

Witch 1141

Chapter 1141: Trust and Misunderstanding

"Hey, just about the right time. I want to discuss something with you." Garcia's voice came from the other end of the line before Roland spoke.

"Um... what do you want to talk about?"

"I would rather talk to you in person. Come to my room. You just got up, didn't you?"

Garcia demanded condescendingly over the phone, as though sleeping in was a capital offence for martialists.

"Well... alright then," Roland said thoughtfully, quickly making up his mind to first see what she would say. If Garcia happened to be in a bad mood, he could always call on her another day.

After hanging up the telephone, Roland asked the three witches to wait for him at the living room before he strode off to Room 0827.

"The door is open. Come in," Garcia said gruffly as she heard Roland's footsteps.

Roland entered and found Garcia in her summer dress, standing in front of her fridge with two glasses in her hands. Her gray hair streamed down to her shoulders, tiny beads of sweat on the tip of her nose. She was wearing a flip-flop patterned with cartoon characters. Instead of a self-disciplined martialist, she looked more like a common college student enjoying the summer. Garcia asked, "Any drinks? Water, tea or coke? They're all iced."

Garcia was actually just two to three years older than him. Had Roland not posed himself as a wretched landlord who used to be a dropout and sacked bartender, he would have been still in school.

"Coke," Roland replied distractedly. "Did you just come back from your morning training?"

"Unlike you, I don't have unlimited leisure time."

Roland did not know how to retort. They had been more open to each other lately. However, Garcia seemed to have developed a nasty habit of constant criticism, and what was worse, she appeared to be quite enjoying it. It was a miracle that she was still alive, fully intact.

Yet Roland could tell, after knowing her for such a long time, that she was in good humor. Indeed, she was quite delighted.

Was it because of the matter she was going to share?

"Here, iced green tea," Garcia said as she put down a drink in front of him.

"I said coke..." Roland protested mildly, his brows raised.

"You didn't do your morning exercise, so it would be better to reduce your sugar intake," Garcia answered seriously to stifle her smile. "The evolution of the Force of Nature has nothing to do with one's body type. A skinny person could also have great power, which means your power won't help you

tone your body. If you plan to take part in a martialist contest, you'd better make sure you work out regularly. A fit martialist is always going to be more popular than an overweight one."

"Then why did you bother offering me choices," Roland snapped within himself while rolling his eyes. He said grumpily, "So what? Did you ask me to come here just to educate me on fitness? I've told you that I have the slightest interest in becoming a top martialist or participating in some sort of contest. I don't need fame to hunt down the evil and protect the world. I would rather be what I am now, a nameless, unknown martialist who fights anonymously for the mankind."

If he did become a public figure, how could he continue to search for the Fallen Evils?

"Incredible..." Garcia muttered, her eyes fixed upon Roland as she continued slowly, "I thought you would never say something like that. My master once told me that you should never believe what a person says but what he does. If I didn't see what you've done, I would have thought you were just a hypocritic who lies unblushingly. But as much as I hate to admit it, you're... honest."

Roland knew what Garcia was referring to.

After he successfully killed his first Fallen Evil, he and the Taquila witches started to work together to exterminate other Fallen Evils in the city.

Faldi searched the city in daytime, and he and the combat witches went to kill at night. Apart from obtaining mutated Forces of Nature, they would also get a lot of extra income often. To avoid uninvited attention, Roland would only take some cash or unidentifiable personal articles. Sometimes, he would donate some Forces of Nature to the Martialist Association as well.

The Martialist Association monitored all the Fallen Evils in the city. If they discovered a large number of Fallen Evils mysteriously died and their Forces of Nature disappeared, they would very likely become suspicious. As such, Roland had to voluntarily report some of the incidents every now and then to keep his identity and his miraculous work secret.

Meanwhile, Roland was also proactively defending against erosions. According to Garcia, he was currently the most active new member in the association, and he had even killed more Fallen Evils than some official members. The Fallen Evils, on the other hand, had also realized that they had a powerful enemy and were now strenuously tracking him down.

In other words, Roland had made quite a buzz among the executives of the Prism City and the Fallen Evils. Nevertheless, he was still a nobody among fellow martialists and the public. Garcia knew all that Roland had done simply because Roland needed to contact her to hand in Forces of Nature.

"Hmph... that's my duty," Roland said while clearing his throat. "Isn't it the responsibility of a martialist?"

"Yes," Garcia, to Roland's surprise, smiled, "this is the responsibility of an martialist." She handed him a piece of paper and said, "Congratulations, you're now an official member of the Martialist Association. This is your contract that has just arrived. Effective upon execution."

"I remember you only need to solve one erosion to become an official member, and I've already solved eight or ten now. That's really slow of the Prism City administration."

"Because... the Martialist Association is an interational organization."

"So I'm an official member just as you are now?"

"No," Garcia said while shaking her head and passed a brochure across the table. "Actually, you've outperformed me."

Roland opened the brochure curiously and was mildly surprised. "This is — "

"The hunting license," Garcia replied slowly, her smile fading away. "Only outstanding and dedicated martialists would be granted the license. There are no more than ten licensed martialists in this city, and the Prism City has issued no more than 100 licenses. Your rights as a licensed martialist and the matters that you need to pay particular attention to are all listed at the end of the booklet. Remember, the license not only represents the trust the Association puts in you but also a greater responsibility. I hope you could carry on and help the mankind gain the eventual victory."

"So this is what she's glad about..."

Normally, people would feel upset, jealous and frustrated when being outstripped by a new member recruited by themselves. However, Roland did not see any of these negative emotions in Garcia. She was truly happy for him, as though she was also honored.

This made Roland a little unsettled.

He knew that Garcia spoke most highly of him at the moment. Because of her high expectation, Roland now felt a surge of heavy guilt. He knew that despite her haughtiness, Garcia was a person of morality and principles. The best example was how she had helped the residents in the modular apartment stand up to the evacuation threat of the Clover Group. Thinking of the potential misunderstanding that might stand between them in the future, Roland was very troubled.

"By the way, why did you call me?" Garcia asked while sipping her tea lazily. "I've done my part. I don't think you anticipated all that, did you?"

"Er... I need your help with something." Roland had no choice but said, "Can you come to my room?"

Garcia cast him a suspicious look and said, "Sure, but is it not something that you can say here?"

"You'll know when you come over."

"OK."

Roland took a deep breath and led her to Room 0825.

As soon as they stepped into the living room, the three witches turned around, their eyes sparkling with excitement.

Then Roland felt a chill running down his spine.

"You... you finally did this!" Garcia gasped, standing rooted to the spot. "My goodness... they're still kids. I, I'm going to call the police!"

Chapter 1142: Different Roads Lead to the Same Castle

Roland was surprised that Garcia's first instinct was to call the police rather than report to the Martialist Association. Although the Martialist Association was a separate organization that was independent from judicial institutions, they required their members to adhere to a strict moral code and therefore, punishments to a corrupted martialist would be more severe than that imposed by law. It seemed that Garcia was particularly lenient with him.

Roland twitched his lips and felt an urgent need to clarify this matter. He had not done anything wrong, so neither the police nor the Association should be involved.

Anyway, he had to first calm Garcia down.

"Call the police?" Roland echoed in a falsely surprised tone. "Why?"

"You ask me?" Garcia said exasperatedly. "What did I tell you the other day? An awakened man could easily lose his head over his power! That's why a martialist should discipline his mind and control his emotions. I don't want to interfere with your private life, and I don't care how many girls you take home as long as they aren't underage. But these girls... they're still minors! Lust is the first sign of corruption. Do you still not understand?"

So Garcia was more furious about him living a life of debauchery than about taking three young girls home?

"I know, but why would I bring you here if I'm truly corrupted like you said?" Roland said on a sigh.

"Don't you think that it doesn't make sense at all?"

"Er..."

"In fact, whether this is true or not, taking three girls home would inevitably outrage the public. A wise man should make it as secret as possible. However, I invited you here. Don't you think that is a little strange?"

Garcia blinked blankly, slowly putting the phone down, and asked, "Then why?"

Roland heaved a sigh of relief and replied with utmost sincerity, "This is what I'm going to tell you. Miss Garcia... I need your help."

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Half an hour later.

"So, you don't have any inappropriate relationships with these girls, but instead, you're their... part-time tutor?" Garcia demanded while squinting at Roland.

"Exactly," Roland said truthfully. "They're all college students living nearby. I have to teach them as well as Zero, and it takes too much of my time. People will get suspicious if I keep them here for too long. Normally, girls of their age should have been in school, so I have to constantly bring in new students."

Roland had been always cautious about taking in the God's Punishment Witches. No more than three or four witches were allowed to visit him in Room 0825 at a time so that the neighbors would not be alarmed.

"So they're the 'relatives' whom you needed to take care of during our first meeting?"

