

# Sixth Ring Wizard

## *Chapter 6: Chapter 6: Night Hunt*

In the woods ahead, an enemy held a longbow, leaning against a large tree. He had just fired an arrow, but it missed the target.

He hadn't expected to hit anyone; their leader's task was just to suppress the enemy with firepower and ensure they wouldn't escape.

Their plan was very successful; the arrows from their side never stopped, making it difficult for the opponents to charge out.

He nocked another arrow, observing the surroundings cautiously as he quietly readied himself to shoot another arrow.

Suddenly, a sharp pain struck his forehead. His eyes widened as he saw an arrow piercing his head at the very moment he revealed himself.

"Why am I so unlucky..." His consciousness gradually faded into darkness, never understanding why his luck was so bad before he died.

He couldn't believe that the opponent had aimed accurately at him; in such a dark night, it could only have been a random shot, yet it hit him precisely.

Herag, after striking the target with an arrow, drew his bow again, aiming at another tree.

The moment the person behind that tree revealed themselves, Herag loosed the bowstring, and the foe fell dead.

"Charge!" Emil didn't have time to applaud Herag's archery skills and was the first to rush out.

With a Knight Level body, he could see his surroundings at night, though not as clearly as Herag, nor was his vision as far.

After witnessing Herag's consecutive kills, Emil decisively decided to break through.

Using the forest trees as cover to evade arrows, within moments, he closed in on an enemy, and with a slash of his sword, the opponent's head fell to the ground.

Herag and the others followed closely behind, seizing any available opportunity as they advanced.

Whenever a foe showed themselves, he raised his hand and loosed an arrow, never missing so far.

"Warning!"

Suddenly, red flashes appeared in his vision, and Shenlan gave a prompt to dodge right.

Without any hesitation, Herag rolled to the right.

A giant sword crashed down exactly where he had just been.

"Oh?" The man who threw the giant sword let out a surprised sound, clearly not expecting Herag to evade the attack.

Herag felt a chill. Had he not dodged, he would've been cleft through the crown by that giant sword.

Thanks to Shenlan's prompt, he evaded it; others weren't so lucky.

The three who pursued were all Knight Level, and the other two each killed a guard.

Big-bearded Hagen clutched his throat, having been slashed by a slender man with a dagger, and fell powerlessly to the ground, blood pooling around him.

The third Knight Level warrior also wielded a sword, the blade was long and fine, typically used in flamboyant court swordsmanship displays.

With a closer look, Herag realized the figure was indeed a woman.

The Female Knight pierced through a guard's throat with a single strike and turned her gaze on Herag.

"Shenlan, detect the opponent's body data."

"Power 2.1, Agility 2.3, Constitution 1.9, Spirit 1.2, contains unknown energy within."

Herag put away his longbow and drew his longsword.

The opponent's agility was far superior; running would only expose his back and quicken his death, leaving no choice but to fight to the death.

At that moment, a hand pressed on his shoulder.

Originally about to break out, Emil turned back, addressing the surviving Herag and others, "You guys go first; they're after me."

"Emil, I thought you'd scurry away like a rat." The man wielding the giant sword mocked, laughing.

Emil remained expressionless, "Long time no see, Marco."

Marco, gritting his teeth, pointed angrily at Emil, "You're always so insufferable, looking down on everyone! Now I'm a Knight too, and tonight I'll crush you completely beneath my feet..."

Herag didn't catch Marco's last words; he and the remaining four faced another dilemma.

The three Knight Level warriors went for Emil, while the remaining two teams of archers targeted Herag and the rest.

They stayed stationed in the woods ahead, suppressing Herag and others with arrows, preventing their escape.

Herag took out the longbow from his back, saying to Jimmy and the others, "I'll take them down; observe and adapt accordingly."

"Shenlan, plot the best route, target eliminating all opponents."

"Route planning complete."

A map marking the route and enemy positions appeared before him; Herag observed it from a bird's-eye view before beginning his hunt.

Simultaneously, Shenlan monitored all enemy movements, predicting the arrow paths in advance.

Utilizing the darkness, Herag easily dodged these arrows, drawing bow and arrow, eliminating the enemies in the woods one by one.

At first, these people didn't notice anything amiss, but as more and more fell, they finally realized how many of their own had been lost.

Herag was like a ghost lurking in the night; they couldn't pinpoint his location at all.

