

Witch 1001

Chapter 1001: Unusual Stone Fragment

Buffeted by wind and snow, Azima crossed the street and entered the Castle District.

Although it was strange to send for her at this hour of the night, as Azima trusted Wendy, she had agreed to follow her to the castle. Meanwhile, she had left Doris behind, who had insisted on coming with her.

This way, she could keep her friend out of trouble in case anything happened.

Shivering under her clothes, Azima held herself tightly as she reached the castle gate.

"Are you cold?" Wendy glanced at her smilingly. "Don't worry. You'll soon need to take off your coat once you get in."

Hang on... take off?

Is His Majesty planning to...

"Please enter, Ms. Wendy." While Azima was still in a shock, the gate slowly opened and the guard ushered them in. "His Majesty is in the study. I'm afraid I have to stop here as I still have duties to attend to."

"Thank you." Wendy nodded. She held Azima's hand and led her into the castle.

In a split second, wisps of warm air drove all the coldness away.

So... this is the heating system.

Although Azima knew that the castle was equipped with a brand new heating system and thus did not require wood heating, the actual experience was still very impressive.

The servants in the castle were all wearing light clothes. She could see people wearing shirts and dresses everywhere. At one corner of the dining room, she even spied some barefoot witches running across the hall on the carpeted floor. The castle was as warm as summer. Awestruck by the luxurious living conditions in the castle, Azima started to suspect that Roland was probably just a hopeless hedonist.

"He just built Neverwinter for his own pleasure!" Azima thought to herself.

Wendy, on the other hand, had already taken off her coat. She winked at Azima and said, "You'll start sweating if you keep your coat on. Plus, it's freezing out there. You'll catch a cold if you go back out all sweaty."

"O-OK."

Azima unbuttoned her coat in a stiff manner. She peered down at her chest. Her chest was not flat by any means, but it was obviously incomparable to Wendy's prodigious bosom.

If His Majesty really intended to seek out pleasures of the flesh... Azima believed she should be the last person Roland would think of.

With self-mockery, Azima followed Wendy to the third floor and into the lord's study.

"Your Majesty, Azima is here."

"Your Majesty."

Azima bowed. She surveyed the people in the room out of the corner of her eyes, finally rested her gaze on the gray-haired man behind the desk.

Azima suddenly realized that the man opposite her was the King of Graycastle. She only had a glimpse of him at the banquet. At the time, she had still been working for the Sleeping Spell. Now that she had the opportunity to have a close look at the king, she was astonished at how young he appeared.

Azima doubted that a person under 30 was capable of defeating all his siblings, ascending the throne, uprooting the church, and conquering all the other kingdoms.

She could challenge Tilly's authority but she obviously couldn't speak to Roland in the same fashion. Once she left Neverwinter, she could not come back to the Sleeping Spell again. The whole kingdom was under Roland's control. Everybody was under Roland's rule, unless they fled Graycastle. Although she didn't fear the power and authority of others, Doris and the other witches were not as fearless as her.

"Please rise," The king replied good-naturedly. "In fact, I've to see you for a long time. Sorry for asking you to come here at this late hour, but I couldn't wait to meet you. Your ability means a great deal to the kingdom. Since the time has come, I didn't want to wait any longer."

"..." Azima looked up in surprise. "Are you saying that you're going to hire me?"

It seemed to be a special recruitment. For jobs which required witches' abilities, the Witch Union would usually offer greater compensation.

Meanwhile, Azima wondered what the "time" that Roland was referring to was.

"Yes... I would like to offer you a contract with very competitive compensation." Roland raised his cup and had a sip. "Two gold royals per month until you complete your task. After the completion of the project, you'll be paid an additional 50 gold royals. How does that sound?"

Azima's heart skipped a beat. Even without that additional 50 gold royals, the monthly salary was already as lucrative as the remuneration paid by the Sleeping Spell. She would not only be able to sustain herself with this income but could also help her friends! As for the extra reward of 50 gold royals, she could either use it to start her new life or purchase a bigger house for her relative Whitepear.

This was exactly what she needed at the moment!

However, years of vagrant life had also made her fully aware that there was no free meal in the world. Nobles were experts in games of deception. They usually provided their victims with empty promises of future rewards. Even if this noble was the sovereign of the state, Azima had to be careful. At this thought, she answered, "It's a high compensation, but I want to know what you want me to do before giving you my answer."

Her ability was very helpful for wilderness survival, and she had relied on it a lot to locate water sources, animals' lairs and fruit, none of which, however, were in shortage in Neverwinter.

"Your job is very simple, I want you to find a stone for me". Roland produced a box from his drawer and opened it on the desk. "It shouldn't be a problem for you."

"Can I take a look?"

"Of course."

Azima walked up to the box and put the stone in her hand. It was about the size of her thumb, pretty thin, smooth and cold, more like a strange coin than a stone. Apparently, it had been carefully polished. In a color of a grayish black, it did not look special, so Azima did not understand why His Majesty showed so much interest in it.

She hesitated for a moment and said, "It's hard for me to trace the origin of a stone. When I was on Sleeping Island, a Chamber of Commerce once hired me to look for the source of some gems, but my ability led them to Searing Flame Island. There was nothing except hot dry sand. Because of this, the Sleeping Spell didn't earn anything but instead, had to compensate them for the expenses incurred on the trip."

"I think the sand was bauxite. You can call it the origin of gems because they are made of the same material." Roland chuckled carelessly. "As for whether you can find what I want, you can test it out now."

Azima wondered if the black stone was also a type of gem. She applied her ability to the stone fragment as Roland had instructed. Instantly, a jet of blinding green light escaped from her palm and almost entirely blocked her vision! The glow was as vibrant and bright as the lights in the castle!

Suddenly, another green flash burst forth from the king's desk.

Azima stood agape.

The flash was only visible to her. It could tell her not only where the source material was, but also much there was. Most of the time, the green light was scattered around, flickering like fireflies. As the glints continuously merged, Azima could see where they led.

Azima understood that it was perfectly normal for Roland to hide the other part of the stone fragment in the desk, as a way to test her ability, but she was surprised at the intensity of the light beam. It meant these lusterless stone fragments were source class materials!

It was her first time seeing such a small source material!

How... can that be possible?

Before she had moved to Sleeping Island, she had found a gold royal on the street by accident. At the time, she had been thinking of using her ability to collect coins that slipped out of people's pockets, but since it was a one in a million chance, she hadn't had much luck. Although she had known people usually kept money in their pockets, she had had no way to get them. However, she had learned where most of the money was stored.

At that time, she had sensed the strongest reaction from the treasury underneath the lord's castle. The current green flash, nevertheless, was as intense, and blinding, as the light back then!

"Is this stone... even more precious than gold?" Azima wondered.

Chapter 1002: A Race against Time

After a long silence, Azima took a deep breath, pointed to Roland's desk and said, "There's a stone made of the same material in your drawer."

"Correct." Roland returned Azima a satisfied smile and put the other box on the desk. "But I'm a bit curious. Why did you call it 'a stone made of the same material' instead of 'an identical one'?"

"Because... the reactions were different. Although they're both source materials, the reaction of the first one is stronger." Azima then described what she had seen.

"Can you locate more pieces?"

"Please let me try."

Azima concentrated her mind and found the green light. Due to the blinding interference of the previous two stones, she had overlooked the other lights, but soon Azima found three more lines extending east, west, and north. This implied there were, at the very least, three stones made of the same source material which were bigger than the one in her hand. To her dismay, she noticed the three lines, although thick, actually consisted of numerous dim thin threads.

After Azima reported to Roland, he nodded thoughtfully and said, "In other words, you won't know how far these stones are unless you actually go there."

"Yes."

"In that case, go to the east and then head to the north." Roland immediately made the decision. "It's too dangerous to travel west, as you have to cross the Barbarian Land. If you still can't find the stone when you reach the beach, then head north."

After a moment of hesitation, Azima asked what she had been thinking all this time. "Your Majesty, is this stone... even more precious than gold?"

Since Azima was not a combat witch, she had limited self-defense skills. Azima was concerned that, if news of this precious stone was leaked, the trip would put her in danger. In that case, she would not only fail her mission but also lose her life on the way.

