

Witch 281

Chapter 281 Redwater River Ambush (Part 2)

Compared with Lotus who could only survey the scene from an elevated and distant position, Sylvie's view was much more vivid.

Through the thick walls of the soil houses, she could see the soldiers busy themselves in an orderly manner, everyone was repeating the same single motion, but all seven to eight people became one complex whole and moved like clouds and flowing water. The paper bags and iron balls stacked at the back of the compartment, were continuously fed into a thick and robust iron pipe, which then erupted with the sound of thunder.

Taking a closer look, Sylvie noticed that the soldiers first lit a rope that was at the end of the iron pipe. The jumping sparks then entered the interior of the pipe and directly ignited the previously loaded paper bag. In the following split second the light became so bright that she was unable to bear keeping her eyes open, the sparks quickly expanded into an orange-red fireball, filling every room in the pipe. With no further place left for it to go, the still growing flame then pushed against the iron ball, ejecting it outward as if a giant hand had thrown it out!

Within the blink of an eye, the iron ball turned into a shadow rushing in a straight line towards the ship sailing on the river. Its strength was so great, that it directly drilled through the planks leaving a fist sized hole in the side. Although its speed slowed down a lot the iron ball's power could still not be underestimated. When it hit one enemy that was trying to climb out of the cabin it immediately tear him in two.

It was Sylvie's first time witnessing such a scene – that without the blade of a sharp knife or the edge of a sword, depending on just one of those plumb iron balls, it was possible to tear a person in two.

Due to witnessing the scene from too close, it even felt as if the blood and guts had splashed all over herself. The still not stopped iron ball then hit several more people, not only cutting off their four limbs but also shattering their heads. For a moment, the cabin was full of flowing filthy blood, and red and white internal organs.

Sylvie suddenly felt her stomach rolling over and over, and stomach acid came rushing straight along her throat.

"Blergh..." The scene in the hold of the ship suddenly faded – under her chaotic emotional state she was no longer able to keep on using her ability. Sylvie forcefully interrupted the connection to her Eye of Truth giving up to the impulse to throw up instead.

"What happened?" Lotus was startled, so she immediately came over to support her then worriedly asked, "Are you okay?"

The Prince also noticing her discomfort turned around and handed her a handkerchief, "If you think it is too bloody, then don't look at it. At least don't use your ability to look at it from a close range. For now, first go and take a break."

"Thank you..." Sylvie took the handkerchief and wiped her mouth. "I'm all right."

This is probably the “incredible invention” Maggie and Lightning had spoken of, but back then we hadn’t listened enough to it or we didn’t pay any attention to it. After all, without personally witnessing it, such an incredible weapon is really hard to imagine.

She once more looked towards the battlefield, to see that Timothy’s fleet had begun approaching both shores – apparently, they have already noticed by now, that this kind of violent wind and rainstorm is coming from the soil houses at the shores that are disguised as earth slopes. However, the other side still isn’t aware that the military fortification arranged by His Highness Roland has far more to offer than that.

Comparatively far away from the V-shaped line of defense, were some more bunkers that were hidden with vines and weeds. Which had a length exactly the same as the length of the fleet column. If they landed at any point, they would just fall into another pincer attack laid out for them from the beginning, the only way to avoid this would have been if they had turned the bow around and withdrew without even the slightest hesitation.

The soldiers in the bunkers were all holding identical long and round iron instruments, these didn’t shoot out round iron balls but rather a single sharp but tailless arrowhead. It didn’t seem as if it had the same unstoppable power as the iron balls, but when it hit the target, it still turned any armor useless before drilling deep into the flesh of a person’s body.

Sylvie guessed that the enemy had planned to launch a counterattack after going ashore and lining up, however, the soldiers within the bunkers never even gave them the opportunity to do so – just as with the previous attack, they also didn’t need to show their faces this time. Instead, they aimed at the target with their weapons, easily pulled the trigger, then sent off a rain of arrowheads; similar to a summer storm splashing down on the enemy.

Confronted with this kind of rapid-fire, without even being able to swing their own weapons, the enemy was unable to resist for long before the frontlines totally fell apart. The people who had already left the ship all turned around, wanting to return aboard, while the people still aboard were waiting for the others to flee. The body of the ships substantially began to sway, until the gangplank was no longer able support their weight and fell into the water drowning many of them, while some other people trying to climb the wall of the ship were also killed off, which turned the whole scene into utter chaos.

“It’s time,” After waiting until this moment, the Prince put down his observation mirror, turned toward Iron Axe and ordered, “Take the reserve and clean up the battlefield, if the lead knights were lucky enough not to be killed during the battle, arrest as many as you can. I want to ask them some questions.”

“Yes,” Iron Axe answered as he saluted.

He then looked at Sylvie, “Go with Iron Axe and ensure that no one can slip away.”

Sylvie nodded, and followed after the First Army Commander as they moved away from the observation hill. She suddenly understood why His Royal Highness Roland would dare to openly protect the witches here in the corner of the mainland... With such a dominant force in his hands, it isn’t known whether the Church will be able to beat him even if they sent out their God’s Punishment Army. If Lady Tilly can also

get her hands on these weapons, maybe there will come a day when us witches will be able to return to our homeland.

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As he looked down at the paralyzed sailboats standing at the river shore, Roland finally let out a breath of relief.

The moment the enemy had decided to land and launch a counter attack was the moment they were fated to lose the battle – merely relying on poles and paddles to turn around the bow would have been a very slow process, even more so under a constant artillery attack which might have been the reason the opposition hadn't turned around and withdrawn. They might have thought that instead of suffering a beating without the slightest chance to hit back, it would be better to hurriedly reach the shore so that they could organize the team for a counter offensive.

However, it would be difficult to completely sink a wooden sailboat by relying on the field cannons' iron balls which weighed a mere 12 pounds. Even if the hull had been covered in holes, it still wouldn't be enough damage and the ship would still remain floating. So, while they might have suffered heavy losses as they turned around, they would've at least have been able to save one or two of their ships, but, by choosing to land, their whole fleet was doomed to be wiped out.

Compared to the last surprise attack at Longsong Stronghold and Border Town's defense battle, the enemy wasn't even able to start an attack at all this time – the pills were usually controlled and held onto by the commander until it was time to attack. Therefore, they were unable to respond quickly enough when the ambush began.

It was not until evening that the work of cleaning up the battlefield finally came to an end.

By that time Iron Axe and a few personal guards had already entered the camp with two captives.

Even before Roland had the time to ask, one of them had already started shouting out loud: "I'm Knight Sznak. Your Highness, please allow me to write a letter to my family. They will certainly offer a rich ransom."

"I am the second son of the Shield Family from the Northern Border, Elvin Shield. Your distinguished Highness," the other immediately followed, "I am also willing to pay the ransom."

"So... the present attack was led by you?" Roland asked as he raised his brow.

"Well, no. The captain was Sir Vincent, but he is dead now." Knight Sznak twisted his body, "Your Highness, could you let your man untie my hands? I hope to receive the traditional treatment during the redeeming period."

"I do not need a ransom," the Prince said while shaking his head, "The target of your coming to the Western Territory, the plan, as well as the further intention of Timothy... Tell me everything you know, and I will probably give you what you deserve."

"This... Please forgive me, I can't tell you that," Sir Sznak said after hesitating for a moment.

"I have already vowed my loyalty and devotion to His Majesty Timothy," the young man of the Shield Family said, "This would be against my oath."

“Then so be it,” Roland answered, not taking exception to it, “Take them away for now.”

After the guards had brought them away, Roland glanced towards Iron Axe and asked, “I heard that you served as the Patriarch’s guard during your stay in Iron Sand City, and that you are excellent at gathering intelligence through interrogation, is that right?”

“Yes, Your Royal Highness,” Iron Axe stated, “There are very few people who can hide information from me.”

“Well, I will give these two men to you for interrogation,” Roland turned to leave, “Your manner and methods are not limited, as long as you get enough information everything is acceptable.”

Iron Axe got shocked and began to say, “The ransom...”

“From the beginning, I have already said that I don’t need payment,” Roland coldly said, “When the questioning comes to an end, treat it as if they had fallen during battle.”

This is the what they deserve after oppressing and seizing commoners then coming to invade the Western Territory. He added within his heart.

Chapter 282 “Stage”

The day after returning to Border Town’s Castle, Iron Axe brought all the information that he’d been able to gather during the interrogation.

“These people were only Timothy’s advance troops?” Roland asked with a frown.

“That is indeed the case, Your Highness,” Iron Axe answered while nodding, “Just like you have previously guessed. Sending one militia troop after another is Timothy Wimbleton’s combat tactic. Apart from the Western Territory, Timothy has also used the same method to deal with Garcia Wimbleton’s Port of Clear Water.”

“Is the force completely made up out of commoners?”

“Not all of them. Some of those people are also criminals or rats, but most of them are refugees who have been seized from all across the country.” He replied, “According to the enemy knight, these people have all been pressed into service. First, they got lured with some verbal promises, and then later they had to take those pills. As a result, they have no other choice than to accept being controlled by Timothy, only in that way will they get further pills to ease their pain and longing.”

“But they do not know that once they swallowed the pill, there is no possibility of treatment,” Roland sighed, “Taking more pills just delays their death.”

“Yes, Your Royal Highness. Timothy didn’t inform the people about the side effect of the drugs. Instead, they believed that the ‘new King’ would fulfill his promises after the war and give them remuneration and a new identity.”

“What is the target of this force?” Roland asked.

