

Witch 141

Chapter 141 Kisses

Later that evening, Roland sat in his office and began to think about new equipment.

The fact that the Church's pills had also appeared in the Port of Clearwater brought him a strong sense of crisis. He could even feel his scalp tingling all the time, regardless if it was the fact that the Church was supporting both him and Garcia in their fight for the throne, or the thought of Garcia's thousands of additional men she got from her alliance.

Thinking of the thousands of soldiers who are wrapped in iron armor and able to run at speeds equal to a full-on cavalry charge, it was hard not to become overwhelmed by such an image. Stopping such a massive charge with his thin rows of gunners would be a tough task for him. As soon as one person was able to reach his ranks, his First Army would come to receive heavy losses.

Fortunately, this pill didn't make someone immune to injuries, even with the medication the consumer's body was still made of flesh and blood.

He had to create weapons that had a higher firing rate and precision, which would also be able to fire over a longer distance.

But without mercury fulminate as the primer, Roland had to find another way to bypass this hurdle, and until then he had to produce some alternative equipment to deal with any possible crises.

And with Anna's new ability he had the confidence in achieving this. Now as long as he could draw the design, Anna would be able to process the object he wanted to create accurately. But also, her efficiency has reached an extraordinary level compared with all the prior tasks where the blacksmith had to create each part of the flintlock carefully; she could now stack several pieces together and form and cut them all at the same time.

With a universal education system and a unified measuring system, he had prepared all the steps he needed for starting a large-scale industrialized production work. But that doesn't mean that he can take a shortcut each time he comes across one. Anna's new capacity was simply a treasure house; carrying an endless potential with it that he could tap into. Every afternoon Roland was now at the testing area at the North Slope Mountain, studying and exploring together with Anna on the usage of her new ability. And in case he didn't have any time to spare, he would let her practice her control by carving some small items such as little witch dolls.

However, at the moment, it seemed that her carving skill was still at the stage of immaturity, but Roland believed firmly that one day his whole bookcase would be filled with colorful witch dolls... probably, right?

He picked up a steel ruler and placed it on the parchment, using it to draw two straight lines, at this moment he heard someone knocking at his door.

As long as a guard didn't shoot some information, then nine out of ten times it was a witch at his door. At this moment, most of the witches were in the living room on the first floor, undergoing Scroll's writing and reading lessons. So, the person at the door could only be someone who didn't have to participate in primary teaching, and there was only one witch who didn't need them.

“Come in.”

Sure, enough, when the door was opened, Anna came stepping into the room.

She gently closed the door and then went to Roland’s side at the table, holding the phantom image of a book in her arms.

Since the beginning of the lessons he could daily see her with a copy of his book, he had to say, even though Anna wasn’t very talkative, her popularity within the group of witches was unexpectedly good. Thinking about the past, it was the same with Nana, who was attached to her like she was her tail. Perhaps she was born with a natural charm to attract other witches?

“How can I help you?”

“Well,” she nodded in greeting and then laid the book she was holding open in front of Roland. “Here... you said that everything in the world was made up of tiny balls, which are all different from one another, but later on you also wrote that they could be turned into... waves?”

“What are waves? Anna asked.

“When you throw a stone into the water, the rising ripples are waves,” the Prince coughed twice, “This is just a concept, but this good enough, you don’t need to get to the bottom of it.”

“Why?”

Because I don’t know it myself, Roland cried out silently; Quantum mechanics is a mysterious and unexplored subject, and as long as I don’t know something I won’t write about it. Even if that might be the truth, I can’t say it aloud,

“Because the balls have the characteristics of waves but they also possess the characteristics of matter. We are the same as those tiny balls, only that our mass is too big, making it difficult for us to observe the fluctuation as they happen. As for a deeper understanding, it will still take several generations of research.”

He thought for a moment and then added, “Because this phenomenon is opposite to our common sense it is tough for us to understand. For us, it’s hard to imagine a four-dimensional space inside of the three-dimensional world. So, you don’t need to put it into your heart.”

Anna curled up her lips, clearly showing that she wasn’t satisfied with Roland’s explanation, but she quickly asked, “What is a four-dimensional space?”

“...”

When she finally no longer asked any further questions, the Prince’s had already become thirsty from all the talking. He had really underestimated Anna’s thirst for knowledge, if it went on like this, it wouldn’t be long before he didn’t have anything left that he could teach her.

Especially when Roland had asked her about her progress in math, she just replied, “Until now it was quite simple, and now that I’ve come to the topic of equations and matrices, they seem to be fascinating.

Simple and fascinating... Roland suddenly felt that the gap between person-to-person was too great, how long has it been? One week from learning simple elementary math until she came to equations and matrices and next it would be differentiation and integration. Back at his school, Anna would definitely have been an intimidating top student.

Moreover... a beautiful bookworm.

Roland looked at the woman who was reading the book, getting spellbound by what he saw. She had carefully arranged her hair over her forehead, but other hair strands had fallen over her cheek. Seeing this Roland could not stop himself from stretching out his index finger, gently stroking the hair behind her ear.

Feeling his finger, Anna turned her head, looking at Roland, with a smile all over her face. Her lake like pupils had no longer their peaceful expression. Instead, they were full of ripples. Staying so close to each other, until Anna opened her mouth trying to say something, but she was only able to move her lips, no sound could be heard. But Roland was still able to read her lips.

“Right now Nightingale isn’t here.”

The meaning of the sentence was very clear and Roland thought that it was stupid to pretend that he didn’t understand her. The whole room was silent, letting him faintly hear her breathing and the speeding up of her heartbeat.

Roland could no longer stop himself, he got became drawn towards her lips, Anna instead closed her eyes, and her cheeks gained a rosy touch. Being so near to her, Roland could smell the fragrance of her body and then finally their lips gently kissed.

Getting lost in the soft touch, the time seemed to stand still, making it impossible for him to tell how long it was until they separated.

Not giving him a chance to say anything, Anna stood on her tiptoe, joining their lips once more.

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“Hey, hey!” Mystery Moon sat cross-legged on her bed, deep in meditation with her eyes closed, her hands held high, forming a circle with her thumb and index finger.

“Have you turned mad?” Lily who was wrapping a towel around her wet hairs asked as she frowned.

“I’m thinking of myself as a particle,” she said, opening her eyes. “I’m a particle,” and she then pointed at Lily. “You’re a particle!”

The latter gave her a supercilious look and got into the soft bed.

“Oh, no again,” Mystery Moon sighed, “I truly think of everything as a particle, so why can’t I evolve like Anna?”

“But you don’t believe it,” Lily explained.

“I do believe it!”

“You do not believe,” she shook her head, “you can deceive others, but you can’t fool yourself... even so it isn’t an excellent reason, but I think that regardless of what the Prince says Anna believes everything he says, without questioning it. Of course, there is also the point that she is much smarter than you. This is the main reason why she was able to evolve her magic and gain access to new abilities.”

“...”

“In other words, don’t think any further about it, instead give your mind some peace and quiet.” Lily said and patting the place beside herself.

“Don’t you want to get stronger powers?” Mystery Moon asked disbelievingly, “Furthermore, I also want to do something for the Prince, ah.”

“I should evolve my magic so that I can let my food preservation last longer?” She yawned, “No, thank you. Besides, why do you want to do more work for him? Men are fickle and ruthless people; you only have to take Echo as an example.”

“Even so you say you aren’t interested, but with the exception of Leaves, you are the most attentive and serious one during class,” Mystery Moon muttered.

Lily took her pillow and threw it against Mystery Moon’s face, “Let, me, sleep!”

Chapter 142 Mine Cart

Since the day he had conquered the Longsong Stronghold a half month had already passed, and the five noble families of Longsong Stronghold had by now all already delivered the needed people and supplies to Border Town.

After the creation of the Ministry of Agriculture was completed, the new spring had finally begun, which was the first step for Roland’s farming revolution. The serfs who already saw the dawn to their life as free people started to work filled with motivation. The scene where someone had to use the whip to encourage the serfs to work basically disappeared in the area South of the Shishui River. The serfs who were lazy discovered that even though no one came to ‘encourage’ their speed, the officers of the Town Hall still came to control their work with their strange measuring tools. It was clear that the Lord didn’t care about the harvest of one or two fields, the only one who should care for their crops were the serfs who were working for their own future.

Even so, the quality of the officers of the Ministry of Agriculture wasn’t so outstanding, they had already thoroughly comprehended the distribution according to work principle, so Roland requested of them that they unceasing repeated these content to the serfs. To strengthen the indoctrination effect, as well as to satisfy the Prince’s own feeling, the shore at the Shishui River was filled with red banners. Which read “Labor is the only way to get rich,” “Work brings honor and glory,” “Work can change your destiny” and so forth.

Of course, these measures weren’t possible without taking any objections, for example, Barov was the first to stand up and complain about it.

“Your Royal Highness, something like this is meaningless, the vast majority of the serfs aren’t even able to read. Even if they could, they don’t care about the text written on the banners. These people are just

uneducated and ignorant, for some even the whip doesn't work, so what can you expect of some unfathomable and mystery text."

Roland 's answer, however, was quite simple: "Those banners are not meant for them."

"So why do you want to set up these banners?" Hearing this answer, the assistant minister showed a very confused expression.

"To create a living example."