Every time Herag killed someone, he immediately changed position as per the route, with arrows always hitting his previous spot, always a step behind.

After he shot the eleventh person, the pressure became too much for them to bear, and they began to retreat.

"Help us, Master Marco! They have a Knight Level archer!" One cried, rushing to where the four were in fierce battle.

Marco furrowed his brows, "Knight Level archer? That wasn't in the intel. Sean, go take care of him!"

Sean, the slender man with the dagger, silently melted into the darkness, using the assassin's usual stealth techniques.

Assassins were the best counters to archers; this was common knowledge.

"There's a Knight Level approaching!"

The moment Sean entered the range, Shenlan issued a warning, marking the position on the map.

Herag turned to look at the spot, which appeared deserted.

If not for Shenlan's warning, he wouldn't notice this person sneaking up behind him.

He hid behind a tree, pretending to shoot forward, suddenly changing direction to target Sean instead.

As Sean silently moved forward, seeing this made his muscles tense and pupils contract.

"How'd he discover me from at least a hundred meters away?" Sean wondered.

The arrow was already nearing his face; Sean twisted his body in an uncanny manner, barely dodging the unexpected arrow.

Yet his right arm was still grazed, leaving a small wound.

This minor injury was superficial, and Sean didn't mind it.

Evading an arrow gave him more confidence.

"He's not a Knight Level archer, just accurate," he deduced based on the arrow's speed.

Herag's surprise shot missed, and Sean felt more equipped to avoid subsequent arrows now that he was on guard.

On the other side, after witnessing the missed arrow, Herag immediately changed positions, delving deeper into the woods.

"Trying to run?" Sean smirked, as assassins relished hunting fleeing prey.

## *Chapter 7: Chapter 7: I've Got a Cheat*

The moon hung high in the night sky as Herag sped through the forest, with Sean closely trailing behind.

His speed surpassed Herag's, but the trees and other obstacles in the forest hampered his progress.

"Damn it! How does this guy know the area so well?" Sean cursed under his breath.

Herag moved at full speed throughout, as if he was intimately familiar with every tree and hiding spot, like someone who had grown up there.

More crucially, Herag would occasionally turn and shoot an arrow.

Each shot was timed with incredible precision, just as Sean was about to burst forward with speed. A cold arrow would come his way, forcing him to twist his body to dodge, widening the distance between them again in the blink of an eye.

This made Sean feel as uncomfortable as swallowing a fly, and he couldn't shake off the odd feeling: "Could it be a coincidence?"

After several such instances, Sean finally couldn't take it anymore: "Die, kid!"

"Detecting unknown energy surge in the opponent's body, predicting an increase in strength by 0.7, agility by 1.1, and constitution by 0.5."

Whoosh!

A chill ran down Herag's spine; it was the first time he'd heard such a sound from someone advancing in his direction.

"Dodge to the left front!" Shenlan advised.

Herag didn't hesitate. He had just dodged when Sean arrived, stabbing the air with his dagger.

"Hmm? Impossible!" Sean was incredulous; his supposedly infallible killing blow had been evaded.

Herag accelerated forward once more, feeling like he had reached his speed limit.

Sean had used a special method to significantly enhance his physical abilities; his speed was now far beyond Herag's.

"Duck and roll forward!" Shenlan advised again.

Herag immediately followed Shenlan's advice. Executing such evasive maneuvers at high speed required great physical demand.

This is where the benefits of practicing the Earth Breathing Technique came into play. Herag had been diligently doing the technique's set movements daily, mastering control over his body.

Sean's dagger barely missed Herag's head, grazing off a lock of hair. His strike had missed again.

"This kid is peculiar!" Sean couldn't believe it. How could someone who wasn't even at the Knight Level dodge his killing blows twice in a row?

"Dodge behind the tree on the right, draw your sword to block behind!"

Herag complied, slipping behind a tree while bringing his Longsword up behind him to block.

Clang!

The crisp sound of metal clashing rang out as Herag turned to see Sean's dagger piercing through the tree trunk and hitting his blade. The violent impact left Herag's hand numb.

Sean witnessed the scene in disbelief: "How does it seem like this kid knows what I'm about to do every time?"

In theory, it was possible. His attacks were always preceded by subtle changes in muscle activation and movement, which could be observed and predicted beforehand.

But these were instantaneous events, and the kid was running forward the entire time without looking back. How could he possibly know all this?

"Hold your sword to block in front!"

