

Witch 351

Chapter 351: Illusions (Part I)

After Mayne paid his respects, he carried the Pope back on to the cart.

"Zero," O'Brien gasped and called softly.

A Pure Witch dressed in white entered the room through a small side door, taking light footsteps which were barely audible. "I'm here."

The Archbishop frowned. He did not expect the presence of a Pure Witch in such a secret place. "Even though they were single-handedly raised by the Pope after their awakenings, and served His Holiness for life, these women are, after all, witches." Furthermore, he felt a little unhappy that this person seemed to know about the Reflection Church earlier than he did.

"Take him to the Illusion Room."

"Yes." She walked up to the sanctuary and pressed down the stone carved Canon on the table. A magical light flashed and the giant portrait started to rise upwards slowly, revealing a black metal gate. Then, Zero took the crystal pendant off the Pope's neck, inserted it into the door lock and twisted. A clicking sound was heard from inside the iron gate, and it started to open outwards.

She pulled out the crystal pendant, but instead of returning it to His Holiness O'Brien, she placed it in Mayne's hand.

The Archbishop turned his head back to look at the Pope, and the latter nodded his head. "Take it. You'll keep it from now on. You may use it to open the library of the Pivotal Secret Temple, or the secret door of the Research Office."

"Let's go." Zero smiled and took Mayne by the hand. They walked together into the room behind the giant portrait - it was probably no longer the Church in the same position above ground, and there was nothing in the room except for a floor-to-ceiling window which faced the highlands of Hermes.

The room looked very spacious and was formed in a circular structure. It was approximately half the size of the prayer hall and could accommodate rows of ten people standing side by side, such that it was difficult to associate it with the name "Secret Room". However, within this space, there was no furniture. The only place to sit down was a stone bench that extended along one of the room's curved walls.

After the metal door was closed, Mayne threw off the hand of the Pure Witch and asked, "Did His Highness allow you to enter?"

Zero dismissed his question. "If I don't come with you, who's going to activate the Stone of Illusion? It's not like you have Driving Power."

Her rude response made Mayne's heart skip a beat. "It seems that she still regards herself as His Holiness O'Brien's witch. After I receive the scepter and take control of the Church's domain, I must

absolutely let her understand that she shouldn't only respect the Pope, but also the Archbishop who has heirship."

"Then let's start." He held back the emotions that triggered in his heart and sat down on the stone bench.

"Yes, Your Highness." Zero lifted open a dark panel on the wall, and pressed the Magic Stone with her hands. "But please be prepared, for this is the first time I'm activating this thing."

"The first time? Hasn't she lived for over two hundred years? Didn't she participate in the previous papal handover ceremonies?" Mayne felt a little puzzled, but before he had any time to dwell on it, a dazzling ray of light flashed by and he found himself covered in darkness.

The darkness was so complete that there was virtually no light at all, causing the walls, floor and the stone bench to disappear from sight. Mayne felt as if he was swallowed by a giant beast from the abyss and suddenly lost all concept of distance. The sky and the earth seemed to merge into one entity, and all he could see was darkness. Lowering his head, he realized that he could not even see his body.

Holding his breath, he cautiously reached his hand down and touched the stone bench which remained underneath him. Stamping with his feet, he realized that the floor was also in place. These allowed him to feel a little relieved. Hence, it was fair for Mayne to believe that he had not been transferred into a new underground chamber, but simply that the Magic Stone had absorbed all the light in the room. ,

"However, under this darkness, how is it possible to witness the "truth" that His Highness mentioned?"

As if responding to Mayne's question, the floor started to brighten again, but it was obvious that this no longer the same Secret Room. The slabs on the floor were polished until they were glossy and slick, reflected a dark blue sheen, and on every one of them was carved various elaborate and exquisite patterns. Soon, rays of light streaked down from overhead, and Mayne was astonished to see a transparent skylight appearing on the roof. Peering through the skylight, he was even able to see the clear sky and clouds.

In a short while, more furnishings appeared within the room: a marble round table was surrounded by chairs, with a globe and glass cups placed on top; the four walls were curtained; an ornamental sword and shield were erected in the middle of the room; a Megacerops' head hung from the top of the doorway.

What followed were shadows of people.

Mayne watched in disbelief as lifelike figures of women appeared one by one in the room. Each of them was wearing a magnificent robe, and they sat around the table. Sat facing the gate of the hall was none other than the leader of all, the red-haired Queen of Witches. Her hands drooped and folded in front of her, with her head raised and her chest out. Her eyes looked directly forward while the other women's eyes focused on her. To Mayne, all of these seemed like an extremely realistic painting.

"Was this what the 'illusion' in 'Illusion Room' represented?" Mayne mused. The illusion before his eyes was perfectly identical to a real scene, such that for a moment, the women seemed to come alive.

"Everyone, the Experiment of God's Punishment Army has been successful," said a witch sitting beside Alice. "They're now extremely aggressive, fearless of life and death, and extremely powerful. Even a

feeble assistant witch can be transformed into a mighty warrior who isn't inferior to the Original Extraordinary. In addition, they also have the ability to disrupt the release of magic power, and hence when facing Mad Demons and Lords of Hell, both of whom require the Stone of Driving to fight, they undoubtedly possess a huge advantage."

"But the incarnation ceremony consumes witches' lives, and I've heard that not everyone can be successfully transformed." Someone said.

"These are insignificant details." She unfolded her hands. "I believe that with the continuation of the research, the Quest Society will be able to remedy this."

"Don't talk so easily, Elaine. We're already short on numbers, and therefore every witch is precious!" That other person frowned.

"What's the difference between dying in the demons' hands and dying in the ceremony?" Elaine raised her head and said. "At least with the latter, a contribution is made to the Union prior to death."

"What are you saying..."

"Enough." Alice said softly. Even though her voice was very soft, the scene was instantly silenced. Everyone kept their mouths closed and awaited the Queen's forthcoming words.

"Mortals cannot defeat the demons, my sisters," she said calmly. "We can choose to do nothing but simply enjoy this final moment of peace, and when the next invasion of the demons arrives, we'll be completely consigned to history. Or, we can choose to put up a final fight, placing our hopes in the God's Punishment Warriors, and make necessary sacrifices for them. I admit that this is a difficult choice, but as long as there is a chance to prolong the existence of Mankind, the spirit and determination of witches will never break."

"Although I'm the Queen of Starfall City, I'm willing to allow you to make this important choice. Do you want to give up the resistance and die in peace, or do you want to avenge our dead sisters, chase the demons out of the Dawn Region, and restore the past glory of witches? It's entirely up to you."

"Of course, none of us is able to directly participate in the third Battle of Divine Will, hence no matter which choice we make, we can live out our transient lives peacefully. Remember, the choice which you make now isn't only for yourselves, but for the whole group of witches... for our future sisters to still be able to see God's smile."

"Those who don't agree, please stand up now."

Chapter 352: Illusion (Part II)

"So... that's what happened then!"

Mayne could not take his eyes off the illusionary scene, and his heart leapt like never before.

"The incarnation ceremony of the God's Punishment Army turned out to be invented by witches in order to defeat the demons, and they willingly sacrificed their own kind... How many of the witches present would stand up and castigate her for her cruelty?"

The final result was beyond his expectation. After a few minutes, not a single person stood up. Even the witch who questioned the ceremony did not openly oppose Alice's words, albeit gritting her teeth and smacked the table as she thought, "How ironic! Having killed so many witches with her own hands, she can still talk about it being for the continuation of witches! Is there anything more ridiculous than this?"

"But she isn't wrong," said an elderly witch. "We're after all born of mortals, and thus if Mankind was wiped out, witches wouldn't be able to persist either."

"Conversely, no matter how many witches are sacrificed in the incarnation ceremony, there'll always be new witches to replace them. The more mortals there are, the more witches there'll be." Elaine shrugged her shoulders.

"Is it certain that the God's Punishment Army will defeat the demons?" Someone asked.

