

Witch 191

Chapter 191 The new King's bared teeth

Petrov sipped the black tea, leaned against the soft lord chair, and let go of a long sigh of relief.

Two months had passed since the takeover of Longsong Stronghold, and by now he discovered that he liked the hall more and more. It's step-by-step ascending structure allowed him to overlook the lower standing officials and attendants from the Lord's seat, having such power in his grip let him have a feeling of satisfaction.

During the first month, some small aristocrats stepped out and openly questioned him or secretly planned riots and such things – of course, the people who provoked them from behind the scene came from Elk, Wolf, and several other big families. Following his father's advice, Petrov delivered the commoners who created trouble or belonged to the underground rats directly to the gallows, while the small nobles were imprisoned and after their family paid the ransom were expelled from the Western Territory.

When this method was put into practice and thunder like struck down on them, the situation soon subsided. After all, with the exception of the Honeysuckle Family, the Knights of several other families had been arrested and brought to Border Town. Making it impossible for them to build up any resistance against Petrov's policies. Afterward, he again guided the interest by announcing that the stronghold shall compensate the big families for their loss during the seizure, in this way forming a stable group of nobles who all shared a common interest.

With the exception of the 30% which had been transferred to Border Town, the remaining 70% of the stronghold's income were split into three sections. 30% were used to keep the city operating, 20% were used to appease the other noble families, and the remaining 20% were invested into the Hull's territory.

Nowadays, the old portrait of Duke Ryan that had hung behind the lord's seat was exchanged with a picture of the 4th Prince, Roland Wimbleton, but he already looked forward to the day when it was exchanged with one of himself – a portrait of Petrov Hull.

In case he thoroughly took possession of Longsong Stronghold, they could turn the tax used to operate the city and the one invested into their own territory into one, becoming truly worthy of the name of a dukedom. And the 50% which were used to appease the other nobles could also be saved. Instead, it could then be invested in the stronghold's trade, in exchange generating an even higher income for themselves.

Of course, the premise for all of this was that Roland Wimbleton could conquer the throne and rule as King of the Kingdom of Graycastle.

"My Lord," one of his guards entered the Lord's Hall and handed him a letter, "It contains news from Border Town."

When Petrov heard that the letter had come from Border Town, he immediately straightened the way he sat.

He received the envelope and took a fragile piece of papyrus from it. From the poor quality of the letter, he could immediately recognize that it was from one of his eyes within the ranks of the serfs.

The outcome of the battle two months ago could be said to be an outrageous result. Although Petrov hadn't personally taken part in it, he still had heard a fantastic story from his father. In order to find out the reasons for the Duke's failure, he had dispatched some of his confidants to Border Town. They would pretend to be artisans, herdsman or serfs, and send all the information they had gathered back to the stronghold.

He firmly believed that the others families had done the same.

But so far, each month he had only gotten information from the two people disguised as serfs. Those who had pretended to be craftsmen or herders hadn't given any sound of their presence, as if they had vanished.

In the end had they betrayed him out of their own will, or were they discovered by the prince who totally removed them?

He shook his head, instead focusing his attention on the letter.

The content of the letter was written with charcoal and also crookedly written. In some places it even had some traces of water, indicating that it had been written sneakily while working.

The first paragraph was about how they were building a tower with an unknown purpose at the shore of the Redwater River. At present, they had already erected three of these bases which had a height close to that of the stronghold's city walls and on top of each of those bases, they had placed an enormous metal pot. It seemed that the blacksmiths had constructed the metal pot in town. Afterward transporting it to the river as a whole piece. Then the First Army would surround the iron tower and standing with their back to the iron pot, and on the next day, the tower was magically erected.

"Building" ... it's again this word, Petrov thought, it was also mentioned in the previous secret letter, just looking at that information it seems that the Prince is always building something. Last time he had repaired the roads and constructed that bridge, this time he is building that iron tower. Could it be that His Highness is spending all of those gold royals he had plundered from Longsong Stronghold in one go? Furthermore, the function of those towers is still unknown... even though my scouts who are disguised as serfs are not real serfs, but in actuality are knowledgeable knights, so in case that those towers were watchtowers, they would able to see it by the first glance.

Probably those towers are still not entirely built yet, making it difficult to judge their purpose. Petrov shook his head. I should wait until next month, maybe I will get more detailed information then.

He shifted his gaze to the next paragraph.

There he read that for a week a large-scale merchant fleet of an unknown owner had stayed in the town's dock and afterward left eastwards. During their stay, a lot of ore and saltpeter were also unloaded from the ships.

The purchase of saltpeter is easy to understand, after all the second month of the summer will usually become very hot, and because of this, the castle will consume a significant amount of saltpeter for cooling. Furthermore, it can also be used for cold drinks and fruit juice. As a royal aristocrat, the Prince certainly doesn't want to sweat all day, like the peasants on the fields are.

But the purchase of ingots totally surprised Petrov. After all, Border Town was a source for ore all on its own. I can still remember, prior to the Months of Demons, when I was sent as a messenger to Border Town, Prince Roland had exaggeratedly said that they would be able to double the amount of ore they could sell. But now, the result was that not only didn't they export ore, but had now they are also importing ingots?

This, together with those city wall high like iron towers, meant that Petrov himself was now more and more unable to understand what His Royal Highness wanted to accomplish.

But when Petrov read the last paragraph of the secret letter the contents immediately left Petrov stunned.

In the last two weeks, Border Town had held several open-air theater performances at the town square?

They didn't sell tickets, and the drama's name was also unheard of. Moreover, they were even encouraging the serfs to go watch. But the most surprisingly part was that one of the performers was the recently vanished Star of the West, Miss May!

What kind of situation is this?

That Miss May had gone missing was the biggest news of recent times. Several of the dramas in which she should have played the leading role, were now played by others, and because of this the nobles had all left halfway through to express their protest. And when they demanded an answer, the theater claimed that Miss May had left without any explanation, and that her whereabouts were currently unknown. When the news had become public, it had caused an uproar among the drama-loving nobles of the Western Territory.

In the end, she went to Border Town? They don't have there any theaters! Furthermore, to be playing in front of civilians and serfs... Petrov's had some difficulty imagining such a picture in his mind since the impression he had gotten from Miss May was that she wasn't a amiable or an approachable actor.

After carefully thinking about it, he decided to write a letter to His Royal Highness Roland Wimbledon, officially inquiring about this matter. As a theater enthusiast himself, in the past months he had been unable to see the fantastic performance of the Star of the West, not to mention getting the chance to personally invite her. Since the drama was a public performance at the town square, it wouldn't be too surprising for it to be seen by a peddler who might have come from Longsong Stronghold, and this could be given as the reason for this the news to have reached his ear – doing it this way, he won't expose his knights who are disguised as serfs.

As soon as Petrov was ready to have one of his attendants draft the text, a Knight rushed into the hall, and hurriedly said, "My Lord, we have a message from the guards at the East Gate, a team of knights are nearing the stronghold!"

"Knights? Were they able to tell who must have sent them?" He suddenly stood.

"The other side is holding up a flag with a tower and two pikes on it, Sir," the Knight replied, "In case they aren't pretenders, they must be from the new King's forces."

Chapter 192 Under the curtain of the night

About 50 people had come, they were all dressed in armor which was sparkling in the sun. Standing in lines of 8 with flags on all sides, three of them displayed the insignia of the royal family: the gray tower with the two pikes. Additionally, on one side there was a flag with a tower and a horse's head on top. Carving through the memories at the back of his mind, he remembered that this was likely the symbol of the Hawes family of the northern border.

One of the cavalymen stepped out of the ranks and yelled: "I am Lehman Hawes, the messenger of King Timothy. With me, I have brought the resolution of the King, pull down the drawbridge."

"Your certificate?" Petrov stretched his head forward and asked loudly.

Hearing his question, the cavalryman took a bow and arrow from his back, tied a piece of paper to the arrow and shot it directly to on top of the city wall.

One of his guards immediately went over and picked up the arrow for Petrov. When he unfolded the parchment, he saw some faint crisscrossing golden threads embedded at the bottom of the document, and there at the lower right corner was the seal of the royal family, which indicated that he was indeed the new King's messenger.

Seeing this, Petrov took a deep breath and shouted, "Lower the bridge and open the gate." He could already roughly guess the content of the so-called resolution – it was undoubtedly related to Roland Wimbledon. Since the other party wasn't a fraud, they also had no reason to refuse the new King's envoy. Otherwise it was equivalent to declaring the new King, and the Kingdom of Graycastle as their enemy. And in case this news were to spread out, the other families would certainly come to target the Honeysuckle territory without any hesitation, and the currently suppressed undercurrent would instantly rebound.

However, since Timothy had only sent 50 people to inquire about the situation in the Western Territory, one of the Prince's speculation had been confirmed – the new King, at present, was unable to rule over the Western Territory.

Since the Prince, His Royal Highness, was able to repel the Duke's coalition who had more than a 1000 soldier, I'm afraid that these fifty people can only return without having any achievement.

Of course, His Highness has to be informed about this development as soon as possible.

Thinking until here, he called the Knight from before, "Westeros, take three short-tailed horses with you, interchange them during the ride, so that you can reach Border Town as early as possible. When you're there tell His Highness that Timothy's men have come."

"As you bid," Westeros nodded.

