

## Witch 921

### Chapter 921: The Locomotive Era (Part I )

The North Slope Mine of Neverwinter was going to witness a great event.

A new railway linking the ore stacking yard and the furnace area was being cleaned for the last time.

Different from the iron coated wooden rails in the mine, the new railway was wider and could support heavier cargo loads. It was made of pure steel and looked very heavy. The amount of steel used to build it was enough to make the armor and swords for a regular knightage, but now it was fixed on the ground and exposed to wind and rain. Any lord of this era would think of this construction as an enormous waste of iron and believe that only a spendthrift would leave metal to rot like this.

When Roland led the conference participants to the ore stacking yard, most of the officials were astonished by the railway and begun to stir since not every department in City Hall knew the details of what it was. The officials from the Longsong Area stood agape while fixing their eyes on it. It impressed everyone with its imposing size and its aura of strength, even if most of them had no idea what it was used for.

They would never believe that their king who had greatly surprised them so many times during the past years was a spendthrift, but they could hardly recover from their shock. In their view, laying cast steel bars on the ground was no different from using gold royals to pave a road.

This was cast steel which could be sold at a high price in any city.

However, Neverwinter could afford to build such a railway.

After the blast furnace for ironmaking and the converter for steelmaking were completed, Neverwinter's industrial foundation no longer relied so heavily on the witches' power. The converter still needed Anna to heat and melt the iron for the first step, but it was much more advanced than the "Star of Steel". It could be called a miracle in this era.

The smelting industry of the North Slope Mine had also been significantly upgraded due to the reconstruction efforts made by the Ministry of Construction. With the help of Lotus, they had taken bold actions to blast away the ceiling of the mine. By doing so, they had made part of the mining area a huge open pit and most of it was an iron mine.

Neverwinter's steelmaking industry had stepped on a brand new stage in the last year. In Graycastle, its monthly steel output was greater than all the other cities' combined.

This result was within Roland's expectation. He took it for granted that modern factories would be far more efficient than blacksmiths. Otherwise, he would not have worked so hard to create the industrial equipment.

As for the railway here, it was part of his experiment of using a railway to connect the mining area, the smelting area, and the wharf.

As the narrow-gauge rail did not differ from the broad-gauge rail in terms of material usage and load-carrying capacity, he made 1.5 meters the standard railroad width. The number was easy to remember and building roadbeds for this width of railroad was within the reach of Lotus' ability. The sleepers were cut out of wood logs and the ballast was from rubble collected during the mine reconstruction. The railway looked exactly like a railroad in modern times.

But it was still a half done project. Because no factory had been involved in this project yet, Anna had used her Blackfire to process and install the railway for the experiment by herself. Since the Graycastle unification war, the construction of the other half of the railway had remained suspended.

To further satisfy the officials' curiosity, Roland instructed the workers to unveil something that was placed at the end of the railway. When the canvas, which was dusty and covered with fallen leaves was removed, the people saw a black steel vehicle standing right in front of them.

"Your Majesty, is it a... steamer carriage?" Petrov, the governor of the Longsong Area, stuttered in amazement.

Roland was not at all surprised by Petrov's thought. With more and more steam engines being put into use in Neverwinter, the officials were getting familiar with these cumbersome, but powerful machines and even actively adopted them in some traditional fields, such as irrigating the farmlands and loading and unloading cargo on the wharf. Given that, they immediately recognized the steam engine which was shaped like a barrel and installed in a steel frame in the main part of the vehicle.

In the beginning, the factories producing steam engines and the accessory equipment had only been able to handle orders from Roland, but now they could also handle some requests from City Hall. City Hall's orders usually had special demands, but the factories could easily meet them by changing the combination of gears, shafts and engine holders.

Roland considered this change to be a good start. The people of this era were becoming more proactive in creating things.

He thought that the reason why Petrov called the vehicle a steamer carriage was that the concrete boats driven by steam engines were called paddle steamers.

It sounded like an acceptable name but Roland did not want to give up the naming rights.

After all, it was a vehicle of era-making significance.

From its birth, it had a profound influence on the world, even though its first prototype was slower than a horse-drawn carriage. It had many different shapes and engines during its development, but its name remained unchanged.

"It's a train." Roland corrected Petrov. "It's the key to solving the transportation problem."

"Do you mean that you want to build a railroad like this one across the grassland for a... train?" Barov had a hard time getting his tongue around the new word. "What if the demons suddenly attack the workers and cause trouble for the railway construction project?"

"First of all, I want to build two railways side by side to ensure a smooth flow of traffic. Secondly, I'm not proposing building a railroad across the grassland. I intend to build one that starts from the Misty Forest

and then turns to the east at a spot near the Taquila ruins." Roland told everyone his plan. "By doing so, Leaf can protect our railroad system from the demonic beasts during the Months of Demons every year. As for the demons... it's a close contest between us. Any place we can get to by train can be our battleground since the train can transport enough cannons and shells for us. Even if the demons manage to destroy some sections of our railroad system under heavy shellfire, we can still solve the traffic problem by building and repairing the railways at a higher speed."

He had discussed the construction speed problem with the Advisory Department. They found that they could build the railway sections between the Misty Forest and the Taquila ruins faster than the sections on the grassland, despite the former being longer than the latter. This was because the former sections were located in the forest controlled by Leaf. With her help, the weed and vines would clear the ground for the construction workers, saving them the trouble of doing it themselves, which was tremendously helpful to them. She could also create slopes for water drainage and structure the forest to help Hummingbird transport the construction materials.

Lotus would be in charge of building the roadbed for the railways. The Ministry of Construction would send workers to pave the ballast, install the crossties and railways, and Anna would seamlessly weld the metal parts together. With everyone working together, they would be able to complete the railway sections between the forest and the Taquila ruins before the end of the winter. When that happened, the Taquila ruins would be within the range of the Longsong Cannons.

#### Chapter 922: The Locomotive Era (Part II)

"In just half a year... Will it really be possible for us to extend the railway deep into the Barbarian Land?" Hearing Roland's plan, Barov, who had already witnessed many "miracles", still widened his eyes in disbelief. "It took the Ministry of Construction more than half a year to complete an ordinary road linking the Border Area and the Longsong Area, and this Kingdom Main Street was less than one-fifth of the distance between the forest and Taquila. Are you sure that Mr. Karl will be able to complete such a task?"

The officials began to whisper among themselves. The Kingdom Main Street was the first large-scale construction project Roland had initiated after Longsong Stronghold merged with Border Town. It had employed about 2,000 workers and had been considered a waste of resources by many people back then. Now this new railroad project was even more unbelievable. Considering its limited construction period, many officials believed that it would be an impossible mission, even if all the workers in Neverwinter were to be hired for this project.

Karl Van Bate, the Minister of Construction, remained silent and seemed to be racking his brain for a proper solution.

Roland was clear about their concern. At present, there were many ongoing construction projects in the city. They were justifiably worried that the expense of this railway project would be too enormous for the city's limited resources. However, in fact, as compared to the road's cement pavements which needed high-quality materials and roller compaction, the railway's roadbed building and ballast pavement were much easier.

As for the final step of installing the rails, it only looked complicated, but it was actually the fastest step of the entire construction process.

Roland had watched Anna's demo of welding the metal parts with Blackfire. She could weld a bar to two tracks at once, and the average time for welding each joint was less than 10 seconds. In comparison to the traditional bolts or the hot-melting connections used in the modern world, her ability not only substantially improved the welding quality but also saved a lot of manpower and material. Roland felt that her work couldn't be any more perfect.

The experimental railway in front of everyone was an almost seamless rail made by Anna. To compensate for the distortions that could be caused by thermal expansion, there were still invisible gaps left in between the tracks, but on the surface, they were seamless. This meant that when the train was running on these tracks, the passengers inside it would not experience the frequent shaking or hear the constant clatter that were part of modern trains.

Ana had finished welding this section of the tracks in just half a day.

This was why Roland made the construction period for the railroad project so short.

Leaf probably needed only five days to place the crossties and rails in a section of a given length, while the workers used to take 10 days to build and pave a roadbed of an equal length. Meanwhile, Anna needed just one day to weld the same section of railroad. She had ample time and was able to take it slow. Maggie could take her to work in the morning and bring her back to the castle in time for lunch.