"I don't know," said Alice. "Before we try, nobody really knows. The defeats in the previous two Battles of Divine Will have already shown that the demons are way stronger than us, and the only way for us to restrict their actions is to use the Red Mist. This implies that even if we create a large number of God's Punishment Warriors, it's uncertain that we'll secure the final victory." She paused. "But you should be familiar with how I do things."

Elaine smiled and said, "Even if there's only a small chance, we must try our best."

"I'm willing to follow you wherever."

"For the continuation of witches."

"I, too, don't want to admit defeat."

Everyone stood up and saluted the Queen of Witches.

The witch who raised questions was the last to stand up, but she declared, "Hopefully you're right."

"So it's decided." Alice nodded, seeming unsurprised by the result. "What we've to do now is to convince the other members of the Union."

"They won't necessarily listen to you," said the elderly witch. "If we're to carry out the incarnation without resistance, the witches cannot continue to act in a superior and privileged position. The Union must be disbanded, and the past must be completely buried."

"I'll do my best to convince them," Alice said in a resolute voice. "If they aren't able to accept it, Starfall City will carry out this plan alone, and a new order will be made."

Shortly, the scene disappeared... Darkness consumed everything again. When light in the Secret Room was restored, Mayne realized that his back was soaked in cold sweat, and his head spun terribly.

"You look a little tired. Shall I carry you outside?" Zero walked over to him and asked.

"No need. Quickly open the door!" Mayne said, taking huge gasps of breath.

After the metal door was opened, Mayne stumbled out of the Illusion Room, and then covered his mouth as he rushed over to the Sanctuary, and knelt in front of O'Brien.

"After the Magic Stone was activated, the scene was automatically mapped into your mind, hence feeling discomfort is perfectly normal," the Pope said softly. "The first time I came into contact with these, I had the same reaction as you. You will be fine after a short rest."

"Why didn't I have any problems?" Zero asked, embracing the Pope's arms.

"Because you're a witch, thus your body has long been used to the operation of magic power." O'Brien smiled benignly. "Whether in terms of endurance or resistance, witches are universally far superior to mortals."

It took a long time for Mayne to calm his breath down. "This is the Church's... origin?"

"Yes. After this, Alice led the witches of Starfall City and two other cities into battle, eventually emerging victorious, and laid down a new set of rules. Witches were no longer the chosen ones, but instead became the evil ones who were lured into degeneration by demons. This war lasted for nearly a hundred years, and is known in the history books as the Battle of Faiths."

"Did she live for that long?"

The Pope shook his head. "Not long after Alice established the Church, she perished along with another Transcendent. The second Pope inherited her will and continued to lead the Army into battle until they completely subdued two other factions. Unfortunately, this battle badly damaged the three cities, and they virtually lost control over the world. The mortals who were unwilling to participate in the battle began to settle down in this narrow strait, and led the indigenes to cultivate the land. Gradually, this became what is now the Four Kingdoms."

Somehow, O'Brien became more energetic as he spoke, and even his voice became more coherent and no longer as feeble as it used to be.

"After that, the Church continued to eliminate its remaining enemies on many occasions, including mortals who didn't belong to Starfall City. But the world order had already taken shape, and due to a lack of strength, the Church was never able to complete the unification of the continent. All of this is due to the early death of the Queen of Witches."

"Natalia, whom she considered a friend, not only rejected her plan but also suddenly attacked her during a meeting. This was recorded in the unabridged Canon." The Pope sighed. "If she was still alive, the Battle of Faiths would have ended fifty years earlier, and after the Church accepted all witches into its membership, it would have easily unified the continent. No one expected the Battle would continue until today."

Mayne wiped the sweat on his forehead and said, "Your Highness, there's something I'm unclear about. Why were the earlier Popes all witches, while after that, it became entirely normal people?"

"Zero, you should head back first." O'Brien kept silent for a brief moment before saying.

"Yes."

Only after the Pure Witch had departed, O'Brien slowly said, "Because of weakness and cowardice."

"W... what?" Mayne was shocked, and for a moment, hesuspected that he had heard wrongly.

"No, child, you didn't hear wrongly." O'Brien seemed to have read his thoughts. The Pope's eyes gleamed, and he looked as if he had returned to a younger age. "In order to restore the witches' glory after defeating the demons, Alice had stipulated that the Pope's position must be taken up by an Extraordinary. But Extraordinary Witches were very rare, and it wasn't always possible to find the ideal candidate. Therefore, a few prominent ordinary witches served as the Pope - but weakness and cowardice were like poisonous snakes in the heart which could never be removed once they appeared. A mortal who served as the Archbishop was afraid of being oppressed by the witches someday and therefore usurped the Pope's position."

Mayne's eyes opened wide. "And therefore, the later Popes were..."

"Yes, all of us are cowardly descendants who profited from the witches' sacrifice." The Pope let out a long and deep sigh. "No matter what happens, the Church has to bury this secret forever." He paused. "The truth regarding the Battle of Divine Will is recorded in the Pivotal Secret Temple. It's now for you to bear this responsibility and continue the line. Even giving up... may also be a wise choice."

After saying these words, his whole body abruptly slackened, as if he had put down a heavy load, and he lay down and slumbered on top of the cart.

"Giving up? If he did so, who else was going to take over this position?" But before he had any time to ponder, Mayne realized that something was not right with O'Brien — his physical condition took a dramatic turn for the worse, and the spirited look of only a moment ago disappeared. His eyes' muscles relaxed rapidly and the radiance from his eyes slowly faded.

"Your Highness, Your Highness O'Brien!" Mayne shook the Pope's body anxiously, but O'Brien stared vacantly at the ceiling with his mouth twitching slightly, as if he was murmuring something.

At the last moment, Mayne felt him saying, "Child, I'm sorry."

Chapter 353: The Quest Society

As the night wore on, a soft ray of light peeked through the cracks of the curtains.

It was daybreak.

Elsa had barely slept all night. Her head had been spinning with Nightingale's words.

"The mortals of this continent are the most powerful ones."

"So much can change in 400 years. Why can't you let go of past ideas?"

"You still have much time ahead of you. You can confirm it with your own eyes."

Elsa rolled out of bed and walked over to her clothes-rack, resting her hand on the robe of the Taquila Quest Society. As she reminisced about gaining the unanimous approval of the Three Chief Witches when she earned this robe, her spirits leaped with joy. Exploring the mysteries of magic power had always been her lifelong pursuit, and the Quest Society's most revered motto was "Existence is truth". So, if those mortals really could prove their ability...

Elsa put on her robe, opened the door, and walked towards the grand hall.

"In any case, I am probably the last member of the Quest Society, as well as the sole survivor of Taquila. If I want to rebuild a new Holy City, it will take more than a couple of days. But before that, I might as well have a look at what this mortal prince could possibly be capable of to have witches at his beck and call."

After breakfast, Elsa, accompanied by Wendy, went to the office of the prince with gray hair.

At a glance, the Prince looked no different from people of 400 years ago. However, he gave off an aura unlike a common mercenary, merchant, or farmer, but it was also different from Kaff, her head of family guards. It took only one glance to see right through these kinds of people, whose deepest thoughts were usually very easy to read, as if they were only symbols on a piece of paper. However, she could not perceive the prince in the same way, especially his eyes. Although they were a simple set of gray pupils, they seemed to be filled with indescribable radiance and confidence. More importantly, this confidence was not blind optimism. It exuded a kind of calmness and peacefulness beyond his years. It was as if he had lived for... thousands of years, and knew all that was in this world like the back of his hand.

"Why do I feel this way?"

"He is Roland Wimbledon." Elsa thought, silently memorizing this name.

"How did you sleep last night?" He smiled. "Did the oatmeal and fried eggs 400 years into the future suit your tastes?"

"It was so-so, but it would have been better if you hadn't let a witch barge into my room."

He was stunned for a moment, and shook his head resignedly. "Alright, she will knock next time. Oh, by the way - if you wish to take a stroll outside to explore the town and people's customs, you can ask Nightingale to show you around. If you wish to read history books, you can ask Scroll; she has kept all the books she read in her mind."

