

## Witch 271

### Chapter 271 Elements

Kyle Sichi returned home after finishing the day's experiments, his wife had already baked flatbread, made him some mushroom soup, and poured him a glass of white wine.

The latter two were both goods that were sold at the convenience market, especially this sort of huge white mushrooms, which were just like the words on the signboard described them as: you won't find any fresher, or more fragrant delicacy, after one taste you too will discover this to be true. If you eat even one piece, you will find it difficult to forget its full and unique flavor.

Of course, its price was also very alarming, one palm sized mushroom required one silver royal. If it weren't for his good salary, Kyle would never be able to bear buying such an expensive food. But there were also a lot of other things similar to this, such as perfumed soap and mirrors. As long one had enough money, their life in Border Town would be much more comfortable than that of an average noble.

Roland was simply deep beyond measure, this was also the deepest of point he felt.

After he finished the evening meal. His wife handed him a letter.

"This is?"

"The letter was delivered by the guard this afternoon, at that time you still hadn't returned from work," she answered, as she started to clean the tableware, "He said that it had apparently come from Redwater City."

"Is that so?" Kyle asked as he entered his study. He cut open the seal using a knife then removed the parchment before spreading it out.

To his surprise, the first sentence was actually, "Dear respected mentor."

Seeing that Chavez was the one that had sent the letter, he couldn't help but smile. He sat at his desk and began to read through it carefully.

Initially, when Kyle left the Redwater City Alchemic Workshop, another alchemist named Capola had become the new chief. But that person had been narrow-minded, and after obtaining the crystal glass formula left behind by Kyle, he not only claimed towards the Lord that this was his and Kyle's work, he even excluded Chavez either intentionally or unintentionally from the alchemy experiment group.

Within the letter, Chavez complained, that this was perhaps because he wanted to borrow the idea of the double stone acid method from him, but in the end didn't want to announce the achievement to the other side. Nowadays, several other alchemist apparently had also begun to intentionally or otherwise shun Chavez, which caused Kyle to feel quite troubled.

Kyle could roughly understand what those people must be thinking, Chavez was the youngest alchemist of the refining room, so many people still thought that it had only been by relying on luck and Kyle's appreciation for him as a discipline that he had been able to stand out of the crowd. But the chief alchemist could only snort disdainfully at that sort of view. Saltpeter and green vitriol were both everyday things, so why had it been Chavez and no one else who had discovered the double stone acid

method? This point alone should already sufficiently explain this issue. Perception, memory, making assumptions without fear, and being diligent during experimentation were all indispensable elements, in the end this young man's innate skill was even above his own.

At the end of the letter, Chavez had attached two alchemic formulas, claiming they were two of his recently discovered acids he wished to share with his mentor. But even at the first glance, Kyle could see that the essence of these two formulas was just the creation of salt when acids and alkali react with one another, this was the kind of recipe he could write down dozens of times in a single breath.

With a sigh, Kyle Sichi put the letter down and glanced at the "Elementary Chemistry" laying on his table.

Everything had changed with His Highness and his so-called "ancient books". If it hadn't been for them, he was afraid, that he would still be the same as Chavez, still aimless, and bewilderedly wandering through the primal chaos, hoping to find some clay on the surface and still regard it as some kind of treasure.

Taking the book, Kyle immediately went to the last page.

It showed a table which was neatly divided into a hundred square boxes.

Every time he looked at the table, he couldn't help but get goosebumps all over his body and feel a hard to describe reverence... and fear from within his heart.

Every box had a small serial number in the upper left corner which without a miss arrived at 118 at the end. Beside the first two rows, the majority of the boxes were blank, except for some symbols in the middle. For example, twenty-six: iron, twenty-nine: copper.

The name of this table was: "Periodic Table of Elements".

While holding the book in his trembling hands, the chief alchemist had asked Roland about the contents of those blank boxes, merely to receive the answer that they had originally been filled, but he was unable to remember them.

If at that time, the other party hadn't been His Royal Highness, he most likely would have taken the book and thrown it into the other's face.

According to the records in the book, this table contained all existing elements on earth. If there existed a Canon of Alchemy, there was no doubt that this would be the most dazzling chapter in the whole book. What scared him the most was the question, what type of person was able to draw such a chart? And if they had already done this before, what were alchemists then supposed to be regarded as? They seemed to be merely a gang of children sitting within the silt and piling up some rocks.

Kyle suddenly thought of His Royal Highness' promise, in case he was also able to call Chavez over, and also pull over the group of recently recruited apprentice, maybe he would be able to fill those three new laboratories. In that way, his dream of laying his hands on the "Intermediate Chemistry" would become a reality.

Thinking until here, he immediately took out a piece of white paper and began to write his response.

In fact, at the meeting when His Royal Highness had asked him whether he had any clue relating to large-scale acid production, he hadn't told him the truth. Because the content was complex and lengthy, it would have been a waste of time doing so. The most important matter was that he still didn't know whether his program worked or not. After all, he had based his production method entirely on the elements and reaction principles written within the book.

Compared with the previous alchemy test, this hypothesis was like a child's nonsensical mutterings in their sleep. Wanting to use materials he had never seen before, together with an unheard of reaction method, to create something which seemed to have no similarity with the raw materials, only because they had the same type of element.

But within Kyle's heart he still had a faint premonition, it felt like this method might actually be feasible!

After all, within the previous hundreds of permutation experiments, there had not been one time which where the book's statement wasn't correct.

With the initial plan concluded, the next step was for him to complete a full set of theoretical tests within the laboratory. Since His Highness had said that the industrial method could be used for large-scale production, it should also be possible to reproduce the results in the laboratory.

Kyle soon finished the letter, he didn't waste any words on consoling Chavez, and instead straightforwardly told his previously marvelous discipline about alchemic knowledge that was both available and measurable. Kyle believed that there didn't exist any alchemist who was brimming with the interests of a wise man, that would let the opportunity to seek truth pass them by.

After folding the letter, placing it into an envelope and sealing it with wax, Kyle could do nothing other than wait for the next day to give the message to a traveling salesman who wanted to deliver it.

After all this, his line of sight once again moved to the periodic table.

Thinking about those blank boxes which would never be filled again, Kyle felt as if his life no longer had any joy left to offer him. But fortunately, His Royal Highness had said one short phrase which had made his heart surge, and until today those words were still pacing back and forth within his ears.

"Don't put on that look, the periodic table arranges each element in a regular pattern according to an underlying law. You can fill it up by yourself."

"Regular... pattern? Do you mean that those unknown elements can also be deducted, just like the derivation of an alchemical formula?"

"That's right, even if you have never seen them before, you can still describe their appearance and characteristics."

"That rule, what is it?"

"Do you want to know? It is written in the 'Intermediate Chemistry'."

Chapter 272 North Slope Mine

The further down into the mine, the more humid the environment became.

Sylvie was holding up a torch and gingerly evading the drop of water falling towards her head as she led the group further into the mine. Even without any light, her Eye of Truth wasn't something that could be stopped by the darkness. Thus she merely used the torch to save her magic power.

"There is another fork in the road," Nightingale who was walking at the front said after she stopped, "Which cave is this already?"

"Twenty-third after passing the first fork from the entryway," Lightning answered, as she took a look at the records.

"I hope this is the last one," Sylvie grumbled, then completely opened her magic eye, "The left side... spreads away from the mining area, there is no ore there. The right side... is the same."

Lightning wrote down the results then announced, "In that case, those caverns were also the last gates we had to inspect."

"Come on," Nightingale said and went from the front to the end, leading everyone back. It didn't seem that her ability was as simple as invisibility, Sylvie could only see faint changes in Nightingales' magic power, but was ultimately unable to capture her figure or movement. According to Lightning's introduction, she was the strongest fighting witch.

This may also be the reason why Roland had her to follow them. There were rumors that the mine had once been a nest for ancient monsters, and there had already been several events of miners going missing. Before their departure, His Highness had also told them several times that they had to be careful and that in case they couldn't determine the situation, they should first exit the mine and report back to him.

However, Sylvie couldn't accept this as correct. There existed no monster which could escape the investigation of her magic eye, even those animal corpses, and the twisting soft-bodied snakes within the walls were clearly visible to her.

There were four people in the expedition team, herself, Nightingale, Lightning, together with a little girl called Lucia. Every time they found some minerals, she would convert them into a variety of debris, and after carefully classifying them she would put them into her pocket, which would later be handed over to His Royal Highness.

Lightning was responsible for drawing the map of the mine, since in her own words, there didn't exist any adventure from which she could be excluded. Hearing her prideful speech, Sylvie couldn't help but think of the captain who was temporarily staying on Sleeping Island.

The 23rd cave was at the lower level of the mining site and could actually be regarded as an enormously deep hole. After penetrating several hundred steps into the mountain, it divided into three paths again, and after following each to their end, they would once again split into several branches. However, since they were at the exterior area of the mining site, with only the rare possibility of find any veins, they had decided to end their exploration.

Returning to the first fork, which Lightning had recorded as "Gate of Life", Sylvie cast her ability to observe the 23rd cave and the circumstances of those three pathways.

The further she spread the range of her Eye of Truth, the greater the magic consumption was, and the heavier the burden on her body. So she decided to observe one channel after another at each fork.

