

## **Witch 1111**

### Chapter 1111: Until Death Do Us Part

In a cloud of dust, she caught sight of her target.

Earl Lorenzo.

It was evident that the earl had just woken up. While he was scrambling to pull on his pants, the God's Punishment Warriors at his bedside drew out their swords and lunged at the invaders.

The break-in had apparently alarmed the God's Punishment Warriors. Although they did not have self-consciousness, they were instructed to kill anyone who entered the room by force.

"Betty!" Zooney shouted.

"Got it," Betty answered as she followed into the room and went down to her knee. She cupped her hands and said, "Come!"

After years of training and numerous battles, they had reached a mutual understanding that transcended words. Without even looking at Betty, Zooney jumped backwards and landed precisely on Betty's hands.

Betty got her just in time.

Then she pushed Zooney upward, and the latter rose into the air and flew over the God's Punishment Warriors like a swallow. She grabbed the chandelier hanging down from the ceiling and swung to the bed.

The spacious, luxurious master bedroom instantly became a perfect stage for Betty's personal show.

Zooney raised her grapshot gun.

Time seemed to stop at this moment.

The God's Punishment Warriors wheeled around but were unable to catch up with her.

Betty, on the other hand, made a posture of victory, her back to the bed. This was definitely a habit she had developed after visiting the Dream World. Apparently, Betty was deeply influenced by special effects in the Magic Movie and the so-called art of combat, believing a real combatant did not need to throw a backward glance at the explosion behind her. Nevertheless, she was not strictly following the rule, for she was leaning sideways while watching the God's Punishment Warriors out of the corner of her eyes, so Zooney did not bother to argue about her silly behavior.

Earl Lorenzo looked up, terrified and astounded.

He had never expected that the God's Punishment Warriors whom he trusted so much would be flattened in less than a minute.

The chandelier fell apart, sending flickers of candlelight in the air.

In the meantime, Zooley aimed her gun at Lorenzo and pulled the trigger.

BOOM!

Then the clock seemed to be ticking again.

A cloud of blood mist erupted from the earl's chest.

As dozens of bullets rained down at him, he first sank under the huge shockwaves and then bounced up. By the time he fell again, his body had turned into a pulp.

Zooley immediately stepped onto the bed. Failing to support Zooley's weight, the bed collapsed magnificently.

At the same time, the God's Punishment Warriors suddenly froze.

"Not a perfect landing, but the rest was brilliant," Betty commented on a whistle. "I wish there was a pair of sunglasses."

Zooley rolled her eyes at her resignedly and said, "Let's recycle those shells first."

"OK, OK..." Betty said, shrugging indifferently. She produced a small horn from her waist pocket and gave it a blow.

It was a special song, the very memory that had transformed these soldiers into God's Punishment Warriors. The song was the activation code for these soulless shells.

"From now on, I'm your new master." Betty cleared her throat and pronounced each word slowly and clearly.

The six God's Punishment Warriors all clapped their fists over their chests.

"But only until you arrive at Neverwinter. Once you get to the Third Border City, you'll be stored away in our warehouse. If you happen to be good-looking, you'll probably have a chance to fight again. Otherwise, you'll be disposed of. Of course, I think the chance of your revival... is pretty slim," Betty jested. She knew they would not respond to her.

Magic Blood had destroyed these soldiers' self-consciousness.

Zooley opened the copper door and saw many guards swarming toward the master bedroom from the end of the corridor. There were patterings of footsteps everywhere. Apparently, the fight had woken everybody up, and the Castle District was now in a state of alert.

"See those armored guys?" Betty said smilingly. "Go finish them."

At these words, the God's Punishment Warriors charged at the guards like a pack of wild beasts. Before the guards realized what had happened, the Warriors had thrust their swords through the guards' chests.

The whole castle was stirred.

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Flanked by the soldiers from the First Army and Hagrid, Joe soon found the dungeon.

When she saw Farrina dangling from the ceiling, he felt as though bludgeoned by a heavy iron hammer in the chest. His heart ached so terribly that for a second he could not breathe.

The woman once being so vivaciously beautiful was now drained of life, alive but barely.

Dark whip marks crisscrossed her skin, from her shoulders all the way to her legs.

Most of them were on her back and chest.

Pus came out of her wounds. Apparently, Lorenzo had branded her but had not given her proper treatment.

Despite the torture, Farrina had not disclosed anything to Lorenzo.

Joe walked up to her tremulously, each step heavy and slow.

It was actually the soldiers coming with Joe that reached Farrina first. They unchained her immediately and put her down on the floor.

"Is this the girl you want to save? Hey, do something. Come help us!"

"Ah... yes..." The words jerked Joe out of his trance, who transferred Farrina to a straw mattress next to him at once.

The soldiers seemed to know what to do. They produced various bottles and jars from their knapsacks and started to give her some basic first-aid treatments. Joe did not know what these liquid solutions were used for, but they seemed to work, as Farrina's breath gradually steadied.

While Joe was helping with the wounds, Farrina suddenly let out an almost inaudible groan and slowly opened her eyes.

"How come... it's you..." she muttered. "Is it a dream?"

"No, it isn't. Everything's over!" said Joe as he cupped her face, sobbing.

"Over?" Farrina mumbled. "I see. I'm dead, right? That's why I see you in the dungeon..."

She slowly raised her hand and touched Joe's face with her crooked fingers. Lorenzo had not only denailed her fingers but also snapped them. Her hand was now no better than a bent piece of wood.

"Sorry. The church is gone... I failed you..."

"That's OK. I don't care..." Joe said, feeling hot tears trickle down his cheeks. "This isn't your fault at all!"

"Are you comforting me? Strange... you've never comforted me before," Farrina said weakly, her wounded lips slightly parting. "Anyway, please don't go. Could you stay with me for a while?"

Joe could not contain himself any longer. He held her tight in his arms and said, "I'll be with you. Wherever you go, I'll always be with you... until death do us part!"

"Thank you..." Farrina said, and then lost her consciousness.

Chapter 1112: The Truth

Farrina had a dream.

The swish of a whip, the malicious imprecation of her enemy, and the excruciating pain all started to fade away.

She found herself in a plain white room with polished, reflective floor.

She did not know where this room led. The only thing in her view was a lofty stone door, behind which came faintly some beautiful and eerie music.

"This is probably what the afterlife world looks like," she thought.

After she passed through that door, she would be able to rest in peace.

Farrina could still not reconcile with herself to the fact that she had failed to kill the traitor and revenge the church.

She also felt sorry for failing Tucker Torr, realizing that she was not capable of such an important task and certainly was not a good leader.

That was all she could do.

The only thing that gave her some solace was that she did not yield.

Farrina had thought she would surrender when that hot red iron needle had sunk into her flesh. Thinking back, she could not believe that she had actually made it.

If she had pleaded for mercy at that time, she would now be too mortified to face her companions who had sacrificed themselves for the church.

However, she soon brushed these thoughts off her mind.

She was dying.

There was nothing she could do now.

Farrina ambled to the stone door.

It was rumored that there was no pain or sadness in the world behind the door. Time was frozen in God's kingdom, and everything there lived an eternal life, looking perpetually young and fresh.

She should feel happy about it, but somehow she just couldn't.

Why?

"Farrina..."

Lost and confused, she suddenly heard a distant, misty voice.

She remembered.

That was Joe.

Joe had not participated in the operation, so Lorenzo had not caught him. She was just hallucinating.

Farrina instantly felt relieved even though she knew this was not real.

"I see," she thought.

She realized that she just did not want to leave for that world alone.

Even though she had been abandoned and assigned to a task far beyond her capability, she still wanted to feel needed.

She did not want to be alone anymore.

"Don't go. Could you stay with me for a while?"

"I'll be with you..." the voice said inarticulately. "Wherever you go, I'll always be with you... until death do us part!"

That would be... enough.

An illusion would do.

The memories of that cold winter seemed to come back again, when a carriage had stopped before her just as she had been about to fall on the way to Hermes.

Farrina stepped on the doorsteps leading to the stone door and pushed it open.

"Thank you."

Dazzling light escaped from behind the door and blinded her.

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When that light dissipated, Farrina opened her eyes and saw a swirling ceiling.

