

Witch 421

Chapter 421: The Interrogation

The prison of the town hadn't changed much since he arrived one year ago.

His mass infrastructure development did not extend to this place, and although the houses and roads above the ground had been renovated, the prison below still reeked of decay. Moss grew on the stone walls, and muddy water dripped down the stairs.

The only difference was that the cells held very few prisoners.

Due to the the expansion and development of the territory, anyone who was willing to work was able to find a job. The scoundrels who were unwilling to change were sent by Roland to the mines, where they were whipped into shape.

Since Anna had wrecked the cells at the bottom of the prison, and there was no need to repair them, the entire lower floor was sealed off and abandoned. Roland followed Iron Axe to the middle of the third floor and saw the captive Priest—the only criminal on this floor.

The man was not hanging on a torture rack nor beaten to a bloody pulp, which completely defied Roland's idea of an interrogation. He was huddled in the icy corner of his cell, and although his clothes were all intact, he seemed completely lifeless and pale with hollow eyes without focus.

"Is he alright?" Roland asked quietly.

"It's not an issue, Your Highness," Iron Axe answered with a bow. "If you have any questions, you can ask him directly."

The prince nodded. The Sand Nation's interrogation methods were indeed unique, but he was not interested in the specifics or the humanity of Iron Axe's process, as long as it got the job done. He cleared his throat, sat down on the long wooden bench near the cell, and asked the Priest through the bars, "What's your name?"

"Are you the Fourth Prince of Kingdom of Graycastle... Roland Wimbledon?" The man's expression changed. "Look... look at what you've done. You've unleashed the demons' powers."

"His Highness is asking your name," said Iron Axe coldly. "If you don't want to undergo last night's punishment again, then cut the crap."

The Priest's face froze, and after a short pause, he lowered his head and said, "My... my name is Campus."

"I heard you're from the Holy City of Hermes?" Roland glanced at the man. "Who was the witch traveling with you? Was she also from the Holy City? What was her role in the church?"

"Her..." Campus seemed hesitant and was silent for a long time before answering, "Her name was Aurora, and she was one of Master Tayfun's Pure Witches. She didn't take any positions in the church."

"Tayfun?" The prince pondered for a while upon this familiar name.

"He's one of the three Archbishops of the Holy City, in charge of the church's external affairs. His position is second only to the Supreme Pontiff." The Priest explained.

Roland suddenly remembered that he had met this person before—at a ceremony in King's City. That day, King Wimbledon III organized a big coming-of-age celebration for Tilly Wimbledon, and Tayfun was the Bishop sent by the church to the ceremony. In his memory, Tayfun seemed like a benevolent old man with a caring and forgiving smile, as if he had nothing to do with anything evil in the world.

"What's a Pure Witch?"

Campus hesitated once more, but after Iron Axe threatened him again, he grudgingly responded. "Pure Witches are witches who are raised by the church and directly managed by Bishops and the Supreme Pontiff, so I don't know too much about them."

Roland scratched his ear to signal for Nightingale's confirmation and learned that the man was not lying.

"How many people know about the church's hidden witches?"

The Priest shook his head. "Master Tayfun only told me about this two years ago and ordered me not to tell other believers, so... I'm not sure how many people know."

"The church is obviously very secretive about raising Pure Witches, which at least means they aren't publicly holding a double standard," thought Roland. "This is definitely good news." This finally confirmed his suspicion and gave him another piece of evidence to hold against the church—if the believers found out that the sermons they received were all false and that the church was secretly raising the very enemies they were taught to fight under their noses, how would they react?

"What was your motive in sabotaging the Lord of Fallen Dragon Ridge? Why did you want to take her back to Hermes?"

"I don't know. My only mission was to monitor Aurora, so only she knows the exact motive. There was a change of plans because Aurora discovered that the lord was actually a witch, and the new Pope thus ordered us to send all captured witches back to the Holy City to be purified."

"Purified," Roland snorted. "Do you actually believe that? If purified witches... no, Pure Witches are sinless, why would the church keep their existence as a secret?"

"Because... because some believers aren't devoted enough, so this's the only way for now..." His voice trailed off, and he eventually closed his mouth.

The prince sneered. "Where did you plan to go after leaving Fallen Dragon Ridge?"

"Redwater City."

"After that?"

"Impassable Castle."

"Anywhere else?"

"Just these three cities." The Priest responded numbly, having given up resisting after disclosing the information about Pure Witches. "Master Tayfun didn't tell us when to return, so we were going to stay at Impassable Castle awaiting new orders."

His answer matched the letter found on the witch's body. "Why these three cities?"

Campus shook his head.

It seemed that he didn't know much since for the church, he was probably just a monitor for the Pure Witch. Roland stroked his chin and thought, "Fallen Dragon Ridge is in the Southern Territory, Redwater city in the center of the kingdom, and Impassable Castle between the Northern and Western Territories, so they have nothing in common, and they aren't important passes or intersections. Even if the church wanted to overturn the Kingdom of Graycastle, they wouldn't start with these cities."

If he had to name a similarity between them, it would be that they all lay on the border of the Western Territory—a thought suddenly sprang into his mind: Was he actually the person the emissary delegation was targeting at?

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The interrogation didn't stop until evening. Roland collected his information and stood up. When he was about to leave, he noticed that the Priest was sitting motionless against the wall, as still as a corpse, neither begging for mercy nor cursing in fury. This surprised him greatly. "Aren't you asking what I intend to do with you?"

"You tortured me into confessing all this... and God will bear witness," Campus said with his eyes closed. "God is my final judge, not you. It doesn't matter what you'll do to me."

"Your Highness, give me another night with him," said Iron Axe. "I'll turn his attitude around."

"Not necessary. This is enough." Since the Priest had already confessed everything, Roland had no interest in continuing to torture him. "He'll be judged, not by God... but by the people."

Chapter 422: Public Trial

Shortly after winter began, a wooden stage was built in the center of the square. It was the first of its kind for the people of Border Town. It wasn't for a theatrical performance but rather to conduct the first public trial.

A notice had been issued two days prior. On the day of the trial the stage was surrounded by a large crowd. The square area was much larger after the extension but it still wasn't large enough to accommodate the entire community. There were scattered snowflakes falling from the sky, but everyone was too excited and completely ignored the wind and snow.

The atmosphere suddenly reached extremity as Roland appeared on the stage.

Watching the audience at the bottom waving their arms at him, he was emotionally touched. Once he had been almost a laughing stock in the eyes of the nobility and he'd had little influence on his subjects. Now, after just one year, the situation was reversed.

With shouts from the crowd, the Priest Campus was pushed onto the stage. His facial expressions changed a little while facing the crowd. Perhaps this parade was common for the top management from the church. They were accustomed to worship from the believers, and could easily influence the lives of these people with a single word or action, Roland thought. Except that this time, he probably wouldn't go through the brilliance of the past.

With excitement in their eyes, the witches from the union walked up to the wooden stage. They had always been slandered, hunted, unjustly treated and tried. But this time the roles were reversed. Witches were the victims, accusers, and jurors, and the trial object was the church. They had always imagined such a scene, but never expected that such a day would come so quickly.

Roland waved his hands and the people quieted immediately.

"Greetings, my people."

"The purpose of today's gathering is to reveal a shameful crime. The church has hidden the truth from the very beginning. I wouldn't have discovered this shocking news if the Priest of the Holy City had not been captured in a rebellion case."