"People's customs?" Elsa frowned, "With the dangers of demons looming over us, I would love to see how you have the audacity to claim that mortals can defeat demons. If you can't fend off their attacks, all the history and customs are completely meaningless!"

The Prince smirked and said, "Compared with heavy industry, light industry and civilian livelihood are just as important... Why are you so interested in cannons?"

"What do you mean by light and heavy?"

"Nothing... Never mind..." The Prince sighed, "You will soon see, and we're going to test new weapons this afternoon. But before that, I have some questions to ask you - questions about the Holy City of Taquila 450 years ago."

New weapons mortals operating ? Elsa's mind immediately went to crossbows and mangonels. If he simply updated these weapons, they would not be nearly enough to defeat the demons. However, she did not let her skepticism show. "Ask away."

"You mentioned that the Holy City of Taquila was a city ruled by witches and that mortals without magic power could only belong to the lowest class. How many meals did mortals eat in a day? What was their staple food? Did they eat a lot of meat?"

Elsa was stunned. She did not expect him to ask such questions. "There were also ranks within the mortals. The mortals who served Senior Witches by running errands or protecting the city had the same standing as the weakest assistant witches. Below them were farmers and merchants, and lastly came slaves and coolies. As for what you asked, I have no idea - no witch in the Upper City ever paid attention to what mortals ate. As for the guards and servants in my tower, they were all provided with three meals a day. Except for the "Months of the Demons", they got to eat meat once a week."

"What was their salary?"

"What is that, money?" She arched her brow. "They became my attendants and vowed to serve me for life, and in return I gave them shelter and food, and I imparted my knowledge onto them. They didn't need any other compensation."

"I see." The Prince scribbled furiously on a piece of paper and asked, "Did the witches participate in farming, livestock breeding, or iron forging?"

"Of course, all of these things were done by assistant witches," Elsa replied. "Although they were only assistant witches, they were far superior to commoners - if commoners handled the work alone, they could never fulfill the Union's needs."

This back-and-forth went on for almost half-an-hour. He seemed to be especially interested in basic necessities of life in major witch cities and asked extremely detailed questions, which confused Elsa to no end. "Compared with these insignificant matters, isn't he concerned about the demons who have already conquered more than half of the Dawn Region and are about to strike again?"

The Prince paused for a moment and handed his notes to Scroll. "You said that you were a member of the Quest Society and that this society specifically studied Magic Stones and magic power?"

Finally, such a decent question was asked. Elsa nodded, "Yes, the so-called Magic Stone is transformed from God's Stone of Retaliation, and it can suppress a witch's ability, but it can also give her unique powers."

These remarks were a shock to everyone. The witch who called herself Tilly blurted, "How is it done?"

Elsa finally felt a rush of her past importance and was quite pleased, "For the past 400 years or so, the Quest Society made endless sacrifices to pursue the secret of the relationship between magic power and Magic Stones. I can share it with you, but you must also share your knowledge of increasing witches' awakening rates in return."

Tilly and Roland exchanged a glance, "No problem, but I am still confused by one thing." She lifted her left hand, and the blue crystal resting on her finger glinted with a striking light. "This Magic Stone was discovered in the ancient ruins and enabled me to fly - there is no doubt that this type of Magic Stone is immensely powerful. When battling the demons, it will give troops an advantage in both attacks and retreats. Not to mention, it saved quite an amount of time in my daily commute." She paused, "So why

did you still retreat on foot? How was it that even a Senior Awakened Witch like you did not have such a convenient Magic Stone?"

Chapter 354: The Magic Stone

Agatha froze in shock. She never dreamed that Tilly would have a Stone of Flight and even figured out how to use it. After hesitating for quite some time, she finally spoke, "We only understood the relationship between magic power and Magic Stones, but we couldn't produce the Stones."

"You couldn't produce them?" Tilly asked surprisedly, "What does that mean?"

"These Magic Stones were made by demons..." she sighed, "If we had a reliable source of Magic Stones, we would have been able to transform assistant witches into combat witches, and God's Punishment Army wouldn't exist."

"Made by demons?" The witches couldn't help but look shocked, while Roland's expression darkened.

"How much do you know about making Magic Stones?" he asked, "and how were these Magic Stones made?"

The tone of these two questions sounded a little too blunt, and Agatha initially didn't want to answer them. However, considering that demons were witches' real enemies and that this information would eventually come to light, she stifled her remarks on his rudeness and answered slowly, "There was a strange being among the demons, which we called the Chaos Beast. Its appearance resembled a large flower bud with the height of three or four people, and it crawled slowly on its tentacles. After it swallowed God's Stones of Retaliation, it could produce a variety of Magic Stones, and the speed of this process depended on the type of Magic Stone being produced."

"Have you... witnessed this?"

"We caught a live beast once." She was extremely irritated by the Prince's skepticism. "The Bliss Army launched a surprise attack on a remote Devil's Town where there was a Chaos Beast producing Stones of Light. Witches brought it back to Taquila and made it work for the Holy City - this kind of demon was extremely unintelligent, so it automatically transformed the stones it was fed. Unfortunately, we did not know how to make it produce more powerful stones, and we also didn't know how to raise it. Six months later, it turned yellow and wilted like an uprooted plant."

"Afterwards, the Quest Society sent a couple of witches to other Devil's Towns to investigate. All reports led to the same conclusion - Chaos Beasts were the only way of obtaining Magic Stones, and it would take a longer time to produce more powerful stones. Most demons used Magic Stones in battle; for example, the Mad Demon embedded on its arm a Magic Stone that could instantly excite its body's energy and give it powerful long-range attacking abilities. All the Magic Stones we had were seized from enemies' bodies or battalions.

"So this Stone of Flight used to belong to a demon?" Tilly asked curiously.

"As far as I know, only a powerful demon leader could have such a Magic Stone." Agatha sighed, "So it probably belonged to the battle spoils of a Transcendent."

"What about the types of Magic Stones?" Roland frowned, "Did they always have all types of Magic Stones?"

"Of course not. If that were the case, humans would have been doomed long ago." She rolled her eyes, "In the First Battle of Divine Will, most demons did not have Magic Stones. Instead, they relied on their immense bodies and impenetrable armor and attacked human cities with metal spears. This is all recorded very thoroughly in history books. After hundreds of years of war, human territories were conquered bit by bit, until everyone was forced to retreat to the Fertile Plains." At this, she sighed, "That was when we were closest to victory. If we had been led by a witch and had a trained platoon of combat witches, the demons wouldn't have even been able to set foot in the Dawn Region."

"And then they gained access to all kinds of Magic Stones?"

"I think so. In the Second Battle of Divine Will, their attacks became much more varied." Agatha's voice dropped in defeat. "This time, we were totally crushed in a matter of 35 years. Although the elite Bliss Army was a strong match for the Lords of Avernus, there were many more of the enemy than there were of us. I heard from the elders of the Union that the witches actually had the upper hand for the first ten years, and that one Transcendent could slaughter an entire demon platoon. However, after we began to lose a lot of soldiers, we were forced into the defensive within our city."

Then, the Prince was silent for a long time and appeared to be considering something very serious.

"He has finally understood the horror of demons," thought Agatha. "Not only were their numbers immense, but their evolution was frightening. Who knows what kind of army will emerge in the next attack."

"Are Mad Demon, Fearsome Demon, and Lord of Avernus categories you assigned to the demons?" Tilly asked as Roland was still lost in thought.

"Yes, these names became widespread in the Second Battle of Divine Will - before they had their Magic Stones, there was not much difference between them besides their appearance."

"How did they reproduce?"

"Uh... that," Agatha stuttered, "I don't know. It was never recorded in any books or learned from captives - they couldn't survive for long without the Red Mist, so we didn't have enough time to understand their language. And the demons who did not need the Red Mist to survive were all low-level beasts that couldn't communicate."

"Beasts?"

"Yes. Demons consisted of many different species, but there were two main categories," she explained carefully. "One had magic power, and the other didn't. The latter didn't need the Red Mist to survive, but their appearance and intelligence were no different from regular animals. Examples of these beasts were Eight-foot Reptiles that carried supplies for the demons, and winged Devilbeasts that could carry demons into the air."