Clang!

Suddenly, Sean appeared in front of him, dagger aimed directly at Herag.

This attack too was anticipated, and Herag steadily blocked it with his Longsword.

"Damn it!" Sean was getting frustrated. It was as if this kid could see through his every move.

"Wait!" Suddenly, Sean's breath became erratic as he clutched his forehead painfully.

Herag let out a sigh of relief: "Finally, it's taking effect. I thought that kind of poison wasn't working on you. With your recent burst of attacks, your blood circulation must have sped up, so the poison acted more quickly."

"That arrow was poisoned..." Sean remembered; he had only been hit by an arrow once.

Herag's quiver held two kinds of arrows, one ordinary, and the other coated with poison.

The poison came from an inconspicuous herb outside the castle. After Shenlan analyzed it, its root could be processed—dried, distilled, and refined—into a colorless and odorless deadly poison.

Sean, as an assassin, was also an expert in poisons, but this one was colorless and odorless, with no initial symptoms, so he hadn't noticed.

It was a neurotoxin, and Sean's vigorous activity had hastened its effects.

"Die!" Sean launched a frenzied attack with his dagger. He knew that only by killing Herag would he have a chance to find the antidote.

But under the influence of the poison, his abilities declined sharply, and Herag easily blocked every attack.

"I have to escape." Feeling his breath becoming rapid and his limbs losing coordination, Sean knew he would die at Herag's hands if he didn't escape soon.

Sean shot a fierce glance at Herag, then vanished into the darkness; as an assassin, he had many escape tricks.

Herag stood still with a slight smile, calmly drawing his bow and taking aim at a clear spot not far off.

Swoosh!

With a scream, Sean reappeared, an arrow lodged in his back.

Even at full strength, Sean would have needed to focus entirely to dodge Herag's arrows under Shenlan's precise calculations, let alone now, while poisoned.

"How did you find me?" Sean's voice turned calm, accepting his fate.

Herag said nothing, drawing his bow again.

Sean stared directly at Herag, neither dodging nor hiding. In truth, his legs had gone numb. He murmured, "How do you always dodge my attacks? You're not even a Knight."

Expressionless, Herag released the tense bowstring and said, "Because... I've hacked the game."

His words and the arrow pierced Sean's head simultaneously, a spray of blood blossomed, and Sean fell backward onto the ground.

His eyes were bewildered in death: "Hack... game, what does it mean..."

These cryptic words baffled Sean even in death.

After Sean had fallen, Herag shot two more arrows for good measure. Only after Shenlan confirmed his death did Herag slowly approach the body.

"So poor?"

Herag searched thoroughly, finding neither a Gold Coin nor even a Copper Coin on Sean.

All Sean had were a pair of decent daggers, nothing else.

After dealing with Sean, Herag slung his Longsword on his back, held the Longbow, and gazed quietly into the depths of the forest, as if in contemplation.

Moments later, he chose to return in the direction of Emil.

He recalled that Jimmy and the others had fled under his cover and should be heading to the castle for reinforcements.

But the round trip to the castle took six days, far too long.

Even Emil, strong as he was, couldn't possibly handle two Knight Level masters alone and the lurking threat of snipers from afar.

He darted swiftly through the forest, his shadow like a phantom, quick and silent.

*Chapter 8: Chapter 8: The End*

After Herag returned, he found that the battle was still ongoing.

Emil was facing both the Female Knight and Marco alone. Emil and Marco were both injured, but the woman appeared unscathed.



The three moved extremely fast, surrounded by a team of archers who could only watch and dared not shoot.

The speed of the three was too fast, and the archers lacked the precision to hit Emil.

Herag observed the surrounding terrain, found a position that was both offensive and defensive, then bent his bow and shot, killing an archer.

"Someone's here!" The archers immediately scattered, seeking places to hide.

They couldn't see Herag's position and could only blindly shoot a few arrows into the dark forest.

Herag made a quick count, there were eight archers left, and he planned to take them all down.

Whoosh! Another arrow flew, taking down an archer hiding behind a large stone.

After killing this one, Herag repositioned himself, moved to another angle, and killed another archer hiding behind a tree.

The archers were in utter terror, unable to locate Herag's position. No matter how they hid, the cold arrows would find their way from behind or from the sides, escaping was impossible.

Marco and the Female Knight couldn't afford to care about them either; their battle had reached a fever pitch, leaving no one to spare a moment for Herag.

