

Adventure

—— 《 Tales of Tarsylia 》 18

吴淼作品

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Tarsylia's Third Age
Year 97 of the Age of Heroes
Capital of the Xidal Trade Federation, Xidal

One hour until Dusk Mercenary
Corps' Hall of Miracles opens

Merle, retired mercenary, opened a tavern -- The Last Glass -- situated on the Golden Road. Its main entrance faces the Hall of Miracles.



There are 24 tables in the tavern. Each table has a name carved into its underside; it's said that these are the names of Merle's partners back in the day. At this time every day, the bar is full of mercenaries young and old who dream of becoming rich. Over half are rookies.



Well if it isn't useless old Silmester. Did you drink Cherry Lips Brothel dry already? You're here so early...



Not so loud, please! I didn't leave home and move to Xidal to become a pimp! As someone who's going to be famous one day, I can't have my name slandered like that!



I figured it's time for me to try my luck at the Hall of Miracles. Opportunities aren't going to knock on a brothel door, you know.



If you think you're ready, then I'll introduce you to some exceptional mercenary troop captains. See over there by the window? Table seven.



From left to right: Special Lightning, nickname "Silent Abyss", captain of the Black Hawk Intelligence Troop. It's rumored that the intelligence they have uncovered is greater than that of the central Dusk group. Their chance of getting killed is fairly high, but Lightning's close-mouthed personality makes him the favorite of many employers. Bertrand, the old hunter, nickname "Wind", captain of the Hunters. Half of the rare beasts in the Rainbow City Mythical Zoo were captured by the Hunters. What's even more impressive is how thorough their intelligence gathering and preparation are, no matter the job. In twelve years, they haven't lost a single person. The one with the bag is Xidal's most famous wild dwarf, Marktoran, nickname "Land Devil", captain of the Land Devil Treasure Hunters. They are the troop with the highest success rate. They once razed three cities in a single week. It's said they are currently mapping out Tarsylia's underground. Macquill, the monk, nickname "The Hammer", leader of the Death Raiders. This one's a douchebag, but he's well-respected in the mercenary world, because he has an invaluable advantage as a troop captain: trustworthiness. He splits the rewards fairly every time, so people are eager to join his troop. The armored knight is "Wise Rykar", of Rykar's Vanguard. He is an outstanding leader, and can always see past the surface of events and unveil the truth. No matter how difficult the battle, every member of the troop gets out alive!



These are the best troop captains today -- or at least, the most reliable ones. If you've truly made up your mind, then figure out a way to join one of their troops. But it's best if the troop's style matches your own specialty. Speaking of which, Silmester, what can you do?



Boss, don't patronize me. I am a bard after all. I have skills you wouldn't believe!



Ten minutes later



Cheers to the useless bard!



Thank you sirs! I'll drink to that!

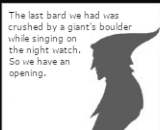


He certainly is charismatic...at least he'll never starve.

Hey kid, what do you say to hanging out with me? See what kind of luck we have. I quite like you.



The last bard we had was crushed by a giant's boulder while singing on the night watch. So we have an opening.



That...May I ask...besides singing during the night watch, is there anything else I should watch out for during an adventure?



Child, preparing now for the future is important. However, you must understand, this world is interesting because there are always accidents and surprises. There are some things that you can only appreciate by experiencing them personally...



You want to learn some shortcut from us? It's not going to work. If you've already made up your mind, just close your eyes and leap!



Short cut? Haha, no way! I just wanted to hear some old stories from my seniors...



For example, you've all said how luck is more important than strength. Can you talk about your luckiest encounters? Maybe I'll be inspired to write an epic!





To mercenaries, luck is absolutely essential! This happened two years after I started the Hunters. By that point, I had captured several rare beasts already, and had started to build a reputation. I met pretty much all the requirements that Dusk had published for hunters...



Once, a small village in an infected swamp hired Dusk for a mission. The village claimed they were being attacked by bats. Without another word, I took my troop and went. The leader of the village told me there had always been many bats around the village, and they would occasionally bite a child or some livestock. But recently, the bats seemed to have gotten bigger, and some shepherd boy even reported seeing one carry away a whole goat! Naturally the village was terrified — they're a bunch of ignorant, cowardly bumpkins — so they dished out money to hire Dusk. When I heard his story, I laughed to myself. After all my adventuring, I recognized this as the Beast mutation. (Note: Beast mutants are larger and more aggressive than their normal animal counterparts.) With the equipment I had on hand, I dealt with them easily. And with that, several hundred gold pieces just landed in my pocket. After I caught it, I would scare the villagers a little more. Fame and fortune were within my grasp!

So that night, I took five hunters and set up barbed nets and snipers near where the bat hunted. We readied a lamb as bait, and then camouflaged ourselves underneath a tree to wait. The plan was foolproof!