As the Knight turned around and left, Petrov sighed. "Let's go and meet the new King's envoy."

...

When Petrov appeared at the city gate, with the exception of the ten people riding at the front, whose spirits seemed to be trembling with excitement, the rest of the Cavaliers all seemed a little sluggish, they were sitting with a crooked body on their horses, as if they could fall off any time.

“Welcome, Sir Lehman,” Petrov welcomed him with a nod. “I’m the stronghold manager belonging to the Honeysuckle Family, Petrov Hull.”

The word ‘stronghold manager’ left a bad aftertaste in his mouth. If he had really been in charge of the Western Border, being the Duke of the stronghold, he would never have had to salute towards an envoy. He wouldn’t even need to greet him at the gate. Instead, he could just stay inside the Lord’s castle, waiting for the other party to come to him.

“I have heard of your name at the Cold Wind Range, ‘Acting Duke’.” Lehman dismounted and walked over with a smile. “The Western Border is indeed a strange territory, even after assembling a vast army, Duke Ryan actually couldn’t conquer such a small town. Moreover, he even lost his own life, which is a rare circumstance for the Kingdom of Graycastle. Of course, for the Honeysuckle Family, this must have been good news.”

Petrov automatically ignored the irony coming from his words, “Are your men alright? They look to be a little... unwell.”

“Don’t mind them,” Lehman glanced backward, “They probably haven’t acclimatized themselves after rushing through the whole journey, they will be better after some rest. To be honest, this region is just too hot.”

“It’s only because the North is too cold,” Since the other person seemed to not to care about the matter, Petrov was too lazy to pay attention further to the subject. “I’m wondering why sir envoy has come from the Cold Wind Range, rather than from King’s City.”

“That is because His Majesty Timothy Wimbleton is currently in the Northern Territory,” Lehman answered bluntly. “Duke Essie thought had thought he could take advantage of the weakened state of the Northern Border Guards to instigate a rebellion. After being suspected of starting a revolution, King Timothy had no other choice than to put down the revolt.”

Rebellion? Petrov frowned, that does not meet with common sense. Although the Border Guards were put together of Knights and mercenaries from all over the kingdom, most of the members were still the Duke’s own men. So how could it be that he had substantial losses created by the rebellion? Remembering the letter within Duke Ryan had written about his plans to annex the North, Petrov created a bad image within his mind... Could it be that Timothy Wimbleton had the same kind of idea?

“That being the case, what is the King’s current decision?”

“He has issued a recall order,” Lehman stated, “His Majesty sent me to see if the Western Territory has also sunken into a state of chaos, caused by war. If I remember correctly, prior to the Months of Demons, the King had sent a recall order to Roland Wimbleton, but until today he still hasn’t returned to King’s City.”

“The instruments should have been forwarded to the stronghold five months ago, but unlike the previous Lords, Lord Roland didn’t choose to return to the stronghold and take refuge here during the Months of Demons,” Petrov paused. “He decided to instead stay inside Border Town and lead his people against the demonic beasts. So, for that reason he couldn’t immediately set out to King’s City and follow the King’s orders.”

“By now the end of the Months of Demons had been almost three months ago,” Lehman didn’t waver in his duty. “The King has sent me to escort the Prince back to King’s City.”

“When will you leave for Border Town?”

“We will set out tomorrow morning.”

Traveling at a regular pace, they should arrive at Border Town in three days, while my Knight will move through day and night, and should be able to deliver the message after only one night and day. This way His Royal Highness should have enough time to prepare to deal with them. I, Petrov, can only do so much.

When the group reached the stronghold’s barracks, Petrov stopped, “This is the place where the Duke’s Knights were stationed, so staying here you should get a good rest, dinner will be sent later to you. As for Sir Lehman,” Petrov looked at Lehman Hawes, “there will be a hearty dinner prepared for you, please be sure to attend.”

“Thank you for your generosity, Sir Petrov,” the latter laughed.

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After dinner, when Lehman returned to camp and stepped into the central tent, he was immediately surrounded by several people.

“What’s the situation?” He asked.

“We are surrounded on all sides by people who are keeping a close watch over us. They have also stationed around a hundred troops at the gates, but most of them don’t possess a whole armor, so they should belong to the city patrol,” one of his men reported. “It seems that the Lord doesn’t trust us.”

“At least it appeared that our intelligence was correct, the information I gathered at the banquet also confirmed this point,” Lehman spoke in a hushed tone. “After the Duke was defeated, most of the Knights were arrested and brought to Border Town, so there aren’t many Knight’s left for them to use in combat.”

Before he had arrived here, he had gathered detailed intelligence about the current situation in Longsong Stronghold. The task given by His Majesty was very simple, which was, to discover the reasons for the Duke’s loss, and then to take the appropriate measures to take gain control over the Western Territory as quickly as possible.

“What’s with those who took that medicine...?”

“They will soon reach their limit,” said the other, “as long as we give them pills, they will do anything.”

The messenger group was also only a pretext, of their team of fifty, the numbers of real Knights were only counted at thirteen, the other were mercenaries disguised as knights. Under the influence of the church’s pills, they were more obedient than the loyalest of hounds, while at the same time being even more ferocious than demonic beasts. They were also the key to Lehman’s plan in capturing the gate. According to his plan, a 1,500 people strong militia were slowly nearing the stronghold and as long as they opened the gates, the city would fall into their hands.

“Hand out the pills, then have ten men stay behind to deal with the patrol and send the others to the East Gate.” Lehman finally gave his orders.

Chapter 193 Castle Bathroom

The theater performance was a great success. Within the last two weeks “Cinderella” had been performed three times, many of the citizens had even seen it more than once. If the first performance was the needed propaganda and announcement to attract so many people to come watch, the next two plays were completely self-sustaining. There were even citizens who came to the City Hall and asked when the fourth performance would be held.

Getting such a response, Roland was naturally overjoyed; they were all so completely attracted to the story that almost no one raised any objections as to why Cinderella got help from a witch. Wait until “The rooster crows at Midnight” gets played next month, which was almost a special performance for the impoverished commoners, it was still unknown how the serfs would view the treatment and assistance of the witches during the drama.

Another thing that pleased Roland was that the crew had settled down in town and even accepted the existence of the witches – after the third performance, Irene took the initiative to find Roland, and had asked him from where the unexpected “sound accompaniment” had come, so Roland then introduced Echo to her.

With Nightingale’s secret observation, they discovered that although Irene was clearly surprised, she didn’t show any resentment or disgust. After she regained her composure, she seemed to be very curious and peppered Echo with many questions, even making her demonstrate her magical sound several times over. The result being that Echo soon joined the theater group, becoming the master of music who was orchestrating from behind the scenes – in order to avoid the possibility of any accidents, Irene alone paired up with Echo when they did a sound rehearsal, withholding it from the knowledge of the cast. There was no doubt that the musical accompaniment would soon reach new heights at the upcoming performance.

Another matter that made him jubilant, was that the castle would soon step into the era of tap water.

The towering water tower stood tall and upright in the castle backyard. Its body and framework was made out of welded iron, giving it a triangular shape. Attached to the top of the tower —with a diameter of two meters and a height of three meters— was an iron bucket. The water valve within the bucket made it very convenient to control the water level. The tower was welded by Anna and afterward covered by a rust-proof coating by Soraya, and finally, with the help of Hummingbird’s magic, they eliminated most of the weight in order to install it on the previously erected cement base.

Due to the height of the castle, the water tower in the castle backyard was even higher than Redwater River’s river bank, with a height of 12 meters it was almost level with the castle’s peak. In order to prevent the tower from collapsing, Roland surrounded the tower by a wall and in this way connected the tower with the castle.

The steam engine was set up outside the backyard and used to supply the water tower with water by pumping up water from the well in the castle’s back garden. Taking a closer look, it could be seen that it

was already the third generation of the steam engine, with the biggest improvement being the great reduction of the working noise.

At each connection point of the steam engine, a spacer was equipped – the light blue spacer was drawn with Soraya's sky coloring, making it soft while also being very tough, significantly reducing the machine's vibrational noise. The inside of the cylinder and the piston's edge were covered with a grass coloring, which lessened the leakage while at the same time also improved the operational efficiency. Components that were prone to tremors, such as the exhaust pipe, had been entirely replaced with coated hoses.

In order to prevent that the steamer from getting scorched and drenched by sun and rain, as well as for further noise reduction, Roland built a small house around it, and had Soraya coat all of the inner walls with a honeycomb design, which was used like a porous sound-absorption material. The practical test showed that even during the night, the noise of the machine would be so faint that the people sleeping inside wouldn't be woken up.

However, Roland's attempt to automatically feed the steam engine failed. He originally envisaged that the steam engine would be regulated by a fly ball which would control the valve in the wood box. As the steam pressure dropped, the fly ball was meant to open the valve, so that the firewood in the wood box would roll into the furnace, but that way the regulator would have to do a lot of work, otherwise with the weight of the fly ball alone it couldn't drive the valve.

After a lot of deliberation, Roland finally decided to give up. At the beginning, the wood box would have to be filled to the maximum, and when it was used up it had to be filled again by a workforce anyway, in that case would be better to arrange for staff to just fill the water tank with water each day.

The final step was to install the water system into the castle – which included faucets, showers, pipes and the corresponding drainpipes.