"Oi Oi, this is something I said more than half a year ago. Why do you keep reminding me of that?" Roland wondered reproachfully. He then said, "They aren't my real relatives, but we're from the same town," Roland lied unblushingly. "Dawnen, Saint Miran, and Dido used to live in the same village as me. They were still little kids when I left my town."

This explanation would sound obviously flawed in his original world but was actually quite reasonable in here since the Dream World had Zero's memories.

"Then why didn't their names show up on the registry?"

Roland paused just at the right moment and said, "Because of... their gender."

"I see," Garcia mumbled and fell into silence. When her eyes rested on the three witches again, her demeanor softened. Garcia asked, "Are there many people... like them?"

"Quite a few although things have gotten a little better in past decade," Roland said quickly as he realized that his plan was going better than expected. "People in my village are aware that I joined the Martialist Association. They probably didn't want to stay there for the rest of their lives, so they came to look for me."

"Your... Roland is telling the truth!"

"Please let us stay!"

"I want to go to school."

The three witches pleaded.

Garcia turned away and looked like she was hesitating.

"Neither tutoring nor learning by themselves would solve the fundamental problem. I want them to live a normal life like everyone else. I think you're the only person who could help us," Roland said slowly. Even if Garcia could not help him, the Clover Group must have some power to smuggle them in.

Garcia was apparently thinking the same thing. After what seemed to be a long internal struggle, she sighed deeply, and said, "I'm sorry but I can't help you."

Upon seeing every sign of an interruption from Roland, Garcia explained immediately, "I severed my relationship with my family. Plus, the Clover Group has yet to abandon their plan to demolish this apartment. If I go see him, he would use it as a leverage. I would betray the trust those protesters have put in me."

Roland fell silent when he saw Garcia's clenched fists. He felt guilty to see Garcia be sorry for not being able to help the girls. Roland said, "I understand."

"But you can talk to him yourself," Garcia said and looked up at him. "My father will be holding a party for the outstanding martialists in the city center hotel tomorrow evening. He knows I would not go but he still sent me an invitation. By doing so, he at least shows to the media that he's trying to mend our relationship," Garcia said while smiling bitterly. "Although he didn't invite you directly, you can go there on behalf of me. Just give the party organizer a call and they'll let you in with my invitation card. A proxy could mean an acceptance or a declination. If I choose you as my proxy, he'll know that I declined his offer."

Roland instantly knew what Garcia meant. If Garcia asked her master Lan to represent her then that would be an acceptance.

"Talk to him in person..." Roland mumbled while stroking his chin.

"Are you scared?"

"Regardless, I have to go. I'm so close," Roland answered. As the King of Graycastle, he had attended numerous parties and gained a large amount of experience in dealing with distinguished figures. "I'm just worried he won't help us. He'll probably feel very affronted that you've rejected him."

"Don't worry. My father isn't an unreasonable person. He cares more about business gains than personal loss," Garcia said while smiling. "And you aren't any ordinary martialist. Even Prism City has noticed you. You should give yourself more credit."

Roland dimly understood what Garcia was referring to and said, "I'll do my best."

"To tell you the truth, I'm very glad for you," Garcia said as she rose to her feet and extended her hand to Roland. "You're on the right track. Sorry that I misunderstood you. I'm very proud to have such an excellent martialist like you as my companion." Garcia paused for a second and then went on, "Also, you can just let me know if you need help in the future, and don't call me Miss Garcia anymore. It doesn't suit you."

Roland slowly reached out his hand and shook hers.

Although Roland lied to Garcia, his goal was still to win the Battle of Divine Will, learn the truth of this world, and liberate humanity from the fate of endless war.

This was the path he had chosen.

Chapter 1143: The Difference between Martialists

As one night in the Dream World was equal to two days in the real world, Roland took the three witches to Crown Hotel the next day evening.

"Your Majesty, is it true that we can eat whatever we want there?" Dawnen asked as she poked her head out of the rear window of his car, her eyes sparkling.

"Of course. It's not that different from the party held by nobles. You should have attended many such parties back in the Union age, right?"

"But you couldn't eat whatever you want at those parties."

"Really?" Roland asked with curiosity.

"Yes," Saint Miran, who was sitting in the passenger seat, supplied the answer with a nod. "Those parties were for prominent figures. They cared more about networking than the feast. Nobody wanted to talk to a person wolfing down food like a savage. You'd become a laughingstock if you did so. If it was a big party, most people would eat something first before going." She swallowed hard and then said, "If Your Majesty fears that we will disgrace you, we'll restrain ourselves."

Roland was amused at the looks of the witches sitting in the back, who were not able to disguise their eagerness in time. He laughed, "Don't worry. I always keep my words. This isn't the Union. You aren't in the king's city either. We're all just normal people. As long as you don't make trouble, eat whatever you like."

"Can... can I bring some food back?" Dido asked with excitement. "Many of my friends wished to attend this first class party."

"Make sure nobody sees you doing that," Roland replied indifferently. "Stay close when we get there. If someone approaches you, don't get involved in a conversation. Let me deal with them."

"Yes, Your Majesty," the three witches chorused.

Around half an hour later, Roland and his party reached their destination.

Roland immediately understood this was a first-rate party. The vehicles parked in front of the hotel were, without exception, luxurious cars. Their car paint reflected off the lights in the city and formed a glaring contrast between them and Roland's shabby little van.

Although martialists earned a lot of money, they were still not able to compare to real capitalists. To avoid unwelcome attraction, Roland had bought the most common van available on the market. He had not anticipated, however, that his van would become the most eye-catching vehicle among all the fancy cars.

"Sir, the hotel is reserved today. Do you have an invitation card?" A waiter came up to Roland after he parked his car.

Roland produced the card Garcia had given him from his pocket and brandished it triumphantly.

"Welcome to Crown Hotel. The meeting room is on the top floor. A customer representative will soon receive you." The waiter then summoned a smile and said, "I'll take care of your vehicle."

Roland did not care what the waiter actually thought of him, but he had to admit that this was really great service.

He led the witches into the splendid hotel hall. To Roland's surprise, they didn't seem interested in this magnificent building. Perhaps, they had seen architecture like this illuminated by Stones of Lighting many times back in the Taquila age. The chandelier dangling from the ceiling, for instance, was probably nothing special to the Three Chiefs.

Roland found it a little amusing to notice that these three witches were more awestruck by some cakes than the spectacular hotel interior. Their extremely beautiful appearances, however, soon attracted a lot of people. It seemed that no matter what world he was living in, witches were always going to be the focus of attention.

The customer representative went through a series of security check. He first scanned Roland's invitation card and then reported to someone over his walkie-talkie. Finally, he returned the card to Roland and said, "Mr. Roland, sorry for the wait. May I know who these three ladies are..."

"Cousins," Roland said while shrugging. "Garcia told me that family members are allowed here."

"I see. Please come this way."

The customer service representative guided them to an elevator, pushed the button to the top floor, and then bowed courteously outside the elevator. "I wish you a good evening."

The wall around them soon sank rapidly. A sinking sun diffused its perpetual splendor into the elevator. A dense group of high-rise buildings slid into their sights and formed a forest of walls in the far distance.

The witches finally uttered exclamations of surprise.

"This is even bigger than three Holy Cities put together," Dawnen muttered. "I can't believe mortals built all these without using any magic."

"The Miracle Building you want to build is also in memory of this world, right?" Saint Miran asked Roland.

Roland smiled. Although nobody except Anna knew where he truly came from, the Taquila witches had already reached a mutual understanding that Roland came from a world similar to this Dream World. This seemed to be the only plausible explanation as to why he was so familiar with this world.

After they reached the top floor, the huge round-shaped meeting room materialized in front of them.

Its wall and ceiling were all made of glass. The entire city was dwarfed beneath them through these windows. Roland was mildly impressed with the enormous financial capacity of the Clover Group.

A variety of delicious food was beautifully displayed on plates, including appetizers, desserts, fruits, and champagne towers. There were several hundred guests at the party that formed tight knots throughout the top floor. Apparently, not only martialists but also eminent political figures and businessmen had been invited.

Roland was now very used to this type of situation. The witches, on the other hand, ran straight to the food at the back of the hall.

"Wow... the fish here is so tender. It feels like it's going to melt in my mouth."

"Are these really grapes? Wow, I haven't had such sweet grapes in so long..."

"Rubbish. You just visited the Dream World last month."

"But I ate fast food last time. Elena only knows KFC and McDonald's."

"Hey, remember that we have to also put some food in Dido's bag to bring something back for the others."

Roland looked at the witches who practically salivating at the sight of the delicacies and shook his head in amusement. He suddenly felt that even if he could not benefit from anything in the Dream World, he should at least make this Dream World continue to exist. For him, this was just a world existing in his dream. However, for the Taquila witches, this was the only place where they felt alive.