“Cave number three... yes, there aren’t any mining areas at the end of it. There are...” she spent a moment frozen in shock, “There are five branches, including one that seems to lead further downwards while also making a detour.”

“Downwards?” Lightning repeated.

“It is indeed like that,” Sylvie confirmed while taking another look. It didn’t take long until the slender downwards leading path turned around a corner and pointed straight back at the mine. When she tried to further explore along the road, her mind suddenly became flooded with a strong sense of dizziness which interrupted her contact with her magic eye, “I think it may lead to a mineral deposit.”

But this interpretation was a bit far-fetched, the North Slope Mine’s tangled and complicated cave system was clearly not something which had been artificially dug out. Furthermore, if she hadn’t been specifically looking for ore, it would be unlikely she’d have discovered any unknown veins, even if they were hidden between two channels. If not for her Eye of Truth which was able to penetrate any obstacle, it would be simply impossible to find any minerals hidden behind rocks and under piles of mud.

“No matter what, let’s immediately go and take a look,” Nightingale said, and shrugged her shoulders.

The group entered the cave behind the third gate one after another, and about a quarter of an hour later they had already arrived at the end of the passage.

There the tunnel divided itself into five like she had seen it. One among them was even so narrow that it was impossible for people to walk through and so it could only be entered by crawling. However, the strange channel Sylvie had seen before was located in the middle of the five, and its topography changed dramatically, almost forming a deep slope when compared with the place they were standing now.

“It seems as if it is going straight down,” Nightingale said and held up the torch, “I feel as if this grotto is somewhat similar to the deep cliff of the Impassable Mountain Range.”

“Let’s quickly finish the inspection, then immediately turn back,” Lucia said in fright as she instinctively grasped on to Nightingale’s arm. “I do not like it here... I constantly feel as if something is staring at us from within the cave.”

“There is nothing in the cave, except for mud and stone,” Sylvie said, even though she didn’t like this quiet and moist place, her ability still told her that there was no danger. “The four on the left and right all contain no ore and are leading further away from the mining site.” She quickly finished the inspection of the leveled side roads, then moved her line of sight towards the front, only to immediately lose focus and release a faint, “...ah?”

“What’s going on?” Lightning asked.

“I... am unable to see the circumstances further down.”

“You cannot see it?” The little girl asked in disbelief, “Can it be that you are too tired and so your ability just don’t work?”

“No, my ability doesn’t have any problems,” Sylvie said and closed her eye, before opening it again, only to see that everything still remained dark, the same as if she had completely lost her vision. Enduring the on-coming headache, she tried to expand her field of vision further, but the results still remained the same, while the surrounding soil became clearly discernible. Only the pass in the middle was enveloped in complete darkness which was as thick as ink. “There seems to be something which obstructs my peeking.”

“You will all wait over here and don’t leave,” Nightingale ordered while simultaneously drawing her two shining silver weapons, “I will go in to explore the situation and immediately come back afterward.”

“Do not go!” Sylvie shouted, grasping her forehead in pain, “There exist only one thing that can produce such an effect. Even if you go, you will be in danger.”

“What is it?”

“God’s Stone of Retaliation,” Sylvie said through clenched teeth, “There is a God’s Stone of Retaliation underground, and it is covering that whole region!”

...

When Roland heard the news, he immediately mobilized soldiers of the First Army and led them into the North Slope Mine.

And the result of their inspection confirmed Sylvie’s guess; they discovered a large amount of God’s Stone of Retaliation at the bottom of the deep hole.

After determining that there was no danger, Roland also entered cave No. 23 with the protection of his personal guards. He wished to see for himself how the God’s Stone of Retaliation at the bottom of the mine looked like.

“Your Highness, please be careful,” Carter reminded him once more, “The exit is directly in front of us.”

“You are unable to use your magic here,” Roland said while looking back at Anna, Nightingale, and Lightning standing behind him, “Didn’t you learn it from Sylvie?”

“Even without magic, I will still be stronger than you. If you can go, I, of course, can also go,” Nightingale said disapprovingly.

“Wherever there is an adventure; I will also be there.” Lightning announced while puffing out her chest.

Anna however didn’t say anything, she merely stared straight into Roland’s eyes. Seeing the flickering flame from the torches in her clear eyes, Roland knew that regardless what he said it would prove to be useless.

“All right,” he sighed. “But you must stay by my side and don’t move too far.”

Coming to the end of the slope, Roland immediately understood the meaning of the Chief Knight’s words.

Suddenly his eyes became filled with light, and a vast and deep cavern then appeared in front of him.

Even without the aid of torches, he could still clearly see the whole cave since it was illuminated by the crystal prism like God's Stone of Retaliation. He could see some majestic towers rising straight from the ground, with a diameter of twenty to thirty meters at the base which seemed similar to some very large neon towers.

#### Chapter 273 God's Stone of Retaliation

Roland roughly estimated the size of the underground cave, the area below was almost the size of a football field, and was surrounded by steep mountain walls. The road connecting it with the other cave started in the middle of one of those mountain walls, and next to the tunnel entrance he could see a narrow stone staircase, which extended straight towards the bottom.

"I guess this staircase wasn't cut out by you," Roland said while he squatted down and brought his torch near the ground. In the torchlight, he could clearly see marks carved out by knives and axes, with piles of dust and rock bits that were within the notches.

"Of course not, Your Highness. At the time we discovered the cave, the stone steps had already existed." Carter said and shrugged his shoulders, "I guess they must have already been here for decades."

"Or since hundreds of years," Anna suddenly spoke.

"I think so too," Lightning nodded in agreement, "It is only seventy years since Border Town has been established, it is unlikely for the stone staircase to be related to the locals here or even the kingdom."

"There were already some people living in the Western Territory several hundred of years ago?" Carter questioned, "Graycastle hadn't even existed back then."

Roland patted the knight's shoulder, "Four hundred and fifty years ago, there existed a group of people who have already been forgotten by history." Then he lifted the torch and said, "Let's go down and take a look."

Twenty to thirty soldiers of the First Army were already standing at the center of the cave, so he took the knight and the witches then went next to one of the God's Punishment Stones without delay. Only when he stood at the edge of this stone pillar was he finally able to realize how huge this actually was. Even by extending his arms as far as he could, he still wasn't able to surround even a tenth of it.

He lifted his head and looked at the top, the tallest pillar made out of God's Stone of Retaliation already came close to thirty meters, which was almost equivalent to the height of an eight or nine story building, and was shining in an ominous purple light.

In theory, stones could emit light either by having a radioactive material, or by containing some fluorescent components. But, the rays of light emitted by the God's Stone of Retaliation obviously had nothing to do with any of these possibilities. The light from the former was from the ionization in the air as the elements decayed. Furthermore, the shorter the half-life, the greater the brightness would be. But according to these very words and taking the stones' brightness into account, the soldiers who had already entered the cave for several minutes, would have died from ionization radiation by now. While the latter possibility would need an external light to shine on it, but there was no light source here at the bottom of the mine, which could support it enough to send out the light continuously.

Roland also noted that although the God's Stone of Retaliation had a crystal's commonly seen prism shape, its surface didn't have the veined pattern that came from crystals, but was instead as smooth as glass.

"The Church sells a thumb sized piece of a God's Stone of Retaliation for several gold royals. However, a piece of this magnitude... it is something impossible to acquire even after emptying the vaults of the entire Four Kingdoms." Carter couldn't stop himself from lamenting.

"You want to give it to the nobles to slaughter witches?" Nightingale asked with a fierce glare.

"Uh, this isn't what I meant," The Chief Knight answered quickly, while unconsciously moving out from her line of sight.

"It is the first time that I have seen God's Stone of Retaliation shine in these colors, shouldn't they be transparent white—" Lightning curiously looked at the pillars, "In case you take them back with you, won't it be unnecessary to use a candle in the evening?"

"I'd rather bring a candle into an already stuffy room filled with dozens of candles, than use this for light," Nightingale murmured while placing both her hands on her chest, "For us witches, they are a prison cage, the stocks and chains that are held by the Church! If the world didn't have these damnable stones, it would be better off."

"Oh, Sister Nightingale, you couldn't read a sentence in the evening anyway..." The little girl licked her lips, picked up a stone from the ground and looked at Roland. "Can I take a piece of it back with me as my spoils of adventure?"

Roland nodded, "If you don't hate these kind of things."

She held a stone and raised her arm into the air and swung it towards the stone pillar. It smashed against the edge of the prism, only to hear a "ting" as the stone in her hand splintered while the prism showed not even the slightest scar.

Seeing this, Carter shouted in shock, "What's going on?... Shouldn't the God's Stone of Retaliation be fragile?"

"Perhaps it is because this chunk is shining differently," Lightning threw the remaining stone chips in her hand away and took a dagger out of her waist purse. However, even after a good deal of tossing around the prism, with all kinds of scraping and cutting, it was still to no avail.

Feeling that something was wrong, Roland looked at Nightingale and said, "You try it."

The latter merely nodded, took out her revolver, aimed directly at the prism then pulled the trigger. Immediately followed by an enormous echo splitting the silence in the cave, and the birth of some sparks at the impact area of the God's Stone of Retaliation. After the smoke cleared, the group walked over to the stone, merely to discover that the bullet wasn't even able to do anything more than leaving a small stain on the God's Stone of Retaliation's surface.