Seeing that Azima was worried about the potential risk, the young king replied smilingly, "In fact, it's yes and no. For people who don't know what it really is, it's just a plain, useless stone. But to me, it's much more valuable than gold. It's the key to the success of the 'Resplendent Radiation' Project."

"Resplendent Radiation? What's that?" Azima wondered, feeling even more confused.

"However, considering the possible variables, I would certainly not let you go alone." Roland pointed to a guard next to him. "This is Sean, your protector. Furthermore, a combat engineer unit from the First

Army would come with you. Your top priority is to locate the stones. Therefore, you can instruct Sean to liaison with the local officials to assist your search if necessary."

"Are you saying... that I can make those lords work for me?" Azima asked in surprise.

"Why not?" Roland shrugged. "They aren't who they used to be. They're obligated to obey orders from the central government." Roland paused for a few seconds and continued. "Since it may take a while to find the source material, I can pay you 30% of the salary in advance and the rest on a monthly basis. That is all for the contract. What are your thoughts on this?"

Azima pondered for a while and asked, "Your Majesty, could you direct the payment to Doris?"

"I have no issue with this," Roland raised his eyebrows, "if that's what you want."

"Then I'll take the job." She bowed. "I'll be ready by tomorrow morning."

Although there were still many things she did not understand, at least... she didn't have to worry about money anymore. Azima couldn't see any problems with the task and believed she would sooner or later locate the stones with the assistance of the First Army. With the 50 gold royals, life would be much easier for her friends, Azima could not wait to tell Doris the good news.

"Very well." Roland got to his feet. "I look forward to hearing the good news."

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After Wendy escorted Azima out, Roland paced back to the French window and sighed deeply while watching the city night below.

"Finally, we've got the ball rolling."

"To create a sun?" asked Nightingale as she revealed herself from the Mist. "You get super excited every time you talk about this project."

"Because it's a path to the sun," Roland remarked impressively. "As of this moment, mankind has entered a new era, an era where we produce our own sun rather than simply admiring it. To me, nothing can be more romantic than such enormous progress." Roland turned around and pointed up at the ceiling. "Do you see a yellow exclamation mark up there?"

Nightingale shook her head in great amusement. "I only see a mumbling daydreamer, in his perfect... delirium."

"Ahem..." Roland was almost choked. "Hey, do you have to be so straightforward about it?"

"I'm just trying to be honest with you." Nightingale jerked away her head, putting on an innocent look.

Roland shot her a stare, half annoyed and half amused. He knew Nightingale was joking. In fact, most people would think he was crazy until they actually saw the finished product.

Even Roland himself didn't have the slightest idea of whether this project would succeed or not.

Roland wouldn't have developed such an unrealistic idea had there been no witches. The Manhattan Project, even in the modern society, had cost so much money, manpower, and resources that even the

most developed country had found it difficult to afford such monstrous expenses. It would be absolute madness to try and replicate the Manhattan Project from scratch. However, with the assistance of the various magic powers, he might succeed.

The most distinctive characteristic of his project was the minimal investment it required, as the witches would complete most of the work. Although it sounded like a joke, to produce a nuclear bomb with almost none of the accompanying modern technology, there was still a chance that it might work.

Roland could certainly carry out the project concurrently with the other industrial projects at this stage of development. Even if it did not go well, it would just be a small failure.

In fact, Roland had started to prepare for this project since the day Lucia entered adulthood. After revisiting all the elements on the periodic table, he had asked Kyle Sichi, the Chief Alchemist, to separate Uranium samples from a bunch of extracted elementary substances and store them away.

Uranium was one of the most common elements in nature. It could not only be found in uranium mines but also in granite, coal, and even seawater. Only, due to the limitations of the current technology, it would cost an exorbitant amount, in both time and money, to properly exploit any uranium deposits. However, Lucia could use her ability to directly collect scattered uranium in nature to provide the raw materials required. It thus saved Roland the trouble of separating and purifying the uranium.

Roland knew his eloquent rhetoric in the meeting was simply a political strategy, designed to raise people's morale. Because he had actually left something unsaid. The ambitious dream of creating a sun was just one, surface level reason, for him putting this plan into action. Another, more important reason, was that humanity was now facing the greatest crisis since its genesis, based on what he had learned from the Senior Demon.

What's the origin of the magic power?

Roland did not have the faintest idea.

He took this irrational, unknown power very seriously.

According to the Senior Demon, the demons evolved through upgrades. That was the reason they had evolved so quickly over the past 400 years.

Agatha's proposal of defending seemed to be perfect, but there was actually a massive flaw. Under this plan, the enemies would have as much time as they needed, which is probably why the Union suffered such a complete defeat.

If the demons were left alone, defeated the undersea monsters during the third Battle of Divine Will, and once again upgraded themselves, how powerful would they become?

Since the demons could upgrade themselves with their magic power in such an inconceivable manner, Roland had to develop a more aggressive, powerful, and devastating countermeasure as his last resort.

Chapter 1003: New Progress

"Why do you look so serious?" Nightingale broke into a smile. "I'll believe anything you say, but you ought to give me some time to absorb the information. Nobody would believe this tiny little thing can decimate thousands of demons, especially when they saw the actual substance extracted by Lucia."

"Do I?" Roland stroked his cheeks. Perhaps he became nervous when he realized that this was a race against time that would determine the very survival of humanity. "You're right though. I can hardly believe in something until I've seen it myself."

Roland turned around and held the tiny "stone fragment" in his hand.

This would be the starting point of harnessing the power of the atom — purified uranium.

It was hard to convince people that the little stone could produce "something as glorious as the sun". The silver-white surface of the uranium sample had lost its shine due to oxidation. It felt cold to the touch and seemed to have nothing to do with heat or the sun. But Roland knew it would produce amazing results under the right conditions.

To collect uranium, Lucia and Spear had spent nearly a week at the North Slope Mine extracting uranium from the crushed granite. Because of this, the Countess had complained quite a bit. She thought it was inappropriate to subject a lady to such heavy labor. As a compensation, she took five apprentices from Neverwinter's city hall for her own region's city hall.

And in the end, they had only got this tiny piece.

Compared to the original samples, this thumb-sized metal piece had a purity of over 90% and consisted of two layers. One layer was Uranium-235 and the other Uranium-238, in a ratio of 1 to 99. This was also the ratio commonly existing in nature.

In other words, the uranium on the surface of the stone, as thin as it was, could be used to produce a "weapon".

As a stable element, both uranium-238 and uranium-235 had a half-life of 10 billion years. Uranium-238 was the predominant isotope but had little practical use, whereas uranium-235 could be used for creating nuclear weapons. Because of their extreme low radioactivity, the alpha particles emitted by uranium radionuclides during their decay could only travel a few dozen microns, not even far enough to penetrate the epidermis of a person's skin. Therefore, the stone would not cause radiation poisoning even if one held it in his hand.

But this did not mean that uranium with a high concentration was absolutely safe.

The alpha particles produced during the decay were highly toxic. Once they entered the body through contaminated food, it could be disastrous.

Due to this, Roland had asked Soraya to coat the "stone fragment" with a transparent film, not only to prevent it from further oxidating, but also to protect people from the radiation.

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Roland had mixed feelings about the stone in his hand. Uranium, which contained so much potential power, lay innocently in his hand, looking almost different than iron. No wonder Pasha and the other witches didn't believe him.

Now that he had made it this far, the next thing he needed to do was to collect the raw materials for the "Resplendent Radiation" Project.

Azima's discovery of low purity uranium through a high purity sample told Roland that he could use the current sample to find more uranium mines. Although Roland could ask Lucia to extract uranium at a mining site and thus obtain sufficient uranium-235, such an arrangement would sabotage his initial plan of conducting multiple projects simultaneously.

Because Lucia also played an irreplaceable role in the smelting industry.

Besides, it was impossible to produce an atom bomb with only uranium. To create atomic weapons, Roland had to utilize a very rare element which was usually found with uranium, but in far smaller amounts. Therefore, even though Lucia could help him extract uranium, he still needed a large amount of the raw ore before he could build a bomb.

For that, Azima was the key.

Roland put the tiny piece of uranium back in a box and locked it in a drawer. Then he pulled out the unfinished sketch of an internal combustion engine from the stack of documents on his desk and spread it out.