A one-sided slaughter began, with Herag transforming into the Grim Reaper, taking down an archer with each arrow.

Ten minutes later, all the archers were dead.

After finishing, Herag stayed hidden in the mountain forest, bow bent but not shooting.

He was waiting, waiting for the right moment to strike.

The three moved swiftly, Shenlan was calculating at high speed, the moment an opportunity appeared, Herag would make his move.

The Female Knight seemed to always be watching Herag, leaving no openings with her cautious strikes.

Marco, however, was in a killing frenzy, intent on a life-and-death battle with Emil, which Herag saw as a breakthrough point.

After all, they were human, not machines; humans always make mistakes.

If there was a mistake, Shenlan would surely catch it, as it wasn't human.

"Marco is not far from the Great Knight level, you know. I really took a loss on this deal. There has to be more money when this is over," the Female Knight said softly.

Marco was inexplicably enraged, shouting, "Shut up! If you went all out, he would be dead by now!"

"If I went all out, he would fight us to the death. This way, he will eventually die, so why choose the riskier option," the Female Knight chuckled.

The battle among the three lasted for an hour and was still ongoing.

At this point, they were visibly tired, their speed and strength significantly reduced.

Marco took a deep breath and shouted, "It's time to end this!"

His muscles swelled as if he had used some Secret Technique, holding the great sword with both hands and leaping up for a vertical slash, leaving Emil with no choice but to defend with all his might.

But if he defended with all his might, it would give the Female Knight a chance.

Whoosh!

At that moment, a cold arrow shot out. In mid-air, Marco couldn't avoid it.

Marco screamed, clutching his eye as an arrow pierced his left eye.

Emil seized this opportunity, executing a horizontal slash, and Marco's head flew off, rolling to the ground.

The Female Knight, about to attack, saw this and leapt back two steps, sheathing her foil.

"Hmm?" Emil was a bit puzzled, having prepared to fight to the death against the Female Knight.

The Female Knight explained, "I was hired by him, the employer is dead, so there's no reason to continue fighting. I'm no combat fanatic. Besides, he only paid for me to act, not to risk my life."

With that, she walked away, not even glancing at Marco's severed head.

"Lord Emil!" Herag hurried over.

Emil sighed in relief and gave a bitter smile, "I thought I was certainly going to die; your arrow was quite impressive. By the way, you're still alive?"

When Sean went after Herag, Emil had felt a bit regretful, as he didn't think Herag could escape from such a Knight-level assassin.

"My arrows were poisoned, and he just got a scratch," Herag smiled.

Emil remarked, "Even poisoned, he could easily have killed you, so surviving this reflects your skill."

He sighed and continued, "See how many horses are left, tie Hagen's and the others' bodies onto them, and take them home."

Herag turned back into the forest and found that all eight horses were just fine, untouched by the recent battle.

He tied the bodies of the two guards to the horses, and with Emil, each rode on one, leading the group with the remaining horses following behind.

Two days later, Herag and Emil met Baron Buck, who was coming to support them while on their way.

Baron Buck was a middle-aged man with a face full of flesh, dressed in a vigorous outfit, showing no sign of being a noble.

After listening to Emil's report, he said, "Things aren't that simple, Emil; they weren't just after you."

"Lord, what else has happened?" Emil asked.

"That Marco worked for that scumbag Simon next door. While they were attacking you, they also raided the southern mine. They thought they could definitely take you out this time, which would leave me without a capable ally," Baron Buck explained slowly.

Simon is the lord of Beihad Territory, and also a baron.

But his territory is poor in resources and has low tax revenue, often causing trouble for the surrounding territories.

Baron Buck continued, "This year, Beihad is suffering from a severe drought and famine, and things are chaotic. Meanwhile, Dur Valley had a bountiful year, so they're likely to take further action. We must strengthen our defenses during this time."

"Understood, my lord," Emil nodded.

Baron Buck looked at Herag and said, "You're called... oh... Herag, aren't you? Well done, lad!"

It had already been widely circulated that Herag single-handedly shot twenty people and even counter-killed a Knight-level assassin.

Baron Buck's guards were somewhat skeptical, but since Emil stated it himself, it couldn't be false.

Herag didn't care, and he was indifferent to others' evaluations and opinions.

His only concern now was to quickly increase his power. Facing Sean, even a small mistake or stroke of bad luck could have meant death for him.