They could get compensated here for everything they had lost from the battle with the demons, including the enjoyment of life and mundane pleasures.

Roland started to study the guests intently before the party officially started.

There were two types of guests in the hall. The ones in business attires were clearly important public figures, whereas those wearing robes were martialists from the Association. Although there were exceptions, he, for example, was wearing a suit. Nobody was in outlandish clothes like the last time he had visited Prism City.

Was this the difference between a professional and an amateur?

He somehow remembered what Garcia had once told him.

"Although the Martialist Association is dedicated to saving the world, it's hard to persuade people to work for them with just a vague envision of the future. That's why we started to hold the martialist contest. The contest only has a short history of 50 years, but it has now become the most popular sporting event. Many awakened martialists gained publicity, fame, and wealth through this contest. On the other hand, the Association also recruits many new talents through the competition. The contest thus plays an increasingly important role in the Association. Outstanding contestants are involved in the decision-making process. Because of this change, a rift began to grow among the executives. Gradually, members are divided into two cliques. Nevertheless, this disagreement doesn't impact the contest at all. In fact, the event attracts even more attention."

At that time, Roland favored the more conservative party. Since the martialists' real enemy were the Fallen Evils, the battle against those Fallen Evils must be far more cruel than some sport game. A contest was a good way to recruit new people, but it was essentially not the same as a battle of life and death. Roland did not get why some executives failed to understand this.

Yet when he entered the hall, he suddenly understood the reason.

Both the members of the Association who participated in the contest and the amateurs were defiant brutes that were nothing next to professional, well-educated martialists. Since not everyone would have a chance to fight against the Fallen Evils and, as the battle was often quite intense, more and more people swung to the new party.

Roland believed that the conservative party would only be able to regain its power after what Lan referred to as "erosion" occurred.

Roland twitched his lips at the thought of his hunting license. He had always thought it very strange to license a new martialist. Even though he was an active member, he did not think he was good enough to be one of the top 100 in the Association. Now it dawned on him why the executives licensed him. They

viewed him as an ideal old-school martialist who was only seeking the Fallen Evils instead of fame and popularity.

Was this the reason that the conservative party asked him to be their representative?

Chapter 1144: A Stronger Person

While Roland was studying the other guest, somebody was also studying at him.

"How did it go? Did you find anything about him?" Carmen asked his men in an undertone.

"Yes," the latter whispered into his ear. "He's just from an ordinary family. He became Lady Garcia's neighbor purely by accident. There's no record whatsoever of Roland on the contest registry, so I don't think he has ever participated in any games. He joined the Martialist Associations just three months ago, which is highly unusual."

Although Carmen did not possess the Force of Nature, he knew all about the martialist contest. As it was the most popular sporting event among the mass, many people were familiar with its rules and procedure. Apart from the final match, "the Martialist Duel", held every other year, there were also many tournaments and trial games every month to encourage new martialists to enter.

Normally, new martialists were very eager to partake in a contest to improve their skills and rankings so they could gain exposure and money. Only amateur martialists would feel reluctant to showcase their power. Carmen believed that these arrogant amateurs feared to be thrown in a spotlight because they were mostly former criminals.

As Garcia's brother, Carmen was very concerned about the proxy his sister had chosen. Garcia was definitely not a very easygoing person. She was too headstrong. Her obstinacy naturally created a barrier that detached her from the rest of world and made people who attempted to approach her hesitant to further the relationship. With this being the case, Garcia trusted very few people.

Carmen was not remotely surprised at the disagreement between Garcia and her father. Garcia might be a competent martialist but was definitely not a good businesswoman.

Nevertheless, this was not the main reason he wanted to investigate Roland.

Another more important reason lay in the VIP table at the front of the hall.

He gazed upon the first row and saw a woman in pure white sitting there. She was not wearing any accessories. Her sheet of jet-black hair streamed down and gave her an air of aloofness and sophistication.

This lady, Fei Yuhan, was one of the most talented new martialists in the past five years. She had already successfully entered the final match of the martialist contest twice. Although she had yet to win the championship, most people attributed her defeat to her young age and lack of experience and firmly believed that she would soon gain her first championship. It was rumored that Fei Yuhan, as a genius martialist of the new generation, would eventually become another executive in the Prism City after she won her championship match.

Carmen did not expect a proud person like her to attend this party. Her attendance really gave Carmen's father a pleasant surprise.

This party would definitely make the front page because of Fei Yuhan's presence.

However, when Carmen had finally found a chance to talk to Fei Yuhan, he had been given an unexpected task.

Carmen calmed himself down and ambled over to the lady

"Miss Fei Yuhan, what you asked me to do..."

"I heard your conversation," Fei Yuhan interrupted Carmen and gave him a faint smile. "Thank you."

Carmen was astonished at her acute hearing. She was at least 10 meters away from him and surrounded by the buzz in the hall. Could normal people really do that?

"I didn't hear everything you said. Even though I could hear them, I need time to process the information," Fei Yuhan explained to him good-naturedly in response to Carmen's shocked expression.

"When your men approached you, I concentrated my mind and read the conversation based on the movement of his lips and voices. Most martialists possess some lip-reading skills."

"I-I see... You're indeed the best martialist in the country," Carmen said as he managed a smile.

"The best?" she echoed in a silvery voice. "I haven't got that cup yet."

"It's just a matter of time. Nobody except you has managed to enter the final match within one year of awakening and this even includes the 'guard' of Prism City..." His voice trailed off as he spoke.

Fei Yuhan was listening, but the nonchalant smile on her face clearly told Carmen that she had no intention of continuing with this conversation. She listened to him patiently only because it would be rude not to.

Then it suddenly dawned on Carmen that she had actually wanted to end the conversation when she had said "thank you". She gave him an explanation simply because he was the organizer of this party. Nonetheless, she did not have the slightest interest in engaging in a personal interaction.

At this thought, Carmen felt a surge of anger blazing inside him. As the representative of the Clover Group, he had never been so slighted.

But Carmen managed to control his temper.

The Clover Group could not offend the Martialist Association, as the latter had an intertwined relationship with various governmental bodies and industries.

This was the exact reason his father put so much money in networking with these people.

Carmen smiled stiffly and walked off.

Fei Yuhan obviously noticed the affronted look in Carmen's eyes.

She did not really care about what others thought of her. The only person she could rely on was herself to defend against the erosion. Wealth and power meant nothing to her.

Her eyes were back on Roland again.

She attended this party just because her master had asked her to. At first, she did not understand why she had to sacrifice her training sessions for such a superfluous networking event, until a man caught her attention.

Once an Awakened reached a certain level, they would be able to know how strong their opponent was. Fei Yuhan had gained such an ability three years ago. She noticed that very few people outside of Prism City were stronger than her.

Nevertheless, she could not read anything out of that person.

She sensed Roland's conduct, the tone in which he spoke, the expression on his face, and the micromovement of his skin, which were exactly the same as those of a normal person, but she could not sense any fluctuations in his power. Therefore, she could not figure out how strong Roland was. Common people normally did not have the Force of Nature, however, Roland was a martialist.

That was why Fei Yuhan had asked Carmen for help.

Although she could do the investigation herself, she preferred to have others take care of these matters for her. Most people were more than happy to help her and, often, did a better job.

Then, she heard Carmen slip that man's name, Roland.

Everything seemed to make sense now.

A week ago, Fei Yuhan had learned a piece of news from her master that there was a new "hunter", a licensed martialist, in Prism City. Fei Yuhan was not surprised at the news because an outstanding martialist who fought against the Fallen Evils deserved some privileges. It wasn't until a little later that she learned that this new licensed martialist was not an old member but instead a newbie!

This incident would have definitely stirred the whole martialist community had the Association not kept the personal information of licensed martialists strictly confidential. Licensed martialists were typically viewed as equal to champions of the martialist contest, and were sometimes even more respected by the public. This was like telling Fei Yuhan that some newly awakened martialist had just snatched the champion cup from her. How outrageous!

If that was the case, her two entries in the championship final suddenly seemed to not matter as much.

The new hunter's name was Roland.

Fei Yuhan balled her right hand into a fist, but kept her face expressionless.

As a student of an old guard in Prism City, Fei Yuhan had also heard about the disagreement between new and old martialists. One of the main questions they argued about was which school of martialists was the stronger one. Were those who put their lives on the line and trained themselves through numerous battles against the Fallen Evils stronger than combatants on the stage, or vice versa?

Fighting against Fallen Evils was indeed challenging, but the chance of encountering a Fallen Evil was slim, and more often than not, the first battle would also be the last for a lot of fighters. Combatants, on the other hand, could train themselves in a more safe manner. However, as they were used to the way

they fought, they would easily panic when coming across a difficult enemy. Both theories had a great number of supporters, and it was hard to tell which one was truer in practice.

However, Fei Yuhan now found a way to find that out.