Roland had been thinking about how to reveal the church's crime effectively for the past two days. The rebellion case of Fallen Dragon Ridge shouldn't be the key point, because the story from a small town far away from them wouldn't gain their attention; the Battle of Divine Will and the Kingdom of Witches shouldn't be mentioned, for the story of a few hundred years ago was irrelevant for them and it might cause panic if it revealed the existence of demons. He needed to share something that they cared about in order to arouse the indignation of the masses.

In other words, it had to touch their hearts.

With no doubt, the witches who lived here shared the same daily lives with the people.

"The church has claimed that witches are the devil's minions, persons that are neither clean nor fortunate, but in fact, both the Pope and the Archbishop have been sheltering witches in a surprisingly large scale! This was said by the Priest himself." Roland faced the Priest and said, "Am I correct?"

After a long silence, Campus replied, "Yes."

Discussions broke out in the crowd.

"Your Highness, is he really a priest from the Holy City?" someone asked.

"Of course," said Roland, showing an expression of praise in the direction of Echo. "He was sent to the Kingdom of Graycastle in the name of the church as a Saint, and all the documents he's brought reveal his identity!" Roland pointed to a small table beside the wooden stage. "Priest's robe, badge, circular letter, all can be used as evidence."

The crowd was liable to doubts about these, so he would let Echo ask first and then answer them accordingly. Furthermore, these items were real, he didn't need to fake it.

"My people, come back to what I said before," continued the prince. "Take note of the term I used—sheltering! Yes, they gather female infants and orphans from all over the country to the monastery of

the Holy City and these women are treated as animals. Only a few turn into witches, and proceed to further their training. The rest simply become trinkets for Church believers."

"No, these ..." Campus raised his head and opened his mouth, but he could hardly make a sound.

"In order to get more witches, they shelter female wanderers in the name of relief, and even collude with Black Street Rats to steal infants! Please think, my people, if there were a church in this town, you wouldn't only lose Miss Nana, but also a family member of yours could be missing too. They claim that the witches are evil spirits, seduced by demons, and drive believers to persecute these innocent women. Could you tolerate if Miss Nana was framed by them?"

"Never, Your Highness, never!"

The atmosphere of the square was hot, and people shook their fists, expressing their anger at the Priest.

"Miss Nana can't be evil, and she is the one who cured my injury!"

"I've know her since she was little. She was my daughter's classmate in Karl's college."

"I would have been killed by demonic beasts if not for her healing. She is an angel to the First Army."

Roland paused for a moment so the crowd could voice their dissatisfaction, then he continued. "So, why did they do that?"

The question caused a commotion among the subjects.

"Because the church needed witches to maintain their rule!" Before they could make more speculation, the prince said, "As you know, the witches' abilities are varied and incredible! Besides Miss Nana's healing and Miss Lily's elimination of demonic plague, they have many other abilities that can improve our lives. The water supply equipment in our town was made by Miss Anna and Miss Soraya. The flintlocks used by the First Army and the steam engine that pulls the miner's truck, all these are gifts given by the witches. Our town wouldn't have achieved any of this without their contributions."

"But everything has two sides. Like a sword, it can be used to fight the demonic beasts or used to kill the innocent. The church is using the witches' abilities to hurt good people. And those who don't obey them are regarded as God's outcast. In fact, the top management of the church is committing a heinous crime which is recorded in the doctrine, and they completely disregard that their God is watching them."

"My dear people, if your children were to be kidnapped by the church and used to hurt you after being trained. If they became the church's whip and razor, how sad that would be!"

Roland turned around, walked to the front of Campus, expanded the long roll of paper, and asked loudly, "Do you have anything else to say about the accusations recorded on this paper?"

"These... are all true." Popping his eyes, the Priest looked as if he couldn't believe he had uttered these words. "I... admit guilt."

The masses became very angry.

"I hand over the right of judgment to you all!" Roland said loudly while the crowd was agitated, "For this evil, your choice is..."

"Kill him!"

"Kill him!"

"Kill him!"

Everybody was shouting the same words, soon there was only one voice left in the square.

In Border Town, with scattered snowflakes floating above, the people made their choice.

Chapter 423: The "Connection"

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Spear Passi solemnly signed her name at the end after she read both contracts several times.

One was the Memorandum of Unification and the other Memorandum of the Witch Union.

The first contract agreed that Spear would lead Fallen Dragon Ridge to give allegiance to Roland Wimbledon after Timothy Wimbledon's rule was overthrown, and in response to the request of the new king, she would surrender her power, and Roland would guarantee her position as the Lord of Fallen Dragon Ridge and other rights. The memorandum categorized those to three categories which were human affairs, administrative and finance. Although such a categorization was new but easy for her to understand of which her daily routine was also included too.

Spear thought about the second contract for a long time before she made up her mind, as this time the union was to serve Prince Roland without any doubt. She didn't want to join Prince Roland so fast, he just occupied the corner region of the Kingdom of Graycastle. But the content of the evening lecture was attractive, and she vaguely sensed that the unique method of calculation would be helpful in managing her territory.

Fortunately, the constitutions of the Memorandum of the Witch Union were very loose, more like a formal consensus, and didn't even limit the whereabouts of its members. She consulted with the prince regarding this, and his reply was that the members could leave any time they wanted.

"I've signed it."

Spear placed two elegant parchments on the table, but Roland didn't respond. He looked at the empty side as if thinking about something.

"Your Highness?"

"Ah..." He blinked eyes as if he had come back. "Let me have a look at it."

He had seldom been so absent minded before the negotiation, and it seemed like after the trial yesterday, His Highness felt confused. This made it difficult for her to understand. The trial was an absolute success, and people were on his side and cheered him. Before that, Spear had never thought the ordinary people would support a nobility. She thought that she and they were in two different worlds, and the nobility needed neither the understanding nor supporting of the people. But she changed her mind one day ago. After seeing people surrounding the square waving their fists, shouting

with a strong voice that shook the sky and land, she realized that they might contain a power that she had never felt and it was more powerful than the noble.

Besides, the decisive judgment displayed by His Highness was also one of the reasons why she signed these two contracts.

Regardless of whether he's trying to protect the witches, it's some kind of good faith to punish rebels who are against his royal power. Considering this, she should respond accordingly.

However, His Highness doesn't seem satisfied... Is he regretting being against the church publicly?

Spear was clear that it was not an enemy they could easily deal with.

It's better to figure it out since it's related to the direction of the future co-operation. She hesitated, and then mentioned it diplomatically.

The prince was astonished for a while after he heard this, and then he shook his head and smiled. "I never regret fighting against the church, after all, they're enemies that must be defeated from all aspects of the view."

"So why..."

"I just have some mixed feelings now."

"Mixed feelings?"

"I feel a little embarrassed, although what I said was true and what I disclosed were the crimes committed by the church." He shrugged, "It seems as I'm not a qualified politician."

Politician? What's that? Like an astrologer devoting himself to studying stars, is a politician someone devoting himself to studying politics?

His Highness stopped the topic before she could ask. "I'll keep these parchments. I heard that your ability is related to controlling magic power?"

"Yes." Spear stopped questioning. "To be more precise, it's to extract the magic power of one witch for other witches to use. Of course, I can also retrieve and recover my own magic power for the purpose of consumption. As this process doesn't have a big impact on the outside world, I can repeat the process anytime in the castle."

"How did you find out you have such an ability?" the prince asked curiously.

"After my awakening." The Marquess answered, "I've no idea how other witches got to know their abilities, but I could feel it, and the feeling was like... you suddenly owned an extra organ."