He had never thought that serfs were stupid and unchangeable. It was true that they were uneducated, but that didn't mean that they couldn't think. Greed and interest will drive even a stupid person, that's simply human nature. So, if the implementation of the Ministry of Agriculture seemed to have little effect in the beginning, it would still leave a primer in their hearts, just like a seed, it would eventually begin to grow. When the first of the serfs were promoted to freemen, and when they used the harvested crops as an exchange for money to buy beautiful clothing, fine food, and even robust and warm brick houses, the often time repeated slogan would soon come back to their mind and become a reality which would burn itself deep into their hearts.

As for the banner at the shore, it was for the time that the universal education system would bear its first fruits.

By only relying on their own hands to get rid of poverty, becoming an official member of Border Town, even more than the native inhabitants, this was the power of hard work.

By comparing it they could all feel the gap between them, and their only chance to close it is by taking the intuitive to pursue him, like this the individual efficiency would rise to its highest level.

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Iron Head stood at the tunnel entrance of the mine, waiting for the delivery of a new ore.

Since the Months of Demons after he was nearly cooked by the high temperature of the steam, he never dared to stand so near to the black machine ever again.

Fortunately, there was the angelic like Miss Nana in Border Town. Whenever Iron Head touched his healed cheeks, his heart was filled with warm emotions. During his deluded and panic-stricken moments, he had even suspected that Miss Nana was one of the devil's minions, but that was clearly a desecration of herself. So, after the winter, he deliberately raised two salted fish and a wild boar leg and delivered them to the Pine Family.

To his surprise, Titus Pine was a Viscount, but unlike the other aristocrats who always held their nose high in the air, he openly accepted his apology. This was the first time that Iron Head felt that not all of the nobles were all ruthless people.

"Old Iron," shouted a miner who was covered in dust while he came running out from the tunnel, "the rope has already been fastened."

"All right," he exclaimed and turned in the direction of the steam engine, "Everyone clear the area! Frank, first you have to lift up the green lever, then you press the red lever! If you make a mistake, I'm going to twist off your head!"

“Rest assured, Old Iron, I know what I’m doing!” Frank shouted back.

After Nils was accepted into the First Army, it was now Iron Head who was in charge of the operation of the steam engine. During the first few days Frank had often made mistakes with the order, which had even caused one of the pipes to burst, so every time he made a new mistake he would get beaten up. Fortunately, His Royal Highness did not care about this matter, not only did he immediately send people to replace the damaged part, he didn’t even make them pay for the destroyed part. Originally, Iron Head had already formed a plan to confiscate their monthly payment in case of something happening.

With the opening of the intake valve, the steam engine released a majestic white cloud of gas and the main wheel began to slowly turn, moving the capstan and stretching the hemp rope straight.

“Don’t let your spirits wander! Look at the hemp rope, look at it carefully!” Old Iron shouted.

Now, in addition to the steam engine, the transportation of the ore in the mine tunnel had also changed.

His Royal Highness had ordered artisans to create many wooden sleepers, which then were laid along the whole of the mine’s tunnel. Afterward two long wooden sticks were also placed on the wooden sleepers, which at first glance it looked like a wooden ladder.

His Royal Highness had called it a wooden rail transportation system, which is a very convoluted name. Even so, it doesn’t seem to be too complicated, but together with the wooden ladder, it also came with a special miner’s cart! That cart is really something. Usually, we needed three to four days to transport the ore, but the steam engine can pull several carts out in just a moment’s breath.

Iron Head had precisely observed this four-wheel miner’s cart. It could run on the wooden tracks and was made from top to bottom completely out of iron. Using so much iron should have cost a lot of money. The key reason that it could move on those thin sticks of wood without falling laid in the way of its construction. The inside of the wheel was smaller than its edge, fixing it firmly on the rail. On top of the wheels there stood a boxy iron pot, which had on its end and beginning each a small hole where they could be tied together with a hemp rope.

He couldn’t help himself from admiring His Royal Highness’ wisdom, with such a simple design, he had made the transporting of the ore so much easier. Before his invention, it was the transportation of the ore, which was the most time-consuming labor.

However, this system also wasn’t perfect, for example, just after five days of usage, there were already two wooden rails which had been crushed under the weight, and it didn’t take much time until others followed after them. Later, His Royal Highness had wrapped all the rails in a thin layer of iron, somewhat improving the durability of the rails.

In addition to the problems with the tracks, the mine also had a rope break by accident, which still haunted Iron Head until this day. According to the regulations, they should only drag four mine carts out at the same time. But on that day, the miners were unusually quick, and because of this, they had linked six mine carts together. During the first half of the transport everything went well, but then suddenly broke one of the hemp ropes. The rebound of the half arm-thick rope was so powerful that the miner who got hit by the rope got several ribs broken. The mine carts instead slid down from the trail and knocked several of the miners off their feet, crushing their legs under it.

Fortunately, Iron Head who had encountered such an accident himself instantly knew what to do. He immediately organized some miners who help him to transport the injured men to the home of the Viscount. He was aware that as long as they still had some life left in them, Miss Nana would be able to heal them as if nothing had ever happened.

“Old Iron, the mine carts are out!” shouted a man who was responsible for overlooking the mine entrance.

Hearing this, Iron Head shouted his next orders, “Frank, wait ten breath and only then should you shut down the steamer, pay attention to the order!”

“Understood!”

After the four mine carts, had slowly stopped at the end of the track, Iron Head went over to record the results of their harvest. The first two carts were filled with a reddish-brown stone, iron ore, which was also the same kind of mineral which was found the most in the mine, the third cart was filled with grayish stones with hints of yellow, which should be copper. But when Iron Head came to the fourth cart, he got rooted on the spot immediately, in it was a kind of ore he had never seen before: The were of a dark brown, but when they sunlight fell on them, they sprinkled in a dark metallic luster.

These stones are clearly an unknown mineral, Iron Head shook his head, the Northern Slope Mine is so large and has so many branches; it’s normal that we would find inexplicable things in it. So, he just drew a cross on his paper, giving the signal to send the carts further into the warehouse. As for the pile of black stone, whether it would be directed to the furnace or not, had nothing to do with him.

Chapter 143 Migrants

The sailboat coming from Longsong Stronghold slowly docked at the pier of Border Town.

After the gangway was lowered, the people on the ship began to walk down the gangway while carrying all kinds of bags. For most of them, it was the first time that they had set foot on this strange land, so they appeared to be somewhat at a loss by what they saw, but the sailors behind them urged them to move further and disregard their uneasy feelings.

When the crowd began to push forward, a middle-aged woman’s foot accidentally slipped. Her body became so unbalanced that she was already falling over the gangway. However, another woman quickly stepped ahead and caught the middle-aged woman’s wrist, stopping her fall.

“Thank... thank you,” the rescued woman’s chest was still rising and falling quickly, showing her lingering fear as she said thank you several times.

The other woman, however, just cheerfully waved her hand, indicating that a thank you wasn’t necessary.

Standing on the pier and waiting for the arriving travelers was Ferlin Eltek. he immediately saw that the skillfully acting woman was Irene, his beloved wife. She wore a white dress, and her long hair was coiled up on top of her head; she always looked beautiful and refined.

The knight was no longer able to suppress his excitement. The moment Irene finally set foot on the pier, he immediately began to quickly approach her, forcing the poor woman who was still clinging on to her

away from her while totally disregarding the shouts of the people around him. Getting approached so unexpectedly, Irene became shocked, but the moment she recognized that it was Ferlin who had hugged her, she fell into his arms.

“When I heard the news of the Duke’s defeat, I got really scared. And when I later tried to meet you in Longsong Stronghold, I never got the chance,” Irene immediately began to speak, “Fortunately, you are safe now.”

“I was imprisoned in the dungeon of the Lord’s castle, and it was impossible for the guards to let you in,” Ferlin explained as he let go of his wife. “How was your time during the last half month, was it okay?”

“...” For a moment she didn’t give him an answer but then she quietly said, “I left the theater.”

Ferlin immediately understood the meaning behind his wife’s words. During the time when he was still the First Knight in the Western Territories, only the Duke dared to lay his hands on her body. However, when he had become His Royal Highness’ prisoner, the men in Irene’s theater group no longer had to hide their malicious intents. They were only waiting for the right opportunity to assault her. So if she had still gone to the theater to work, it would be the same as sending a sheep into a tiger’s den.

“That does not matter, I got a job here, and the salary also isn’t low.” Ferlin tried to comfort her, “Let us first go home. There, we can talk in peace.”

“Home?” Irene was clearly surprised, “We do not have to live separately?”

Usually, the prisoners who weren’t killed during the fight and who weren’t bought free were mostly used as coolies. These prisoners were packed in bunches and had to live in tents or barracks, laying on the ground which was only covered with straw. At the same time, the families of such prisoners weren’t treated any better. The women had to live in special camps, where they also had to sleep on the floor. During the time the men worked, the women had to clean up the men’s homes and wash their laundry.

Thinking of this, Ferlin got a warm feeling within his heart. At the farm near the Longsong Stronghold, Irene at least had her own spacious room with a comfortable and soft bed. Yet, she still chose to come to Border Town on her own. Even though she knew that she had to live with other women in a small house or tent and would have to do forced labor every day she didn’t flinch.

“I am now a teacher.” in one hand he took Irene’s luggage and with the other he grabbed her hand. They walked side by side in the direction of the “New Civilization” district, “As a teacher, I get my own house for free.”

To tell the truth, when he had first heard the teachers’ treatment from the Prince, he hadn’t expected too much. As a prisoner, having his own room could be seen as good. Even if the room had leaks where the wind or the rain could come through, it would still be a good living area after repairing it himself. Thinking of this, the actual result was totally unexpected for him; he had never thought that the assigned houses for the teachers would be so... regular.