This suggested that the durability of these intensely shining stones already exceed that of homogenized steel plates.



“Even the gun is useless?” Carter asked with a frown, “In the end, how is the Church able to cut a piece off and sell it?”

No one could answer this question, causing everyone’s expression to cloud up.

Even Roland had been able to use his own force to break the God’s Stone of Retaliation, like that time he’d broken the necklace around Anna’s neck for instances. Just two or three pulls from him had been enough to turn the pure and limpid stone into a pile of white dust.

But at this moment, Anna who had been silent until now, suddenly opened her mouth, “Your Highness, do you still remember the ‘treasure map’ that Ferlin Eltek had drawn?”

“Treasure map?” Roland asked confused. He could vaguely remember that there was a triangle occupying more than half of the drawing. One of the three edges pointed at the Holy City Taqila, one at the stone tower in the Concealing Forest and one at the foot of the Northern Slope Mountain... hold on, at the foot of the Northern Slope Mountain? Suddenly a lightning spark flashed through his brain, “Don’t tell me...”

“I don’t think it was pointing at the foot of the Northern Slope Mountain, rather it was pointing here,” Anna said slowly, “This is a place which contained a lot of God’s Stone of Retaliation underground.

...

Even after a careful search, besides a large number of indestructible God’s Stone of Retaliation, they hadn’t been able to discover anything else that was of value within the cave.

Not to mention remains of ancient books, there weren’t even chiseling tools used for the stone staircase left behind, which was very strange. According to the current level of technology, if they wanted to chisel out a staircase in such a steep cliff, it absolutely would be a tremendous and arduous undertaking. Things such as accidentally falling or losing tools should have been frequent occurrences. But for the current scene, besides the stones, and even more stones, it seemed as if the cave had been thoroughly cleaned before they’d left.

When Roland returned to his office, he immediately called for Scroll, and had her reproduce the Knight’s drawing on top of her ‘Book of Changes’.

Similar to the pattern in his memory, the southernmost point was indeed located at the foot of the Northern Slope Mountain.

If Anna’s guess is right, can it be a map left behind by the Church, contains new veins of God’s Punishment Stones? However, why would they spend all that time and effort to dig out the stairway to the bottom only to abandon it afterward? If the Church had already built a church in Border Town four hundred and fifty years ago, I am afraid that the current Border Town would look completely different from now. In accordance with the God’s Stone of Retaliation selling price and its usage, it is unlikely that they would willingly give up the natural resources in this mine.

Nowadays the Holy City of Taqila had already become a forbidden region, that was fully out of reach. Perhaps the only remaining possibility for finding the answer lies hidden within the stone tower... or perhaps it will remain unknown forever.

## Chapter 274 Exam

After dinner, Candle entered the castle hall quite early.

On every nightfall, Teacher Scroll would give lessons in the room, but unlike the aristocracy colleges in large cities, the students who attended the lecture were witches from the Witch Union.

But she wasn't the first person to come to the "classroom", when she entered Evelyn was already sitting at the long table and waving to her.

"Has His Highness assigned any duty to you recently?" The moment Candle took her place, Evelyn couldn't stop herself from asking.

She recalled the time they had only just arrived, and she had drily addressed the other party as 'milord'. While secretly laughing at the bottom of her heart Candle answered, "There is, he gave me the task to cast my ability on a few strange lumps of metal, so that they would remain at room temperature, but I don't understand what use that would have."

"Yes... It's like that," Evelyn's eyes became dull, "So far, His Highness had not asked me to do anything."

"He didn't provide you with adjusted practice content?" Candle asked in wonder.

"No, I'm practicing according to my own wishes," Evelyn shook her head and said. "He only occasionally comes and asks me to taste a new wine."

"Maybe that is just that what His Highness is looking for, all your life you've been in pubs, and so you're very familiar with the taste of the drinks. There aren't many witches like you."

"There is no need for a witch who can taste wine at all," she protested. "A salary of a gold royal is enough to recruit a specialized winemaker."

"Uh..." Candle patted the other side's shoulder, "I think His Royal Highness certainly must have a plan."

"Scroll also tried to comfort me this way, but even I do not know what to do with my ability. I cannot simply rely on air to turn water into wine... Don't tell me he just wants to make the tastiest type of wine to sell? But commoners are only able to afford ale of poor quality, while all the nobles have their personal preference which doesn't have anything in common with one another." Evelyn laid her chin on the table and continued in a depressed tone, "And the wine His Royal Highness gives me to taste is becoming more and more... hard to drink. I already suggested that he adds water or fruit juice, but he seems to only want to make the strongest wine possible."

For a moment, Candle didn't know what to say, regarding this point, she and Evelyn were both sitting in the same boat. After reaching Sleeping Island, most of the time they could only do some trifling chores – along with the daily increase in fish oil, solidifying candles had become unnecessary, while Tilly completely forbid any sort of drinking in general.

Even during the early tense phases, their supplies were often allocated according to a person's ability; sometimes Candle would only receive some unsalted grilled fish. During this she never had the feeling that there was any problem with this approach, to the contrary, she was even willing to forgo her food for those witches who needed to consume larger amounts of their magic. However, that the other

witches began to divide themselves into groups and even somewhat excluded her had made her feel a little uncomfortable.

Fortunately, Lady Tilly had still looked after them extremely well, even apologizing for the method of distribution, and going so far as promising that after the supplies became more plentiful, they would start to make adjustments, this way the less-favored witches didn't feel the rejection that clearly anymore.

But in Border Town such a situation had never occurred – all the witches sat together at the same table, and enjoyed the meal together with His Royal Highness. And the clothes they put on and the treatment shown to them didn't hold any differences... but the most important difference she'd been able to see during their daily life, was that regardless whether their ability was formidable or not, they all regarded each other as a one group. Although it had only been two short weeks since she'd come to Border Town, she had already experienced this point very deeply.

They really considered each other as sisters.

Something which made Candle feel very envious.

When all the witches had come and sat down, Teacher Scroll entered the room while carrying a stack of white papers, "Today, I won't teach you any new content. Instead, I will conduct a comprehensive exam of what you have learned until now."

"What is that?" Lightning asked as she raised her hand.

"Googoo?" Maggie also asked.

"You have been studying for three months now, and His Highness believes that it is time to test the results of your learning." Scroll said cheerfully, "All the questions have been arranged on these papers and are separated into three parts, kingdom language, mathematics, and nature. Altogether there are sixty questions, every answer gives a point while every mistake lowers the score... Of course, if you do not understand the problem, you just have to raise your hand and ask your question. I believe that all of you have already mastered the primary writing and reading skill, or else even if you'd known the answer, you would still be unable to answer." Scroll paused for a moment before continuing, "By the way, His Highness had said that only those who have answered more than half of the question correctly, will be able to enjoy ice cream during the weekend's afternoon tea. If your score is below this limit, you will lose your afternoon tea qualification."

Candle suddenly heard a gasping sound, she turned around and saw Nightingale wearing a dumbstruck expression with charcoal lying in two pieces on the ground.

"Furthermore, His Highness has especially made it clear, that the five witches that came from Sleeping Island are not to be included in this arrangement. So it is their decision whether they want to stay behind and answer or if they want to leave and have a free evening." Scroll looked one after another at Candle, Evelyn, and the others, before saying "No matter what your final score is, you will be able to enjoy the delicious afternoon tea."

"Puh," Evelyn patted her chest, turned her head and whispered, "I won't be able to recognize all the letters, so I'm not confident that I will get the ice cream."

Honey and Lotus immediately got up, happily saluted Scroll and left the hall afterward.

Plus, Sylvie, whose body had been feeling somewhat unwell and thus hadn't even come to the hall, left Evelyn and Candle as the only witches from Sleeping Island in the hall.

"Do you want to stay?" Candle asked in a small voice.

"I want to try," the other nodded, "Didn't His Highness say that knowledge leads to evolution? If I don't work hard in this respect, I'm afraid I will never be able to compare with them." She showed a sly smile, "These days I've been practicing writing my characters in my room after the class, Lily and Mystery Moon also taught me how to read and write some common words."

While mentioning this, the frustration within Evelyn's voice immediately dispersed a lot, and her eyes became shiny, making it impossible for Candle not to smile.

"Yes, I'll also try it."

...

"Your Royal Highness, the test results have come out," Scroll said while handing the summary over to Roland.

"You've worked hard," Since the recent discovery beneath the Northern Slope mine Roland was still feeling quite puzzled. So he found it difficult to concentrate on his daily tasks, so he tried to focus on something less intense, "Huh? Was Nightingale's performance unexpectedly able to meet the standard required?"

"Yes, but not only was it good enough, her grade was even in the forefront; which was partly due to her perfect language score," Scroll reported with a smile, "After all, most of your topics were very simple. Furthermore, she has already learned how to read and write a long time ago, so her starting point had been much better compared to the other witches."

"Tsk," Roland smacked his lips, "I thought I could make her eat fewer sweets with this exam." Even before his voice had completely fallen, he felt his shoulder being severely pinched. "In short, the result look quite good, all the members of the Witch Union have more than sixty, so it seems that your education is bearing fruit."

"These results are also inseparable from their efforts."

Moving his vision further down Roland asked, "Only two of the witches of Sleeping Island participated in the test?"