“Border Town,” Iron Axe quickly replied, “According to what they had heard from Knight Vincent who had fallen during battle, they believe that Border Town doesn’t possess a city wall, which would make it

easier for him to achieve his goal of a war of attrition. He'd expected that with a force of one thousand drugged militia he would be able to cause about three thousand casualties; which would be a severe blow for Border Town, but..."

"But what?"

"Knight Sznak confessed that Timothy has also handed them another mission, they were to divide the militia into several small groups intending to attack Border Town in waves. In this way they could ensure their safety while it would also be possible for them to observe your response pattern and combat effectiveness. I think... by now he should already have received the answer to this question, since there was no report from the lead knight who was meant to command the previous attack."

"This time there will once again be no one returning," The Prince said nonchalantly, "Since the advance army was used as consumables, did the two knights know anything about the plans of the follow-up troops?"

"Not much, only that its scale would be much larger than that of the previous two attacks."

Hearing this, Roland's gritted his teeth, and his mind immediately flooded with hatred, not only are you forcing people into labor, but now you are also sending one wave after another to me as cannon fodder? Even if I'm able to prevail over my enemy without any loss, it will still be a tragic victory. Compared to resisting Timothy's invasion, it was even more important for me to put a stop to this insignificant war – otherwise, after I finally manage to unify Graycastle, how long will I have to wait for the population to prosper again?

"After the arrival of the Months of Demons, all of the Western Territory land routes between the cities will be sealed off by snow, thus a large armed force won't be able to move even a single step. However, if they try to come over with ships, the whole process would take a very long time. Not to mention the tremendous cost, it is also quite easy to intercept it on route," he said. "So, if he still wants to launch another campaign this year, he will have to act before the first snow of winter. And he will have to rake in the population even earlier than that, he would have to completely enlist the militia before winter starts."

"You intend to..."

Roland closed his eyes, and started to gather his thoughts, then he said. "I want to delay this war."

"Do you want to send him an envoy or a diplomatic letter? I'm afraid that it is unlikely that Timothy Wimbledon will do as you wish." Iron Axe said in a low voice.

"No, that wouldn't be very useful," Roland said slowly, "Ultimately, if I want to dispel all of his thoughts of starting another offensive, I will first have to reduce the population he can enforce. Secondly, I will have to make him realize that a war of attrition would not make any sense, and also implant a fear of what would happen if he ever tries to invade the Western Territory again. Originally I had intended to have Barov spread the news that the Western Territory had opened up new land, and in this way attract those people living outside of the cities, but now it seems that this would have been much too slow, and the measure is also too conservative. If I want to gather those people before Timothy can lay his hands on them, it will have to happen in the same way as the last trip to King's City. By taking the initiative to go and recruit them. The most important area is the Southern Territory which has been suffering under

the constant flames of war, followed by the northern part of the kingdom. I estimate that I will need to dispatch the First Army if I want to carry out this plan.”

“If you merely want to recruit, I believe that a team of fifty people would be enough,” Iron Axe suggested without hesitation, “After all, we won’t operate in the city vicinity, so there will be no need to worry about any confrontation with the enemy.”

“First let me think of a plan; after I’m done, I’ll call you to see me again,” Roland nodded.

The main force needs to remain inside of Border Town as a defensive measure. Furthermore, the team which will be sent out has to be back before the Months of Demons begins. Furthermore, there is also the issue of whether we have enough gold royals and food: A more active attraction policy will naturally pull in more people, but at the same time, it will also increase the costs. The previous program was relatively good cost-effective, but now with an important objective, it is even more necessary to carefully consider how it should be implemented.

“Regarding the second point you mentioned... what do you plan to do?”

“First we have to let off the news by sending the captive commoners back to King’s City. This way Timothy will be able to become aware of the course of the battle – telling him that something like this is to no avail, so he should never try and do it again.”

“However, by doing this, our artillery warfare will also be exposed.” Iron Axe interjected in worry.

“We didn’t reveal anything of value,” Roland said, while tapping on the table, “Besides learning about the long striking range and the incredible power, he won’t be able to learn the principle, so he won’t be able to manufacture it for himself.” As long as the level of industrialization remains at the current era’s, he won’t be able to resist even if he’s already aware of it. Hot weapons are just too overwhelmingly superior to cold weapons. Even with a strong will, good tactics, and a large number of people, it will still be nearly impossible to reverse the situation. “Also, those people will also send him a warning letter.”

“Warning Letter?”

“That’s right, the letter will be a notice containing the date and time of an attack. I plan to attack King’s City on that day.” The Prince calmly said, thoroughly emphasizing each word.

“...” For a long time Iron Axe merely kept on staring at Roland, his mouth hanging wide open in shock. Then by the time he came back to himself, he solemnly and respectfully stood at attention, gave a salute, and said, “As long as you order it, I will give my life for victory!”

“Relax, I’m not thinking about sending you out to die,” Roland gave a reassuring smile. “My plan does not need the First Army to participate; the witches will do it on their own.”

How is it possible to make Timothy afraid of the Western Territory? I think that nothing else than a direct attack against the palace would ever shake him to his roots. All thoughts of dispatching troops should vanish, after he realizes that there is no place where he will ever be safe.

Roland envisioned the dropping of leaflets out of planes during later generations. However, instead of delivering leaflets, Roland intended to send Timothy two bombs – the so-called surprise attack of a

bomb dropping from the sky. The possibility of directly killing the new King with it was minuscule, but as long as it could play a deterring role, it could still be considered as a successful mission.

However, whether the other side would stop insisting on launching a large-scale attack because of this would be very difficult to determine.

Roland was clearly aware of the fact that the pattern of the Battle for the Throne had changed. He was no longer so weak that he needed to disguise himself and hide, as he did at first after crossing over. It was now finally time for him to show his hand. Step by step he was climbing up to Graycastle's political stage, finally making the people of the Kingdom pay attention to his existence – this had nothing to do with any desire to show off, rather it was intended to propagandize the power of his territory.

It was useless to obtain a kingdom in ruins, and fields that were plastered with corpses. He hoped that with this declaration, even more people would be motivated to travel to the Western Territory and stand by his side.

As the sun sunk behind the mountains, Roland opened the windows of his office. The evening breeze brushing past his face, no longer was it burning hot, instead it contained a trace of chill.

Autumn was approaching.

Chapter 283 Hydrogen Balloon delivery

On the third day after the start of fall, the fleet from Margaret's Chamber of Commerce docked at Border Town's pier.

This time, the size of the fleet had already returned to the scale of the past, ten sailboats laid in a row, firmly docked at the side of the pier.

"Most Honorable Prince, we meet once again," Gammon the merchant from the Crescent Moon Bay said while he bowed in greeting, "According to Miss Margaret, the transformation of the first steam powered ship has been completed."

"That's true," Roland acknowledged laughingly, "However, in order to ensure the quality of the goods, it is still required to go through a three to four days sea trial. So that we can test its reliability and power of the system."

"I am really looking forward to seeing it in action," Margaret said while happily clapping her hands.

"That's about the time we will have to wait for the fleet to unload anyway, so we will stay here and wait for it. May I ask if it is possible to go about and look around during the sea trial?"

"Of course. It is, after all, an entire new kind of ship. its handling is completely different from any sailboat in the past, so I will have to show you how to operate it anyway. However, according to the schedule, this will only happen tomorrow." Roland gave them the signal to follow and said, "For now the most important matter is for you to relax your tired body, have you had any lunch yet? I have a sumptuous banquet prepared in the castle hall."

"Every time we come to visit you here, there is a very satisfying meal for us to enjoy," Margaret covered her smile and confessed, "By now I am really hungry, and my stomach is already crying out loud – those wheat cakes and pieces of dried meat are as hard as stones, and also very difficult to swallow."

During this era, there was still not any reliable food preserving technology, therefore, if it was called 'dry food' it would be very dry and hard. Which inevitably had made Roland think of canned food. When the light industry was fully developed, manufacturing all kinds of delicious and convenient canned food which was suitable for long-distance traveling and sailing merchants would absolutely be the best choice.

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When the feast came to an end, Hogg patted his belly with a satisfied smile on his face and said, "This bowl of mushroom soup made me unable to stop my tongue from swallowing. I also seemed to have tasted some seafood, it also had the flavor of stewed chicken and pig bones, the skills of your court chef is truly quite excellent."

"I much prefer the dessert that was served after the dinner, which is called ice cream... correct?" Margaret said. "I'm guessing that you made it out of milk and honey, then froze it using saltpeter into its current state of crystalline ice."

"You also have to add some butter and egg white. Otherwise, you won't be able to get the soft and waxy texture," Roland added, "How much saltpeter is there this time?"

"Still only one vessel," the business woman shook her head. "The Alchemist Association is still wantonly purchasing saltpeter; the Imperial Prime Minister even sent out the patrol to help plunder the saltpeter fields. Even though that group is carrying the mighty name of sage; there is still no difference between them, and a gang of robbers, this one ship of saltpeter also came from Redwater City."

"So, this month's goods are for the largest part washing stones?"

"That's right," Hogg drained the cup of white spirit in one gulp and then poured himself another before saying, "Although the amount may be a little too much this time, it is still deeply engraved within my heart, that you told me to get as many as possible last time. In addition to washing stones, there are also the best iron ingots and lead ingots. Recently, apart from you here, there are very few cities and towns which need this stuff," he sighed, "The mining business is getting worse and worse."

This is the effect brought on by the civil war, Roland thought to himself, the purchasing power is progressively declining in all parts of the country. In case that this continues for the next two to three years, the food price will go up tremendous and there will be starving people everywhere.

"Oh, that's right, what kind of problems have recently occurred in the Western Territory?" Margaret suddenly asked.

"What happened?"