"This is God's kingdom?" she wondered.

It was not as fabulous as she had thought.

Time did not stop either.

She turned around and a familiar face swam into her view.

Farrina asked hesitantly, "Joe?"

Joe was lying on his face next to her, fast asleep. After she called his names several times, Joe opened his eyes blearily. Ecstatic, he exclaimed, "You, you finally woke up!"

"Woke up?" Farrina said while drawing her brows together. "Didn't I just..." she broke off. The excruciating pain was back again.

"You just passed out," Joe clapped his hand over her head. "Don't worry. Everything will be OK."

Farrina stiffened. It took her a while to realize that she had not died. In fact, she had just escaped from the dungeon, which meant...

"Lorenzo is..."

"Dead."

The surprising answer cheered Farrina up. She asked, "Really? How did you do that?"

"I didn't kill him," Joe replied while shaking his head. "The King of Graycastle, Roland Wimbledon, killed him."

Roland Wimbledon... This was the last name she wanted to hear. "What are you talking about? How is it possible that he would help us recover the Archduke Island?" With these words, Farrina looked around immediately. "Hang on... what's this place? Aren't we on the Archduke Island?" she asked.

"We're now on the ship heading to Neverwinter of Graycastle. You were in a coma for three days. The medicine provided by the First Army saved you," Joe said softly. "Take it easy. I'll fill you in later."

An hour later, Farrina finally knew what had happened.

"As for the king's trial, the guard Sean told me that as long as you've never killed or persecuted a witch or a Graycastle citizen, you're not likely to be sentenced to death. You were a warrior of the Vanguard Battalion who fought against demonic beasts on the New Holy City, and I was an assistant priest. Neither of us met any witches. In other words, we'll all be alive!" said Joe.

He got more and more excited as he went on, "Although you sustained severe injuries, a witch called Nana in Neverwinter can heal any wounds, as long as we pay! I'll find a way to get some money. I'll do everything to cure your legs!"

To prevent her from escaping, Lorenzo had broken Farrina's hands and legs, and also smashed her knees with a hammer. Now, Farrina could neither stand nor walk. However, this was not what Farrina cared about.

"Just because of me..."

"What?"

"Just because of me, you sold yourself to the devil!" Farrina hollered indignantly. "He destroyed the church and all our hopes! How could you do this to Pope Tucker Thor!" Her fierce accusation was soon replaced by a hacking cough.

"Farrina!"

"Don't you touch me!" Farrina bellowed, blood starting to trickle down the corner of her mouth. "The man... ruined the world and the entire human race. How could you ask him for help? My life is nothing to the Battle of Divine Will. What's the point of saving me? I would rather wait for him to fall — "

"Clap, clap, clap."

Someone applauded outside the room.

"That's so touching. I didn't expect to have a mortal's support after over 400 years. Such a pleasant surprise," said a woman as she pushed open the door and entered.

"I support the church that did its best to protect the human race, not the underlings of the King of Graycastle — " Farrina retorted fiercely despite the pain in her chest. However, she stopped dead as the woman came in. Farrina uttered an exclamation of surprise, "Army Commander... Enova?"

For a split second, Farrina could not believe her eyes.

The Martial Arts Hall of Fame in the New Holy City displayed the most distinguished and outstanding Judgement Army Warriors in the history, most of whom had received the highest award granted by the pope, which was the incarnation ceremony for the God's Punishment Warriors. As the commander of the Premium Corp of the Judgement Army, Enova had obtained the greatest achievement a female warrior could possibly dream of. Farrina had always viewed her as her role model.

But... Enova was a person living over 100 years ago.

"Go on," Zoey said as she leaned against the bed. "I want to know how much you really want to support us. Don't be shy. I haven't been flattered by a mortal for a very long time."

Chapter 1113: A Third Wheel

"Ms. Army Commander?" Joe stammered. It took him a while to register the person in front of him and understand why the woman looked familiar. But... how was this possible?

"I... don't understand. You should have been killed in one of the battles during the Months of Demons..." Farrina swallowed hard. "Plus, God's Punishment Warriors are all extremely pious warriors who have devoted themselves to God. They never — "

"They never speak, as though they're mute?" Zoey talked over her. "This has nothing to do with faith. They never talk because they've been brainwashed, otherwise, we can't use their bodies."

Use their bodies?

"What are you talking about..."

"Well, I want to first ask you though, how did the church advertise the God's Punishment Army?"

Joe replied fervently, "As the warriors who have obtained God's power, the mortal enemy of the witches, and the church's greatest hope to save the world. Only faithful and fearless believers will be granted the honor of becoming a God's Punishment Warrior," Joe paused for a few seconds and then said, "I used to think that saving the world meant to stop the demonic beasts invading the interior from the Great Rupture; however, after I read the last will of Pope Tucker Torr, I learned about the Battle of Divine Will and the existence of demons."

"So, the God's Punishment Army is actually a special army that fights demons," Farrina supplied Joe's answer. "Only the Prival Council of Hermes knew how to hold the incarnation ceremony. Now, Roland Wimbledon has ruined everything."

"It sounds very touching, but unfortunately, none of this is true," Zoey said with a contemptuous smile.

"What you believe is that the God's Punishment Army is merely a tool the usurper used to suppress

witches. Although the original purpose of creating such an army was to save the human race, this wasn't the church's original idea, but rather, a witch's."

Farrina stared at Zoey incredulously. She would have refuted such a groundless allegation had the person talking to her not been the famous Enova, whom she admired.

Joe took a sharp intake of breath and said, "Could you... tell us more about it?"

"Fine. I'll satisfy your curiosity then, mortals," Zoey said with a faint smile playing around her lips.

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After Zoey had told them everything, Farrina felt a pain sear through her ten fingers. Looking down, she noticed that her hands had clenched into fists as her broken fingers started to bleed profusely again.

Now Farrina knew why such a historical figure would suddenly appear in her life, alive and well. The Enova standing in front of her was not the army commander of the Judgement Army she knew, but an ancient witch who has lived for over 400 years.

She would have drawn her sword and fought a life-and-death battle against the witch while accusing her of profanity had she the strength to fight. Even if she could not win, she would not allow a devil to use a warrior's body in such a disrespectful fashion.

However, she was too weak to get out of her bed.

This was ridiculous.

This was a preposterous absurdity!

According to Zoey, witches had founded the church. They were neither the representation of evil nor the devil's underlings but were actually the real heroes dedicated to preserving the human race. The Queen of Starfall City had sacrificed herself for mankind. Was there anything more ironic than this? The God's Punishment Army was actually a creation of the witches whom she despised. The incarnation ceremony she had been longing to attend was merely a process to provide the witches with more shells. Witches had even, in a way, shaped the world.

"Argue with her. This is a lie, a fabrication!"

A voice yelled in her head. Farrina opened her mouth but nothing came out.

Zoey's story did explain many things.

For example, it explained why some God's Punishment Warriors had mysteriously disappeared.

Why there were bodies of females drained of blood.

Why there were large monasteries in the old Holy City.

And why there were Pure Witches who looked no different than ordinary witches.

If everything was indeed a perfect lie as Zoey had told, the person who had fabricated all of it must have been staying in the church for decades, and know the church's largest secret. Farrina could think of no one but the popes.



Apart from that, there was another piece of solid evidence: "power".

Since the God's Punishment Warriors were designed to kill demons, then the stronger the better. From the fact that two God's Punishment Witches could easily break through the castle on Archduke Island guarded by the God's Punishment Warriors, Farrina judged that a conscious man was apparently much more powerful than an unconscious killing machine. If witches could exert such incredible power in a body of a God's Punishment Warrior, why had the church wanted to kill them? Why had they not made good use of them instead? The church could have definitely used Pure Witches if they were prejudiced against ordinary witches.

In fact, there had not been a single God's Punishment Witch in Hermes.

Farrina knew the reason.

Because Pure Witches could be subdued by a God's Stone.

But the church had no feasible measure to control a God's Punishment Witch as powerful as an Extraordinary.

As a result, they had not considered the creation of God's Punishment Witches.

If the pope in the Holy City had indeed cared about the human race, many believers would have been willing to sacrifice themselves, including witches.

However, this possibility had long since passed.