Entering the new district, the streets suddenly become spacious, and the ground became covered with gray gravel. The stones on the ground were smooth and flat and even after walking on them for a long while, their feet wouldn’t hurt. At first, Ferlin didn’t understand the reason for all of this; this was clearly a waste of manpower and the masons’ time. He didn’t understand the reason for it until he saw

rainwater flowing along the gaps in the stones sinking into the ground on a day with heavy rain. The rainwater was lead into drainage ditches on both sides of the road. In Longsong Stronghold, every time when it rained, the streets became muddy and were covered with puddles, so the new streets in Border Town were many times better.

Irene, who was taking in her surroundings, showed a puzzled expression and asked, "Here all the houses seem to be new, are you sure you went the right way?"

"Yes, my dear, we're almost there."

Two corners later, Ferlin Eltek paused in front of a two-story brick house with Irene, "We're here."

"Where?" She turned around twice, only to see that her husband was still looking at the house directly in front of them. Not daring to ask aloud, she covered her mouth, "Is the whole house our home?"

"Of course not," Ferlin laughed. "This is the teacher building, our home is in the middle of the second floor, now let us step inside."

Taking the key out of his pocket to open the door, Ferlin pulled his wife by her hand into the new home. Their home contained a central hall, two bedrooms and two auxiliary rooms, which were freely available for them. Although the rooms were small, it was still surprisingly comfortable. Whether it was the central hall decoration or the bedroom layout, everything felt quite refreshing. And now with Irene at Ferlin's side, the house was now even more perfect.

"Heaven, are you sure you were taken as a captive?" Irene couldn't stop herself as she ran from one room to another, carefully looking at everything. She was as excited like a small child, "Will we actually live here?"

"Well, of course." Ferlin answered happily and took some bread and cheese from the cupboard and placed them on the table. "You didn't eat anything on board right? Let us first fill your stomach, I will have to go out to work later."

"Right, you are a teacher now," Irene ran back to her husband, "do you have to teach the children of the nobility?"

"No, not the nobles, rather, I have to instruct His Highness' citizens."

"Citizens?" Irene couldn't believe what she had heard, "teach them what?"

Deciding that an example would be better than his explanation, he took a book from the table and gave it to his wife, "I have to teach them how to read and write. This was given to me by His Highness, my... 'teaching material'"

Even so, he had chosen to become a teacher, but he was still worried that he would be unable to do the job. After all, normally it was always a white-haired old man who served as teacher. However, His Royal Highness' s attendant had said that he should just teach according to the teaching materials. Looking at this so-called textbook, he realized that the concept of learning how to read and write could also be refined to such a degree.

From the teaching method to the course's contents, everything was written down. On the first page, there was also a list of dozens of frequently asked questions by novice teachers, such as, "How to

become a good teacher? How to awaken the student's interest in learning? How to test the effectiveness of one's teaching?" The answers were always short and easy to understand, giving the reader the feeling of having learned something new. Without realizing it himself, Ferlin had already been attracted to the book, even before the start of his career.

Irene was also clearly such a case, from early on she had lived in the theater and had read many books and the scripts for plays. Ferlin had lamented more than once that with his wife's face and intelligence, if she had been born into an aristocratic family, her name would have certainly been known as an outstanding woman.

After turning a few pages, Irene suddenly raised her head and asked, "Previously you said... that the teachers are paid quite well?"

"20 silver royals a month, and an annual raise of five."

"There is also no theater here, right?"

"No... there," Ferlin hesitated, he had already guessed his wife's idea.

Sure enough, the other side closed the book and laughingly said, "Then it's decided, I will also become a teacher, Honey, just like you."

TN: Release that Witch Fan Art Contest Voting

Chapter 144 True thoughts

Near the North Slope Mine, at the furnace back yard.

Nightingale picked up the glass which laid on the table and raised it near her eyes to take a closer look. The translucent crystal glass sparkled in the light and not even a little bit of discoloration could be seen.

She knew that this cup was known as the Crystal Cup; the firing process and the formula had always been the royal alchemist's confidential information. The value of such cups like the one she held in her hands were measured in gold royals. Such crystal glassware was only used together with silver tableware; they served as an opportunity for powerful nobles or wealthy businessmen to show off their wealth.

But now, these crystal containers were gathered from inside the whole palace and were about to be melted into their raw state.

"Your Highness, you can't burn these cups, they are worth several gold royals!" Nightingale exclaimed.

"I have no time to study how to turn sand into a colorless glass, so this was the only way I could get it." Roland took another beautiful cup and threw it into the cauldron formed from Anna's black fire. Seeing this cup, Nightingale remembered that the Prince had used it to drink ale out of it during their afternoon tea sessions before the start of the Months of Demons and during the welcoming party for her sisters.

Due to the stable high temperature, the glass inside the pot soon began to melt, turning into a sticky paste.

"Do you get glass... by burning sand?" Anna asked. "Are they made out of the same substances?"

“Well, the main ingredients are similar, but in the sand, there are a lot of impurities. The glass created by burning natural sand is partially brown or green most of the time, which doesn’t meet the required standards.”

“So with other words, crystal clear glass is created out of pure sand?”

Hearing this question, Roland had to smile. “You can think of it like that. I already put this knowledge in the book, so you will see it again later. Those small balls decide what matter looks like.”

Whatever, I don’t understand it anyway... Nightingale thought uninterested, the color of the glass doesn’t affect the function of its container, ah. Furthermore, you aren’t even using them as drinking glasses, so why do you insist on using clear crystal cups? Asking this herself, she went to Anna and took a look at the remolded glassware.

Although they were still transparent and crystal clear, their new appearance and their former form of cups were completely different.

Some looked like a tube, with a round bottom and a thin and long body. The other ones looked like bottles with the body of a kettle, but the bottleneck was only thumb-sized.

The strangest thing was a tube that was bent like a horseshoe but with no seals on either side of it.

Not understanding their function, Nightingale asked, “What are you going to do with these crystal glasswares?”

“I won’t use them. They are for the alchemist who will later come to Border Town,” Roland used a rod to stir within the melted glass.” They can use these vessels to extract acids and alkali chemicals; I need those chemicals to produce new weapons.”

Acids? Alkali Chemicals? Nightingale blinked confusedly with her eyes, completely unable to understand what he was talking about. This kind of feeling made her depressed. But if she asked one question after another, she would seem to be ignorant, and Nightingale really didn’t want to expose this side of herself to Anna, so she tried to focus on their conversation. This was the only way she could understand what they were talking about.

“How do you want to lure alchemists to Border Town? Even Longsong Stronghold has no Alchemy Workshop. You have to go to Redwater City to find some alchemist, and I also heard that their pay is even higher than that of ministers. It will be hard to recruit them with gold royals alone.”

“You actually know a lot,” Roland replied with a smile, “That’s right. I have already sent people on their way to Redwater City; I’m awaiting their answer in around two weeks. But I don’t try to recruit them with the help of gold royals. Instead, I offered to reveal some secrets of alchemy to them. As for if I am able to recruit them or not, we will see, but at least I tried it.”

The praise in the first part of His Royal Highness’ explanation immediately dispelled Nightingale’s depressed mood, so she happily went to the center of the yard and picked up one of the pastries placed on a round table and stuffed it into her mouth.

Since Roland would now spend most of his time staying at the experimental site during the afternoon, the tea session had also moved from the castle backyard to the Northern Mountain Slope.

On the round table there were the special snacks the chef had created under Roland's instructions.

For example, this is called steamed stuffed bun- its crust was made out of wheat flour, but she didn't know the kind of method they had used to make it so incomparably soft. It was wrapped around a meatball, and when she bit into it, her mouth was filled with juice... in that way, it wasn't like bacon, which was hard to swallow. As long as one bit into it, it was the perfect fusion of minced meat and meat stock.

After happily eating it, Nightingale put one finger after another into her mouth and sucked them clean. While sitting on the couch with a full stomach and a worry-free heart, Nightingale was suddenly overcome with a tired feeling.

Can it be that I have become more and more lazy as of late?

Her body was sprinkled by the afternoon sun, surrounding her with warmth just like water. The rustling sound of leaves created by the spring breeze calmed her heart. She took off her shoes, rolled her legs under her body and laid down sideways.

This perspective allowed her to directly look at the back door of the calcining room, which had an extra curtain in front of the door. The curtain was most probably only for her so that she couldn't secretly enter the room. Thinking of this, Nightingale felt it was quite funny, the wall separating it from the backyard was well and good, but in the end, it didn't matter. After all, she could just go through the ground. She had also once entered the mysterious room, even standing quietly beside him during the production process, but she still didn't take the finished gunpowder.

However, the other side still thought that she didn't know anything about it, but in the end, he didn't know that it was he who was being kept in the dark.

After moving her head, Nightingale was able to look at Anna.

She was holding a recently melted down cup in her hands and spoke with a serious and focused expression to His Royal Highness.

Towards this talented woman with a common family background, Nightingale's heart only had feelings of admiration.

She and her sisters were able to escape from their fate of homelessness and were freed from the torture of the demonic bite largely because of Anna. If she hadn't changed the view of how the Prince looked at the witches, all these positive developments would have never happened.

If His Highness were to ever actually take a witch as his wife, then Anna was almost the only person Nightingale could think of.

Although there was also a trace of expectation in her own heart, Nightingale had chosen to deeply bury it in her heart. She decided that it would be enough for her to be happy as long as she was able to stay with His Highness for most of the time.