"When the fleet was on its way to Border Town, we met a lot of... well," she paused for a moment, considering the words she should use, "a lot of 'floating corpses'. They were dressed in rags and were mushy from rotting. Furthermore, there were so many of them floating that they covered the whole river channel from one side to the other. Apart from the corpse, there were also some broken planks and ropes that were floating on the water surface. It looked as if a ship had hit a reef, sunk, and thus ceased to exist. However, there is no reef in the river, so I thought..."

“Well, those were the remains of Timothy’s fleet which he used to try and invade the Western Territory with,” Roland put on a look of indignation, and told the story of the fight a week ago. “They have gotten the punishment they deserved.”

In order to avoid blocking the ship channel and spreading a contagious plague, he had transferred Anna and Lily from Border Town, after cleaning the battlefield. One was responsible for burning all the remains of the ships, while the other was responsible for purifying the water. But since Margaret still saw the floating corpses, she mustn’t have been far away from the actual fight to have passed the place so soon after the end of the battle.

“So that’s the reason,” the merchant said with a smile. “It seems as if Timothy has hit a wall on both sides.”

“On both sides?”

“There was also Garcia’s Port of Clear Water – the latest news I received was that the looters who attacked the cities of the Eastern Territory were actually Garcia’s men. After looting everything from the Sea Wind Region and Valencia, the Black Sail Fleet went further North along the coastline instead of returning to the harbor, who knows where she finally landed.”

“North...” Roland asked in surprise, “Did she leave Graycastle?”

“For now that seems to be the case. Timothy’s troops have already thrown themselves against an already evacuated Port of Clear Water which left it as a ghost city.” Margaret stated, “There were a lot of rats within the force he brought along, so that’s why all of these are well-known secrets within the streets. No matter what, you are the only thorn left remaining in his side, thus in the future, it is quite possible that his attempts to invade the Western Territory will become even more and more frequent.”

“If you ever want to leave Graycastle, Crescent Half-Moon Bay will welcome you at any time,” Marlan offered.

“That’s right,” Gammon agreed while patting his chest, “The island is sufficient enough to contain ten Border Towns, and we are even willing to provide for you and your people free of charge.”

You merely want me to hand over the technology for the steam engine and steam paddler, right?

Roland rolled his eyes in his mind, even if I couldn’t stay in Graycastle any longer, the first person I would seek shelter from would be Tilly Wimbledon. On the surface however, he still smiled and replied, “Alright, if such a day ever come about.”

“Oh, by the way,” He turned towards Margaret, “Last time you placed an order for the investigation balloon; I’ve already succeed to fabricate two.”

“So fast?” The latter was pleasantly surprised, “Can you take me to see it?”

“Of course, please, come with me,” Roland said and then got up to leave.

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Arriving at the castle backyard, they saw an already completely inflated hydrogen balloon.

The balloon had a waterdrop-like shape, it was wide at the top, and narrow at the bottom. It had a diameter of five meters at the top, and in accordance with the size of the test sample, it could carry one grown man and lift off. The air sac and ropes were coated with a sky like camouflage, so if that were paired with the observer also wearing camouflage, it would reduce the chance of it being detected to the minimum.

“It doesn’t seem to be the same as the balloon we rode on last time, right?” Margaret carefully sized up the new product.

“That’s because you can use it even without witches,” Roland cleared his throat and then began to introduce how to use the investigation balloon. “At the end of the air sac is a movable valve, through which gas can enter and come out of – it is precisely this alchemical gas filling which allows the balloon rise up and fly. The inflation method is very simple, as long as the matching hose and gas tank are connected, you merely have to open the valve on both ends.” After finishing the verbal exploration, he went through the demonstration of the deflation and inflation process in front of everyone.

“How many bottles are needed to fill a balloon?” Margaret quickly caught the key point.

“Five bottles or six bottles...” This question made Roland slightly embarrassed, “Definitely no more than seven bottles.” The main reason for the variation laid in the problem, that the density of the diluted sulfuric acid -which was necessary to produce hydrogen in the bottle- is hard to control. It would be a waste of valuable human resources to first purify the sulfuric acid to 98% only to later dilute it with water again.

“Is this alchemical gas very expensive?”

“It is indeed. It is also hard to conserve and full of dangers... That is, when it is carelessly handled,” Roland coughed twice, “Therefore, you can only store the gas tanks for a year at most, and it should neither be knocked over, disassembled or burned. Otherwise, it could have serious consequences.” He paused for a moment to let his words settle. Then continued, “Although the price is somewhat expensive, rest assured. When purchasing the investigation balloon for the first time, the first batch of gas tanks ordered from Border Town will be free of charge. In addition, you can also get an extra set of sky camouflaged investigator clothes.”

Chapter 284 Companion

It was only after the fleet had departed that Roland could finally breathe out in relief.

Finally... the treasury is filled up once again.

A total of eight steam engines were handed over to the three merchant guilds. From those eight, three had been produced by Factory No. 2, which was set up with the assistance of the Crescent Moon Bay Caravan – Roland had to acknowledge that regarding the artisans from the Fjords, no matter, if it was their innate skills or their capacity to learn, all were far higher than that of Border Town’s miners or blacksmiths. After grasping the operating procedure of the machines, their passing rate for finished products immediately began rising. Perhaps after another two more months, the production capacity of Factory No. 2 will have caught up to that of Factory No. 1. Fortunately, according to the signed contract, the income from the sale of those machines would entirely be owned by Roland.

In addition, he has also received a new purchasing order for the hydrogen balloon from the Crescent Moon Bay Caravan, Marlan had been especially interested in this greatly the vision expanding thing. In addition to a single person detection balloon, he also specially asked for a custom-made giant balloon with the capacity to carry three to four people, which he intended to use for the exploration of the Fjord's new islands.

Including with the delivery of the first steam paddler, all three items had brought Border Town an income of close to seven thousand gold royals. After deducting the costs for buying goods such as metal ingots, washing stones, grain and other commodities, the remaining six thousand gold royals should be sufficient to support his population expansion plan.

Thus, Roland called Barov and Iron Axe into his office.

"Now that the treasury is full again, it is time to recruit more foreign citizens." He looked at the two able men, "This task will be carried out by a cooperation of the City Hall and First Army, which specific personnel you assign will be your decision, I will merely brief you with the rough details of the mission."

"Please speak," the Prime Minister said with a nod.

"Recruitment will be split into two areas, the North and the South." Roland took a map and placed it on the table then spread it out in front of the other two, "Especially the area between Eagle City and Port of Clear Water... I suspect that Timothy regards these people as members of Garcia's group, thus turns them into useless people who he can consume as he wishes. Therefore, you need to rush over to be the first who tries to rope them in."

"The team sent out by the City Hall will be responsible for attracting the nobles, artisans, and other literate people. While the First Army's main task is to recruit the commoners. Compared with the previous propaganda missions, this time the strategy must be more active, do you understand what I mean by that?"

Iron Axe hesitated a moment and then asked in uncertainly, "You mean... dragging along by force?"

"Keke, such a method isn't necessary," Roland coughed twice, the Sandpeople's style was really straightforward and cruel, "For example by giving away food for free, taking the initiative to convince them using advance payment of living expenses, etc." He turned his view to Barov, "You should be very clear about this kind of stuff."

"Of course, Your Royal Highness, previously as a cabinet minister I have aided the patrol to suppress or pacify riots of refugees several times," the latter said. "This request is quite simple, sometimes it's already enough to merely feed them until they are full. Therefore, there is no need to use money to rope them in; don't even start talking about remuneration with them – if the conditions seem too generous, they will become suspicious. However, the arrogant aristocrats will prove troublesome. Although they are currently hard pressed for money and no longer so well-off, they are still experienced and knowledgeable, so their demands will also be higher. It's unlikely that they will go on a long-distance trek simply to receive a steamed bun. To lure them it's required that we coerce them with money and promises."

Roland clapped twice, "It is a pity that there are so many responsibilities for you here in Border Town that you can't go out in person. Otherwise, the success of this mission would be guaranteed"

“Please rest assured, Your Royal Highness, I shall dispatch the disciple whom I’m the most pleased with,” Barov said with a smile, “To establish Border Town as a city next year; it’d be nice if both sides of the Redwater River could be covered with houses.”

“It’s possible that such a day will come.”

After the two men asked for leave, Roland leaned back against his chair to rest for a short period; he decided to go to the yard at the North Slope to see Anna.

Stepping through the door, the first thing to enter his view was a pile of metal cubes.

Roland picked up one piece and held it in his hand – they were basically all of the same size, about five centimeters long and wide. The surface wasn’t smooth at all. It looked as if they all come out of a press, there was also a number engraved on one side. For example, on top of the piece in his hand was written the number “256”.

“How was it? Were you able to discover any better one?”

“No. 1057 and No. 2284, are exceptionally hard, compared to the others, regardless of their hardness or toughness, both are excellent,” Anna answered after coming over to greet him with a bright smile.

“Were you already able to climb over two thousand?” Roland asked in astonishment; and took the record handed over by Lucia, it was completely filled with data. Seeing No. 2284, he discovered that there were several numbers written on it, ‘carbon content of 0.8%, 15.2% of unknown elements.’”

“Well, this is more satisfying than cutting gun barrels,” Anna confessed with a wink, “Whether it is unexpectedly possible to create such earth-shaking changes to its characteristics by mixing iron pieces together with other metals, is something I really look forward to finding out. I want to know how these metal pieces work.”

Anna and Lucia’s current exploration was a far-reaching task.

Roland let the little girl first break down the ore into its raw materials before Anna then mixed and melted them together according to the different mass ratios. Afterward they would then test the performance of these pieces – by stretching and squeezing it under the heat of Anna’s black flame. Through observing the actual time taken and amount of magic power it took, Anna could distinguish between its strength and toughness.