It must have been a big win!
There isn't an animal you couldn't
catch, after all!



I can only hope that young black
dragon forgets all the stupid
things I did to him that night!



My turn, my turn! I also had an
exceedingly lucky
adventure
once.



Once my troop and I ransacked an imperial monastery full of riches. Our goblin thief proposed searching the basement for more treasure. I was worried about one of my troopmates getting there before me, so I rushed in first...and ran into a wretched shapeshifter. (Note: Shapeshifters are one of the more terrifying types of shifters. Not only can they mimic your appearance in the blink of an eye, they can also use telepathy to mimic your thoughts and behavior.)

That was a minor disaster. In the end, my teammates tied up both of us and had us cross-examined by the fire mage: "Think fast! At the end of last year, when we robbed the dwarf caravan, how many gold pieces did you distribute to each person?"

"Me! I know! Everybody got 1000 gold pieces, and we also split the money we got from selling the firearms!"

My strongest barbarian then asked, "Great, earlier this year, I asked you to enchant my hammer. How much did you charge me?"

"I know! I know! 3000 gold pieces, based on the weapons shop discount."

The goblin thief asked, "The first time you and I adventured together, how much money did you borrow from me?"

"I know! 981 gold pieces and 4 silver pieces in total."

The mage asked again, "When I joined the troop, there was one condition that we didn't write into the contract. Do you remember what it was?"

"I know! You received 10% of the Xidal market price of any magical object we acquired!"

The mage said, "Your imitation is superb, shapeshifter, but don't think that your tricks will work on us!

The Hammer's memory isn't nearly that good! Brothers, let's crush this answer-stealing shapeshifter!"

"You dare pretend to be our boss!?"

...



You sure were lucky you
had such a sharp
team!



Right?

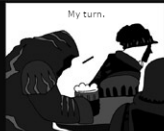


It took me three whole
months to recover...





My turn.



That year, I had just received my wizarding license...

Back then, my teacher had gathered ten apprentices and created a magic circle to open the gates of hell, in order to retrieve some bauble. Unluckily, a demon found out. I was the only one who survived the slaughter, and in the chaos I also grabbed a ring from my teacher (at that point, only half of him was left). When I returned to the City of Shadows, I discovered that I now owned a Wishing Ring, something that my teacher's teacher could only have dreamed of having! Maybe this is what he went to hell for, this treasure that could grant all your wishes! So I found a secret room that no one was using, intending to use it...

I said to myself, "Gods, what should I ask it for? Money? How shallow would a wizard need to be to ask for money! Power? With my current strength, asking for power would be akin to suicide!

"Eternal youth? I can't enjoy youth if I'm murdered! That's it! I'll ask for a spell, the rumored destruction spell....No, even with the spell, I still couldn't Master Sibelius with his hands tied behind his back! How about a demon servant? One loyal to me for forever...It's still too dangerous.

A holy weapon? That would depend on what it could do...Gods, I thought I had it figured out! How am I....

"What should I ask it for, truly? My head's about to explode! Hell, if only someone would give me some suggestions. By now, I've lost all sense of reason."

The ring said, "Ah, then make a realistic wish!"

I thought about it, and realized it was correct. Humans are insatiable. Why not just make a more realistic wish, like for a castle, or a beautiful woman....I am a wizard after all. How could I lose my sense of self so easily! It's quite shameful.



Then...what did you ask for in the end? Quick, tell us!



As soon as the ring finished speaking, it disappeared.



Boring! My adventure was much more romantic.



Kid, this epic better be popular!



As you say...I'll do my best!



It was my first time on a combat mission. We had cleared Wildfang Woods of the man-eating monsters, and were recuperating in an elven village before heading back to the city. To thank us, the leader of the village had arranged a magnificent banquet. I was about your age back then, and it was the first time I had looked death in the face. That night, I found a fresh admiration for life...I wolfed down the food, appreciating how lucky I was to be alive, when I noticed something bizarre. Throughout the feast, the leader had her eyes pinned on me. I swear to the gods, I wasn't drunk, and I'm certain she kept giving me these doe-eyed looks...

I was a hot-blooded young man! I had the passion of a fire elemental, the courage of a halfling, and had heard too many stories of adventure...Young people are always eager for love, and love tinged with a dash of mystery was even harder to resist. Of course, the most important point, she was the most beautiful woman I had ever met. You could point out that the lifespans of an elf and human are too different, but fuck that. No one gives a shit at that age! So that night I took a hint (at least, I thought it was) and snuck into the leader's room...

I can hear you snickering, boys. I was at least ten times excited as you are. I knelt in front of her bed, looked into her eyes, and nearly turned into a goddamn animal. I'm serious! But she gently made small talk until I cooled down. I can still recall her dulcet voice...In that conversation, I began to see how different we were, and started pulling back. But you know what she said to me? She said she left the holy mountain because she loved humans. Our lives may be short, but in these few years, we erupted with every emotion. Even more heartening, she had fallen in love with a man before. It must have been enchanting. Her eyes shone with happy memories when she talked about it...