Unlike most of the residents in Neverwinter who usually went to bed early on a snowy winter night, Roland still had a lot of work to do.

"Staying up late again?" Nightingale asked as she tilted her head.

Roland stretched and then picked up a quill. "We are marching down the path to victory. If you want your name to be passed down throughout history, you have to make at least some small sacrifices, right?"

"Really? But you seem a little reluctant."

"Ahem... don't you believe what I'm saying?"

"Yes, but you also asked me to detect lies with my ability." Nightingale shot back, with her tongue out.

"Oh well... then I'll say that I'm very willing to get this thing done. Are you happy now?" Roland replied resignedly. "I don't want to lose to the demons or the so-called Divine Will."

"Good, now you are telling the truth. I'll prepare you a cup of hot tea and some snacks." Nightingale smiled. "I'll ask the kitchen staff to prepare spicy barbeque, juicy mushrooms, deep fried shrimps seasoned with salt and pepper, and Chaos Drinks. How does that sound?"

"Hey, you're just ordering what you want, aren't you?" thought Roland.

Roland shook his head, totally speechless. "Order whatever you like."

"As you wish, Your Majesty," Nightingale said slyly.

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The next day, Azima took the high purity uranium fragment with her and set off. Meanwhile, Roland received a piece of good news from City Hall.

The Ministry of Construction and the Ministry of Industry had completed the construction of Fractionation Tower I.

To show how important the project was, Roland personally attended the unveiling ceremony.

The tower was located by the Redwater River in Neverwinter's industrial zone. Standing almost 25 meters high, the tower incorporated many new concepts and technology. Divided into several sections, the tower separated oils and liquids with different boiling points. After Anna took care of the welding work, the chemists were now able to more precisely control the fractionation process.

While a simple boiler would be sufficient to separate oils, the quality of the final products obtained using such crude methods was far from satisfactory. This reminded Roland of a geology book he had read as a kid. The book had made him believe that his country was sitting on an enormous fortune in metal and mineral resources, but after growing up, he realized those many of those minerals were simply raw materials with a low purity rate.

Like people's physical appearances, minerals varied. The difference between low and high-quality minerals was huge. Low-quality minerals required a lot of work before they could be used. The same held true for oils. Untreated oils that had impurities like waxes, sulfur or mineral salts, were as thick as mud and were therefore unusable. They had to refine them in order for them to become useful. Some oils, such as those from the oil fields in Borneo, were purer than most and could be directly used as fuel.

The Blackwater River that spread across nearly half of the Southernmost Region belonged to the latter category.

After Roland learned that there were gushers in the desert, he started to pay particular attention to that area. It turned out that the oil collected from Endless Cape was of fairly high quality. While not comparable to the refined oil in his original world, after basic fractionation, the oil met Roland's current needs.

The real advancement was the continued improvement of Neverwinter's industrial infrastructure.

Chapter 1004: The World in Her Eyes

The smelting zone was the most industrialized area in Neverwinter. The entire production process, from transportation to feeding raw materials into the smelters, was powered by steam engines.

The plant processed a large quantity of crude oil and coal every day. It covered a huge rectangular area, with the port and a coal storage yard on the north side of the Redwater River. Several conveyor belts, driven by steam engines, continuously fed coal to the boiler room. The parallel black lines on the conveyor belts exhibited a sharp contrast with the gray concrete pavement.

The other end of the facility was designed to store and process the crude oil from Shallow Beach.

The construction of the oil storage warehouses on the west side of the fractionator was now half-completed. Completely different from the design of the residential buildings across the river, the

warehouses stood in a solid line like impregnable fortresses, but looked surprisingly attractive. Despite their plain exterior, the warehouses were installed with advanced equipment and designs such as decompression valves, inspection windows, carrier pipes, antistatic devices, etc. As the construction teams had gained a lot of experience from the construction of the chemical plant, the whole construction process had gone very smoothly.

Roland was extremely satisfied that the Ministry of Construction and the Ministry of Industry had done all the design work. All he had done was the final review and approval. Needless to say, the staff of these two Ministries had learned a lot from the previous mining and furnace projects. They had apparently applied what they had learned to this new project. Since Roland had yet to establish a set of industry standards, the workers had to confirm the parameters of each individual machine or part before it was sent to the plant for manufacturing. This showed that the workers had already developed reading and writing skills and learned the basics of engineering; otherwise, it would be hard for the two departments to communicate effectively.

Two years after its implementation, this was the first great success to show the effectiveness of Roland's mandatory universal education.

As the temperature of the boiler increased, vaporized oil flowed into the fractionation tower and melted the snow clinging to it. The wind had ceased howling, but the snow still persisted. Nevertheless, spectators gazed at this beautiful metal tower without a blinking. Their breath misted in the cold air and mixed with the steam being ejected from all types of machinery on the square, heating up the cold winter air.

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"So beautiful," Edith muttered as she stood on the steel bridge.

The smelting zone was a few miles away from the bridge, so there were fewer spectators here, only some occasional passers-by. They were all hurrying to the high tower to witness the new wonder and meet the king. However, almost everyone slowed as they rushed past the Pearl of the Northern Region and the girl next to her. Apparently, the two ladies in the snow attracted a lot of attention.

"Isn't that just a chimney? What's the beauty of that?" Cole grumbled silently. "If you wanted to see it, why didn't you go with the people from city hall? Sir Barov reserved a spot for you, and His Majesty..."

Although the bridge was at a high point in the city, giving a wide view, it was too far away for them to get a close look. As all the officials from city hall were going to see the tower, it would have been a perfect opportunity to network with Edith's co-workers. Essentially, the whole point of this event was to connect with people instead of appreciating the magnificence of the tower. Just like a first-class banquet, nobles didn't care as much about the food, but about who they dined with.

As a seasoned diplomat, Edith should have known the trick better than anyone else. She had promised to help Cole build his relationship with other city hall officers, yet she had just let such an excellent opportunity slip through the cracks. Sometimes, Cole felt he had a really hard time understanding his sister's thinking.

But seeing Edith purse her lips, Cole sensibly shut up.

"Because of you, my dear little brother." Edith jested in a soft voice. "Do you really want to appear in front of all the other officials in this outfit?"

Hold on, you made me wear this!

It was not a big deal to dress up like a girl at home, but Cole had not expected that he would be forced to wear women's clothing outside. If some of his friends saw him dressed up like a doll, he would probably jump off the bridge.

Alas! Cole could only blame himself. One day when he had been trying on Edith's clothes, his sister had caught him. Fearing that Edith would tell his little secret to someone else, Cole had no choice but to comply.

When Cole was about to, somebody whistled behind him.

As his face flushed red, he instantly lowered his head.

"Well, this isn't the right way to handle this kind of situation."

Edith grabbed Cole by the chin, forcing her brother to raise his head.

Next Cole saw the Pearl of the Northern Region sweep her gaze over the stranger with the condescension and nonchalance of an uninterested aristocrat. It was a glance that froze a person to the bone. Cole shuddered at his sister's icy look. The stranger stumbled back. Without a word, he scurried off and disappeared from their sights.

"Got it?" Edith shrugged. "This is also a test for you."

"... If I was wearing my usual outfit, I wouldn't have had such trouble." Cole mumbled quietly.

"But there will be many things you'll encounter in the future, some things that you may not necessarily like, but can't stop from happening. The only thing you can do is accept them and learn to control them." Edith paused for a moment and then went on, "Do you think I sincerely wanted to welcome Timothy when he drove his army straight into the Northern Region? Every coin has two sides. The key lies in how you view it. Besides, I bet you like the garments you are wearing, otherwise you wouldn't have tried on my clothes. Am I right?"

Cole stiffened. Edith could always justify her behavior like it was a matter of course. He knew he wouldn't stand a chance if he tried to argue with his sister, so he kept silent.

But he would never admit to her last statement!

Then, he remembered Edith was impressed with the beauty of the tower. Was it because she viewed it from a different angle?

Cole thus voiced his doubt, and he clearly saw a rosy flush on Edith's cheeks.

"Do you still remember what the City of Evernight looks like in winter?" Edith asked.

"Um..." Cole thought for a while and soon remembered the warm fireplaces, the ales, and the banquets during the winter in the City of Evernight, all of which were associated with indoor activities. After a long silence, Cole answered hesitantly, "Maybe... kind of quiet?"