But when she closed her eyes, she couldn't prevent the pictures from appearing in her head.

Roland stood in the King's Palace in front of the throne as the new King. He was wearing a golden crown and was holding a scepter in his hand. Then he began to move toward the castle terrace, where he showed himself to the crowd, accepting their admiration and cheers.

The whole time was a woman walking and standing at his side; she was wearing a white satin skirt and had to be Anna. Just like the king, she also wore a golden crown, but her face was hidden behind a veil. She raised her hand and waved to the people with a smile.

During the entire time, Lightning was drawing circles above them, letting rose petals rain down on them, and from the king's clock tower in the distance, a melodious bell toll could be heard.

On both sides, Nightingale could see her sisters standing, shouting their blessings and applauding.

She could feel how her body was slowly overwhelmed by sleepiness and her consciousness became hazier with each passing second.

Roland finally turned into the direction of the woman beside him, lifted her veil and slowly moved his face towards her lips.

The final scene of her vision become very blurred. When the veil was taken away, Nightingale saw that the woman standing there with closed eyes as if in a trance... was herself.

She tilted her lips upwards and fell asleep.

Chapter 145 Searching for traces, finding the cause (Part 1)

When Theo entered the tavern, his nose was immediately assaulted by a sultry and moist odor mixed together with the smell of the alcohol.

Under the dim light, he could see a group of men with their sweaty and bare upper bodies left exposed. They sat around the table at the center, pouring one cup after another of the cheap beer into their mouths, all the while loudly laughing and talking with one another. Then there was maid dressed in revealing clothes brought them all a new round of beer.

After looking around the place for a while, he finally found the goal of his coming to this place. A young man was sitting in the corner, which also happened to be the most hidden place in the whole tavern. The only noticeable part of him was the withered wild rose which he had put on the table in front of him.

After discovering the man, Theo went to bar, first getting a cup of beer for himself. While slowly tasting the bitter flavor of the beer, he discreetly screened the room to see whether there were any other eyes that showed any interest to the little man. The result was very satisfactory, although there would occasionally be some people that would look at the corner, most of them were unintentional movements. Only one man, sitting at the central table, was constantly keeping watch over the corner trying to mask it by drinking his beer.

One person as a contractor, one person as a lookout, the typical method used by shady street rats, this was also identical of Theo's knowledge.

"Once more cup," he shouted to the bartender, "with ice."

“Sir, for a beer on the rocks you have to pay double,” the bartender reminded him.

Hearing this, Theo threw a silver royal in his direction, “The more ice, the better.”

Holding his cup with the white mist coming out of it, he went across to the little man, placed his beer on the table so that it swept over the wild rose. The cold beer flowed along the petals, seeing this happen the little man raised his head and looked impatiently at Theo. “Good beer is meant for drinking, not for the table, what madness has befallen you?”

“An offer to the wild rose,” Theo teasingly spoke as he took a seat across from the little man. “I’ve been looking for you for a long time now.”

“That only proves that you haven’t been looking in the right places,” he replied in a raspy voice. “That being the case, as a client... tell me now, what do you want from me? Are you asking for clues, scrounging, redeem lost goods, or do you want to get rid of some stolen good?”

“No, I hope you can help me with spreading a rumor.”

“That doesn’t fall into the business area of the Wild Rose’s.” He shook his head.

“No, don’t be so fast to jump to conclusions. As long you get paid with gold royals, you will be surely interested in this,” Theo shook his finger, “I am not one of those laymen youngsters. Occasionally, so to ensure that the prey takes the bait, you first have to lay out the bait, and rumors are the best way to achieve this. There won’t be any evidence left and with this there will be no way to catch you. This is much safer than stealing.”

“That sounds reasonable,” acknowledged the little man, showing a smile, “Have you commissioned anyone else besides the Wild Rose?”

“I completely trust that you can achieve it alone, after all, this is only a small place. Their name also doesn’t sound as elegant, and they also don’t seem to be as capable.”

“The business area here is just too small, so it’s hard to find the right business, the competition within Silver City is vicious.” He picked up the rose, shook it, and when it was dry he put it into his pocket, “Tell me, what rumor do you want us to spread for you?”

“Some news about the witches,” Theo laughed, “An organization with the name of Witch Cooperation Association has found the Holy Mountain, they were also able to get rid of the pain during the demon’s bite, gaining eternal peace.”

“Bro, this news is...” the little man smacked his lips, “Really outdated. Although I will rarely step away from trying to scam someone, your gossip should at least be a little believable. Let me guess, in case you aren’t trying to abduct a witch, then it sounds like you want to ensnare the church, which is the same as just waiting to be sent to the gallows by a group of judges, so I think it should be the first option...

“showing a vulgar smile, “Unfortunately, as far as I know, most of the witch-hunters who’ve wanted to catch a witch by now are all already dead. Even though they were all carrying a God’s Stone of Retaliation on them, those women, after all, aren’t just some idiots.”

“Why shouldn’t it be believable?” Theo asked curiously.

“An organization formed by witches would be as flashy as the moon during the night. If it were true, the church would undoubtedly flock to it. So, if I were a witch, I would naturally never go to such a place, in case the news was a fake, then there would be no reason for me to go. As for getting rid of the demon’s bite, my man, are you serious? The witches are the Devil’s messenger, even the witches themselves would snort disdainfully at hearing such a pack of lies.”

“Then come forth according to this statement,” Theo disagreed.

“In the end, the customer always has the final say,” the young man just shrugged his shoulders, “It doesn’t matter to me, just don’t come to me afterward and say that I didn’t warn you. This job will cost you twenty gold royals.”

“One-time payment?”

“Yes, the Wild Rose does not take deposits, nor anything other than money.” He spread his arms, “this business relies entirely on sincerity.”

Theo sighed, but then he took out a small money bag from his pocket. Turning it around and letting nineteen gold royals fall onto the table, he then took another moneybag from his belt and put another one hundred silver royals on the table and pushed everything to in front of the young man. The latter just checked the authenticity of one of the gold royals and afterward swept everything into his own bag.

“Will the news reach the witches’ ear?”

The moment he had received his money, the little man’s face became a lot friendlier, “The Wild Rose has accepted your commission, it’s nearly impossible that we cannot get the accepted jobs done. Just like I had previously said, the competition within Silver City is cruel. In case we would ever try to deceive our customers, or if anything was to happen to them, our reputation would definitely fall. If you don’t want to rush back towards the West and wait for someone else to take the bait, you can always stay here for the next few days, it won’t be long before you will hear the news spread all over the place.

“Of course, only for as long as they are willing to speak about it. I’ll keep it short and wish you success on your hunt, and if you ever manage have catch one, don’t bring them to the Church. You can make more money by selling them to the aristocrats. And if you cannot find the right person or you’re too afraid of being found by the Church, you can always come back to us, we will only take a small introduction fee.”

With this offer, the young man stood up, took the bag and left the tavern. It didn’t take long before the person responsible for keeping the young man safe also stood up and left. In the next fifteen minutes, Theo just waited and drank his cup of beer, then belched and also left the pub.

With this, the task given by His Highness has finally come to an end, he thought. Fallen Dragon Ridge, Redwater City, Silver City, he had visited them all. Always searching for the local street rats, letting them spread the news up to the last corner of the city. There were always such hidden organizations, even the King’s City was no exception to this. Such organizations were able to reach places and spread news, he could never contact using the legal ways. How successful they were only depended on how much money the customer had already offered.

The only difficulty in this job was to find the contractor, he had to say, as an outsider it was quite difficult to get their trust. Only if he used the right phrase would they try to talk him, but to receive the

sentence, he had already had to pay at least five gold royals. Theo lamented within his heart, if I hadn't already had similar experiences in King's City, I am afraid I would never have been able to leave the Fallen Dragon Ridge.

On the way back to his inn, he noticed that there was something not quite right.

Someone is tracking me.

Although the other party was very subtle, as a professional bodyguard, Theo immediately became aware of the other's existence. He pulled out the dagger at his waist, and turned at the next corner, entering an unknown alley.

Are they from the Wild Rose? He had purposely turned his money bag inside out when he had paid the nineteen gold royals, this way he wanted to avoid the other side becoming greedy. In general, hundreds of silver royals weren't enough for them to go after an already accepted customer.

He pressed his back against the wall, counting the ever-approaching footsteps. The moment the other person was about to pass by the ally he fiercely rushed out from his hideout, instantly pressing his dagger against the unknown person's neck.

"Don't move!" Theo lowly hissed.

But he would have never expected that the other one would just turn into fog, disappearing.

It's a witch! The moment he realized it and wanted to shout out, was the moment he received a severe blow to the back of the neck. Immediately becoming dizzy then losing all of his strength and unable to keep himself from falling to the ground.

Chapter 146 Searching for traces, finding the cause (Part 2)

When Theo regained his consciousness, he could still feel a stabbing pain from the back of his neck.

Damn, that brute of a woman had hit him really hard. He opened his eyes and tried to move, only to discover that his hands were tied behind his back and his legs were tied to the legs of the chair he was sitting on.

"He woke up," suddenly the voice of a woman could be heard.

"What is your name?" One person stepped in front of him and raised his chin. "I suggest that you do not lie, or tomorrow you will already have become just another floating corpse in the moat."

Theo had to blink to see clearer, the woman in front of him was wearing a veil, and her body was shrouded in a robe, apparently, she didn't want him to be able to recognize her appearance.

"Theo," he answered truthfully, at the same time he secretly looked around.