"Well, the one named Evelyn received five points, while Candle got thirty-six. The latter should already have some prior foundations, so most of her points come from kingdom language." She replied.

That she, even after having followed the class for only two weeks, was still able to receive some points outside of the writing part right, shows that her individual quality is truly astonishing. Both instincts and external knowledge are components to the continual improvement of a witch's magic.

The results of their own witches were also excellent, for example, Lily, Hummingbird, Mystery Moon and the others had only spent three months' time from being illiterate before they grasped the basics of reading and writing, and with this they've already exceeded the majority of the people in the streets.

What would the future look like when the people could put aside their prejudices and work together with the witches to promote the level of society and civilization as a whole? Roland's heart became filled with anticipation at the thought.

#### Chapter 275 Lucia and Nightingale

Lucia was cautious and solemn as she put three iron chunks on the floor of her bedroom before closing her eyes. She took a deep breath, and went through the experiences from her previous practice once more, then stretched out her hand and release her ability to surround the target.

This was the method of practicing that Anna had helped her come up with. Using three wrought iron ingots which had been especially melted by Anna that were made out of components that had nothing in common with each other, and all respectively containing silver, copper, lead, and some other impurities. Her task was to reconstruct them as pure substances while at the same time leaving behind the impurities and to also find the ingot that contained the highest amount of silver.

This meant that she had to control her magic output, and always needed to work on one target first.

Otherwise, it could happen that she broke the impurities further into their elements, which was what she had previously done at her home in Valencia, and was also the reason why she felt that her ability were so hard to control. Even if two pieces of paper looked the same, if they were restored to their original elements they could look very different. The fact that there was a relation between the amount of magic power she used and the effect of her abilities, was something she would never be able to comprehend by herself. Which led to the result that the components of some of the papers had been split apart several times, and ultimately turned most of the raw materials into water and gas.

After arriving in Border Town, the first lesson the other witches taught her, was that she had to practice controlling her magic.

Originally Lucia wasn't convinced that those invisible and incomprehensible things could also be precisely be controlled. Only when Anna demonstrated how she was able to control the lengths of her black flame, was she finally able to discover how badly mistaken she had been. Not only could Anna adjust the output of her magic, and change the size and thickness of the black flame, she was able to reach a level of perfection in it each and every time.

"Elder sister, are you going to go practice again?" Bell curiously stuck her head out of the bed. "It's just after lunch."

Lucia's hand trembled, and the iron ingot in her hand immediately turned into a pile of fine dust.

"I told you not to bother me when I'm using my power," she said, turning around to knock against the top of her sister's head, "Concentrate on reading your letters!"

"I'm unable to make sense of what I'm looking at," Bell said fretful, "I can't even understand half of the words' meaning; I'm not like older sister, you can write and read."

“That’s why it is important to read more; many words have a similar structure, so even if you haven’t seen them before, you should still be able to guess what it means. Literacy is a familiarizing process.”

“Alright,” Bell retracted her head.

Lucia focused her attention on the second piece of iron ingot, then exercised her control to slowly release her magic. She tried to imagine a thin layer of gauze covering the ingot, and wrapping it up evenly.

“Hey, I came,” the door suddenly squeaked, and the blonde woman dashed into the room. “Hey, are you practicing your ability?”

“Sister Nightingale!” Bell shouted carefreely.

The second piece of iron once again turned into a pile of fine powder.

Lucia sighed and put all the metal debris on the floor into a leather bag, feeling that it might be impossible to train today.

“Here, this is yours.”

Suddenly an ice cream with a rich aroma of milk was handed over to her.

“Thank you,” Lucia said, taking the ice cream, “But shouldn’t this only have been given out during the afternoon tea?”

Nightingale proudly patted her chest and said, “Oh, that’s true. But this is a special reward I requested from His Highness... here, you also get one.” With these words, she handed another one to Bell, which made the little girl immediately burst into laughter.

“Sister Nightingale is the best!”

This guy, as soon as she sees something delicious everything else gets thrown to the back of her mind, Lucia thought helplessly. But the moment the ice cream entered her mouth, and the sweet and rich taste of honey and milk spread through her mouth, together with the cold and refreshing feeling of the ice, further enhancing its sweetness; she also felt that if she had been in her sister’s place she would most likely also have reacted in the same way. Even after completely swallowing it, it still left a slight chill on her teeth and her lips.

No one can resist its deliciousness, especially during the hot summer. No wonder that His Highness only gives out ice cream during the weekend afternoon tea. She was afraid that this unique style of food was actually worth a lot of money, she at least had never heard of this dessert during her life in Valencia.

Thinking until here, Lucia could not help but ask, “How were you able to get it from His Highness?”

“Heh heh,” Nightingale smiled widely, “I ranked third during the exam, second only to Wendy and the Leaves, however, His Highness thought I would be unable to pass the exam at all. Since the actual situation was worlds apart from his imagination, it was only natural that I requested a special reward from him.”

“Actually... it was like this,” she hesitated for a moment then asked, “Then, my?”

“Sixty-eight, but I don’t know your actual rank.”

“Uh, so low.” Lucia was depressed. Altogether there were 120 points, but I was only able to get a little bit more than half of them right, even though I already learned how to read and write long ago.

“That’s pretty good,” Nightingale said while patting her head. “After all, how long have you been following the lectures? It’s only natural that you would fall a bit short in regards to mathematics and nature. But if you ever come across any problem, you can come and ask me if you want.”

“Me? Can I also ask!?” Bell raised her hand.

“Of course,” Nightingale answered laughingly, “You’re welcome at any time.”

“If I pass the elementary examination, is it possible for me to choose my own work?”

“You are still too young, His Highness said, the minimum age to start to work is fourteen years of age, but right now you are only ten years old, so don’t be so anxious.” Lucia stared at her.

However, the little girl was unwilling to give up so easily, “I also want to help you share the pressure. In case you want to get married and have a baby, you will need to spend a lot of money. If the money is not enough, your days will become very painful!”

“Where did you hear this?” Lucia threw her hands in front of her face.

“Daddy said it; he was always nagging that he’d almost been unable to raise us.”

“Pfff, hahaha,” Nightingale couldn’t suppress her laughter, “If you could take a job, where would you go?”

“Chemical laboratory!” Bell raised her hand and said, “I want to become an alchemist, get the title of Sage and receive everyone’s admiration and praise!”

“This... better not,” she shook her head. “The lab is dangerous.”

“Dangerous?” The sisters asked simultaneous.

“Yeah,” Nightingale said while spreading out her hands, “Not only do they often have to deal with acids, but there are also explosions sometimes. Even the chief alchemist Kyle Sichi was unable to avoid accidents. Four of his fingers were blown away last time. I’m afraid that if it weren’t for Nana’s magic, Mr. Sichi would’ve been unable to pick up any jars or bottles for the rest of his life.” She paused, “Furthermore, it seems that His Highness is recently trying to develop a new type of gunpowder. And even he thinks that it is extremely dangerous, so he commanded that it could only be done in a separate laboratory.”

“Uh, in that case, do you have any good suggestions?” Lucia went over and wrapped Bell into her arms, determined never to let her sister go to such a dangerous place.

“Without a doubt, she should enter the City Hall and become a civil servant.”

“Civil... servant?” she repeated.

Nightingale coughed twice, "Cough cough, that was what His Highness called them when he was thinking out loud. Commonly speaking, they are called City Hall Officials. Their job is stable and safe, while their salary is on the upper level. Moreover, their prospects are also good, if you can become a department head, your rewards won't be less than that of a witch."

"So, it's like this," Lucia said thoughtfully.

"Sister Nightingale, do you like His Royal Highness?" Bell asked in curiosity, "In many of your sentences you say: 'His Highness said', my mother said, you'd only talk so much about someone if you liked them."

When she heard her sister's question, Lucia's face became stiff. To hell with it! How can you directly ask such a question, this is simply too rude. At most we can be regarded as friends, so you cannot ask such a question of someone; even more so since that person is my highly-esteemed senior. She felt stricken by panic and hurriedly covered Bell's mouth, but before she could even start her apologies, Nightingale already gave her a frank response.

"Yeah, I like him."

Chapter 276 New artillery research and development

While on her way to bring the ore to His Highness, Nightingale's answer was running through Lucia's mind.

She had to admit, she was shocked by the calm manner in which Nightingale had revealed her feelings.

Although she wasn't entirely clear about the feelings of all the people involved, but a witch and a prince... simply couldn't ever be with each other, right? So shouldn't she be careful and hide her thoughts at the bottom of her heart, and never let others know about them?

Furthermore, why would she as a simple listener feel so excited and embarrassed?

Coming to a stop in front of the door to the office, Lucia took a deep breath before pushing open the door and entering.

"Your Highness, I've brought the ore."

"Let me see," Roland answered as he fought the urge to yawn.

The ruler of Border Town seemed the same as always, with his drowsy-eyed appearance it seemed it hasn't been that long since he'd finished taking his nap and it wasn't like he was in that much of a clear-headed state yet either. While leaning comfortably against the back of his chair, showing a natural bearing and speaking with an easy-going tone, he was completely unlike the other nobles with their strict and insulting mannerism.