"Interesting description." He nodded thoughtfully. "You should know that the reason I sent Nightingale to Fallen Dragon Ridge is to pass you an invitation."

"You need my ability." Spear paused a moment and bowed. "It's my honor to serve you."

Anyway, since there was no way for her to return to Fallen Dragon Ridge at the moment, it was better for her to see what the prince usually do, despite the fact that she had just being in the town for a week.

She realized that the town was different from others, a secluded land that was far away from the center of the Kingdom, but as energetic as the capital. As a Lord, she was curious.

What made Spear more surprised was that the life of the witches here was completely different from what she had imagined. The prince didn't over control them, but rather allowed them to live freely, and this could be seen from his waiting for the return of Nightingale—he obviously hoped that she could return early, but still agreed with her requisition.

His Royal Highness didn't treat them as servants.

Some nobles sheltered witches because of their beauty. She thought it would have been done more unscrupulously because His Highness openly recruited witches, but he was surprisingly self-disciplined.

Was the rumor true? Was the prince both prudent and incompetent?

She had more faith and felt ridiculous at the same time. When she thought it back, she felt what Nightingale had told her was totally true.

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She left the castle with the prince and they came to a yard at the back of the town, where Spear saw two other witches.

"This's Anna and this's Mystery Moon." Roland introduced. "The Magic Power of Mystery Moon is considered at a relatively low level, but the consumption of her magic power is astonishing."

"I'm obviously at a middle level!" Mystery Moon protested.

"Among the awakened witches," the prince added.

Mystery Moon kept quiet immediately.

"Do you want me to connect their magic powers?" Spear looked at Anna. "Does she have the strongest magic power in the union? I suggest that you invite a few more witches to come over. The stock magic power is related to their age, even if there's a difference, it wouldn't be big."

"It's just an experiment," His Highness said, touching his chin, "and if it works, I'll ask them to come over."

The Marquess nodded and summoned the passage of magic power—it was a sphere shining with blue light, quietly floating in the air. Under her control, two thin tentacle-shaped threads stretched out from the sphere to Anna and Mystery Moon.

"You'll feel weird in the beginning, so just relax and it'll be fine," Spear explained. "It'll fail to transfer the magic power if you resist it."

Anna was shocked when the tentacle touched her chest.

What's... happening here? It seems the tentacle is connected to a solid metal cube instead of the rotating magic power. It's so huge that I feel like an ant standing at the bottom of it, and I can only see its top while raising my head.

Chapter 424: The Dawn I

How is magic power with such a form possible?

Spear "touched" the edge of the metal in disbelief, which was her unique way of sensing magic power. As soon as the passage was connected, she could see, touch, and even smell the magic powers of witches, as if she were entering their bodies.

Hard and cold, the surface was as smooth as a mirror, reflecting every detail of the tentacle-shaped thread. When the antenna-like cord of energy reached the cube, it swiftly bounced back.

"Relax." Marquess comforted her. "They're harmless." She wasn't sure whether her ability could affect this metallic cube since Anna's magic power seemed unable to flow.

After trying a few times, the antenna finally stuck to the cube.

But there was no transmission of magic power.

"What's going on?" Nightingale noticed something was wrong.

"I've never... transported magic power of this kind. It's too massive and doesn't look like the air that can be transferred." Spear felt her throat dry. "As soon as the channel is connected, the magic power should have been absorbed by the 'pivot'."

"I'll try to charge it with magic power." Anna suddenly spoke. "The same way as using the Sigil of God's Will."

"Be careful not to expend too much each time." His Highness nodded.

What was the Sigil of God's Will? Spear found that she'd heard several new terms since she came to this little town.

As she was pondering, the magic power in Anna's body suddenly transformed.

The perfect mirror was broken, and the surface of the metal rippled. The liquid without light rushed into the pipe and then became a floating ball as if pushed by something.

She then felt some weight.

Different from the cyclone of magic power, the liquid was very heavy. As it flew into the pivot, it was like putting in chunks of iron ingot. Spear found that she was consuming an increasing amount of magic power.

It was rather unbelievable. Prior to this, she could easily exhibit her abilities for half a day. Now at this rate, she might not be able to last a few hours.

Out of desperation, she drew out another cord from the pivot, connected it with her own body, and sustained the channel using Anna's magic power.

When the light ball was full, the metal cube in Anna's body was still in its original form, as if the magic power it lost was only a very insignificant portion.

Spear really wanted to take back what she had just said. She coughed twice. "Hem... now the channel can supply enough magic power for Miss Mystery Moon. What do we do next?"

"Stick to it." His Highness Roland handed Mystery Moon a copper cylinder. "Now show us what you can do."

"Ok." Mystery Moon took a deep breath, held the copper object in her hands, and closed her eyes.

All of a sudden, the Magic Power began to flow furiously.

Spear saw that the metal cube in Anna's body gleamed, the fluid in the pivot came out, and filled again; the entire channel kept on trembling. It looked as if it would be torn apart by the turbulent magic power. The Marquess had sweat on her forehead. She felt as if she was standing in front of a tsunami.

On the other side, Mystery Moon had a frowned forehead and red cheeks. Obviously, she was also under the impact of the fierce waves. But considering Spear was the one transferring the power, Mystery Moon must be under tremendous impact. Even so, she didn't stop using her abilities, and the rapidly consumed magic power was the proof.

These girls were monsters!

Spear didn't know how she managed to last to the end. When the magic power in Anna's body was drained, Spear felt she could barely stand on her own feet.

"Fi... finished." Mystery Moon opened her eyes and excitedly held up the copper cylinder. "I made it!"

"Well done." Roland carefully clamped the copper object with a pair of wooden tongs, as if it was a red-hot iron.

"What's this?" the Marquess asked. "It looks exactly the same as before."

"A strong magnet with ever changing magnetic force," the prince replied. "I don't know whether it'll form an access with the earth while being held in a person's hand. If so, it would discharge. So we'd better be cautious."

Spear blinked her eyes. "What?"

Nightingale smiled. "Don't mind them. This is such a topic that only Anna can participate in."

"Then... what can it be used for?"

"Let's try it out." Roland put the copper cylinder into a black iron machine standing in the middle of the yard. Judging from the silhouette of the machine, it looked like a giant iron tube. It had a wooden pedestal at the bottom. An iron pole as thick as an arm stuck out from the middle. The prince looked at Mystery Moon. "Turn on the switch. If it works, it'll bring a whole new source of power to the town."

Mystery Moon nodded. She held the wooden handle on the machine and pulled it downward with effort.

Sparks burst out from the downside of her hands, making a crackling sound. To Spear's surprise, the iron pole in the middle began to rotate rapidly. The pole must have been as heavy as one or two people. How could it rotate so fast?

"Have we... succeeded?"

"Not yet." The prince found a chair and sat on it. "It depends on how long it can work."

Spear noticed there was something glittering in Roland's eyes as he looked at the plain rough iron machine. It was as if he was looking at a piece of shining jewelry.

Three days later, Roland pushed open the door to the backyard of the North Slope Mountain. Upon hearing the sound, Anna stopped her work and rushed to greet Roland. She couldn't conceal her excitement. "It's still working."

There was no need for her remark though. The prince also heard the noise made by the operating electric motor. To him, this noise was almost as euphonious as the sounds of nature. Because it meant that the variable magnetic core cylinder, being filled with Mystery Moon's magic power, was still operating properly. As a whole new power source, it had shown its practical use.