"It's dead silent, as if the earth was frozen." Edith looked at the distant high tower. "I always thought that was what winter should look like, but it's actually not true." Edith exhaled a breath which immediately misted in the air. "What are you seeing now? The earth is breathing, and the steam proves that this city is alive."

"I don't really... get it."

"This shows that nature can be altered." The Pearl of the Northern Region stressed each word. "Human beings don't necessarily need to comply with the rules of nature. We have been constantly dominated by nature because we are weak. When we grow stronger, we can change the world. Isn't such power beautiful?"

But Cole saw something even more beautiful.

The lady who radiated confidence as she spoke. Her blue hair rippled in the flurries of snow, more breathtaking than anything else in the world. The rosy hue spreading across her cheeks softened the outline of her face, making her look even more stunning.

Cole had a sudden desire to see through his sister's eyes. He wanted to know what the world looked like to Edith Kant.

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"There's oil coming out!"

The crowd near Tower I began to cheer.

"What's going on?"

"Someone said it's oil!"

"Cooking oil?"

"Rubbish. Coal is processed here, not lard."

"Who cares what it is? Anything His Majesty does is brilliant."

"So can we celebrate now?"

"Yeah, long live the king!"

"Long live the king!"

Soon more and more people began cheering, even though many of them had no idea what the fractionation tower was for, they understood that the king was happy.

The tidal wave of cheering spread throughout the smelting zone. Within a few minutes, the crowd became exuberant. The cheers of the people seemed to add a little color to the dull routine of everyday life in the depressing Months of Demons.

Watching wisps of black and white smoke rising along the river bank and the metallic tower rising up through the snow and mists, Roland felt his heart swell with pride.

If the thick smoke above the North Slope Mountain represented the success of the first industrial revolution, then the smoke produced by this tower heralded a brand new era.

Chapter 1005: A Letter from the Desert

"Achoo!"

When Lorgar got out of her warm bed, she felt a dull, throbbing pain on both sides of her head. She smacked her lips, still able to taste the remnant flavor of the strawberry liquor between her teeth.

"Looks like... I'm having a hangover again."

"Aw..."

An almost inaudible moan escaped her lips.

Lorgar had been like this ever since she had returned from the war.

She blamed the chief, Roland Wimbledon for all of her misery.

All the witches who had participated in the war were well rewarded for their services. Some had received dozens of dollars while some received over a hundred dollars. Lorgar had received a remuneration of 35 dollars, which equated to around 100 gold royals.

It was common to reward soldiers and warriors after a war. Mojin warriors were willing to bet their lives on a holy duel not only because of the fame and glory the fight would bring to them but also because of the huge rewards they would receive afterward. Since the desert was always short of resources, the competition for food was fierce. To live a better life, the Mojins had to constantly fight for it.

But the members of the Witch Union viewed their rewards in a completely different way.

Every night after the learning session was over, the castle hall would be filled with noise and laughter.

As the witches now had excessive money to squander, they spent it lavishly on food and shared the food with the others. Andrea was particularly fond of organizing parties as she had received the greatest reward. In fact, she was the person who first started the tradition of carousing and revelry.

Lorgar had to admit that those pretty sheets of paper were magical. She didn't realize how much she had spent until she actually tallied up the numbers. It was seriously a huge amount.

But she just couldn't help it...

It was the first time the wolf girl had such an intimate relationship with her peers. After joining the Witch Union, she had soon been accepted by the other witches. Lorgar was quite flattered by their offers of friendship. Although witches were treated as Divine Ladies among the Mojin Clan and were highly respected by most clansmen, Divine Ladies rarely bonded among each other, because each of them represented different rival clans. They would keep a vigilant eye on each other when they met, and certainly would not dine or drink like friends.

Although none of the witches were tight on money, they could still not afford to have too many Chaos Drinks. Therefore, Andrea proposed a resolution through card games. The winner would have Chaos Drinks while the loser White Liquor. No magic was allowed, and those who participated in the game had to hold a God's Stone in their hand...

The end result—she ended up with a terrible hangover.

Lorgar would never admit the fault to be her own bad luck. So, she attributed everything to the chief.

Had Roland rewarded them with gold royals instead of paper bills, she would have saved up instead of spending them so recklessly.

"No, this has to stop."

The wolf girl patted her cheeks.

She kept reminding herself that the purpose of this trip was to polish her combat skills. If she continued to indulge herself in endless parties and games, she would forget all her fighting techniques.

Lorgar had never seen any of the God's Punishment Witches abandon themselves to worldly pleasure. They were always so dignified, solemn and self-possessed. That was what a seasoned warrior should look like!

Lorgar took a deep breath, pulled on a sweater and got off the bed. She planned to visit the Third Border City after brushing her teeth and washing her face.

Every single witch in the Third Border City was an excellent warrior. Since Lorgar was not allowed to leave the city alone, she thought it a good idea to learn some combat techniques from the God's Punishment Witches.

Just as Lorgar walked out of her bedroom, she noticed a piece of parchment wedged underneath the living room door.

After she had joined the Witch Union, she had moved to the Witch Building in the Castle District and shared a room with Sharon. However, most of the time she had the whole room to herself because Sharon only spent the nights in the building when necessary.

So she assumed this piece of parchment was for her.

Lorgar picked up the paper with curiosity and found it was a letter. She unsealed it and noticed it was her father's handwriting.

"My dear daughter, how are you doing in Neverwinter? I hope you aren't being bullied there."

Unlike the letters from the northern kingdom that always started with a long opening, her father's letter was simple and straightforward. The handwriting was as untidy as usual. Lorgar, however, felt a sense of belonging as she read the letter, as if she was back in the desert again.

Her tail began to wag excitedly behind her.

Although Lorgar had been determined to not rely on her family anymore when she had departed her clan, she felt happy to know that somebody was still worried about her.

"How can I be bullied? I'm not a three year old!" Lorgar mumbled.

She continued to read the letter. "Haha, I think I asked the wrong question. You're Lorgar Burnflame, Princess Lorgar of the Wildflame Clan. Nobody can bully you, only you can bully others. Am I right?"

"Our clansmen have moved to the Port of Clearwater from Iron Sand City. We've got a piece of fertile land close to the river. Although I don't know how well the chief treats you, at least he has kept his word to us. He did what he promised during the holy duel. As long as we have a job, we can remain fed and clothed. Therefore, there have been more clans coming here, though it has also created some unpleasant disputes over resources."

"But those northerners are different from the Queen of Clearwater. They prohibit any brawls for personal reasons and insist on resorting to legal measures. The process is slow but at least we aren't being used. Many of the Sand Nation have agreed to resolve their problems in this way, so overall, life here is peaceful."

"Apart from rebuilding the Port of Clearwater, our clan has also developed many farmlands in the suburb. We're planning to grow the wheat shipped through the inner river. Many people from Fallen Dragon Ridge came here to teach us how to dig a trench, fertilize the land and grow crops. I have to admit it's so easy for the northerners to sustain themselves. They can easily grow the food we have to go through so much pain to collect from the oasis, and they grow so much surplus. Now, everyone has begun to live like a northerner. I'm not saying it isn't good, but I just feel something is missing when we no longer need to hunt or train ourselves to be strong. My dear daughter, do you have any good idea to make up for this loss?"

"You should be asking my elder brother this question." Lorgar twitched her lips and continued to read.

"Now about you. If... I say, if the chief treats you well, you should find an opportunity to express your desire to serve him. I've heard northern nobles like a variety of girls. Perhaps he's that kind of person..."

The wolf girl rolled her eyes.

"Alright. Paws in. I'm just joking. Compared to that, I'm more concerned about your personal development. Have you encountered any of those horrible enemies? You should have become a lot stronger than when you left, right? Remember though, that you should always remain patient. Focus, and slowly work toward your goal."

Lorgar felt her cheeks flush red. She almost died of mortification.

Lorgar really had encountered the demons. There had even been a big war between them, to which she had contributed nothing. She had thought the front line would be the closest to the enemies, yet the demons had stopped somewhere 300 meters away from their encampment. As a result, instead of getting a closer look at her opponents, Lorgar had been attacked by a weird flying stone pillar and forced to retreat.