Seeing him like this, Lucia's former indescribable nervousness loosened by a small amount. She then calmly took out the ore granules they'd found in the Northern Slope Mine and place them on the desk one after another.

After being broken down with her ability, all those granules now seemed to have almost the same look. Their colors weren't ash-colored, but were silver-white instead, and it was probably only a brilliant person of wide learning like the Prince that would be able to distinguish what these ores really were.



However, even after looking at them for a long time, the Prince still ended up knitting his brow. First, he took them into his hand one after another in order to estimate their weight. He then went to the window behind his desk to take a closer look from within the sunlight, only to finally wave with his hand and say, "Keke, seems I have no choice but to give these ores to Mr. Sichi to identify them. For now, you can go back to the courtyard at the North Slope and continue the practice of your ability, if there is something you don't understand you can always go to Anna and ask."

"..." Huh? There exist something His Highness doesn't know? Lucia quickly bowed and said, "Yes."

Just as she was about to leave the office, Roland called out to her again.

"Oh, that's right, your present test grade is pretty good, sixty-eight ranking ninth in the class. And that's after just one month of learning. Showing such a performance is not easy, so you must try and keep it up. Also..." he paused for a moment. "I hope that Bell can also participate in the next exam together with everyone."

"Yes!" Lucia excitedly agreed.

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After watching the little girl happily bow away, Roland looked at the metal particles on the table and sighed.

I was too naive, thinking that by breaking them down into one element, I might be able to discover what kinds of ore veins are hidden within the Northern Slope Mine. However, I once again have to acknowledge that there is a great deal of difference between mechanical engineering and geology. If that wasn't the case, I would have known that these stones would be broken down into three or four different kinds of metals. The most of the still remaining parts of the rocks can be considered as metalloid ores, but they have almost no difference in their color or shape. Such as iron, aluminum, magnesium, potassium when in a high purity state they are all silver-white metals, if I ever wanted to distinguish them by naked eye it will be much too difficult.

In the end, it is still better to give this issue to the chief alchemist to resolve, after all, he can verify the characteristics of the material through observing their chemical reaction, which should be much more reliable than my own guesses.

When he made up his mind regarding this matter, Roland took out a piece of paper and began planning on how to deal with the upcoming Months of Demons.

Seeing that summer was about to end, these three months of fall were his final preparation time. Besides resisting the invasion of the demonic beasts from the West, he had also had to keep an eye on Timothy and the Church who might come from the Eastern side. Unlike last year where he had to pull on his lapels exposing the elbows, Border Town's population and income nowadays had gone through a substantial growth. They had also gradually increased the iron production, and with the help of more than a dozen witches, he was sure that he would be able to turn the Western Territory into an impassable iron bastion.

Based on to the previous year's combat experience, the greatest threat to the wall was without a doubt the mixed demonic beasts. Especially so when the enemy had a thick crust, which would be hard to

wear down using bullets, and thus could only be killed by explosion at a close proximity, or by sending witches out of the city. However, no matter what kind of countermeasure he used, they both held high risks.

Also, until now he had only faced attacks from the enemy's cavalry or infantry, so he had never seen this era's siege weaponry. If the other side could construct a torsion catapult, or the more advanced counterweight trebuchets, he feared that he would encounter a lot of trouble. After all, the process of loading a cannon so that it could fire was very inconvenient. Not only did they have to raise the cannon chamber each time they loaded, it was also easy for the cannon ball to roll out of it.

These circumstances all meant it was inevitable that he would have to develop a new cannon.

After thoughtfully thinking about it, Roland began to list all of the requirements he had onto a piece of paper.

First of all, it had to have a sufficient shooting distance and force; enough that it could break through the shell of a mixed species that was a thousand meters away. Secondly, it had to be rear loaded, this way the head could freely be lowered or raised, while still preserving its ability to shoot quickly. Finally, in order to reduce the time of repeated research and development, the cannon should also be designed to fulfill several purposes. Meaning that in addition to being used to defend a stronghold and suppress the enemy, it could also be directly pulled onto a ship and be employed as the major weapon for future heavy gunboats.

Because of this it would have to be a large caliber with a long barrel type of heavy artillery.

Roland first thought of those 15-16 cun (2.5cm) huge monsters that were used on battleships, with a range of several scores of kilometers, and powerful enough for a shot to dig several meters deep into the ground, only to quickly reject an unrealistic idea such as this. Although there shouldn't be any problem on the processing side, but with Border Town's current level of materials, it meant that at least nine out of ten cannons would be explode. And if he thickened the cannon's wall to more than one meter, they would lose their practical value since he would be no longer able to move them.

By now he could only give birth to high-purity wrought iron that had the performance of ordinary steel. So the plan still had to be on the conservative side.

Roland finally set the caliber to the sacred number of 152 millimeters.

The cannon used a vertical wedge breechblock, which was upwards and downwards sliding door..When it was pulled down it exposed the cannon's chamber, and after loading it with an artillery shell, the block could be moved back up to completely lock the rear, so that the gunpowder could only erupt forward. Compared to a spiral breechblock and horizontal wedge breechblock, its speed was faster, and its principle was also very simple and was a blueprint he already knew by heart.

However, if he wanted to implement rapid firing, the artillery had to be equipped with a recoil mechanism, which in simple terms resembled two bicycle pumps, one that was filled with a padding of oil and the other with a spring or gas. Due to the recoil the muzzle would press against the two tubes, and would simultaneously compress the oil and the spring. The oil was used to buffer the recoil, while the spring would store the power and push the canon back into its original position after the shell left.

Lastly the shell.

Since he was already using the sacred cannon, there was no way he could be satisfied with using clumsy iron balls and paper wrapped canister shot anymore. But Roland decided to develop two sets of artillery shells just to be safe, one would be the enlarged version of a bullet, with a warhead made out of solid metal; and another kind, one that had an explosive warhead and using an impact detonator, like the howitzers used by later generations. After all, he would surely come across some technological problems while developing the explosive warheads, things like the development of a reliable detonator needed repeated testing. Because of this he couldn't guarantee that he could achieve it before the begin of the Months of Demons, therefore they had to first produce the former before they could resolve the problems of the latter. Even with a solid warhead, it should still be possible to easily deal with the slow-moving thick-skinned mixed beasts and fixed siege equipment.

Of course, no matter which kind of shells he used in the end, both would still consume a lot of smokeless gunpowder. In case they weren't able to start large-scale production of the two acids, the new guns could only be used as special weapons, which would mean that wanting to employ a large artillery barrage would be impossible to realize despite how much he wanted to do so.

At this moment, one of his personal guards pushed open the door and entered the office.

"Your Highness, a secret letter from King's City has arrived."

Roland put down the quill and opened the envelope. From start to finish, the letter didn't have a signature, and its handwriting was also very unfamiliar, but its short sentence made it clear that Theo was undoubtedly the one who had sent it.

"Today a group of about a thousand people left King's City, while heading toward the Western Border."

#### Chapter 277 Theater Conflict

Longsong Stronghold, theater performance hall.

The curtain fell to the sound of the audience's endless whistles and cheers. May wiped the sweat from her forehead and saw Irene's gaze, full of excitement and expectation, lingering on herself; she gave two slight nods in response.

This acknowledgment made Irene cheer out loud, the moment the curtain hit the ground, she could no longer stop herself from rushing over, and forcefully wrapped May into a hug.

"Hahaha, I really can play it!"

So troublesome, May gave her a supercilious look and pushed her away, "At last you have made some progress and can now take the stage independently."

"Miss may, then... what's with me?" Rosia, another actor that was playing a witch cautiously asked her.

"You still have a long way to go," she answered without hesitation, "Your expression is still stiff, your movements are sluggish, you also didn't put any feelings into your lines. During the second act you made two mistakes, and during the fourth act you'd positioned yourself incorrectly, which is a typical mistake if you don't memorize the script."

“Haha, Miss May is indeed really strict,” Gheit awkwardly scratched the back of his head, “However, the audience’s response seems to be very good, if you listen, you can hear that the applause has yet to subside.”

“Most of these people are civilians who have never been to the theater, so seeing a play such as this is still a new thing for them,” May interjected bluntly. “If this had been a regular show, those several mistakes would have been sufficient for the nobility to all let out hissing sounds.” She paused, “If you want to go down the actor’s road, you are never allowed to be satisfied with temporary successes, only by continually improving yourself will you be able to gain a firm foothold on the stage.”

The surrounding people all simultaneously lowered their heads and said, “Yes, thank you for your guidance!”

May sighed, here we go again, I definitely cannot be considered as the drama tutor of this group of people. But in the end, she was too lazy to care about such a trivial matter and merely said, “All right, everyone carry on with your hard work. The ‘Witch Diary’ will be shown at least until September, so there are still many plays during which we can develop further. This is a rare opportunity; no one should miss out on it.”

“Yes!”

One month ago May had received a notice from the Ministry of Education, the members of the theater team were instructed to go to Longsong Stronghold and perform. These so-called members were those inferior performers she had met at the start of her journey to Border Town, and Irene Eltek.

Perhaps it was because His Highness the Prince and acting Duke Petrov had reached an agreement with the theater to let them free its schedule, so that the crew could perform the “Witch Diary” trilogy. And so, with this group of amateur performers, together with the newly added actors who also couldn’t be considered as well-known actors, were now openly performing on the stronghold theater’s biggest stage. At normal times, they might not even be selected as a substitute for a supporting role. Now however, not only were they able to play the role of an important character on stage, but they could also perform hand in hand with the Star of the West, which made a lot of people lament about the impermanence of destiny.