The castle wasn't like the brick houses of the newly constructed district, the holes, roofs and walls built out of stone caused the transformation of the castle to be very inconvenient. So this step had taken nearly a week, but in order to live a happy life, Roland personally directed Karl to change one room on the second and the third floor into a bathroom.

For this, Soraya's new ability once again played a vital role, after the drainage pipes on the ground were paved with cement; she painted a thin layer of grass over the ground, not only making it waterproof, but in this way walking in the bathroom was like also as comfortable as walking on grassland. When she'd done this, Roland directly permitted her to coat the whole room. Turning the ceiling into a blue sky and clouds, while on the surrounding walls far-off valley and grassy areas could be seen and the walls of the bathtub became crystal clear, just like a jewel.

On the day at which the water system was working, the Prince called all of the witches to the bathroom to let them finally experience for themselves this wondrous achievement.

The water tank in the backyard was filled with water, so when he turned on the faucet, the water rushed out of the pipe.

“From now on, there is no longer the need to get the water from the well,” Roland proudly proclaimed. “It is not necessary to use the same bathwater for three days. You only have to stand under the shower and pull the lever.”

“Where does the water come from?” Lightning stuck out her tongue and tasted the water, “It’s sweet.”

From below Lightning, Macy stretched out her head and followed her example, “Very sweet goo!”

Seeing a third one trying to taste the water, Roland stopped Nana, “Those who want to drink water, can only do so after it has been boiled. The water from this can only be used for hand washing and bathing.”

“This is... the siphon principle, right?” Anna looked to Roland, her lake like blue eyes flashed with intelligence.

“What is that?” Hummingbird asked as she raised her hand.

Under Scroll’s teaching, every witch in the class had gotten used to the habit of raising their hand whenever they had a question.

“ ‘Elementary Physics’ says when the level in two containers is not equal, and if the two tanks are connected by a pipe, no matter what shape the pipe has, under the force of gravity the liquid will always level out.” Anna explained what she remembered, “Our current position is lower than the water tower, so the water will continue to flow to here.”

“That’s entirely correct,” Roland praised. Being able to link the learned knowledge with the reality, really was worthy of a talented person.

“What about this?” Nightingale asked, curiously pointing to the shower, “Why does it have so many holes in the bottom?”

Roland turned the valve open, letting thin water droplets spray out, “It’s for the purpose of making it easier for people to take a bath. Just by standing under the shower, an individual can easily clean their body.”

“So that was the reason you were rolling around in the castle this whole week, to make it more comfortable to take a bath?” Lily curled her lips and whispered, “It’s really worthy of the luxurious life of a Lord.”

“Lily!” Scroll scolded with a frown.

“Never mind,” Roland waved his hand, indicating that he did not mind her words, “The pursuit of enjoyment is one of the biggest sources of human progress, and I am not an exception to that.”

Chapter 194 Lily

Not long after the Prince returned to his office, Scroll, following after him, also entered the room.

“Your Highness, I’m sorry, Lily, that child... it was not on purpose.”

“I don’t mind what she said,” he smiled, “After all, she is still a little girl.”

“Only His Highness is so tolerant of us,” Scroll sighed. “At first, she wasn’t like this, but after she was deceived, it is hard for her to believe in ordinary people again.”

“Are you speaking about something that happened to her before she joined the Witch Cooperation Association?” Roland asked. “If I remember it correctly, it was one year ago that she had joined you.”

“You already know that I can feel the existence of magic, the closer I come to the source the more intense the feeling will become. Though it is not like Nightingale’s sense, that allows her to directly see the shape and color of the magic, I can at least use it to detect new witches. So whenever we reached a new town, I will go to the local shelters or orphanages and pretend to be an aristocratic wife who wants to adopt a child, looking if I may be able to find an awakened sister,” she paused, “I found Lili in a shelter in a remote village, but when I expressed my intention of wanting to adopt her, I was rejected by the owner of the shelter, who declared that he would only sell the girls after they have become adults.”

“Why?” Roland already had his doubt. The last chance for a girl to awaken as a witch is on her day of adulthood, is that the reason?

“We were also surprised at that time, so we had Nightingale sneak into the shelter and search for books, records, and related information. Fortunately, the shelter was far from town so we could stay there for a long time.

“With Nightingale’s ability, why didn’t you just take Lili away, with her ability it shouldn’t have been too difficult, right?”

“It wouldn’t have been difficult,” Scroll nodded in response, “With the exception of the God’s Stone of Retaliation that the operator wore, there was no other stone within the whole shelter, but we still couldn’t do that, after all, there was a precedent for that.”

“What precedent?” The Prince filled a cup of tea and handed it to Scroll.

“Thank you,” Scroll took the teacup. “At first, as soon as we detected a witch, we would take her by force, but after what happened in the Seawind Region we had to change our way of thinking. They thought of us as evil, so when we brought them to the camp of our Witch Cooperation Association, they wouldn’t listen to us or accept our explanation and would instead try to attack us. In the end, two of our sisters died, they were killed by Cara’s magical snake, ‘Death’. And since then, we would always carefully observe the witch over a period of time, and determine her situation and get to know her beliefs before we would take action. In case we were chased by the Church and had to act urgently, we... had no other choice than to give up on them.”

“So, the meeting between Nightingale and Wendy wasn’t by accident?”

“Of course not,” Scroll took another sip of her tea, smiled and shook her head, “The interval of becoming aware of Nightingale’s existence until Wendy made contact with her, more than one month’s time had passed; during which we also recruited other sisters, such as Red Pepper and Windseeker...” Speaking until here her expression turned blank, “Unfortunately, they are now buried in the wild lands. At that time, if we had only chosen to settle in Border Town, they could still be alive today.”

Roland also felt quite sorry for them. If the Witch Cooperation Association had decided to settle down in Border Town and had brought their more than 40 witches with them, I think it is entirely possible that we would already have entered modern life by now.

“But right now we weren’t speaking about them,” Scroll took a deep breath, “we were talking about Lily. During the search of the shelter as well as following the host’s tracks, we discovered an astonishing fact – the small country house was neither a real shelter, nor was it an establishment to screen for witches.”

“Then what was its purpose?”

“Its only purpose was to satisfy the owner’s selfish desire.” Even for a person with a good self-control like Scroll, when speaking these words her facial expression became somewhat dreary, “Every week the owner would go to the slums of Redwater City, abducting those vagrant girls, and deceive them by saying that he was a kind and selfless aristocrat, who had opened up a shelter in the suburb. Furthermore, his shelter would often be visited by powerful nobles who were looking for girls to be adopted as daughters. As long as they were selected, they would no longer need to worry about food and clothing for the rest of their life. Of course, not everyone would be deceived by his sweet words, but... after ten years of running, in addition to the 66 who still lived in the shelter, there were still several hundreds of names written in his books.”

“So many?” Roland frowned. “But you said that it was not such a big shelter.”

“Hundreds of them now only remain as names in those books. Most of them were already... dead,” she whispered. “During the last ten years, he had discovered three witches, who were all sold to the Church. While the other girls –who had better appearance– got dressed up nicely and then sold to people, who had a need of them. However, those for those who no one had any interest in were killed and buried in the woods behind the shelter.

“...” Hearing her story, the Prince didn’t know how to respond. At that moment he suddenly felt from his back, someone gently place their hands on his shoulders.

“The chances that a girl awakens to become a witch is not high, so after reducing the living cost, within all the years, he hadn’t earned more than 20 gold royals, based on the data we were able to gather from his accounting book. Because of those 20 gold royals, more than 300 women had lost their life in the woods, filling the pit in the woods with corpses.

“When Cara had interrogated him why he did this, he’d said, that it had never been his intention to earn gold royals, that was only to keep the shelter running. Because of this, he only sold them when they became adults, after all, a witch could be sold at a much higher price than an ordinary woman. His only goal was to enjoy the power to decide about life and death and to feel the pleasure of forcefully taking it away; giving him the feeling as if he had become their King.

“Afterwards, Cara killed him in anger, and when we later wanted to dispel the girls from their belief, most of them only glared at us as if we had taken away their chance of being adopted by a noble.”

At first the same was true for Lily, and only after Cara took her to the grove behind the building, where she then saw her friend was buried – a month ago the owner had lied and said that she was one of those lucky girls who were selected by a noble and with that could leave the shelter. Soon after seeing the several corpses in the already stinking pit, Lily threw up and turned into a total mess, fainting and falling

into Cara's arms. Later when she awoke her look had become stupefied, without any trace of spirit left in her eyes, she was only later under Wendy's care that she was slowly able to recover. Since then, Lily is full of vigilance and distrust to ordinary people, especially the aristocracy. "Scroll explained, "But I believe that she will be able to slowly change her point of view. After all, you are also a member of the nobility."

"So, that's the reason," in his heart Roland secretly sighed, after experiencing this kind of event, being able to once more cheer up, her spirit must be considerably tough.

Scroll went over to the kettle and filled up their two cups. Afterward, the room was silent for a long time until she said: "Your Highness, I have a question I want to ask you."

"What question?" Seeing the serious expression on Scroll's face, Roland got started.

"Nightingale, are you there?"

"Well," Nightingale said, "Do you need me to leave?"

"No... you already know about it anyway," Scroll shook her head, "so you can accompany me this time, and be my witness."

