God's Stone, the demons would not be able to erect the Obelisk, which meant they would lose their foothold on the Fertile Plains in the next 400 years. Wasn't the cost a little too dear?

Were they really worth the demon making such a huge sacrifice?

Andrea felt her head swimming as a multitude of thoughts crammed into her head. It was Sylvie who asked the question that bothered her.

"... Why? Taquila should be more important than us!"

The Magic Slayer was surprisingly patient this time. He shook his head and replied tersely, "I can't tell you."

"Can't you just indulge a dying person's curiosity?"

"But you aren't dying," Ursook jeered. "You aren't giving up even in this desperate situation, are you?"

"What's he waiting for?"

"Is he awaiting his God's Stone of Toss to be recharged?"

His arm did not shrivel either.

Anyway, this was a chance. Andrea swallowed hard. She knew there was no chance for Sylvie, Camilla and Margie to stop the Magic Slayer, but she and Ashes might more or less hold him back, although she barely had any magic power left.

The only person they could now rely on was Lightning.

The fact that she had not shown up yet indicated that she had noticed something wrong. If she could send the 'Seagull' to support them, there would still be a chance to snatch a victory out of defeat!

It would be simply more advisable to play for time by asking more questions.

There were indeed so many questions burning inside her.

At this thought, Andrea turned to the Magic Slayer and asked heavily, "I don't understand... Even if we were misled, it isn't likely that we'll miss a lurking enemy. We checked everything before firing. You were eight or nine kilometers away from Taquila, and you couldn't possibly get here within a second. Where did you hide yourself?"

"We've dug many underground passages over the past years at the rear of Taquila instead of the front," Ursrook answered leisurely. "The entrance of the passage is hidden among the God's Stones, so it's hard to spot. Plus, the passage forked out deep down underneath the ground, so it's perfectly normal that you failed to notice them." He looked up at the sky and said, "Human beings are monitoring the area above, right? You did do a good job. That's why you fell into our trap without realizing it."

"There are passages nearby?" Andrea felt a jolt of uneasiness in the pit of her stomach. "Even though you were hiding underground, it still isn't easy to spot us on such a vast land. We constantly moved from one place to another. How did you find us?"

"I didn't find you. You found me," the Magic Slayer drawled as a malicious smile suddenly flutter over his face. "Right, not only one person saw me... Where's that flying little girl? If you have a plan B, your reinforcements should have arrived by now, right?"

A dreadful leaden feeling prevailed Andrea instantly.

"It sees you the moment you see it" — that was exactly what the Eye Demon did. Had she just shot an Eye Demon? But an Eye Demon should be much larger than the Magic Slayer. Did Ursrook somehow make that decoy have the Eye Demon's ability?

Regardless, this did not even matter now. At this moment, Andrea realized where her uneasiness came from.

There must be demons other than the Magic Slayer hiding underground.

The Magic Slayer must be waiting for his reinforcements so that they could kill them all.

Just then, several grenades whizzed out of the woods and darted toward Ursrook!

The Magic Slayer shot up in the air and dodged the grenades gracefully. The grenades landed magnificently on the ground with an almighty crash.

Before the stirred air around them tranquilized, bullets had hailed down at the Magic Slayer.

Ursrook climbed higher, and his body emanated a ghostly blue glow.

"The God's Punishment Witches are here!" Sylvie exclaimed with excitement.

"Are you all OK?" Zoe dashed out of the woods and stepped between the demon and the witches, followed by the other seven God's Punishment Witches who immediately shielded the defeated witches.

"Go. We have to get out of here — "Andrea shouted at the other witches, having no time to provide further explanation.

Meanwhile, Ursrook slowly raised his arm.

There came two muted, distant whooshes.

Sylvie paled, who knew better what that sounds meant than anyone else. "Watch out. It's the Spider Demons!"

Two gleamy black stone pillars flew past above them and showered down long needles after they exploded.

Andrea summoned what remained of her magic power, whipped the air around them and attempted to wrench the falling needles away.

However, nothing happened. Her magic power was shattered by a black flash.

The Magic Slayer generated the anti-magic area!

Elena, who was closest to Andrea, scooped her up and sprinted up to a tree nearby.

It was a fraction of a second that seemed to stretch into years.

Andrea felt her body rising and her eyes streaming. By the time she finally landed, her legs were numb.