

Witch 431

Chapter 431: From the Kingdom of Dawn

Apart from the upgraded heavy machine gun, Roland also planned to develop a bolt rifle which would have a mid to long shooting range. He did not need many, a mere hundred or so would suffice. The rifle would have the same caliber as the heavy machine gun, and could be easily transformed into a sniper rifle by simply installing a gun sight.

In this way, he could continue to manufacture revolving firearms and black powder bullets without a huge waste of the products.

During a battle, soldiers could use field artilleries to suppress enemy forces within 800 to 1,000 meters and heavy machines guns 500 to 800 meters. Snipers could take care of enemies in less than 500 meters, and revolving rifles could be used to clear out enemies within the last 200 meters. Therefore he could, in theory, make sure every inch of the battle field was covered.

Of course, it would probably take three or four months to fully equip his army with the whole set of weapons he planned to make. He might not be able to complete it before the spring attack. Therefore, he needed another weapon, an inland river gunboat equipped with a culverin with a 152mm caliber. One would be enough to pressure on enemies when he launched the attack.

Roland felt he held more responsibilities upon his shoulders than before. He thought of the founding ceremony subsequent to the Months of Demons, the unification of the entire Western Region and the new population that would swarm in after he kicked Timothy off the throne. He even wished time could have slowed down its pace, and that the Months of Demons hadn't ended so soon.

Upon entering the Western Region, the landscape started to change.

Otto Luoxi lifted up the blinds and peeped through the window. Heaven and earth were washed out altogether. The sky was covered with dense snowflakes which swirled in the harsh wind, drifted down to the ground and blended into the vast canvas of whiteness.

It seemed that the heavy snow would never cease. He could see nothing other than piles of snow cloaking the soil, rocks and woods in the past two days. If the boat was not wobbly, he would even think it remained on the river.

"Shut the blinds." The captain grunted. "Go out on the deck if you really want to see it. Nobody will care."

He did not take the captain's words personally, but shut the blinds and asked, "Does it always look like this here?"

"Of course, do you think I was bluffing?" The captain sipped wine from his decanter and said, "Every year when the Months of the Demons arrives, the Western Region is cut off because of the snow. There's no way to get here except through the Redwater River. I can use my fingers to count how many people in the entire King's City are willing to ferry you over here in this bloody weather. Well, they also

gotta have a boat." He grumbled, letting out a burp. "So five gold royals is an awfully good deal. You got it?"

"It's a bit expensive, but I didn't bargain with you when I paid," said Otto, smiling.

"That sounds better." The Captain tossed the decanter to him and said, "It's warm. Drink some. It'll warm you up." He wiped his mouth and continued, "There was once this tradesman who wanted to purchase goods from the Western Region faster than anyone else, but he didn't want to pay a little more for the fare, so he asked the rats on the black street to ferry him. You know what? That fellow was killed halfway. Those few mercenaries he brought with him were craps. They all ended up feeding the fishes."

"That was... really unfortunate." Otto took the decanter, but did not pull out the cork to drink the wine. Instead, he took off his gloves and held the decanter in his hands. He really did not feel comfortable sharing drinks with others.

"You get what you pay for. It's a universal rule. There're always people who think they can get away with it. Did it never occur to him that if rats agree to provide him with the service at such a low price, how are we going to run our business?" The captain added, twitching his mouth, "By the way, what's your trade in the Western Region? Don't you blame me for not reminding you. There used to be jewelry and furs in this damn place, but you can't get anything from here now."

"Really?" Otto marveled, pretending to be interested. "As far as I know, don't they make a living on these trades? Have people in the Western Region all become bandits now?"

"They're stale news now." The captain lit his pipe with the charcoal fire and inhaled deeply. "Ever since Prince Roland ruled Border Town, the Western Region has become weird. You know the town is well known for its furs and jewelry, but nobody knows what the hell the prince is messing around with in his territory. Now there're only imports but no exports. Some jewelry still gets sold in the Longsong Stronghold, but the noble has their specific ways to get a hold of it. You can't butt in."