Apparently, the church was not as passionate about saving the world as they appeared to be.

"Everything the church did was a joke," Farrina thought weakly in bed. "The God's Punishment Warriors were meant to fight the demons but they used them to merely overpower witches."

This fact seemed to have also gradually dawned on Joe, who asked nervously, "How many people like you are there in Neverwinter?"

"Several hundred," Zoey answered, shrugging. "We use the bodies donated by the church, so don't be too flustered if you see someone you know."

Farrina vaguely understood why Joe asked that.

It was impossible for the witches to impersonate hundreds of God's Punishment Warriors at a time.

Judging from the innocent look on Zoey's face, Farrina knew she was telling the truth.

Zoey's answer cleared her last doubt.

Farrina felt the world that she had been relying on gradually fall apart.

She wanted to be needed.

She used to put her faith in the church. As a church member, she was obligated to shoulder the responsibility of saving the four kingdoms and the human race. But now, everything she had once firmly believed in began to crumble like a weathered wall inside her, behind which nothing remained.

She must... do something.

"The church... the church can rectify it... and make things right again..." Farrina said with difficulty.

"How?" Zooley asked, shooting her a cold stare.

"You need... bodies to create God's Punishment Witches, right? Only the church can do that. For example, me — " Farrina gasped. "I can offer my body."

"Hmm," Zooley said, a playful smile fluttering over her face. "You don't mind losing your mind?"

"Farrina!" Joe exclaimed exasperatedly

"If that will save the human race — "

In this way, she would have something else to rely on and would be needed again...

However, her dream was shattered as Zooley said coldly to her, "Very interesting, mortal, but we no longer need God's Punishment Witches anymore."

"Wh-why?"

"Because it doesn't work," Zooley said while spreading out her hands. "The plan probably would have worked if this was still 400 years ago, but the demons have improved a lot too. God's Punishment Witches can't defeat them anymore. That's why all of us are now supporting the King of Graycastle."

"..." Farrina's parched lips parted like a dumb man's. For a moment, phrases attempted to form in her mouth but in the end, she only managed to produce a few odd hissing noises.

"Living witches, no matter how weak they are, can still be very powerful once they've found the right path. King Roland discovered that ordinary witches don't necessarily need magic blood or a shell to become strong. Everyone now believes that they can learn and make progress," Zooley said as she rose to her feet and headed to the door. "In other words, no witch would be willing to offer their blood even if you wanted to sacrifice your body, because it's not worth it."

Zooley stopped and smiled at Farrina at the doorway.

"Let me be frank with you, the church was a mistake from the beginning."

Farrina heard something crack deep down inside.

Chapter 1114: A Return

"You rarely have such a serious talk with a mortal."

Betty, who had been waiting for her at the railing, approached Zooley as she came out of the cabin.

"I talk more with King Roland," Zooley replied indifferently.

"But we all know he's not technically a real mortal," Betty said in a sorrowful tone. "Sean wanted you to only talk about the origin of the church and the immense power of the God's Punishment Witches. But

what did you end up saying? 'It's not worth it', and 'the church was a mistake from the beginning'," Betty broke off while clicking her tongue. "That was too much information for a patient."

"Our task is to recover the ancient treasure and rescue the captured believer. Whether she's alive or not, that's none of our business," Zooley said as she stopped and narrowed her eyes at Betty. "Speaking of you... since when did you start to care about a mortal?"

"Shouldn't people care about each other?"

"Yeah, we should, but it doesn't sound like something you would say." Zooley paused for a moment and said, "Hang on... you're just gloating over her misfortune, aren't you?"

"Hey, don't say it out loud," Betty said while sniggering. "Because I really wanted to go in there with you —"

"Yes," Zooley said on a sigh. "She does look like them."

"She's the express image of them," Betty said as she walked to Zooley and leaned against the porthole. "If she were born 400 years earlier, and if she were a witch, then in the last Union meeting..."

"She would definitely support Lady Alice rather than us," Zooley supplied Betty's answer. "That's what makes me upset."

Farrina did not resemble a particular individual, but a specific group of people.

She resembled a group of survived Union witches facing an uncertain and dismal future.

They had had very few choices at that time.

Most of them had chosen to support the plan of the God's Punishment Witches instead of the hopeless proposal of "the Chosen One", even though this meant they would have to sacrifice themselves in the end.

On that meeting that had determined their fate, Alice had completely flattened Natalia, winning the support of the great majority. At the end of the meeting, people on the floor had set up a chant of "the human race will perpetuate. Long live the witches", and their voices reverberated across the hall. In fact, even some Natalia's supporters had become hesitant in the end, uncertain whether their choice would lead them to the light at the end of the tunnel. Zooley, at that time, could not do anything for the Queen of Sunchaser but stomped her feet in agitation.

Now she took her anger out on Farrina.

Zooley was not repudiating any church believer per se but the disbanded Union instead.

She had wanted to tell them that even the weakest witch had the potential to become strong.

She had also wanted to let them know that ignorant, short-sighted mortals could also make a contribution.

What she had wanted to say most badly was "if only they could hang in there just a bit longer..."

She wished they had not reached a parting of the ways just because of different opinions.

But all her thoughts dissolved into a deep sigh.

With no solid and conclusive evidence, the Three Chiefs would inevitably make the same choice if everything had started all over again.

Only a person with a heart of steel was capable of helping everyone get through that dark times when the regime of the Union was tottering.

"If only Lady Alice, Lady Eleanor and Lady Natalie could see what we have now..."

Zooey muttered as she gazed at the boundless blue ocean.

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In another room on the other side of the cabin, Kajen put down his quill, shocked and dismay.

"Mr. Kajen..." said Roentgen, who was equally perplexed by what they had just heard. "I'm afraid we've known too much."

To let Kajen better understand the story of Joe and Farrina, Sean had settled him and his student down in a room adjacent to the patient's cabin and made a little adjustment to the wall. He had set up a one-way transparent mirror which allowed Kajen to peer through the wall and see everything that happened in the next room. In addition to that, Sean had also installed two amplifiers that enabled Kajen to hear the contents of their conversation clearly.

It was Kajen Fels' first time to pry into others' privacy. Although he understood it was not very appropriate, the temptation was just too great to resist. This was just like a reality show where actors documented unscripted real-life situations. He, on the other hand, was a viewer and also recorder of the show.

Much to his consternation, he had not only heard a story about love and redemption but also learned a secret, appalling history of the church.

The witch empire had established the Four Kingdoms?

The church was the offspring of the Union?

Those ancient witches could possess a human body?

Every single piece of information would be sufficient to disquiet the public.

Roentgen peeped through the door restlessly, as though fearing some guards would suddenly burst in, throw a burlap sack over her head and dump her into the ocean.

The words of King Roland gradually came floating out of Kajen's memories.

"It's a romance in dark times."

"You should know what 'based on' means."

Perhaps, Roland had predicted that this would happen.

Anyway, he could not chicken out now.

Even if he was presented the choice to back out, he would not do so.

Dimly, Kajen had a feeling that this play would create a huge commotion.

This play would be unprecedented and also set a milestone for the future play industry.

Just at that moment, Kajen saw the two people in the next room start to talk again.

He immediately picked up the amplifiers.

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"So... that's what we've got in the end..." Farrina stared at Joe, her eyes sliding out of focus. "The church is gone... Nobody needs me anymore... You saved me but I can't give you anything as a return... I'm sorry..."

Her voice, in the end, was hardly over a whisper.

Joe grasped her hand, a look of melancholy on his face and blustered, "I saved you not for the damn church!"

His thundering voice shocked Farrina.

"I never put much faith in the church. I joined the church just to find something to do. Everyone pretended to be a pious believer because they wanted to get promoted fast. I used to be a noble, and it doesn't make sense that I would devote everything to God!"

"You — " Farrina said, biting her lip, her eyes fixing on Joe again. She slowly raised her hand in a painful sort of way, in an attempt to slap in his face.

Joe did not dodge but held his head even a little higher.

But Farrina dropped her hand in the end. She said, "You're... lying, aren't you? You followed me to the Kingdom of Wolfheart after the defeat of the God's Punishment Army. How could you say that you don't have... much faith in the church?"