The first material to add had obviously been carbon.

Even though Roland knew that the essence of steel was a type of iron and carbon alloy: with too much carbon it would become pig iron, and without any carbon it was pure iron, when the carbon content was within a certain range would turn into steel, etc. However, even with just a small fluctuation it could already greatly change the metal’s properties, so the first thing they needed to measure would be the size of that range.

Within the history records he had seen, before 1500 they had only used mixtures made out of pure iron and carbon for smelting, but after 1500 they began adding new elements on top of a steel foundation. Roland thoroughly understood that every additional element in the sequence could potentially increase

the results many times over, which would turn into a very long process. Therefore, he only allowed Anna to advance her exploration if she had finished all the important manufacturing tasks.

He encouraged the two witches with a few words then sat to the side, quietly enjoying the rear view of the busy Anna.

After entering autumn, the sun was still shining brightly, but it was already no longer as cruelly hot as during the last month of summer. Instead, his body now felt nice and warm, and a long lost feeling of calmness spread throughout his heart.

He didn't know how much time had passed, but the yard gradually quieted down. He felt a soft hand being placed on his forehead, when he narrowly opened his eyes. He saw that Lucia had already disappeared and that Anna was sitting in front of him, "You have something you want to say to me?"

"..."

"It was your eyes which told me," she said while leaning forward, letting her hair fall down naturally, resembling strands of translucent gold silk.

Roland hesitated, but then shook his head and helplessly replied, "I'm just a little confused." He told her about his population expansion plan before continuing, "Compared with my original intention of free choice, now in order to seize time, I have to use a combination of half luring and half forcing. Although I'm doing this to avoid Timothy pressing them into his army to die under the eroding effect of the pills. However, if I think seriously about this, my way of handling things isn't that different from his... the only difference would be the purpose."

"Can't you explain your purpose to them?" She asked softly.

"But..."

"I know what you want to say," Anna covered the Prince's mouth. "You are worried that they won't appreciate your act of kindness, furthermore you also can't guarantee that your objective will forever stay so proper in the future – being misunderstood because you used the wrong method while trying to achieve a good goal, or using the right methods but committing an irrevocable mistake... In the end, you do not know if it is more important for you to use the correct method or to hold on to the right objective. Am I right?"

"Be at ease," Anna immediately answered her own question, not even giving him the chance to say anything. She put her hands on his cheeks, softly whispering into his ear, "I'm here... I'll always make sure that you look good."

Chapter 285 Answer

Sleeping Island's living environment became better by the day. The further Tilly rose into the air, the more she could see of the coming and going crowd and the bustling market.

This place was no longer the secluded place where three hundred witches had all been living in isolation. Through negotiations and agreements, some of the Fjord's Islands like Crescent Moon Bay, Twin Dragon Island, Sunset Port and Shallow Water Town had all established trading routes with Sleeping Island. Even

going so far, that some ordinary people from overcrowded island villages had decided to settle down on Sleeping Island.

Although they were currently living in the outer region of the island, far apart from the witches, Tilly believed that there would come a day where Sleeping Island would become one big city. The fusion was a slow-moving process, but it left one brimming with expectation to see the result. The best news however, was that no matter if the witches, were living on other islands or were already locals when they awakened, they would all become members of Sleeping Island. Which meant that Tilly and her migrants would be able to regularly obtain new supporters.

“Come down, the wind is rising,” Ashes shouted from below, “And be careful not to fall!”

“I’m fine!” Tilly waved her hand. But all of a sudden, her body dropped down. Only after falling a short distance was she able to stabilize herself again, “Oh... it is still a bit hard for me to control.”

“I knew that your control isn’t good enough to fly so high!” Ashes stamped with her foot, “Next time you will only fly at a lower height or go over to the sea! If you don’t come down immediately, I will climb up the roof and catch you myself.”

“Alright, alright, I got it,” Tilly indeed felt the wind growing stronger and stronger. So she decided to no longer to show off or try to be brave, instead gathering her magic and releasing it so as to slowly land in the garden.

“Next time, if you want to do something like this, call Molly first.” Ashes’ eyes were wide open as she reprimanded her, “At least her magic servant could catch you if you were to fall.”

“As long as I keep up the magic supply, it is impossible to fall. The worst that could happen is that I couldn’t control the direction,” she took the glove with the blue magic stone off and handed it to Ashes, “You also have to try it, next. The feeling of flying is simply incredible. When you overlook Sleeping Island from up high in the sky, it will feel as if the whole world has become something entirely new.”

“I’d rather not,” Ashes waved dismissively, “From the beginning, I have always been unable to activate the lightning magic stone, so don’t even mention continuously providing the stone with magic. Furthermore, there is also only one, even if I’m able to grasp the control skill, there is no way for me to fly with you.”

“Then let it be,” Tilly regrettably said, taking the gloves back. “I always believed that if we could figure out the principle behind it, there is the possibility that we can manufacture similar magic stones.”

“Do you think those stones are man-made?”

“Without a doubt,” she nodded without hesitation. “No matter if it is their polished exterior appearance or their particular applications, it is unlikely that those stones were formed naturally. It seems that the group who inhabited the ruins had a much deeper understanding of magic than we did, it’s just a pity that they didn’t leave any more clues than a bunch of incomprehensible scrolls.”

At this moment, a huge white figure suddenly fell from the sky. Due to the speed at which it fell being too fast, it practically smashed into the ground with a thud, lifting out a circle of dust.

“Maggie?” Ashes lifted her eyebrows.

“Ooooh... that’s extremely painful, goo,” The little girl that was lying on the ground said as she rubbed her head and stood up. “Just now, were my eyes playing tricks on me? Lady Tilly can actually fly in the sky! If it wasn’t that you had the wrong color of hair, I would have believed you were Lightning.”

“You were not mistaken, I just flew in the air,” Tilly said while rubbing her cheek with a smile, “how about... are the witches who went to live in Border Town doing well?”

“All fine, goo, they asked me to deliver a letter to you,” Maggie said, flipping her bag over to find some letters. “This is Lotus’s, this is Evelyn’s, and this one... is from His Highness.”

For a moment, Tilly could only stare dumbfounded when she saw the one foot and half a finger thick letter which had been sent by the Prince. It was wrapped so tightly, that it resembled a parcel more than it did a letter. It was even so heavy, that it caused her hands to drop down a bit, which made it obvious that this wasn’t just a simple letter.

“You’ve worked hard.”

Ashes took out one-half of a wheat cake, broke it into small pieces and handed it over to Maggie. However, the latter merely shook her head, put a dried fish into her mouth and vaguely said, “I’m off to play with Molly.” Then she turned back into the large white pigeon, flapped her wings and flew out of the flower garden.

“Why do I get the feeling, that after one month she’s somehow become bigger?”

“I have the same feeling,” Tilly laughed, “Perhaps the life in Border Town is quite good.”

Back at her house, she tore open Roland Wimbledon’s letter. Within, she discovered that besides a sheet full of written content, the more than a dozen remaining pages were unexpectedly some vivid and lifelike pictures.

“What are those?”

Ashes’ question exactly reflected Tilly’s own puzzlement. She shook her head, took out one of those painted sheets and spread it out – the content on top was somewhat hard for her to believe: The background resembled a wasteland in the evening. Under the bloody red light of the setting sun, two atrocious shaped monsters could be seen in a close quarter fight against a group of witches. The witches were clearly in a disadvantageous position; their best abilities didn’t seem to show any impact, no matter if it were vipers or fireballs they none were able to stop this enemy. When she came to the last picture, she saw that several witches had fallen, forming pools of blood.

Tilly frowned, the scene was undoubtedly drawn by a witch, only magic would be able to create such a lifelike image. But... in the end, were these merely simple pictures, or were they a reminiscent of something which had happened in the past?

With a feeling of being on a knife-edge, she immediately snatched the letter and quickly skimmed over its content.

Soon, Tilly felt her stomach tighten, and her hands began to shake as she saw one word appear in the letter again and again: ‘Devil.’

“What happened,” Ashes asked in concern, grasping Tilly’s tight to support her, “What did the letter say?”

“It’s the past of the Witch Cooperation Association,” She patted the back of Ashes’ hands, indicating that she was alright, “They were looking for the Holy Mountain in the wilderness... You should remember the Holy Mountain, right?”

“Yeah, it’s the legendary destination of all witches. At the Holy Mountain, they can find real peace and serenity, but this is merely a vague rumor, there’s nothing genuine about it.” Ashes couldn’t accept it as correct, “Here on Sleeping Island, we can also live in peace, moreover, the demon bite is nothing more than a lie of the Church.”

“But Cara was convinced that the Holy Mountain did indeed exist. In addition, she had also found an ancient book within the ruins inside a forest of the Eastern Region, fully believing that it could lead her to the gate of an uninhabited land in the forbidden area. She went so far as to lead the Witch Cooperation Association over the Impassable Mountain range. However, after entering the wilderness, they didn’t discover the Holy Mountain, but instead met with a terrible monster.” Tilly said in a small voice.

“The one from the painting?” Ashes gasped.

“That’s right,” Tilly confirmed, showing a somewhat dark expression. “The letter said, that they possess extraordinary strength, moved nimbly and can control demonic beasts. One of them could even release lightning from its hand... Just like a witch. From the more than forty witches in the beginning, only six people survived. Then in their desperate situation, they decided to rely on the help of the Lord of Border Town.”

“Unexpectedly it was originally... like this.”