"Only imports but no exports?" He echoed, stunned.

"Yes. Although you can't purchase local products, sales are pretty good. You can pretty much sell out everything from food and garments all the way to fabrics and general goods. No one knows where Prince Roland got so many gold royals from." The captain breathed out some smoke and concluded, "So you're very likely to return empty-handed this time."

Otto put on a worried look without giving any response. In fact, he did not really care whether this would be a fruitless journey, as his sole purpose was to meet the lord of Border Town. However, due to the hostile relationship between Roland and Timothy, he had to be disguised as a tradesman and come to the border in secret.

Before taking off, he had already conducted a thorough investigation of his destination.

As its name suggested, Border Town was insignificant to neighbors. It was initially built for the purpose of monitoring the intrusion of demonic beasts, and was later transformed into a town for permanent residence. From the prince's widespread notoriety and the wasteland he was entitled, it was widely

believed that Prince Roland was the least favorite of the king, and had been abandoned to his fate on the border.

However, the truth was, not only did he settle down in the Western Region, but he had also become a big threat to the new king. This was what confused Otto the most. If Prince Roland was indeed a capable man, what was his infamy based on and how had he put himself in such a desperate position in the first place?

According to his information, the rise of Roland Wimbledon was just incredible.

As a matter of fact, it was more like the prince had been banished to Border Town a year ago, accompanied by no ministers or guards. Even the knights with him were dispatched by the king. It was almost impossible for him to force the local noble to submit to his rules with such inadequate resources, not to mention the implementation of his policies. Therefore, a lot of people treated his arrival as a joke.

Nevertheless, Prince Roland defeated Duke Ryan and conquered the Longsong Stronghold, becoming the true ruler of the Western Region in merely six months. There were various rumors about the battle among the mass. Some believed the duke was killed during an internal rebellion, while others thought he'd been thrown from horseback, which was why the knightage failed to compete against a group of miners.

Roland thus secured his position as ruler of the Western Region. The wars induced by the Royal Decree on the Selection of Crown Prince had become increasingly intense. With Prince Gerald and Princess Garcia being killed in succession and Princess Tilly missing, cities in the Southern Territory and the Eastern Region were devastated by the constant chaos. Only the Western Region remained tranquil and peaceful.

This was certainly not due to the benevolence of the new king, but that the armies sent by Timothy had never come back. Otto was very curious about what on earth Roland had done to foster such fierce soldiers.

"Captain, Border Town is right at the front." The sailor pushed the cabin door open and reported, "We're almost there."

"Ah, finally!" The captain tapped the pipe and yelled, "Lower the sail, raise the flag and tell the dockmen that we're here! I'm going to a tavern to have a good sip." He looked at Otto and reminded him, "Hey, don't you forget your luggage. See you in a week. I'm not waiting for you if you run late."

Otto shrugged his shoulders, showing no objections.

Out of all the rumors about Prince Roland, the one he cared about most was that the prince had given himself up to demons and was hiring witches in secret. This was believed to be the real reason he was able to quickly crush the duke and occupy the whole Western Region, the evidence of which was the burned church in the Stronghold, the murder of the Priest and the expulsion of believers.

He came here actually because of this rumor.

Otto did not care about whether the prince was trading with demons or hiring witches, as long as the prince was on the opposite side of the church.

In this regard, Roland was more beneficial to the Kingdom of Dawn than Timothy.

The cabin suddenly shook violently when the boat was ashore.

Chapter 432: An Encounter

Since his trip was kept confidential, obviously there would be nobody greeting him.

Therefore, Otto did not plan to go straight to the castle, but to first spend one or two days looking at the prince's territory before turning to local rats for information, as a picture was worth a thousand words.

He walked out of the cabin and onto the trestle, and was immediately astonished at what he saw.

This is... really a borderland wharf?