If she had known this would happen, she would have never chosen to stay at the front. The Artillery Battalion at the rear had, at least, got a chance to have a real battle.

In addition to this, she was also not accustomed to using the special firearms the chief specially made for her. They were powerful indeed but were, essentially, something external that could not help her

improve herself. Meanwhile, she had a hard time controlling the weapons, so it was difficult for her to blend them in with her actual combat skills.

The recent carousing further made Lorgar ashamed of her lack of self-discipline.

She had an impulse to visit the Third Border City right away, but stopped as she read the last paragraph of the letter.

The wolf girl frowned as she read.

"Right, I'm having a little problem. I've got news that Iron Sand City is a little disturbed these days. It appears the big clans living there aren't very happy about so many people leaving the Silver Stream Oasis, although I don't know the details. It's up to you to whether to report this to the chief. If he is discriminating against you because of your appearance, you should give him something to worry about as a way of retaliation, shouldn't you?"

Lorgar did not even need to think it over.

She put away the letter and pushed the door open. Just as she was about to set out for the castle, she spotted Wendy at the other end of the hallway.

Lorgar walked up to her and made a curt bow. "Could you take me to His Majesty? I have something to report to him."

"Such good timing," Wendy said, chuckling and winking. "His Majesty wants to see you too. Follow me."

Chapter 1006: A "Magic Movie"

To Lorgar's surprise, the chief did not receive her in his study.

Lorgar followed Wendy into the castle parlor and noticed that other than Roland Wimbledon, there was also another woman she did not know in the room.

She surveyed the woman with curiosity and noticed the latter was also studying her attentively. Lorgar did not like the way in which the woman stared at her. It was such a piercing stare that she had an impression the woman could see through all of her thoughts.

"There you are," Roland said, as laid back as he always was. "I need you to complete a new task. Please take a seat."

"Yes, Your Majesty," Lorgar replied. After living in Neverwinter for half a year, Lorgar learned that the chief did not take the etiquettes very seriously. She went straight up to the lady and sat down in front of her, tail high in the air. Then she said, "However, I want to tell you something about the Southernmost Region first."

"Oh, that sounds interesting," said Roland as he raised his brows. "Go ahead."

Lorgar related the news she had learned from her father and said, "I don't think the clans in Iron Sand City would pose any threats to Port of Clearwater, but it would be a good idea to keep our eyes peeled. It takes time and effort to develop a virgin land but only a second to destroy it. We need to stay alert,

especially considering that the main force of the First Army isn't stationed there anymore. They are all back to Neverwinter."

"I see," said Roland thoughtfully as he stroked his chin. "In fact, the General Staff has foreseen this kind of situation when they proposed to relocate the clansmen. It has been almost a year now. I believe they're well prepared."

Lorgar asked thoughtfully, "You are referring to..."

"That's right," Roland said, flashing back a smile. "As the First Army has to get prepared for the Battle of Divine Will, we can't rely on them to take care of everything in the kingdom. It'd be better to let the locals solve the problem in the Southernmost Region themselves." Roland paused for a few seconds and then said, "But I appreciate your father's heads-up. If he could interfere with the matter, that would be very helpful."

"Perhaps I can write to my father." The wolf girl blurted out. She soon realized she had already taken the side of Neverwinter... or rather, the chief's side before she even noticed it.

"It's politics. Leave it to me." Roland waved away Lorgar's request. "Plus, I asked you to come here not to discuss those serious political matters. Let me present May to you. You are probably more familiar with her other name: the Star of the Western Region."

"Star Flower... Troupe?" Lorgar was a bit surprised. She took little interest in plays. In fact, she had not known the name of the troupe until Echo had told her. Lorgar knew nothing about the troupe except that there were two famous actresses admired by everyone in Neverwinter.

She wondered what she had to do with the troupe.

"You're Princess Lorgar of the Wildflame Clan, right? Growing up in the desert, you look indeed quite different from us." May finally stopped gazing at Lorgar. She rose to her feet and dipped in a curtsy gracefully. "Nice to meet you, Ms. Lorgar. I'm looking forward to working with you."

"Working with me?" Lorgar was completely in a blank. She gave the chief a bewildered look. May was not a witch. As for herself, she did not have a talent in acting like Echo. It did not make any sense for her to work with May.

"Let me explain it to you," Roland said, a faint smile playing about his lips. "Do you remember I once said that more people should accept those witches who possess abilities similar to yours? People shouldn't judge a person by their looks. No matter how strange their appearances are, they are one of us, even if they have scaly faces. Starring in a play is definitely the fastest way to let people know about you."

"You want me to be on stage?" said Lorgar, panic-stricken. Although the residents in Neverwinter weren't blatantly discriminating her because of her ears and tail, it was a different story to put herself in the spotlight. Lorgar protested, "But I know nothing about acting, and this isn't something I'm good at either. I haven't seen anyone show hostility against me. Perhaps you should find someone else..."

"Don't worry." As if seeing through her mind, Roland replied, "You don't need to act in front of strangers, and the target audience isn't Neverwinter residents either. This is something brand new. I call it mo — No, it should be termed as 'magic movie'."

"Magic movie?" The wolf girl echoed.

Roland presented her a strange-looking crystal on his desk, and then she noticed it was not just a piece of ordinary ornament. There were three gorgeous gems embedded in the silver-white prism, patterned in ghostly blue stripes. As the light hit the prism from different angles, Lorgar saw flickers of light reflect off the surface of the striped prism.

"This is called the Sigil of Recording. Like the Sigil of God's Will, it's a legacy device used in the Taquila Age. It can create various magic effects if used in combination with other magic stones," Roland explained. "However, it doesn't mean that the Sigil can manipulate time. Instead, it records it. Thanks to the Senior Demon and the giant Devilbeast we captured, we obtained many high-quality magic stones, including this one. It's very precious, so it isn't easy to get hold of one. In other words, you aren't acting on the central square or anywhere else, but in this very world."

"When I heard we can do such a wonderful thing with magic power, I couldn't contain my surprise and excitement," May put in. "Ms. Lorgar doesn't know much about plays, so you may not understand what this implies. Our performances depend on various factors, such as the actress' age, her experience and personal condition. Therefore, we can't expect her each show to be perfect. She can only have her best performance once."

"However, His Majesty is now able to record our best moments, which means we can rehearse our every single movement and expression until they are perfect. This is a miracle!"

"I've heard the Sigil was used to record important meetings and ceremonies. It's an ingenious idea to experiment with it on plays. His Majesty decided to write a play based on a real story." May heaped praises on Roland. "I'm certain once the news gets out, all actors will be exhilarated. They will be willing to pay tons of gold royals to witness this historic moment."

"Ahem." Roland was a little embarrassed, an expression that was rarely seen on him. "Star Flower Troupe should take the full credit. You've done a lot over the past two years in terms of political propaganda." He then turned to Lorgar and asked, "What do you think of it? The story is based solely on your personal experience. It took me nearly half a month to write it."

Lorgar did not have the faintest idea what the "magic movie" was. She could neither relate acting to the miraculous magic stone, nor did she want to waste her precious time on something she had no interest in. However, when Roland told her that the story was based on her personal experience, she changed her mind.

"Well in that case... I'll give it a shot," Lorgar replied while shaking her ears.

Chapter 1007: The Sigil of Recording

After everyone withdrew from the room, Nightingale asked, "Half a month? Didn't you just make the decision a couple of days ago?"

"Nevermind the details," said Roland whilst ignoring Nightingale's question. "Do you think she would agree if I told her the truth? If Lorgar refused to participate in this project, we would have to ask Joan. She can't even talk to people, except Lightning and Maggie. Even if May teaches her acting skills, it

wouldn't be much of a help. That's why I spoke in such a grave tone so that Lorgar couldn't refuse... This is also one of my negotiation techniques."

"Well, I suppose you're right..." Nightingale muttered under her breath while twitching her lips. "But why do I have the impression that this wasn't the real reason she consented."

"What did you say?" said Roland.

"No, nothing," Nightingale said evasively with a whistle. She shoved a piece of dried fish into her mouth and asked, "Is it really OK to leave the Southernmost Region as it is?"