And so I worked up my nerve and grabbed her hand. She guided my head to pillow on her thighs, and, looking into my face, shared more stories from her past. It felt like we must have been lovers in a previous life, and through some narrow path of fate had found each other again... I'll never forget that night!



That's legendary! To think that this happened on your first quest...I can't wait to leave already!



Foolish child, as long as you're alive, you can always find miracles!



Then let me propose a toast...To life!



Cheers! So... then what happened? To the two of you, I mean.



Kid, not every story needs an "ever after." If you understand that, life will get a lot better.



"Ever after"? After she spent the whole night mooning over your grandfather, who would have the heart for an "ever after"?



Hah, hey kid, do you know why I believe there's never enough time?



Alright, I've listened to you all babble for long enough. It's time to tell you about my luckiest adventure...



When I left the capital Aladon's Light, I took nothing with me, not even my faith. I left because of a stirring in my gut that something somewhere was beckoning me...In short, I had lost my way. I was looking for a guide, a light to show me the path.

Have you heard of Nazoris's top stargazer, Moonstaff Doloramir? They say he's a prophet, capable of knowing the future. I thought I could visit him, and learn of my own future. But as you know, telling prophecies takes a huge toll on the prophet's body, so any supplicant must fork over a fortune. In fact, this is Nazoris's top income stream! Someone as broke as I was wouldn't even be able to book an appointment!

But us dwarves have our ways. With no money to pave my way, I got my hands on a map of Nazoris, and drilled a tunnel from outside the city walls to the sewers. I spent a year down there mapping my way through the city's arteries, and then began to dig. Two years later, on one moonlit night, I finally crawled out of a tunnel into Doloramir's observatory!

Guess what? He was standing there waiting for me. Before I could say a word, he asked, "Why did you waste so much time getting here? If you want something, you should just ask for it. Are you aware that your life will end when the new year starts? And yet, you wasted three years for a mere prophecy! If this is how you would spend your remaining time, then you're on your own. Goodbye!"

I sat in the tunnel in a stupor for a whole day...and then I grabbed my sheepskin paper and charcoal and drew out a map of the city. As a child, I was fascinated by Tisler's maps of Tarsylia, but as a dwarf, wasn't convinced by them. He only drew whatever features existed on the surface! Only us dwarves knew that the surface was overlaid on top of a world that stretched in every direction, a world far more complex than the one above! I had once envisioned making a map of Tarsylia's underground, but gave up when I deemed it impossible. But if I only had a year left to live, then what did impossibilities matter! I organized a troop of treasure hunters to search through various catacombs and underground labyrinths as fast as possible. I didn't care about the treasure -- I was only concerned with how little time I had left...and how to record all the paths I had traveled. The rest, you already know...



I...I'm so sorry, sir...



Horseshit. If you have feelings to spare, worry about yourself instead.



I truly admire your courage. If it were me who got such bad news...I can't even imagine how I'd suffer through that year!



You get used to it. These 21 years have passed by in a flash... Hey, the Hall of Miracles is about to open! I'm going first to grab a good spot. Waiting in line is wasting your life. I will see everyone later. Kid, if you ever stumble across some ancient tunnel, you know where to find me...

Goodbye...sir...



Alright, it's about time for us as well. If you're interested, you can join us.



Bye!



What's wrong? Haven't decided who to join yet?



I...um...



You're still young, kid.

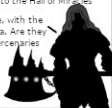


Thanks...give me two jugs of wine. I have to take some back to the madam...



Three years later
Entrance to the Hall of Miracles

You there, with the
harmonica. Are they
hiring mercenaries
here?



I just saw you
talking with that
giant...

That's right, •
this is the
mercenary hall.
But you're a bit early.

I can tell you are a peasant outsider just by
looking at you. Pleased to meet you, I am a
useless bard, Silmester. Judging by your axe,
you may indeed create a miracle in the Hall of
Miracles. But, without a sponsor, you won't
survive for long around here. Here's a
suggestion. I'm currently starting my own
career as a mercenary, care to be my deputy? I
promise to treat you well...



This brainless lump is the
giant Wyldor. He's
usually very nice.
He watches the
entrance to the
Hall. Watch this.

Oy! Hello!
Wyldor!



HI! BROTHEL KID!



Haha, did I mention I'm also Xidal's
greatest pimp? We offer the
highest quality, and for you, I'll
throw in a discount!
At any rate, stick
with me and you'll
have a rich life...



"I'm Sela....um...Sela uses axe, large axe....Sela likes drinking spirits!"
"Drinking? No problem. You can bathe in dwarven wine if you want! Let's
go in. If we're lucky, we might find some more comrades..."



All of life is an adventure.

END

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