It was a narrow room, and his surrounding was covered in dust and pieces of plaster from a broken statue, even though it was once complete, now merely one-half of it was left. The accumulated dust and plaster had already begun to turn brown as if it had already been abandoned for a long time. The room was without windows, so no sky could be seen and he could only speculate on how late it was. The only light in the room came from an oil lamp hanging on the wall.

“From the Fallen Dragon Ridge to Silver City, such a long way,” continued the woman in a cold voice, “Why are you looking for us?”

“I am not looking for you, it’s the Witch Cooperation Association who is looking for you.”

“What is an Association?”

“It’s a group of witches just like you. They had entrusted me with the task of spreading their news.”

“Nonsense,” the woman snapped, “I do not know where you had heard their name, but they are located far to the East, in the Seawind Region. Do you think that just by randomly throwing names into the room we would believe you?” The woman drew a knife from her waist and Theo had to discover that it was the knife that he had previously used. “I’ll give you one last chance, don’t challenge my patience!”

“What I said was the truth!” He stated in a loud voice, he wanted to continue to shout, but in the end, he didn’t dare, so he said with a suppressed voice, “They had originally intended to go into the Impassable Mountain Range, trying to find the Holy Mountain, unable to find the Holy Mountain, they had to settle down in Border Town, only to discover that the symptoms of the demon’s bite had disappeared. When they realized this, they naturally wanted to save other witches, I swear I did not lie!”

“Then why would they send you?”

“Cause I helped them, I helped them when one of their members was chased by the Church’s Army of Judges, I helped her by distracting her pursuers. Their mentor is called Cara, and there are also Wendy and Scroll, they asked me to go!”

After listening to his explanation, the masked woman turned silent, she put the dagger back to her waist and stepped behind him. Soon, Theo could hear how the two women whispered behind his back.

Fledglings, he commented in his heart, even though the two of them act like criminals, it is still clear that they are entirely new to interrogating.

During an interrogation, it is absolutely taboo to ask questions that had only one answer, in the case that they didn’t get their answer, the questioner only had the choice to kill or not to kill? If they decide to kill, they will lose any further possibility of receiving any more information, if they didn’t kill, it’s equivalent to losing their threat of dying. This would severely damage the interrogator’s position of power, and the effectiveness of the next threat would be substantially reduced.

If he were the interrogator, he would start the torture with the fingers, for every lie one finger would be cut off. So even if there were an error in judgment, it would become a big problem. Under this threatening atmosphere the enemy’s heart would quickly collapse, but without professional training, it would be very tough to carry out such a trial.

As long as he would show a frightened look, the interrogator would become unsure, which is equally to exposing that they just cannot tell whether he was lying or telling the truth.

And Cara, Holy Mountain, and the Witch Cooperation Association were reliable and genuine information, which would further strengthen the persuasiveness of his information.

It didn’t take long before the masked woman appeared once more in front of him, “When was it that they entered the Western Territory?”

“Two or three months before the Months of Demons, and directly after the end of winter, they returned to the town, claiming that they had found the Holy Mountain.

“How many people are they?”

“Up to 40? I’m not sure of it, in addition to Cara, there are almost no other witches who decided to show themselves,” Theo decided to add another bit of information, “Cara the Snake Witch, have you heard of her? She has the ability to summon magical snakes, one of them is called ‘nothingness’. With her, she can quickly erase every toxin. I have seen it myself, it was very powerful.”

“You actually do not fear the witches?” The woman’s voice seemed to be a bit puzzled.

“Why should I be afraid, the witches are very... beautiful, they don’t possess claws like demonic beasts, and furthermore they don’t hurt ordinary people. If I feared them, I would have never gone so far to spread the news.”

“If someone went to Border Town, how could they contact them?”

“Some of them can naturally see magic, so if there is a witch, they will find her.”

“Shadow, what do you think?” The masked women looked into the direction behind Theo.

“I’m not sure,” the witch, known as Shadow, hesitated. “Shouldn’t we wait for our sister and then make a decision? She surely will know what to do.”

“All right.” She nodded and took a clean chair, sitting herself in front of Theo.

“Who is your older sister?”

“The guide,” the masked woman’s attitude had softened a lot compared to before. Probably his statement that he didn’t fear the witches, changed her thoughts and feelings a lot, “she will take us away from here.”

“You will leave? Where will you go to?”

The spoken too just shook her head and didn’t answer.

“You are not a witch from Silver City, right?” Theo continued, “Your accent is not the same as the accent of the King. Silver City was near the capital, so the inhabitants here are proud of imitating the king’s accent.”

She hesitated for a moment, “I... am from the South.”

Witches from all over the Kingdom have gathered here, and soon they will be lead away from here... Theo thought to himself, there is no doubt, they are another witch organization. They are also attracting witches, just like the Witch Cooperation Association had done before. However, in the end, where do they want to go?

At this moment, from outside the sound of footsteps could be heard.

“Sister came back!” Shadow shouted cheerfully. With the creaking sound of the door opening, Theo began to hold his breath.

“Is he the one who has been using the underground channels to spread the news?” The newcomer’s voice was mature and steady. “What have you asked him?”

“What he had said seems to be true.” Began the masked woman to explain how she saw the questioning, “He could not have been so clear in his explanation if he had not been in contact with the Witch Cooperation Association.”

“Well, there’s that,” she went by Theo, stepping in front of him. There was a big difference between her and the masked woman, she didn’t hide her face. Her long black hair nearly reached her waist, and she seemed to be around twenty-five years old. Taking her in whole, the most eye-catching part of her were her eyes. Theo discovered that she unexpectedly had golden irises, even standing in the dim light, her eyes were still clearly visible just like the stars during the night.

Theo had often been at His Highness side, but the unknown woman’s appearance could still be considered as belonging the top category. She had a visible scar over her left eye, beginning at her brow and going down to her cheek. This scar not only did not destroy her beauty but instead added another harsh touch to it. From the first moment that he saw her, Theo felt that this woman was a full-fledged warrior.

“If the Witch Cooperation Association had indeed found the Holy Mountain, they would have never sent people to spread such news.” She shook her head, “This wouldn’t only let the Church getting wind of it and let them arrive, no they would even have to leave Border Town as soon as possible, I’m afraid they would only bring a great calamity over themselves.”

“Then... what should we do?” Shadow asked.

“The ship will arrive today at midnight, and you aren’t the only witches, so you will have to leave,” she said without hesitation, “I’ll escort you to the ship. As for the Wi...” The black-haired woman looked at Theo who was still tied to the chair, “Please help me to say hello to Tilly, tell her I’ll be late for a few days and perhaps I’m even be able to bring some more witches with me.”

“You want to go with him to Border Town?” Shadow asked surprised, “But, in case this is a hoax...”

She smiled a little and said full of confidence, “if that were the case, it would be the same as killing oneself.”

Chapter 147 Missionary Mission

Alicia had never thought that she would one day become a member of a missionary mission.

After all, when the Church sent people on such a mission, the group would always be formed from elite warriors who were also well versed in letters and military tactics, since they would represent the face of the Church the entire time they were away. She was very confident in her fighting skills and her etiquette; it could even be said that she looked like... the whole year I’m constantly moving along the defensive line, always holding and waving my double-edged greatsword, can such a woman be good-looking when she has to go somewhere? Thinking of this, her whole body was covered in a feeling of unease.

The Priestess Mira had said, that they had to go to the western border town of the Kingdom of Graycastle, investigating the case of the royal power housing and shielding some witches. In addition to

the Priestess who led the envoy, the group also consisted of ten Judges, one of them being the captain who had given her the cold pill during the defense of Hermes.

But it seemed that even away from the battlefield, he was still constantly wearing his cold face, and just by standing beside him Alicia could feel how the temperature drastically fell.

The Priestess instead was the completely opposite expression, she was already over the age of 40, and had a pair of wise and farseeing eyes. Always telling and laughing about anecdotes of the Church, she clearly had a lot of experience, full of passion for others' interest but never losing her elegant demeanor as she went. Even in the presence of the Archbishop, her aura wouldn't reduce. More than once, Alicia had heard that she was the likeliest candidate to be the next bishop.

And to the warrioress' surprise, as a public official, Mira's riding skills were not much worse than the skills of the Judges. For the past two days, she had spent most of her time in front of the troops, leading them ever further down the mountain trail, bypassing the forests, cities, and towns, so that she could always keep the horses going at the same speed and try to reduce the physical exertion. This technique was just like that of an experienced long-term rider.

When they left the Hermes boundary and entered the Kingdom of Graycastle, one of the Judges asked, "We aren't going further south?"

"No, the distance between Border Town and where we are is too far, if we take the land route, my buttocks will start to bloom just like flowers." Mira waved her hand disapprovingly, "We will first go eastwards until we reach the Hidden Valley Town, there is a river which flows to Redwater City and from there it won't be much further before we reach Longsong Stronghold.

"When was it that you first joined the Church?" Alecia asked curiously. "Not only do you know all sorts of anecdotes about things that've happened in the Holy City, but you also know a lot about the world at large."

"I joined the Church, twelve years ago, when I was thirty," Mira replied.

"That's quite late," Alicia exclaimed, "as far as I know, the older one is, the more difficult it would become to comprehend the doctrines of God, it is even more shocking that it only took you ten years to be promoted from the rank of a believer to that of a Priestess."

"Yes, well," Mira smiled, "This is one of the enchanting aspects of the Church. I ah, was originally the daughter of a merchant and traveled together with my father through the four kingdoms to sell goods. Goods that are common at some places at other locations are rare and because of this worth much more.