"You previously said, that you are willing to take a witch as your wife and marry her, but I do not know if you know, that a witch is unable to conceive a child." She paused, and after a moment she finally asked, "Your Highness, even if it is like this, is there still no change to your original intention?"

Chapter 195 Answer

Roland doubted if what he had heard was right, so after a while, he was only able to say, "What?"

Scroll bit her lip and repeated what she'd said once more.

This time he was convinced that this wasn't the result of a hearing problem, was that also the reason why the witches initially cared so much about the marriage? "Are you certain that witches cannot have children? Does it come... from that specified source, which lead to the known mistake? For example, the same as what lead to the Holy Mountain previously."

"I would have hoped so too," she sighed. "Unfortunately, many cases have already confirmed this point. Whether it was between an ordinary man and a witch who got along well or forced intercourse, there has been no time that the Witch Cooperation Association had heard of where a witch has become pregnant."

"Reproductive isolation"... was the first word which emerged in Roland's mind. Can it be that the witches have really completely exceeded the ordinary, becoming a new kind of human species, which is unable to give birth to a descendant with our old humankind? Or, can it be because of the magic power gathered within their body, which results in this phenomenon?

But now isn't the time to get to the heart of the problem, he thought, the important part is what this implies. Will this knowledge be a hindrance for myself if I want to marry a witch?

The first person Roland thought of was Anna.

Although he couldn't deny that he would regret it if he couldn't have children with Anna, his wish to raise a child with Anna was based on his affection for her, so not being able to have a child with her wouldn't reduce his affection. For a person with a modern soul, and for him, having blood relation with his descendants is of far less importance than it was to the people of the past. As a separate living individual, he does not regard his child as the continuation of his life – the latter could neither inherit his thoughts nor inherit his memories. Instead, they were an entirely independent person.

So, looking at it from an emotional point of view, he could accept that a witch cannot have a child.

Then only the real obstacle would be – the need for an heir. However, looking at the history this was still not a thorny matter, he just has to establish an empire that doesn't need an heir, and how to achieve this, there were options he could choose from, but which one he would pick he could slowly decide on later .

Looking at the big picture, Roland surprisingly discovered, that this was good news for him.

He and Nightingale had already spoken several nights and pondered on this question, how to build a social framework which allows witches and ordinary people to peacefully coexistence and progress together. Right now, even with the God's Stone of Retaliation, as long as they had enough time, witches and their offspring would always form a more powerful community – even in the case where science and technology allowed an ordinary person to use magic. Even then, it couldn't make up for the witches increased intelligence, memory, comprehensive speed and their overall leading edge.

But now he was told that witches are unable to give birth. This significantly avoided the problem of forming witch clans, closing the gap between witches and ordinary people, giving him the hope to one day see people and witches work together and advance hand in hand.

Perhaps the time he had been lost in his thoughts was too long, no matter what, Nightingale couldn't bear it any longer and squeezed his arm.

When Roland returned from within his thoughts, he reassuringly patted the back of her hand and cleared his throat and said. "The way I have thought before is still the way I think now."

"..." For a moment Scroll was frozen, "What?"

The hand on top of his arm also instantly grasped firmly.

Seeing their reactions, Roland couldn't suppress his laughter, previous it was he who had thought that he had misheard them, and now it was them who thought so? He coughed twice and then reassuring said: "I still think the same – I'm willing to marry a witch and take her as my wife."

...

When Scroll left the room she wore a very strange expression; it looked as if she was perfectly contented and yet she was also carrying a somewhat sad look, leaving behind a confused Roland.

Needing an explanation he turned around he asked, "Is she okay?"

The one he spoke to didn't answer, she only looked at him with a smile, which together with the outside sunshine shining upon her white face gave her a gentle, bright and beautiful appearance causing others' hearts' to beat faster.

“Alright,” Roland moved his line of sight away from her, “It seems you are in a pretty good mood.”

At this moment, the voice from outside the door traveled over, “Your Highness, one of Longsong Stronghold’s Knights has arrived, he claims to have crucial news for you.”

“Take him to the reception hall; I will meet him there.”

When the Prince walked into the hall, the knight immediately stepped over and then went down on his knees, “Lord Petrov has sent me to tell you, that an envoy sent by Timothy Wimbledon has arrived at Longsong Stronghold.”

“Envoy?” Roland mused. “How many people have arrived?”

“Altogether there are about 50 people.”

It seems that they are just a group which wants to persuade us to give up, he thought, simply a diplomatic strategie, nothing which should be painful or itching for me, “When did they come?”

“Yesterday morning,” the Knight lowered his voice, “Lord Petrov gave me the order to inform you as soon as possible.”

Merely a day and a night, I’m afraid he had hurried all through the night while holding up a torch, “Thank you, I have put you to a lot of trouble, rest for a day before you return.” Roland looked to the guards and told them, “First give him a gold royal as reward and then take him to the inn.”

When the Knight had left the hall, Roland wanted to put the matter aside, after all, a team of just 50 people could never become a threat to Border Town. In case they wanted to negotiate, he would merely allow the single leader to enter. However, since Petrov treated this situation so carefully, it might be better to grasp the situation himself and to know the whereabouts of the envoy.

Thinking until here, he called for Lightning and Maggie, giving them the order to fly together to the stronghold and examine the situation.

A double-hour later, the two witches had completed their investigation and returned to the castle.

“There was nothing to see,” Lightning reported. “We didn’t see a group of 50 knights on the road. Actually, we didn’t see even one lone knight.

“Haven’t seen anyone, goo!” Maggie confirmed.

It seems after they had reached a big city, traveling such a long distance, they were in need to first have some fun for themselves and to ease their tired body. “Before the envoy arrive here,” Roland ordered, “every day you two will fly along the way and check if you can discover anything.” He paused, “Oh that’s right, how far are you with the map?”

“Probably she has already put together several hundred pieces, they are enough to almost fill Soraya’s whole room,” Lightning explained. “By now she had moved the map to the backyard, do you want to take a look?”

“Alright,” Roland laughed.

The castle's backyard had been turned into a botanical garden, ever since Sean had brought back the seeds from Port of Clearwater, Leaves had created even more fantastic oddities of every description. In order to save the land and place for flower beds, Leaves had put up a wooden frame in the sky, so that many plants grew and twisted around the frame like a grapevine, some of them even climbed half of the castle wall. This was the reason why the wall behind the castle hung full with grapes, apples, wheat and sugar cane, and whenever the witches had some free time, they would gather in the backyard and picked up some fruit and sugar cane from the wall to eat. Unfortunately, these crops could only grow with the help of Leaves' magic, and with this, could only be regarded as an unsuccessful test.

The map which was a mosaic, pieced together by many parchments, was placed at the center of the yard, reaching a size of five to six square meters.

"Here we are," Lightning announced, and then put an arm around Roland's waist, beginning to slowly float into the sky until they were hovering over the map. "Do you see the palm-sized brown square? From high up in the air, Border Town looks exactly like that."

"The blue pieces East and South... are they the sea?"

"Yes, but you have to climb over the mountains to reach there."

Roland felt a cold shiver running through his heart, if we say that it was still normal if the wildlands were ten times more vast than the Kingdom of Graycastle, he still hadn't expected, that when he had the complete map in front of him, the Western Territory would actually seem so small. In front of them was the Impassable Mountain Range and behind them the sea, just like they were sandwiched between a natural barrier and the marginal zone. No... not only the Western Territory, when he completed the undrawn parts of the map with his mind, in the case where he thought of the Impassable Mountain Range as a wall splitting of the mainland, then the Kingdom of Graycastle, no, the whole "mainland" itself, would be nothing more than a small piece of land behind the wall.

Chapter 196 The Calamity of the Church

Lehman and his knights rode their horses through the streets of Longsong Stronghold.

Now, after the fighting had come to an end, the city's residents were all hiding in their houses and keeping their doors shut; not even half a shadow could be seen on the streets, making a cold and cheerless image.

"Sir Lehman, I hope that your hand is alright," The "Shield" Knight, Sir Levin asked.

"It's not a problem," Lehman Hawes shrugged his shoulders, "at least I can still move it," however, that small movement was already enough to make him wrinkle his brows.

Last night's seizure of the gate had went smoothly, only twenty guards had been stationed at the East Gate, they never expected that the enemy's attack would come from the inside.

Even though they were able to sound the horn, the reinforcements had still needed a quarter of an hour to arrive, by then, the 15 mercenaries, enhanced with the pills, had already reached the top of the gate; killing one guard after another and thus allowing Lehman with this Knights to open the gate. Under the darkness of night, Lehman hadn't noticed the side door in the city wall from which two knights had suddenly appeared, the one armed with a hammer immediately throwing himself at Lehman.

In order to lessen the swinging power of the hammer, he had to take the hammer's blow before it reached his waist, under such a hasty situation Lehman was merely able to use his arm to resist, and almost at the same time using his sword with his other hand to pierce into the guard's waist. Affected by the impact of the fatal blow, the incoming hammer lost a lot of its strength, but it was still strong enough to leave behind a noticeable dent on his arm's armor piece.

At first, Lehman hadn't felt much pain, however, after they had conquered the gate, he noticed that he had problems with lifting his arm, when he unlocked the armor he discovered that his forearm had already swollen up like a rolling pin.