“Furthermore, the point that puzzles me the most is that the ancient book contained one paragraph which looked like a slovenly written essay, however it was written in the language of the Four Kingdoms.” Tilly turned her attention back to the letter, “Within, it mentions the Holy City, a fight with the Devils, and Alice’s experiments of a God’s Punishment Army. It should be the story of what happened four hundred years ago, but since they know the language of the Four Kingdoms, why should they use a very different language to record the documents and books?”

As she was still unable to get any results after thinking about it for a long time, the 5th Princess just put all these things aside and instead took out Sylvie’s letter, intending to learn what the examination of the Lord of Border Town has shown.

In the end, the first sentence of the letter had already left her dumbstruck, even more so than the shock when she had seen the word ‘Devil’.

“Lady Tilly, I was unable to find any sign of camouflage or magic on Roland Wimbledon’s body. Also, besides the witches of the Witch Alliance, there are no other witches hidden in the town. So I think... he may be your genuine older brother.”

Chapter 286 “Change”

Genuine older brother.

Genuine... older brother, how can this be?

Tilly held the letter in a startled fashion with both hands, her mind not able to focus in the least, all the thoughts in her mind were tumbling up and down like the tide.

Her father, King Wimbledon III had five children. Gerald, Timothy, and Garcia, due to their earlier birth, could be considered as the first circle. By the time Roland had been born, the previous youngest Garcia was already six years old and would naturally not take him along to play with her. By this reasoning, she and Roland should have formed another circle, but... this hadn't been the case.

Her brother was always yearning for their two elder brothers' approval, and tried to integrate into their circle, but the only result was that they would often bully him. In the end, this caused Roland's character to become twisted and irritable. Of course, he never dared to release his anger at Gerald or the others, and instead had come to vent his anger on her.

For example, he had once tried to persuade her to steal father's crown with him, and when he was met with rejection, he inevitably flew into a rage out of humiliation and began insulting her; it would sometimes even go so far that they exchanged blows. Later, when their father found out about this, Roland had been taught a ferocious lesson. After this incident however, he restrained himself a lot, but his bad habit of threatening her in all different kinds of ways was still as strong as before.

At that time, she had still been unable to understand these matters; but in retrospect, Tilly only felt that it was rather ridiculous and... childish.

The year she became ten years old, she discovered some cut in half earthworms had been placed into her favorite shoes; it finally became unbearable for her, and so she finally decided to fight back. She called Roland to come over, and as he opened his mouth to threaten her once more, she directly threw one of those earthworms into it – ever since then, he'd never dared to provoke her again, and she in turn, had stopped talking to him.

After becoming an adult, Roland still hadn't changed. Instead, it had even become more severe. She often heard about his dandy deeds, and among the nobles, he was always referred to as being violent, mean, and without any learning or skills. To sum it up, he was the worst image of a noble among all nobles. Except for his identity as a member of the royal family, he had nothing at all. Regarding this evaluation, Tilly fully agreed with it... Furthermore, she also knew, that the reason he had the outward appearance of being violent and irritable, was because he was doing everything to cover his greatest weakness – being timid and afraid.

However, can such a person unexpectedly stand up and side with us witches? Giving asylum to a group who are known as 'the Devil's minions', in the end even becoming an enemy of the Church without any hesitation?

For a moment, Tilly didn't know what to say.

"Tilly, Tilly?" Only after Ashes had shaken her two times was she finally able to come back to herself.

"I'm all right; everything is just a little... hard to believe," she shook her head. "Sylvie said that the Lord of Border Town is very probably the real Roland Wimbledon and not a puppet controlled by a witch or replacement.

“Oh, that stupid one who tried to grope me in vain – Keke, that animal?” Ashes coughed twice, “After not meeting for a year, he truly changed astonishingly. Apart from his appearance and impression which were still almost the same, I felt like I met someone completely different.”

“Can you speak a bit more clearly?”

Ashes crooked her head and thought for a long time before she found the right words, “I think... the biggest difference, was that he appeared to be cleaner.”

“Clean?”

“No matter if it was his style of dressing... or the feeling he gave to other people. None of it resembled a noble. He didn’t wear any ornament, no matter if it was gold or jewels there weren’t any on him.” Ashes recalled, “Even his clothes were all utterly of common style, they seemed to be relatively simple, without lace, added decoration or golden threads. If not for his hair color, which was too eye-catching, there was almost no difference between him or a commoner, and... yet, at the same time, he didn’t seem to be an ordinary person.”

“He resembled a nobleman?” Tilly asked.

“No, not like a nobleman,” Ashes curled her lips, “Those aristocrats are unclean. Not like a pool of stagnant water, but unclean like the muddy silt underneath the pool of stagnant water. As for him... I’m unable to come up with a precise description, in short, he let people feel good.”

“It’s quite difficult to believe that you can say something like this.”

“Uh, I merely want to answer your question seriously, nothing more.”

Tilly breathed out deeply, it seems that brother has changed quite a lot, but in the end, what might have led to his transformation? Or is it because of a reason he himself isn’t aware of; and thus, unconsciously caused him to change into such a different person?

The 5th Princes suddenly remembered the content of Roland’s first letter – “Therefore, I have to destroy the entire Church, and turn their statement that the witches are the Devil’s messenger into dust. However, rescuing the people from their ignorance and stupidity will be a long and slow process. For this, I will need even more help from you.

“Concerning, what would lead to this decision, what caused me to no longer be as indifferent to everything as in the past, are all trivialities that can slowly be elaborated on when we have the time. The ability to express oneself in a letter is limited, so I won’t say any more than necessary.”

Perhaps only by meeting him in person will I be able to discover the real cause.

To regain her train of thought, Tilly turned her sight back to the letter.

The latter half reported on what Sylvie had seen and heard during her stay in Border Town.

Originally Roland had chosen her for the purpose of verifying the natural mineral resources in the North Slope Mine. However, in the end, they had instead discovered an enormous amount of God’s Stones of Retaliation – it turns out that the stones with the ability to suppress a witch’s ability, comes out of the

ground; just like any other mineral. So, in conclusion, the New Holy City at Hermes must also be in control of such a vein, which allows the Church to continue to produce the God's Stone of Retaliation.

Once again further down, she came across another piece of news which attracted her attention.

That he possessed a type of weapon which could release iron balls and arrowheads from an iron tube, which contained a great deal of power, and was accompanied by a deafening roar... Even though Maggie and Ashes had already mentioned this kind of thing, but it was the first time that she had ever seen such a detailed description. Sylvie had even attached a hand-painted diagram to the paragraph.

"Oh? As it turns out, that thing which caused my injuries looked the same," Ashes, reading the letter by looking over Tilly's shoulder, remarked. "Since we are allies now, you can ask him to send a large batch of weapons to Sleeping Island with your next letter, and tell him that we need them to guard against the Church. If he doesn't want to... Humph, this ally might not be as reliable as you thought."

"Being allies doesn't mean that you won't guard against each other at all," Tilly said laughingly, "This weapon is clearly the foundation he used to build his home, so how could it be so quickly handed over to others? This kind of test would only destroy the trust we worked so hard to build – I also excluded Molly and Wind Reader from the list I gave him about our witches. And this winter, we will go and visit Border Town anyway. At that time, we will be able to speak from face-to-face, don't you think that that would be a better time for it?"

"Well," Ashes spread her arms out and said, "You have the final say in this."

Tilly showed her a smile and then continued to read the letter.

When the line of sight turned to the last paragraph of the letter, she couldn't help but feel shocked once more.

Roland unexpectedly invented an undergarment which was used to wrap up the woman's chest, he even went so far as to present it to every grown-up woman in the Witch Alliance. This is simply too absurd! It is known to send personal clothes as a present, but only between lovers, how could he – hold on! Tilly suddenly remembered a story which had spread throughout King's City. Apparently, there was a time when Roland had presented some young noble ladies with skin-tight corsets; but among them there were some who had immediately thrown it back into his face, which later turned into a joke among the nobles for some time after.

This indeed sounds like something he could do!

Tilly suddenly felt tangled up; on one hand, this brought him more in line with the image she had in her memory; on the other hand, she now felt that it might not be so good to go and meet him.

In the end, should, or should I not go to meet him in Border Town this Winter? The 5th Princess thought to herself in distress.

Chapter 287 Preparations for the soap factory

Western Territory, Border Town.

The amount of washing stones purchased from Silver City filled four ships, and had taken several days to unload.

Now that there were enough raw materials, the soap mass production plan was officially placed on the agenda.

The necessary buildings, like the factory and warehouse, had already been set up long ago — the soap factory was located beside the industrial park, next to steam engine factory No. 2, built in exactly the same style as the former. Since the roof, supporting beams, and planks for the walls were all made out of wood, and it had the same measurements as before, the task of wood cutting and transportation was placed in the hands of the witches, and the whole construction period ended up being very short.

Manufacturing soap needed a series of chemical reaction, washing stones, which was a natural soda, could be used for this. The other raw materials required were also very common, in addition to soda ash, he also needed an enormous amount of milk of lime and fat. After soaking the milk of lime, or to be more precise, the lime inside the water, it would settle down at the bottom of the cloudy water inside the receptacle. By mixing it with sodium carbonate, it will react and produce caustic soda, and by adding fat in turn, it will react to produce high-level fatty acid and glycerol. While the former product was the soap, the latter was a critical raw material for explosives.

Prior to manufacturing perfumed soap, Roland had already tested this entire chemical reaction process in the castle backyard. The basic theory was the same, but if he wanted to expand from the small amount of trial production to start mass production, he still needed to develop a consistent industrial production process and norms. But what was even more important to him were the professional chemists needed to guide the manufacturing process.