"Hold on." the Prince suddenly frowned and asked, "Did these Devilbeasts you mentioned look like this?" He took a painting out of a drawer and spread it out in front of Agatha.

"This is indeed a Devilbeast." The painting of the winged demon was incredibly lifelike and was no doubt the work of a witch. "Have you seen one before?"

"Not too far from here." Roland sipped his tea and continued, "I thought it was a demonic beast tamed by the demons. So you're saying that... they aren't the same thing?"

"Of course not. Low-level demonic beasts were nothing but food for demons, while powerful mutant demonic beasts were actual threats to demons. When the 'Months of the Demons' arrived, their attacks usually decreased, giving us some time to recover." Agatha paused and changed the subject to the nearby enemy, "If there are Dinotheres around, that means a Demon's Town can't be far away... Where are they?"

"Just West of the Mist Forest, behind a large snow mountain." Roland roughly told her about his investigation, "It's completely covered in Red Mist."

"No, not completely!" Agatha exclaimed, "Those short stone towers are used to maintain the Red Mist by evaporating a stored liquid, so they need to be refilled periodically. That's why those demons always hide underground to reduce usage. We can try to capture this battalion!"

"Initiate an attack on the demons?" the witches all gasped in fear.

"There are Multi-eyed Demons on watch, which meant that there is probably a Chaos Beast in the battalion. Otherwise, there would not be high-level demons stationed in such a remote and small battalion." She bit her lip, "A Chaos Beast will always preserve its ability to produce its last Magic Stone. Even if it is not a powerful Magic Stone, we can still use it to further the research of the Quest Society, and even find the principle of transforming God's Stone of Retaliation!"

Chapter 355: Miracles

The group of people stared at her, dumbfounded. After a long silence, the prince cleared his throat and asked, "Isn't the red fog extremely toxic? There's no way for us to approach it right?"

"It's only toxic to witches. According to the Quest Society's research, normal humans, plants and animals can all survive underneath the red fog. In addition, fire can speed up its rate of dispersion," Agatha plainly replied.

"Weren't you the one who said even normal people could fight the Devils? Well, prove it for me to see! The winged hybrids can be lured away by our flying witches," She said as she pointed to Tilly, "The rest of the people can stand by waiting for us to rouse the devils and lead them into a trap. If what you said is true, taking this stronghold should be a piece of cake."

Roland chuckled and shook his head, "I forgot to mention this earlier, this investigation trip was done via hot air balloon, not the flying witches you assumed — this kind of flying device can only carry a dozen people, I'm afraid there's no way we can carry a whole troop of normal soldiers. In addition..." he paused, "This plan you came up with is highly susceptible to risk. We have no idea just how many devils are lurking around. Close quarters combat will result in casualties, not to mention the dangerous job of luring the Devilbeasts. I refuse to put my people in such danger."

"How could anyone have a foolproof plan for fighting the devils?" Agatha fumed. "Every time the Blessed Army mobilized its people in the past, everyone went in with the expectation of a bitter battle to the death. As I thought, he's delusional! In order to achieve an end goal, casualties are an eventuality. Only a naive rookie who's never experienced the cruel reality of war would worry so much about every single individual life."

Though extremely disappointed, she still controlled her feelings, managing to hide her doubts. In the afternoon, after attending his presentation of this so-called new weapon, everything will become clear.

Only now, Agatha no longer harbored any real expectations.

They were just a prince who's only fought before on paper, a bunch of witches with support abilities, and finally some fragile and useless ordinary mortals. Even with the most powerful of weapons, how strong could they possibly be?

Perhaps from the moment the Union collapsed, humanity had already been destined for destruction.

"You often spoke of the Battle of Divine Will, why do you call it that? Isn't it simply a war to repel the devil invasion," Roland took a new piece of paper, raised his quill and asked.

That's what everyone called it. The history books never recorded the initial reason for the war," Agatha answered in a disheartened tone, "It's not wrong to call it a war to repel the invasion, after all, the devils did only come to the Land of Dawn from the stone gates..."

"What stone gates?" Scroll couldn't help but interrupt.

"The Gates of Hell that rose from the ground." Agatha sighed. "On the eve of the Bloody Moon, the Gates of Hell shall open, engulfing the world we know. That's what was written in the history books — either way, these damned stone gates would appear every few hundred years. The first horde of devils used them to come to the Land of Dawn and rabidly attempted to murder us all."

"So the pattern of their invasions is also related to this?"

"They needed the red fog to survive, in order to leave the fog they had to depend on their own handheld reservoirs — the leather pouches, metal containers and demonic beast hide tanks. This is also the reason we were even able to have the second or third Battles of Divine Will. Only when the stone gates appeared could the devils build their fog generating Obelisks, which were usually taller than even mountains and had a wide area of diffusion. A single one is enough to cover the entire Fertile Plains," she explained slowly.

"If another Battle of Divine Will erupts, the devils will definitely construct an Obelisk in the middle of the plains to serve as their base. After it's complete, they'll use their fortresses at the boundaries of the fog to initiate their attack. This time, I'm afraid there's nowhere left for humanity to run."

"If that day comes, everyone can at least escape to Fjords to weather the storm." Tilly shrugged her shoulders.

"Are you talking about those few islands in the middle of the Swirling Sea? How many people could a tiny land like that possibly sustain? It's nothing but a place of desperation where one waits for their eventual demise," Agatha snappily retorted.

"Alright, everyone cheer up a little, at least we now have a decent understanding of the devils we're up against," the Prince shrugged and said, "By the time the third Battle of Divine Will begins, we won't be unprepared. Let's call it a day here. Anything else we can discuss after lunch."

...

Agatha finished her sumptuous lunch and followed Wendy back to her room.

Life in the wastelands was a lot more... luxurious than she imagined. Both the variety and taste were far superior to that of any feast in her memory. She thought that perhaps this was because she was born in an era of war; those days, be it in her own stone tower or at the fortress of the Union, food consisted solely of bread, jerky and vegetable soup. Yet here salt, butter, and honey were all plentiful, as well as some delicious spices she didn't recognize. Even though she wanted to maintain her image, she nevertheless couldn't help but devour an entire plate of fried mushrooms as well as two huge pieces of honeyed steak.

However, the more she ate, the angrier she became. She both loathed herself for succumbing to the temptation of delicious food, bringing shame upon Taquila, and loathed the Prince for being so short-sighted as to be wasting time savoring delicacies while the humanity walked towards its doom!

Thinking of this, she couldn't help but harden her tone and say, "I'm already familiar with the castle halls now. You needn't bother with the hassle of escorting me back from now on."

"It's not a hassle at all. I'm delighted to do these things..." Wendy smiled. "Also, if you want to talk about anything, I'm always here. Bottling your feelings up in your heart will only make them fester."

"Didn't he say he was going to show us the new weapons in the afternoon? Why'd he leave all by himself after eating?"

"You mean Roland? This... is probably because he's taking a nap," Wendy covered her mouth and whispered, "That's His Majesty's habit, usually after lunch he'll always sleep for at least an hour. His Majesty often says the body is the foundation of all efforts. Without enough rest, it's impossible to fulfill the duties of a lord."

"An afternoon nap! What kind of habit is this! A whole night isn't enough for him!?" Agatha angrily thought, "This is obviously nothing but a lazy person making excuses, yet you actually wholeheartedly believe him!"

"Be it normal witches or Senior Awakened Witches... why is it that you all have such confidence in him?" she took a deep breath, "Is it just because he gave you a safe haven? Do you really believe that he can win against the devils - no, even against the Church that has been suppressing you all?"

"I can't speak for the other sisters," Wendy gently replied, "but I myself do believe in him. Because His Majesty is capable of making the things that no one else imagined, or even dared to imagine, happen. To me, he's someone who's made countless miracles happen."

"Mira... cles?"

"When witches everywhere were being hunted to death, he saved the Association; when everyone saw us as demons, he created a place where we could coexist in harmony; in a single short year, His Majesty

has managed to use an army of peasants to fend off the Months of the Demons, and defeated Duke Ryan who had a territory several times of his; even the mad empowered army of Graycastle wasn't able to take a single step past our border."