Roland, who had never participated in any matches and had been continuously fighting against Fallen Evils since his awakening, was definitely an old-school martialist.

Compared to Roland, Fei Yuhan was obviously considered as a modern martialist.

Her master intended for her to come to this party, probably in hopes that Roland and she, as the representatives of traditional and modern martialists, could get to know each other.

However, Fei Yuhan had no interest in involving herself in the conflict within the Association. She never thought she was a modern martialist. In fact, she would have fought against Fallen Evils if her master had not explicitly forbidden her to do so.

Just like Roland.

She only cared about who was stronger.

And Roland seemed to be a decent competitor.

Fei Yuhan would have known how big her chance of winning had she been able to detect Roland's power. However, since she could not, it was hard for her to envision the duel between them.

In other words, they were tied.

Fei Yuhan curled up her lips. It appeared that this party had become a little more interesting.

She had also overheard some interesting conversations between the three girls Roland brought to the party.

She heard words like "the Dream World".

Also something like "His Majesty".

Was this some new trendy game?

However, judging from the three girls' looks, she did not think they were doing some juvenile role-playing either.

She decided to ask Roland in person.

Fei Yuhan quickly came up with a few questions in her mind.

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In the meantime, Roland finally found the person whom he was looking for.

Garcia's father got a resounding round of applause as he ascended the stage at the center of the hall.

Chapter 1145: A Deal and A Strange Phenomenon

"So that man is..." Dawen muttered unclearly as she was too busy wolfing down the cake she had thrust into her mouth.

"Yes, that's the man we saw on the paper," Roland replied with a nod. He had done some research on the Clover Group before coming here. The man on the stage was Garde, one of the directors and president of the Department of Construction of the Clover Group. As Garcia's father, he was the fifth child of his family.

He expected to see King Wimbledon III, but now it appeared that Zero had not killed the poor King of Graycastle. Roland also realized a fact that the residents in the Building of Soul had now completely blended into this Dream World and developed their own memories and personal relationships. There was no way to know whether Garcia came before Garde, whether the existence of Garcia resulted in the appearance of the Clover Group, or whether Garcia was just a jigsaw puzzle piece that randomly fit in this whole picture. Had Roland not had the memories of the other world, he would have probably also thought this Dream World was a world of reality.

Although the Dream World was currently changing in a direction unfamiliar to him, it was essentially based on his own memories. The increasingly bizarre phenomena thus constantly reminded him that he was in his dream.

For example, Garcia's real last name was Wimbledon. However, in the Dream World, her last name was Gar. Unlike Cobb in the movie Inception who needed some personal articles to help him distinguish the dream from the real world, Roland did not require such things to do so.

Garde's speech was all about his gratitude and support to the martialist attending the party. He also, very incidentally, mentioned her estranged daughter. Just as Garcia had predicted, Garde felt sorry about his daughter's absence and expressed his wish to mend their relationship.

The hall erupted in a resounding applause. The journalists danced around taking photographs. Blinding flashlights came with every shot.

Roland jeered.

This party was totally unnecessary. Garde only needed to abandon his plan to destroy the apartment or well compensate the residents to win Garcia back.

After the speech, Garde made toasts.

This was the moment Roland had been waiting for.

"Let's go. We'll come back later," he beckoned the witches and walked up to Garde with a glass of champagne in his hand.

...

"President He, thank you for coming to my party. I'll still need your support for the Green Project."

"Naturally, naturally. We've been working together for so many years."

"Miss Yuhan, do you like the new stadium we built for the championship match on the south side of the city?"

"I haven't been there yet."

"Oh... haha. I'm sure you'll make it there this year."

Roland went straight up to Garde as the latter finished his toasts to the honored guests at the front and made his way through the crowd.

"You're..." Garde asked hesitantly.

"I'm Roland, Garcia's proxy," Roland said flatly.

"Oh, I see... Nice to meet you," Garde said as he took a glass of wine from a waiter and tightened his demeanor immediately into formality. "You're really lucky to have the Force of Nature. I do envy you young guys."

Roland clanked his glass with Garde's but did not drink his champagne. He said, "I want to talk with you, in private."

This invitation seemed pretty rude. Roland, as a newly-awakened martialist, was much younger than Garde, and also had a much lower social and economic status compared to a director of a large financial group.

Garde frowned and replied, "Sorry, I'm expected by someone else."

"Garcia asked me to talk to you. Aren't you interested in how your daughter is doing these days at all?" Roland said as he raised his voice.

Out of the corner of his eye, he noticed that some journalists started to look in their direction.

Roland was confident that Garde would come with him.

Otherwise, he would soon ruin his carefully managed reputation of being a loving father.

"Alright," Garde receded resignedly, "if this isn't going to be long."

"Of course. It won't take you much time," said Roland smilingly.

There was a VIP room in the hall. After all the guards withdrew, only Garde, Roland, and Garde's secretary were left in the room.

"Is it OK to have him here?" Roland asked while casting a glance at the elderly secretary. "What I'm going to say involves the interest of your company."

"That's fine. He's been working for my family for several decades," Garde said glumly. "I'm more concerned about the three pretty little girls you brought here than my secretary. This isn't an amusement park."

As soon as they were well out of earshot, Garde no longer disguised his impatience and annoyance.

Roland knew that Garde was very alarmed. Judging from his stance and position, Roland believed that Garde also possessed awakened power.

"The matter we're discussing in next few minutes concerns these three girls..." Roland answered with a shrug. "Let's cut the crap. I want to make a deal with you. They're illegal immigrants, and I need you to help them obtain legal status and send them to a reputable high school."

Garde lapsed into a long silence. At last, he said, "Is this all that you want?"

If Garde was just some ordinary businessman, he would have probably flared up and walked away. The fact that he waited for Roland to finish his story indicated that he was well bred and civil.

"Yes," Roland said defiantly. "I don't think it's hard for the Clover Group."

"You said it's a deal, so what can you offer me? Are you going to oppose Garcia or persuade her to abandon that apartment to me?"

"No, I'm her friend."

After Roland had found out that the apartment was where all the memory fragments were, Roland was determined to protect it. Anyone who attempted to demolish the building would face a relentless resistance from 300 Taquila witches. The witches could easily, for example, disassemble the track of an excavator or create an illusion that the building was haunted.

"Hmm... friends," Garde jeered. "Then we have nothing to talk about."

"Not necessarily," Roland said as he produced his hunting license from his pocket and brandished it at Garde.

"This is..." Garde's expression instantly changed. He turned to his secretary inquiringly.

The secretary stared at the license for quite a while before he slowly confirmed, "It's legit."

"How come you have that..."

"That's top secret information of the Association that you aren't entitled to," Roland talked over Garde. In fact, he did not even know how the Association approved and issued licenses. "You just need to know what it stands for."

Garde gazed at Roland darkly. He fumbled with the cigar that he distractedly took out from his inner pocket and spoke at last, "My daughter seems to have made her acquaintance with an extraordinary person. Mr. Roland, the Martialist Association is a law-abiding organization..."

"Do you think I'm threatening you?" Roland said with a determined sigh. "Like I said, this is a deal."

"So you mean..."

"A successful businessman like you must have encountered many difficulties, right? You may remove enemies standing right before you but not those in hiding," Roland said as he stuck out one finger. "I can take care of that for you, though not everyone. They have to be underground criminals. Also, their presence has to constitute a threat. I have my own ways to conduct my investigation, so don't you attempt to fool me. In this way, the Association would not notice our deal. I would rather keep this conversation between ourselves."

In short, Roland was going to crack down on criminal groups.

The capture of these large criminal organizations usually involved a lengthy process, which included collecting evidence, ambushing, arrests, and trials. As such, companies normally preferred to resort to force to avoid substantial financial loss. From Garde's look, Roland already knew he had had many unfortunate encounters with these criminals.

Garde said hesitantly, " Mr. Roland, if you're serious, then that wouldn't be a good deal for you."

Roland stifled his smile. Garcia was right. Her father was not only a "reasonable person" but also a wise one.

"Just see them as your deposit. I'm going to ask you to help these three first. The total number would be around 300."

"300... illegal immigrants?" Garde echoed in disbelief. "The police will get suspicious..."

"Take it slow. I don't need you to do it anytime soon. Take your time. This is a long-term project," said Roland. who believed, as Celine had suggested, that not every witch liked studying. For example, Elena and Phyllis would prefer to kill Fallen Evils with him much more than poring over books.

"In that case, I may be able to help you."

"Well then, I look forward to working with you."

The deal was sealed after the secretary took pictures of the witches. Although they had not signed an agreement in any form, Roland was certain that Garde would not break his promise.

When Roland was about to leave with the witches, Garde suddenly shouted behind him. "Hey, wait..."

"Is there anything else I can help you with?" Roland said while turning around.