Roland came to the center of the yard and saw that Mystery Moon was sitting beside the electric motor. With her hands on her chin, she looked at the black machine, feeling bored. "Your Highness, when you said my abilities are full of potential, did you mean this thing? It doesn't look any different from a steam engine."

"This is only the first step to change the world," Roland said beaming. "You'll be able to see what changes it can bring to our little town soon enough."

Every step forward in the history of the human race was related to the utilization of energy. To some extent it could be used to measure the level of a civilization's advancement. From steam to electricity, from electricity to nuclear, the breakthrough in energy would usually boost the industrial production. The variable magnetic core cylinder filled with Mystery Moon's magic power was such a kind of new energy. It resembled a super large battery and transformed magic power into electric energy. Its small manufacture scale limited its application, which meant it couldn't lead to an energy reform. But as a supplement to the steam engine and internal combustion engine, it was still a perfect power source.

Besides, with the growth of Anna's magic power, it still had the potential to be used in other areas. And when Leaf gained control of the Impassable Forest and obtained the massive magic power supply, the potential was unimaginable.

"The name 'variable magnetic core cylinder' is too long," Roland said, smiling. "Let's call it Dawn I."

Chapter 425: The Utilization of Energy

On the afternoon of the fifth day, the electric motor stopped working.

In other words, a single Dawn I could provide energy for a large-scale electric motor to work for five consecutive days. If an electric motor didn't run continuously, then its work time could be extended. When the magnetic effect of the copper column was lost, it could be recharged with magic power, which was purely low-consumption, recyclable, and pollution-free energy.

Its flaw was also very obvious—recharging it would exhaust all of Anna, Mystery Moon, and Spear’s magic powers. So if the three of them produced a Dawn I per day, it could only sustain five electric motors (non-stop). At the moment, Anna was irreplaceable for the fine machining and steel smelting in the little town. Roland had tried his best to distribute most of the manufacturing work to ordinary townsmen, but without the machine tools produced and maintained by Anna and her supply of materials, the production of revolving firearms and bullets would instantly bog down in stagnancy.

Furthermore, Anna was also essential for the production of the 152 mm Longsong Cannons, new-style light weapons, and Roland’s other new ideas. So he wouldn’t want Anna to strain her magic power on charging the batteries.

Roland leaned back on the wing chair and deeply sighed.

There were two solutions for this problem. First, increasing the duration of Dawn I. To this end, they needed greater resources or more witches to supply magic powers. Unfortunately, the Marquess’ passage was just strong enough to transfer Anna’s magic power and the process almost exhausted her, so she couldn’t manage to transfer any more witches’ magic powers to Mystery Moon. Hopefully, Spear could get used to it gradually—after all, she might not have the time to study how to improve her abilities while she was a lord.

Second, substituting other witches for Anna. Compared with Anna, Soraya, and Agatha (who were usually busy with work), most of the other witches didn’t have to exhaust their magic powers during the day. So if the rest of their magic powers could be used to produce variable magnetic core columns, it seemed plausible.

As long as the total volume of the magic powers didn’t exceed that of Anna’s, Spear would be able to handle it. She had once said that the passage for magic powers could be connected with more than two people at a time.

Thinking of this, Roland wrote it down. Questions like who had more magic powers or how much of the magic powers should be used per day were left for the Witch Union to calculate.

Undoubtedly, Wendy would be a perfect candidate since everybody trusted her.

After finding solutions for this problem, the next question was how to make use of this whole new energy.

Different from the steam engines, of which four to five pieces could be produced per month and would operate as long as boiling water was supplied, the number of terminal conversion machines was dependent on the number of Dawn Is. Considering the magic powers that could be used, he estimated that only three to four terminal conversion machines could be sustained in the little town. Whether to use them as source power, for boiling water, or supplying energy for light bulbs, the correct choice was imperative if the system was to operate steadily.

Roland thought for a long time and finally drew a circle on the light bulbs.

As for source power, electric motors exceeded steam engines in such aspects as stable rotating rates, easy maneuverability, and automatization. But the power supplied by steam engines was enough for the time being. He had also visualized some high-end electric equipment, such as electric cars that

commuted between Longsong Stronghold and the little town, or electric airships that were accessible to ordinary people. But such equipment wasn't so cost effective—to make it work, Anna or other witches had to stop their work for a day.

The same was true with boiling water, which could simply be solved by a boiler and firewood could. Even though several workers needed to be hired to attend to and maintain the steam engines, it was still more economical than using magic powers. After all, the magic powers weren't that abundant.

Furthermore, lighting is more significant—a stable and clean source of light could greatly increase the residents' happiness and render them better study conditions at night. After all, not everybody wants to read a book under the dim candle light after a day's stressful work.

Besides, doing something like seizing the legendary thunder power and using it for daily life would help eliminate suspicion and enhance scientific spirit. This was probably the civilians' most intuitive understanding of electricity's applications. As astonishing as airships and electric cars may sound, they were too far away from people's daily life.

More importantly, the weak candle light simply couldn't meet the needs for night production. With light bulbs, the factories would be able to sustain production even at night, and the workers could even work on three shifts if necessary, which meant the work efficiency in the little town would be further improved.

After setting the direction of development, there were still a series of problems to be solved to achieve his goals, such as light bulb manufacturing, line construction, power supply schemes, and the promotion of electricity utilization, etc.

But these problems could be considered later.

With this thought, Roland called Wendy.

"Do you intend to calculate the daily consumption and the surplus of my sisters' magic powers, and transfer them to Mystery Moon according to the plan?" Wendy asked, after hearing Roland's statement.

"Yes. Those combat witches who have fixed missions can be excluded from your calculation though." The prince nodded. "What do you think?"

Essentially, they were to gather the magic powers left after the witches' ability practice, mission consumption, and emergency preparation, and use them to produce the Dawn I. Such an arrangement could not only put the magic powers of witches into full play, but could also enhance the effects of their practice, which was helpful to the promotion of their magic powers on the annual Days of Awakening.

"I think Hummingbird and Echo would be happy," Wendy said with a smile, "because they can then be as useful as Anna. But how will the magic power surplus be measured?"

"By using the Stone of Measurement, which was a universal method used by the Union."

"Yes, Your Highness." She bowed slightly. "Right, today is the Day of Adulthood for Lucia. Should we gather all the members of the union to accompany her?"

Roland was shocked a bit. "Oh... I've almost forgotten it."

"There are so many things for you to remember," Wendy said softly. "I've written down every sister's growth history on this notebook so that nothing will be missed."

After Anna's Day of Awakening, Lightning, Nana, and Echo had also passed their "second birthday" in succession. But the Day of Adulthood was actually more meaningful and it could be taken as a special Day of Awakening. Although they happened on the same day, the bite of magic power that one suffered on the Day of Adulthood was several times stronger than usual. Unless the witches could master how to eliminate the pain caused by biting, the Day of Adulthood could be a matter of life and death.

After adulthood, the witches' abilities would be stabilized while getting considerable improvements at the same time, and some witches could even develop derivative skills, which was as significant as evolution.

"OK. I'll prepare a rich dinner tonight." Roland said softly, "Besides the Witch Union, I'll be there to accompany her as well."

Chapter 426: The Shining Starlight

After dinner, the witches gathered in Lucia White's room.

Touched by their encouragement and comfort, she could feel her tear-filled eyes. She inhaled deeply with her eyes shut, willing herself not to cry.