Roland shrugged to indicate that he had no intention of probing into the matter. "It might be bad news if this happened in the time before their relocation where nobody knew what life in Port of Clearwater would be like. But now, it's too late for the conservatives to turn the table. The fact that the chief of the Wildflame clan wrote to Lorgar about this incident indicates that he has completely sided with us. Those conservatives can't win. If they do wage a war, they would be declaring enmity towards all the clans."

There was a garrison of 500 new recruits stationed at Fallen Dragon Ridge and Port of Clearwater, but Roland was not planning to send them to the desert. He simply needed to inform Brian in the Southern Territory for the latter to know what to do.

Roland was now done with negotiation and persuasion. If someone attempted to stir up trouble, he did not mind resorting to force.

Nevertheless, Roland did not want to waste his time on these trifling matters. He returned his attention back to the Sigil of Recording.

The Months of Demons had been ongoing for half a month already. In the past, by this time of the year, the focus of Neverwinter would normally shift from construction to city defense. People would automatically start to prepare themselves to fight against demonic beasts without the need of Roland to remind them.

But the whole northwest was surprisingly peaceful this year. No demonic hybrid groups had emerged so far, not even the regular demonic beasts that usually acted alone.

Lightning had once flown to Hermes Plateau. She reported that no demonic beasts were found there either. She had also seen the flag of the Wimbledon House ripple upon the city wall of the new holy city. Within, she saw nuns delivering bricks back and forth to build new blockhouses and to form a defensive line at the garrison in Coldwind Ridge. Nothing else came into her view except a desolate land covered by snow as though the entire Fertile Plains was frozen.

After a heated discussion, the ancient witches concluded that the demons had stopped the invasion of demonic beasts.

It made sense. Although the Taquila Ruins was a tiny spot on the vast plains, the demons relied on it to transport supplies and put out sentries. It was very likely that they had exterminated those demonic beasts long ago.

As all the construction work had been suspended due to the interminable snow and there was no need to fight at the border any longer, the residents in Neverwinter soon found themselves in a state of

extreme boredom. Roland was well aware how detrimental this could be to people's morale, especially when this occurred after a major victory. The best example was the witches in the castle who abandoned themselves to card games and carouse. To keep people motivated and also to help the witches release their energy, Roland had thus decided to make a movie.

Roland had witnessed the effect of the Sigil of Recording once at Reflection Church in the old holy city. It was even more impressive than the 3D photography in modern society. The recording was, in a sense, a reconstruction of a scene. Roland believed that before he could successfully develop virtual reality technologies, the Sigil would be irreplaceable in the entertainment industry.

Roland wondered how citizens would react to the lifelike 3D movie when a mere traditional play was sufficient to entertain them.

Now, Roland saw why May had lost her composure after seeing what the Sigil could do. For actresses like her, the technology was definitely epochal. If she could star in the movie, she would be remembered by all her peers in the acting industry.

He didn't tell May, however, that in reality, movies soon replaced plays, becoming the most popular form of entertainment in modern society. It was a truth May would probably never expect to happen.

Despite its amazing recording feature, the Sigil of Recording had a big drawback, which was that the recording wasn't modifiable. Moreover, the magic stone of which the sigil was made of was only available to the demons. According to Agatha, one Sigil of Recording had a "battery life" of 12 hours. Once it was fully "charged", it would start to record the scene. The recording would automatically stop upon interruption, which meant no mistakes were allowed during the process. The only way to eliminate a recording error was to recharge the stone for another 12 hours and start again from the beginning. In that case, the new recording would overwrite the old images.

Another downside was that the Sigil could not be recycled.

Like the Sigil of Listening, the Sigil of Recording was also a compound. The Sigil of Listening was composed of two separate parts, a "receiver" and a "microphone". The Sigil of Recording, however, was exactly the opposite. It worked only when two stones were combined. There was a groove at the top of its crystal base. When the magic stone was injected with magic blood and inserted into the groove, the Sigil would instantly start to play all the footages it had previously saved. You could not switch back to the recording mode once the Sigil started to play footages. Removing the magic stone by force would destroy the device. This was actually an asset for preserving important historical records — once the Sigil was in the play mode, nobody could tamper with the videotape.

This made it a big downside for filming.

Because in that case, they only had one chance to shoot, and all shots had to be perfect without any errors, which was almost impossible to achieve.

Fortunately, Roland had found a solution.

He just needed to ask Summer to reconstruct scenes.

In this way, actresses could rehearse as many times as they liked until they were satisfied with their performances. During the final shot, a "cameraman" would arrive and film with the Sigil of Recording.

Since Summer could fast forward, playback and pause footages, they could even achieve some special effects such as bullet time.

Summer's ability did not include reconstructing sounds, but Echo's dubbing could easily solve this problem.

Now that all the conditions for filming were met, Roland just needed actors and actresses. He could foresee what a big stir the movie would make among the public.

...

After taking a shower, Lorgar wrapped herself in a bath towel and returned to her room.

She slumped onto her soft bed before her tail was completely dry.

Her body was sore from training, but she felt happy for being productive again. She did not care about how much progress she had made at this point.

All she needed now was a good rest.

Then she saw the yellow book on the nightstand in the corner of her eyes.

"Ah... right, the script."

Lorgar pricked up her ears, untied the bath towel, got into bed and picked the script up.

May Lannis had told her it was important to familiarize herself with the story first. If she had any questions, she was welcome to ask her anytime.

But this was not what Lorgar cared about.

She just wanted to know what the chief thought of her.

Since it was a story created for her, she might find some clues in it.

Lorgar took a deep breath and started to read.

Then she saw the title —

"The Wolf Princess"

Chapter 1008: The Wolf Princess

"Once upon a time, there was a great city with lofty mountains behind and a beautiful plain in front. It was known as the Mountain City and inside of it lived two lovely little princesses."

"At the age of 14, the elder princess awakened and became a witch. It was not a big deal since the people of the city lived with the witches in peace. Actually, without the witches' help, they could never settle down in this dangerous place. But beyond everyone's expectations, the magic power ruined the princess' appearance instead of increasing her beauty."

"Her ears atrophied day by day while a pair of furry pointy ears were growing on the top of her head. Her fingers became long and hairy and it was hard to shave them. Gradually, she started to look different from a human being."

"No one has ever seen such a witch. Even the court mentors could not confirm that this change was caused by awakening."

"As time went by, the princess' condition got worse and worse. A rumor from an unknown source started to go around the palace. They whispered that the elder princess was cursed."

"So the great chief wants me to play this elder princess?" Lorgar touched her own face and thought. "Lucky for me... I don't have hairy cheeks."

She felt sympathetic to the elder princess. Lorgar got her half-animal look after repeated use of her transformation ability and had spent quite a long time to accept this change. The princess in the story, however, began to look like a wolf after her awakening and it was not strange that she would be rejected or abhorred by others.

"This is too cruel to the princess. Maybe the great chief should make some change here."

The Wolf Girl maneuvered her body into a more comfortable position and turned to the next page with interest.

"The princess' little sister did not mind her changes at all, but the wolf princess could clearly feel the increase of the strength in her body. It was so strong that she was afraid that she would not be able to control it well. Since she did not want to hurt her little sister accidentally someday, she deliberately distanced herself from her, and in the end, she even shut herself off in the depths of the palace."

"Since then, the two princesses who had been so close had lost touch with one another."

"This separation lasted for four years."

"When the little princess was 16 years old, something unforeseen took place."

"An exotic prince came to the Mountain City to propose to the little princess. His convoys formed a long queue of 2,500 meters, and his attendants respectfully called him king of the world. The jewelry he wore shone brighter than the sun, and all the girls in the city were attracted by his handsome appearance."

"The king was greatly pleased and held a splendid banquet to entertain this distinguished guest."

"All the nobles praised the prince and averred that the marriage between him and the little princess would bring supreme wealth and prosperity to the Mountain City."

"I disagree!"

"The wolf princess suddenly came to the banquet hall."

"She couldn't sit idly by and let a suspicious person take her little sister away."

"However, her little sister, who had not seen the wolf princess for four years, hesitated to trust her judgment."

"Overwhelmed by sadness and disappointment, the wolf princess finally lost control of her power. She vandalized the hall and injured the prince. After that, she escaped from the Mountain City."