The dock areas were built with russet colored bricks within several hundred paces from the river bank. Trestles were built at certain intervals, with a sign where the trestle and the dock connected, on which there was a number. Otto counted them roughly. There were 26 in total, all of which were neatly displayed like tentacles extending from the bank. Some were covered with snow while others revealed the tawny planks beneath. This indicated the town's wharf was well taken care of even during the Months of the Demons.

In comparison, the trestles at the dock of King's City were less than half the ones here in terms of both length and number!

However, what stunned him more was the boats at the wharf.

A line of colossal gray boats he had never seen were at berth not far away. There were seven or eight in total, each of which had a shallow waterline with no sail or mast. Nonetheless, they were definitely too big to be operated by poles. One unique feature of these strange boats was the giant wooden tire on either side and the bulky iron pipe in the middle. They looked different from any inland river boats.

Otto stood there and watched them for quite a while. He was still trying to figure out how these weird "tire boats" were operated when it began to snow.

He brushed the snow off his head, put these thoughts behind him, and decided to follow the crew to the town.

Apparently, Otto was not the only passenger on the "Downwind" from King's City. He watched the crew unloading cargo and piling it up at the wharf. Several guards wearing black uniforms were jotting something down on the paper. They seemed to be examining the goods, as they picked out a couple of bags every now and then.

"Who are those people? The mercenaries hired by buyers?" Otto went to ask the captain.

"Huh? Mercenaries?" The captain beamed, "Those guys are patrollers in Border Town."

"Patrollers?" He was puzzled. Weren't they the same as bandits? He remembered the first time he left King's City, the patrollers there blackmailed him for two silver royals, which he later learned was actually a common practice everywhere. These patrollers were sort of the rivals of underground rats, but they

basically did the same thing. The difference was they charged more and often charged for nothing. However, to Otto's surprise, the captain seemed pretty relaxed, still smoking his pipe leisurely without any intention to stop them, nor did he thrust them silver royals or ask the patrollers to leave.

"I thought the same thing when I came here for the first time." The captain explained, seeming to have read his mind, "The patrollers here are different. As long as you follow their rules, you don't need to pay anything before entering the market."

"Patrollers' rules?" Otto doubted, frowning. "Even the bandits here talk about rules, and they also note things down. They probably write nothing but wiggly symbols, but this is already more than enough to blow my mind."

"What are they recording?" he questioned.

"The types and numbers of goods... especially wheat," the captain answered, throwing up his hands. "Goods will be checked after being delivered to the market. This is to prevent you from selling them to others halfway. The food here can only be sold by the lord. Of course, I don't have wheat in my cargo, so it's going to be fast."

All the bags were loaded to the carriages and everybody departed from the wharf, ready to set out for the market. Otto was suddenly dazzled by the scene.

Is this really the most deserted territory in the Kingdom of Graycastle?

Looking at the smooth, hard-surfaced road, the handsome houses along the street and people going to and fro, Otto felt the town was as thriving as City of Glow, the capital of the Kingdom of Dawn.

As a noble, he had seen many magnificent buildings. Compared with the Spire of Dawn and the Great Hall of Sun, these two or three-story buildings were definitely not in the same league.

Yet there was only one Spire of Dawn, which was surrounded by tumble-down houses, swampy paths, and muddy water.

However, he could not find a single house here that looked even slightly worn, as if all the residences had come about at the same time.

"You look quite surprised," the captain said, laughing. "Nothing to be embarrassed about. Everybody was as stunned as you when they first came here. I ought to say Border Town is an amazing place. See the three-story building over there? It wasn't there when I was here last time."

"I heard... that it used to be a mining base here."

"That's what I've heard too, but who knows the truth," he commented, picking the nose. "You know a lot of times rumors fly and truth walks. Perhaps there's tons of gold hidden in the North Slope Mine, and that was why His Majesty sent his son down here... After all, they're blood-related."

"Hang on. What's that?!" Across the square, Otto suddenly caught a glimpse of two big colorful balloons floating in the air. Below hung a banner, which read "Welcome to Border Town" on one side, and "Join Now to Obtain the Citizen Welfare" on the other.