"No crying. It's embarrassing enough to cry out loud in front of Nightingale, not to mention in front of my little sister. I must set a good example for her," Lucia chided herself.

She had only heard about a witch organization situated here before she boarded the boat towards the town. She was not hoping to live a good life here but simply to find a cure for her sister's demonic plague and a shelter.

What they found was not only a comfortable life, but a group of people with so much in common that they soon became like family. She felt at home again for the first time since her parents' death in the pirate attack.

"Is my sister really in danger?" Bell asked while resting in Lucia's arms, "How painful is a magic power bite?"

"Unbearable pain, it feels just like thousands of knives stabbing you from the inside of your body." Nightingale grinned. "Only a few witches can survive this. There are probably only one or two out of ten witches who can survive their Day of Adulthood."

The little girl shivered.

"You don't scare her." Wendy stared at Nightingale. "That was all the way back to the time of Witch Cooperation Association."

"All you need to do now is to keep on practicing every day and release all your magic power before the Day of Awakening, then you'll be fine," Scroll said, smiling. "I heard that even Anna was asleep when she was growing into her adulthood."

"And her first High Awakening appeared at the same time," Agatha yawned. "It'd definitely cause a stir if it happened 400 years ago back in Taquila, as there's never any witch who could come to enlightenment in their sleep."

"Are you alright?" His Highness looked at her and asked, "Even though work's important, you should not push yourself too hard."

"The Battle of Divine Will is approaching. If I'm not busy with it now..." Agatha said with her hands covering her mouth, "it would not be an issue to sleep forever if we fail this time."

"We won't fail for sure this time." Prince Roland assured.

"I decided to do a little bit more as I was feeling optimistic about your invention." Ice Witch rolled her eyes at him, "Otherwise, do you really think that I like to stay in the lab every day?" With these words, she turned around and muttered to herself softly, "I wouldn't be able to do anything to you even if you don't fulfill your promise..."

"Well, you shouldn't discuss such a heavy story at this time." Wendy interrupted and said, "Oh yeah, didn't Miss Agatha mention before that each of the witches shall be granted a wish on the Day of Awakening? It's Lucia's turn this time; what would you like to wish for?"

"Uh... me?" Lucia was shocked to find that she was the center of attention in the knot of witches.

"Get the ice cream bread in exchange, sister!" Bell said with her eyes sparkling, "10 of them will do, and we'll have a half each!"

"This one... all you can think of is food," she thought and gave her sister a good knock on her forehead. Then she looked towards Roland. "May I keep this wish for now?"

"If you wish." He could not help but smile and say, "However it would not increase even if you keep it."

"Only one will do," Lucia answered with gratitude. She had nothing more to ask for herself as long as she could live in this town. All she could hope for was for Bell to live a happy life. Her younger sister was not a witch, so she would have to leave her and build her own family with someone someday. This wish might be able to help her if there were any changes by then.

It was then that Lucia felt her empty body tremble suddenly and the magic power was regenerated as if it was appearing in the void and pouring into her body continuously.

"It's started." Nightingale reminded.

Even though the sisters told her not to worry, she grasped the blanket tightly, as a chill washed over her palms and the soles of her feet. This she ascribed to an overwhelming sensation of tension.

"Relax," Wendy said, reaching for her hands. "The magic power is part of our body."

"Should we talk about something else to distract her?" Lucia heard someone, perhaps Lily, ask.

"What should we talk about?" Mystery Moon asked.

"What about the result of the second test?" Lily's voice seemed to come from far away. "Normally once the topic's brought up, she immediately changes the subject and diverts attention, like what about Mystery Moon's results..."

"Don't say!"

"Look, it works."

Lucia wanted to laugh but she realized that the expression on her face was very stiff and it was scorching hot inside her body. At the same time, there was an undefinable sense of contraction and increasingly more magic power as if she was sucking everything around her into her body.

Will every witch experience this feeling in her Day of Adulthood?

"What was Lucia's result?" She could only hear Mystery Moon intermittently.

"Her average was 86," Prince Roland replied.

"Wh... what?"

"That's very high!"

"You see, she didn't even try to stop us."

"You've failed, so it's time for punishment!"

"Go away!"

"Hold on... Stop fighting, Lucia doesn't seem to look right."

She could hear the conversation between Mystery Moon, Lily and finally Nightingale's voice, but she realized the voices of the witches had become distant to her. Lucia was clenching her teeth and she held her head up to look at the sisters around her. She was shocked to see the completely changed scene. Everyone's appearance became hazy and pixelated like a composition of innumerable squares—some big, some small and each of them had a different color.

She wanted to scream in terror but all she could hear was the hissing sound in her breath.

The contraction in her body was getting stronger and it started to cause a vague but growing sense of pain. Lucia could only hold her breath and see people around her starting to get busy.

It was exactly like Nightingale said, the pain in the Day of Adulthood was far beyond the pain of the awakening. The more persistent she was, the stronger the pain became; it felt as if she was being cut into pieces.

Suddenly, a strange magic power probed her body. Lucia could clearly feel the magic power did not belong to herself. It was just like a tube ridden in the magic whirlpool.

She could not bear it any longer, subconsciously yielding to the overwhelming power and allowing the current to carry her. As if she had finally found her savior, Lucia kept injecting the magic power into it to suppress the pain in her body.

The strange contraction eased after a period of time. The magic power no longer twirled around but it felt substantial and solid; it was a completely different experience.

She blinked and was relieved to find that her vision had fully returned.

Looking at a fearful Bell, Lucia patted her head and reassured her in a hoarse voice, "It's alright now."

This was when she realized that she was soaked in sweat. She could feel the chill on her back when the cold wind blew.

"Wait, how could there be any wind in a room with the heater on?"

When she turned her head, she was shocked to see the huge gaps in the wall facing the garden and the two missing windows that allowed the cold air to swarm in. She could see the dark night and the tiny little lights of the small town through the gap. Standing in front of the wall was Anna, looking at her with concern. The Sigil of God's Will in her hand glimmered.

"Her ability has crystallized," Nightingale said.

Chapter 427: The Aftermath

Roland walked into the office yawning as the sky turned bright.

He had not expected so many accidents on the Day of Adulthood. It was supposed to be an easy day.

The magic in Lucia's body became extremely turbulent. Nightingale realized something was wrong with her expression. It was exactly the sign of the magic power bite. It was incredible that this was happening to a witch who practiced frequently, especially since she had released all her magic power prior to her Day of Adulthood.

Agatha came out with a solution.

As an ex-member of the Union she had witnessed countless witches awaken. She quickly thought of a remedy.

Ice Witch made Spear Passi summon the magic power channel and release the bite from Lucia's body. Then it was transferred to Anna who had the greatest capacity. Finally, the restless magic power was absorbed by the Sigil of God's Will.

Surprisingly, the released magic power had lit up four God's Stones and activated the Sigil of God's Will. Anna released it into the open space without further hesitation.

Suddenly, the town was brightened by the golden sun. The dazzling light shone through the castle wall and pierced through the dark, starless sky. The thick clouds could be seen in the dark sky and there were thousands of tassels flowing in the sky. It was incredibly beautiful. Although it only lasted for a few moments, the scene was undoubtedly miraculous.

Lucia was finally safe and she had developed a new ability during this adulthood transformation, just like Anna had a year ago.

However, it was not without trouble. The accident had happened around eight o'clock at night, when most people were still awake. Quite a number of people must have witnessed this spectacular event. Roland would have to come up with an explanation to the public when he returned to his room.