"Ah... you idiot, your ability won't grow with your age." Lorgar stroked her forehead. She speculated that such uncontrollable behaviors must have been caused by lack of practice. She thought that if she was the wolf princess in the story, she would ask her father to build her an exercise room where she could fight against some professional warriors every day to improve her skills. Only by doing so, a witch would learn to manipulate her magic power flexibly.

Lorgar herself could serve as an example. In the second year after her awakening, she had succeeded in using her wolf hand to hold a cup without crushing it after repeated practice.

She had just intended to flip through the pages in the beginning, but now, she was utterly immersed in the story and could not wait to know what was going to happen next.

"The wolf princess decided to let go of her past and freely release her energy after she left the city. Soon her Day of Adulthood arrived. Her power increased drastically and she turned into a giant wolf. Meanwhile, she realized something strange about the exotic prince. He had come to the city on a snowy day, but his convoys had left no track in the snow and there had been no light in the carriages even at night. It seemed as if the ones inside the carriages were not human beings."

"At the same time, inside the city, the little princess felt that she was wrong. She did not want to lose her elder sister, her closest friend in the world. With the help of a pigeon and a fish, she sneaked out of the palace and set out to find the wolf princess."

"Unexpectedly, she bumped into the exotic prince halfway. He came to stop her but she refused to leave with him. At this moment, the prince tore off his disguise and revealed his true self. He turned out to be an insidious demon lord. It proudly explained the whole thing to the princess: The Mountain City was a natural choke point, so the demon lord planned to crack human beings' defense line from the inside, and after its army conquered the Mountain City, they would march into the heavily populated areas. It told the princess that it was already too late for human beings to react since their army, which was hiding in the convoys was slowly passing through the gate of the city now."

"After that, the demon lord kidnapped the princess, but the pigeon overheard the whole conversation and told it to the wolf princess. Without any hesitation, she rushed back into the city which was now caught in the maelstrom of war. She helped the soldiers to turn the situation around and led the human army to recapture the palace."

"However, the demon lord still refused to give up, so a decisive battle between the demon and the wolf princess broke out."

"After a fierce combat, the wolf princess killed the demon lord and saved her sister and the city. Unfortunately, she was severely wounded during the battle and died in the end. When her sister became the queen, she built a statue in the city to commemorate the wolf princess. This touching story was widely spread and passed down from generation to generation..."

Lorgar closed the book and rubbed her sore neck.

She breathed a big sigh of relief and felt sincerely satisfied!

She could tell from the story that in the great chief's view, she was an excellent warrior now, who could not only protect her friends but also stand out to save a country. She felt so flattered and wagged her tail happily.

She did not have a problem with the ending where the wolf princess died. As a warrior, she thought it was an honor to be killed on the battlefield, especially in a fight against a strong opponent. For her, it was an acceptable ending, since there was not a healing witch like Miss Nana in the story.

However, she still felt confused about some parts of the story.

Such as, why did the wolf princess feel so bad when she heard that her younger sister was about to get married. Since at that time, the exotic princess was so popular and no one found out that he was a demon, as an elder sister, the wolf princess should have wished the new couple all the best.

She also wondered why the demon lord had to explain everything to the little princess before kidnapping her. As a military leader, it appeared too talkative and was clearly not prudent enough.

"Well... who cares."

"Now that I had already promised the great chief, I have to act in this drama—no, this magic movie well. As for the training... it is not too late to start it half a month later."

Lorgar stretched herself in satisfaction and fell asleep with a smile on her face.

Chapter 1009: Commitment

Three days later, the filming for The Wolf Princess officially began.

Undoubtedly, shooting a film was a brand new experience for the people in this world, but Roland had never expected them to become this crazy over it.

Since the very first day, it had caught the attention of all the Witch Union members.

Most of them had never seen a film, but this did not prevent them from imagining how marvelous it would be. Some of the cast were God's Punishment witches. They vividly described their experiences in the cinemas of the Dream World and so made this magic movie sound even more appealing.

If someone now asked the witches which location they wanted to visit the most, most of them would definitely choose the Dream World.

The Witch Union members and the Sleeping Island witches, who were unable to get into the Dream World, were particularly looking forward to this movie.

No one was willing to just spend their whole day eating, drinking or playing cards anymore. By the second day of filming, all of them, even Tilly, had applied to join the film shooting project.

Roland was surprised since, as far as he could remember, this was the first time Tilly had ever demanded something from him.

In the end, the roster of the cast and the crew members had to be changed several times to include the extra witches. Roland was more than happy to indulge them as long as it did not affect their work and productivity. These new members also brought the crew many surprises.

Lightning was one such example. She replaced Amy to work as the cameraman.

In order to portray the two princesses' happy childhood in a better light, the little girl took full advantage of her flying ability. She flew up into the sky and then descended from that height to shoot a panorama of the snowy city. She recorded a stream of pedestrians while flying along the streets. After that, she captured all the images along the way as she flew into a small bedroom in the castle through a window which had many icicles on the frame. Finally, she landed in the room to shoot a close-up of the laughing sisters in front of a burning fireplace.

Roland spent a great deal of time explaining camera language to the crew. He even drew pictures to show them what he meant, even though he was not good at sketching at all.

In the middle of describing basic viewing angles and framing of shots to the crew, he spotted an exceptionally excited look in May's eyes.

The Star of the Western Region was extremely talented in drama. She could imagine a whole scene in her head and could take each prop and each person in that scene into consideration. It was not an obvious advantage for a traditional theater actress, but it would become an incredibly important skill in filmmaking.

The other actress Irene, who was playing the younger sister of the wolf princess, was sorely lacking such a talent.

In the following days, May started to use the shooting skills she had learned from Roland.

She quickly got familiar with them and even created some new techniques on her own.

Some of the scenes that she directed even reminded Roland of the modern movies.

When she filmed the scene where the exotic prince came to the palace, she began with close-ups of his jewel-encrusted boots, his golden cloak, silk shirt, and then his handsome smiling face. After that, she panned out to show a long queue of gorgeously dressed servants behind him to show his grand entrance. By the way, the man who played the prince was her husband, Carter Lannis. Though Roland was reluctant to admit it, his Chief Knight was indeed the most handsome man in Neverwinter when dressed up.

The improvement in composition and directing was just one of the surprises.

The adoption of special effects was an even more amazing progress.

New ideas and new visual effects emerged every day.

Soraya's "three-dimensional background" was one such example.

Another was Sharon's lightning effect.

If needed, Nightingale could use her Mist, Molly her Magic Servant, and Shadow could create phantom illusions for even more special effects.

Maggie played two roles in the movie. In her pigeon form, she was a close friend of the younger princess. In her Devilbeast form, she was the demon lord's best warrior and would fight a fierce battle against the wolf princess on a snowy field. The battle scenes they filmed could only be called "ground-breaking". Both the earth and the mountains would tremble and all the birds and animals would flee from the scene as fast as they could.

Even Lotus and Honey got to contribute significantly to the production of the movie.

By the time they were just halfway through the filming of the movie, the number of crew members had already expanded to more than 300 people. Apart from the Witch Union members, the Sleeping Spell witches and the Taquila survivors were also attracted by this event. In the end, this filmmaking process turned into a giant carnival for the witches.

Standing on top of the city wall, Roland looked down at the bustling crowd and sighed with emotion.

To his surprise, this magic movie brought the three witch organizations closer. In the past, they had been like oil and water, refusing to mix, but now they seemed to be able to along well with each other, as if they were one big family.

No matter what kind of abilities they had, now they worked together for the same movie. When they focused on doing their jobs well, they forget about their differences in strength and origin. Gradually, this experience created a very special bond between them.

For Roland, this was really a pleasant surprise.

It was a cold day. As Roland exhaled, he could see white vapor coming out of his mouth. He turned to look at Anna. "Aren't you going down to have some fun with them?"

In the beginning, Nightingale joined the film crew only when she was needed. However, now she frolicked around with them all day long.

"No, I've lots of work to do." Anna showed her hands to Roland. Her sleeves were covered in oil. "The sizes of the internal combustion engine parts in the drawing aren't accurate enough. I still have to make adjustments, and..."

"Huh?" Roland blinked.

"And I have the most fun staying beside you." She smiled and rested her head on his shoulder.

The next moment, he felt her warm flames spread out to dispel the chill of the snow.