"The stuff above or below?" The captain replied, pouting, "I don't know much about the floating balls up there, but as to the one below... You can go to the east of the square where the Lord's notices are usually posted. The banner says they're recruiting tourists, tradesmen, and refugees from all over the world."

"Even refugees?" Otto asked in dismay, "What's the citizen welfare?"

"Allowance for work, food for the first two months and a shelter. Sounds pretty awesome, eh?" The captain explained airily, "It isn't that easy to get approved. Many of my crews have tried, but none of them passed. The Lord wants someone who's loyal, not a believer of the church and has no criminal records. But holy cricket, theft is also a crime. All sailors stole at some point in their lives, don't you think? Plus, it looks very bustling here, but in fact, there're also lots of downsides as far as I can tell."

"Such as?"

"Barely any entertainment. No casinos or whorehouses, not even a hooker on the street." He coughed out a spit and continued to complain, "Wouldn't you be bored to death living in a place like this?"

The marketplace was to the north of the square. Otto decided to first take a look by himself while the captain and his crews were delivering the goods. According to the captain, there were plenty of rare finds in the convenience market on this side and the high-end market on the other. Indeed there were. Otto saw lines of racks filled with various goods. Once he lingered a little longer at a booth, there would be someone coming up to greet him. No matter what the result of the negotiation with Prince Roland would be, Otto knew this town had already drawn his attention.

Just then, there was a stir among the multitude.

Otto turned around and saw two ladies heading toward this side.

One of them was wearing a black gown with a long dark ponytail. She had fine eyes, a cute nose and plump lips. But the coldness on her face made her look unapproachable. The other one, was completely different, looking soft and gentle. The traits of her every character were elegant and graceful like a warm spring breeze. Her gorgeous blonde hair reflected a shimmer of golden rays of the dawn.

Otto felt all his blood rushed to his head at the sight of the blonde lady.

He rubbed his eyes over and over again, hands slightly trembling, and was sure it was her...

"Andrea Quinn!" Unable to restrain his excitement, Otto shouted aloud in the crowd.

Chapter 433: Unrequited Love

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"Enjoy." The maid placed some wine on the table and gave the three people a strange glance. "If you need a refill, just pull the rope near the door."

"Got it. You're excused." Otto waved his hand, and the maid bowed and left. When the door closed, the ruckus in the lobby was blocked out, and the room immediately fell silent.

Even now, his heart was still racing, and he stared intensely at Andrea, as if he was afraid she would suddenly disappear. "I thought this was a dream. Belinda and Oro both think you're dead, and I never thought I'd see you again..."

Otto's loud outburst in the market caused Andrea to stare at him; since she responded to this name, this meant that she wasn't just a lookalike.

In fact, she couldn't be anyone else, since Andrea's outstanding beauty and air of elegance were unparalleled among other girls.

However, she wasn't as excited to see him as he had expected, and instead, she frowned, walked up to him, and sternly ordered him to follow her as she exited the market.

"She probably didn't want to cause a scene. Yes, that's right, the noble shouldn't draw attention to themselves when among commoners. I was being rude."

He followed the two people into a private room in a pub and finally got a chance to take a closer look at Andrea. Even after five years, she still looked the same as he remembered. If this was a dream, he hoped that it would last a little longer.

"This is your ex-lover?" The dark-haired girl whistled in awe.

"Since you insisted on coming, you should know when to keep your mouth shut," Andrea said with a glare. "Even if you stay quiet, no one will think you're mute."

"I came to protect you," said the other girl with a grin. "Besides, you dragged me here to buy Tilly a birthday present, so kicking me out now would be an improper behavior for a noblewoman."

"That depends on who the behavior is directed to." Andrea scoffed. "I don't have to be proper towards you."

"This is ..." Otto didn't get a response from Andrea and felt a little awkward, so he turned to the equally stunning dark-haired girl. "... your friend?"