When May returned to the backstage area, she couldn’t refrain from puckering her brows.

There at the lounge, she saw a group of people disturbing everyone with their noise, seemingly trying to start a dispute. The moment they saw May appear, more than a dozen followed the leadership of one woman as they stepped forward and began to surround her.

These people were all actors of the theater. May also recognized the woman leading them, she was called Bella Dean and was a famous actor that belonged to a different group. Some nobles even went so far as to say that she was May’s biggest competitor for the position as the Star of the West, but in fact, whether it was her acting or fame, she had never been able to pressure May.

“Guess who I’m finally able to see?” Bella bypassed May and slowly started to walk over towards Irene one step at a time, “A group of inferior actors who’ve sneakily returned from the countryside.”

“What did you say?” Irene asked with a bewildered face, Gheit, Rosia, and the other’s faces all turned stiff and they couldn’t stop themselves from taking two steps back.

“Pfff,” Bella covered her mouth and said, “She doesn’t even know her own identity and status.” These words aroused a burst of laughter from the group, “Then let me say it directly to you, a big city such as Longsong Stronghold isn’t a place where people like you should come to perform. Moreover, the stronghold theater also doesn’t welcome such a vulgar and third-rate performance. What ‘witch diary’? it’s just a few stray dogs all howling in grief. Who could ever be interested in seeing this kind of drama that’s bad enough to spoil one’s appetite? The earlier you get lost and return to Border Town, the better.”

“You,” Irene suddenly turned red, “What do you call a third-rate performance? didn’t you hear the applause of the audience?”

“Ha, audience?” Bella sneered sarcastically, “You call those people who work in the mud, and come in contact with hoes and furnaces every day, an audience? Don’t make me lose a tooth from laughing! Just catch some monkeys and make them run in circles and they will also be cheering loudly! If it hadn’t been for the free tickets, would they ever have the spare money to come and see you perform?”

“I...” Irene opened her mouth but didn’t know how to properly refute.

“The theater already has to deal with a continuous fall in revenue since you came to perform on the big stage every Wednesday. Furthermore, even we are being affected, as long as you and your drama keep on playing here, the nobility will not come!” Bella raised her voice, “Who would be willing to sit on greasy and dirty chairs covered with mud bits? I in turn, also do not want to come into a messy theater that your group of country bumpkins have left behind.”

The other side has apparently come to pick a quarrel, May thought, with the sudden appearance of Border Town’s performers, many people from the theater crowd have indeed lost their chance to appear, but by no means is Bella Dean suffering under this effect. According to the news I’ve received from some acquaintances, after my departure from Longsong Stronghold, the theater deliberately tried turning her into the new Star of the West, so they naturally cannot cancel the drama she’s starring in.

Looking at Bella’s action from this point of view, her purpose was clearly evident. Even though it seems she was scolding Irene and the others, in reality, her attack is directed against me. If these people shrink back, I alone cannot perform the Witch Diary and will have no other option than to go back to Border Town in shame. In this way, by defeating them, it is equal to defeating me. Moreover, by recovering an opportunity for the other actors to play, her prestige is also bound to rise; in that way establishing her place as the new generation’s Star of the West.

But I will never become the stepping stone for someone else!

“The theater’s income is falling, are you serious?” May turned and said thoughtlessly, “How can you come up with such a naive judgment as to think that the theater is unable to make ends meet just because of giving away free ticket. The theater manager has undoubtedly reached an agreement with His Royal Highness and Petrov, concluding that the loss of revenue would naturally be paid for by Border Town’s City Hall. This is a business contract, not someone playing house. You really should use your brain rather than rely on your imagination to start shouting and screaming.”

“You... are only talking nonsense!”

“In the end, the decrease of the income is merely because of you and this group of inferior actors with no status.” May showed a faint smile, “There was one time when I was performing at King’s City Grand Theater, which is an open-air theater. It just so happens that on the day of the show it was raining. However, the nobles still came and filled even the last seat. So, you’re saying it is because of the commoners that the nobility is unwilling to watch your show? No, it’s simply that they do not enjoy coming over to watch a play that is performed by a group of monkeys.”

“...” The scene fell into a strange silence, not only did no one step forward to blame them further, they weren’t even trying to find an excuse.

“Finally, you said that the ‘Witch Diary’ is of inferior quality and vulgar; a story about stray dogs struggling and howling in grief?” The corners of May’s mouth rose, her voice however, was bone chillingly cold, “I may have forgotten to tell you, but it was the Prince who wrote the story for the script. Do you want to tell me that His Highness ideas are low-grade and vulgar? Insulting the royal family is a crime punishable by cutting off the tongue; are you still going to stick with your point of view now?” She looked at the crowd standing behind Bella, “Or do any of you want to give it a try?”

One after another, the more than a dozen actors under her gaze backed away.

“Enough!” Bella clenched her teeth and hissed, “Since you’ve already left for Border Town, you should never have come back! May, do you think I don’t know! The actual reason why you went to that broken place was not to see that idiot Irene, but Morning Light.”

“Slap!”

Bella’s voice stopped with a grunt; a bright red hand print was glowing on her left cheek. She touched her face, not daring to believe what had happened just now, “Y-you actually dare to str-strike...”

Fuu~ in the end, she had acted on impulse, so she took a deep breath and tried to calm herself. If it went on like this, it could cause some trouble for her later on.

Sure enough, two actors behind Bella stepped forward, “Miss May, you are going to far.”

“Do you know the importance of appearance to an actress; I think that at the very least you need to apologize to her.”

Apologize? Isn’t that the same as saying I was the one in the wrong? May couldn’t help but to grimly start laughing from the bottom of her heart, the urge to act impulsively returned, but the thought to apologize never even surfaced.

With a calm and collected expression, she sized up the two men with their oily hair and powdered faces, and could not help but think of what Carter Lannis had once told her.

“Do not look at a man’s strength, they also have many weaknesses, attacks towards their eyes or throat will make them instantly lose their resistance, of course... there is also the place between their legs. As long as you act decisively and quickly it is not impossible for you to knock down a man much stronger than you.”

Although she wasn't sure how far this could be applied to the current situation, she had already placed her feet into an attacking position, just waiting for the two men to come closer...

However, at this moment, the lounge door was brutally pushed open, an armor wearing knight came in followed by several soldiers with pikes in their hands. As they entered the room, they immediately pointed the pikes at the crowd.

"I heard that somebody had slandered His Royal Highness, and that a whole crew is conspiring against him."

May couldn't help but stare blankly, thinking that what she had seen had to be an illusion, she forced herself to blink. However, nothing changed, the man standing in front of her showing her a secret smile was indeed the knight Carter Lannis.

#### Chapter 278 Combat Plan

The conflict soon ended.

When they saw the knights threateningly closing in on them, none of them dared to speak up. It was fair to say that the majority of actors were people who moved whichever way the wind blew, otherwise there wouldn't have been a dispute to begin with. It wasn't like everyone had the courage to stand up and confront her, the all too famous May. And now that the situation had completely turned around, Bella was escorted away by the two men as they immediately left the lounge.

Soon after, Carter and Border Town's theater group were the only ones in the huge room.

"Thank you for your help," Gate and the others said as they bowed.

"You were really... too fierce! Two or three of your sentences were already enough to turn her completely speechless." Irene said, grasping May's hands, "Furthermore, that slap, she looked so perplexed, she couldn't do anything but cover it with her hand in her disbelief."

She then turned towards the Chief Knight and saluted, "Sir Carter, for what reason are you in Longsong Stronghold?"

"About this point, I'm also very curious," May said while shrugging with her shoulders, but within her heart, she felt relief.

"Because of His Highness' orders," Carter answered and then asked in return, "Can I invite you to a drink?"

...

"This is... the place where you live?" The Chief Knight appeared somewhat reserved while he surveyed the room.

"Yes, very ordinary, right?" May took a bottle of white wine from the cupboard and poured him a small cup. "The taverns only open at night, so just regard this cup as my invitation to you." Irene and the rest of the group had quickly slipped away, one by one they suddenly remembered something they had still needed to do. Which left only her and Carter in the group by the time they'd reached the residence.

“Yes, indeed... quite ordinary,” Carter coughed twice, “I’m unaware about your family...”

“My mother passed away when I was still young, I got my father a job in the theater, where he had to do all kinds of easy chores,” May stated serenely, “But I think he will come back in the evening.”

The location of the small cottage was within a dark alley of Longsong Stronghold’s inner city, but she had actually spent all her savings after becoming the Star of the West to purchase it. Even though the house was small and old, but by moving away from the outer city, she at least could get away from harassment and the disturbing peeping Toms.

“Uh... sorry.”

“It’s nothing,” May answered, and gave herself a small cup, “Did His Royal Highness let you come in order to rectify the theater’s social order and solve the disputes between the actors?”

“No, of course not,” Carter repeatedly waved his hands and said, “Timothy has sent some people to the Western Territory to cause some trouble again, because of this, His Highness Roland along with the majority of the Army are currently on the road. I instead took Small Town and arrived beforehand to arrange the Second Army, reinforce the night watch, and alert the Honeysuckle Family as I do so as to prevent someone from raiding the gates and the like.”