Joe grabbed her by the arm and said feverishly, "I did so because I want to be with you! Screw the Supreme Pontiff! Screw the Battle of Divine Will!"

"Joe!"

"Let me finish!" Joe talked over her. He had been waiting for this opportunity to pour his heart out for too long. He had once thought he would have never had the chance to do so. Now, he simply could not let this chance slip through his fingers again. "After you were captured, I tried every possible means to come to your rescue. It had nothing to do with the future of Hermes, because I know the world wouldn't be any different without the church. All I need is you... I don't want to lose you... I need you!"

CRACK.

The quill in Kajen's hand snapped.

"You... need me?" Farrina echoed perplexedly.

"Didn't you say you couldn't return me anything? Then I'll demand something from you as a return," Joe said as he clutched Farrina under his arms. "Be with me — you must stay with me wherever you go. No matter what our fate will be, we'll face it together. This... is what I want from you as a return!"

#### Chapter 1115: An Epochal Missile Test

A week later in the valley of the Impassable Mountain Range

After the previous napalm missile test, the valley became Roland's new test site. Since there were more visitors from the northwest of the city coming to the Misty Forest than ever, it was now practically impossible to simply create a clearing in the suburb to conduct the test. Therefore, Roland had to pick a new test site that was closer to the North Slope laboratory and attracted less attention from the public.

Considering their weapons would become increasingly powerful in the future, it was only natural to relocate the test site.

This time, Roland was going to test out the anti-demon rocket-propelled grenade he had previously worked on.

With the development of the industrial technology as well as abundant research, it had only taken Roland five days to complete the test - the shortest so far in Neverwinter.

Nevertheless, the speed test was also largely attributed to the simple structure of the grenade itself.

In Roland's previous world, even the worst terrorist who barely knew anything about military weapons was able to produce a giant home-made RPG with a gas can and a hosepipe. If equipped with a pickup truck, they could transform the RPG into a self-propelled multi-gun. As the industrial system in Neverwinter steadily matured, Roland could now produce a rudimentary grenade effortlessly.

"So, I just need to aim the missile head at the target and then pull the trigger, right?" said Alethea brightly as she scooped up the launcher with her tentacle. As a former Senior Blessed Warrior, she was very interested in the new firearm, especially when this firearm was particularly designed to defend against the demons.

Except, the whole situation was a little strange and creepy as far as Roland could see.

What he saw now was a huge blob monster covered in tentacles holding an RPG, which was not a common weapon it normally used - as depicted in horror movies. More often than not, a tentacle monster like that would attack their enemy with their fatal stare, swords and shields, a powerful sucker, and special body fluids. An RPG, in this scenario, was simply a little out of place.

Roland asked the original carriers to conduct the test purely out of safety concerns. Neither the soldiers nor the God's Punishment Witches could possibly survive a close-range shot when the firearm was unintentionally discharged. Only the original carriers had the ability to transport the weapon with their tentacles to a remote, distant area and thus avoid such unfortunate accidents.

"Just make sure that you aren't pointing your tail at yourself or anyone," Roland said as he coughed. "Go ahead."

Alethea gave her main tentacle a quick tap of comprehension and pulled the trigger.

A sudden flash erupted from the muzzle and zoomed across the field toward the target 100 meters away.

The projectile gently arced in the air and hit the lower part of the target. With a deafening crash, the targeted iron case rolled over on the ground, fully intact.

Compared to the earth-shattering roar of the Longsong Cannon and the furious flames that overcast the sky produced by the napalm bomb, the performance of this weapon didn't seem very satisfactory. The explosion emitted hardly any gunfire, dust, nor particles. Within a few seconds, the wind had dispersed the faintest hint of smoke produced by the bomb.

The atmosphere became awkwardly silent.

Only Roland didn't look too disappointed at the result. On the contrary, he said smilingly, "Go retrieve it and take a look."

Soon, two God's Punishment Witches brought the iron case back.

"Well, this..."

As they approached the case and examined it carefully, they found a scorched white mark at the bottom of the case, at the center of which was a small dent that was three fingers wide.

"Did the missile penetrate it?" Pasha asked curiously. "It wasn't slow but not fast either. At least, it appears to be more powerful than a regular bullet. I don't think a revolver could do that."

"I don't think a Mark I type HMG could do that either," Alethea remarked as she drew closer. "This iron case is a replica of the stone pillar thrown by the Spider Demons. It's plastered with steel plates as thick as a man's finger, so it isn't easy to penetrate. Right, we put a tester in it earlier. Open it and see what it looks like now."

When Alethea stretched out two of her tentacles and opened the heavy lid of the case, everybody gasped in surprise.

The several chickens Roland had hung with an iron wire from the ceiling of the case to simulate the demons in the stone pillars were now nothing but a pulp, topped with a few burned, blackened chicken feathers.

"It seems to be working," Roland said while nodding in satisfaction. He was more surprised at the fact that Alethea had hit the case with one single shot than the burned chickens, for he had thought it would take at least five or six shots for a successful attempt.

Roland had foreseen that the explosion would not produce dazzling flames or earsplitting noises, because, essentially, the missile did not release considerable energy. The direct result of low reaction energy was the low velocity of the projectile.

When the amount of gunpowder remained constant then the larger the missile head was, the greater the air resistance would be; the heavier the missile head was, the slower it would travel through the air. To enhance the firing accuracy, Roland abandoned the idea of using a huge caliber weapon but confined

the caliber of the grenade to 40 millimeters, which was the same as that of the barrel. The front part of the missile was shaped as a cone in order to reduce air resistance.

Based on the firing result, the missile seemed to be quite steady when it streaked across the sky. Although it was much smaller than a Panfauster, it was large enough to pierce armor plates of ten millimeters thick. Currently, the missile was almost as powerful as the stone pillar projected by the demons.

"Do you think this weapon could defeat the Senior Demons?" Roland asked as he turned to Pasha and the other witches.

"Well... " Alethea spoke first. "It's hard to say. There are strong and weak Senior Demons, just as we have Extraordinaries and Transcendents. If our enemy is swift and fast or happens to be a Magic Slayer, then... to be honest, the chance of hitting it in its face is very slim. They can easily dodge the grenade while the grenade is traveling in the air. However — "

She broke off and continued with an abrupt rise in her voice, "This is definitely an epochal weapon, Your Majesty, because it closes the gap between demons and common people. It offers us an opportunity to outnumber our enemy. I can't praise this novel invention enough!"

"Exactly," Pasha rejoined smilingly. "It was impossible for a mortal to wound a Senior Demon in the past. If we had such a weapon in the Taquila age, Lady Natalia would be thrilled."

"And I just discovered another way to significantly improve the accuracy rate," Alethea said while swaying her main tentacle.

"Yes?" Roland said as he looked at her. "What is it?"

"To equip each individual God's Punishment Witch with this weapon," Alethea answered in exhilaration. "Only the Extraordinaries can rival the Senior Demons. If the enemy is shot in the face, then there's no way it can survive the shot, no matter how strong it is!"

"Don't worry. It's an individual weapon, and certainly everybody will have one," Roland promised with a smile. "So will the God's Punishment Witches."

The next step would be further increasing the power of the missile while maintaining its current traveling speed and overhead cost. Meanwhile, Roland had to also create a new weapon that had a large caliber to target the Spider Demons that moved much slower than the Senior Demons. Considering they would eventually invade the demons' city and the Spider Demons would very likely lurk around alleys and streets, Roland felt it necessary to develop a new type of bomb as early as possible.

While Roland was deep in thought, his guard suddenly came to deliver him a message.

"Your Majesty, Sir Sean and his rescue team have returned from the Kingdom of Wolfheart. They've just reached the dock by the inner river."

Chapter 1116: An Underground Laboratory

...



In the lord's office in the castle.

It took Sean two hours to recount his story.

Generally speaking, the plan had been successfully executed. Zoey and Betty had not only retrieved the ancient Magic Cube but also manipulated the God's Punishment Warriors into looting the entire treasury of the Archduke Island. All the treasures, including jewels and gemstones, had been dumped into a vacant cabin. Henceforth, all the remnants the Church of Hermes were uprooted. Nobody on the Archduke Island would ever have any engagement with the church.