"I hope there's an analgesic herb in the church," Levin said. "They often prepare some strange things."

"Like those pills for example." Duane, another Knight who happens to be near, said.

Soon, the knights reached the church's gate, and a team of around 100 militia could already be seen waiting for them, showing off a look full of desire.

"Hand out some pills to them," Lehman dismounted from his horse. When he saw that everyone had taken the pills, he turned around, climbed the stairs and led his team to the main hall.

"Halt," the two gatekeepers shouted, "This is Holy Land, no one is allowed to bring their weapons inside!"

Levin pulled out his weapon and placed it in both his hands to hand it over, "We are aware of that, this should be given to you, right?" When the believer stretched out his hands, ready to receive the weapon, Levin suddenly and masterfully grasped the sword's hilt then slashed his sword upwards, sending the believer's two hands falling to the ground.

"Ah -" even before the believer's sorrowful cry could fully emerge from his throat, the Knight had already pierced the tip of his sword through it

Even though Levin's nickname was Shield, his quick sword draw was truly unmatched.

After the other believer's throat was cut open by Duane, Lehman kicked open the door and expressionless entered the hall.

"Who are you?" A middle-aged man wearing a blue-and-white ritual gown walked up to them not showing a trace of fear as he faced the bloody sword which was pointed at him, "Daring to have the impertinence to break into the church! Children, grab them!"

Lehman sneered, right now, most people were at home, so there were no more than 20-30 believers inside the church. Having to face his battle-hardened knights, their rebellion would only be a doomed cause.

Not waiting for his order, with a devilish laugh Duane pulled his sword, cutting down one of the believers that was rushing over. Other people also quickly joined the battle, turning the church into a scene of chaos. Seeing the situation, the priest shouted, "Children, take the holy medicine so that God will give you the power to defeat the mob!"

His Majesty Timothy's guess was right, Lehman thought, they really did have pills stored in here! Merely to see how the believer's eyes suddenly turn red through and through, and on the believer's face blue

veins were blossoming. With those drugs, an ordinary person could break through the human body's limit of strength and speed. Furthermore, the narrower the terrain, the more challenging it would be to deal with them. Unfortunately for them, they aren't the only ones who possess those things, he thought, now have a taste of your own medicine.

"Get out!" he yelled, "make the militia fight against them!"

Hearing his shout, the militia behind him couldn't wait to swallow those two colored pills and madly rush forward to fight against the believer. Seeing all this, the priest's face finally lost his color, "Why do you also have the...!"

"Holy Medicine?" Holding his sword in his hand, Lehman bypassed the group of fighting people, closing in towards his counterpart. "They were a present from your Church, and if we hadn't to face your obstacles, His Majesty Timothy would have already unified the Kingdom of Graycastle."

"His Majesty?" The priest's eyes became wide, "you are Timo—"

With a grunting sound his voice stopped, the Knight's sword pierced the man's chest, penetrating his heart and lung.

Soon after, the unequal fight ended and there were more than 20 believers slaughtered with their bodies spread all over the ground. The further the drug efficacy vanished, the heavier the soldiers began to breathe so when they were finally able to sit down, they were so satisfied that they didn't mind to sit in the blood which was endlessly flowing over the ground.

Lehman's arm also became heavier; just his previous sword stroke was enough to make him experience a tearing pain. Sometimes, he also wanted to swallow that black pill, let himself ignore the physical fatigue and suffering, but whenever he saw the pill's ugly side effects, this idea would immediately vanish.

Lehman had a profound understanding of the two pills that were sold by the church. For a healthy person, the pill would only be effective for three times. While the first time it was still effective for a quarter hour, the duration would decrease with every following dose, at the same time forming a heavy dependence on it. If you were unable to take the medicine for a long time, the body would gradually decline until finally, death.

Taking advantage of this characteristic, he let every one of the soldiers eat a pill to unify the militia, in this way forcing them to obey his orders. The craving for the drug could turn even the weakest farmer into a bloodthirsty beast. Now, after the hundred people had taken the pill for the second time, they could only be used one more time.

But... even if the drug is taken after the third dosage, it will only slow the process, it still cannot reverse its damage. In other words, as soon as one takes the first pill, it is equivalent to setting their first foot into the coffin. Of course, this was something he would never explain to them.

There is no doubt that the two-color secret medicine is a conspiracy of the Church, His Majesty Timothy is apparently aware of this, and because of this, he prohibited all of the Knights from taking it. However, it is also a weapon which can be used to unify the kingdom, or... rather, must be used. Without it, His Majesty cannot overcome Garcia Wimbledon, who also has those pills with her.

When His Majesty mentioned this matter to him for the first time, Lehman couldn't believe it. He just couldn't understand why the Church would support two members of the royal family who were competing against each other for the throne. But after a series of unforeseen events, he had to acknowledge His Majesty's judgment. And now, with the Church in the Western Territory also in possession of the pills, he no longer had any doubt – the Church doesn't intend to help any of the Princes or Princess to the throne; no, they want the entire Kingdom of Graycastle for themselves.

"We found the pills in the basement, there are four large boxes, with thousands in all of them." After thoroughly plundering the Church, Levin excitedly came back to report, "There were also gold royals, jewelry, and many silk fabrics, all of which should be the donations given by believers."

"What can be taken, take away and what can't be taken, burn," Lehman instructed. "In case someone asks, Roland Wimbledon was the one who did all of this. We're just helping the Church to suppress his rebellion."

Because we still have to rely on the Church to get the secret medicine, so, for now, we can't burn all of our bridges with them. It is better if we blame the Prince for it, since he can already be considered dead. In order to prevent the Church from becoming suspicious, His Majesty himself had stayed in the North, pretending to comply with their fake instruction. He'd only secretly sent out a small number of Knights, who recruited a large number of militia to capture the Western Territory.

Nowadays, all the forces of the Church are concentrated in the Wolfsheart Kingdom, so we have to unite the Kingdom of Graycastle as soon as possible, only then will we have the strength to resist an attack of the Church. His Majesty Timothy believes that it is only a matter of time before the Church attacks the Kingdom of Graycastle. So until then, we have to store and collect as many pills as possible. At the same time, he has also ordered King's City Alchemy Association to research its ingredients, so that they could become able to imitate it.

Now that we have the pills in our hand, there is only one task left – completely eliminating Roland Wimbledon.

Chapter 197 Preparing for the Enemy

On the next morning, Roland was informed that Lightning, on one of her routine patrols, had discovered that there was a large force slowly closing in on them. .

"What, they have more than 1000 people?" Hearing such a large number startled Roland, wasn't I told that it was only a 50-person strong envoy?

"En, goo," Maggie added, "there aren't many people that are riding on horses, only six!"

"The people who are walking... how are they dressed and equipped?"

"They seem ordinary, most of them don't possess a helmet or armor. They're wearing normal linen clothes instead," Lightning reported, "Furthermore, they all have different kinds of weapons, but there are hundreds of people who are carrying short spears on their back."

With such a poor level of equipment, does that mean they are civilians or serfs who were forced into serving? Roland questioned this, during this era they had no specialized militia training, this was also the

reason why the militia usually only belonged to the logistic team and handled the food and supplies of the Knights. While they were also sometimes used as cannon fodder, as a target for the enemy's arrows.

If Timothy wants to use military force to dispose of me, it should be impossible that he doesn't know about the explosive fight between Border Town and Longsong Stronghold. That time, Duke Ryan's coalition of more than two hundred Knights could not even touch the town's edge, not to mention that crowd of mercenaries who would have to run on both of their legs. Knowing about the fight's process and eventual result, yet still wanting to attack Border Town, this can only mean that they have confidence that they can break through the intensive row of gunfire.

Roland could not help but think of the church's pills.

Previous he had already guessed that the Church was supporting Garcia and himself at the same time, but whether they also favored Timothy was still unknown. If that troop was in possession of those pills, the situation would be entirely different.

For a short time they would be able to reach the speed of a running horse, while also not being afraid of pain, meaning, the gun line would actually face an impact of more than 1000 "Knights", and as long as one person managed to rush into the lines, they could cause significant casualties to the First Army.

Fortunately, the First Army now was no longer the First Army of two months ago.

With the revolving rifle, although until now only 100 had been replaced, the firepower they could deliver went far beyond that of the previous flintlock army, especially after he'd provided the gunners with a special ammunition loader. As soon as they enter into a scope of 300 meters, the enemy would have to face a constant stream of attacks.

Furthermore, after the fight with the stronghold, the artillery force has also been expanded. From its original size of four to its current size 20 groups, each was equipped with a modified version of the 12-pounder field cannon, doubling its range, its effective range was increased to over a kilometer.

However, Roland soon thought of another problem.

"Have you noticed if anyone of those soldiers that were walking was wearing a God's Stone of Retaliation?"

"I didn't dare to get so close," Lightning said, then pointed at Maggy. "But this fellow, after she had turned into her eagle form she could see them many times better than I could."

But the latter also shook her head, "Haven't seen, they might have hidden it in their clothes, Goo!"

"If it's like this..." for a moment Roland pondered about it, "How about you take Nightingale with you. If you only carry one person while flying, you can still reach a height of ten meters, right? You will follow the Redwater River, Maggie will fly in front of you and take responsible of being on guard, as for the possibility of coming across a ship, Nightingale will step into her world of fog," he said, then he looked at Nightingale. "When you are close enough to the enemy, you will observe them from distance. Find out if the troops are carrying God's Stone of Retaliations, however, without my permission, you will not attack."