Roland did not want to explain the details of the witches' abilities to the officials, since not everyone knew the witches well. Meanwhile, he predicted that the construction period could be even shorter if he could find some relevant witches from Sleeping Island who were willing to offer help for the project. However, he had not yet had a chance to ask Tilly about her witches' abilities, since he had gone straight to the wolf girl and then to the meeting immediately after he had arrived at Neverwinter.

Seeing Roland ignore Barov's question, the officials turned their eyes to the train.

In contrast to the seamless rail, which appeared very futuristic, the train itself seemed to be an antique. Its steam locomotive was divided into two parts. The front part consisted of a fourth generation steam engine and a transmission device, and the rear part was a coal car. A driver's cabin was located between these two parts, from where the drivers could control the speed of the train, add coal to the boiler, and blow the steam whistle.

Due to the interruption caused by the Gyaycastle unification war, this steam locomotive was still just an unfinished prototype, yet it was already much better than the first generation steam locomotives of the world where Roland had lived before. Its steam engine adopted crankshafts instead of flywheels and drive belts. Instead of gears, which could easily get stuck, a mechanical linkage which moved seamlessly was utilized to connect the wheels on both sides of the locomotive to the engine.

Roland had simplified his design for the locomotive as much as possible. As a result, it looked as if he had just patched all the main components together. When compared to a modern train, it had numerous defects. It had no mechanical brake and needed manpower to turn the capstan to stop the train. As the drivers' cabin was on the connecting beam that linked the front and rear parts of the locomotive engine, the drivers would be disturbed by the constant shaking and vibrations caused by the

steam engine when driving the train. It was not equipped with any electrical device, so the drivers and the other workers on the train had to blow the steam whistle or shout to each other to communicate. However, it was already the best design possible based on the current technological capabilities of Neverwinter.

He had to build this prototype first, and then gradually improve it, just like what he had done with the first generation steam engine.

"Your Majesty, what's the carrying capacity of this thing?" Kyle Sichi, the Minister of Chemical Industry, asked with curiosity. "Is it any higher than that of a concrete boat?"

"I think its cargo capacity should be almost five or six times that of a concrete boat." Roland was satisfied seeing the surprised looks on the officials' faces. "But this is just the beginning. With technical progress, it'll be able to carry cargo which needs 100 concrete boats to transport at once."

"A, A hundred?" Barov swallowed hard. As the City Hall Director, he was well aware of the meaning of the number.

"So... what about its speed?" Petrov asked in a trembling voice.

"I'm not sure. I'm still waiting for the test results, but it definitely won't be slower than a concrete boat."

In this era, horse-drawn carriages and some other pack animals were the principal forms of transportation on land. On the bumpy and soft ground, their transportation efficiency was low. Besides, carriages did not have any rubber tires or any other kind of shock absorption measures, so their wooden wheels often got shattered by the repeated shaking on the road. Under such circumstances, the Kingdom of Graycastle used ships as the main mode of transportation. In the inland rivers, the steam-powered boats, which did not need to move with the help of the wind, quickly outshone the traditional sailing ships. Given that, in the view of the officials, the concrete boats were already extremely fast and efficient carriers.

Hearing that a train would be able to travel faster and carry more cargo than a concrete boat, they fell into silence.

They instinctually wanted to deny such a possibility but felt reluctant to do so, since they were afraid that it might turn out to be true. Seeing the bewildered officials, Roland could not help but feel proud. If he had told them such a thing two years ago, he would have been regarded as a lunatic. As the war was fast approaching now, and he had failed to improve the boats, he wanted to use this new invention he built to boost his subjects' morale.

After all, he had not exaggerated the strength of the train.

After all, the steam engine was only the first generation of industrial power sources.

Once the trains could be equipped with internal combustion engines, they would become the dominant mode of transportation on land.

"Your Majesty, could you please show us how it works?" Barov asked after a while.

"Yes, but not now. It still lacks some key components. We need another week to complete it." Roland shook his head.

"According to the plan you gave to the Ministry of Construction before the unification war, you intend to use the railway to connect the mine to the wharf, right?" Barov asked.

"Yes." Roland sensed that Barov had something else to say.

"Such a powerful vehicle will boost our people's morale and greatly help the City Hall in our war propaganda work," Barov spoke out his idea. "Is it alright to let all your subjects witness this incredible scene on the day of the train's test run?"

Roland immediately understood what kind of propaganda effect Barov wanted to achieve and was pleased to see that his City Hall Director had learned to guide the people's opinion during these years.

"As you wish," he smiled and said.

Chapter 923: A Deliberate Provocation

A shrill alarm rang and grabbed everyone's attention.

"Woo—woo—"

Everyone stood agape.

It was the highest alert again!

Wendy was the first one to recover from the shock. "Your Majesty, please retreat to the castle right now!"

However, Roland did not move since he was greatly surprised by Tilly and Ashes, who came close to him swiftly after hearing the alert. The Extraordinary stood in front of them and Tilly grabbed his wrist.

He felt something as cold as a metal around his wrist.

He looked down and saw the ring on Tilly's finger shining a bright blue light. Obviously, she was ready to fly with him down into the mining area in case of emergency.

Somehow Roland forgot about the danger and focused his mind on Tilly.

Unlike Nightingale who trusted him wholeheartedly, Tilly had not yet recognized him as her brother.

She was too smart to be deceived.

She called him brother just to maintain good relations with him.

In fact, there was still an invisible barrier between them, and because of Tilly's attitude, Ashes always seemed a little restrained in front of him. He was unable to explain to Tilly that what Prince Roland had done to her back in the palace had nothing to do with him. Given that, he had lied to her and never expected much from her. However, now he felt relieved.

He found that he had already won her trust and recognition as an ally, even if she might still have a doubt about his identity.

"Yes, this place is too close to the city wall at the border. Your Majesty, please leave here as soon as possible!"

"Guards, where are the guards?"

"Come, clear the way for His Majesty!" The officials also came to their senses now and started to shout.

The people's voices, together with the alert, turned the scene into pure chaos.

The noises recalled Roland from his reflections. Seeing such a tense situation, he could not help knitting his eyebrows and thought, "Maybe the frontier guards have already spotted some demons?"

He looked to the west and was lost in thought. "Now that Sylvie is on the watch for demons, the alarm can't be false. And the frontier guards' highest alert must be about the demons. I heard that they should remain dormant for some time since they don't have enough Red Mist. Did their supplies arrive at the Taquila ruins recently?"

He wanted to go to the city wall to have a look personally, but he quickly gave up the idea. He did not want to increase the burden for the frontier guards since Nightingale and the main force of the First Army had not arrived yet.

When they walked down the North Slope Mountain, he summoned Wendy and said to her, "Regardless of the situation, send me any news from the City Wall as soon as you receive it."

"Yes," Wendy promised with a solemn face.

...

Watching the enemies approaching quickly, Sylvie felt her hands were wet.

It was not the first time for her to see demons, but they still made her feel stressed out.

"One, two, three, four, five, six." She counted the number of the Devilbeasts who were flying toward Neverwinter in a horizontal line. In the Eye of Magic, every detail of the enemies was clearly discernible. Just like Alethea had mentioned, not every Devilbeast took a Mad Demon on its back. Two of them looked just like pack horses and carried bone vessels which looked like bumps on their backs.

She zoomed in and saw the Red Mist surging inside the bumps.

Obviously, they were their mist tanks for this long-distance raid.

But... why are the demons launching an attack so early?

For the moment, they should stay close to the God's Stone mineral vein at the Taquila ruins, waiting for the Bloody Moon.

Sylvie was bewildered by the sudden appearance of the demons. Fortunately, the frontier guards' quick response made her feel relieved. They had already removed the cannon covers and gotten ready for the combat. If the enemies continued to fly in this direction, they would come within the cannons' range in seven or eight minutes.

"Miss Sylvie, someone called to ask which direction the enemies were heading for. And if they plan to enter the city, can you estimate which blocks they will fly over?" The guard who was in charge of communication asked.

In order to transmit the information about the enemies' situation on time, Roland had moved the wind-up telephone prototype, which had been made in the backyard of the North Slope Mountain, to the city wall. Apart from the telephone line linking Neverwinter and Longsong Stronghold, it was the first telephone line in the city. Limited by the length, the telephone at the other end of the line was installed at the entrance of the Third Border City. Roland had arranged two guards to assist Sylvie in communication and had sent two God's Punishment Witches to protect her.