"My daughter, Garcia, how is she?" Garde asked after a moment of hesitation. "I called her many times, but she didn't pick up..."

"Rest assured. She's doing very well," Roland replied.

...

Garde finally ignited the cigar after the door was closed. He muttered to his secretary, "Is he really just some random martialist?"

"I have the same feeling," the secretary, who had been keeping his silence throughout the conversation, said, "He talked to you with an air of undisguised condescension."

Common people would usually talk to him in a timid, unctuous tone or tried to be audacious while pretending that they were not afraid of the huge social and economic difference between them. Garde did not think it was the Force of Nature that made Roland fearless, because he had just awakened.

Nevertheless, Garde had not noticed any signs of such timidity in Roland. On the very contrary, he was confident, relaxed, and even a little haughty. It was as though he had seen much of life already.

How could that be possible? Roland was around the same age as Garcia. A man in his twenties!

For the first time in his life, Garde could not figure out a person.

...

"You didn't have to negotiate with him yourself," Saint Miran mumbled after they left the room. "You're the king of the two worlds. It's really rude of him to stare at you like that."

"If Lady Alethea were here, she would have put a knife to his throat," Dido agreed.

"As a king, you can do whatever you want," Dawnen said disapprovingly. "Lady Alice never cared about what other people thought of her."

Roland was amused at the bold speech of these "little girls." "My ministers can't get in here, and I've told you not to call me 'Your Majesty' outside."

"Yes, brother Roland," the three witches said together instantly.

"By the way, are we still going back?" Dawnen eagerly looked at the new servings on the table as she licked her lips.

"The feast doesn't end until midnight, but we might as well head back soon. The other witches are waiting for us," Roland said as he stared up at the darkened sky. "We'll stay another half an hour and then we'll set off at 8:00 sharp."

"As you command!" the three of them chorused and sprinted up to the table.

"They do look like underage kids," Roland thought to himself. He shuffled behind them and was about to drink his champagne when he realized he still had to drive, and dejectedly put down the glass.

Just then, the pale, golden champagne suddenly changed.

A red swirl of ink suddenly appeared in his glass and gradually formed creepy, crooked words!

"Don't forget what you promised me."

A chill ran down Roland's spine.

He fought down the urge to throw the glass away.

Roland was holding the wine glass with such immense strength that its stem cracked!

Roland, once again, peered down at his champagne and discovered that the threatening words had vanished. The liquid was a pure, crystal-clear pale-gold again. It looked as though nothing had happened.

Chapter 1146: In the Name of Rose

An ominous sense of foreboding flooded over Roland. Somebody was obviously watching him in this Dream World.

Roland looked up and scanned the faces of everyone across the hall.

Who was doing this?

A waiter? An entrepreneur? Or an Awakened?

Everyone seemed to be enjoying themselves at this party. He was the only person being paranoid here.

Roland took a deep breath to calm himself down.

The messenger must be the same person who had left the note in the book.

"Rose Café, No. 302."

Without a doubt, this person wanted to meet him.

This was something beyond the Force of Nature. Unlike witches who possessed various supernatural abilities, martialists were physically faster, sharper, and more powerful than common people. They could, to some extent, release their energy to create some sort of magic, but, overall, they were more combatants than wizards.

Plus, Roland did not sense any fluctuations in the Force of Nature.

In other words, those words were more likely a result of some other unknown, more superior power.

Which was probably what made the Dream World transform.

"Hmm... some non-player character is apparently keeping an eye on me," Roland said under his breath. The time in the Dream World was frozen when Roland was awake, so Roland believed, other than the visiting witches and those defeated by Zero, everybody else was fictitious. No matter how "real" they seemed to be, they were controlled and manipulated by the creator of this world. Now, that creator seemed to have noticed Roland's presence and sent him a message.

"When did this start?" Roland wondered.

Was it from the moment he had borrowed the book from Garcia, or the moment he had found the person in the Reflection Church, who had been dead for over 800 years, look exactly the same as Lan in the Dream World?

Or had it started even earlier when he and Zero had fought the Battle of Souls.

Roland had absolutely no idea.

He did not want to dwell on this matter either.

The more important thing was what that creator was trying to convey.

"Roland?" Dawnen's voice pulled Roland back to the present. "Are you OK?"

"Yes... I'm fine," Roland said, a little flustered. While shaking his head, he said smilingly, "I'm coming."

After making sure that the wine glass was back to normal, Roland put it down on the table closest to him and followed the witches.

"You should try this. It's so tender, but you have to wait for a while..."

Saint Miran handed Roland some barbequed French foie gras that smelled amazing.

Roland felt very embarrassed when he saw the three witches dominate the tables and take all the food the chef had just served.

Some ladies in the hall started to complain.

Their voices were carried back to Roland —

"Who brought them here?" "They're pretty cute, but they look as though they haven't eaten for ages."

"Look at what they're wearing. I hope they aren't some little tramps." "Poor things. It's like they've been starving for hundreds of years."

Roland gave those gossiping women a cool stare. He did not even bother asking them to stop.

"Sorry, but yes, they literally haven't eaten for hundreds of years."

"We ought to bring some of these to our friends."

"Right!"

Roland lapsed into thought again as he chewed the barbequed French foie gras distractedly.

Since the creator had enormous power, why did he not talk to him in person? Why did he make everything so difficult?

Did he fear that he would frighten Roland, or he did not have such an opportunity?

Roland did not think that the creator really cared about his poor nerves. The message in his wine had indeed scared the hell out of him.

He thought of the note in the book again.

"We'll meet when we receive divine revelation." Roland ran these words through his head several times and gasped out. "Does it refer to..."

The arrival of the Bloody Moon?

The appearance of the Bloody Moon marked the beginning of the Battle of Divine Will.

So, he could only talk to the messenger at that time?

But how come a person in the Dream World would know things in the other? Time remained frozen in this world if Roland chose not to come here.

Even if they were supposed to meet when the Bloody Moon appeared, Roland still had no idea where they were going to meet up.

God only knew where the hell the Rose Café was.

Why not just meet in the apartment or some other well-known building?

While Roland was complaining internally, two middle-aged businessmen walked past him.

"I heard that you're going to build a new golf course?"

"It has been just approved. I put tons of money into it. Do you play golf, Mr. Gao?"

"Sometimes. I'm not big on sports, but I'm more interested in the master you recently hired. Someone told me that you just gave three million away."

"I had to. It's all about luck. You know how important luck is for us. I can always earn more money, and I've heard that the names given by that master always bring huge profits."

"So what is it called?"

"Green Meadow. It's right across from the Clover Group's green project."

"Haha, such a pleasant coincidence."

Roland stood still. He did not hear a single word of their subsequent conversation.

"That's right! You can always give it a name yourself!"

For the past few weeks, he had been asking the witches to look for the Rose Café, but he had forgotten one thing — he could totally open a coffeeshop and name it Rose Café.

If that person really wanted to talk to him, he should not have picked a place Roland had never heard of.

If that person had the power to write in his wine, he would certainly know about Roland's new café.

Roland had already taken over the second floor of the warehouse. He simply needed to rent another two venues next door to open his coffeeshop.

He could even combine these venues into a huge room, add necessary amenities such as tables, chairs and a bar counter, and set the room number as 302!

The Taquila witches could be both waitresses and customers.

Roland quickly made up his mind after he did a rough calculation of his current funds.

...

Fei Yuhan picked up Roland's wine glass after the latter left the party.

She had seen that this new licensed hunters wrench the glass away in great shock, but catch it just in time. It was as though it was not a glass of champagne, but a piece of red hot coal. For a split second, she had even seen Roland freak out.

What would make a licensed hunter so unnerved?

Fei Yuhan could not think of anything.

Even death would not frighten him so much.

And this was just a glass of wine.

Fei Yuhan was not sure if this was just her imagination.

But she did see cracks in the goblet stem, which indicated that Roland had lost control of himself. Only newly awakened martialists would make such errors.

She thus judged that what ever Roland had seen was definitely something extraordinary.

Fei Yuhan sniffed the rim of the glass but did not perceive any noticeable odor. Roland had not touched the champagne, which meant what had shocked him had nothing to do with the wine itself.

She slowly gulped down the wine and confirmed her theory.

This was just ordinary wine.

She was more curious about Roland's reaction at that very moment than his ridiculous conversation with the three girls, which includes words like "the king of the two worlds" and "my ministers", because at that moment, Roland was real.

Something must have happened at that time.

Fei Yuhan put down the glass and looked at the entrance of the hall. Her gaze was burning with curiosity.

Chapter 1147: A Picture Underneath the Sand

When Roland strolled out of his bedroom the next morning and entered the castle hall, the Taquila witches all raised their arms in a kind of salute to pay their highest respects to the king.

"Good morning, Your Majesty. Thank you for your hospitality."

"I would say it was the greatest experience I've had in the past hundred years."