This was the reason, he had called the chief alchemist into his office.

“Your Highness, you previously asked me to develop a sulfuric acid mass-production system, I believe that I finally found a feasible plan.” Kyle Sichi immediately shouted after he had opened the door. “However, it will demand we use a large amount of lead. We will also need a blacksmith who can to make a vessel from the lead. I heard that some of your witches could accurately cut metal, one of them made those lumps of steel which make those rumbling and banging noises; is it possible that I...”

“Of course, just give me a report with the shape and size of the vessel you require, and I will instruct the Witch Alliance to make it.” Roland impatiently waves with his hand, indicating that he should take a seat, “The reason I called you over today, wasn’t to question you about the acid production system. Instead, I want to discuss another task with you.”

“Your Highness, these days I’m really busy, I don’t have the time to do any other work,” Kyle said, shaking his head repeatedly, “The acid mass-production system is a tough challenge. I have to finish at all costs.” He paused and then added, “and it is a daunting challenge. My disciples are also out of the question; all of them are aiding me in preparing this task, none of them can leave.”

“Rest assured, you won’t have to lose any time about it,” Roland said comfortably, he took a mouthful of tea before he continued, “It isn’t necessary that you transfer any of your beloved disciples to take over, simply sending over a few apprentices should be good enough.”

“What will be their task?”

“To make soap. More precisely, to make a cheap version of the perfumed soap which you can buy at the convention market. Which with the exception of its scent, provides the same function as the perfumed soap and can be used for bathing, washing clothes, as well as cleaning tableware.”

“Are you speaking about the saponification reaction mentioned in ‘Elementary Chemistry’?” Kyle asked while stroking his beard, “The one that uses the reaction of caustic soda and fat to produce alcohol and salt?”

I have to say, hearing standard chemistry terms come out of the mouth of an alchemist is a very strange feeling, especially since I am the one to come up with them, Roland thought while forcing himself to restrain his smile. Instead, he spoke with a deathly earnest expression, “That’s right, the saponification reaction, as has been written down within the ancient book. It was because of this foundation that I was able to produce perfumed soap.”

“In that case, what do you need me to do? If it is not very important, I suggest we shift the production to a later date. After all, even if your subjects are unable to take a shower for several days it won’t cause any problems, it should be good enough if they just soak their clothes, meal plates, and other such things directly in the river.”

“It’s crucial,” the Prince said slowly, stressing each word. “To say it more clearly, making soap is unimportant. However, it is the byproduct of the production process that I desperately need right now.”

“Do you mean the... alcohol?” Kyle couldn’t believe what he had heard.

“That’s right, exactly the alcohol, you may also call it glycerol.” Roland stated, “It is a very valuable raw material, whose importance is not inferior to the two acids.”

“Okay,” Kyle shrugged and said, “However, as I already have stated it, I don’t have the time to do it myself.”

Roland exhaled slightly; once more starting to learn how tiring it was to deal with the chief alchemist, “As long as you pick out several talented apprentices and demonstrate the process one time in front of them, it will already be enough. I will recruit some of my subjects to carry out the production process, however, in the end, none of them even understands a word about chemistry, so there have to be some people to check on every segment.

After pausing for a moment, the Prince continued to say, “You can also treat it as a never before practiced chemical test – if placed in the alchemic workshop, this process may mean the discovery of some new alchemic formulas, enough to earn an apprentice the title of an alchemist.”

Those last few words were probably what persuaded Kyle in the end, “If you say it like this, I’ll need an entire afternoon to teach the apprentice what they require.”

“Excellent,” Roland smiled. “You should also know that the most important thing about the process is ensuring that enough caustic soda is produced.” He wrote down the reaction formula on a piece of paper.

Before the invention of the syntactic alkali production, natural soda was the most important alkali raw material. The latter was mainly composed of sodium bicarbonate, which when heated would break down into sodium carbonate, carbon dioxide, and water. Because it was accessible in great amount and

also quite simple to process, it was still in use even in modern times. “By decomposing the washing stones with heat, followed by dissolving them in water and afterward filtering the water, you can obtain a relatively pure solution of sodium carbonate solution.

“Followed by heating it together with milk of lime, you can get a sodium hydroxide solution, for which you should easily be able to come up with a purifying method for yourself,” Roland explained. “To clarify, first distil, then mix, repeating these steps until the concentration is high enough. Then after it has cooled down, the concentrated solution will have formed a huge amount of crystals.”

These were the details written in the “Elementary Chemistry”. Since those two alkalis had several nicknames (such as caustic soda, lye, soda ash, sodium hyposulfite, sodium thiosulfate, soda crystals, etc.), it was incredibly easy to get them mixed up; which made it an important subject of a knowledge test. The reason why he could still clearly remember it to this day was because he was initially required to know the textbook’s related content by heart.

“I understand,” the chief alchemist said, looking over the equation of the chemical reaction from start to finish. “But Your Highness, what’s to be done in regards with the fat?”

“I will arrange people who will send it to you.” Animal fat was an expensive resource during this era, however, during the previous seed collecting mission, his personal guard had brought back the seeds for olive trees from Fallen Dragon Ridge, which now gave Border Town a reliable source for vegetable oil. Even though there was currently only a small plantation at the castle backyard, but since Leaves had the ability to hasten ripening, harvesting a pile of fruits each day was no problem at all.

The extraction of olive oil was also very simple. When the fruit became ripe, they simply used physical strength to squeeze the oil out and afterward sieved it so as to filter out the flesh and seeds.

Finally, after a brief description of the requirements and necessary preparation for the soap and glycerol production, Roland permitted Kyle Sichi to leave the office.

From now on, when the soap factory started its production, Roland would obtain a steady stream of glycerol.

And with glycerin, he had finally made a big step towards getting real smoke-free gunpowder and powerful explosives.

TN: Sodium carbonate

ED: saponification

Chapter 288 Teacher and Disciple

Kyle Sichi passed through Border Town into the direction of the Redwater River.

By now, Border Town had become a flourishing place; it was hard to imagine that this place had started out as nothing more than an outpost used to detect the movements of the demonic beasts. The ground beneath his feet was grayish black and solid. Both sides of the street were lined with neatly arranged single-story houses, different to the residential building in the other district. These houses weren’t used for a living; their interior was much more spacious than the other residences, and were somewhat similar to a small warehouse.

According to His Highness, these houses would be used as stores.

In front of the single-story houses was one deep gutter, which was covered with stone slates, it was like the boundary line for the black street. In addition to this, at intervals of one segment they had also planted a big tree at the roadside, sandwiched between two houses, the branches grew close to the center of the road. Not only did it offer protection from the sun and rain, but it also warmed the people's hearts and delighted their eyes.

Kyle had no choice but to say, that in the end, it was the regularity that gave him the greatest impression.

No matter if it were the buildings, roads, sewers or trees, they were all located at the right place according to a previous plan, each was carefully selected for quality at a level not inferior to that of a Lord's flower garden. The experience of wandering through the streets of Border Town, was equal to wandering through the Duke's district of Redwater City – although the latter's buildings was more concentrated and were even larger than these, the harmonious arrangement of these ordinary and mediocre houses exude their own unique sense of beauty. This kind of feeling surpassed that of individual greatness, showing a higher level of grandeur since it was part of a whole.

Just like those chemistry formulas that are adjusted to a uniform system, he thought, this is a beauty brought forth by order.

Nowadays, Kyle had a lot of reputation in Border Town. The passersby who were coming and going all greeted him with a nod and respectfully addressed him as Sage. However, compared with the title of a Sage, he still preferred the title of the Master of Chemistry. It was just a pity that His Highness had made it clear, that he had to understand "Intermediate Chemistry", before he could receive this special glory.

Walking away from the central district, Kyle could see the Redwater River flowing along the western edge of Border Town. The laboratory that were situated at the riverside had already increased to four buildings, however because of their lack of workforce, the last two were temporarily idle.

Kyle was prepared to immediately call for his apprentice to complete His Highness' mission but was stopped by a soldier wearing the uniform of the First Army.

"Your Excellency Sichi, a sailboat arrived at the docks with more than fifty... civilians," the soldiers said after giving a salute, "Due to the number of people being too large and because they also aren't merchants, a squadron of the garrison decided to stop them at the docks. Among them there was one who said that he wanted to see you, he claimed to be an alchemist from Redwater City, named -"

"Chavez!" Kyle shouted, simultaneously grabbing the soldier's shoulder, "Take me to see him!"

...

Together with the soldier he went over to the dock district, there he saw a familiar silhouette come into his view – Chavez had indeed arrived.

"Honored Mentor!" The moment the other side saw Kyle, Chavez immediately waved his hand to get his attention.

“These are the alchemists and the alchemy apprentices I have invited,” Kyle turned toward the garrison captain and explained the situation, “Have every person you’re holding come over, I will take them to the City Hall so that they can register.”

“Yes, Your esteemed Self. But please allow me to send a squad to escort them.”

“No harm.”

In reality, the so-called escort was dispatched to control and keep a close watch over them, to avoid someone separating from the group and sneaking into Border Town’s central district. But this was also an established rule set in place by His Highness the Prince. Therefore, Kyle also didn’t have any intention of interfering with it.

“Honored Teacher, in the end, what is going on? Why would they especially dispatch someone to look after the docks in an out-of-the-way Border Town like this?” Chavez walked over the moment he was released and started complaining, sounding somewhat unhappy, “Moreover they were even stricter than the guards protecting the city walls of a major city. They asked for my name, surname, and origin. Even when I attempted to change their mind with silver royals it proved entirely useless.”

“Silver royals?” Kyle asked with interest, “How many?”