"But these are merely the battles of mortals, compared with the war between God's Punishment Army and the devils, they're completely different." Agatha shook her head.

"Of course it's not just this," Wendy continued, "His teachings and theories allowed four sisters to evolve their abilities, and has unceasingly created increasingly powerful weapons, which allow knights and even ordinary people to win against Extraordinaries... these are all miracles that I've personally witnessed, not just the wild rumors of a tavern, nor the bombastic descriptions of historical records — they happened right in front of my eyes."

"One day he'll become the King of Graycastle, and lead us to defeat any and all of our enemies." Her eyes were filled with mirth yet her voice was full of confidence.

"That's what I believe."

Chapter 356: 「152 ! 」

Weapons that enable civilians to defeat Extraordinaries?

After Wendy left, Agatha kept mulling over this phrase. Did they truly know what an Extraordinary was?

Unfortunately, she did not have a Stone of Measuring with her to clearly determine the powers and types of these witches.

After waiting for an annoyingly long time, Nightingale appeared in her doorway. "His Highness invites you to view his new weaponry tests. If you don't want to go..."

"I'll go," she mumbled. "Please lead the way."

When she saw Prince Roland still groggy and yawning, Agatha had a sudden impulse to dump ice chips onto him to wake him up. However, this move would probably cause some misunderstandings with the other witches, so she could only think about it to herself.

As they left the castle, she saw the entirety of the town in broad daylight for the first time.

With the snow as a backdrop, the first impression that leaped into her mind was order—all the two-story houses stood in clean rows and had exactly the same appearance, with matching white silhouettes and red tile roofs. The black roads were all straight as an arrow, splitting the town into equal square sections. Looking into the distance, the scenery seemed to be continuous layers of houses, trees and streets and so on.

Even Taquila's Inner City could never be this orderly!

But she felt there was something about the town that couldn't compare to her city. Except the castle, there were no buildings worth a second glance in this town. Even the castle itself could not compare to Taquila's Quest Tower in grandiosity.

"After all, it's only a small town." Agatha scoffed inwardly and turned to Nightingale. "How many people live here?"

"Um... There used to be only a little over 2,000, but now, with the refugees from the North and South, there're almost 30,000."

"There were only 2,000, and he claimed to defeat demons. What a stupid... hold on, 30... 30,000?" Agatha widened her eyes in shock. Even in its prime, Taquila could only accommodate 50,000 people. Could this tiny place hold 30,000? She wasn't counting the populations of the surrounding villages, right?

Although these square brick houses did seem to have a larger capacity than wooden bungalows, the increase of population wasn't merely a simple addition of numbers. After the population reached a certain point, demands on the city would also increase exponentially. Firstly, the demand for food and water would increase dramatically. Secondly, there would be more public safety issues following an increase in slums. Finally, even waste disposal would become a difficult issue.

Towards the end of the Second Battle of Divine Will, Taquila faced all of these issues—following the collapse of many major cities, more and more people flocked to the Holy City. Overpopulation did not strengthen the city's defense, but instead paralyzed the entire city. The Union had to forcefully remove a group of refugees to settle the crisis.

After experiencing this firsthand, Agatha knew how difficult the growth of population was. As she observed her companion's casual demeanor, she somewhat distrusted her. Perhaps Nightingale had no idea what she was talking about and was simply lying to her.

"I should ask Wendy these kinds of questions in the future, " she thought. "At least she seemed more sincere."

After crossing the crowded city streets, Agatha followed the prince and his group onto a city wall made of mud. This kind of short city wall was far from lofty and sturdy. There were no barbs on the surface of the wall, nor was there a moat surrounding it. Demons wouldn't even need machines to climb this wall as they could do so bare-handedly.

She became more disappointed in her heart.

Every hundred steps or so, there were protrusions of flat platforms on the top of the wall, which seemed to be prepared for ballistas. It didn't take a long walk along the wall for Agatha to see the weapon being tested that day.

Its appearance was so unique that it commanded everyone's attention.

It was a metal tube that looked like an enlarged iron spear, except there was no spear head. It was entirely smooth and had a slight silver tinge to it, so it didn't seem like a metal weapon. The parts at the ends of the tube were slightly complicated. Besides a stabilizing stand, there were also two shorter tubes that were attached to the top and bottom of the large tube. It had no pulleys or slots for arrows, appearing nothing like a larger ballista or mangonel.

But she still could not figure out how this thing could attack enemies.

"This is a newly-invented weapon of Border Town—the 152 mm Stronghold Standard Artillery, symbolizing justice and glory!" The prince exclaimed, waving his hands. "We made many improvements on the basis of the 12 pound field artillery, and it's outstanding in all respects. It's undoubtedly a revolutionary weapon!"

Agatha couldn't help but frown. All this talk of justice, glory and Stronghold Standards sounded extremely superficial. Not to mention that the long string of introductions was a mouthful of made-up words. Was he really the prince, whom, as Wendy introduced, was learned and trusted by all witches?

"Clap, clap, clap," Nightingale was the only person clapping, and the atmosphere seemed a little awkward.

"Ahem," Roland cleared his throat. "Let's not waste our breath and start testing. Iron Axe, take it away."

"Yes, Your Highness." Three people dressed in the same uniforms immediately stood up and got to work.

Agatha stood on the side and followed every movement of these men, hoping to understand the workings of this weapon.

She watched one man slide off the metal piece at the end of the tube, and another immediately stuff an orange sharp object into the tube and shut the metal piece.

"Report. Preparation is ready. Prepare to launch!"

"Everyone, cover your ears." The prince demonstrated with his hands, nodded, and said, "Fire."

"Wait... is it ready this quickly?" Just as Agatha was about to ask, a large boom exploded next to her ears. Her head immediately began buzzing, and her surroundings quieted. The long metal tube spat out a ball of orange flames, blinding yet fleeting. In that moment, she sensed the immense power of the fire, and felt the city wall trembling beneath her feet. A wave of heat rushed towards her, pushing her back a few steps. The cannon itself also suddenly sank back suddenly—but then it steadily returned to its original position.

"..." Nightingale supported her in time from behind and seemed to say something to her, but she could only hear fragments of whispers, as if they were coming from far away... Finally, the buzzing subsided, and her hearing was back to normal. "Are you okay?"

She shook her head, looking towards the fields of snow, but couldn't see any change.

Were those flames only good for intimidating the enemy?

"Did you see the landing point?" the prince asked a witch with green hair.

"It fell behind a small hill, nearest to the red flag," the latter said after peering out for some time, "but it was still much farther."

"Red flag?" Agatha looked at Roland with puzzlement. "What are they talking about?"

Luckily, the prince quickly addressed her confusion. "This weapon can fire shells—or bolts that you're familiar with—to a long distance, so it's used to attack enemies far away. In order to observe the range

of attack, I had Lightning place colored flags every one kilometer, and the red flag was the last one at five kilometers away." He explained, "By your measurements, one kilometer is a little over 300 yards."

Agatha was stunned. "Is he saying that that weapon fired a bolt over a distance of more than 5,000 meters? There were no pulleys or power-storing mechanisms. How did they make it? Even Siege Beasts driven by magic power could only reach a range of 1,500-2,000 meters. If he was not lying, then a tall and sturdy city wall, combined with these kinds of weapons, could really fend off the demons' attack."

But... it's probably not very easy for a weapon with such an astonishing firing range to fire even once.

"It just doesn't feel right without seeing where the shells landed," The Prince stroked his chin and said, "Next, let's test a fast triple-shot flat aim to attack targets in short range."

Chapter 357: Unfinished-work

The second time it fired, Agatha covered her ears up in advance.

Then she saw an incredible scene.

There was no endless charging work that she expected. Gigantic as the long metal pipe seemed, it was actually not as heavy as it looked like. Every shot seemed to shake the earth up. However, its base remained absolutely still, as if the pipe and the base were not related at all. The long tube was quick and accurate each time in terms of backing and resetting, and this process did not even require human control—only three of the four operators were busy working, while the commander Iron Axe was just standing aside issuing orders.