"Shenlan, scan Baron Buck's physical data." He was curious about the power level of a Great Knight.

"Buck Salara: Power 3.8, agility 3.5, Constitution 4.1, Spirit 1.3. His entire body is charged with unknown energy."

This kind of data would already be considered superhuman in his previous life.

What intrigued Herag more was that Baron Buck's entire body was filled with unknown energy.

While Emil and Sean, who are Knight-level, only had unknown energy within their bodies.

When Sean pursued him, he had once utilized the unknown energy, greatly enhancing his stats, including driving a dagger through a tree trunk.

"Baron Buck's entire body being charged with unknown energy, does it mean he can exceed Sean's burst strength with a casual strike?" Herag speculated in his mind.

*Chapter 9: Chapter 9: Watching the Drama*

Two months later, the training ground.

"Earth Breathing Technique stage two practice complete: Power increased by 0.4, Agility increased by 0.5, Constitution increased by 0.5."

"Herag Merlin: Power 2.0, Agility 1.6, Constitution 2.2, Spirit 1.2."

"Physical data is approaching the genetic limit."

After Herag completed the thousandth Earth Breathing Technique practice, he checked his various statistics.

During these two months, he spent most of his time diligently practicing.

At first, there were occasional attacks and harassments from the Beihad Territory next door, with some grain and property being stolen. But then they suddenly ceased their flags and drums, showing no further interest in Dur Valley.

Baron Buck was frustrated by the harassment from people in the Beihad Territory, and could only passively defend every time an incident occurred. Those people were like flies, causing damage everywhere and often disappearing right after making trouble.

He had very few soldiers, with all his guards adding up to only about three hundred people.

This number was barely enough to guard the territory, with no ability to attack the Beihad Territory.

Moreover, the Beihad Territory was suffering from famine, with no resources worth plundering.

After the territory was no longer harassed, Herag and these guards found themselves with free time, no longer needing to rush about defending the land.

"Herag, how's it going?" Emil came directly over to the training ground to inquire about his progress.

"Still none of that feeling you mentioned, I suppose there's no hope of becoming a knight for me," Herag replied.

His physical statistics were already about the same as an official knight's, but he hadn't awakened a Life Seed, so he couldn't become a true knight.

According to Shenlan's Chip's notification, he had reached his genetic limit, unable to improve any further, and the chance of becoming a knight was slim.

Emil comforted him, "There's no need to rush, take it slow, and persevere in your practice. Many knights awaken their Life Seeds suddenly during unnoticed moments of practice."

Herag nodded silently, knowing his strength was entirely due to Shenlan Assistance, and in reality, he didn't possess the talent to become a knight.

"Emil!" An appealing female voice rang out from the edge of the training ground.

Emil looked up, visibly surprised and flustered. Only after flickering his gaze a few times did he bow his head and greet, "Miss Melissa, when did you return?"

Melissa, Baron Buck's eldest daughter, was wearing an elegant gold long dress, gracefully walking over, her skin fair and exposing a hint of whiteness at her chest.

She sneered and said, "What? Surprised to see me? If I told you beforehand when I'd return, would you have found an excuse to patrol the territory?"

Emil still dared not look up, quickly explaining, "The territory's been unsafe lately. If I knew you were coming back, I could have prepared to pick you up."

Melissa dismissed it with a laugh, "I'm a student from Nosentan Academy, my tutor is Master Claude, and my father is a Great Knight. Who dares to harm me?"

"It's always better to be cautious..." Emil murmured.

"Hmph! Look at me! Why do you hesitate to look at me? Do you know why I came back?" Melissa demanded emotionally.

Emil seemingly gathered a lot of courage to look up, only for a brief glance into Melissa's eyes before diverting his gaze away quickly.

"I'm back to get married! My father is marrying me off to the Duke of Tulip's son!" Melissa confessed tearfully.

Emil was silent for a long time before speaking, "That's good, the Duke of Tulip's territory is vast. You should have a good life there."

"Is that all you have to say?" Melissa asked, her eyes red with emotion.

Emil remained silent.

"I'm in love with you! You're in love with me too! We both know this! Why can't you be brave enough to be with me? Who says knights can't marry their own miss, let those outdated societal rules go to hell! We are young people, our mentor told us, the times have changed, and we have to take charge of our own lives! My father values you so much, if you tell him, he will surely agree!" Melissa cried out in anguish.