"For example, the price for green coral, when we bought it from local fishermen in the Seawind Region, we could buy them for a price of only twenty to thirty silver royals. We put them into water tanks and transported them the whole way northward to Imperial Palace of the Kingdom of Endless Winter. If the transport was successful and the corals still had their natural color, and were without any broken branches, we could sell them for five or more gold royals. I often thought, it's obviously that they are the same item, so how can it be that there is such an enormous difference in their value?"

"Because... in some places they are rare?" Alicia suggested.

“At the beginning I thought the same.” Mira nodded in agreement, “But then something happened that changed my view. One noble secretly harbored a witch who was able to control the temperature, after some tests he finally came up with a way in which he could keep and raise the corals of the Seawind Region in the Kingdom of Eternal Winter. He turned the basement of a house in his garden into a huge pond, setting some skylights into its ceiling, with this he could harvest the corals once a year. His output was ten times more than what my father was able to transport and we were only able to make the journey once a year. So, there were now much more green corals on the market than before. He not only sold them to the palace, but also to other powerful aristocratic families. If the price was only decided by its rarity, the expensive price of green corals should go down.

“But after two years, the palace refused to accept those low-priced green corals, saying that they were counterfeit goods. Not only had my father not cut down on the prices of the green corals, no he had even doubled it. As for the noble with the witch, he became confined by the Church, according to the crime of harboring and kidnapping of a witch he was burned at stake. But I knew that the corals sold by him were no counterfeit products, there was no difference between them and my father’s product.

“Thinking it’s because of the reason that the items are rare, isn’t the wrong idea, but there are many other reasons which also determine the price of goods. Furthermore, this was only one of the simplest examples. Because the Royal Palace thought of the green corals as a symbol of luxury, they artificially set its value to be higher. When more green corals appeared on the market, it would also significantly impact the provisions of the royal family. Therefore at the day of execution, the Queen also celebrated. Don’t you think that these goods are the same as us secular people?”

“Like... what?” Alicia couldn’t follow her thought process.

“Just like the children of royalty and commoners,” Mira spoke without stop. “When they are born, they all get a price attached to them, but this price doesn’t reflect our real value. We are just like those green corals, yet sometimes they can be bought for a low price, but at other places, the price becomes too high to even reach.”

“Too high to be reached... you mean becoming nobility?”

“Nobles are the corals of the Royals Palace of the Kingdom of Eternal Winter,” the Priestess smiled, “when they and we are born there is no difference between us. We both have a pair of hands, a pair of feet, a pair of eyes and a mouth. However, they were artificially classified as beings of the highest value. This inequality isn’t based on their own ability, but on the rule of the royal power. Because of this, I joined the Church. At least in the Holy City, your origin does not limit your value. If we could put the whole continent under the rule of the Holy Church, establishing the so-called Kingdom of God, it would be the case for everyone.

“You are right, that would truly be a good thing!” Alicia wholeheartedly and thought excited. It would be like heaven on earth. If we were able to establish a kingdom under the rule of God. Just like Mira had described it, there would be no difference between the people when they were born, nor would there exist any pariah or slaves.

“A Kingdom of God? Well... do you want to turn all the people into cold-blooded monsters?” The cold-faced captain of the Army of Judges shook the reins of his horse, and joined up with them, “Priestess, how much do you know about the God’s Punishment Army?”

“Hey, you” Alicia was about to remind him to pay attention to courtesy, but she was already stopped halfway by Mira.

“The God Punishment Army is the gathering of the most powerful warriors of the Church. They also possess the strongest faith, willing to sacrifice themselves, only the brave and fearless members of the Army of Judges can be transformed.”

“Them being the most powerful is a good point, that they need to be transformed to be able to join the army is also not bad, but they aren’t the most converted of us soldiers, no they are nothing more than a group of people without any feelings, just like monsters!” After coldly dropping this sentence, he went to his horse and rode it back to the front of his team.

“He is simply a rude one!” Alicia bitterly said, when she had seen him at Hermes, even so, they had to face danger, he was exactly like a general he had to be, both calm and brave. But now... what had happened to him, that he had become such a kind of person?”

“It’s okay, he’s just not in the mood right now.” Mira shook her head. “To build the Kingdom of God, there will be setbacks and sacrifices... but at least we all joined voluntarily.”

It was already late when they arrived at the next town, and as missionaries on a mission of the Church they were allowed to rest in the town’s church. After everyone had eaten. They all went back to their own room to sleep. Alicia was walking behind the captain, but when they reached an aisle, she suddenly called out to him.

“Mira is our leader, what was the meaning behind your outbreak during the ride? Did you forget all the rules and regulations of the church?”

After a moment of silence, he asked: “Your name is Alicia, isn’t it?”

“Yes, and just like you, I’m now a captain in the Army of Judge. At the fight during the Month of Demons I had asked you for your name, but you didn’t give me an answer, are you now able to tell me your name?”

“Abrams,” he said with a blank expression, “as to why I did that... do you have any brothers or sisters? ”

“No.” Alicia suddenly remembered that he had said that his brother was a member of the God’s Punishment Army.

“I have. He and I grew up in the Church, we were so close that we would always know what the other was thinking. Later, he accepted the invitation and transferred to the God’s Punishment Army. Since that day I have never seen him again. The presiding judge told me that his transformation was very successful and that he was now out on a special mission of the Church, I was euphoric for him.” He paused, “Until one day, I finally saw him again in the cathedral, I shouted his name, and when he came up to me, I wanted to embrace him. But can you guess what I saw? ” Asking this, Abrams’ face showed for the first time some feelings, pain, “He acted like a stranger, he didn’t see me at all, he just walked straight past me. Never turning his eyes in my direction, always staring to the front, ultimately acting, unlike a human.”

“...” hearing his story, Alicia could feel a cold chill running down her back, she wanted to shout that he had lied, but when she opened her mouth, no such words could escape.

“The member of the God’s Punishment Army are deprived of their human feelings, they are nothing more than a group of living dead.” He pushed Alicia to the side and walked back to his room, not looking back as he left.

Chapter 148 The merchant from King’s City (Part 1)

Border Town welcomed the long missed rainy weather, from the dark clouds in the sky, the rains came splashing down onto the earth, hitting the windowsills and the windows creating a loud crackling sound the whole time.

It was reasonable to say that the spring was meant to be a rainy season, both warm and humid. But this year in Border Town, since the end of the Months of Demons, the number of rainy days they’ve had could be counted on one hand. Fortunately, the farmland was directly beside the river, which made the watering very convenient. Now, due to the heavy rain they received the oppressive air had finally dispersed. So now, as Nightingale opened a window, the room was flooded by the rich fragrance of mother earth.

From afar, you could see the sprouting crops on the other side of the Shishui River. The horizon was covered with endless amounts of green wheat seedlings. Now, washed by the rain, these crops sparkled dazzlingly in contrast to the gray water of the river.

Roland stretched his body and put the pen back into its container.

Seeing that he had finished, Nightingale finally asked, “Did the blueprint turn out well?”

“Well, it is an entirely new weapon, with its fire rate increased by several times,” Roland said, placing the blueprint on the stack together with more than a dozen of designs. “I’ll call it the rotating rifle. What do you think?”

“You don’t need to show it to me,” Nightingale said, showing an ironical smile. “I wouldn’t understand it anyway.”

“This is just the primary type, if the barrel gets shortened, it will become a revolver, which you can also carry around with you. However, even if it would come in handy to have it, I still first have to solve a missing key piece of technology. But, when the times comes and I can give it to you, you no longer need to fear the Army of Judges coming from the Church.”

“You mean, it will allow an ordinary woman to kill a heavily armed Knight?”

“Not only one, but several,” Roland smirked, “if you’re lucky, then five powerful men also wouldn’t be a problem.”

Nightingale exposed a look full of disbelieving, the moment when he wanted to say something further, a knocking sound could suddenly be heard coming from outside the office.

“Your Royal Highness, Barov’s apprentice who was sent to the capital, came just back, he brought a merchant with him who trades in saltpeter, at the moment the merchant is waiting outside of the castle for you to receive them.”

What apprentice of Barov? When Roland thought about it, only one thing came to mind. Before the attack on the Longsong Stronghold, Border Town’s stock of gunpowder was running low, and he had

sent some guards to the Fallen Dragon Ridge and Redwater City, hoping to obtain a new source of saltpeter. Barov's apprentice was the last to be sent on his journey, his destination was King's City. After all, they should have all kinds of goods over there, coupled with the approaching summer, this meant the production of saltpeter would certainly be significantly increased.

He had never expected that the last person he had sent out would be the first to come back with good news.

"Bring them to the reception-room, and I'll join them soon," Roland looked out the window at the sky, "And let the kitchen prepare another portion of dessert."

Turning back around, he saw that Nightingale had already disappeared.

But he knew that she was as always at his side.

...

Later when Roland entered the reception-room, the merchant was only just now brought into the room by the guards. She took off her wet cloak and straw hat, then bowed in front of the Prince showing her respect, "I am Margaret Farman, a merchant from King's City, today I'm here to salute you, Your formidable Highness Wimbleton.

Seeing that the merchant was actually a woman, was completely unexpected to Roland. During this era, the traveling routes were much less safe than during the later times. Traveling around one may not only encounter bandits or refugees, but the towns also had many underground forces, not to forget there was still the dangerous wildlife to take into consideration, so seeing a woman working as a merchant was quite rare.