He shut his mouth and enjoyed this peaceful moment with her.

After a long time, Anna said in a soft voice, "The future you promised has arrived."

He followed her gaze to look at the crew again. Besides the witches, the common people also fitted in well. May was making gestures with her hands. She seemed to be teaching Lorgar and Carter how to act together. Irene was squatting by the side combing Maggie's hair. The little girl was squinting her eyes

and seemed to really be enjoying it. Together with the God's Punishment Witches, the new staff of the film crew was placing the props for the next scene. Compared to a factory, which featured a clear division of labor, the film crew's style of working appeared more relaxed and harmonious.

On this snowy day, both the witches and the common people were working together with one heart and one mind.

"No, I have yet to fulfill all of my promises." Roland shook his head.

"Are you referring to the situation of the other regions of Graycastle? Things are going to get better in those cities soon."

"No, I didn't mean the relations between the witches and the common people. I meant something else," he replied with a smile. "I thought that I would need mountains of preparations to achieve this goal step by step, but now I feel that it's not that complicated. As long as I take the first few steps, the rest of the problems will automatically resolve themselves in the process, just like how this movie has progressed. I haven't set up any rules or guidelines for it, but it has still turned out this well. It's even given me a lot of pleasant surprises."

"So what is it that you still have left to fulfill?" Anna raised her head and blinked. In her eyes that were as blue as a peaceful lake, he saw the reflection of snowflakes.

"Ascend the throne as a king," Roland paused and then said word by word, "and then marry you."

Chapter 1010: A Legitimate Heir

"Your Majesty... Your Majesty, please think twice!" Roland heard Barov shouting anxiously outside his office.

It was only after the City Hall Director had run to his desk while panting heavily that Roland finally put down his teacup and asked, "What should I think twice about? The coronation ceremony?"

"No. I meant your wedding announcement. You are going to marry a witch and make her your queen." Barov glanced toward the place behind Roland while wiping the sweat from his forehead. "Ah, Your Majesty, I'm afraid this isn't a proper way to handle the case."

Roland was not surprised by Barov's objection at all. He had anticipated as much when he first informed the City Hall of his decision. To remove the obstacles to his marriage to Anna, the City Hall would be the first group that he had to persuade.

After the Months of Demons, Neverwinter would send troops to the Fertile Plains once again to eliminate the demons' latest outpost in Taquila. Meanwhile, the City Hall would be busy carrying out the spring plowing plans, new construction projects, and trade programs. The coming year would be an exceptionally busy year for Graycastle, so it did not sound like a good idea to hold such a ceremony now. According to tradition, preparing a coronation alone would need at least two to three months, not to mention that there was a wedding after it. Preparing these activities would inevitably increase his administration's workload and thus would interfere with Neverwinter's production and military plans. However, Roland did not make this decision on a sudden impulse.

Different from the previous winters, this winter was peaceful. He wanted to seize this rare opportunity to hold both his coronation ceremony and his wedding, which would boost his subjects' morale without costing him too much effort.

More importantly, he really hoped to redeem his promise to Anna as soon as possible.

Of course, as a feudal king, he could do whatever he wished just like the rest of the self-indulgent rulers throughout history who had imposed their personal values on others and thus had forced their foolish decisions to get implemented. However, he did not intend to become such a ruler. He created this City Hall, and he was confident that he could properly handle this case without turning against his own administration.

In Roland's view, exercising his power while staying within the boundaries of the rules would be a much better choice than abusing his power.

"Why?" Roland knocked on the desk as he asked Barov.

"It's... it's because you need an heir," Barov said urgently. "Everyone knows that a witch can never give you a child. There's a war on the horizon. If some unexpected stroke of misfortune were to happen to you, the other nobles would covet your throne. An heir will make your people feel secure." Barov paused for a moment before adding, "If you just want to be with lady Anna, you don't really need to marry her."

"Oh? What do you mean?"

"You could marry a lesser noble's daughter," Barov suggested. "No one would oppose such a decision. You don't have to take her seriously. You just need her to stand beside you on official occasions, and you can still do whatever you want—"

"So you mean that Anna can't become the queen because she's a witch?" Nightingale suddenly interrupted.

"I don't think Lady Anna will mind such superficial things." Barov coughed twice to cover his embarrassment. "It's for the benefit of the country, Your Majesty. If you find it hard to tell Lady Anna about this arrangement in person, I can pass on your words to her."

"You aren't her. How can you know that she won't mind? I can bet that she would never want a third person between His Majesty and herself!" Nightingale insisted.

"It has nothing to do with personal feelings. It's about an heir..."

"Enough." Roland raised his hands to stop them. "I get it. I just need to find a legitimate heir to the throne to reassure my people."

"Find... a legitimate heir?" Barov was a little bit startled.

"Isn't this a good solution?" Roland replied with a casual air. "After I defeated the Pope, I absorbed her entire lifespan. I actually don't need anyone to inherit the throne. That's why I was able to decide to marry Anna. Unfortunately, there are only a few people like you who know about this matter. Most of the subjects know little about magic power and thus probably won't believe it. Under such

circumstances, in order to give my people an inner sense of security, I must find an heir and let them pin their hopes on him. Am I right?"

Since the battle at Coldwind Ridge against the church, the senior officials of the City Hall were aware that Roland had gone through a spiritual battle called the Battle of Souls, in which the winner could inherit everything from the loser. They had found it hard to believe at first, but then the appearance of the Taquila witches and their Soul Transfer technique had reduced their doubts about it. During the first United Front meeting, Roland had confirmed this rumor and had used this advantage to win Pasha's trust. Ever since then, all the senior officials of the City Hall had bought the story that Roland now had a limitless lifespan.

"Yes, that's what I meant," Barov said, unaware that he was falling into a trap. "As long as you have an heir, no one will oppose your marriage."

"I have a simpler way to solve this problem." Roland shrugged. "A year ago, when we attacked Hermes, I happened to find Gerald Wimbledon's mistress. She's a maid working in a tavern, and she had a son with Gerald."

"What did you... say?" Barov's eyes widened in surprise. "Are you sure that the child is..."

"Yes, he has grey hair and grey eyes." Roland nodded.

"Why didn't you tell me at that time?"

"If I had told you, they would have been killed a long time ago." Roland picked up his teacup and took a sip. "How is it? We have a legitimate heir now. Isn't it a better way to solve the problem?"

Gerald's child was indeed a good choice. He was not a threat to Roland and could be replaced at any time. Even though he might ultimately never become the king, he would still be widely discussed and could greatly raise the subjects' spirits. Barov's eyes shone with excitement. Seeing this, Roland knew that the Chief Director had already understood what he meant. Now, he did not need to do anything except tell the subjects about this boy and bring him to Neverwinter.

As for the actual situation surrounding the little boy and his mother, he believed that the people would exert their imagination and creativity to make up their own legendary stories.

"If his mother is just a maid in a tavern, he can only be counted as a bastard child. We must give his mother a higher status. Otherwise, making him an heir will attract many disapproving comments. Fortunately, she's not a noble lady. It's much easier to control a civilian woman..." Barov started to plan the whole thing in his heart.

Roland felt his lips curling into a smile. Now he could avoid fighting a verbal battle against Barov to sell his ideas, unlike three years ago. The City Hall Director could easily follow his hints and help him plan out the whole thing. No one would doubt his words anymore, no matter how implausible they sounded, not even his claim of having eternal life.

"You go make a plan for this child and my coronation ceremony. We'll discuss the details later." Roland waved his hand to Barov, indicating that he was dismissed.

After Barov's departure, Roland heaved a long sigh of relief. "I never expected that you would speak up for Anna."

"I'm sorry. I just can't help it..."

"No, you don't need to apologize. You're absolutely right." He glanced at Nightingale deliberately and found that she looked much calmer than he had expected. "I just thought you would..."

"You thought I would look miserable and feel depressed hearing this news?" Nightingale gave him a cold stare. "I think this wedding is already too late. If it wasn't for Anna, I wouldn't have let you get away with it so easily."

Roland still remembered the relieved look on her face when she had appeared in front of him after disappearing for two days. He guessed that her change must have had something to do with the secret agreement between her and Anna.

Curious as he was, he still did not ask her about the secret.