Withdrew the metal stopper, slid off the copper shell, stuffed the new bolt, and then fired... and repeated the process. Agatha could feel the ground-shaking anger of the earth almost every ten breaths. At the same time, she also witnessed the soil and the snow columns kicked up one after another by the flat fire at a close distance—the prince did not lie that this weapon truly shot the bolt out at a speed that was impossible to capture with naked eyes. Judging from the interval between the firing time and the time when the snow columns were kicked up, it could be concluded that even a Transcendent would absolutely have no way to avoid the attack!

Agatha looked at this silver white long tube weapon and could not help being amazed.

If ... if Taquila was guarded by such a powerful weapon at that time, we should have been able to keep all the frightful demons below the city walls, and thereby prevented falling into the dilemma of attrition after the walls were destroyed. The war would perhaps not have gone that bad either.

"Was this weapon created by witches?" After quite a while, she swallowed a mouthful of saliva and asked quietly. From its bright and shiny appearance, this could absolutely not be handcrafted by mortals with iron hammers.

However, the prince's reply greatly surprised her.

"This is a masterpiece jointly created by witches and mortals," he smiled and said, "Witches took care of everything from smelting to casting the Longsong Cannon, whereas alchemists were responsible for

shells that were used to fire. By the way, the witches who have been engaged in manufacturing are all what you call assistant witches except Anna."

Agatha felt that her long-standing idea was suddenly shaken. She thought she had been kind and generous enough to mortals, and for this she had been even marginalized by the Quest Society. However, it now appeared that what she had done was far from enough?

Is that true that the Union had been wrong all the way from the beginning? Did it mean that what the prince said, namely "Mortals can defeat demons" was actually right? ...

Yet if the cooperation between witches and mortals can generate such powerful strength, then why did the first Battle of Divine Will end up with a disastrous defeat?"

With questions continuously coming to her mind, Agatha started to feel very confused.

...

When the Longsong Cannons jetted out flames in succession, Tilly was greatly shocked as well.

Although she once stood on the top of the city wall and saw shells being fired at demonic beasts, the drawbacks of those firearms were also quite evident—it was hard to target at a long distance, and it could not shoot downwards if enemies drew close. It was only at somewhere in the middle that they were able to exert the optimum power. However, as the loading was sort of slow, it was very likely that swift hybrid demonic beasts may have already arrived at the foot of the city walls before they had time to ignite them.

Furthermore, in order to quickly load and shoot, five to ten people were required to run a mortar team. The weapon operation would be affected even a single step went wrong. Besides, it required someone to specially keep an eye on the combustion source upon ignition. When there was heavy rain, field artilleries probably would not be useless.

Nevertheless, the Longsong Cannon newly developed by Roland did not have the aforesaid deficiencies.

Charging from the rear of the cannon enabled the muzzle to stay lower than the breech, and thereby largely increased the efficiency of close range shooting. The firing rate was also multiplied several times, yet the staff was reduced to three people. Meanwhile, the cannon did not need to be lit by open fire, which meant that they could operate even in harsh weather. As its attacking scope was far greater than that of mangonels, it totally deserved what Roland referred to as "an epochal weapon".

Although they currently relied on witches' abilities to manufacture such weapons, Tilly believed that this was only temporary—Sylvie's observation could verify this: In the past, only Chief Knight was equipped with automatic weapons, but now each soldier had one in their hand. Anna only needed to create the facilities and equipment for the manufacturing of such weapons. Specific casting and assembling work could be independently completed by laborers.

From Ashes' and Anderlia's looks, one could tell that the Longsong Cannon was something that they could not possibly imagine.

It was nice to have such an ally, but as a brother, she felt he was even more distant.

She even had a feeling that Roland had gone far ahead of her.

This made Tilly a little frustrated.

If only he could be more frank.

...

Seeing the shells that were produced with great difficulty exhaust in a blink, Roland felt his heart was aching. In spite of this, he still had to put on an inscrutable look to cover up his unwillingness.

This was not a new cannon testing in a real sense.

In order to achieve a brilliant demo effect, he asked Iron Axe to borrow a group of elite artillery from the artillery battalion and had them start on simulative shooting practice a few days beforehand, during which they also carried out two rounds of ball firing practice. This was nothing but a force demonstration specially prepared for the witches.

The shooting went on well, and the result was also excellent—at least from Agatha's shocked look, one could tell that the performance of the cannons had blown her mind.

Nonetheless, to Roland, the firing performance of this Longsong Cannon was far from ideal.

Except for the sacred caliber of 152 mm, the rest of it was not even close to that of the real 152. With Anna's ability in precision machining, Lucia's in element purification and Sylvie's in crack detection, theoretically, he could manufacture modern cannons in a real sense, rather than a replica that only had a shooting range of seven to eight kilometers.

The key lay in details.

For now, it appeared that the setting of its chamber was too small.

In consideration of the weight of fixed ammunition, Roland decreased the volume of the chamber on purpose, which resulted in insufficiency in powder charge. Although it had a long barrel of 40 caliber, its shooting range was still unsatisfactory.

Another thing was propellant.

Since nitroglycerin was still in the process of testing, all that was loaded to the cannons was nitrocotton. This was also a reason why Roland felt it was a pity that the nitrocotton consumed by a few shells was enough to load thousands of bullets. In addition, these smokeless propellants had not been gelatinized, which further decreased the powder charge.

Finally, the shell itself was after all a larger version of the bullet. If the bullet had not been charged, it all relied on kinetic energy to create lethality. Missing the target meant zero harm. At this stage it could only be used to attack some slow enemies.

Overall, there was still a long way to go before they were able to barrage and cover every inch of the earth with cannon shells.

However, Roland felt he probably did not have as much time as he initially expected.

Ever since he knew that the transformation of the Magic Stone was originated from demons, he felt increasingly alert deep down inside.

"If demons also had their own scientific technologies, would they enjoy an advance by leaps and bounds in these technologies at some point?"

Chapter 358: Invitation

This was not a wild guess, but it could be best proved by the development of human civilization.

It took mankind nearly a million years to enter the Iron Age from the Stone Age, but only 3,200 years from the Iron Age to the Age of Steam. From the Age of Steam to the Electric Age, it merely took 150 years, and the world directly stepped into the information era in another 50 years.

From the information Agatha disclosed, demons were not an invariable race. Over 800 years ago, they combatted in a close range with knives and shields made of bronze and pig iron, fighting in a similar way to mankind. In order to compete against witches, some Senior Demons would also wear God's Stones of Retaliation. Every time they attacked a city, demons generally did not have any effective countermeasures for long-distance weapons such as crossbow bolts and mangonels, and therefore always suffered great loss before conquering a fortified city. If they were not born to possess such immense power, perhaps mankind would have become the ultimate victor of the first Battle of Divine Will.

Nevertheless, demons had already been able to mass produce Magic Stones in the second Battle of Divine Will, and their groups had also experienced differentiation. Demons of various forms took on diverse operation missions, and even Mad Demons who outweighed in number had also developed measures for long-distance attack. According to Agatha, they even created transportation tools and engineering instruments driven by Magic Stones! Now more than 400 years had passed, how far had they evolved?

Roland originally thought Agatha would bring him the Magic Stone technologies from Taquila's Quest Society, and based on them, he would be able to wedge a new path of industrial development, but he did not expect that such technologies were from the enemies. In that way, the competition against demons would very likely become a war between industrial and Magic Stone technologies.

"Only the one that develops technologies faster will win in the end."

At this thought, Roland could not help but heave a sigh. It seemed necessary to have a thorough discussion with Tilly.

...

Roland met Tilly Wimbledon at his office after dinner.

He felt pleased when he saw she came alone—at least there had been great progress in terms of trust between them.

"Nightingale told me you want to discuss something with me." she took a seat and came straight to the point.

"Yes." Roland poured a cup of tea and handed it over to her himself. "It's mainly about how to cope with the third Battle of Divine Will and our future."