"Road No.5 or No.9," Sylvie wiped the sweat from her hands. "But they may also fly toward the square. There're still some people left behind."

She was worried that once the Devilbeasts rushed into the crowded market, the consequences would be disastrous.

"I got it." The guard picked up the phone and repeated what Sylvie had to the person at the other end of the telephone line.

"Wait!" Sylvie suddenly raised her voice. "They're ascending!"

"Are they planning to fly over the city wall?" The guard was anxious.

"But they slowed down at the same time. Now the guards on top of the city wall should be able to see them directly."

Before she finished her sentence, she heard the vague noise of gunshots coming through the phone.

The guards of the city wall were elite soldiers of the First Army, who had taken part in the snow mountain exploration. They remained calm at the sight of the demons. Several teams took turns to fire and tried to maintain a low rate of fire in an attempt to conserve bullets.

At this moment, Sylvie noticed a problem.

For the guards, hitting targets in the sky was much harder than shooting down some demonic beasts or God's Punishment Warriors on the ground.

As they were unable to predict the enemies' movements in the sky, they had no idea which angle they should use. As a result, the Devilbeasts remained intact after several rounds of firing and now they were only about 150 meters away from the city wall

They stayed more than 100 meters above the ground and thus the guards had to lift their barrels to aim at the enemies. The soldiers drastically increased their firing rate, but still failed to hit any target.

At the moment, the Devilbeasts stopped flying forward and hovered in the sky.

The Mad Demons' arms were swelling rapidly.

"No!" Sylvie could not help crying out. "Inform the guards to retreat from the city wall as soon as possible!"



"What?" The guard was confused. "Retreat?"

Unfortunately, it was too late. The demons had already thrown their bone spears. In the blink of an eye, four beams of white light came down to the city wall and struck at the defenseless guards. The wall built by Lotus was unable to protect them from attacks coming from the sky.

Beyond Sylvie's expectation, instead of launching the second round of attacks, the demons only emitted some weird noise after their arms withered and threw several animal skins down. After that, they turned around and flew toward the grassland. That was where they came from.

This sudden attack ended just as suddenly. After a while, they disappeared over the horizon.

Sylvie could not bear to see the situation of the city wall. The guards who got impaled by the bone spears were dead. No matter how hard the other soldiers shook them, they would not open their eyes again. The blood coming from their wounds formed a pool of blood under their bodies.

The animal skins left by the demons were slowly falling through the air, turning out to be pictures.

The most striking one among them was a portrait of a big wolf.

Chapter 924: An Old Trick of the Demons

"What's the meaning of these things?" Roland asked in a deep voice while looking at the animal skins on the table. His face was expressionless.

The demons had launched a surprise attack on the city wall and had left behind a provocative message. However, now was not the time for him to react to this provocation. Furious as he was, he still tried his best to keep control of himself.

The officials nervously glanced at each other, but none of them dared to answer the king's question.

No one wanted to further irritate the enraged king by vocalizing the meaning of the self-explanatory pictures.

Undoubtedly, the big wolf was Lorgar.

The other pictures depicted common people who were down on their knees, a witch who was tied up, a city wall that was on fire, and the ruins of a city littered with corpses respectively.

They looked like quick, crude drawings, but they were still easy to understand.

This series of pictures was a threatening ultimatum.

The demons wanted Neverwinter to hand the Wolf Girl over to them, and they asked the common people to lay down their weapons and surrender. Otherwise, they would totally annihilate the defenders and burn down the city.

Roland glanced around and exhaled deeply, trying to calm himself down. He found that the officials had lost a lot of their fighting spirit, and some of them even looked terrified. Fortunately, none of them tried to advise him to give the witch to the demons.

"Your Majesty, this isn't just a threatening letter from the demons. It's a trap!" In the middle of this stressful atmosphere, a beam of light suddenly appeared and expanded next to a wall and then Pasha's voice rang in his head. "Sylvie has told me what happened. Never believe anything the demons say. It's another one of their old tricks."

She sounded anxious as if she was worried that the king might make a hasty decision.

Roland immediately comprehended the implications of her statement.

"Did something similar happen to you before?"

"To be exact, it happened to a lord of the common people," Pasha said seriously. "During the first Battle of Divine Will, the demons used this trick to create a divide between the common people and the witches. That was how they nibbled the Land of Dawn away step by step."

The ancient witch continued to explain the "trap".

"During the first Battle of Divine Will, the demons not only acted aggressively on the battleground but also plotted against the witches. They often lured a lord of a city to hand over the witches to them in exchange for postponing the attack on that city. Back then, the common people and the witches lived together peacefully. Though the witches were only a minority, they did not have to hide their abilities. As a result, they could be recognized easily."

"Hoping to survive the war, the cities where the witches were in a weak position usually chose to make a deal with the demons. As a result, many witches who had just returned from the battlefield were caught or executed by people of their own cities. In such a situation, the estrangement between the witches and the common people was gradually aggravated, and then, after a complete betrayal, the witches broke irretrievably with the common people."

"In the middle of the first Battle of Divine Will, two major cities located in the central part of the Land of Dawn built two coalition forces to fight against the demons. One of the coalition forces was controlled by the witches, and the other one was led by and consisted of the common people. During a fierce battle, the common people's army surrendered to the demons all of a sudden. The witches' army withdrew but was besieged by their former ally. The common people even used weapons made of God's Stones of Retaliation to fight them." "The witches were exhausted and had lost more than half of their warriors during the previous battle against the demons. They resisted strongly but still lost. After that, the leaders of the witches were beheaded in public, and the common people sent some of the remaining witches to the demons while enslaving the rest of them."

"The Union named this incident the 'Red Betrayal'. We consider it a profound lesson for us. From that day on, the witches and the common people have grown apart."

"The cities that surrendered to the demons did not survive as long as they had hoped. Forcing the common people to betray the witches was just the first step of the demons' plans. If the demons' outposts were close enough to the cities, they would never hesitate to conquer them. The Lord who initiated the 'Red Betrayal' was no exception. He followed the demons' orders and helped them in building mist storage towers and outposts. He even provided them with intelligence services. However, in the end, he couldn't enjoy his old age in peace. It's said that he was imprisoned in his castle by the demons and was starved to death. There were also some rumors that said that he was killed by a group

of vengeful witches when he fled his domain after finding out that the demons planned to eliminate all of humanity. After the first Battle of Divine Will, human beings lost the Land of Dawn and most of our domains became uninhabitable. Since then, the sight of the Red Mist on the horizon had become a lingering nightmare."

"The Witch Union rose from the ashes of this defeat and became the ruler of the Fertile Plains for next few hundred years."

At the end of the story, Roland heard a shocking rumor from Pasha.

"There was also hearsay among the witches in the upper levels of the Union, according to which the demons learned this trick from the human beings themselves."

"What did you say?" Roland asked and then quickly realized that Parsha only told the rumor to him.

All the officials in the hall looked startled, wondering why the king raised such a question.

"It was rumored that long before the beginning of the first Battle of Divine Will, back when the demons were no different from beasts, some person got in contact with them and taught them knowledge," Parsha said in a low voice. "A few people believed that this explained why the Senior Demons looked like human beings, but the Three Chiefs thought it was absolute nonsense and forbade the people from talking about it. As a result, only the witches in the upper level of the Union still remember this rumor."

Roland held his breath and tried to talk to the ancient witch through his mind, "Do you believe it?"

"I'm not sure." To his surprise, Pasha was uncertain about the rumor. "If it's true, then it means that we have to be extremely careful when communicating with the demons."

After a moment of thought, Roland asked Parsha about a specific detail of the rumor. "Was the person in the story a witch or a common person?"

Parsha sighed lightly. "Some people said it was a witch and some said it was a common person."

"What an unreliable rumor," Roland thought.

He agreed with the Three Chiefs of the Union on their decision to stop the rumor. After all, no matter how the demons came about to become the enemy of all of humanity, they still had to guide their followers to defeat them. He changed the subject. "If a lord remained unmoved by the demons' offer, what would they do?"

"They'd keep harassing him, or even send an army to the city to besiege it until the lord surrendered," Pasha said. "This old trick had proven to be very effective in conquering small towns and cities."