On the other hand, Kajen Fels took his leave right after the ship disembarked and returned to his hotel with his student. It was obvious that he could not wait to work on his new play.

Both Farrina and Joe were detained, awaiting for their trial which would be presided by the Graycastle Security Bureau.

"I'll leave them to you," Roland looked away and said quietly to Nightingale.

Nightingale gave him a pinch of comprehension on the shoulder.

"So, is the legendary treasure... the Magic Ceremony Cube in this lead box?" Roland asked as he cast a look at the gray box next to Sean. Based on the traitor, Hagrid's description, the Cube was of the size of a palm and made out of a polished stone. In consideration of the lethal property of radioactive material, Roland had asked the rescue team to take full protective measures before they had set off for the journey.

"Yes, I kept it in my custody during the whole trip as you had instructed. Other than Miss Zoey and Miss Betty, nobody has touched it," Sean replied. "However, I found an unusual sign before putting it in this lead box."

"What sign?"

"Your Majesty, do you remember in my encrypted letter, I talked about the reason Lorenzo had decided to send Hagrid to the Cage Mountain to investigate the treasure?"

Roland said thoughtfully, "Because the treasure suddenly emanated blue light for the first time in the past 100 years?"

"Yes," Sean confirmed with a nod. "When Miss Zoey brought back the Magic Ceremony Cube, she said one thing that caught my attention. She said 'the blue light seems to be changing directions all the time'. So I took another look and noticed the light always pointed at me like a compass. To be honest, I was terrified at that moment and almost dropped it."

Roland felt a chill running down his spine as he listened to Sean's narrative. However, he still managed to keep a straight face and said nonchalantly, "And did you find out the reason?"

"Maybe," Sean said as he produced something from his pocket and placed it on the mahogany desk. "After I calmed down, I gave it some thought and think it's not likely that an ancient artifact would respond to a common person. It must be sensing something else. After a further examination, I discovered the light wasn't pointing at me, but this coin."

It was the exact enriched uranium coin Azima had used to look for uranium mines, which she had given back to Sean after her return to Neverwinter.

In other words, the Magic Ceremony Cube illuminated because it sensed the coin.

This sounded interesting.

Roland spoke after a moment of reflection, "I see. You did a good job. Off you go."

"Yes, Your Majesty."

After Sean retired from the room, Nightingale revealed herself from the Mist and studied the lead box up and down.

"Any luck?"

"This is a magic artifact," Nightingale said positively. "Although it looked like a crude rock, it contains power. I saw something similar to Magic Cyclone from the Mist, just like the Taquila Witches' magic core."

Roland came to realize that magic power shaped this world in a more subtle and fundamental way than he had originally thought. Unfortunately, based on the current information, he knew little about magic power except that different races viewed and used magic power differently. With insufficient analytical tools, it was hard for him to study it systematically.

However, Roland could still learn about magic power from his personal experience. Before the development of the classical mechanics theory, people used to create tools based on their own observations and daily practices. Now, since he had just observed a new phenomenon, he simply needed to do more research.

"Let's go to the Third Border City," Roland said. "I wonder if Celine has set up a laboratory for me."

Anyway, this cursed artifact should not be brought into the castle before he confirmed it was completely harmless.

...

"What brought you back?" Pasha said as she greeted Roland in the underground hall. "Anything wrong with the new weapon?"

Roland shook his head and said, "I asked Celine to dig a cave earlier. Is there any update on this matter?"

"Oh, are you talking about that secret metal chamber? Everything is pretty much good to go except the elevator. She's now in the chamber. Do you want to take a look?"

After receiving an affirmative answer from Roland, Pasha said while bending her main tentacle, "Please follow me."

When Roland had decided to dispatch the God's Punishment Witches to the Kingdom of Wolfheart a week ago, he had also instructed Celine to build a research facility — an enclosed laboratory deep down underneath the ground.

If the Magic Ceremony Cube was indeed radioactive, it would be very dangerous to conduct an experiment above the ground. Since he was still not sure whether Nana could cure injuries arising from radiation, it would be better to conduct the research underground.

As Roland followed the original carrier off to the laboratory, he told Pasha about what had happened in the Kingdom of Wolfheart.

"I see," Pasha said with a smile. "Better to leave it to Celine than someone else. She's a top researcher back in the Quest Society, and no one knows better about magic power and the repair and reconstruction of this artifact than her. After she changed her body, her skills have improved by leaps and bounds. I'm not sure about others, but I can tell you that Celine is the only person who offered to merge with the carrier before Taquila showed signs of a downfall."

"Ugh..." Nightingale commented with a disgusted look. "Do you mean she prefers to be a blob with tentacles over human?"

"If that would help her explore the world," Pasha replied while shaking her tentacle. "She complained a lot back in the Quest Society about not having enough hands to multitask and also about getting tired easily. If she could transfer her soul back then, she would probably make that choice."

After they walked for about seven minutes, they reached the end of the passage where a big cave materialized in front of them.

"This is the entrance. It'll take us a few days to install the elevator," Pasha said as she dropped down her main tentacle. "Come on."

"Um... is this the only way to get down there?" Nightingale asked hesitantly as she stared at the numerous wriggly tentacles, a look of total distrust on her face.

"This is the fastest way," Pasha said. "Don't worry. These small tentacles are pretty flexible and durable."

Roland took a deep breath and clambered up the head of the original carrier. He had thought he would have to endure a really uncomfortable ride, but actually, those tentacles were as soft as a rug.

After Nightingale also scrambled up the original carrier, Pasha entered the cave and hurtled toward the bottom.

They dropped around 100 meters before Pasha slowly came to a stop. Then, Roland saw the gleaming metal door of the laboratory stand magnificently before him.

#### Chapter 1117: The Light of the Cursed

Although Roland designed the laboratory himself, he was still quite impressed with its real version.

Thousands of Stones of Lighting illuminated the pitch-black underground space, spilling light on the surrounding rocks plastered with lead plates, which formed an enclosed area the size of a basketball court.

There was, somehow, a sort of beauty in those smooth, glinty and colorless lead plates.

It was the beauty of industrialization.

"If we lose the Battle of Divine Will, this place will become an ancient relic as well after hundreds of years, right?" Roland murmured.

And it would be a relic completely different from those of the underground civilization and the demons.

The marks on the lead plates would then become evidence that proved that the human civilization had, at one time, been prosperous.

"Probably," Pasha replied as she put Roland and Nightingale down gently. "However, I've never had such a strong feeling as I have now that we'll survive in the end."

"I believe so too," Roland said smilingly and stepped into the laboratory.

The entire room was divided into two sections, one for operation and the other observation. A concrete wall of around half a meter thick, which was also heavily protected by lead plates, separated the two chambers. Lead oxide had been added to the glass implanted at the center of the wall created by Lucia. Due to the limitation in the current technologies, the lead glass was not as transparent and bright as modern glass. However, it was sufficient for people to see through.

"Ah, you're here, Your Majesty," Celine said as she poked her main tentacle out of the door of the operation chamber, her giant body looming over them menacingly. However, the threatening atmosphere soon lightened as they saw bolts and rulers in the crook of her auxiliary tentacles. "I heard Pasha talking when I was installing a lead plate. Did Zoey bring the ancient treasure back?"

"It's right in this box," Roland answered as he placed the lead box on her main tentacle. He then entered the operation chamber and examined it carefully.

"What do you think? This is designed and built solely according to your instructions," Celine said while raising her tentacles. "But is it really necessary? If the curse is a sort of light, wouldn't a regular wall be sufficient to block it out?"

"Just in case. If my theory is correct, the light won't be detected by naked eyes and can be highly penetrative. Regular walls do block it, but they have to be several meters thick," Roland replied as he turned to the two ancient witches. "So, you can never judge things based on your instincts. Even though the original carriers are very resistant to various perils, before we obtain a thorough understanding of the Magic Cube, we have to follow our procedures."

Since radiation would break down DNA structures and thus hinder the replication process of DNAs, it would cause great damage to organs with a fast metabolism. Organs such as heart and brain were more resistant to radiation than the others. Judging from the incredibly long lifespan of the original carriers who could normally live for hundreds of years, Roland believed that they were also somewhat immune to radiation. That was also the reason why Roland had asked Celine to conduct the test.