"Ashes," she said quickly before Andrea could respond. "Who are you, and why do you know her?"

"I'm Otto Luoxi, and I come from the Kingdom of Dawn." He was slightly taken aback by her interrogating tone—this Ashes girl spoke too bluntly and incisively to be an educated noblewoman, so why was Andrea in her company? "I've known Andrea since we were children, along with my sister Belinda, Oro Tokat, and the eldest son of the King of Dawn, His Highness Appen. We were all extremely close."

"Sounds like a bunch of rich brats." Ashes shrugged. "You said she died?"

"That's because..."

"That's enough." Andrea interrupted. "Belinda and Oro are right—the lady of the Quinn Family whom you knew is dead."

"But you're right here." Otto shook his head. "What happened?"

Besides the royal family, the most powerful families in the City of Glow, the capital of the Kingdom of Dawn, were the Tokat, Quinn and Luoxi families, because their heads were the King's trusted friends and held high positions. This tradition had been passed down since the founding of the Kingdom of Dawn and remained the same for Otto's generation.

Andrea was the eldest daughter of the Quinn family and was outstanding in her appearance and background, so she naturally had many suitors, including Otto and Oro.

However, no one expected that during a spring outing, Andrea's carriage would go out of control and fall into a canyon, an accident that even startled the king. The three families combined their efforts to search for her, and ages later, they found her battered body at the foot of the mountains.

After hearing about this, Otto was depressed for a long time, because while Oro had already begun pursuing Andrea, he had not yet expressed his feelings to her. He never thought he would get the chance to do it, and he would never have expected to see her again in this foreign land.

After a long pause, Andrea sighed. "It wasn't an accident.

"W... what?"

"The carriage accident five years ago was all planned by my family," she whispered. "Father found out that I was a witch."

Otto was startled. "A witch?"

"Seems like you did a pretty good job of hiding your powers," Ashes said, covering her mouth, "since you were even able to fool your childhood friends."

Andrea ignored her. "Yes. After father learned this, he immediately arranged for the accident to be staged—I wasn't even in the carriage, and a driver and maid lost their lives for me. Then, I was sent away from the Kingdom of Dawn and settled secretly in Palisade City of the Kingdom of Graycastle." She paused. "He never actually asked for my opinion on the matter and didn't care what I thought because he was only focused on getting rid of me as quickly as possible."

"So that's what happened..." Otto fell silent. "The beloved 'Flower of Glow' is actually a witch. If word of this gets out, it'll greatly damage the Quinn Family name." However, the staged accident also protected Andrea from harm—as a member of the upper noble, he had heard many tragic stories about the sufferings of witches who fell into the hands of the church.

After some hesitation, he shared his thoughts with Andrea, but she interrupted him with a cold chuckle.

"Protect? As long as father didn't give me up, what could the church have done? Sent the Judgement Army straight into the inner city to arrest me?" She raised her voice. "He was Prime Minister to the King of Dawn and controlled the outer city's surveillance teams, but he didn't do anything to help me. Nana's father was only a Baron, but for the sake of his daughter, he went straight to the Lord's castle and demanded mercy from His Highness Roland, while my father simply banished me from my home. Do you call that protecting me?"

Otto was at a loss for words, and after a long and awkward silence, he finally said hesitantly, "Are... are you going back?"

"Never." Andrea stood up. "I already said that the lady of the Quinn family died five years ago, which was exactly what father wanted."

"Oro still leaves flowers at your grave every year. He can't forget you."

She walked up to the door and whispered, "His love is one-sided, so he'll forget me one day."

As Otto watched the two people disappear from view, he lay helplessly on his chair.

He was beginning to hate his cowardice.

Even at that moment, he still only mentioned Oro instead of expressing his own feelings.

I can't forget you either.

He closed his eyes.

Chapter 434: The Birthday Gift

Roland learned from Anna that Tilly got her twentieth birthday coming.

He hadn't thought about such a thing until now.