"Yes," Nightingale and Lightning said simultaneously.

When the three were ready to go, Roland stopped them one more time, “Remember, safety first, the most important thing is that you protect yourself.”

“No problem,” Nightingale said with a wink and smile.

When the witches had left, Roland felt a little uneasy, wasn’t the last sentence too much like raising a flag?

But he also became aware of a major mistake he had made, which was, that his intelligence control within the Longsong Stronghold was too weak – if it weren’t for the messenger sent by Petrov, he would only become aware of the enemy after it had already hit his door. Once a street fight broke out, the First Army would lose its advantage of firepower, and it would be difficult to get the advantage back.

I’m too young, too simple, Roland thought, after the war, this has to be changed, not only our intelligence system, Petrov should also be placed in my own staff.

In the following time, Roland sat restlessly at his table, even when it was time for lunch he wasn’t in the mood to eat. Only when Lighting, carrying Nightingale, flew in a fairy like manner into his room was he able to breath out in relieve.

Maggie closed her wings, dropped on Nightingales shoulders and chirped in a high voice: “Doesn’t exist goo, doesn’t exist goo!”

“They have no God’s Stone of Retaliation?”

“Most of them don’t possess them,” Nightingale said, taking off her hood, freeing her golden flood. “I have observed them from the front to the end, and I could only detect three to four black holes from the ranks of the militia.”

“Very well,” Roland said, immediately forming a preliminary battle plan. “You all should be hungry by now. In that case, go to the dining hall and order whatever you want to eat from the chef.

“Honey-sauce barbecue, Goo!” Maggie chirped, spread her wing and flew ahead.

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East of Border Town.

Van’er glanced at the stone masons and workers who were busying themselves at both sides of the road, “In the end, what is it that they are building?”

In the beginning hundreds of people had dug out several huge pits in the ground, and they then built a brick wall at the edge of the pits, he thought that the walls would be connected, cutting off the road this way, so he never expected that they would actually be built around the pit.

“Don’t worry about it; I only know that there is finally another enemy we can beat,” Jop said excitedly while setting up the cannon on the right spot.

Indeed, how satisfying that would be. Last time when we had defeated the Duke’s coalition, His Royal Highness had personally awarded us members of the artillery group with a bronze emblem... No, that’s wrong; it was a medal. The Longsong Stronghold’s wall was depicted on the front of the medal, while

the back was engraved with the year and their accomplishment. It was an exquisite production and had led to a lot of envy from the others within the firearm squadron.

And as if that wasn't already enough honor, they had also been promoted, Van'er was now an artillery captain, and was in charge of ten artillery groups. The Rodney brothers, Cat Claws and Jop, were promoted to team captains, with three of them transferred to newly formed groups, where they were in charge to teaching the newly enlisted gunners how to operate the cannon.

However, the most inspiring was, that the Prince, His Highness has honored his promise, and had assigned a piece of land, which laid east of the town, at the foot of the Impassable Mountain Range, to him. Even though it was only a forest for now, but on the ground there now stood a stele, symbolizing that this piece and the rights to it's use belonged to him.

So when they had learned that an enemy wanted to invade Border Town, the First Army suddenly began to boil, everyone was fully motivated, and hoped to gain some merits within the battle.

When the evening came, and the day's drill finally came to its end, Van'er wiped the sweat from his forehead, and sat down on the shelves to take a little rest. During the whole afternoon he had gone from one artillery group to another, checking whether the new recruits were following the rules and execution steps when firing, he had yelled so much that his throat was nearly on fire.

"Drink something," Jop handed him a leather flask.

"Thank you," Van'er twisted open the lid, drinking thirstily.

"I think I know what they're going to build," said the former, raising his lips, proudly.

"Is that so?" He gave the leather bag back to Jop. By now the brick wall has been piled up to half a person's height, roughly surrounding the pit in a hexagon. However, on each side of the wall, 30 – 40 centimeters over the ground, they had left open a long and narrow cross, which slightly resembled a window but appeared to be a bit smaller. "It won't be a house."

"Calling it a house, wouldn't be wrong, I just went and asked a mason," Job nodded, "he told me that this was something His Royal Highness, the Prince had come up with, when the firearm team hides themselves within they can fire while being half buried in the ground, not having to worry about anything. But they also have a unique name; His Royal Highness called it a bunker."

Chapter 198 The sudden opening

Three days passed quickly, and the construction of the defense line had finally ended.

Roland stood on a stage far behind the front line, the same way he had done when they repelled the demonic beast during the Months of Demons. Today, he once again went to the battlefield in person in order to inspire all of the officers and soldiers of the First Army.

Due to having a special task, Nightingale had already snuck onto the battlefield, and took Echo along with her. Because of this, it was Anna who stood at his side this time and took over Nightingale's protection duty.

Roland himself wore a coated armor together with two revolvers fastened at his waist. However, as long as the defensive line didn't totally fall apart, allowing a rushing enemy to pass through like a fish that was escaping the net, it would be awfully difficult for the enemy to pose a threat to him.

"Currently the enemy is about ten kilometers away from here, Goo!" a giant pigeon informed him as it descended from the sky and landed on his shoulder.

"Well done, keep watching," Roland took a piece of beef jerky from his pocket and passed it to Maggie's mouth. Within two or three pecks she had swallowed down the whole jerky, then once more opened her wings and rose into the sky, flying eastwards.

With Lightning and Maggie taking turns investigating, Roland had a clear picture of the enemy's movements this whole time, allowing him to set the battlefield comfortably to his liking.

When dealing with crazy drugged warriors, confronting them in a line formation wasn't safe. He was especially taking extra care after Lightning's report that several hundreds of them were wearing short spears. If he wasn't wrong, then it was likely that the spears would be used as pre-emptive weapons.

General the range of throwing weapons shouldn't be longer than 50 meters, however, this was only the case for ordinary people. But, how far they could throw them after taking the pills, Roland wasn't sure of either. If they could reach further than 100 meters, they would become a threat to the firearm team. Because of that, he had chosen to put down a number of bunkers, and implementing urban tactics. By constructing a barricade, letting the guns stopping them from coming closer, and an artillery barrage as support, he had built an insurmountable line of defense.

Under the current situation of having a sufficient amount of cement, it was easier to quickly construct some bunkers than construct the city wall. Furthermore, the bunkers were only a building with a monolayer of bricks, making it somewhat fragile, but for the militia who weren't using heavy siege equipment, that should still be an unbreakable fortification.

Ten bunkers forming a rhombus were built on each side of the road, forming a crossfire zone. Each bunker was stationed with twenty-four soldiers, half of whom were veterans with the other half being recruits. The experienced veterans were responsible for shooting; while the recruits were responsible for loading ammunition. Lastly, Soraya had also drawn an "optical camouflage" for the bunker. So that as long as someone was looking from a distance, the bunker would become interspersed into the surrounding environment, making it difficult to distinguish the difference between the two.

Behind the frontline there stood the artillery unit. The twenty cannons were lined up and would follow the same firing sequence as last time, adjusting the firing angle and filling the corresponding ammunition according to Lightning's signals.

At the side of artillery positions there also stood an emergency force, with about 100 people, equipped with flintlock guns, whose only task was to protect the artillery unit and the Prince, His Royal Highness who was standing behind them.

Watching the line of defense and seeing the soldiers with their high morale and their spirits trembling with excitement, within his heart, Roland was deeply moved. The army, at first extremely weak and fragile, built out of people who only enrolled into the military with the purpose of having an egg to eat;

after going through the baptism of the Months of Demons and the defense battle, now stood side by side, proudly wearing on their shoulders the responsibility of defending their home.

“Your Highness, right now the enemy is only two kilometers away from us,” Lightning, reported as she returned.

“Very well, the surveillance task will be fully handed over to Maggie; you instead will have to go into the woods and issue the signals for the artillery.” Roland nodded, then turned to the Chief Knight and said, “Pass my order, all members of the First Army should enter their alert position and prepare to welcome the enemy!”

“Yes!” Carter saluted.

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Lehman felt it as his hand became harder and harder to move.

Two days ago he had constantly felt a burning pain, but by now he had almost lost all feelings in his arm. He could no longer put his armor over his swollen greenish blue arm. At the place where the iron hammer had hit his arm, it had left behind a blackish red mark, at first glance it looked like a somewhat transparent yet shiny layer was laid over his skin. .

The bone must be broken, he thought, if I don’t treat it soon, this arm won’t be preserved. The analgesic drugs we found in the church can alleviate the pain, but they cannot regenerate a broken bone. He decided to wait until the end of the battle before he would immediately return to King’s City, where he would go find the best pharmacists and alchemists in the whole Kingdom of Graycastle. They ought to be able to cure this damned internal injury I have.

“Sir Lehman, your hand... is it really alright?” Levin asked concerned.

“It just looks a bit scary,” he pretended to be indifferent. “Let’s put it off until after we’ve attacked Border Town, for now, the town still isn’t in our hands, so we should keep our concentration focused on that task.”

“I hope the pain in your arm didn’t make you head muzzy, Sir,” Duane sneered. “How do you want to attack the town?”