Herag stood awkwardly aside. By now, there were only the three of them on the entire training ground.

Being too close, Herag found it difficult to leave or stay, so he stood silently at the side, pretending to be invisible.

"I..." Emil struggled to speak but eventually chose silence.

This was Herag's first time witnessing Emil so helpless and flustered.

Slap!

Melissa slapped Emil hard, then left crying.

Emil stood there, staring blankly at Melissa's departing silhouette, and kept silent for a long while.

After quite some time, Emil left alone as well, leaving Herag the only one left on the vast training ground.

Herag knew he might have heard something incredible, but dared not speak out, escaping to the back garden instead.

Old Henry's health had been progressively failing lately, diagnosed by Shenlan with several common senior ailments, leaving it uncertain if he could survive this winter.

"Tell Mary if you need anything, I've provided her the budget." Herag spoke while sitting at the bedside.

Old Henry lay in bed, his breaths erratic.

Mary was an old maid in the castle whom Herag had employed.

Lately, Herag had been performing well, and his good relations with Emil raised his status outside the castle too.

He had mentioned to Emil that Old Henry needed care, and Emil had quickly arranged it, but Herag still had to pay the wages himself.

Spending some time chatting with Old Henry about the recent happenings in the realm, Old Henry fell asleep during their conversation.

He instructed Mary to look after Old Henry and returned to his cabin.

It was no longer the leaky old hut, but a house all his own.

He had a few Gold Coins in his pocket now, rewards from Lord Baron for his bravery in killing enemies.

Even if he couldn't become a knight, his combat skills were unmatched among the castle guards.

A regular person might settle for this position, living such a life contently.

Herag leaned against the window, looking at the enlarged round moon in the sky, knowing he wouldn't be satisfied with this; he knew he hadn't yet gained control over his destiny.

Yet the path of a knight was nearly blocked, and wizards only existed in legends, leaving him a little lost.

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The news of Miss Melissa joining the Tulip Family quickly spread, enveloping the entire territory in festivity.

Everyone knew what this implied: Dur Valley would no longer need to fear harassments from any territory.

No lord of the Norton Kingdom would dare invade Dur Valley unless an enemy country intruded.

No one knew how Baron Buck got in touch with the Duke of Tulip, but indeed, the people of Beihad Territory ceased their harassment of Dur Valley.

"Herag, in the next two months, you'll accompany me to guard Pumpkin Farm," Emil came to find Herag early in the morning, a pack on his back as if long prepared.

*Chapter 10: Chapter 10: Pumpkin Farm*

"Why go to the Pumpkin Farm at this time?" Herag asked suspiciously.

Now that the autumn harvest was over, there was nothing at the Pumpkin Farm, and no one would cause trouble there, so it had no value for stationing guards.

Seeing Emil's awkward expression, he suddenly understood: "Fine, I'll go with you, but have you really thought it through?"

He had noticed it that day; Emil and Melissa indeed liked each other.

This time, Emil was running off to the Pumpkin Farm, most likely to hide for a while until Melissa got married.

He patted Herag on the head: "A child's business is not for adults to ask!"

Herag could tell Emil was in a hurry, so he quickly gathered his things and left with him.

At the castle gate, two horses were already prepared, laden with packs of varying sizes, all filled with winter provisions.



Herag turned to glance at Emil and found his spirit sagging, guessing that he hadn't slept all night.

"Emil!" Melissa's voice came from afar, and Herag turned to see a graceful figure running towards them.

"Let's go!" Emil hardened his resolve, mounted his horse, and galloped away.

Herag saw him take off in a flash and, looking back, saw Melissa running towards them. He also wanted nothing to do with the nobility's affairs and mounted his horse to follow them.

When he rode across the river, he looked back to see Melissa kneeling at the castle gate, seemingly weeping.

The autumn mountains had changed their appearance, with red covering the hills and layers of forest dyed, and fallen leaves covered the mountain paths, making rustling sounds under the horses' hooves.

Emil, having something on his mind, was silent throughout the journey, and Herag ignored him, treating it like an outing.

Though young, Herag had lived two lives and had far more experience than Emil in this regard; everything required time to settle.

Since this trip had no tasks, they were in no rush to travel fast.

On the way, they passed a cave where Herag and Emil stopped for a moment.

Emil poured two cups of wine onto the ground, performed a knightly salute, and then left silently.