“Of course, just one,” Chavez answered, looking somewhat perplexed.

“Ha ha ha,” hearing his response, Kyle stroked his beard and started to chuckle, “It is only natural that it hadn’t worked. You have to understand, their salary is already set at fifteen silver royals each month.”

“Fif-fifteen?”

“Yes, compared to those city patrols who rely on the blackmail of merchants and traveler to make a living, the living standard of the First Army is much more comfortable. But this is also the reason why extortion, looting or accepting bribes are so strictly prohibited. Once discovered, they will immediately be expelled from the army, and at the same time they will be put into the dungeon to await trial.” Although, Kyle wasn’t an official minister of the City Hall, as the temporary substitute for the Minister of Chemistry he had still attended several conferences. Thus, he came to have a precise understanding of these upper layers of policy.

“Don’t tell me that they are really able to restrain their hands?” Chavez asked slightly suspicious.

“There still exist some who are unable to control themselves, but all of them have been sent to the mine to serve out their sentence,” Kyle twitched his lips then asked, “Didn’t you noticed any unique aspects about Border Town when you arrived?”

“Uh... there were a lot,” the young alchemist scratched his head, “For example, along the river channel there were many people who were chopping wood and repairing a road. However, they were already so far away from Border Town, in the end, where does the road they are repairing lead to? Furthermore, what purpose do those iron towers along the river shore serve? Do they store drinking water?” He paused, “Oh, that’s right! Before our arrival at the pier... I actually saw an iron bridge which was still under construction! It wasn’t made out of wood or stone, I’m sure it was made out of iron!”

“Also, didn’t the bridge seem much longer than any you have ever seen in your life before?” Chief Alchemist asked smilingly. “Therefore, since you’ve arrived here you shouldn’t keep hold of your life experience from Redwater City. This is an entirely different kind of city, of course... At present, it is only a town, but it is already amazing enough. It is the same with ‘Elementary Chemistry’, before you have seen it, you would never be able to believe that something like it would be ‘possible’.”

He didn’t know why, but as he said these words to his apprentice, he felt indescribably carefree and joyful within his heart. Unknowingly he had already come to regard himself as a citizen of Border Town, which meant he was only taking some pleasure in showing off his new home to a visitor.

...

After the completion of the registration, the City Hall’s officials arranged the residences for the apprentice, while Kyle Sichi immediately pulled Chavez along and returned to his house.

“Though I knew that you would accept my invitation, I still didn’t expect you to come so soon.”

“I...” Chavez looking somewhat embarrassed as he bowed and confessed, “I should have agreed from the beginning.”

Hearing this, the Chief Alchemist smiled. Even though he was engrossed in alchemy, but that didn’t mean he didn’t understand a word about the affairs of life. The reason why Chavez didn’t choose to leave from the beginning, was that due to his discovery of the two acids method, he had hoped that Redwater City’s Lord would give him the position of the Chief Alchemist. Only after Kabora, who’d already held some prejudice towards him, became the new chief did he decide to leave Redwater City.

But Kyle didn’t really care about such small matters, longing for the position of the chief alchemist of the workshop had always been the ultimate goal pursued by alchemists.

“Do not cherish your previous work, alchemy is meaningless here. All your past achievements in the field of alchemy are not even worth mentioning. In this place only one thing is worth pursuing: Chemistry.”

Chavez took a deep breath and then said, “I understand.”

“Even though you may get your own house assigned to you, but sleep here for tonight... since we haven’t talked for a long time.”

Back when he had taught Chavez his alchemy skills, he had pulled his young disciple along and talked with him all through the night, and if they became too sleepy, they ended up squeezing into the same bed.

The other party apparently understood his meaning and immediately answered in an excited tone, “yes, mentor!”

After eating dinner, the two went to the study, where Kyle Sichi carefully handed Chavez the “Elementary Chemistry”.

“Is this the praised ancient book?”

Chavez solemnly opened the first page and earnestly started to read. Kyle stood to the side, he was there in case Chavez came across some points he couldn't understand. Looking at this scene, it seemed as if they had stepped back some years, the other party was being taught by him once again.

Now with the addition of Chavez and the fifty new apprentices, I finally have more than enough people to test the large-scale production of sulfuric acid, while at the same time, the other two laboratories can also begin their work. But the most important part of this is that I have fulfilled His Highness' task, and now it's now up to him to fulfill his promise and to give me the book on "Intermediate Chemistry", Kyle proudly thought.

Chapter 289 West of the Western Border

Lightning, in charge of her own "adventure equipment", checked it over once more.

Flint and tinder, bandages, daggers, maps, as well as a bag full of rations stuffed with dried beef.

"What about you?" She looked at Maggie, "Check it again."

"Goo!"

Maggie put her hand into her bag – this cloth was usually hidden in her fluffy hair, in the end, it was hard to determine just how many things she could actually put into it. Since the moment she turned into a bird, all her clothes and bags seemed to disappear without a trace. Even though Lightning's ability to fly was restricted by a weight limit, Maggie, however, didn't seem to be affected in the least. The best proof of this was that she pulled far more out of her bag than Lightning.

Jerky, shredded dried pork, drumsticks, fish, eggs, all were piled up in front of Lightning.

"Oh, my God," Lightning shouted in disbelief, "We are going on an adventure, and not on a barbecue in the wilderness. At least take some weapons along with you."

"Googoo!" Macey pointed at her mouth.

"Do you want to say that your beak is your weapon?" Lightning sighed, "If you encounter a judge dressed like a can, it'd be a wonder if you could ever peck open his armor! Hey, forget it!... It's only a one-day trip anyway, we shouldn't encounter any danger, so let's get started."

"I see! Goo!" Maggie immediately turned into a pigeon, ran two steps, and started flying close above the ground before slowly rising.

Uh, maybe the weight did have an impact on her.

Lightning pulled her windproof glasses down, gently leaped into the air and then flew to the front.

I can still clearly remember when I had seen Maggie for the first time. It was just south of here, in the woods that we started our air chase. Even though she couldn't escape my hands in the end, but I still had to spend a lot of effort before I was able to jump on her. Nowadays, I'm afraid I would be able to catch her in the blink of an eye.

This cannot go on, it's already so rare to find a partner to fly. In the future, I have to bear the responsibility for the adventure equipment alone, the little girl thought, but it does seem she is in need of a good exercise.

"Goo, goo?"

Lightning reduced her speed and flew over to Maggie's side, "Alright let's speak!"

"I want to ask, what area are we going to explore, goo?" The pigeon's mouth opened and closed repeatedly.

"The western end of the Concealing Forest. I want to see how big the forest actually is in the end," Lightning said, she pulled out a map from her bag and spread it out in front of them. Pointing at a blank space on the western side and said, "We will also be able to fill out this missing piece as we pass by, and maybe we can also see where the Redwater River comes from."

When Maggie had returned from her mission to the Fjords, Lightning immediately began preparing for the expedition. Whenever they had free practice, His Highness never cared where they flew off to. Furthermore, the little girl also had a secret in her heart which she couldn't tell her counterpart – she was afraid of exploring the forest alone.

This was simply an extraordinary shame and humiliation for an explorer.

But she could not deceive herself, ever since her trip to the stone tower she had developed a fear of the deep forest. At the thought that the horrible monster might be hidden in the woods, she could not help but want to escape as quickly as possible.

Fortunately, she was still the daughter of the greatest explorer.

Thunder had once mentioned to her a method of overcoming fear. Which was by approaching it a bit, then observe it, and coming to understand it, ultimately, you will discover that your "fear" is not so terrible.

Because the roots of these obstacles are all planted in your own heart.

This time the adventure was exactly Lightning's attempt to get rid of her fear and together with Maggie as a companion, she felt that at least her heart was a little more emboldened. The route she chose was also very secure, flying westwards along the Redwater River, never going deep into the forest, which she presumed would make it very unlikely for her to encounter any Devils. After they've taken the route once, Lightning would try it alone next time. She totally believed that one day, she would be able to go out alone to draw a complete map of the Western Territory, visit the stone tower again, and also uncover the truth about the Holy City Taqila.

...

All along the road, Lightning contained their speed at around sixty kilometers per hour. Nowadays, she was already fully able to accurately control her speed through the amount of magic power she released. And according to the current consumption, she could continue to fly all day.

Also, flying along the river and only at the edge of the forest made it a lot more relaxed compared to the last search for the stone tower. At that time, her entire field of vision had been filled with dark green,

giving off a gloomy and depressed feeling and making it impossible for her to distinguish direction and height. Today however, under the waves of bright sunlight, the Redwater River has turned into crystalline silver belt, coupled with Maggie's constant chatter in her ear, Lightning's fear was quickly fading.

"Quick, look, there are mountains in front, goo!"

At last, Lightning also saw the incomparable Mountain – even though it was still far away, its dusky body already showed its majestic appearance. The mountain peak was next to the ocean, as if the land had crept over to the water. The closer they came to the Redwater River, the more the hills close to the river's waters rapidly shrank away, until they finally became one with the silver belt.

"This mountain is just a bit too big," she could not help but sigh in sorrow, with the shortening of the distance, the contours of the mountain also became increasingly evident. Its peak was snow white, appearing to go straight into the clouds. Even though it wasn't like the Impassable Mountain range which with its ups and downs went on for thousands of miles, but regarding height, it was even higher than three to four mountains put together. The hillside south of it was only one extending part of its mountain ridges, the source of the Redwater River also came from this magnificent high mountain.

"It's the end of the Concealing Forest!" Maggie screamed excitedly.

Just like Maggie had said, the piece of dark green finally came to an end under their feet, the earth was also restored to a light green – which should be a slice of grassland. Further ahead however, at the edge of their line of sight, it unexpectedly changed into a pitch-black which covered the whole area up till the foot of the mountain.