The tone the other Knight spoke with made Lehman frown, but now wasn’t the time to care about such a small matter.

“According to the news we were able to gather from the nobles of the Wolf and Elk Family, they mainly relied on a long-range offensive weapon to curb the Knights. This kind of weapon could attack the Knights before their charge reached them. Furthermore, when used they are accompanied by a flame and a loud noise. All in all they are similar to a huge ballista, which can throw objects at a much faster speed than a crossbow arrow.”

“In other words, despite its power, it cannot continuously fire, right?” Levin quickly seized the key point.

“Yes, the faster we are able to reach their defense, the fewer attacks we will have to face,” Lehman nodded, “in addition, the number of people is also crucial. As far as I know, Duke Ryan and his coalition of nobles all together only had 200 Knights, and in the end, they only missed the chance to break

through by a final step. However, we possess more than 1500 people, who, after taking the pills aren't any slower than a running horse, so our result will be entirely differently than the last attempt."

"Or all that will never happen," Duane thought otherwise, "Perhaps Roland Wimbledon is still sitting in his castle, waiting for the arrival of the envoy. So, as long as we relaxedly enter the castle, we can just go and chop off his head."

"No, by now he definitely has noticed us," Lehman categorically denied this option, "Didn't you discover that within the last three days we hadn't come across any caravan? That the merchants in Longsong Stronghold, after seeing our large unit chose to either stay or return to the stronghold isn't strange, but that we hadn't seen any caravan coming from Border Town is unusual. The only explanation for this is that the Prince must have sealed Border Town off."

"Do you finally understand why his Majesty chose Sir Lehman to be captain instead of you?" Levin asked mockingly.

"Well, it looks like you have no problem with your head," Duane just shrugged his shoulders. "This way it's quite good. Compared with merely killing the Prince by myself, it will be more interesting to kill all of those outcasts who dare to rebel against His Majesty Timothy."

"Sir Lehman, we have discovered soldiers and horses in front of Border Town," the investigating Cavalier reported.

"Alright, let's go and have a look," Lehman pushed his horse forward. At this point the castle's outline had become faintly visible and at the end of the road he could see some shadows busy walking. Pulling out his observation mirror, he carefully observed the arrangement of the enemy's defensive line, "Those things with the wheels, according to our intelligence they should be the long-range attack weapons, but their number seem to be much greater than was reported."

"Should we have everyone rush madly at them?" Levin asked.

"This road is a bit narrow, I am afraid that it can't accommodate the whole militia," he looked at the woods to the right of him, "We should branch off some people and let them circle around, even though they will be slower, but that won't matter. As long as we are able to start a flank attack, their defensive line won't be able to last for long."

The moment Lehman was preparing to give his commands to adjust his army, he suddenly caught a touch of white from the corner of his eyes.

Being startled, he stared blankly, is this... a hallucination caused by my broken arm? Impossible, it actually is a woman. The woman was wearing a hood, her whole body was covered with a white robe, and even faster than he was able to open his mouth to shout, a flame suddenly appeared from her hands.

Lehman only felt how his head suddenly got hit by a force similar to the hammer, before the world began to spin and he fell into darkness.

Chapter 199 Chaos of War

"Everyone charge!" Almost at the same time, Lehman's voice sounded out loudly.

Levin stared disbelievingly at Lehman Hawes who had suddenly fallen from his horse. The back of his head was completely blown away, revealing a red and white sticky paste from within. His helmet laid broken to the side, blooming with a big hole at its top, showing that it had not had any protective effect.

“Charge, everyone, to me!” Then Levin’s voice also rang out.

No, they both hadn’t spoken! Levin covered his mouth, looking behind him, he saw the militia wasn’t waiting, they immediately swallowed the pills and began to rush, just like a flood of people coming towards him.

It’s a witch. He realized that a witch had imitated his voice. “Do not charge, cease!” He shouted out as loudly as he could.

However, within the excited crowd his voice didn’t spread very far, the few people who had heard his cry stopped, but even more continued charging forward.

“Hurry, quickly attack, try to break through the center of the enemy’s defense line, everyone who reaches the town is allowed to plunder!” It wasn’t just his voice, Duane’s and the voices of the other Knight’s also sounded out, one after another, as if all of this was by prior arrangement. Moreover, the witch’s voice overshadowed all the other noises, as if it was being directly created next to his ear.

Within the militia, there were also many voices bursting out, as if in line with their commands, the crowd began to shout out “looting” slogans. Levin didn’t know who had started it, but soon the slogans rang throughout all of the ranks. The situation had completely gone beyond his control, Levin didn’t try to shout any more commands, they would just be drowned in the excited roars of the crowd anyway. Instead, he had to fully concentrate on controlling his horse, in order to avoid getting himself pulled away by the mighty current. And as if they have lost all reason, the militia rushed towards the center of the road.

No, that wasn’t right. From the very beginning they had already lost all reason, especially in the case of someone else guiding them. After they took the drugs they became totally euphoric, and with the thought of killing and looting they got even further stimulated. In the beginning, the first people had still tried to avoid stepping on the fallen Lehman, but the people after didn’t care any longer, and directly stepped onto the corpse.

Levin wanted to meet up with Duane and the other Knights, only to discover that they had been scattered all over the place by the flood of people. Under these compelling circumstances, he would first have to go along with the stream of people, and gradually try to lead his horse to the woods at the side. In case he decided to turn his horse directly, it was only a matter of time before he would be knocked down by the strength enforced militia, and if he then wanted to get up again, it would be nearly impossible.

From within the ranks, Levin was looking all over the place, trying to find the witch responsible for causing the chaos, wanting to chop her in 1000 pieces. In his view, this definitely had to be the doing of a witch!

The 1500 people who had eaten the pill are rushing into the direction of the Prince’s defense line, for the Prince this wave has to be a deadly attack. Even if the other side had now more of the new weapons, it still won’t be enough to go against so many people at once, for that guy, the result of this won’t be

much better. A situation where both sides have to suffer a loss, is obviously something the witches will be jubilant about, this was also the reason why they had infiltrated our ranks and caused so much trouble, luring our army to advance forward of their own initiative.

“The witch who killed Lehman and the witch who created the chaos can’t be the same person,” Levin let his gaze wander over the few people who still stood at his side, they had previously stood at the front and had witnessed the fall of Lehman, furthermore, later they had also heard him calling for a stop. But they couldn’t be compared with the huge army of before, even if they gathered, they still couldn’t reach 30 people, “One of the witches has the ability to hide her body and the other one can manipulate her voice. After all, a witch cannot have two abilities, go and find the latter, I want to tear out her throat!”

...

Through the shooting window, Brian could see how the enemy steadily came closer. From the bunkers at the forefront even the first gunfire could be heard.

His defensive position was at the middle of the diamond. Because of this, he had to wait until the enemy passed the purple marks at the side of the road. Having to wait so long before he can fire made him very anxious.

To do something else, he went to the window on the other side, there Brian could look at the defense line further behind. From the artillery positions white smoke was unceasingly rising up, and with it, a thunder-like roar rolled over the battlefield. They are once again the first to become busy, with their 12-pounder they can almost cover the entire battlefield. As long as he listened carefully, he could even hear the screams of the shells as they flew through the air.

“Oh my God, they are running so fast!”

“Look at that fellow, his hand was torn off by a shell, yet he is still running forward.”

“What His Highness said was true, can they still be called human? They are simply the same as demonic beasts.”

Because the First Army was already informed during the pre-battle mobilization, of the enemy having taken the Church’s berserker pills, they didn’t become scared when they saw the enemy’s continued attack even under a hail of bullets; instead they were full of fighting spirit, after all, they were the First Army, who got forged under the flames of demonic beasts.

“Captain, they are coming!” Someone warned.

Hearing the call, Brian quickly returned to his position, took a revolver rifle next to the window and began loading it. Compared to the old weapons, His Highness’ new version had a simple improvement. Now, within a breath he could already fire off five rounds of bullets, then he could just throw the cartridge towards the recruit standing behind him, take the five extra rounds and fire them off, while the recruit would have reloaded his previous cartridge.

However, during the training, His Highness had stressed that only when the enemy had stepped into the range of 100 to 50 meters, were they allowed to use this kind of shooting. While for long-range shooting they had to aim to be as accurate as possible, because the manufacturing the bullets of revolver rifles was very troublesome, everyone’s amount of rounds were limited.

Brian deeply believed that the shells which contained the gunpowder –with their slender front and thick back, and their, and their almost always similar form– absolutely couldn't have been created by a blacksmith. He knew that such a fine and delicate work had to have come from the hands of a witch.

Usually, after the shooting exercise, they would collect all their cartridge cases and hand them over to Iron Axe. Shooting practice was generally followed with a reloading exercise, during which they would sit as a group in the center of the camp.

To assemble the used cartridges into a new bullet, they had to follow strict operating guidelines. First, they had to push the primer to the bottom, followed by filling it up with gunpowder, then finally inserting the projectile. Due to the exercises, he was reluctant to consume his ammunition carelessly, in case the target was too hard to hit.

The moment the enemy crossed the purple marker, Brian took a deep breath, then finally shouted, "Fire at will!"