Seven days later, they arrived at the Pumpkin Farm.

The Pumpkin Farm was located at the foot of the Jade Mountain Range. The two descended the mountain road, and after passing through the forest, a broad plain opened up before them.

On the plain were fields of varying sizes that usually grew wheat, pumpkins, and other crops.

Because the autumn harvest was over, most of the fields were barren.

In the middle of the Pumpkin Farm stood a large courtyard, its walls built with thick stone blocks, a formidable defensive structure.

"This is to guard against wild beasts and also for occasional enemy attacks," Emil explained.

The farm's gate was a heavy iron door. Emil walked up and knocked gently.

After a long while, footsteps could vaguely be heard inside, and a hoarse voice asked, "Who is it?"

"Castle Guard Captain Emil, reporting for duty," Emil answered.

"Who?" The old man inside seemed to have not heard clearly.

Emil had no choice but to raise his voice and repeat himself.

This time, the old man seemed to understand, and the sound of a key turning in an iron lock came from behind the door.

Creak...

The door slowly opened, accompanied by a jarring grinding noise. A tremulous old man, dressed in a bulky cotton jacket, appeared behind it.

The skin on the old man's face was dry as bark, and his eyes were cloudy; it was unclear if he could see.

"Are you Massimo? I'm Emil, and here's my token." Emil took out his Knight Captain badge and handed it over.

Massimo took the badge without looking at it, felt it with his hands, and then returned it to Emil, saying, "Come in."

"He's the farm's only guardian, having stayed here for forty years," Emil introduced.

"Forty years..." Herag looked at the staggering old man, somewhat shocked.

"Remember, at night, do not leave your room. No matter what sounds you hear, don't come out. There are demons in the mountains. In past winters, some guards stayed here, but they disappeared the next morning, so be extra careful," Massimo walked ahead, saying.

"Demons? Do such things really exist?" Herag asked.

Massimo didn't respond, ignoring Herag.

Emil said, "There really were guards sent here to stay in the past winters, but without exception, they vanished, so no guards are posted here for the winter now."

"Then why are we here?" Herag wore a 'you tricked me' expression.

Emil laughed, "Haha, the talk of demons is just rumors—there are many wild animals searching for food in the mountains during winter, so going out at night is indeed risky, but you and I, are we afraid of animals?"

Herag thought this over—the usual beasts were just appetizers. But the trouble was if something uncanny was involved, it couldn't be assessed with past life's notions.

The farm had over a dozen houses of different sizes. The larger ones were mostly warehouses for storing grains or other supplies.

The smaller rooms were typically living quarters; Massimo lived in the northernmost small house, while Emil and Herag stayed in a three-story large house in the center of the farm.

The house was relatively messy, but after tidying up a bit, they managed to give it a hint of livability.

The house even had a cellar. Emil opened the wooden panel covering it, lowered an oil lamp inside, and after confirming it didn't go out, he ventured down.

The cellar had bags of flour and several large barrels.

Emil's face lit up with joy. He picked up a barrel and sniffed it: "This is all fine wine!"

The two brought a barrel up, found two cups, and poured out some crimson wine, letting the rich aroma spread.

"Cheers!" Emil smiled.

"Cheers!"

Both were weary from the long journey, and the wine was just the refreshment they needed.

The Constitution of a Knight level was hard to intoxicate with alcohol. With no one else around, Herag asked boldly, "Aren't you worried about being here hiding? Won't you regret it later?"

Emil smiled wryly, "I regret it right now, but some things are more important than my personal feelings."

"Lord Baron's alliance this time is to preserve the entire territory. If I affected this alliance due to my selfishness, it would implicate the territory, implicate Lord Baron," he continued.

Herag was puzzled: "Preserve the entire territory? Behard's people don't have the capability, do they?"

Behard was as poor as could be, how could it possibly threaten all of Dur Valley?

Emil looked at Herag and said, "Do you know why Lord Baron can control Dur Valley for so long? Is it because of many guards? No, it's because Lord Baron is a Great Knight, and there are only a few Great Knights in the entire Norton Kingdom."

"Such top-tier combat strength as a Great Knight serves as deterrence, so no one dares to invade in force because a Great Knight could wipe out your entire family alone."

"Is it possible Lord Baron he..." Herag suddenly had a suspicion—if Baron Buck's days were numbered, then Dur Valley was a piece of juicy meat that everyone would have an eye on.