Celine broke into a laugh and said, "You remind me of the president of the Quest Society. Don't worry. One of the principles of the Quest Society is to follow rules. I'll be cautious."

Roland returned a nod, "So let's begin."

Celine thus shut herself in the operation chamber.

The first step according to the operation manual was to keep all the doors of the laboratory closed during the experiment. Everybody should recede to the observation room except the operator.

Through the lead glass, Roland saw Celine open the box and take out of the Magic Cube.

Like Sean had said, a jet of pale blue light escaped from the crack of the stone and pointed at the coin on the work station.

"Interesting," Celine mumbled while studying it attentively. "This isn't activated, right?"

Since the wall blocked the transmission of sounds, Roland replied with his mind, "According to Sean, the Earl of the Archduke Island touched it after it emanated the blue light, so I think it functions as an indicator."

"I see," Celine said while snatching up the Magic Cube and wrapping it with her tentacles.

"What's she doing?" Nightingale asked.

"Feeling," explained Pasha. "Our tentacles are much more sensitive than men's fingers. They can touch, smell, and remember every single dent and bump on the surface of an object. A genius like Celine can even form a picture of the outline and details of the object by touching it. Unfortunately, this part of the information is conveyed via the carrier's mind only. Human brains can't process it."

"Can you see what she has sensed?" Roland asked in surprise.

"If she's willing to share," Pasha said as she stretched out one of her tentacles and tapped the glass.

"Now I see the Magic Cube right in front of me."

This was such a convenient ability. Like a psychological network, it not only enabled the original carriers to share their thoughts but also 3D visions.

"The length and the width of the Magic Ceremony Cube are almost the same. They are both 15 centimeters. The cube is hollow, and there are cracks. I can tell that it isn't a whole piece," Celine suddenly spoke.

"What do you mean?"

"The Cube seems to consist of several stones. Hold on... I probably have just found the key to opening it."

At these words, all the tentacles relinquished their grip on the Cube, and Roland saw a small opening at the back of the Cube, as though this was the entrance to a treasury well hidden for years.

"Wow, impressive," Roland remarked in amazement. "That was fast."

Over the past hundred years since the Magic Ceremony Cube had been smuggled out of the temple, none of its previous owners, despite extensive research, had discovered that this was actually not made out of a single stone.

"I told you Celine is the best person to consult," Pasha said with a smile. "She pieced together the entire magic core of the underground civilization."

"Your Majesty, I have a question," Celine put in as she poked her tentacle into the opening. "Why does it only respond to this coin? You say the Magic Cube has been unresponsive for years. I thought probably it had exhausted its power, just like a magic stone or a sigil. However, after I check it, I find, as you may also notice, that there's still some magic power in it. So, is it possible that what this thing lacks... is the element used to create what you call 'the Glory of the Sun'?"

"I think so too," Roland replied while curling his lips. "You can try to insert the coin, but it may activate the Magic Cube, so you must take some protective measures."

"Got it," said Celine as she moved to the other side of the work station behind a plate. The plate was a round lead shield with four little holes in the middle, which allowed her auxiliary tentacles to pass through. Celine put the coin into the Magic Cube, and the opening immediately closed itself. Meanwhile, the light at the top of the Cube instantly turned dark red.

He was right!

Roland and Nightingale exchanged a look. Both of them were excited.

Celine continued to study the Cube for a while when suddenly, a flash of red light erupted from the other side of the Cube and fell straight onto the wall, adding a reddish hue to the dull, colorless laboratory.

Chapter 1118: Experiment Records

"Recording"

On the 12th, Day 1 of the experiment.

According to His Majesty's instructions, I conducted a dangerous experiment.

I put 30 roosters on the work station, one of which was placed under the direct radiation of the red light.

The roosters were subject to the radiation for five minutes.

The rooster subject that took direct radiation reacted violently. It threw itself against the cage fiercely, whereas the others did not show any visible response.

I smelled a whiff of burned flesh in the laboratory.

After the experiment, I found that the feathers that came off the subject rooster were slightly burned. As the burn was fairly minor, I judged the cause of the feather loss to be from the struggle and not the radiation.

As for the subject rooster itself, it seemed normal except for being a little crestfallen.

"From my point of view, a torch is even more lethal than the radiation."

Recorder: Celine.

...

The 13th, Day 2 of the experiment.

Something happened.

The subject rooster started to have symptoms of diarrhea and also began to wail as if it was infected by the demonic plague.

The other roosters acted normal.

His Majesty looked grave and sober (delete this sentence in the official report).

No new experiment today.

...

The 14th, Day 3 of the experiment.

The subject rooster died.

The autopsy showed that there was fluid accumulation and internal bleeding in the rooster's body. Signs of decomposition had also been found in its hypodermis, which would normally take place one day after an animal has died.

In other words, the red light killed the rooster's skin when it was still alive.

Things are becoming a little interesting now.

Considering what had happened in the Temple of the Cursed and Thorn Town as well as the drawings on the murals, the findings did explain some things.

The cursed ones seemed to be enduring excruciating pain, although they looked fine physically, until every inch of their skins peeled off and festered. It must be awful to watch yourself die little by little and be unable to do anything to stop it.

I take back my previous remark. The radiation was more lethal than a torch, and it killed in a more subtle and sinister way.

However, His Majesty had his own opinion on this matter.

He believed the red light had a detrimental effect on the self-renewal process of living beings.

Our body was constantly growing and dying on a microscopic level to make sure these two process were balanced. The termination of cell growth would immediately result in massive acute necrosis of skins and organs. That was probably what the curse really was.

I agreed with him given that no other evidence proved otherwise (please delete the following paragraph in the official report).

Microscopes are fascinating.

The materials collected from the Dream World also corroborated my research findings and showed that living beings were made of numerous tiny growing cells.

The reason that the light could penetrate a body was that our cells are not tightly packed in our body but instead in a loose formation.

I feel like I have entered a new realm.

It is a pity that I can't visit the Dream World.

I have learned that it would normally take nine years to complete the "high school" curriculum and have a thorough understanding of the human body.

So it will probably be a little hard for Phyllis, Elena, and the other witches to learn all the courses in such a short period of time.

...

The 16th, Day 5 of the experiment.

All the roosters, both alive and dead, were buried deep underground.

The laboratory was thoroughly cleansed.

I continued with the experiment the following day.

This time, I used three cows as my research subject. The purpose of the research was to see whether the Magic Ceremony Cube could be used as a weapon and how well the cows could hold up when exposed to the red light.

...

The 20th, Day 9 of the experiment.

The result was frustrating.

The three cows were each exposed to the red light for 10, 15, and 30 minutes respectively.

However, even the cow with the highest exposure lived for four days.

Whether this red light would cause harm to the demons remains unknown, but one thing was certain: the demons would never stand transfixed to one spot waiting for the light. Even if the "curse" did affect the demons, the demons would only be exposed to the red light for a fraction of a second on the battlefield.

The murals in the temple, which depicted that the Magic Ceremony Cube had defeated giant monsters, were indeed exaggerating.

Or another possibility is that... those monsters were particularly vulnerable to the "curse".

...

The 21st, Day 10 of the experiment.



Testing the radiation range.

King Roland agreed to conduct the experiment outdoors after I assured him that the radiation would not travel to the surrounding areas.

The test site was still in the valley at the base of the Impassable Mountain Range.

The outcome was very disappointing.

The red light could not travel more than 100 meters, and basically anything could more or less block it.

For some metals, the red light could not penetrate them at all.

For example, a stack of ten gold royals.

Even water could somewhat block it.

I thus concluded that the light could not be used as a weapon.

...

The 26th, Day 15 of the experiment.

Since Nana has returned from the front, we conducted a healing test.

The damage caused by the radiation was curable, but not completely.

For instance, Nana could not repair the damaged skin or heal the contaminated organs of the subject cows. Their conditions would continue to deteriorate, and the parts that had been healed would be contaminated again later.

However, if we implanted a healed organ to another healthy cow, the health of the subject cow's organ would cease to decline.

In other words, the "curse" could potentially be removed provided that we reconstruct the infected body.