“These matters, you shouldn’t have told me,” May said shocked while shaking her head.

“You asked, and it’s not like this is a secret operation,” Carter drank the wine, “rest assured, I still have a sense of discretion.”

“Good,” she answered, curling her lips, “So, how did you get to the theater?”

“After I took care of the matters at hand, all of the sudden I happen to hear about your play and suddenly had the desire to come and see you perform on a real theater stage, wondering what it would look like. And it was just like I thought, even though I could only see the last part of the play, your performance was still wonderful.” the Knight praised. “So, I went to backstage intending to invite you to a drink, but I didn’t know whether I should come in or not. Thus, I was indecisively wandering in front of the door when I heard the argument inside...”

“You’ve already been outside from early on?” May frowned.

“I did not mean to eavesdrop,” Carter said in defense while he raised his hands. “It’s just an accident, I promise.”

“Puff,” May couldn’t suppress a chuckle and then said in comfort, “I don’t blame you, there is no reason to show an expression like that.”

“You don’t?” The Knight breathed out in relief and reached for the wine, only to get stopped by May.

“You still have night duty, right?” May shook his finger and said, “Therefore, I can only let you drink a small cup and no refill. But...” She smiled, “Wait until the end of the mission, then you can nicely invite me.”

After Carter left, May took another cup of wine and leaned back against the chair.



Since she had tasted the wine for the first time, she discovered that she had slowly started to enjoy its hot and mellow flavor.

As for Carter's previous invitation, she already had a faint answer to it within her heart. It is indeed only possible to know the results of some matters after trying them, just like the wine in my hands. Although the first taste was difficult to swallow, but compared with its following richness and mellowness, those sour and sweet fruit wines or the bland ale just can't compare.

After the end of the theater season, I might as well take my father with me and settle in Border Town, right?

...

Roland arrived in Longsong Stronghold two days later.

Petrov and members of the five families came out of the city to welcome His Highness the Prince and his troops.

After stationing the First Army into the stronghold, Roland went straight to the castle and held a brief meeting.

"I got my hands on reliable news, that Timothy had raised a force that is advancing towards the stronghold." Roland announced after sitting down on the Lord's seat at the top of a flight of steps, while looking down on the nobles gathered beneath, "Their actual number and the route they've taken is unknown, but there is no doubt that they are coming for me. According to Timothy's consistent tactic, they are bound to expand their troops by plundering and enforcing the civilians, and then use drugs to force these people to attack."

"Excuse me, Your Highness," the eldest son of the Wolf Family interrupted puzzled, "The drugs you are speaking about..."

"A type of vicious red pill, that can give civilians more strength than a knight, but after the effect wears off, those who took it can only helplessly struggle before dying." In addition to Petrov, the other four influential families didn't know about the Church's secret medicine, so Roland gave a simple description of the characteristics and the source of the pill. Then he continued, "Through this plan Timothy continues to weaken the resistance of the Western Territory. Any person he cannot use is a target of looting and enforcing, the same goes for your territory. As the Protector of the Western Territory, I request that you clearly explain the situation to your Family's staff and the commoners staying on your land; and that you transfer all of them into the city, so that Timothy won't be able to expand his force."

"But the food and stored goods in our warehouses..."

"You can move as much as possible," Roland decisively interrupted, "However, I can only give you three days, until then all the commoners in the surrounding have to have been gathered together inside of the stronghold. After I beat back Timothy's troops, you can all naturally leave."

After the conclusion of the meeting, the Prince summoned Iron Axe to the castle.

In fact, by no means had he disclosed the exact situation to the nobility. Lightning and Maggie were already able to expose the whereabouts of the troops coming from King's City. Unlike the previous

group of invaders, they were traveling by sailboat this time, and moving straight along the Redwater River's channel in an attempt to enter the hinterland of the Western Territory by passing through Willow Town.

This was a very thorny route, at the time the enemy came to the river's bifurcation point, they could either follow the tributary to attack Longsong Stronghold's Southern and Eastern Gate or continue following the river westwards and go straight for Border Town.

In order to prevent his defending troops from needing to split up and create a situation of attending to one thing and losing sight of another, he needed to concentrate his superior military strength and take the initiative to go out and defeat the enemy.

Evidently, the Redwater River's bifurcation would be the most suitable place for such an ambush.

Chapter 279 Battle line up

After entering the hall, Iron Axe gave a standard military salute.

"Timothy's troops are expected to reach the junction in the Redwater River four days from now. The First Army will set off this afternoon," Roland bluntly spoke. "You will meet up at the battle site with Border Town's defensive troops and take over the command; I will travel there as quickly as possible."

"Don't we need to defend Border Town?"

"All of the enemy's movements are under the surveillance by Lightning and Maggie. Setting up a defensive division is no longer necessary, just one joint attack to the right side should be enough to smash the enemy." The Prince paused, "But we also need to leave one hundred soldiers in Longsong Stronghold to watch over those nobles."

"Remain... here?" Iron Axe asked shocked.

Roland summarized his previous released orders to the five families, "The reason that I gathered them together was to make it more convenient to watch over them. This will keep them from having any thoughts after learning about Timothy's attack on the Western Territory. The Second Army's weapons are old and their combat experience is lacking, so in case they encounter an unexpected situation they may not respond to it. However, with the ten squadrons of First Army's soldiers, we can ensure that the nobles cannot lift any wind and waves. Since I do not want to fight at the Redwater River junction, only to birth riots at my back."

"As you bid, Your Highness," he said.

"Do you have to go?" After Iron Axe had left the hall, Nightingale stepped out from behind the lord's seat and asked him.

"Of course," Roland said, "If I do not go, who else could make good use out of Lotus' ability? I may not be adept at commanding battle strategy, but I'm damn good at using bunkers to seal off roads and tanks to slap faces."

"Bunker I know of; however, what is this tank?" Nightingale's face showed her confusion.

“Oh... they are carriages which drag around a cannon,” the Prince coughed twice. “But currently we do not have enough horses, so we have to rely on Little Town to transport the cannons, which like this cannot be called tanks.

“That’s the reason why you picked Honey?” She blinked and asked, “As far as I know, she can even tame tigers and panthers making them as gentle as horses. But aren’t “tanks” nothing more than cannons which are pulled by wild animals?”

“Of course,” Roland couldn’t refrain from tilting his mouth, “The different models can also straightforwardly be named Tiger and Panther.”

Just then, Carter, holding a white-tailed kite in his arms, came in and announced: “Your Highness, there is news from Border Town.”

Roland clapped his hands, immediately after, as if it had intelligence, the white-tailed kite unfolded its wings, freed itself from the knight’s arms and soared into the air, gliding the short distance to firmly land on his shoulder. Feeling the kite land on his shoulder, he took a piece of jerky from his pocket and gave it to the bird to swallow. It also conscientiously raised its claw, so that Roland could easily untie the cloth tied to it.

The kite wasn’t Maggie in her hawk form, it was one of Honey’s trained air messengers. They could remember five to six different people, as well as hundreds of flight routes, even in case that they were brought to an unknown place, they could still find their way home. This time, for his trip to the stronghold, Roland had brought a total of four messengers. Within one hour they could travel from one place to the other and back. Furthermore, they could also fly for a whole day without having to take a break. In the absence of a wireless transmission, this way of keeping in touch counted as the quickest method.

Roland spread out the letter wrapped into the cloth and quickly skimmed over its content.

The author of the letter was Wendy, she was reporting that according to his request she had already carried Lotus, Sylvie, Leaves, Hummingbird, and Nana to the fork of the Redwater River. Some artillery members had also traveled together with them. They’d also taken eight cannons with them, which was the maximum number of cannons that Little Town could accommodate.

The Prince had estimated that in case Wendy traveled at full speed with Little Town, the cement ship would take about a day to reach the destination. Even though they had Sylvie as their navigator, which made it possible for the ship to travel at night, Wendy’s magical source was much smaller compared to Anna’s, which meant it was impossible for her to use her ability continuously like Anna could. They would therefore need to rest during the night and travel during the day. So with one trip to and fro taking two days, the four days would be merely enough time for them to have transported sixteen field cannons to the river fork.

Even though their number was less than during the last battle, but taking into account the surprise raid and the fact that the other side was traveling on ships, it would be impossible for the enemy to counterattack. This amount of firepower would be just barely enough to defeat them. Roland took the pen Nightingale offered and wrote a new set of instructions, he ordered the defense troops to

immediately arm themselves and set off. Furthermore, after having reached the river fork they were instructed to merge into one large force under Iron Axe's command.

Only half an hour later, the white-tailed kite would have delivered the letter into Scroll's hands, who would then hand it over to Captain Brian.

...

The next morning, Roland himself arrived at the scheduled location.

Reaching the place where the clear and gleaming river divided itself in two, one stream flowing towards Longsong Stronghold, the other carrying on until Redwater City.

As the latter river branch was wider, the people used to regard it as the main channel of the Redwater River, while calling the stream leading to the stronghold Little Redwater.

After disembarking, they were immediately welcomed by the witches, who had been waiting at the riverside for a long time.

Looking around, Roland asked, "Wendy?."