"Your Highness, Director Barov asked to see you," the door guard informed after knocking on the door.

"Let him in."

Barov with a head full of white hair walked into the office. Before he paying his respect, he blatantly asked, "Your Highness, what happened last night? How come there was daylight appearing in the night?"

He was indeed here about the light. Roland took a glance at his face and saw dark circles. He probably had not slept either. If outsiders were not strictly prohibited from entering the castle at night, he would have come to the door last night.

"No hurry. Have a seat." Roland pointed at the chair in front of the table and said, "Have a cup of black tea first."

Roland mentioned the incident of Lucia's adulthood after pouring a glass of hot tea. "It was just an accident, don't worry too much."

"So... this was caused by a witch?" The City Hall Director frowned.

"Don't be silly. It was not the demonic side." Roland quickly guessed the other party's thought. "No one was hurt aside from the missing wall of this old, broken castle."

"But the villagers will think this," Barov shook his head. "Most of them accepted the harmless healing power of Miss Nana but not the ability to destroy the castle like this, causing astonishing changes in the sky."

"That's why I came up with a solution," said Roland while sipping his tea. "You'll arrange for your men to spread this news: the golden light that appeared last night was from when His Highness captured lightning, in order to bring light to his people."

"What?" Barov was stunned.

"I'll soon be building the power supply equipment in Border Town. It has a similar essence to the lightning in the sky." Prince Roland explained briefly. He knew he was speaking technically and the other party could hardly understand. "This equipment can light up the town brightly even during the night. It coincides with the news."

"Is that... Is that true?" The director asked in surprise, "Can you really make lightning?"

"It's everywhere by itself," Roland shrugged and said, "however, please remember that it's just hearsay, so it shall be spread according to 'the Art of Rumor'. Do you understand?"

In order to prevent any impact on the universal education in the future, these statements should not be too democratic. It would be fine as long as an ambiguous explanation could temporarily be given to the public to redirect the discussion towards himself.

Not too long after Barov left, Karl Van Bate, the Minister of Construction came to the castle.

"Your Highness, regarding last night..."

"I know what you want to ask," Roland put his hand on his forehead. "Sit down first and we'll talk."

He sighed silently to himself. Perhaps he would have to explain this incident for the entire day.

Fortunately, Karl was not a deep thinker like Barov, and he simply sighed after listening and said, "It turns out Anna has already become so strong."

"It was indeed a decisive disposition at the time." Roland agreed. "If there was any further delay, I'm afraid it would have been not only the wall that disappeared but the whole bedroom instead."

"The gap in the wall..."

"Just fill it in with bricks. You can go ahead to arrange an exact plan as long as it's done before the nightfall. I'll get Lightning and Hummingbird to help you with this." Prince Roland said. The appearance of the castle would need to be restored after mending the wall. He would get Soraya to paint a simulation coating on it.

"Yes, Your Highness."

As expected, Carter Lannis, the Chief Knight; Iron Axe, the instructor of the First Army and Kyle Sichi, the alchemist, were taking turns to ask about yesterday's incident and each of them had a different concern.

Carter was concerned about whether she was hurt.

Iron Axe was concerned that the light had been caused by the demons' attack.

However, what concerned Kyle was... which was more powerful, the Sigil of God's Will or the nitric acid glycerine?

The men were finally dismissed after a series of non-stop talking and explanations by Roland. He leaned back in his chair, getting ready to take a nap but someone was knocking on the door again.

The last to enter was Tilly Wimbledon.

"No worries. Yesterday was..."

"I already know about it." Lady Tilly interrupted. "I asked Miss Anna before I came here and she told me what happened."

"Oh, I see." Roland cleared his throat and sat up straight. "Anything else?"

"I'm just a little concerned with the cause." Tilly said slowly, "According to Miss Agatha, be it awakening or adulthood, as long as a certain amount of practice is carried out normally, it shouldn't cause any sign of magic power bite. It's basically in line with what we've learned from past experience. It's never happened to any of the witches on the Sleeping Island, so how could Lucia be the one who fell into the bite of the magic power?" She paused here for a little, shook her head and said with a smile, "As for the High Awakening, I'm not surprised... I've seen a few of them each day since I arrived in Border Town."

A few of them each day, that's an extreme exaggeration... Roland thought, he poured her a cup of tea. Contemplating for a moment, he said, "I do have a preliminary guess regarding Lucia's misfortune." He pulled out a transcript from the drawer and handed it to Tilly. "This's probably the reason."

Chapter 428: An Exploration of Magic Power

"... Grades?" Tilly took the transcript, glanced at it doubtfully, and said, "She did improve a lot."

"Yes," Roland nodded. "As a businessman's daughter in Valencia, Lucia White already had basic writing and arithmetic skills, and she also performed well in the natural theory course. That's why her grades are so good."

"I'm not questioning your theory that 'a better understanding and cognition of the world can help develop abilities,' " replied Tilly, twitching her mouth, "but what does it have to do with the bite of magic power?"

"Judging from the evolution of Lily, Leaf, and Mystery Moon, as well as other witches, we can tell that evolution also increases witches' magic power limits. I think such limits have a lot to do with how well witches perceive the world." Combining what Agatha referred to as "ancient High Awakening" and the evolution of the town witches' abilities, Roland explained his theory in details. "They're essentially the same thing. However, witches who evolved by partial or random enlightenment are far less powerful than those who evolved by a full, comprehensive understanding of the world—Mystery Moon is a typical example. Although she's a member of the Witch Union, her evolution was achieved through enlightenment, so her magic power isn't in the same league as Anna's and Soraya's."

Tilly soon learned what Roland meant after a moment of reflection, "You mean the reason Miss Lucia's magic power was low both on normal days and her Day of Awakening is that her body has adjusted to a certain level of magic power? Yet her ability evolved when she entered adulthood, which resulted in an instant surge in her magic power, and so much power was far more than she could take, right?"

"Pretty much like that, but I prefer to think there are two different types of power increases." Roland continued, counting on his fingers, "Magic power increases on the Day of Awakening, on the Day of Adulthood, and during evolution. The effects seem the same, but I believe the first two are passive, while the last is voluntary."

"Why do you think so?"

"Because evolution won't cause magic power bites," the prince replied slowly. "If this wasn't the case, Anna would have been killed by the surge of magic power during her evolution. I assume there's a magic power redline for witches. Once they go beyond it, they'll suffer from bites. Daily practice can gradually increase their limits, and that's also why witches need to empty all their magic power before awakening."

"Redline? It sounds interesting..." Tilly murmured, sinking into her thoughts. "Do you think the outpouring of magic power that was generated by Miss Lucia's evolution resulted in insufficient space for magic power on the Day of Awakening, which led her to exceed the power limit and thus caused the accident?"

"Correct. Like Lucia, Anna experienced her first evolution when she reached adulthood, but her magic power capacity was incredible, so she had a much higher limit for bites than ordinary witches." Roland paused for a moment. "This also explains why Lucia went back to normal after Spear extracted the agitated magic power—that power didn't belong to her anyway."

"Your theory... does clarify a lot of problems." Tilly pushed her hair behind her ear and propped up her chin on her hand, apparently absorbed in thoughts. "Why witches present different forms of magic power despite their power sharing the same origin? Why free magic power can only be seen upon witches' awakenings? Because witches can't integrate it unless they accept it."