It wasn't because he was careless, but because Prince Roland's memories were like a database that he would only delve into when necessary. However, his memories rarely contained anything related to politics or occultism and mostly consisted of mischievous wrongdoings and ideas for pranks, so he revisited them less and less.

Moreover, Tilly was a sore spot for Prince Roland, so everything related to her had little significance and had been buried away, as if he didn't want to recall them.

Tilly's birthday didn't mean her Day of Awakening, but her actual day of birth—as an Extraordinary, she didn't even know the time when she awoke as a witch, and she wouldn't experience the feeling of biting by magic power when the Months of Demons came around. Therefore, her birthday was her only important milestone.

Roland scrolled through his memories and realized that since Tilly was the Queen's youngest child, King Wimbledon III used to throw her a birthday celebration in the Inner City every winter when he was still alive, which was a luxury that even his favorite child, Timothy, never received. However, besides this, he usually ignored Tilly and showed no interest in her life. Otherwise, Prince Roland wouldn't have dared to bully his little sister so much.

As he continued scrolling back, he found another interesting piece of memory.

Tilly's celebration on her eighteenth birthday was her most extravagant one, even surpassing the rite of passage ceremony that followed. Not only did the four border guardians come to the King's City for this celebration, but there were also gifts from the Kingdom of Dawn, the Kingdom of Wolfheart, and the Kingdom of Everwinter, and even the Fjord Islands sent an emissary delegation.

Timothy and Garcia were extremely jealous and wanted to teach Tilly a lesson that she wasn't father's favorite child—the only one reason why King Wimbledon III threw her these celebrations was to make up for the loss of his queen and to console the spirit of Tilly's deceased mother.

No matter how Roland felt about this theory, they both believed it at the time, so they tried to convince Prince Roland to carry out their plan on his sister. However, after Tilly taught him a lesson eight years ago, he was too scared to mess with this girl who seemed meek at first glance but had the spirit of resistance in the depth of her heart, so he refused. The two siblings were forced to act on their own.

Prince Roland didn't know how they did it, but Tilly's favorite gift, the bear cubs from the Kingdom of Wolfheart, was somehow poisoned—as he watched his little sister dully cradling the dead bears, Roland realized the prince had actually felt entertained.

No wonder he was the scum of the royal family. Besides murder and arson, Prince Roland had done every awful thing under the sun.

Either way, this was definitely an awful memory for Tilly Wimbledon.

After he finished scrolling through his memories, Roland suddenly came up with an idea for a gift.

He took out a sheet of paper and began drawing the picture of his gift.

"What's this?" Nightingale peeked him from behind. "A bear?"

"Yes, a stuffed bear, the one you can sleep with at night." Roland smiled.

Judging from his limited gift-giving experience, he knew that most girls loved cute and furry gifts, and a life-sized stuffed animal was the perfect combination of these two features. Of course, a simple stuffed animal was too easy and common. As a prince with a group of witches to assist him, he could do much better.

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On Tilly's birthday, Roland carried her gift to her room.

She was alone when she opened the door and was slightly surprised to see him. "Why do you come over?"

"Today is your birthday, so I'll host a celebratory feast in the castle tonight," Roland said with a smile, "but before that, I have a gift for you."

"A gift?" Tilly said, taken aback. "Is it what you're carrying?" She turned around and said, "Come in."

"Um... It's a little bit big, but I promise it's very special." The prince mopped the sweat on his forehead and placed the gift on the floor. The noble during this time usually gave small and delicate gifts, such as flowers and rings, so that they could hide them in their robes and take them out as a surprise. Roland carrying a large wrapped paper box was definitely a rare sight—and this thing was much heavier than he imagined.

"You've never given me anything before," Tilly said in a mysterious tone.

"I gave you a goose feather quill when you were born." Roland corrected it. "But it wasn't anything valuable."

"Alright, it's a Graycastle royal tradition." She shrugged. "What about this? Can I open it?"

"Of course."