"I'll be looking forward to my next visit to the Dream World when the time comes."

"... What happened last night?" Anna asked curiously as she looked at the God's Punishment Witches who apparently had yet to come out of their blissful reveries.

"A sumptuous party," Roland answered smilingly. Dido and Dawnen had almost ravaged half of the table and crammed the invisible bag with tons of delicacies. Fortunately, nobody had really cared about the food they had taken. Had this been an ordinary buffet, they probably would have been thrown out of the party outright by angry waiters.

"That makes me hungry too," Anna said as her stomach protested mildly. "When can I have that kind of food?"

While staring into Anna's expectant blue eyes, Roland stroked her graceful head gently and said, "In a few years. I promise."

Ingredients were the key to accessing luxurious food. Fast transportation enabled people in the modern society to obtain food from all parts of the world. If they wanted to eat fresh sea urchin from the Port of Clearwater, the boats on the inner river should at least travel two to three faster than they currently did.

Of course, an alternative way was to drive the demons out of the Fertile Plains and fly around Graycastle on the "Seagull" to try out different food if the former method was not an option.

Roland had his usual breakfast that consisted of an egg, bread, and a glass of Chaos Drink, which was really not a satisfactory breakfast compared to what he used to have in his original world. However,

considering that the Taquila witches were still relying on tasteless, high-calorie rations to sustain themselves, Roland emptied his plate.

After breakfast, Anna bade Roland a quick farewell and left for the laboratory on the North Slope. Like most of the members of the Witch Union, she now hardly had any leisure time in Neverwinter or at the front. Roland returned to his office and strode over to the French window. He saw a few witches pass through the front yard below. They had now completely blended in with the community and were working together strenuously with common people for the future of the human race.

Just then, Nightingale pushed open the door and entered.

"Mail from the garrison at Festive Harbor," she said as she dropped a thick paper bag on Roland's desk. "I met Sean downstairs. He wanted to give you this."

"Quite heavy, isn't it?" Roland said as he picked up a pair of scissors.

"They probably shipped the package here by sea," Nightingale said as she walked past Roland and drew out a bag of pickled dried fish from a drawer. "I checked it. It's safe to open."

Roland unwrapped the package and dumped the contents on his desk. Apart from a letter and a stack of drawings, there were also some "stones" sealed in a few bags. They looked pretty similar to the samples provided by Rex the other day.

Roland's brows furrowed as he skimmed through the letter. The report by the First Army startled him. The so-called ancient ruin was not just confined to the underwater cave but it actually infiltrated the entire Endless Cape!

Under Roland's order, the garrison at Festive Harbor immediately followed Simbady into the ruin and blasted the entire cave. Infuriated, the Giant Armored Scorpion came out of hiding and was later bombarded by the machine gun squad and the mortar unit before it could launch an attack on the soldiers.

This result was by no means surprising. What surprised him, however, was the subsequent exploration to the cave.

The engineering team noticed that the ground within a radius of several hundred meters sank to various degrees as a result of the explosion. From the enclosed drawings, Roland saw the beach slope downward as though the ground had caved in.

Shortly afterwards, the First Army conducted a few more explosions and excavated the ground before they found 16 similar ruins in the vicinity of Festive Harbor. The area covered by these ruins was as large as seven or eight ports put together.

Due to the limited manpower, the people of the Sand Nation had only cleaned up three ruins. The findings at the three locations were amazingly similar. Tablet walls five to ten meters' thick were found at each ruin underneath the desert, whereas the area uncovered by the walls was carpeted with leafy grass.

Roland fell silent after he saw the drawings.

First of all, he had to admit that this was great news.

With so many tablets, they could now produce as many tracers as possible.

In addition to manufacturing tracers, Roland also thought of many other potential applications of these unique electric silicides, such as pressure gauges, lighters, quartz clocks, etc.

Also, Celine would now be able to replicate the Magic Cube with the tablets discovered in this exploration.

However, the implications behind these findings sent a chill down Roland's spine.

How many tablets in total were there at the Endless Cape if there were already so many at Festive Harbor? If these tablets were really the bodies of some ancient silicon-based creatures, what kind of massacre occurred?

The fact that the geological features of the three ruins were almost identical indicated that they had been formed at around the same time.

Roland used his imagination to see how these ruins had come into being.

The desertification was probably not caused by the evaporation of water. Perhaps, the Silver Stream used to be a fertile land rather than an underground river.

Everything had, however, changed when a massive war had broken out.

The tablet men had been slaughtered by the radiation people, whose bodies littered the entire continent. According to the murals in the Temple of the Cursed, the radiation people had won the God's relic and obtained the final victory.

What concerned Roland most was the aftermath of this huge Battle of Divine Will.

As those bodies were silicon-based, they did not decay like those of carbon-based animals. These bodies had thus formed towering walls, which had subsequently blocked rivers and crushed trees. This rendered the whole land uninhabitable for all vegetation, except for some vines that struggled to live in the cracks of rocks.

The Southernmost Region had been, hence, destroyed.

Nevertheless, mother nature was kind.

Whether organic or not, everything would eventually become a part of this world.

Hundreds of years later, the bodies were reduced to sand after years of exposure to wind, and that was how the desertification had begun. The vines living in the cracks of rocks had gradually died out over the years. Plants were obliterated except those who were not covered by bodies. The plants that survived thrived and thrived in the desert and turned sand back into earth.

The whole process had taken thousands of years.

During those thousands of years, the bodies on the top turned into the desert they saw today. The lower ones, however, piled up and formed the bank. Since the sand on the top constantly moved about, the pressure applied to the tablets below were subject to constant change. As such, those tablets illuminated and extinguished alternatively, which made it really hard for plants down there to grow.

Nonetheless, some species did survive the harsh environment. As for the land uncovered by the tablets, they had eventually become the Silver Stream Oasis where the Ironsand people of the Mojin Clan had settled down and prospered.

In other words, both Iron Sand City and Festive Harbor were sitting on the top of weathered corpses.

Roland shuddered at this hypothesis.

He really hoped that he was wrong.

If the Battle of Divine Will would never end, how many people would have to die?

Down in the earth and in the depths of the ocean...

There was probably not a single acre of land that hadn't been soaked in blood.

Chapter 1148: Camilla's Return

"Hey, Roland..." Nightingale's voice jerked Roland out of his thoughts. "Are you OK?"

"Er, is anything wrong?" Roland said after a clearing throat.

"You were staring at that paper for a good several minutes, and you don't look very well either. Terrible news?"

"No, I hope that I am wrong," Roland said while shaking his head and briefly recounted his theory. "If that was the truth, what a dismal world we're living in."

Another problem that alarmed Roland was how short their lives were. One life cycle was just a fleeting second compared to the history of this planet that stretched thousands of years before the emergence of lifeforms.

Where had human beings and demons been when the radiation people and the tablet men had fought furiously for their survival?

If the Battle of Divine Will was unending, then how does one win?

No matter how fierce the battle had been, there should have been a winner in the end.

Why had both parties disappeared?

Roland suddenly regarded this battle with a sense of evil foreboding.

"I see..." Nightingale mumbled thoughtfully. "But even if you're right, I think there's still a solution."

Roland looked toward her in surprise and asked, "What solution?"

"Well, I have to make it clear first. I'm not Anna, so it may be just some random crazy idea. Don't you laugh at me, alright?"

"I won't," Roland promised.

Nightingale shoved a piece of dried fish into her mouth and said, "First of all, you have to admit that this is going to be a problem that will take at least two generations. So the most important task now was to pass on the information until the time is right."

"Right... that's true," Roland said, nodding. "Then what?"

"That's it."

"Huh?" Roland gaped.

"Because by that time, this battle will have nothing to do with us," Nightingale replied matter-of-factly. "We can only live once and already have so much to worry about in this life. Why do we want to let something that will only happen after we die bother us now? Whether our descendents would succeed or not and how they are going to do that are their problems. There's no point of us doing their jobs for them."

Roland could not help grinning. So, was Nightingale comforting him? Anyway, this solution was straightforward, simple and overall, very Nightingale-ish.

"Are you gloating over my shortsightedness?" Nightingale demanded while squinting her eyes at Roland.

"No," Roland denied and immediately put on a straight a face. "That was very incisive."

"Hmm, that sounds more or less right," Nightingale said with satisfaction as she held her head a little higher. "If you fear our descendents couldn't do a good job, ask the other races for help."

"How?"

"Reconstruct the ruin and record the Battle of Divine Will as this is another way to pass on information. Didn't you find out the existence of the radiation people and tablet men from the murals in the Temple of the Cursed? Build some underground fortresses in Graycastle and carve the wall to inform the later generations who participate in the war. If time permits, I believe there will be one or two races figuring out what they should do."