Roland said with a smile, "We can view awakening as drawing magic power in, but only a small part of it can be retained. Evolution expands and develops this small part, and the greater cognitive breadth a witch possesses, the better strengthening effects she'll obtain. It's also reasonable to assume that there's no limit on the number of times a witch can evolve, since the exploration of the world is endless."

"I'm suddenly curious."

"What?"

"If you were a witch, how extensive would your power be after evolution?" asked Tilly, covering her smile.

Roland nearly choked himself. Although he really wanted to personally experience these extraordinary powers, he would rather turn them down knowing the sacrifices he had to make.

"Can I bring a copy of the textbooks you wrote back to Sleeping Island?" Tilly asked, while raising her eyebrow.

She sounded pretty casual, but Roland noticed her right hand gently grasping her skirt's hemline.

"Absolutely." He would not miss a single chance to leave his sister a good impression, and generally speaking, it was better to respond as quickly as possible. "It'll also be helpful to Border Town if the witches on Sleeping Island evolve. Besides, you're my sister."

Nightingale immediately pinched his left shoulder with immense strength.

"..." Tilly did not respond back, but simply showed her gratitude with a slight nod. "Thank you, I'll be excused then."

"Sure."

It looks like my performance was overdone. She probably won't be interested in this kind of approach before hearing a convincing explanation.

Yet to Roland's surprise, Tilly stopped at the door, turned her head and answered quietly, "Sometimes, I'd rather hope that you aren't my brother."

...

After Tilly's departure, Roland sat at his desk in a daze, with her last sentence reverberating all around his head.

Would rather hope I'm not her brother. What does that mean?

"Hey, are you OK?" Nightingale revealed herself, waving her finger in front of the prince.

"What do you think her last sentence meant?"

"How do I know?" Nightingale commented with a shrug. "Perhaps she thinks you're better as an ally than a sibling."

Roland would certainly not assume anything inappropriate, since he had already known this royal princess pretty well after cooperating with her for half a winter.

Could she mean that she doesn't want Prince Roland to come back? Or was it just the backlash of his lame approach?

"You aren't her brother anyway. Why do you even care?" Nightingale turned over to sit on the desk, crossing her slender legs. She thrust a piece of dried fish into her mouth and added, "Plus, I could tell you were lying without even using my ability when you said 'you're my sister'."

"Um, is that so..." Roland stroked his nose. "So the answer is the latter then?"

"Also, since Tilly isn't your real sister, is it alright to give her that Natural 'Something' Theory?"

"That's Natural Science Theoretical Foundation," the prince corrected her with a sigh. "There are several months of winter. Don't you think she can produce a copy? I bet she already knows everything by heart, but she still requested my formal permission. This definitely says something about her attitude."

At least from the standpoint of political alliance, there's no question in Tilly's sincerity.

He waited for a moment before continuing, "The residents on Sleeping Island are primarily witches. Even if all of them have evolved, they still rely on witches' power. However, I'm different. The knowledge not only enables witches to progress, but ordinary people as well... It's the power of all the people that I'm relying on."

Chapter 429: Element Separation

Accompanied by howling wind and raging snow, Lucia entered the backyard of North Slope Mountain and closed the door, shutting the chill out of the room.

A circle of wooden sheds was pitched in the yard after winter kicked in. Although the lighting was somewhat affected, the houses here would at least not be buried in piles of snow.

There was a bonfire in the yard, and Lucia could even feel the heat of its flickering flames by the door. She took off her gloves and put her freezing hands above the blazes to warm herself up.

"Are you cold?" Anna, who stood at the workstation, turned her head and beckoned. "Come here, I'll warm you up."

"Ah... thank you." Lucia trotted to her. Soon bathed in warm green flames that gave her a languid and relaxing sensation from head to toe, she felt like she was soaking in the bathtub of the castle.

"Such a convenient ability..." Lucia thought enviously. "She's never afraid of the bitter cold."

"Are you warm now?"

"Yes!" she affirmed, nodding vigorously. "What are you making?"

"Some parts for new guns." Anna grabbed a long slim steel tube with a piston in the middle and pulled it back and forth. "His Highness says he's not sure if it'll work with the first shot, so it needs to be tested repeatedly."

These parts, bright and shiny from the outside, were apparently made from the best rolled steel and were carefully carved by the Blackfire. Before coming to the town, Lucia would have never thought that the surface of iron objects could be as smooth as glass, like artwork.

She had also made a contribution to their creation. Lucia could not suppress a smile at this thought. Both Roland and Anna had said that without high-quality materials, the finished products would still be damaged goods, even with precise and refined processing methods.

"His Highness didn't come with you?" asked Anna, who withdrew her green fire.

"He said that he still needed to take care of something and would come a little later. He asked me to first get familiar with my new ability," Lucia answered, twitching her mouth.

"What does your ability look like after the evolution?" Anna inquired with great interest. "There's probably no one in the Witch Union who created a bigger stir than you did upon entering adulthood."

Lucia scratched her head, looking a bit embarrassed. "I probably couldn't have made it without you and milord Spear."

"You already thanked me, no need to worry about it." Anna dismissed it with a wave. "Let's see your new ability."

Lucia agreed. She summoned the magic power in her body and again sensed the same odd feeling enveloping her heart—everything became strange and obscure, dividing into numerous tiny squares that grouped together by color, forming different color speckles. However, this time she did not suffer any pain from magic power bites, so she could calm herself down and carefully observe each single square.

She took one of the parts processed by Anna. There were lumps and bumps on its surface, which had been smooth and shiny earlier. With the help of the magic power, she could clearly see the color speckles on it—there were around seven or eight color blocks, the largest of which was cyan. As if an artist carelessly spilled various pigments on the floor, there were no patterns whatsoever in their arrangement. The only difference, however, was that each color speckle had visible boundaries that prevented them from mixing with each other.

It occurred to Lucia that these were not the tiny particles His Highness had referred to. These "squares" and "color speckles" were just too big to be considered as the fundamental elements of everything.

There's a larger classification than the particle, which is the element.

Small particles form larger ones in accordance with different patterns and rules, and these larger particles will exhibit entirely different properties due to their various structures.

Lucia used to have no idea about her own ability or its specific functions back in Valencia, but now she thoroughly understood the concept of elements. According to His Highness' description and classification, she believed it was elements that she had just observed.

After hearing what Lucia saw and thought, Anna pondered for a while and said, "It may be a type of derivative skill."

"Derivative... skill?"

"That's a rare talent," Anna explained, smiling. "There are only a few adult witches in the Witch Union who possess such a talent—according to Agatha, it only occurs on the Day of Adulthood. Once you miss it, you miss it forever. I believe it has a lot to do with the witch's primary ability, or we can say, it supplements and strengthens the primary power. For example, Soraya needs to first mix pigments into paint if she doesn't have the magic brush. The same applies to Miss Scroll's Book of Magic. She once told me that although she could quickly memorize most of the books prior to adulthood, she couldn't share the contents with others because she didn't have any money to purchase pens and paper."

Anna paused for a moment before continuing. "Your main ability is separation and restoration, so I reckon these color speckles may be assisting you in accurately separating a specific type of element—you can give it a shot to see whether you can separate a particular color block or not."

Lucia nodded. She started to once again apply her power to the pig iron ingot by the workstation. Unlike the separation earlier, this time she cautiously transformed her magic power into a filament to pull the cyan squares.

The whole process was much harder than she expected. Lucia had never manipulated her magic power in such a laborious manner, but she was delighted to see her progress. Compared with her confusion prior to adulthood, she was now able to truly feel the magic power, as if it had become her own fingers—even an extension of her consciousness.