"Do you mean to say that the demons will come back again?" Roland sneered. "Barov."

"Yes!" The City Hall Director stood up immediately.

"Soothe the subjects first, and then we'll hold a memorial ceremony for the soldiers who died in combat. It's the best way to raise the spirits of the mourning people." Roland stressed each word with due strength. "As for the demons, I'll let them know that things are different now. This isn't the first Battle of Divine Will anymore."

## Chapter 925: The Air Defense System

Roland had mentioned several problems that needed to be solved. The lack of an air defense network was as big of an issue as the transportation problem.

The importance of achieving air supremacy stuck in his head. He had learned this lesson from the history of the wars in his previous world. An army who had the aerial advantage was always able to launch an attack from any point at any time, and before the invention of the radar, no one on the ground was able to detect enemies coming from the vast sky, let alone defeat them. Bearing that in mind, he planned to enhance his army's air defense capabilities as soon as possible. Otherwise, he would never be able to build an artillery position near the Taquila ruins.

He guessed that after Lorgar's escape from their pursuit, the demons had probably had flown to the border of the Western Region several times to investigate, and they would have likely concluded that most of the residents of Neverwinter were common people. That was why they thought they could repeat the old trick that they had used in the first Battle of Divine Will.

The demons' investigation teams had somehow managed to avoid the sentry posts in the Impassable Mountain Range as well as the God's Punishment Witches who had gone deep into the Barbarian Land. If Sylvie had not taken over the scouting job, the frontier guards would not have been able to detect the approaching demons until they came near the city wall.

The battle on the city wall had highlighted what was lacking in the current technology, and proven that the sky had already become the biggest vulnerability in Neverwinter's defensive line.

After all, the people in this era could hardly imagine aerial forces, let alone countermeasures for aerial attacks.

Roland had been pondering over the air defense problem ever since the moment he had seen the demons with their flying Devilbeasts, but he had never expected them to come to the city so early. He had not started the development of air defense weapons yet, or even finished building the Impassable Mountain ground defense line and the telephone network.

The fact that the frontier guards had not been able to shoot down any demon or Devilbeast during the earlier incident did not surprise him at all. It had been his decision to use revolving rifles to fill up the blind zones of the machine guns and the cannons for now, and they had proven to be quite effective in suppressing enemies on the ground. However, resulting from the low pressure in the bore, a revolving rifle had a relatively short range and a low accuracy, which became a very serious defect against airborne enemies. Furthermore, its hit rate was low and its firepower was limited, since each of its cartridges could only contain five bullets. Last but not least, it had no suitable tripod or aiming tool for targets in the sky. With these defects, it could hardly serve as an ideal ground-to-air weapon.

He felt that he had better begin to replace all the revolving rifles with bolt rifles.

It was already part of his plan, but Anna was unable to mass-produce that many parts that were necessary for the large-scale production of the bolt rifles. Given that, he had only equipped the sniper team with bolt rifles for now. Fortunately, the workers had started to get familiar with the operation of

the new machine tool which was put into use recently, and they were already able to assemble rifles on their own. Once they could improve their work efficiency and guarantee the quality of the products, the output of bolt rifles would be substantially increased.

Though bolt rifles could shoot farther and more precisely than revolving rifles, they could hardly serve as ground-to-air weapons. Their rate of fire was even lower than the revolving rifles, and their tracer ammunition, which had a complex structure, was not easy to manufacture, especially when the ammunition production line was already working at its full capacity. Even if he began to focus on tackling the key problems for the mass production of bolt rifles now, he would need several months to achieve this goal. By the time he succeeded, the Months of Demons would already be over.

Under these circumstances, he decided to create new ground-to-air firearms as the primary air defense weapons and use the bolt rifles to assist these new weapons in a fight.

Based on the existing technologies, he was not able to equip his army with any kind of high-tech fire control system, so his only choice was to create a hail of bullets to stop the enemies in the sky.

The easiest way of achieving this effect was to convert some of the Mark I type heavy machine guns into anti-aircraft machine guns, which had been a tried and tested solution in the modern world's history and would not increase the burden on the manufacturing and logistics sectors. A Mark I type HMG equipped with an aiming tool and an adjustable tripod would be able to shoot low-flying enemies out of the sky.

In any case, his Mark I type heavy machine guns were easy to convert, as he had planned for the air defense usage in advance and had equipped them with air-cooled barrels instead of a water-cooled casing when designing these machine guns.

A heavy machine gun was well-suited for hitting long-range targets, while also having a remarkably high hit rate at shorter ranges. It fired its shells extremely fast, and thus had overwhelming firepower. With these features, they could effectively suppress the spear-throwing Mad Demons who rode the flying Devilbeasts. If the city wall had been equipped with two such converted Mark I type machine guns before the previous skirmish, the outcome would have been very different.

With this plan in mind, after he concluded the meeting, he immediately headed for the Arithmetic Academy instead of returning to his office.

This new academy was located to the south of the Castle District, next to the chemistry laboratory. Most of the researchers working in the academy were the former Astrology Association members. Being venerated as a school of sages, it had recently been attracting quite a lot of the talented citizens who had just completed their primary schooling. It received almost 20% more job applications than the Alchemist Workshop next door.

Roland speculated that the frequent explosions and accidents in the lab might also have played a part in discouraging prospective job applicants.

Astrologer of Dispersion Star welcomed him in the main hall.

After bowing to the king, the Chief Astrologer began heaping praise upon the profoundness and beauty of mathematics.

"Your Majesty, please forgive me for nagging you. That book you gave me, 'Analytical Geometry', must be the deities' work! I had never imagined that I'd be able to see the world so clearly with my mind instead of my eyes. Even if I were to one day become dim-sighted from old age and lose the ability to observe the starry sky, I would still be able to describe the world just as clearly as before. For example, now I can even describe your wavy hair, your clothes, and even your boots using numbers and symbols..."

Fearing that he would go on and on, Roland interrupted him. "Have you mastered all the knowledge in the book?"

"I can't say I've mastered all of it, but I did master most of it." Dispersion Star calmed himself down and continued. "In the past six months, apart from the calculation missions you gave us, we've been working on a huge project. We recorded the stars' celestial coordinates and our previous observation results in the mathematical language. Now we can be sure that the Star of Extinction, the Bloody Moon in your words, always stays at the same spot in the sky. It doesn't move at all."

Roland had once paid close attention to the Bloody Moon, whose coming was said to herald the beginning of the Battle of Divine Will. Now that the demons had already begun to take action, he no longer had any interest in the star.

"I've come to give you a new mission. You'd better finish it as soon as possible." He said explicitly. "It's not a pure math problem like the previous missions. You need to solve a practical problem for the First Army."

"Do you mean creating something like the cannons' firing table?"

"It's more complicated than that," Roland shook his head and said. "You need to work with the craftsmen to produce a tool which can predict the movement of a target in the sky. You'll need two equations to describe this kind of movement. One describes the horizontal displacement of the target and the other describes the vertical displacement. I have a general idea of the design, but you have to determine the specific parameters through more detailed measurement and calculation."

What Roland wanted was an aiming tool for the new ground-to-air machine guns that could determine a target's distance and forward direction in the sky. With these parameters, a soldier could adjust the weapon to get the proper high angle and advance angle, and then riddle the flying enemy with bullets. This aiming tool was a manually operated mechanical device rather than a piece of electronic equipment, so all that the shooter needed to operate this weapon would be an accurate firing table and some basic knowledge of mathematics and geometry.

#### Chapter 926: Quitting Math for Dummies

The anti-aircraft machine guns were just the first step to enhancing Neverwinter's air defense capabilities. The most effective way to protect the city's airspace was still building a functional air force.

Back in the days when the Union had ruled the human world, witches had guarded the skies.

A small number of witches endowed with a flying ability, as well as a few Extraordinaries wearing Stones of Flight, had performed this air defense task. They had been recognized as the strongest warriors of the Union, and thus their status had been higher than that of the other combat witches in the Blessed Army.

According to Pasha, throughout the history of the Union, all the Three Chiefs had always been former members of this air defense troop.

As for the common people who did not have the talent to use magic power or the Magic Stones, the only solution was to create a kind of machine which could serve as their wings. When that happened, they would be able to get rid of the constraints of gravity and fly up into the sky.

In order to dominate the battle in the air, Neverwinter had to build up its own air forces.