Like Lightning, she had bright blonde hair, but her hair was thicker and longer. She should be around 30 years old, and perhaps because of living a harder life than that of the ordinary people, she already had wrinkles around the eyes and on her forehead. Her skin color was also darker than the Kingdom's people, at first glance her appearance seemed a little rough. But it was clear that she didn't belong to the Sandpeople, but rather to the people of the Fjord.

"Sit down," the Prince said, motioning that she could take a seat. "You aren't an original citizen of the Kingdom of Graycastle, are you?"

"Why would you ask that?" Margaret smiled.

"The color of your hair, it is a very rare sight to see from people of the mainland. As far as I know, most people coming from the other side of the Vortex Sea have such pretty blond hair, I also know a... an explorer from the Fjords."

"You are very knowledgeable; my hometown is indeed in the Fjord. But I have already left the Fjords and come to the mainland more than a decade ago. Today I'm living in the capital, and can be considered as a half-citizen of the Kingdom of Graycastle." She paused, "Since it wasn't so long ago that you've left the capital yourself, it is possible that we have already met somewhere before. To be able to live in the same city as Your Highness, I feel very honored."

Sure enough, a successful businessman is splendid at speaking, even knowing that the other side was just flattering him, Roland still got a pleasant feeling. However, right at this moment, he could feel how his right side was suddenly pinched ... uh, this time you didn't need to determine if she was telling the truth or not, Nightingale you're too enthusiastic about doing your duty.

"In the Fjords, being an explorer isn't just a hollow title." Margret continued earnestly, "You may not understand, but the land where the people can survive is very scarce in the Fjords, where the water rises and falls, some islands will be swallowed at high tide. While other islands spew flames and smoke all day long, and they have such a high temperature that even the stone melts, converging all into a dark red river. Only those who open up new channels, or find a new suitable place for people to live, are eligible to get this title, so there aren't many people who proclaim themselves, explorer."

"Haha, not only does she call herself an explorer, she also claims her father to be the greatest explorer," Roland smiled and shook his head, "Well, children, they like to imagine themselves as great people."

"In the Fjord, even the child, will not so easily claim that title," Margaret frowned up, "did she ever mentioned her father's name?"

Seeing the earnest look on her face, Roland also realized that had he misread the situation, can it possibly be, that for the Seafolk take the title of Explorer as something they believe in spiritually? Is it possible that it cannot be called so casually?

"Her father's name is Thunder."

Roland had never expected that the moment he said the name, Margarite eyes became big and round, "You know Sir Thunder?"

"No, I only know his daughter. How is it possible that you've heard of the name?"

"No one in the Fjords hasn't heard the stories of him! Sir Thunder, the Twin Dragon Islands and the Shallow Water Island were discovered by him. With this he expanded our living area by almost half. He also painted a detailed map of the east coast and the Shadow Island. Now, every child of the Fjords knows of the deeds of Sir Thunder, he is one of the greatest explorers of the Fjords!"

"But I heard that Thunder seemed to be buried in the sea because of a storm..."

"No, Your Royal Highness, a real Explorer will never fall because of a storm. He has faced numerous dangers, but in the end, he has always survived. At the moment Sir Thunder must be somewhere gathering the crew for a new expedition, just like he has always done.

Margaret leaned forward, "Your Highness, would you happen to know where his daughter could be right now?"

Roland was still a little surprised, he had never thought that Lightning's father was actually so famous. Can it be that her tales which sounded so much like fantasy were all true?

"She lives here in my castle, after the shipwreck, she has kept traveling westwards until she reached Border Town, when I happened to meet her, and I took her in."

"In your castle?" Margaret was full of expectation. "Can I see his daughter?"

“For now, most probably not,” Roland said, at the moment, Lightning should be flying over the Concealing Forest, looking for the site marked on the treasure map. “She is currently practicing... taking a jungle adventure. But if you plan to stay overnight, you can wait until she comes back.”

“Then I’ll wait and I will talk with her later,” Margaret nodded without hesitation.

“Then we can now discuss business, right?”

“Of course, Your Royal Highness,” Margaret answered laughingly, “do not hesitate to speak your mind.”

Chapter 149 Merchant from King’s City (Part 2)

“Are you King’s City’s biggest saltpeter trader?” Roland directly cut to root.

“No, Your Highness,” Margaret was no longer just showing her formal smile, her speech also became much more intimate, “I run all kind of different businesses, from gems to cloth, from inns to taverns. In fact, not even a month ago, I still had nothing to do with saltpeter trading. Only when the original owner of the nitrate field lost all of his reserves and went bankrupt during his visit in my casino, did I have the rights transferred to me as payment.”

Not only was she selling all kinds of goods, she even had a firm hold in the service industry... being able to build such a large business empire, in the end, what background did she have? It was well known that if you wanted to open a casino in King’s City, with money alone it would be an impossible thing to achieve. Wanting to know if she was telling him the truth, Roland knocked on the table, but Nightingale pinch to the middle of his back left him unsatisfied. Since a pinch like this indicated that Margaret was carrying a God’s Stone of Retaliation, making it impossible for her to judge whether the other one was telling a lie or telling the truth.

Wait a moment... since it’s impossible for her to observe, why did she pinch me so hard previously?

Roland coughed twice, suppressing his curiosity.

He had heard that some of the merchants from the Fjords had settled down in the Four Kingdoms. Their businesses were so successful that they grew bigger and bigger until they accumulated so much wealth that it became hard to even imagine it. After finally securing some wealth, many merchants were easy marks and were effortlessly swindled out of their gains. Only a few were able to stabilize themselves and put down roots, and reinvest their money successfully into local establishments, forming a relatively stable business union. Can it be that Margaret is one of those big dogs?

This being the case, Roland decided to be direct and straightforward with his request, “I need a large amount of saltpeter, the more, the better.”

“The Western Territory of the Kingdom isn’t a scorching place, especially near the Impassable Mountain Range. Your Royal Highness, do you really need so much saltpeter?” Margaret became curious, “In the eastern outskirts of the kingdom, I have three nitrate fields, enough to supply a middle-sized city of nobles with ice.”

Definitely a big shot, she even has three nitrate fields! Even though, Roland became overjoyed, there was no visible change in his expression, “I’m going to build a cold store in the basement of the castle to

store some perishable food. As long as you give me the right price, I'll take all the saltpeter you can bring."

"Since you've explained it so clearly to me," she nodded, "I'm willing to transport all of my saltpeter to Border Town, and I will only charge you the typical market price of King's City, but..."

"But what?"

"I do not want to be paid with gold royals, I already have enough of them to fill up a whole warehouse. I heard that you were in possession of some foreign products, if you used these instead of the gold royals, I would be happy to conclude a deal with you."

"Strange products?" Roland got rooted, it was the first time that he had heard someone say that he didn't want any gold royals.

"Yes, well. I heard something about a self-running black iron creation," Margaret leaned slightly forward, "Your servant said, that with this thing, you only need to ignite a fire and boil water for it to become amazingly powerful. In fact, only after I heard him speak about such a creation did I decide to visit Border Town. Otherwise, directly selling the saltpeter to the nobility around the capital would be much more in line with my interests. After all the transportation distance is many times farther, so I have to bear a significant loss."

This is really a pleasant surprise, Roland thought. Although I don't know how Barov's apprentice caught hold of this line, and in what way he had described the steam engine, but evidently this merchant from King's City was very interested in it.

How incredible the profits and business potential of industrial products were, was all very clear to Roland. Especially since they could be only created by his own mechanical products. He had already worried about that after Border Town had sold all the ore and used up all the Duke's coins, that they would have no other business opportunities. But he would never have thought that today such an excellent opportunity such as this would be put right in front of him.

"So, that was your reason," the prince said. "What you had heard of is called a steam engine. It converts water by boiling it into steam, which can be used as source of power. The principle behind it is very simple, but only we her in Border Town are able to produce it."

"So there exists really such an amazing thing?"

"Of course," Roland answered, "but it is very complicated to manufacture so the price will be quite high. If you are interested, you can go with me to see the machine."

"Extremely interested," she said with excitement.

...

In the North Slope Mine, Margaret saw a large roaring steel monster which pulled several mine carts loaded with minerals out of the mine tunnel, her eyes turned full and round, nearly falling out of their sockets.

"Your Royal Highness, t-this... is incredible." Margaret whispered, feeling overwhelmed,

“Previously I had thought that your messenger had exaggerated, but even in my wildest dreams, I had never thought that he even understated it... I am afraid that even a dozen of people together don’t possess a power such as this... steam engine.”

Wanting to take a closer look, Margaret took a step toward the engine but was stopped by Roland. “The running is very dangerous, don’t get too close to it. Do you see the white gas spraying out of it? Even if you only get hit by a small part of it, it is still enough to burn your skin.”

“Do you only use it to transport ore?” As the noise was too large, she had to step near Roland and shout into his ear.

“In this mine, we using two, one is used to help the miner transport the ore, while the second one is used for pumping out the water in the mine,” Roland replied, “In fact, until today, Border Town was only able to produce three steam engines. We use them there where they are needed the most. But they can be employed for a broad range of purposes, as you could perhaps imagine. They can replace windmills and waterwheels, to grind wheat. They aren’t affected by rivers or winds, and they don’t need any manpower or animal power. What might interest you, even more, is that they can even be fitted onto a sailing boat, moving the paddles, allowing the ship to move without any sails.”

He knew that their dependence on the wind and its direction was of great significance for the Seafolk. Sure, enough, hearing this Margaret looked with wide-open eyes at Roland, “Just name a price, I will take it with me!”

“That’s out of the question, the mine also relies on it to maintain the production. You can order a few new steam engines and then when you deliver the saltpeter, you can take them with you.”