Roland smiled as he watched her untie the ribbons, and when the box fell open, he heard her gasp quietly.

"What... what's this?" Tilly blinked.

"It's a bear!" Roland said with a grin.

"What kind of bear looks like this." She circled the stuffed animal curiously and patted it. "It's so soft..."

Its fur cover was specially made by Soraya according to the fur of Northern wolf cubs and added a silky soft touch. As for the design... Roland completely based it off of the future's pandas. As an animal that had survived millenniums by simply acting cute and had even been used as diplomatic gifts, it was exceptionally cute.

"I've never seen this kind of bear... Its color is so strange..."

"You don't like it?"

"No, I mean..." Tilly seemed to be at a loss for words, but her eyes, which were flashing with excitement, revealed her true thoughts.

"It's called 'panda', and it's a... widely-loved animal."

She quickly understood what he meant. "This belongs to your other world..."

Roland nodded. "And it's not just a stuffed animal you can hold. Try pinching its neck."

Tilly did as he advised, and the panda suddenly started to move, wave its legs and try to climb on top of Tilly. She covered her mouth in shock and backed away, while the stuffed animal continued to move its legs and walk slowly towards her.

This was why it was so heavy—Roland had installed connecting rods and gears in its body with small generators in each leg, and the generators' power came from miniature Dawn I engines. As he lowered the magnetic flux, its shelf life was greatly extended, lasting up to three or four months without use or four fifths of the time if used frequently. Even if Tilly returned to the Sleeping Island, the panda would still accompany her for a long time.

"Pinch its neck again, and it'll stop." Roland smiled. "I hope you'll like this gift."

This time, even though Tilly didn't respond, her expression told Roland everything he needed to know.

Chapter 435: Arrested

"Why do you... want to give me this?" After a while, Tilly put down the muppet.

"Do you remember what happened on your 18th birthday?" Roland asked slowly.

"..." She pursed her lips and asked, "You did that?"

"No, it was Timothy and Garcia." The prince told the story again. "But I should also take some responsibility. If I had told father, it wouldn't have happened."

"And they also would have beaten you up," Tilly said, "so it was reasonable for you not to tell."

"This sort of thing will never happen again."

"I thought that the extra space in your head was used to store knowledge." She didn't respond and changed the topic. "Now it seems that's not the case. Besides this 'panda', is there anything else new? "

When he heard her get tongue-tied trying to pronounce this strange word, Roland couldn't help but smile. "Of course... countless things. When I get a chance, I'll tell you more."

There was no doubt that Tilly was smart. He believed that she would understand him even if he didn't tell the whole story.

Sure enough, after pausing for a moment, she stared at Roland with thoughtful eyes.

Suddenly, Andrea's voice sounded through the door. "Lady Tilly, I want to give you a gift... You, go away!"

"I came first, OK?" Ashes' voice immediately followed.

"I was the first one!"

Roland laughed and stood up. "Indeed, a lot of unpleasant things had happened before, but the past is the past. No matter what, you and me, or Border Town and Sleeping Island shouldn't be bound by bad memories. If you have any trouble in the future, you can come to me anytime... I'll be your elder brother forever." He paused for a while and said, "Happy birthday, Tilly."

He opened the door. The two witches were immediately stupefied and stared at each other with confusion.

The prince smiled and said, "Stop quarreling, I was the first."

Otto wandered the streets dejectedly with Andrea's words still lingering in his mind.

"...the lady of the Quinn family died five years ago, which was exactly what father wanted."

He didn't agree with her, but he couldn't find any excuses to contradict her with. These days, besides observing Border Town, he spent the rest of his time wandering near the market. He hoped to see her again, but was ultimately disappointed.

Otto went to the stone bench next to the square, flicked away the snow on top, and sat down slowly.