To achieve that goal, Roland needed to create airplanes.

This was no easy job, as it involved tackling many technical problems at the same time. He was not familiar with aircraft design, and even the structure of a biplane from World War I was complicated enough to give him a headache. He was able to get away with the simplified power transmission systems and braking systems of the train for the initial prototype. However, the flight control surfaces of a plane could not be half-assed and had a much lower tolerance for error. More importantly, he had never flown a plane and thus had no idea whether the mechanical devices he created would work or not.

Fortunately, he could choose another kind of aircraft—the glider.

Wendy, who was able to sense wind direction and wind power accurately, could work as his test pilot. With the help of Lightning and Maggie, who could ensure Wendy's safety, he believed he would be able to write a flight manual for the operation of the gliders without risking anyone's life.

"Your Majesty." Astrologer of Dispersion Star spoke, interrupting Roland's thoughts. "I understand what you mean. The Arithmetic Academy will make this aiming tool for you as soon as possible."

"Good." Roland nodded in satisfaction. He was happy to be able to talk to this astrologer, who could immediately understand his intentions. He felt that it had really been a wise decision to bring the whole Astrology Association to the Western Region.

As a school of sages, the Astrology Association also required hands-on practical ability just as the alchemists did. The astrologers were not only excellent at mathematics but also good with their hands. Since no blacksmith knew how to make a telescope, they usually designed and assembled the telescope parts by themselves.

Just as Roland was about to leave, he noticed that Astrologer of Dispersion Star still seemed to have something to say.

"Is there anything else?" Roland asked.

"Here's a thing I can't figure out, Your Majesty." The scholar cleared his throat by coughing several times. "I don't understand why there's the word 'Intermediate' on the cover of the book, 'Analytic Geometry', and on every cover of the mathematics books you gave me."

Roland chuckled. "That's the thing you want to ask?"

"Please forgive me for being so bold, if it's a thing can't be disclosed." Different from Kyle Sichi, Dispersion Star had stayed in the old King's City since his birth. He had served several kings and was

always on his best behavior. However, Roland could tell from his eyes that he was just as curious as the Chief Alchemist.

Roland could not help but smile while recalling that he had used "Intermediate Chemistry" to lure Kyle into working for Neverwinter. In order to get his hands on the book, Kyle had recruited students, given lectures, and even taken up the post of Minister of Chemical Industry. Nevertheless, Roland felt that he would not need to repeat this carrot-and-stick trick on Dispersion Star.

He explained plainly, "It's because there's a book called Advanced Mathematics. It's not just about geometry or arithmetics. It's advanced mathematical theory. You can imagine the primary and intermediate books as the trunk of a tree and advanced mathematics as the top of the tree. But this book is much harder to understand, so it has another name."

"What might that be?"

"Quitting Math for Dummies," Roland answered with his hands laid out in a shrug.

Obviously, Dispersion Star did not understand Roland's implication. He stared blankly at the king, and then he said, "Your, Your Majesty... I'll never give up, even if I have to spend the rest of my life to grasp the theory! Could you please show me..."

Seeing the sincere look on the scholar's face, Roland somehow felt a little embarrassed about himself, since he had regularly dozed off in his advanced mathematics class. He cleared his throat and said, "Of course. After finishing this project, you may come to the castle to get the book."

"Yes, Your Majesty!" Dispersion Star knelt and replied with excitement.

...

After that, Roland left the Mathematics Academy for the backyard of the North Slope Mountain.

Apart from the anti-aircraft machine guns, he intended to make some special weapons for the God's Punishment Witches.

After having spent several months together, he was firmly convinced about the Taquila survivors' burning desire to wreak havoc upon the demons. Neverwinter had to fight the demons to survive, but the Taquila witches just wanted revenge. In the hearts of the ancient witches, the demons had been the source of their pains for the past hundreds of years, the enemies who had killed their families and friends, and the nightmare they longed to get rid of.

Roland felt that it would be a complete waste for these mighty warriors to use only swords and spears to fight the demons. He also noticed that they were able to fight with weapons that were too heavy to carry for conventional soldiers. This meant that he could equip them with fiercer firearms and turn them into high mobility heavy battle units.

His initial plan was to design a portable Mark I type HMG for the God's Punishment Witches, whose ammo box could be carried in their backpacks. With these weapons, the God's Punishment Witches would become mobile fortresses. Once they encountered a pack of demons, they could immediately turn them into Swiss cheese.

However, now he had changed his mind.



Some heavy machine guns were going to be converted into anti-aircraft machine guns, and a new variant of the Mark I guns would soon begin production on a large scale. In the near future, the bullet consumption speed would be incredibly fast, but based on the current efficiency of Neverwinter's bullet production, he could not ensure the supply of ammunition for so many guns. Under such circumstances, even if he were to manufacture 300 guns for the God's Punishment Witches, they would not get enough bullets to be able to achieve the target effect of a walking fortress

To solve this problem, he needed to create a powerful and simple weapon that used fewer bullets while also being easy to maintain.

He quickly sketched the outline of the new weapon on paper.

It was a grapeshot gun, a gas operated weapon with a 40mm caliber.

The prominent advantage of a grapeshot gun was its wide killing range and the long-distance shots resulting from the enlarged caliber. It shot automatically and its shooter did not have to be very accurate. It could help the revolving rifles and bolt rifles in suppressing the enemies who managed to break through the cannon blockade line. It could also be adopted in a sneak attack. In such a battle, the grapeshot gun shooter could take the initiative to approach the target.

Judging from the demons' fighting methods in the second Battle of Divine Will, they were still in the era of cold weapons. In a direct encounter, they usually fought hand to hand instead of throwing spears.

Given that, Roland was confident that the God's Punishment Witches equipped with automatic grapeshot guns would be able to give them hell in a close combat fight.

...

Five days later, Sylvie spotted some Devilbeasts again.

The number of enemies had doubled this time. Twelve Devilbeasts, looking like a dark cloud in the sky, were flying towards Neverwinter.

Chapter 927: Air Defense Battle At The Border (Part I)

Roland had added two short telephone lines connecting his office with the command center of the Neverwinter garrison and the Taquila survivors so that both stations could instantly contact him if the need arises. Therefore, the castle, the camp of the First Army, and the Third Border City received the news almost at the same time.

"This happened too soon." Pasha was a little doubtful. "Based on our experience, we should have had half a month or even a month before the demons would launch their second attack; especially for a city like Neverwinter since they can't arrive in one day."

"Why?" Roland asked.

"Because they need time to let the panic spread. By that time, no matter how the lord of the city tries to calm his subjects, it will be all for naught. The second attack would crush the people's confidence and

snuff out any remaining hope. That's why they normally waited for some time before commenced the second attack." Pasha explained. "The demons seem a bit hasty this time."

"I see." Roland nodded. Pasha was right. In an ancient city, people were too busy working every day just to feed themselves every day. In such a disconnected society incomparable to the one where Roland came from, five days were only long enough for the news to spread among the Rats and the patrons of a few taverns.

Somehow, the old rumor seemed a bit more credible to Roland now. After all, the demons' strategy was so similar to the humans'. It was highly unlikely for them to act so human-like without a human guiding them.

"What are you going to do?" Alethea chimed in.

"What else can I do? Just kill them all!" Roland said decisively. Time seemed very limited. They had only managed to add the new aiming tool on the Mark I HMG recently, and the machine gun squad they hastily assembled only had one trial, with balloons as the targets. But since many witches, including Nightingale, Lightning, and Maggie, had returned, they could now take the initiative to attack.

Roland looked at Nightingale and the other witches. "Just follow the plan. Remember the most important thing is..."

"Safety. Lightning perfectly understands!" The little girl raised her hand.

"Maggie too, coo!"

"Don't worry. I'll take care of these two little ones," Nightingale said, smiling.

"Who's the little one?" Lightning protested, raising her chin.

"Of course it's you, coo."

"Why?"

"I'm bigger than the two of you combined after transforming! Coo!" Maggie spread her wings.

"That's not what I meant!"

The two hadn't even finished arguing before Nightingale picked them both, one girl in each arm, and went out of the meeting room.

"I'll leave the defense task of the city wall to the witches of the Sleeping Island," Roland said to Tilly.

Tilly answered without hesitation, "They'll do their best."