“What would their price be...?”

Roland lead her away from the entrance of the mine. Being further away from the noise of the machine, it was now much easier to speak. “One steam engine will cost five hundred gold royals,” Roland offered. Even so, the price was a bit exaggerated, being almost equivalent to a knight’s territory annual income. The ore to produce one steam engine cost around twenty gold royals, plus melting costs, labor costs and installation costs it would be another fifty gold royals. However, to get a good price, one always had to have some space for a bargain.

“Then I’ll buy ten steam engines!”

“...” Roland became frozen, ten steam engines were the same as five thousand gold royals! Almost the equal to the five or six years of the Duke Ryan’s savings. Not even trying to bargain, was that the power of a big dog? He cleared his throat, “You’re sure of it? After all, it’s not a small sum, and the machine is also not always available for usage, and even if you bought it, you still have to invest money into it.”

“I know, it’s just like a ship which has to visit the dock every year to clean up the keel of parasites and algae, replacing the sails, ropes and so on,” Margaret did not mind it, “What later needs to be added, I’ll buy it from you. If it actually becomes impossible to manage by myself, you only have to name a price, and I will pay you for the craftsmen to maintain and operate the machine.”

Roland closed his mouth, there was only one thought left in his mind, being wealthy really must be nice.

At this moment Lightning was flying somewhere across the Concealing Forest.

In her eyes, it seemed that the world had become smaller. As far as her eyes could see, all the details had faded, only a world made out of pure colors was left. Brown was the earth, gray were the mountains, green the forest and blue the river.

Yet it was this green which occupied an overwhelming majority of her field of view.

And not the bright green of the grass fields in Border Town, here the green was mixed with gray and black, turning it dark and condensed. Whether it was to the West or the North, everywhere she looked, she only saw a dark green, with no end to it in sight. Due to seeing it for such a long time, she slowly developed a feeling of falling. So, from time to time, Lightning had to look up at the sky, to disperse the ever-increasing feeling of discomfort.

Behind her, the overcast black clouds were flowing past very low, enclosing the Impassable Mountain Range and Border Town in rain and fog.

She was now flying over the forest trying to find the remains from four hundred fifty years ago, for her, this was undoubtedly a great adventure. Two weeks ago, when Roland had offered her this task, Lightning immediately accepted this mission. Furthermore, there was a big difference between Cara who thought of the ancient book as infallible and the Prince. His Highness repeatedly explained to her, that this drawing could only be used as a reference and that the most important part of the search was her safety, it wouldn't matter if she could find the tower or not. This gave the young girl the impression that she would have a great time.

She knew that His Royal Highness was right, even in case that it was Border Town's castle, over the period of more than four hundred years, the plants would have grown almost everywhere and gradually turned into a pile of dust. But she still wanted to find this place, to determine the location of the hexagonal star, it was the equal to determine the position of Taqila. Having heard the ins and outs of the matter, Lightning naturally understood what it meant for her to find Taqila.

That she was helping the Prince find the real cause of the outbreak of the war with the Devils, which the Church was trying to hide with all their might.

If she compared this with her father's exciting explorations trying to find new sea routes, it was even more exciting!

For her search, Lightning used the chart method. She had separated the map into many small squares, and with keeping a constant speed and counting the time that she flew, she would know how far she had flown. At the same time, she consistently drew out the inside of one of the squares. Every time one of the squares was filled, she also knew that the area had already been searched through.

Now she had already filled half of these squares.

The stormy clouds behind her seemed to be approaching faster than Lightning had previously imagined, the young girl could even faintly hear the thunder rolling in the clouds. To be safe she lowered her height, dropping down towards the forest.

At this moment, a gray shadow flashed past her vision.

Shocking Lightning, who immediately stopped her forward flight. Instead she hovered in the air, looking back through the mass of green.

But she could find nothing.

Was it an illusion? Lightning thought, not believing it, she decided to search the area again.

But this time, she flew at a much lower height. The forest was no longer one solid block of green, instead turning into a collection of mottled tree trunks, bifurcated branches, and all kinds of different leaves... in front of Lightning's eyes, the details of the world had emerged from a solid block of green.

After several scores of breaths, Lightning suddenly detected a small white stone tower hidden behind the tree branches. The complete upper part of the tower had been cut off, leading to the problem that the trees had grown higher than the tower and had covered it with a layer of green, making it nearly impossible to be seen from up in the sky. If not for her wish to avoid the rain-laden clouds, she would most likely have missed it.

Lightning heart began to beat faster, could it be that this was the location marked on the map?

She slowly flew several rounds around the tower but didn't discover any unusual circumstances, so she decided to take a closer look to see what she could detect.

After landing, the witch only found out that it wasn't right to call it a white stone tower.

Its surface was covered with vines and moss, during the passing of time the tower had now become a gray-green. The tower was slightly tilted to the side, giving the impression that it had been hit by a huge force, which had filled the surrounding with scattered stones. These stones were made from the same material and color as the stone tower and must have been fragments from the tower's former top. The larger pieces were still clear to see, but the smaller ones had already been buried under soil and weeds. The former stone tower was certainly huge. Even now, the bottom area was still as large as Border Town's castle. Ruins like this would usually have a basement.

Logically speaking, the right thing to do was to record the location of the remains and then immediately return to the Border Town.

The various adventures she had heard also all reminded her, that stepping into an already for hundreds of years sleeping ruin wasn't the right choice, for example the stale air in the sealed basement could have become toxic and would quickly end her short life.

Knowing all this, Lightning still didn't move one bit, her own curiosity was constantly nagging her: go in and take a look, it won't take long.

Once more, she looked up at the sky, seeing that the formerly relatively blue sky had turned a gloomy dark, apparently, a storm was coming.

With this it's decided, she told herself, flying through the rain would be very uncomfortable, so I can't help it and have to hide in the tower and if I'm already there, I can also take a quick look. In case I actually discover the basement, I absolutely won't go in by myself.

After thinking about it, Lightning's obedience had been suppressed by her curiosity, so she went to the vines and began to search for the entrance. When she found it, she pulled out a knife from her waist and

cleaned out a small hole, it was only big enough that she could crawl through it. The door which was previously made out of wood had already been eroded away long ago, thus she could now successfully enter the tower.

As the top was torn off, she wasn't in need of a torch to see clearly. After circling the bottom of the tower, Lightning had still not discovered anything that was exciting. Apparently, over time all traces of items had been erased by nature. In addition to the remnants of the old walls, there was nothing else left on the ground. Behind a still standing wall, she discovered a hole in the ground, which should be the place of the former stairs, but every trace of them had already been erased.

The access to the basement seemed very conspicuous, it was built in the southwest direction of the floor, facing the entrance of the stone tower. Lightning suspected, that if she moved along this path into the Wild Lands, she would discover the ancient Tower City Taqila.

At this time, the rain begun to fall from the sky, hitting Lightning on the nose. To keep herself dry and no better option, she entered the hole and slowly walked into the channel that extended underground, when she turned around a corner, she was stopped by a wooden door. Although the door wasn't completely corroded, it still looked dilapidated, as long as it was only touched a little, the door would surely be torn apart.

Soon, the outside rain turned into a downpour, and the crackling sound of the rain hitting the ground gradually became one, turning the chaos into an inseparable sound. Where she stood now, she was safe from the rain, but the water began to flow down into the hole. To avoid getting her shoes wet, Lightning lifted her feet from the ground and began to slowly float upwards.

Suddenly, she could vaguely hear a cry, mixed with the rain, it was almost indistinguishable.

The sudden sound let all her hairs stand up, and the young girl began to look panicky around. But within the narrow passage, she couldn't detect anything besides the scattered stones. With the help of the faint light coming from outside, she opened her bag and took out a torch and flint from inside. Wanting to use some fire to take a better look.

At this point, the cries sounded again, but this time it actually seemed like it had come from behind the door. Lightning couldn't help it, she flinched and quickly turned around. Losing her hold on her torch, dropping it to the ground, where it with a loud splash entered the water.

This time the sound had been much clearer, she could faintly distinguish that it was a woman's voice.

Was someone in the basement? Thinking of this idea, she began to sweat, how can this be! The Stone Tower has already been left here for over four hundred years. Furthermore, it is also deeply hidden in the forest. In addition to myself, who else can have arrived here?

"Help me..."

When the sound could be heard for the third time, she was sure that the sound actually came from behind the wooden door. Also, it sounded like someone was in distress. Lightning swallowed her saliva and carefully placed her hand on the door, gently pushing against it. The wet and creamy wooden door immediately fell backward, smashing with a muffled bang onto the ground.

Exposing a tall figure directly in front of her!

Lightning felt her blood freeze in her veins, the silhouette looked exactly like the Devil's in Soraya's painting! In the dim light, the Devil seems to be watching her, it's massive body slightly bent forward, holding a huge ax within its hand which only had three fingers. In the reflecting light, she could clearly see the blood stains on the ax body. For a moment, the bloody images of these horrible monsters killing her sisters came to her mind.

"Ahhh!" Her scream echoed through the basement, she threw the flint she was still in her hand into the direction of the Devil before she turned around and flew with her fastest speed out of the channel, directly into the rain, fleeing into the direction of Border Town.

Lightning did not notice that when the piece of flint smashed in the devil's chest, it created the sound of a crisp crash. The area where it had hit, began to crack, quickly spreading until they covered the whole body. The Devil's body covered by cracks broke into many fragments, turning into white dust, which then disappeared in the wind.