Tilly took the tea cup and blinked, seeming to wait for him to continue.

"According to Agatha, the Four Kingdoms was merely a tip of the Land of Dawn and that even the Barbarian Land used to be the most prosperous Fertile Plains. It was after being defeated by demons twice that human beings had to retreat to this place. Based on the time the Stone Gates opened, the third Battle of Divine Will is at the corner." Roland hesitated for a moment and stated bluntly, "I hope you can stay."

Tilly smiled faintly after a short pause and said, "I didn't expect you would say that."

"The strength of demons is unpredictable, and we must gather all the powers available to win the war. Although Agatha said the first Battle of Divine Will was operated by both mortals and witches, it was very likely that their cooperation was only on the surface, which essentially had no difference from the second Battle of Divine Will." He addressed in a sincere tone, "As you've already seen, the excess of the memories in my head possesses weapons sufficient to defeat demons. Once these memories are converted to physical entities, mortals can also burst out powers beyond imagination. The right choice is to have witches take care of the operation of war machines, while ordinary people fight in the war. Upon a big war, one more person means one more source of strength."

"..." Tilly took a sip of the tea and did not answer for quite a while. Roland felt his heart was in his throat.

Yet under such circumstances, there was no use feeling vexed. He put on a composed look, waiting silently for Tilly to speak.

After seven minutes or so, Tilly finally heaved a sigh and broke the silence. "If I stay, what about the witches on the Sleeping Island?"

"Does that mean... she agreed?" Roland restrained his excitement. "Ask them to come to the Border Town. They are totally welcome here. I'll mark off a plot of land for your witches, and each of them will be equally paid as those in the Witch Union—ah, I don't mean making them members of the Union. They'll still be led by you. It's like establishing a special autonomous district in the Western Region. This is not only convenient for our cooperation, but also helpful to boost the mutual understanding between us."

"Will they be equally paid?" She could not help but smile, "You don't mind their abilities? You know most of them can't fight for you."

"No, no," Roland waved his hand repeatedly and said, "In the cooperation model I have conceived, assistant witches, on the contrary, can play a more important role than combat ones, because it isn't themselves that are strengthened, but hundreds of thousands of ordinary people—nature doesn't lack power, but lacks people who discover and make use of them. In this regard, the abilities of assistant witches are far greater."

"Is this your real purpose?" she asked slyly.

"Um..."

"It's indeed a generous offer." Tilly smiled, shaking her head. "In view of the public concerns, I can't refuse your request to jointly fight against the intrusion of demons; in view of the personal concerns, I also want to stay here to learn the interesting knowledge. However, I can't give you my consent now."

A bit surprised, Roland immediately asked, "Why?"

"Since I am the leader elected by the witches on the Sleeping Island, I can't decide their future based on my personal preference. Once moved to the Western Region, the organization will inevitably lose its independence. If something happens, they'll be too vulnerable to resist. If one day there're conflicts between us, should all the witches have to pack up and return to the the Sleeping Island again?"

"No, I'll never..."

"I can't put their future in an oral promise," Tilly interrupted, "If you were me, would you surrender everything of yours to me simply because we are allies?"

Roland was instantly speechless. He knew the answer even without thinking about it. If he himself was in such a situation, he would never agree with others easily. Most of the time, the closer two people are, the more likely they'll have conflicts. That's exactly what the so-called "befriending a distant state while attacking a neighbor" means. The same applies to powers and lovers.

"See? You are worried about the same thing as I am."

"But... you are my younger sister. I won't hurt you." Roland had no choice but to make the last effort.

"Really... but for the reason you just said, I still can't trust it," Tilly closed her eyes somewhat melancholy, "this is probably why I can't promise you right away." She paused for a little bit, as if she wanted to leave those thoughts behind, "Let's just treat each other as an ally for now—I will give my full support to the construction of Border Town. If you need witches, I'll try to meet your requirements as much as I can... If it's really hard to resist the attacks from demons, you can still return to Sleeping Island and spend the rest of your life in peace. This is all that I can do so far."

Chapter 359: Different Choices

The fire in the fireplace shook for a second and fainted. Nightingale revealed herself, and put some firewood inside. Cracking sounds came from the fireplace and the flames suddenly rose up.

Roland looked at the stretched shadow of the cup and took a deep exhalation. Tilly had been away for some time, and he had been recalling their conversation to see if there was any way to change the result, but it ended up in vain - trust is very intriguing, and only by taking a lot of time can he earn someone's trust.

"It seems that you're not capable of everything," said Nightingale. She brushed off the dust on her hand and sat back at her usual place, "What on earth did you say to her that day?"

"A white lie." Roland leaned on the chair. "It's very normal that she doesn't believe it." He paused and said, "You said that you had a younger brother. If he suddenly becomes very different than he used to be, and keeps saying that he's still himself, will you believe him?"

"Do you mean that guy who looked innocent but then betrayed me at the back?" Nightingale twitched her mouth, "As far as I see, he was basically no different than a mutation."

"Well, I shouldn't have mentioned this."

"It doesn't matter. Anyway, I'm not a member of Gelan Family anymore, and they're just strangers to me." She said carelessly.

"She and I were once just like strangers as well," Roland sighed and continued, "or I would rather say that I didn't get along well with anyone in the palace."

"If you feel bored, you can share it with me." Nightingale gave a subtle smile, "I've been very curious about the royal life, but I also want to know how bad you were at that time. How could you be so bad that your notorious reputation was even spread to the Silver City?"

"To be honest, back then I was much worse than now." Roland could not help but raise his lips. He picked some stories from his memories and said briefly, "Probably from the moment she fell onto the glass slag, she began to hate me."

"It's indeed... terrible," she clicked her tongue and continued, "but I think she doesn't hate you now."

"Oh?" Roland raised his eyebrows and asked, "How could you know that?"

"Of course I know. Didn't she say these words—in view of the personal concerns, I also want to stay here to learn the interesting knowledge." Nightingale imitated. "It sounded like a consolation, but the truth is that she didn't lie about it. If she still hates you as much as she did in the past, she would never feel like staying here."

"Are you comforting me?" Roland smiled and said.

"I'm just telling the truth," she shrugged and continued, "and I think it's fine to maintain the status quo."

"Why?"

"She promised to give priority to providing witches for the town to support you against demons, so there's no difference whether she stays here or not. If the witches on the Sleeping Island all come to the town at the same time, with more witches like Ashes, I may be very busy." Nightingale threw a dried fish into her mouth and muttered, "Not everyone is as obedient as Maggie."

Roland could not help but laugh, "It sounds like that you had some issues with Ashes before?"

"Oh? Of course not. How could it be," Nightingale waved her hands and said, "I just keep my eyes on her occasionally to prevent her turning against the Witch Union."

"Really?"

She turned her head to another side and whistled.

"I'm not sure if it's an illusion," Roland stared at her. "Why do you feel so happy when I was rejected?"

"That's an illusion," affirmed Nightingale, and then she looked at the door, "well, someone is coming." With these words, she concealed herself.

"Was it just her excuse to get away?" Just at this moment, someone began to knock on the door outside the office.

Roland was very surprised. It was almost midnight now. Who would come at this time of the night? He changed a new candle for the candlestick and said, "Come in."

The visitor was Agatha.

The prince was shocked for a moment and asked, "What's the matter?"

She didn't reply but came to sit down at the round stool beside the table, "Ms. Wendy said that the flintlock that can fight against Extraordinaries and the cannon with an amazing long shooting range were both your ideas. Is it true? And the theories behind these things and their manufacturing methods are all recorded in the books you wrote? "

"Do you mean Natural Science Theoretical Foundation and Elementary Chemistry? There're related theories in them, but as for their manufacturing methods, they're not written down because of length." said Roland, "After all, they are just textbooks for elementary theories. " Do you come to see me just for this?"

"Only members of the Witch Union can learn such knowledge, right?" she didn't reply but continued to ask.

Roland nodded and had almost figured out what she wanted to say.

"Then I apply to join the Witch Union," Agatha said without a pause.