"Good. Then I shall stand by the phone and wait for your good news," Roland said and then commanded word by word, "Move! Now!"

Pasha did not speak until Roland was alone in the room. Her voice sounded serious. "Are you serious about this? The demons would change their mind once they spot so many witches, and they won't see Neverwinter as a city ruled by the common person but by witches. They would then have completely different tactics in store for us."

"I know. You've already warned me about that." Roland exhaled softly. The ancient witch had told him about her concern when they made the defense plan. In her opinion, if the demons thought Neverwinter was a Holy City under the dominion of the Union, they would undoubtedly strengthen their defenses and attack with increasing aggression in the coming battles. In other words, they would start to view Neverwinter as an even opponent. The demons only took the witches seriously and completely disregarded the common people.

"I thought... humans would prefer to avoid a war like this."

"They'll come sooner or later, right?" Roland arose and walked up to the French window, and looked off into the direction of the border. "Since that's the case, it's better to fight a battle we have prepared for instead of heading mindlessly to war. The First Army is made up of men who used to be common hunters, miners, and farmers, and the army was not exceptionally powerful in the beginning. Now that they have to face an enemy that is not in the least like the ones they faced before, every chance of confrontation would help them gain experience and prepare them for the Battle of Divine Will. The so-called elite soldiers are simply those who have survived several times on the edge of life and death."

"I must say that your resolve has moved me." Alethea whisked her tentacles. "You're better than most of the common people just from this point."

Roland shook his head and said, "Common people didn't earn the label of 'common people' because they're incompetent, but simply because of their large population. Therefore, their strength is often easily ignored. There're stories in the Dream World telling of tales where powerful entities, whether they be ancient gods or colossal dragons, underestimated the might of the humans, and ended up being slaughtered by mere 40 ordinary people."

"I have never heard of such a legend."

"But they're not entirely false. I dare say that as technology advance, we will only need 25 common people to do the same job." Roland shrugged. Then he turned around and said seriously, "Furthermore, we can mislead the demons by letting them believe that Neverwinter is a city ruled by the Union. They will conclude that the bizarre attacks they're about to suffer are from the witches abilities and ignore the most important point—Neverwinter is neither a city ruled by a common lord nor one under the Union's rule. It is an industrialized city that has managed to merge the essence of both."

\*\*\*\*\*

Fish Ball widened his eyes, and stared unblinkingly at the grassland to the North, so as not to miss any sign of the enemies.

He had heard of the existence of the demons from His Majesty a year ago, but the first time he saw what they looked like was during the incident five days ago.

When he witnessed the scene of the enemies' bone spears piercing through his fellow soldiers' chests, Fish Ball felt the dread he had not felt for a long time flood back over him. No human beings could attack like that. Even the demonic beasts could not threaten the city wall with that huge distance between them and the wall. For the first time since he joined the army, he met an enemy whose range of attack was comparable to that of the flintlocks. However, he failed to strike back due to the limited

angle range of his weapon, which made him a conspicuous target to the enemies if he had held his ground on the wall.

At that moment, Fish Ball wanted to run away.

But he stayed his ground. It was, at first, his trained reflexes kicking in that prevented him from fleeing, but then, a strong feeling of fury and detestation flooded over him. He was furious about the previous deaths of his companions and his powerlessness.

He used to be a wimp that was known for his cowardly nature to people in the old Border Town. People laughed at him wherever he went, and for a time, he nearly believed that he was a real coward. But that all changed the day Van'er had tricked him to join the then-new Militia with two eggs. In the first confrontation with the demonic beasts on the wall, he was so scared that he peed his pants, but ever since he returned from the wall that day, no one had laughed at him anymore.

Now, Van'er was already promoted to the head of Artillery Battalion, yet he was merely transferred from the Flintlock Squad to the Machine Gun Squad and became a squad captain. Fish Ball had neither gripe nor jealousy, for he knew that Van'er was much more capable than him. Van'er even had guts to speak in front of His Majesty, and that was something he would never dare do. But that did not mean that he did not want to be a better person.

Ever since he decided to serve His Majesty, he had witnessed things far beyond his imagination. He had traveled on a concrete ship that could make its way upstream without sails, and he had attacked the nobles' capital city. He had also helped defeat the arrogant Church of Hermes and claimed the desert of the south in Graycastle for his King.

He had already seen so many things. So why should he be afraid of the demons?

Suddenly the observer shouted, "Attention. Suspicious targets spotted at 10 o'clock!"

In the same instant, Fish Ball also noticed some indistinct black spots on the horizon.

He pulled off the rifle bolt of the Mark I and raised its muzzle towards the sky.

No one knew that he was still ashamed of what had happened five days ago.

Only the blood of the enemies could help him was this disgraceful memory away.

Chapter 928: Air Defense Battle At The Border (Part II)

"Targets confirmed. The demons are coming!"

"They're heading this way!"

"They're coming from two directions. Demons also spotted at 12 o'clock!"

The observers of the different squads took turns watching their targets through the telescope, giving warnings continuously. Fish Ball's eyes were glued to the second group of enemies that appeared in the shooting area he was assigned to.

The demons in his field of vision were tiny as the leaves flying in the wind, and only when the devilbeast flapped its wings could they tell the difference between them and regular birds. Having learned by heart the firing procedures, Fish Ball placed one of the demons in his aiming reticule and then adjusted the heading indicator of the aiming tool.

The new aiming tool on top of the gun looked very odd. It contained two concentric rings: One was equipped with a Devilbeast model that could spin; the other consisted of several paratactic tiny holes that could rotate with the model.

Fish Ball knew nothing about the principles behind this aiming tool, but he knew that since His Majesty had designed it, it would be as fabulous as any of the other ingenious things the King had made. He spent a whole night memorizing every step he needed to go through before firing the weapon. The first step, he remembered, was to move the heading indicator, the Devilbeast model, to where it was parallel with the target.

In a short amount of time, the enemy in the air was aligned with the tiny hole in the aiming ring.

Right after that, he glanced at the model and shouted to his partner beside him, "A quarter!"

That meant the area of the target to that of the model was four to one, indicating that the demon was in the shooting range of the Mark I HMG.

Lord Astrologer of the Dispersion Star, who assisted in training the squads, had hammered it into them that any distances judged by the naked eye were bound to result in inaccuracies; it could only serve as a rough estimate of the range to the enemy. To ensure maximum effectiveness of the Mark I, it would be safer for them to round the distance up.

That sounded easy enough for Fish Ball to understand. A premature spray from the Mark I would be guaranteed to hit the target while firing too late might just waste bullets.

After making the call, Fish Ball only needed to wait for his partner to find the corresponding number on the shooting table before he would pull the trigger.

It only took a few seconds to finish this procedure, but the process felt excruciatingly long to him. As this was happening, everything around Fish Ball seemed to slow down for him, and the shouting sounds of his fellow soldiers in the background started to fade away. For a moment, he even heard his own rapid heartbeats and heavy breathing clearly.

He could feel a slight amount of moisture in his palms. He knew that the cowardly Fish Ball was still inside him somewhere.

But that only helped him steel himself for what was to come.

As the demons flew steadily towards the wall, they gradually rose, going for the same pattern they executed five days ago. Now that they were at least 800 or 900 meters away, they fully extended their wings so that their bodies were as stretched out as possible. This made them such thin targets that even marksmen of the sniper team would be able to guarantee a clean shot on them.

"But we are different," Fish Ball thought.

The scholar had told him of many principles, most of which was beyond Fish Ball's understanding. But he had remembered one point very clearly.

"Once the enemies are close enough to throw spears, you're free to aim and fire. But before they get in that range, you don't need to worry about hitting the enemies but rather just send as many bullets as you can in their path and wait for them to fly into the bullets."

"Use the fifth hole!" At this moment, his squadmate behind him shouted.

Fish Ball took a deep breath and raised the muzzle, "placing" the Mad Demon that he was aiming at in the fifth hole and pulled the trigger as hard as he could.

Suddenly, a gush of flame flashed out of the muzzle.

The sound of gunfire was ear-piercing, and it seemed to have resumed the flow of time which had previously appeared to slow down. Almost simultaneously, the other squads had also started to open fire. The area atop the city wall instantly heated up.

This all felt rather bizarre to Fish Ball.