"Let's go down and take a look," Lightning shouted, and pointed down before she dived towards the dark earth. She quickly discovered that the ground was entirely formed out of black stone.

"What is this?" After landing, Maggie immediately pecked twice at it, "It looks like it isn't something to eat, goo!"

"Of course, you cannot eat it," Lightning said and picked up a black stone to take a closer look. It had a sharp and clear-cut look, and even though it had a pitch-black outward appearance, Lightning could still see a metallic sheen when she turned it in the sun. And this kind of stone was everywhere, together with a few patches of mud. At first glance, it looked like the earth has been soaked in ink. "It might be some kind of ore, take two pieces along and we'll let His Highness take a look."

It was then time for drawing work, so she returned to the air and began to record the terrain in the vicinity.

It had taken them almost half the morning to arrive from the edge of Border Town to the foot of the mountain. In other words, this place was close to two hundred and forty kilometers away from Border Town; much further than Longsong Stronghold. And this mountain... Within Lightning's mind an idea suddenly emerged, with such a gigantic mountain, how would the scenery look like? Is it a vast jungle, or undulating hills and mountains?

After her fear disappeared, it became hard for her to suppress this idea once it had appeared.

Crossing the mountains would obviously be somewhat challenging, just the peak covered in white snow was enough to make people shrink back. But, there was also one other route, bypass it by sea. By doing this, she wouldn't even need to fly to the back of the mountain, she would only need to travel onwards to the middle of the sea, and she could put the rear of the mountain in her line of sight.

Lightning called Maggie over, then repeatedly warned her not to move about randomly. She put on her windproof glasses and raised her speed to the limit the next instant – her magic power quickly drained, and the oncoming wind swept her short hair to the back of her head, the land beneath her continually receded, and the blue ocean filled her entire field of vision.

After about half an hour's flight, she was finally able to faintly see the scene behind the mountain. Behind it, it seemed that there was a succession of mountains that separated the sea from the land, but then, Lightning saw something which made her blood freeze inside of her veins.

At the end of the horizon, there was a layer of reddish-brown fog which covered the mountains, looking just like blood. The fog extended all along to the west, making it almost impossible for her to see its boundary.

Chapter 290 Investigation Plan

While Roland was sitting at his desk, in the middle of pondering how to attack the imperial palace from the air, a pounding sound suddenly came from the french window at his back.

Looking back, he saw Lightning pressing against the window, her face stricken with panic. While Maggie, squatting on her head, was quickly pecking at the window.

The moment Nightingale opened the window, the little girl immediately flew into Roland's arms.

"What happened," Roland asked confused, "What made you become like this?"

"A black stone, goo! An enormous snow-capped mountain, goo!" Maggie dropped on the table, wildly flapping her wings as she reported.

"What?"

"No, that's not all," Lightning corrected with a muffled voice, "The Devils. I saw the Devils!"

"What?" Roland's expression turned serious, he stroked her head, trying to give her some emotional support, "Don't panic, just explain it to me slowly."

After a while, Lightning freed her head from the Prince's embrace and looked at his face. Her golden-bright hair looked like a complete mess, and around her eyes were two circles, which formed light red mark. Apparently, she had forgotten to put on her wind protector in her panic to flee at high-speed, "I wanted to draw the border of the Concealing Forest, so we flew westward along the Redwater River, at its end, we found a mountain..."

After listening to the narration of the details of what she had seen and heard, Roland couldn't help but to stare with big eyes into the empty air. The snow-capped mountain with the red mist that those Devils need to survive lays to the west, at our back, and it is only two hundred kilometers away from here?

He looked at Nightingale, who nodded and said, "I'll call the other sisters."

Soon after, the witches came together for an emergency meeting in the castle office.

After Roland told them what Lightning had discovered, the witches who had experienced that one night of slaughter all exposed the same disturbed expression. Especially Leaves, who had killed the two Devils with her own hands, could not help but cover her mouth and cry out in a small voice.

“Your Highness, I recommend we scout out the land covered in red mist further,” Scroll was the first to speak, “After all, Lightning was only able to take a short glance from very far away, thus we cannot be certain that the Devils indeed live under the red mist. Also, it is necessary to investigate whether they will cross the mountain range that’s next to the ocean and travel along the coastline to reach the mainland.”

“I agree with Scroll’s standpoint,” Wendy answered and nodded in agreement. “Although they are very powerful, it is always better to prepare to defend, than have your hands tied and wait to be captured.”

As the two oldest witches of the Witch Union, Scroll and Wendy had always been the pillar of many sister’s hearts. Thus, even though some of them still showed some sign of fear, none of them seemed like they only wanted to sit still and wait for their death.

Roland preferred this kind of response, and he could see that no one was expressing any objections, the basic plan was already set like this. The crucial point now was to decide how they would implement it.

“We could use a hot air balloon for the investigation,” Anna suggested. “The cloud gazer is already covered with a sky camouflage, so we can use clouds as cover and fly over the ocean.”

“In addition, you can also take Sylvie along,” Nightingale stated. “Her ability is perfect to deal with this kind of situation.”

“Right,” Roland nodded, “Furthermore... I will also be going.”

“Your Highness!” The second the words had left his mouth, the three, Wendy, Scroll, and Nightingale shouted at the same time to stop him, “You can’t take this risk yourself!

“It’s not that I will be taking any risks,” Roland waved his hands to calm them down before explaining further, “If they had the ability to pass over the high mountain or the sea, they would already have spread all over the Four Kingdoms by now. However, the reason why they are still gathered in the land to the Far West is simply because they are not as fearful as in your imagination.”

Still, there was another reason he hadn’t mentioned, in regards to judging the level of development of a differed kind of civilization, he was far more experienced than any of them – if he could lay his eyes on the Devils and their city, it would be a great help in developing the path to follow in the future and also to come up with a tactic to repulse the enemy.

“But...” Wendy’s face was still filled with hesitation.

“Do not worry, we will just take a look from a distance,” the Prince said and showed a reassuring smile, “In case I came to the conclusion that a distant investigation was dangerous, I would never permit you to go.”

“Alright, but you have to take me along with you,” as she saw that their attempt to dissuade him was in vain, Nightingale was the first to change her tact.

Seeing his counterpart's serious gaze as she declared her demands, Roland knew that it was impossible for him to reject her. So, after thinking about it for a moment, he announced: "In that case, the people who will come along on this trip besides me, are Anna, Wendy, Soraya, Sylvie, Nightingale, Lightning, and Maggie.

"The mission will be in one week. In addition to the necessary food reserves, I also will give each of you a revolver. Use the week to practice, so that even if you are a non-combat witch, you will still be able to fight back if you are facing an enemy."

Since the hot air balloon's speed of flight was far less than Lightning's, Roland feared that they would need a whole day to travel a distance of more than 200 kilometers. They would therefore have to camp one night in the wilderness if they wanted to complete the investigation. Taking this into account, dry food, tents, and weapons were a must.

"Yes, Your Highness," the witches said in chorus.

After the crowd had departed, Roland finally had time to look at the black stone that Lightning had brought back under such great effort.

"You said that this kind of stone was everywhere at the edge of the forest?"

"Yes," by now Lightning had calmed down, but even while sitting at the mahogany table, her legs were still swaying, the red flush on her cheeks also had not faded. "Furthermore, the nearer to the foot of the mountain the larger the more black stones there are. Looking at it from high up, the area covered by these black stones is more than a dozen times bigger than Border Town."

When Roland picked it up to estimate its weight, his heart jumped slightly.

With regards to its weight, it is much lighter than an ordinary stone, which makes it unlikely that it's ore. Its external appearance is hard and lithe, and under the sunlight, it reflects with a metallic luster. Furthermore, it lays bare on the surface... Is it possible that this could be a coal mine?

Thinking of this, he quickly called Anna back.

As it burned down under her black flame, the black stone soon became bright red, looking just like an iron ore in the smelting furnace, but it soon began to dissolve. Even after Anna had taken her black flame back, the orange light exuded by the stone didn't weaken in the slightest degree. Instead, they could even see how a blue flame was slightly rising from its surface.

With this, Roland had confirmed his guess that it was indeed a piece of anthracite with excellent quality.

"So, this is the original look of a coal mine," Lightning said in surprise. "I always thought it would resemble fragile charcoal and be covered with dust, so that if you touched it with your hand, it would make your palm dirty."

"Of course, only after going through a crushing and dilution process will it look like charcoal briquette and coal cake," Roland explained laughingly. "Most of the extraction that comes out of a coal mine look like stones in general, and of course, the higher the quality of the raw coal, the stronger will its structure be. In the end, they will become just like these stones, showing a reflecting luster on their surface."

This unexpected discovery made him exceptionally happy.

Coal wasn't a rarity in the Kingdom of Graycastle. Both Fallen Dragon Ridge and Silver City had coal mines, their yield was mostly used to fuel kilns or personal heating. But in fact, its range of use was extremely broad. Before the extensive spread of the internal combustion engine, the smoke of burning coal had covered about half the sky. While using it for coal coking, it could replace charcoal for smelting iron into steel and would be much more environmental friendly than wantonly cutting down trees. Even after humanity had entered the electrical era, coal could still be refined into coal gas, hydrogen, and asphalt. Or it could be used to generate electricity. It was thus regarded as a cheap fuel of high quality.

Holding an open coal mine in hand was clearly much better than relying on imports. The only question was, how to exploit it?

Roland moved his gaze to Lightning's newly drawn map.

It seemed that the construction of steam driven cement boat was imperative.