"But the Witch Union is an organization belonging to the Border Town. Are you sure you want to work for the town?" he said with curiosity, "Its lord is not a Transcendent but just an ordinary mortal."

"Any mortal that can create weapons to defend demons is not ordinary at all. Even in the Quest Society, there'll be a place for you." Agatha paused for a little bit and said, "As long as it does no harm to the witches and it's not against the survivors of the Union, I don't mind... cooperating with a mortal."

Probably it's a little hard for her to say "to work for a mortal" at the moment, but Agatha's capability of accepting new things had impressed Roland a lot. Perhaps someone who was engaged in research was always able to accept new things quickly. He restrained himself from smiling and said, "I thought you would follow Tilly to the Sleeping Island, which is a city built by the witches."

"It's just a refuge for hiding from the hunting of the Church," she shook her head and said, "I've learned about everything from them before I made this decision. And I've seen so many cities ruled by the witches before I was frozen, yet they were all gone without any traces. It'll be meaningless if we cannot defeat demons. I wish I could see the hope of victory here."

"You will," Rolland nodded, "but as to not be against the Union... I cannot promise that, because it probably hasn't been gone, but just changed its name and covered itself up."

"What?" Agatha was shocked.

"I've thought about what you said carefully. Even if you ran away from Taquila after it was defeated, there were still Transcendents and many Blessed Warriors in the Union. On this undeveloped land in

which many original inhabitants are living, they can't entirely extinct unless they intend to do so." Roland said in a deep voice, "The Church is probably a transformation of the Union. It were not the mortals that took away the power and the methods of creating God's Punishment Army from the witches, but the witches themselves did that and turned the Union into an organization that hunted witches. In this way, it's more convenient for them to create a large number of God's Punishment Armies."

"Are you saying that it's the Union that has led to the tragic situation where witches are oppressed and hunted?" She said in great surprise.

"I'm not sure yet. It's just a guess." Roland stood up and went to the bookcase, took out several thick black books and handed them to her. "You can find their chronology written by the Church itself, and the histories of the Four Kingdoms written by astrologers. You can make reference to them. In any case, the Church is now our enemy that we must eliminate in the future."

"If you decide to stand on the side of witches and fight against demons with me, you're most welcome at the Witch Union."

Chapter 360: Ice

Early in the next morning, Agatha received parchment scroll from Roland.

"What is it?"

"A contract. After you leave your fingerprint on it, you'll officially become a member of the Witch Union."

She spread the scroll of paper, carefully read the contents in it and asked in surprise, "That's all?"

"Yup?" Roland seemed a little confused about what she said, "Why ask?"

"The restrictions on it are useless," Agatha pointed to the part of "Services" and continued, "it just mentions that witches cannot betray Border Town unless the mutual agreement between both parties is breached, but there isn't any restricting measures. If a witch does want to break the contract, she might have no pressure at all. Besides, and the wordings are way too loose. Is this a real contract?"

"Well, I just wrote it casually and it's just a kinda formality." The prince nodded without any surprise. It seemed that Agatha was not the first one to point out the loopholes of this contract.

"It's a formality full of loopholes ." Secretly criticizing the contract in her mind, she then touched the ink pad and put her thumbprint on it. There were very few requirements for both parties in the contract of the Witch Union. According to the articles, Agatha could barely see any differences after she joined the Witch Union. Although she thought it was unnecessary to sign the contract, she felt much relieved than before.

She said she would work with the mortals, but she knew it well that the man with gray hair was the real leader of the Union. If she had to work for a mortal like the way she served the Union or the leader of three cities with the utmost deference, she would probably not accept it. But now, she was at least free to a large extent.

Roland put away the contract and asked curiously, "What were the restrictions on the contract of Taquila?"

"It was only used for recruiting the mortals and the penalties included corporal punishment and mental torture." She twitched her mouth. "As for us witches, we didn't need such contracts. Once you joined the Union, you should serve it for your lifetime and there was only death for traitors."

"Okay," he took a breath and said, "welcome to the Witch Union." After breakfast, remember to come to the castle garden. I need to test your ability comprehensively."

...

The ability test was much easier than what Agatha thought. All she needed to do was to show every characteristic of her ability once in front of the prince and answer some questions.

"The form of the magic power is a sky blue pentagonal prism and it's a medium level. It belongs to the summon category. Your ability has evolved once. The initial performance is creating a low temperature, and it can freeze at a normal temperature after evolution, which is a very convenient ability," Roland asked after recording the results, "how did you get evolved? "

"Constant practice and a sudden enlightenment," she proudly said. As the youngest High Awakened, she was called "the Genius of Taquila" by all the members of the Union. "Every day I kept trying to lower the temperature to freeze the water instantly. One day, I saw a witch who manipulated the flame to melt a piece of lead into liquid, and as the lead was heated by the flame, the lead water began to boil."

"This scene made me realize that everything may have three states: gaseous, liquid and solid—lead is solid at room temperature, but if the temperature is high enough, it can also turn into gas; water is liquid at room temperature, and when the temperature falls, it can freeze into ice."

"So for gas at normal temperature, can it freeze as long as the temperature is low enough, just like the case of the lead?"

"With this idea, I quickly felt the magic power in my body changing entirely, and I finally evolved into a Senior Witches. This enlightenment is also recorded in the General Principles."

In fact, she was the youngest witch whose enlightenment was recorded in that book. Back then, even all the Three Chiefs praised her, for such enlightenment was very significant in enlightening witches to evolve and in practical research. However, when she said those in a serious manner, Roland was quite calm.

"I see." The prince nodded. "What is the General Principles?"

"Wait... Aren't you surprised at all?" Agatha asked surprisedly. "The world is full of gas everywhere. It can be anywhere and without any weight. Actually, the gas can turn into flowing water and frozen ice."

"They are very normal phenomena, and there are many kinds of gases, each of which has different boiling points and melting points." Roland shrugged. "Why should I be surprised? These're common sense in Natural Science Theoretical Foundation."

"..." Agatha was quite shocked and hurt, and she took two deep breaths and said, "Alright, I'll read it carefully."

"The General Principles..."

"It records the feelings and experiences of the High Awakened during their evolution," she said in discontent, "but the abilities of witches are different from each other, which makes it very difficult for them to evolve by imitation and referencing, so this book is of course incomparable to your Natural Science Theoretical Foundation!"

"Did I say something wrong?" The prince was quite confused.

"No, I'm too arrogant," Agatha was unhappier now.

"Well." He seemed to figure out the reason, so he changed the topic quickly. "You just said that the abilities of the witches are different from each other... so there's no one sharing the same ability among thousands of witches in the Union?"

"No," she replied bluntly, "The Quest Society believes that the form of magic power decides the ability, but there are no witches sharing the same form of magic power."

"But when you first saw Anna, you could instantly tell that it was the ability of fire control."

"It's just an informal categorization, which is easy to understand. The abilities of generating light and heat can be categorized into fire control, but with the development of magic power, consolidation after growing up, or High Awakening, similar abilities will change greatly. Even at the initial stage of fire control, some witches are good at controlling the temperature, some generating greater fire, and some throwing the fire. Even if there're no obvious differences, it's because of the lack of careful observation," Agatha said, "The Quest Society's categorization method was much more formal and basically the same as yours."

"Also three categories?" Roland asked.

"Four. The main difference is the summoning type—the Quest Society divided it into two categories, Magic Power and Shaping. You can understand the difference from the literal meanings."

"The former means that the summoning of the ability costs magic power all the time, just like Anna's. When the magic power is gone, the summoning of the ability will stop. And Shaping can exist for a very long time, just like the Coating drawn by Soroya, right?"

"Although I don't know the exact ability of Soroya, it's pretty much like that... That can stay for a long time can be taken as Shaping, such as my ability of freezing at a normal temperature."

"Understood." Roland recorded these contents as well. "That's all for the test today." Usually, if you receive no assignment from me, you can practice your ability as you wish, but I'm thinking that someone might urgently need your help."

"Who?"

"Kyle Sichi, the Chief Alchemist of Border Town."