The muzzle of the Mark I was not aimed at the demons but a vacant space in front of them. No one knew if they would hit the target. All they could do was keep their fingers tightly on the trigger, and pray for the best as the cartridge box was emptied one bullet after another.

Fortunately, this did not last long.

After three seconds or so, a "flower" of red bloomed among the group of demons at their 12 o'clock.

Along with the explosion of red, Fish Ball could also see a half-broken wing and body parts flying everywhere.

The Devilbeast that had been shot were jolted and spun in mid-air, like pieces of thin paper being crumpled up. It was only then that Fish Ball got a rough view of the demon's appearance. However, from the scattering limbs, he did not spot any body parts resembling those of the Mad Demons. This unlucky devilbeast must have been one of the ones who were responsible for carrying the red mist canisters.

Subsequently, two Devilbeasts swayed away midair and dropped down like stones. Fish Ball could not tell from their movement whether they had been urgently dodging the bullets or seriously injured. But they failed to recover their speed and smashed directly onto the grassland.

Apparently, the sight inspired the soldiers, who started to cheer rapturously.

"And another one! Partner, well done!"

"Air Defense Squad, it's all yours now!"

"Come on, kill those nasty things!"

"Long live King Roland!"

The demons seemed to sense something wrong. They started to disperse and accelerate, charging towards the wall without any sign of retreat!

"Three fourths!" Fish Ball grabbed the gun handle tightly and kept adjusting the shooting direction.  
"No... four fourths!"

The enemy in his vision was the same size as the model, meaning that the enemy was now within spear-chucking range.

"Open Fire!" the observator shouted, "All gunners, fire at will!"

The soldiers armed with revolving rifles also joined and opened up at the approaching devilbeasts.

All the guns were blasting away, cracking continuously at the wall. Four devilbeats were already shot down, however, ever since the enemies became aware of their attack and started to dodge the shots, few bullets succeeded in hitting them. At this moment, Fish Ball noticed a Devilbeast dart through the sky and dove towards him. As the deformed monster was snarling down at him from the air, he could faintly see that the Mad Demon on raised up a bone spear and aimed it at him.

A piercing chill instantly rose from the soles of his feet, crept through his body, and caused his hands to tremble involuntarily.

Now that the demon in his vision was bigger than the model, he didn't have to estimate how far the demon was anymore, for this distance was short enough for the bullet fired by Mark I to maintain a perfectly straight trajectory through the air. All he needed to do now was to raise the muzzle, aim, and keep firing until the demon's body was riddled with bullets.

But, that spear would also pierce through his body without mercy.

Flee or die.

The familiar feeling crawled up like a shadow, and the cowardly Fish Ball seemed to have grabbed him by his hands.

"Ah——!" In the next moment, Fish Ball bellowed, "Go away. I'm no longer——!"

At the same instant, the barrel of the gun spat out flames of death toward the demon.

The bullets released from the gun whistled toward the demon, tore through its muscles, shattered its bones, and ricocheted in the demon's body before exiting the other side. The impact was so intense that its body swelled a little as its guts were smashed to smithereens.

The Mad Demon threw the bone spear at the moment the bullets flew into him.

Fish ball had foreseen his ending when he pulled the trigger.

But he did not let go of his finger. He stood firm even though he was trembling violently with fear.

"—a coward!"

Bang!

Just one meter away in front of Fish ball, the shadow-like bone spear shattered as it flew into a semi-transparent barrier that had appeared out of nowhere. The barrier only shook a little but otherwise remained intact.

Fish Ball finally came to himself and realized that a short-haired and short witch had appeared on the battlements, and blocked the spear with her incredible power.

"What are you shouting for?" She let out a long breath and slowly withdrew her hands. Then she turned around and smiled at him. "Of course you aren't."

Chapter 929: Air Defense Battle At The Border (Part III)

Sylvie, who was observing the battle, could finally breathe out a sigh of relief. The Mad Demons' first volley this time did not cause as much damage as compared with their previous attack. With the help of the witches of the Sleeping Island, the spears were either blocked or strangely missed their targets. Only one spear managed to hit a heavy machine gun and shatter it, blasting the splinters everywhere. The explosion forced the squad to cease fire temporarily, but none of the soldiers were fatally wounded. Nana would be able to heal them all as long as they held on until the end of the battle.

The Mad Demons had to let their swollen arms recover before they could attack again, while the First Army could just keep firing. The longer the demons stayed in one spot, the easier a target they became for the First Army gunners. Sylvies knew then that the enemies' defeat was inevitable.

The demons seemed to sense that too. As a horn rang out, the surviving Devilbeasts scrambled to turn around and accelerated away towards the west.

Compared to the evasive movements the devilbeasts displayed when attacking, the beeline they made in the air after turning tails turned them into easy targets for the soldiers. The hail of bullets managed to snap off one escaping Devilbeast's wing. The beast then fell into the Misty Forest with its body bent in an odd angle.

By now, there were only five flying Devilbeasts left, and only three carried the Mad Demons.

Sylvie informed the last of the Neverwinter attackers, who were currently lying in ambush about this information through the Sigil of Listening.

They were the last nail in the coffin for these demons.

"Copy that," said a familiar voice from the other end of the Sigil. "I'm on it. Enjoy the show of a great explorer!"

"Be careful..." Before Sylvie could even finish, sounds of wind whooshing past already blocked out the rest of her words.

That was a signal of falling from the high sky, and an omen of death for the enemies.

The last thing the demons controlling the devilbeasts expected was that someone would attack them from above. They were proud of their natural ability to strike from the air. However, in the face of the witches above the clouds, the odds were not in their favor this time.

Lightning accelerated so fast that the goggles started to crack.

120 kilometers per hour!



That's almost twice as fast as Maggie in the Devilbeast form.

If she flew any faster, the turbulent airflow would very likely blow away her wind goggles.

What she needed to do now was no different than what she did to blow up the king's city.

Adjusting the horizontal direction of the "bomb" so that it would hit the flying demons.

But, the "bomb" she carried this time was Ashes.

It was a tentative decision to add an Extraordinary in the battle. Ashes could fly with the help of the Stone of Flight, but she could not fight while she was controlling the stone. It would be a waste to leave such a mighty warrior on the ground, so they finally came to a solution where the little girl would carry Ashes to attack the enemies. This operation turned out to be surprisingly smooth. Ashes could keep floating in the air by her will so that she would not be a burden to Lightning, and at the same time, the Extraordinary's body was strong enough to bear the violent airflow due to high-speed flight.

As they broke through the thick clouds, their vision suddenly cleared up.

The five Devilbeasts Sylvie had told them about appeared in front of them.

The enemies were still unaware of what was happening above them.

Lightning mustered all her strength and threw Ashes towards one of them.

Ashes unsheathed her long sword and slashed at the demon head-on.

It was not until the demon had heard the blade whistling through the air did it finally become aware of the danger that was fast approaching. But by then, it was too late. The demon swelled its arm and put the spear in an attempt parry the strike, but Ashes' slash was unstoppable. Her sword cut through the spear before cleaving the demon in half. The last thing the demon saw was the Extraordinary's pair of golden eyes.

The rest of the demons were startled, and they screamed out as they made their devilbeats swerve to the sides. They all raised the spear, ignoring the Devilbeast whose master had just been slaughtered. At that moment, a terrifying roar distracted them.

"Woo—Ooo—!"

The giant Devilbeast that Maggie had transformed into dashed out of the thick clouds and swooped towards the demons.

The enemies could not help but put their focus on the gigantic Maggie instead of Ashes. They knew that it was not a real Devilbeast, for they could see a witch on its back.

Two spears hurled by the demons sped towards Maggie like a pair of shadows.

The next second, the Devilbeast suddenly vanished and the spears passed through thin air. The demons then saw a white pigeon floating proudly where the Devilbeast had been.

"Coo!"

Just in a flash, Nightingale showed up in front of the enemies.

Although the peculiarness of the misty world had restricted her movement in the air so that she could not act as freely as she could on the ground, she would not let any enemy within one "flash" escape.

As long as the enemy was pulled in the misty world, Nightingale would dominate the battle.

Without God's Stones of Retaliation, the demon would never see her. The Devilbeast' narrow back was as large as a town square to her.