Roland was momentarily stunned at Nightingale's insight. Even if human beings were exterminated in the end, they could still preserve their culture and civilization in an alternate way. If some race in the future managed to terminate the endless wars with the help of this information, they would definitely carve a glorious place for humanity in their history.

Perhaps, Nightingale herself didn't even realize how important this was for the future generations.

After a long silence, Roland shook his head in amusement, poured her a glass of Chaos Drink, and said, "I'm very impressed with your idea. I didn't expect you to think this far ahead."

"I don't need to hear the latter half of your comment," Nightingale said defiantly and snatched up the glass.

Roland admitted that if he failed, this would be his last resort. Although, personally, he would rather be the recorder of history than the history itself.

He then summoned Sean and asked him to send the stones in the package to Celine before he commenced his work. In the afternoon, Graycastle greeted a person Roland had been longing to see for a long time.

He met Camilla Dary, the butler of the Sleeping Island, in the castle.

To Roland's surprise, Camilla did not come with Tilly. Travel-strained from head to toe, Camilla looked particularly disheveled.

This indicated that she went straight to the castle after the ship disembarked.

It was apparently not a good sign.

"Did you just get here?" Roland asked as he poured a cup of tea for Camilla. "You've had a long journey. How was Thunder's exploration?"

Camilla drained the cup and nearly choked in her cup. "S-something went wrong at the Shadow Islands. Joan...Joan disappeared!"

"Disappeared?" Roland echoed, his heart sank rapidly, and he exchanged a dark look with Nightingale. "What happened exactly? Slow down. Tell me what happened."

...That was what happened." It took Camilla half an hour to finish her story. "We floated on the sea for two days, but Joan didn't come back. Thunder said only you would know what happened to Joan undersea. Are those floating pillars and the distorted space real?"

"This is incredible!"

Roland rubbed his forehead in a painful sort of way. The more he probed into this world, the stranger it turned out to be. The bizarre phenomena in the Dream World had already confused him a lot, and it appeared the real world was equally mysterious.

The lengthened stone pillars and fishes did not seem to be a result of external forces, the evidence to which was that neither Camilla nor Joan had experienced excruciating pain when Joan's fingers had elongated.

Both of them were physically fine.

The only possibility Roland could think of was that the space was distorted in the depth of the ocean.

Although it sounded pretty outlandish and there was not a shred of evidence to support his theory, Roland knew he had to provide some reasonable explanation to Camilla. The fact that Camilla directly sought him for advice instead of Tilly showed that she was worried about Joan's safety. From her bloodshot eyes, Roland judged that she had not slept well for the past few days. Perhaps, she was not only concerned about Joan but also blamed herself for Joan's disappearance.

So, he had to say something.

Roland had seen even stranger things before, such as a Sealine perpendicular to the horizon, so a distorted space would not be as nearly peculiar as the former.

He mopped his forehead fidgetedly and spoke at long last, "I think Thunder was right."

Camilla instantly held up her head and asked, "Do you also think Joan's still alive?"

"Yes, and she's probably now to the east of the Sealine."

"So, she transported herself somewhere thousands of miles away? Is that... possible?"

"That's only my guess here, but one thing is certain, that the water level of the Shadow Waters did drop, right? The change in the water level even impacts the tides at the Fjord Islands, which indicates that it's a great amount of water we're talking about here. So, where did the seawater go?" Roland said more to himself than Camilla as he picked up a quill and drew a circle on a piece of paper. "I gather they went to the east of the Sealine."

Camilla thought for a while and said, "Thunder did say that the seawater near the Sealine were heading westward."

"Because if the water didn't go there, the Swirling Sea would have dried out after two or three tidal cycles," Roland said as he drew another circle several inches apart from the first one. "The question is, if the water was transported from one place to another, the tides should have come at intervals. However, in fact, the water currents are moving continuously. To make this happen, the water must go through these two circles at almost the same time. So, what's the fastest way to travel from one circle to another?"

Camilla ran her finger on the area between the two circles with uncertainty and asked tentatively, "Go straight?"

"In theory, yes," Roland said as he drew a straight line, "but there's another possibility." He then folded the paper, and then the two circles overlapped. "In this way, the water can get to the other side almost instantly."

Camilla gasped, "How... how can that be possible?"

"It is weird, but magic itself isn't something science can explain. For example, Nightingale can transport herself from one place to another in a second and walk through solid walls, which is not something common sense can explain either."

"..." Camilla fell silent.

"Also, although it's now just a hypothesis, one thing you mentioned is quite interesting," Roland said as he thrust the quill through the circles. "You see that this quill has traveled from the front to the back. However, in reality, it traveled in a straight line. So, back to the fish. If the fish traveled thousands of miles within a second, what would you see?"

Camilla muttered uncertainly, "It... shrank?"

"Correct. Things that are far away always look significantly smaller than those close to you. Therefore, the fish didn't elongate. The reason you saw it being stretched was that its body had been thousands of miles away from you."

"Oh..." Camilla heaved a deep sigh and looked much more relieved. "If the other side is also the ocean, Joan should be able to survive."

Roland nodded.

"Thank you..." Camilla said weakly then suddenly swung sideways and fell to the floor.

Nightingale caught her just in time.

"She must have been worn out."

"Take her to the Witch Building. I'll let Tilly know."

"Yup," Nightingale said as she carried Camilla under the crook of her arm and vanished into the Mist.

Chapter 1149: A Challenger under the Sky

A glowing sun sank slowly behind the mountains and laid orangish-red stripes over the vast land below.

Unlike the Red Mist, this particular shade of red was pure and untainted.

Ursrook liked to ascend the peak of the mountain and bask in a slanting beam of sunshine while admiring the sky above him.

He could have flown higher, but he did not want his magic power to break the momentary silence under the canopy of the dusky sky.

He felt the sky, flooded with sheets of red and purple lights and interspersed with gilded clouds, was now almost within his reach.

It was a very rare experience.

Most of the time, he was enveloped by the Red Mist hovering over his head. Although he liked the Red Mist, it created a barrier between him and the sky.

He was probably one of the few of his kind who did not like staying at the Birth Tower.

Yet Ursrook did not regard himself as an outlander.

He simply had a greater desire for magic power than anyone else.

Yes, magic power came from the sky.

Human beings called it the Bloody Moon, which was somewhat correct.

It was rumored that his race would have an ultimate upgrade after they inherited God's power, upon which they would be elevated from the earth to Heaven.

Without a shadow of a doubt, a broader expanse of land was awaiting them.

Perhaps, that was where God lived.

By then, they would receive immense magic power, which would further lead them to immortality.

Ursrook did not completely believe in this theory.

He had once tried to leap high into the air.

Unfortunately, due to the lack of the Red Mist, when he had reached a certain altitude, he had experienced a series of physical dysfunctions such as a rapid drop in his body temperature, frosted armor, slow blood circulation, and difficulty in breathing. If he had used his magic power to fix these problems, he would have quickly run out of his power.

He had once attempted to go as far as he could and almost died during that audacious flight.

Nevertheless, his desire for the sky grew even stronger.

Because in the midst of the dark purple sky, he had seen something beyond description.

It was like a flicker of gleaming scales.

Which meant that the theory was not completely groundless.

Also, he had heard someone call upon him from far away.

It was hardly above a whisper, a long echo of a murmur in his mind, so to speak.

Ursrook knew that the Realm of Mind was approaching him.

He had been so close to the higher realm.

Only the one who could open the gate separating the two realms could be promoted to lord.

Ursrook closed his eyes to let the wind carry the warmth of the setting sun to his back, when he heard the patterings of footsteps coming from behind him.

"Sir Ursrook, everything is ready."

As he had expected, it was his junior guard.

"Very good," Ursrook said without turning around. "Keep monitoring them."

"Yes, sir," the guard replied, who did not leave immediately but instead asked, "Are those low lives really going to do what we want them to? They should have had a glimpse of your real power now... We sacrificed a lot to set up this trap. If the Sky Lord knows..."

"Right, I understand your concern, but I believe it's worth it," Ursrook opened his eyes and looked toward the south. He could now see a black winding track stretch across the continent. Over the past six months, numerous demons had been killed in the human territories. The track continued to inch forward with incredible obstinacy. It was as if nothing could stop it.

This was the first time that human beings had been at an advantage during a battle without erecting city walls.

Ursrook knew he could have easily slaughtered the human beings in various ways if they had built the track in an area dominated by the Red Mist, however, it was extremely difficult to wipe them out on the Fertile Plains. First of all, the number of troops at his command was pretty limited. Even if the lord sent him reinforcements, the victory would cost him dear considering that the humans would have already fully established themselves on the plains.

So he must exterminate this new human army in its infancy.

"How do you feel about the war recently? Do you feel thwarted?"

The guard answered after a moment of silence, "That's because we've burned our bridge behind us."