However, such a task was beyond Nana's ability.

To do so, we had to utilize Spear Passi's channeling ability, so we had to set this idea aside for the time being.

I put it as "incurable" for now just in case.

By the way, the first cow died 10 days after being exposed to the red light.

...

The 28th, Day 17 of the experiment.

The Magic Ceremony Cube emanated the blue light again.

The coin was gone.

Fortunately, His Majesty had another coin that was exactly the same as the previous one.

However, as this was the source material to produce "the Glory of the Sun" and it was extremely hard to collect, I felt I was wasting the most precious resource in the world.

Furthermore, the Magic Cube had exhausted its magic power, but, like a Sigil, it could be recharged.

Considering the test was resource-consuming, I did not think it a good idea to continue with the experiment.

I hope that we can dismantle it after we finished the resistance test.

...

Roland closed the "Official Research Journal" and heaved a sigh.

"You're reading it again," Nightingale said while snacking on dried fish on a recliner. "Isn't it obvious? The ancient treasure is merely an instrument to torture captives. It doesn't possess any incredible powers whatsoever."

As the murals had suggested, the only reason for this invention was to torture enemies.

The mechanism of this Cube was probably very similar to that of ionizing radiation. Its source material was the uranium coin. Although what activated the Cube remained a mystery, the result was pretty much the same as only the Magic Ceremony Cube could direct energetic particles to a certain spot.

Roland suspected that the red light was just an indicator, similar to a laser beam, rather than the actual radioactive ray. It was highly unlikely that human beings could detect neutron beams or high energy electrons with the naked eye.

Now, he unveiled the truth pertaining to the Temple of the Cursed and the mysterious death of the Thorn Town residents.

A civilization who had heavily relied on radioactive elements had created the Cube with magic power. The device could release energetic particles after being activated by enriched radioactive materials. As to why the beam could only travel 100 meters, it might have something do with magic power.

Roland was a little discouraged by this conclusion.

He expected to find something more extraordinary than this since the nature of this device concerned knowledge of advanced physics. Perhaps, the original owner of this treasure had never taken it seriously, but simply used it as another instrument of torture just as they used a whip and a guillotine.

This was probably the difference between civilizations.

Just then, Sean came in and reported to him, "Your Majesty, the Taquila witches sent in another experiment report."

"Give it to me."

According to the schedule, this was the last test.

They subjected different animals to the radiation for the same amount of time to determine the relationship between the body type of the animal and its radiation tolerance.

After that, they would terminate all the tests with respect to the Magic Cube.

Since uranium was a rare element, he should make the best use of it.

Roland opened the journal that was handed to him by Sean and took a sip of the tea.

It was in Celine's handwriting again.

The 30th, Day 19 of the experiment.

The experiment was finally drawing to its end.

The result indicated that the larger the animal was, the higher tolerance it had to the red light. However, at this point, I was not able to develop a specific formula to address this relationship. It might take some time for me to do so.

Also, I had experienced a little hiccup during the experiment.

The incident was actually kind of amusing. I planned to use the remnant of the materials to see if it was fatal, so I directed the beam at a fish tank.

Five minutes later, I noticed wisps of steam that escaped from the surface of the water, although the fish were still alive.

That meant that the light was not even as deadly as boiling water. If I had continued with the experiment, the water would have been boiled and the fish cooked.

Perhaps we could use it to make soup?

"Haha!" Roland choked in his mug.

"What's so funny?" Nightingale asked in surprise.

"I almost forgot about that..." Roland mumbled. He had been too focused on the potential military application of the red light to realize that it was also a form of energy. Any form of energy could heat up water.

The history of the human civilization was, essentially, a process where men continuously developed different methods to boil water.

Chapter 1119: A Real Researcher

Roland called the Third Border City and demanded immediately, "Ask Celine not to dismantle the Magic Ceremony Cube! I need to see her now!"

"Yes... Yes, Your Majesty!" The telephone operator on the other end of the line apparently had no idea what had happened, but still, he obeyed the order instantly.

"Take me to the Border City," Roland said as he turned to Nightingale. "As fast as possible."

"No problem," Nightingale replied with a smile and grasped his hand. "This may make you feel dizzy."

Within a second, they had stepped into the Mist.

Five minutes later.

"Ugh... finally." For a moment, Roland was at a loss as he emerged in the underground hall, with his hand clapping over his mouth. Nightingale had indeed improved a lot compared to when he had first met her. She glided through waves effortlessly and gracefully in the black and white world. However, to Roland, the trip was not nearly as comfortable as sitting in a roller coaster. He saw a blurred stream of objects streaking past him, his inside churning, and the whole world had dissolved in a grayish whirl.

Nightingale patted him on the back with an understanding smile.

"What's the matter, Your Majesty?" Celine asked as she slowly descended from the ceiling of the cave with a bunch of tools on her tentacles. "You were looking for me?"

Roland breathed out a sigh of relief after he saw the latter carrying a hammer, a saw and a file. He said, "Well, it seems I'm just in time."

He also spied a trident and an ax, failing to understand why Celine would need them. Did she actually plan to grind the Cube?

"Where's the ancient artifact?"

"Still in the underground laboratory."

Roland took a deep breath and asked, "Are you able to replicate it?"

Mildly taken aback, Celine asked, "Are you sure you want to replicate it? Isn't it just a useless piece of junk?"

"Probably not completely useless." He then explained his idea to Celine, "The biggest drawback of steam power is fuels. If we could replace it with the Magic Cube, it may bring about a second industrial revolution."

The ultimate goal of industrial development was to search for an efficient and powerful resource. A powerful resource would potentially change the nature of everything, including their manufacturing process, the way they generated electric power, as well as facilities.

Nevertheless, this was not going to be an easy step to take. It was not a simple task of just switching a traditional boiler to the Magic Cube. The change in the heating method would subsequently change the thermal system, the control system and the related repair and maintenance. They might experience numerous failures before succeeding in this undertaking. However, it was, at least, worth trying.

"Heating up water... I see," Celine said thoughtfully. "But... it's very hard to replicate it without exploring its internal structure. It's a magic device after all, and you don't allow me to dismantle it."

"Ahem, what I'm saying is that you don't tear it down like it's a piece of junk," Roland said on a cough. "I want you to dismantle it in a careful, methodological manner for replication purposes."

"Is there a rough dismantling procedure as well?" Celine asked in astonishment. Then she said in a pretty aggrieved tone, "You would get punished if you mishandled a relic back in the Quest Society."

From the time I joined the Society to the fall of Taquila, I had never been punished. Lady Natalia spoke highly of me, saying that I have deft fingers. If I was so careless, there would have probably been no core instruments left in the hall now."

As Celine boasted in the guise of a defence, Roland cast her a skeptical look and asked, "Did you use these tools to disassemble relics back then?"

"These?" Celine said in surprise. "How could that be possible? Didn't you just equip us with the new weapons? So these swords and axes are now useless. Rather than storing them away in the warehouse, it would be better to melt them down and use them to make something else. I still need some bookcases in my storage room. By the way, why do you think they're research tools?"

Nightingale turned away while clapping her hand over her mouth, shaking with suppressed giggles.

A little embarrassed, Roland replied, "No, I just fear that you'll get overexcited when it comes to magic power..."

"You must have heard it from Pasha," Celine said as she mopped her giant blob with her main tentacle. "She doesn't know the difference between a craze and a hobby... A real researcher must always have a clear mind to accurately control his behavior. It's normal for a researcher to work day and night or mumble while reading a book — "

Roland interrupted Celine just in time to stop her from rambing on. "Well, speaking of the Magic Ceremony Cube, are you sure you can replicate it once you know its structure?"

Celine replied, instantly back to normal, "That depends on how complicated this Magic Cube is. I can't guarantee you now, but there's a big possibility, because one good thing about this Cube is that it doesn't require magic power to operate it. This means the biggest difficulty in the replication is gone."

"The hardest part is the replication of magic power!" Roland uttered an exclamation of comprehension.

"Exactly," Celine said while bending her main tentacle. "Due to physical and psychological differences, human beings, demons and the underground civilization use magic power in very different ways. For example, we probably could never gain multiple abilities by inserting Magic Stones in our bodies like the demons. Likewise, if I didn't convert to an original carrier, I would have never been able to repair the magic core."