As more filaments clung to the color speckle, the squares finally started to loosen up and wriggle out of the iron ingot. Meanwhile, the rest of the color speckles also changed—their distinct boundaries began to wobble, and the whole iron ingot collapsed and crumbled into a yellow green crystal as small as half of a nail, next to which appeared a box-like iron block.

Lucia withdrew her power and wiped the perspiration from her forehead. She noticed the crystal and the block displayed different colors under the magic power than with normal vision—the previous cyan speckle had turned silver white, which was a color usually seen among pure iron. Nevertheless, the crystal still remained colorful, but if she did not look at it using her magic power, it just looked like a polished gemstone.

"What's this?" Lucia gently took the tiny crystal. Its size was not even close to that of the iron ingot, but it looked much more beautiful.

"It's probably a compound formed by the other elements in the pig iron," Anna suggested, her eyes glistening. "I'm not sure, but I can do a small experiment to verify it. If I've guessed right, do you know what that means? It means that you can separate some elements from an object and reorganize the rest of the elements, instead of breaking them up... Any useless, poor-quality materials can be reborn with the help of your power."

Chapter 430: "The Star of Steel"

It was the last month of winter in Border Town after Lucia's day of adulthood.

As for the Months of Demons, the end of winter did not mean the end of the snow. The snow would often continue to fall until the spring of the second year, and it was totally in God's hands as to when it would cease.

Based on past experiences, the Months of Demons would end within the first half of the first month of spring, and it would be a very difficult period. It would be an extremely tough time if it ended within the second half of the first month. The days could become hard to survive if it delayed until the second month.

However, it was a situation that only the local people ever encountered.

The situation this year had been greatly improved. The wheat being stored in the granary would be enough to make sure everyone was adequately fed, even if the Months of Demons continued to the end of the second month of spring.

Roland naturally would not be satisfied merely by no one being starved or frozen to death. Over the last few days, he had been sprawling across his desk, excitedly working on many drawings and the ideas for the next stage of his big plan. The entire plan was divided into both military and civilian aspects. The former included the construction of the weapon factory, the bicycle plant, and the dock as well as the shallow water gunboats and other locations. The latter mainly involved the connections for the water, heat, and electricity of the residential area in addition to the promotion of the universal use of the iron farming tools.

It was Lucia White who motivated him. After he realized what her ability was, Roland clearly recognized that the final limitation of the mass production was resolved, and the productivity of the town could usher into a new peak of the growth in the population.

The limitation was the supply of materials.

The modern way of smelting was very complicated, and the output of steel iron was one of the most important parameters to measure an industrial country. However, Roland did not know much about it, and this was the main reason that the iron making capacity of the town was still outdated. Not only were the techniques not as advanced, the scale was not nearly comparable with the private smeltery owned by some mining businessmen. When the iron ore in the brick blast furnace was smelt into pig iron, quality pieces would be sent away to become parts of steam engines, while the poorer quality ones would be passed to Anna for further processing into steel. However, this process was totally out of control, and the carbon content was not stable. Sometimes, the useful materials could only fill up one to

two carriages after an entire workday, which greatly limited the production of the steam engine manufacturing plant.

Although the low-quality pig iron could be processed into the quality-controlled rolled steel with Anna's special smelter, the production quantity was only enough for military plant use. It would basically meet the need of the small town in the fall, but with the two expansions of the army and the development of new firearms and cannons, the limited quantity of rolled steel could potentially be overstretched come winter.

Lucia's evolution could be described as a cardiac stimulant; her targeted separation ability would allow easy removal of undesirable components in the material and regulate the elements proportions in the smelting phase, allowing each furnace of molten steel to be maintained at the same performance.

The smelting standard of Border Town would instantly increase exponentially with the help of both Anna and Lucia.

Roland had already got Anna to put down all the other projects on hand in order to concentrate on the creation of the enormous, latest generation smelter for this reason.

The new smelter was 10 times bigger in size compared with the old special smelter designed by her previously, extending to 50 meters in length, 10 meters in width and four meters in height. It looked like a slender swimming pool at the first glance. It was essentially similar to the last generation special furnace; it was still a metal box without any heating equipment and fully independent on Anna's Blackfire. However, it was buried in the ground, relying on the soil to support the pressure of the molten iron on the walls. There was also an aisle built in the center for Anna to heat up the iron ingots on both sides at the same time.

The huge volume was its only advantage. Based on the previous smelting method, it would contain too much of product for only the limestones used for removal purposes; it also required a lot of effort to clean the impurities generated and would be very painstaking to reinforce and stir them. Thus, it should not be mass produced or used with the old method. However, there was no such concern now. As long as the pig iron was melted, Lucia could eliminate the harmful components, such as phosphorus and sulfur.

Roland intended to build a batch of kilns along with the old blast and shaft furnaces. He was only responsible for the initial smelting, and he did not care about the quality of the finished product as long as the ore could be melted into the rectangular iron ingots, all of which were then put into the new smelter for secondary refining. The molten steel formed would flow through the stroke into the mold at the lower terrain and directly form the materials to be processed. After that, the steam engine plant would be converted into rolled steel production, and it would bring a powerful new source of motivation to the town.

Roland was going to name the latest smelter "Star of Steel".

As soon as Anna completed the manufacturing, the steel production of the town would be more than 10 times higher with the Star of Steel officially in use.

It could be said that the latest large-scale production plan was built on this basis.

Furthermore, the development of the state-of-the-art light-weight weapon had come to a conclusion.

Roland discovered that his initial idea was not appropriate. He had designed a few prototype weapons himself based on the principle of the latest pneumatic automatic rifle, which simply used some of the high pressure gas generated while the bullet was fired to finish the process of ejecting, chambering and re-filling.

This project took about half a month. It was not difficult but it needed to test each of the components repeatedly to make sure it operated normally. He did not bother to memorize the specific structure of the rifle. As long as he knew the operation of the weapon, he thought he would definitely be able to piece together a useful weapon after a few tries.

That was exactly where the problem lay.

The completed prototype machine was not only humongous, it also consisted of almost one hundred different components which were all custom-made by Anna. These included small little gadgets like springs, the firing pins, and the induction pistons. It was really hard to mass produce such a weapon with the current machine tool. If all the revolving rifles in the soldiers' hands were to be replaced by automatic weapons, it would not only increase Anna's burden, but the current firearms processing equipment units that had been put into production would be wasted as well.

Additionally, the ammunition consumption was undoubtedly going to increase significantly if all the soldiers were equipped with the automatic weapons. Roland did not care too much about this in the beginning as he felt that it could be resolved by increasing manpower. However, he soon discovered that as soon as the new weapon was put into production, it could easily overtake the entire production of the acid plant.

The frequent cartridge jamming during the shooting test, failure to fire, and the other small issues had become less important as he realized that the weapon production was not feasible.

He finally dispelled the idea of mass replacement of the automatic weapons after repeated contemplation. However, increasing the firepower of the military had become an urgent need. He began to shift his focus on continuous firing weapons.

He was considering the heavy machine gun.

A heavy machine gun could be assigned to 20 to 50 people in order to significantly reduce the number of weapons. In this case, both of the most critical problems would be solved easily. It could also be self-loaded with the use of a ventilation method; the structure was similar to the trial manufacture of the prototype weapons. It could be put into the principal test after a few alterations, and it could be built in a bigger size with bigger components. The difficulty to himself, Anna, and Lucia would be greatly reduced.