"She is already on her way back, together with Little Town," Leaves reported, "She said that there is another batch of cannons which has to be shipped."

"I heard that you are going to deal with Timothy Wimbledon, the fake king who hunts for witches within the cities every day." Lotus could no longer wait and asked, "What is it you want us to do?"

Although Iron Axe and the main force of the First Army had yet to arrive, as long as the witches were here, the preparatory work could still be carried out in advance.

"I need to build a line of defense on both sides of the main river," Roland explained while squatting down and using a stone to draw on the ground. "This line represents the enemy's route forward, so I will split my troops and place them on both sides of the river to launch a sudden pincer attack. However, in order to successfully surprise them, they will have to remain hidden until the attack has begun. So, it is important that you raise a soil house forming a large V-shape on both sides of the river. The houses should have a long form, the walls must be thick, the inside should be divided into eight individual compartments and there should only be small windows on the side of the Redwater River.

"Your Highness, I don't get it..." Lotus was clearly puzzled, "If you put the soldiers hidden in the soil house you will be able to conceal their whereabouts, but this way they won't be able to attack the ships on the river, ah. In case the Fake King's fleet absolutely doesn't stop nor pulls toward the shore, and instead directly pass by, what should be done then?"

"No, they are unable to make it through," Roland laughed. "You'll know why when the time comes."

Then he turned to Leaves, "You are responsible for covering these fortifications, with weeds and vines so that everything appears more natural."

"Yes," Leaves answered.

As a result, when the artillery was pushed into the hidden fortifications, the two soil houses Lotus had thought to be useless were instantly transformed into an “unsinkable battleship”. When the time came around as long as they lifted the cover plate in front of the windows, each compartment could then let out a deadly flame. It was unlikely that the sixteen field cannons would lose aim because of jolts, in fact, shooting at such a close range, it should be possible to hit the ships sailing in the middle of the river even if their eyes were closed. Granted that the attacks were unable to sink the ships, it should still be sufficient to turn their decks into Asura’s realm.

Furthermore, from the very beginning, the enemy will be at the disadvantageous point of the “T”, Roland proudly thought, you tell me, being at the “T’s” superior position, how could I ever lose?

#### Chapter 280 Redwater River Ambush (Part 1)

The enemy’s fleet took longer to reach the fork in the Redwater River than expected, instead of late morning it was already afternoon of the fourth day when the ten sailing ships slowly appeared at the end of their field of view.

Receiving this news, Van’er forwarded it to the sixth compartment, turned to the artillery team he was responsible for and gave the order for them to prepare to shoot, then returned to his shooting position.

“Where is the enemy?” Rodney asked while opening the window’s cover plate to look around.

“They are at least still several hundred meters away from us,” Cat’s Claw, in charge of observing the signal flags murmured while he looked through the sky window. “I can’t even see their shadows, there are too many weeds on the roof.”

Each compartment, in addition to the shooting window, also came with a second window at the top of the wall. After climbing the two steps staircase made of earth, it was possible to see the situation on the Redwater River through the window.

“Speaking of the weeds, the ability of the green hair witch is simply inconceivable,” Jop said while wiping away some of the cannon’s rust marks. “Wherever she goes, grass grows to be as long and as thin as her hair. After completely covering the bunkers, they now look completely like ordinary soil hills, there is no difference between the two.

“What green hair witch?” Van’er said beratingly, “That’s Miss Leaves. At the time, when we confronted the Duke’s Knight for the first time, she helped us by planting the vines on both sides of the forest, making it impossible for the Knights to bypass us. Otherwise, they could have gone around us through the wood and attacked us from behind.”

“With their magic, what kind of witch is ordinary?” Rodney asked while he shrugged his shoulders, “One can build those bunkers within one night, the other covers the ground with vines and weeds, one can fly freely in the sky, and one can even change into a giant dove, these are things no mortal could ever do.”

“If I have to choose, the most amazing one is Miss Nana,” Cat’s Claw’s voice was full of longing and expectation, “I do not know if it is an honor to be wounded nowadays. As long as you’re wounded, then you can see her from close range, maybe even hear some comforting words from her.”

“For my benefit, pay careful attention to the enemy’s position!” Van’er snapped, “If any of you dare to talk any more rubbish, I will punish you with cleaning the toilet when we return!”

Hearing the threat, Cat's Claw stick out his tongue, and then turned his body around to explore the outside situation.

The artillery captain sighed in his heart; nowadays these guys have lost their sense of tension, they weren't like a few months ago where their hands and feet trembled at the beginning of the battle. He couldn't say if this changes were good or bad, he always felt that some of them held too much contempt towards the opponent, but he also couldn't severely reprimand his men, because he was in no way better than them. Since he had become a soldier of His Royal Highness, Van'er's understanding of battle had undergone changes as great as the difference between sky and earth: The seemingly bloody and cruel fights, no longer had anything to do with your personal strength, skill, and courage. They now only needed repetitive drills to learn all of the necessary steps by heart. Ready themselves according to the rules, meet the enemy according to those rules and open fire according to the rules was equivalent to winning.

Especially when Border Town had to withstand the attack of the new King's Militia, the opponent obviously had astonishing strength, a fierce spirit, and didn't show any fear of death, just like humanoid beasts. But the fight only lasted for half an hour. When it was time to clear the battlefield, he discovered that he didn't feel even the slightest trace of fatigue, as if he had only gone through a warm-up exercise before his training, yet they had already exterminated the enemy.

In this way, will there be a day when they will fight wars over distances where they couldn't even see the enemy's face? Will they be able to wipe out the enemy thousands of miles away just by operating some metallic machines?

Just when Van'er got lost in his own world, he was drawn back by Cat's Claw's warning shout.

"I see the enemy!"

"Fill in the ammunition!" Van'er ordered with a firm voice while shaking his head, pushing all of the distracting thoughts to the back of his head.

The people within the compartment suddenly became busy; they had already gone through the following steps so many times, that they could now fill the cachet and artillery shell into the chamber even if their eyes were closed. Under the circumstances that they didn't need to reset the cannon into the starting position or to adjust the shooting angle, the artillery group could easily shoot once every twenty breaths.

His Highness Roland and Iron Axe had already planned and put the strategy for the battle long ago. Moreover, it was similar to Border Town's previous defense battle, so Van'er could fluently recite it from memory. Therefore, the moment they saw Miss Lightning wave the red flag, they immediately tore down the window's cover plate and opened fire. The two cannons nearest to the river bank were filled with bullet canisters intended to wipe out the deck, while the rest of the cannons bombarded the hold of the ships with their solid shells.

He calmly waited for the arrival of the red signal.

...

Lotus no longer needed an observation mirror to keep a lookout, she could see that the fleet of the Fake King had already neared the ambush place.

Compared to the three-masted or four-masted seafaring sailing ships, these ships were notably much slimmer, had no tall rigging or fences, and with their low hull, they looked as if they were at the same level of the river. In addition to their bulging sails, they were also pushed forward by sailors on both sides of their decks, who were slowly pulling the helms in their hands.

Even now, His Royal Highness still hadn't issued any new orders.

She could not help but become somewhat anxious; standing at their observation point located at the top of a high hill. Even though they could overlook the whole battlefield from here, it was still far away from the river. Without Lightning or Maggie by His Highness' side, sending new instructions to each team would waste a lot of time, and even if they were only a little late, Lotus was afraid that there wouldn't be enough time to stop the fleet from passing through the Redwater River fork.

Seeing that the leading sailboat was about to pass by the soil houses, Lotus couldn't help but want to open her mouth to inquire, but at that very moment, a loud bang suddenly rolled over the river. As if this were the signal to attack, more than a dozen thick smoke clouds mixed with a blazing flame came spouting out of the soil house, sending an unending oppressive and earth trembling sound across.

In the end, what exactly had happened?

When Lotus turned her eyes back to the river, she could hardly believe what she was seeing, She didn't see any fight between knights or mercenaries, however, on the deck of the first sailboat, it looked like a boiling pot had just exploded. Wood chips, disabled limbs, and severed arms splashed everywhere in all directions. More than half of the scullers had been killed or injured in a flash, and as the bloody mist cleared up, it had smeared the deck a bloody red.

After losing half of its moving force, the speed of the vessel quickly slowed down, while the thundering explosion sound hadn't stopped for even the slightest moment. Not long after, several shadows cut the tall mast at the center of the ship in half; it shook twice before falling to the ground with a loud bang, burying two knights who had just climbed out of the cabin under it.

The sailboat was pushed by the water current and slowly began receding, while the other ships fanned out while trying to avoid it. After hearing the cacophony of sounds, lots of people rushed out from within the hold of the ship, only to helplessly look at the leading ship which had already sunken into hell, seemingly not knowing what they should do anymore.

Then the horrible attack fell on the second ship.

The bloody mist emerging from the now crowded deck became even more raging, and Lotus could see, that after another round of rolling thunder, those enemies who originally stood nearest to the river bank had been completely broken apart and had given birth to many scarlet red empty spots. Those people who were still alive, gave out heartbreaking screams as they tried to push their intestines back into their body. While other lucky survivors immediately jumped into the river to try and escape, no longer willing to spend another breath in the hell on top of the deck.

Finally, Lotus understood what His Highness had meant when he said that they would not be able to get through, but... how had his men been able to do this?