"The fact that the Cube doesn't require magic power means we don't need to know what kind of Magic Cyclone that disappeared civilization once had and used. To be honest, we could never figure that out without relevant documentation. However, we now just need to replicate the object to achieve the same magical effect. Of course, this would still be hard in the Taquila age, but it's a lot easier now with the magic core which I can adjust anytime."

Celine paused for a second and then went on, "However, we still have another problem."

"What is it?"

"Material," she answered. "I've been doing research on the Magic Cube. Although it looks like an ordinary stone, it isn't made of stones. I don't know what it's exactly made of, probably of the bones of that civilization or some other solid materials. Anyway, I need a lot of samples... Yet you said earlier that

the Temple of the Cursed was looted years ago. It was pure luck that we found this Cube. So, I don't know if the replicate made of a substitute material would work the same way as the original one."

"Materials..." Roland said meditatively. "Perhaps I know a place where you can find similar materials."

That area should have changed a lot by now. Roland gazed in the southern direction. If the murals in the temple were telling a real story, perhaps he could find something there.

Chapter 1120: A Cape City

"Here comes the ship, chaps! Get going!" Simbady hollered while wringing his fist in the air.

"Yup!" The Fishbone clansmen all swarmed toward the dock and commenced working. Some of them went to fix cables while some build springboards. Although everything seemed to be a chaos at the first glance, everybody knew what they were doing. These clansmen were as good as experienced sailors. It was unimaginable that just a year and a half ago, they had never been to the sea, let alone working on a ship.

The ship was quickly unloaded.

"Simbady, they say we can load the ship now!"

"Red or black, and how many for each, do you know?"

"Rest assured. I wrote it all down on the back of my hand!"

"Great! Let's begin!"

The word "black" was the term they used specifically to describe the black water of the Styx River, which was the only product produced at the Endless Cape. Nonetheless, as the mine gradually expanded, Sand Nationals found two more underground streams bearing two different colors: deep red and dark green. They were both combustible, only their properties and scents were quite different. To avoid confusion, they called the black water "black", and soon northerners adopted this name as well.

This was the fourth time that Simbady came to work at the Festive Harbor.

The first time he had stepped on this deserted land, he had simply wanted to survive the first three months and then stay as far away from this place as possible. However, much to his surprise, a city was gradually formed at the far south of the desert. If the revival of oases was a miracle, then the development of the Festive Harbor was a divine bliss.

The reason the Endless Cape had always been a settlement to exile prisoners was that there had literally been nothing except perils and dangers. Even the most experienced hunter would not be able to survive on this land. Sand Nationals believed only Three Gods could build a town with hundreds of thousands of residents out of this bleak emptiness.

Simbady had thought the chief would eventually abandon his ridiculous idea after several fruitless attempts. He had not expected, however, that it was Sand Nationals themselves, who had been living in the desert for hundreds of years, were the ignorant ones.

There was something at the Endless Cape.

They had just never noticed it.

The first problem they had solved was water.

That official from the northern kingdom named Konkrete first took them to a large pond surrounded by numerous sheds covered with black films. They did not find anything unusual about it at first, but after the Months of Demons, they soon noticed white salt had come out of the seawater. Water vapor condensed into liquid on the films, trickled down a slope into a groove, and finally into a water storage tank. Water was collected in a much faster manner when heat went up. Although they could not produce much drinking water with one pond, they could collect a lot with several hundred.

As the number of such ponds increased, they now not only had sufficient water for daily use but also excess for the ships from Neverwinter. This technology completely broke Sand Nation's stereotype that there was no water in the desert.

The second was accommodation.

Apart from water, they also had to shelter themselves from the scorching sun in summer. Tents were obviously not a long-term solution.

It was rumored that all the building materials shipped to the Iron Sand City were from the Southernmost Region when it had yet to be a desert. That was why there was only one city at the Silver Stream, although there were many oases.

Northerners taught them to use local materials to build houses.

They built numberless furnaces, fueled them with the Blackwater, filled them with dirt at the bottom of the sea, and then mixed them with sifted fine sand to make bricks. Since there was an inexhaustible supply of dirt and sand, soon brick houses rose at the Festive Harbor, with double-bricked external walls and ceilings. Although the houses were not shaded by trees like those on the oases, they were, at least, proper dwellings.

The last was food.

The elder of the Osha Clan Thuram instructed them to spread dozens of fishing nets at the beach, which would totally submerge in tidal waves when the seawater rose. Once tides ebbed away, many strange creatures would cling to the nets, such as crabs, sea snakes and sea urchins. At first, Simbady was too afraid to try these gruesome food. However, under the threat of a whipping punishment, he forced himself to eat.

They were actually pretty good.

Although Sand Nationals still relied on Neverwinter for staples, they ate much better than a year and a half ago.

With a place to live and food to eat, Simbady gradually changed his mind. After the three months was over, he made a choice that even astonished himself — he chose to stay at the Festive Harbor.

First of all, the pay was much higher than in the Port of Clearwater.

Also, there was another reason.

...

After the last ship was loaded, everybody packed up, ready to go home.

"Simbady, good job, man!"

"See you tomorrow, Big Sim!"

"I'm going to the marketplace later. Do you want to tag along?"

Since he had worked here for several times, Simbady had naturally become the superintendent for the Fishbone Clan and the first person Thuram would go to when there was a new task. He was flattered by how much trust people placed in him. Back at the Silver Stream Oasis, he used to be one of the most insignificant members of the clan. Few people would voluntarily talk to him, let alone seeking his instructions. But now, not only young men treated him as a leader but girls started to ask him out as well. Simbady felt grateful to the chief. His heart swelled with pride.

However, Simbady turned down these girls' offers.

Because he already had someone he wanted to ask out.

"Hey, wait for me, Simbady!"

When he was about to leave the dock to look for Mulley, he heard a familiar voice.

Simbady could not help curling up his lips. He turned around but his smile suddenly froze on his face.

It was Mulley, a girl with a black pony tail, who had always been so kind and generous to him.

After Carlone left the advance unit, Mulley stayed, which was another reason Simbady chose to live here. Simbady had thought with Carlone leaving the desert, he would have a chance to win Mulley's heart, but he had not expected Mulley would bring another man here.

And that man was not from the Mojin Clan!

"Mulley, you... and him..." Simbady stammered.

"Ah!" It seemed Mulley had just noticed that she was grasping the other man's hand. She immediately disengaged herself and said with an uncomfortable smile, "I wanted you to meet him, so I brought him here."

"Oh... r-really?"

"Agh, this lady is so strong," the man said, panting. "I couldn't stop her. She just dragged me here... Now I see how strong the Mojin Clan is." With these words, he studied Simbady up and down and said, "Let me introduce myself... I'm Rex, from the Fjords across the channel."

"I know you're from the Fjords," Simbady said, stepping between them, eyes full of alert. "I don't have any relics you want. You can leave now!"



In the past three months, the arrival of Fjords people shattered the peaceful life at the booming Festive Harbor. A large number of Fjords ships sailed to the Endless Cape, creating unprecedented trouble.

Those islanders who claimed to be explorers dug holes everywhere and purchased weird products from the advance troop, making the entire Festive Harbor boisterous and chaotic. Their sudden arrival did attract many Mojins to buy things they liked from their marketplace instead of from the Port of Clearwater, but these foreigners created more problems than convenience.

For example, one explorer had fallen into the underground river when he had tried to explore it. In the end, the advance troop had had to rescue him.

Another explorer had purchased tons of strange stones and metal wares from a Sand National with false money, which had almost caused a physical altercation between the two parties.

The worst one was that some of them had tried to steal the lifeline of the Festive Harbor — the special films on the sheds used for the water tanks. They finally had had to send for the First Army to settle the matter. The wrongdoers had later been escorted to Neverwinter and sentenced to lifetime heavy labor at the mine.

The avalanche of trouble made Simbady very suspicious of every single Fjord citizen.

"I'm not planning to buy anything. Compared to some shady businesses, I prefer to work my way up," Rex said while rubbing his hands excitedly. "This is a good opportunity to improve the reputation of the Society of Wondrous Crafts."