"No, it's because our enemy dragged us into the arena to face a battle to death," Ursrook corrected him. "We've established outposts and also tried to expand the Red Mist. However, these two methods didn't work as well as 400 years ago, because human beings now possess weapons with large shooting ranges. Whether you view them as low lives or not, it's a fact. Our every single movement is currently under the scrutinies of the witches, which is why there has been hardly any progress lately."

Ursrook broke off his speech, his right hand outstretched in the direction of the black track, and gradually balled the hand into a fist. "Nothing will change if we don't erect the Birth Tower. Therefore, I have to blind their eyes and chop off their arms before they're awakened so that they can't play their old trick, even though this means that I'll have to sacrifice two outposts!"

As Ursrook spoke, a horrible, contorted smile flutter over his face, and the air around him stirred. He knew that at the encampment at the end of the track, somebody was watching him. Perhaps, the disturbance of the magic power just now had already created a commotion over there.

"I'm at your service, sir!" The guard shouted respectfully as he sensed the immense magic power.

Ursrook did not tell the guard that he was now very close to his next upgrade.

Soon, his power would experience a significant increase.

Perhaps this upcoming battle would help him upgrade.

War was always the fastest way to improve oneself. Even the king would love to participate in a battle.

If he became a lord, the Sky Lord could no longer control him.

As for whether human beings would take the actions in the direction he desired, Ursrook was not worried at all.

He knew perfectly well men's habits

They would always come for the bait.

The sun had now completely sunk below the mountains. Darkness gradually crept over as the last drop of sun rays faded out and left a few faint glimmers of stars strewn over the sky.

Ursrook remembered that one time he had soared into the upper air.

He had reconfirmed his desire that day.

Now, he was working toward his goal.

And human beings were possibly thinking exactly the same thing as he was now.

In this battle that would determine their fates, only the victor was entitled to the unknown realm and the Origin of Magic.

He was waiting for this upcoming final settlement with great anticipation.

Chapter 1150: The Ambush Plan (I)

Just as Nightingale had suggested, Camilla collapsed mainly because of the mental strain rather than frailty and fatigue.

She completely recovered after two days, as though all that she had experienced was just a dream.

Roland was hugely relieved.

Camilla was the key to their ambush operation.

Although Camilla distanced herself from him immediately, becoming wary and alarmed again, Roland was glad to see her come back to normal.

He knew Camilla was still worried about Joan.

However, she managed to suppress her anguish, as she had something more important to worry about.

Roland decided to keep the news of Joan's disappearance from the other witches, particularly from Lightning, and only disclosed it to a very few selected witches, including Tilly, Anna and Nightingale.

He knew Joan was a member of the Neverwinter Exploration Group, of which Lightning was the leader. Currently, as the two main figures responsible for the outer defense of the First Army, Lightning and Maggie had been staying on the frontier for several months under exceptional pressure. Plus, Lightning had been hurt by the Magic Slayer, so Roland would not allow any news to disturb her state of mind.

The following week, he traveled back and forth between the Third Border City, the weapon test site and the castle boardroom, aiming to finalize their ambush plan. Since their biggest threat at the moment was the Magic Slayer much faster and also more nimble than regular Devilbeasts, it was very hard for him to develop a perfect plan to kill him.

He had thought that the plan would only take him two or three days, but he had encounter some major difficulties during mock operations. Fortunately, with the help of various parties, he had finally drafted a feasible operation plan.

The pre-operation meeting was held in the underground hall at the Third Border City a week later.

Alethea spoke first.

She turned on the magic core and projected the image of the rear of the Taquila ruins on a screen that ran across the wall for several meters, looking exactly like a window that had been opened in midair.

Nevertheless, this was not a real window where one could poke his head out of, so there was literally not much to be seen. As Alethea could not adjust the angle of the projector after the Five-Colored Stone was broken, they could not see the surroundings of the ruin. However, the "window" was facing the demons' Red Mist supply line directly, which provided them with a fairly good reference as to where to set up the ambush.

"This Red Mist supply line stretched away on the continent to the northeast and southwest, and there's a group of demons supplying the Red Mist pretty much every day on this route. Ten months ago when Lorgar found the demons and when Ashes went to locate them, this number increased to three. Using the information, we can determine how many troops our enemy has lost and how many are left. Since they only have one supply line, the Senior Demons would not deviate from this line too much when they retreat."

"Can't they build a fake Red Mist supply line?" Wendy asked apprehensively.

"As long as the demons still rely on the Red Mist to sustain themselves, this information should be reliable," Alethea explained patiently, though she had answered the same questions several times.

"They did transport a large amount of the Red Mist to mislead us once, and also used the Red Mist to attack us from a long distance. However, they've never reduced the Red Mist to deceive us, because that would be suicidal."

"It's very easy to understand," Agatha put in. "If the demons really had alternative supplies, they would have invaded the interior of Graycastle directly from the Misty Forest or the Hermes Plateau, which would definitely cause more damage than attacking from the frontier. If they have something else other than the Red Mist, they would no longer need to hold on to the Obelisk made of God's Stones."

Seeing no more objections, Alethea continued, "The demons' supply team is mainly made up of transformed Siege Beasts and several Mad Demons, which would not pose any threats to our Special Unit and the 'Seagull'. With this taken into consideration, our main target will be the Devilbeasts in the sky."

"As for the location," Alethea said as she pointed to Edith, "I agree with this mortal's judgement. She'll take over from here."

"This is a joint effort of the General Staff and the witches," the Pearl of the Northern Region said while smiling gracefully. "Also, special thanks to Miss Lightning and Miss Maggie for supplying us the map. Please take a look at the report you have. The land to the east of the Red Mist supply line is as flat as a pancake with hardly any trees, so it's not ideal for an ambush. Nonetheless, the 'Seagull' could see everything from above. The landscape to the west is much more rugged, and there's a small mountain there."

Roland flipped open the report on his desk and found the map. Compared to the high definition map drawn by Soraya, this map was apparently much simpler. Roland gathered that it was probably Lightning's work when she rode on Maggie in the sky. Although it was not accurate enough to serve as a guide for the troops and the artillery, it provided them with basic information on the rear of Taquila.

"We can more or less see the landscape on this side through the phantom instrument, so we need a map to supply the part not shown on the screen. There are three locations where Miss Andrea could shoot. One is the crest of the mountain in the north, another in the jungles in between, and the other the protruded area at the foot of the mountain in the south."

"The best location would be the crest," Roland cut in.

The so-called "mountain" was actually no more than 100 meters high, and it looked like a huge mound of earth in the distance, but this was the highest point in this area. Nothing could be more important for

a sniper than a clear view. From a high point, a sniper could not only hit his target from a distance but could also spy on the enemy on the ground.

"Yes, Miss Andrea said so too," Edith agreed with a nod. "That mountain is relatively far from the Red Mist supply line. If the 'Seagull' catches up with the Magic Slayer, the Special Unit would have to travel a long way to provide supports. Also, there's no place to hide on the top of the mountain, so we'll be pretty much exposed to the Devilbeasts in the sky. If anything happens, the 'Seagull' would not be able to come to rescue at a moment's notice. The most important reason is — we can't see it through the phantom instrument."

Roland said thoughtfully, " So, do you fear... that the demons would come?"

"This is the highest point of this area. I would be extremely careful if it were me. Although Lightning says the demons haven't done any war preparation, it doesn't hurt to be cautious, since this is, after all, a war of magic. Like the way we use the Sigil of Screaming your Majesty had put at the headstream of the Redwater River, we don't necessarily need a garrison. We simply need an alert. Remember, the biggest priority for the Special Unit is to maintain its secrecy. If they're exposed, there will be no point whatsoever in setting up an ambush."

"To be honest, back in the Union age, the most difficult part was to make mortals understand magic power." Just then, Alethea's voice came to Roland's mind. From the reactions of the people on the floor, it appeared that the message was exclusive for Roland. "Mortals rarely take magic power into account and act as if they're living in a different dimension from us, but this mortal is different... Your subordinates do have quite interesting personalities."

"That's because you guys have never really taught them. Not everyone is a genius. Education is the most effective way to elevate a civilization," Roland replied casually and then turned to Edith. "So, which location did you pick?"

"In the jungle," she replied quickly. "The sniper team will have a narrow view and could hide in there easily. They could monitor the sky while at the same time supporting Princess Tilly if necessary from the jungle. Of course, they could also hide at the foot of the mountain but it's too close to the Taquila ruin. If the enemy retreats, they'll be spotted very quickly. So overall, the jungle isn't the best option but —"

"The most thoughtful one," Roland supplied Edith's answer.

Edith agreed with a smile while placing her hand on her chest, "Exactly. Two units would round on the Magic Slayer. Miss Andrea could shoot him if he isn't aware of the ambush. If he is, the God's Punishment Witches will be stopping him. Nevertheless, the whole ambush plan relies on the new weapon made by Queen Anna."