While Nightingale shot down the demon with her revolver, she pulled the reins on the devilbeast that is now masterless and had it crash into the last devilbeast still with a rider. The Mad Demon atop the last beast attempted a desperate struggle and threw two spears towards Nightingale while paralyzing its own arm. As the Magic Stone was flashing blue, it did not only drain the demon's magic power but also made half of its body wither up.

Nightingale, however, did not even dodge the spears. She merely turned the black and white world upside down so that the sky became the ground, she then stood on the abdomen of the Devilbeast who, instead, took the spear for her.

The turbulent misty world also concealed Nightingale and her mount. Then abruptly, the Devilbeast, controlled by Nightingale, smashed into the last pair of the enemies.

The misty world absorbed the demon in instantly.

This was a strange world for the demon, and the distorted space and lighting of this world instantly distracted it. By the time the demon realized what had happened, the borderlines that were fine as silver yarn flooded over it like a tsunami.

When the enemies reappeared, both the Devilbeasts and the Mad Demon had been minced into pieces, and their remains showered down to the ground below.

Maggie re-transformed into the beast and quickly caught Nightingale who was falling, while Lightning flew to catch Ashes, who had finished dealing with the other Devilbeast.

"Two to one, I win." Nightingale showed two fingers to the Extraordinary.

Ashes shrugged without a comment.

After they landed safely on the ground, Lightning produced the Sigil of Listening from her bag. "Sylvie, can you find the other two escaped Devilbeasts?"

There was a moment of silence before Lightning heard the answer. "Yes, I see them. They are about 2,500 meters away to the Northeast of you."

"Great, please guide me there."

"You want to go alone?"

"No, Maggie'll go with me. Don't worry," Lightning said as she clapped her chest. "They're just two beasts without a master."

"Noone will escape!" Maggie returned to a pigeon, fluttered to the top of the little girl, and said with her erect bird head.

"Be careful with the red mist cans. Remember not to come into contact with the mist." Nightingale warned.

"Retreat immediately if you see any new enemies," Ashes added.

"Got it. You can count on me!" Lightning raised a thumb and took off with Maggie, heading to where the enemies were fleeing.

...

#### Chapter 930: A Letter from the City Hall

After waiting by the telephone for an hour and a half, Roland finally received the final battle report.

The witches who were responsible for the ambush did not let any demons escape, and they also seized a lot of cans containing the red mist. Also, they acquired the corpses of the enemies shot down by the air defense squad, and Leaf also captured the final surviving Mad Demon who was wandering around the Misty Forest. All in all, they had gained more from this battle than he had expected.

First, and most importantly, the victory had boosted First Army's morale. The battle had let them realize that even though the demons were not an enemy that could be easily defeated like the knights or wild demonic beasts, they at least had the power to fight back. The demons that everyone had heard so much of was not supernatural and fearsome as the characters narrated in the old stories. In terms of defense, the demons, who were flesh and blood like human beings, were no better than the God's Punishment Army in front of His Majesty's powerful firearms.

Second, the captured enemy would make the anti-demon propaganda in Neverwinter much more effective. Roland believed that once the migrants saw what the demons looked like, they would no longer discriminate against the witches; it was impossible for the demons, a kind of monster that shared none of the similarities with humankind, to brainwash the witches' minds and make the witches their servants.

Lastly, the corpses of the demons would also be quite useful. For research purposes.

Since the magic blood could not save up separately and would lose its power quickly after the host had died, Roland had not counted on applying the enemy's blood to new sigils. But Celine had volunteered to take on the job of making sigils in Agatha's absence. Celine told him that Agatha was indeed among the most outstanding in the entire Quest Society, but the knowledge of sigil making was essential to every formal member of the society.

She also stressed that apart from the quality of the Magic Stones and demon blood, the appropriate method of carving the vessels on the stone was also crucial to making a good sigil, albeit it being a less important factor. One could directly use a stick to draw a straight line if the time was limited, but carving intricate patterns on the stone would be able to fully bring its power into play.

She was proud to say that no hands could be more exquisite and precise than her tentacles. In terms of sense of touch, control of strength, and not to mention the numerical advantage, the human hand was no match against her tentacles.

As Celine goes on bragging about her tentacles, strange ideas kept popping up in Roland's mind, and it took him a long while before he could get back to reality. Fortunately, Celine could not read his thoughts when their minds were communicating. Otherwise, there would be no way for him to explain himself out of this.

But of course, there was also the bad news.

It turned out that the anti-air effectiveness of the Mark I type HMG was mostly unsatisfactory. By looking at the overview of the battle, Roland found that the hail of bullets fired when the enemies were closer to the wall was the most deadly. The demons, at first, did not expect that they would be attacked, so they flew in slowly cramped up into two tight formations. This made them perfect targets for the guns. However, out of the twelve devil beasts that came, only four were shot down by the guns. After the demons changed the tactic and started to disperse as they entered the effective range for the Mad Demon's spears, no bullets succeeded in bringing any of them down.

Fortunately, the demons' ideal range of spear throwing was about 200 meters, a distance short enough for the bullets of Mark I to keep a straight trajectory. After three more Devilbeasts were hit, the rest of the demons stopped fighting and retreated immediately. However, if the enemies' attacking range was farther, or if they chose to approach the walls in a more spread out formation, this battle would have been much harder to win.

After all, in the face of the enemies that could maneuver freely in the air, the disadvantages of the immobile defenders on the ground were apparent.

Roland would try to improve the Mark I after this, but there were limited things he could do with the design. He might add a protective steel plate around the gun or convert the guns into small forts to protect the gunners. Also, he would increase the production of Mark I to deal with the war after the Bloody Moon arrives. However, Roland understood that there was no way for them to eliminate the Devilbeasts' threat unless Neverwinter had a comparable air force.

But let him put the concern aside for now. Roland put down the quill and let out a long breath. Finally, he won the air defense battle. No matter how insignificant it was, the battle would be regarded as the first battle in the human history that was won with the help of firearms.

At the thought of that, Roland sent for Barov Mons.

"Hold a celebration ceremony in the central square tonight. Make it as good and as lively as possible as the ones we have on Victory Day. It'll be a part of the propaganda. Do you understand?"

"Yes, Your Majesty," Barov responded with a hand on his chest.

\*\*\*\*\*

Five days after the ceremony, Snaketooth received a letter from the City Hall.

"Who was knocking?" Tigerclaw slurred behind him. "Don't we rest today?"

"Don't worry. It's not the foreman. Just go back to sleep."

Snaketooth returned to the low table and craned his head to look out of the window. The Sun had barely set, and there was still a faint trace of light outside as if a misty veil covered the sky.

Snaketooth had been sleepy when he was awakened, but he could not be soberer now. Seeing the City Hall's red seal on the envelope, he vaguely knew what was in it.

His life had changed significantly in the past a year and a half. After he moved in Border Town, he no longer had to live a rat-like life. Instead, he, like most people, started to make a living by himself. But, still, he had not believed such things would happen to him until he got his first pay, for he was so, so familiar with hirers who were notorious for exploiting their workers. Those corrupt people would cheat workers out of receiving their wages. This was especially so for a worker like him, who was a migrant. However, on the contrary, he got a full pay every month.

So, now he couldn't even imagine how much his life would continue to improve in the days to come.

With a salary of 12 silver royals per month, he could save up one odd gold royal for a down payment on the cheapest house in the residential area of Neverwinter. And if he took a part-time job, he might be able to buy the house much earlier. Now that he was clear about how long it would take him to achieve his goal, he started to look forward to it.

As His Majesty's promises to the people were getting realized one after another, Snaketooth started to hope for more.

Snaketooth carefully unsealed the letter and poured all the contents onto the table. There were three pieces of paper of different sizes and colors.

The first piece was the thickest and palm-sized, with only a few words on it, but it made his heart thud.

Without any doubt, it was an identity card of a formal Neverwinter citizen.

Unlike the temporary card, this card was wrapped up by a transparent and hard film that gave a smooth touch. On it read not only his name and the day of his birth but also a vivid portrait of him.

Finally, he had become a member of this city, and a subject that was acknowledged by the King.

Snaketooth tried to compose himself before he looked at the second piece of paper.

It was a written notice. There were many paragraphs he could not fully understand, as he was only able to spend limited time on night classes since coming to Neverwinter, but he was able to grasp the general idea of the content.

As he had expected, his application for participating the railway construction in the Misty Forest was passed by the City Hall.