The soldier that have been waiting for this order for a very long time, enthusiastically aimed at an easy target and start pulling the trigger. Suddenly, the bunker became flooded with the sound of the gunfire. The first enemy to cross the line was hit by bullets from both sides, which caused blood to splash from his waist, after staggering two steps forward, he fell to the ground. It was obviously that they could suffer through more pain than ordinary people, but in the face of heavy-caliber bullets, this still didn't matter.

Brian noticed that several people had jumped on the top of the frontmost bunkers, wanting to sneak attack the soldiers who were inside from the back, but they were blocked out by a thick iron gate. Not hesitating, he pulled the trigger, killing off the madmen who were exposing their bodies to him one after the other. The reason why the bunkers were arranged in a diamond formation, was so that that they could help with defending one another, enemies who wanted to bypass the first row and attack from behind would be shot to death by the rearmost bunkers.

"Be careful, they've thrown out their spears!" Someone suddenly shouted.

Brian noticed how a dense shadow rose up from the center of the enemy's army, after passing its apex, they began to fall upon the bunkers that were on both sides of the road.

At such a distance, they have to cover two or three hundred meters! He subconsciously lowered his head into the pit, only to hear the sound of a series of cracking sounds from the top. After this wave of attacks had come to its end, he stood up straight and discovered that not one of those spears had been able to penetrate the bunker. Looking at the bunker in front, he saw that their situation was similar; only a few spears had been able to insert themselves into the wall, like some lonely feathers.

"Even if it's looks very scary, it is still useless," everyone began to roaring with laughter.

At this moment, Brain saw one enemy who disregarded all dangers, and threw up several splashes of earth in his forward charge towards their bunker. Then the enemy bent over and threw his spear in a flat curve, and at the very moment the spear left his arm, he was nailed down by an intense hail of bullets.

“Down!” Even before his warning shout could entirely leave his throat, the thrown spear already passed through the shooting window, and pierced the chest of a shooter, the latter issued a stuffy groan and then fell face up, towards the ground.

Chapter 200 Hunters and Prey

“Freckle!” Someone shouted, “He’s injured!”

“Do not move him!” Brian roared, “I’ll go and take a look at his injury, you continue shooting.”

He put his rifle in the hands of the recruit at his side, the one who was responsible for loading, and lowered his waist to approach the injured soldier. The wounded, who still hadn’t lost his consciousness, asked in a trembling voice, “Captain, I... am I going to die?”

The short spear had pierced him at the lower pit of the stomach, it was unclear if it had gone through, however, seeing that his breath still seemed to be flowing freely, the spear must not have punctured his lung. During culture class, His Royal Highness had briefly described the various organs of the human body and which measures were to be taken in the case of an injury. The best solution Brian could think of at the moment, was to remain here and wait until the end of the fight, then allow for Miss Nana to come over and treat him.

“Does it hurt?” Brian asked.

Freckles nodded with difficulty.

“Since you can still feel pain it means you won’t die,” to reassure the Knight, he put his hand on Freckle’s forehead. “You should know about Miss Nana ‘s ability, right?”

“Uhhn,” With difficulty, Freckles was able to show a smile. “During times of peace, everyone... wants to go see her, putting it that way, I... I, I can finally see her, now.”

“That’s right! Therefore you have to persevere.”

When Brian returned to his shooting window, the recruit turned towards him and asked concerned.

“Why didn’t you pull the spear out?”

“By pulling it out it is likely that instead of helping, it could cause massive bleeding, later in class you will also learn about this, and then everything will become clear,” he paused. “The best we can now do for him, is to defeat the enemy as quickly as possible.”

...

Standing on his heightened stage, Roland could clearly see the enemy rushing like a tide towards the town.

The moment they crossed the first row of bunkers, their speed slowed down a lot, by the time they reached the third row of bunkers, the enemy’s flanks were fully exposed to riflemen’s crossfire.

Echo’s task was quite obvious, even though the enemy’s force was stretched into a long line, most of them still acted in accordance with her unceasingly issued “concentrated charge” command, rushing along the road.

Every moment there were a lot of their people falling, and they couldn't do anything about it. Having to face up against a fortification they couldn't destroy with their spears and swords, Timothy's militia force could do nothing except endure the casualties they faced and continue pushing forward.

After they passed the third row of bunkers, they crossed the 300 meters mark, which meant that now the cannons would now be loaded with canister shells. Among the gunner's, stepping into this area was also known as entering into the death zone.

In the sky, Lightning had replaced her flag with one in bright red.

The angle of the 20 cannons were lying flat, their front spit out flames and thick smoke. Roland had roughly estimated, that the most skilled artillery group would be able to release one shrapnel shot every twenty seconds, while the slowest would need around 30 seconds. At first glance, it seemed that they came close to the rate of fire of the best artillery groups during the American Civil War, but the latter's three shots per minute were performed with solid shells, for which they had to clean the cannon repeatedly and aim it at the target once more. However, canister shells could be fired without aiming, and the cannon also didn't need to be wiped, so it was only natural that the rate of fire would be fast.

For the enemy, such a rate of fire was terrible news. Furthermore, the canister shells' kill and injure-rate without even aiming was especially astonishing, almost every iron bullet would penetrate two to three people. Although after taking the pill they could withstand a great deal of pain, the pills couldn't also suppress fear.

When seeing how the people around them were slaughtered one after another, even if they were totally excited and thirsted after massacre, they were unable to suppress their body's instinctual fear of death. Even more, they originally hadn't been an iron-willed force, without their pills, these people were just a group of untrained, civilians lacking in true practical combat experience. When half of their force laid out on the road, the enemy began to flee.

Like a plague the fear quickly spread, what began with one person was soon followed by a second then a third, until the forefront eventually completely stopped with its assault, and instead wholly started to turn around and flee. Once again the artillery regiment changed their ammunition to solid bullets, aiming at the center of the road, while the whole time the bunkers had never ceased in their shooting.

Creating a pile of corpses laid on top of the road.

...

As Levin's raging heart gradually cooled down, a feeling of fear began to grow within him.

In the beginning, more than 20 people had set out and discovered the witch wearing strange clothes, who created the chaos, hiding within the forest, almost perfectly integrating with the surrounding scenery. If she hadn't moved forward along with the main force, always guiding the people to cram themselves together at the middle of the road, it would have been almost impossible for them to detect her.

Even after they had discovered her, she still caused considerable trouble to Levin. He found out that she didn't need her mouth to imitate the voices and even more the sound drifted around without an anchored source. Sometimes, it was coming from the left, other times it would come from the right, and

at times even came from behind him. The content was also varied, such as imitating his accent and giving orders or sending out a distressed call for help from a fellow militiaman.

But when they wanted to close in and seize her, the woman dressed in white appeared again.

Seeing her, Levin recalled the shocking scene of her killing Lehman Hawes.

In her hand she was grasping a silver-white "light crossbow", and the moment she sent out a spark, with a loud bang, another person would fall.

The surrounding encirclement was instantaneously torn into shreds, all of them suddenly turning into frightened birds.

My armor doesn't offer any protection, and using a shield also doesn't work, the iron shield tied to Levin's arm had been broken in half, seeing the hole in the metal told him how powerful that weapon really was.

I'm afraid the only weapon that can match up with this power is a heavy crossbow. If he hadn't subconsciously lowered his head, he would have already become a corpse by now.

But a heavy crossbow can't be fired off in succession!

With her hiding ability and her unrivaled weapon, Levin realized that they stood no chance of winning. The moment he became aware of this it felt as if he had met with a cold wind, his burning rage was quickly extinguished.

"Take the pills and kill her the moment she appears!"

Even though his mouth called to attack, Levin himself retreated, planning on running into the woods the moment she put her focus on the militia.

No, it should be even safer to stay within the large group, she will never dare attack me when I'm inside the crowd!

Furthermore, this forest seemed to have grown very strange, the thick weeds almost reaching to my knees, covering the vines below, as if they want to trip me. When he finally was able to stumble out of the woods, Levin looked toward the front, wanting to hide within the large group, yet the scene in front of him left him stunned.

The drug efficacy shouldn't have come to its end, so why are they... retreating? No that's not right, it should be said that they are running away. Those who move too slow or haven't responded have been mercilessly pushed to the ground and later trampled on. Previous during the charge they ran as fast as horses, but now with the escape it was the same, during their raging flight they were throwing dust into the sky. Seeing such a situation, he did not dare to come close to in the attempt to stop them.

In the end, what happened? Levin was unable to process the situation, in such a short time, how was it possible to entirely defeat the 1500 people? Even more, since all of them had taken those pills! Are the Prince's men actually monsters?

At this moment, from behind him, the sound of someone stepping on weeds could be heard. Gritting his teeth, Levin suddenly drew his sword and stabbed with it behind himself. At this critical moment of life

and death, his quick drawing technique was faster than ever before, like a flash of lightning. Nevertheless, he was still greeted by a dazzling flame. His blade was hit by something, sending sparks flying, and stabbing into his hand, instantly erasing the feelings from his fingertips.

When he moved his line of sight towards his arm, Levin saw that half of his arm was missing, exposing red and white muscles and bones, like a flower in full bloom. The woman in white looked at him with a blank expression. Unable to confront her, he couldn't help but back up several steps, tripping over a weed.

The moment he laid still, the witch placed her foot on his shoulder and pressed her cold weapon against his forehead. From his perspective on the ground, Levin could see the face hidden under the hood.

So... beautiful.

Was his final thought as the gunshot rang out.