Although thoughts were surging in his heart, he still didn't forget the reason why he came here. Except for the corps and battalions, he had gone through every corner of this village and had a comprehensive

understanding of this area. For example, the villagers' lives weren't so affluent at the very beginning and had been no different from those of regular slums. All these changes were due to the Lord, His Highness Roland Wimbledon. He led the people against those bloodcurdling demonic beasts and invented various magical machines and tools to improve people's lives.

Otto had witnessed the black machines operating in the mine area. Just two or three iron lumps could easily finish the work of tens of people.

Also, it was said that the high tower alongside the Redwater River could send water to each resident's home.

There were the quickly built city walls, residential communities, and docks as well.

In addition, it seemed that the ditches that were being dug would make the installation of heating equipment easier, and the inhabitants would no longer fear the cold—news like this could be seen on the bulletin board in the center of the square every day. More astonishingly, most of the villagers could understand the official documents on the board.

The more he observed, the more astonished he felt. Changes were happening everywhere in Border Town and were totally beyond his imagination.

Opening his notebook, Otto intended to take down today's new discoveries, but someone suddenly grabbed the hand holding his pen.

Looking up, he saw two patrol officers with black uniforms in front of him. "Are you Silver Eye?"

That was a false name he used when disguised as a businessman. Otto answered calmly and when he looked around, he found out that there were also people with black uniforms appearing on the other two sides of the square. However, they just stared at him and didn't come closer.

They came here for me.

Otto's heart sank. Before, he thought that the patrols here weren't like what he saw elsewhere and behaved appropriately, so he didn't expect to get into trouble.

"What's up?" he asked with a cold voice. Faced with these bullying and greedy people, there was no benefit in flattering them. Even if they wanted to blackmail him, he wouldn't let them run their mouths. In the worst case, he would have to use his identity as a nobleman.

However, the uniformed officers' answer surprised him. "According to the report we received, we suspect that you are conducting espionage. Now, keep your hands behind you and follow our instructions. If there is any resistance, we can't guarantee your safety."

"Espionage? What a strange reason... Could it be that they want to find a fall guy?" Otto thought silently. "I don't understand what you are saying." He shook off their arms. "I'm from the Luoxi Family in the City of Glow, a noble of the Kingdom of Dawn. I'm not a..."

As soon as he shook off their hands, his belly was suddenly punched severely, and more than half of his strength disappeared immediately with an acidic taste filling his mouth and his body curling up involuntarily. Then, the two men knocked him down into the cold snow, and his hands were tied together with ropes.

"A noble? You said you were a businessman several days ago." One of them sneered.

"I told you not to resist." The other man gave him another hard kick. "You asked for it."

"Several days ago? Does this mean they have targeted me for a while? This is impossible... At least no patrol guards noticed me in the first two days."

"Ahem... I'm indeed a nobleman, and the writ... is in my bag." Otto struggled for a while, but the men ignored him.

"Save your excuses for His Excellency Carter." Two men lifted him up. "If you're honest, you may get to survive."

...

After staying in jail for a day, Otto felt hungry and thirsty and finally saw the one whom people called His Excellency Carter.

Before the knight could say a word, he gripped the iron bars and blurted, "I'm really the Otto Luoxi from the City of Glow in the Kingdom of Dawn. Entrusted by the King of Dawn, I came to this Kingdom of Graycastle for allies to confront the church. I'm not the spy you accused me to be! I want to meet with your Lord, His Highness Roland Wimbledon!"

He had long heard about the shady dealings in jail. Patrols always colluded with Rats and imprisoned foreigners to be scapegoats. If they thought that he was an unimportant stranger, he probably wouldn't live to see another day.

Carter was shocked. "I haven't asked you anything yet." He turned his head. "What do you think my answer will be?"

Then, in a scene that shocked Otto, a girl came out from the shadow, her body covered by a white robe and her face concealed by a hood. However, judging from her figure, she seemed no different from the "Flower of Glow".

"What he said is true," she shrugged and said.

"Really? Does this mean he's indeed an envoy from the Kingdom of Dawn?" Carter put his hand on his forehead. "It seems that we caused some trouble for His Highness."

Chapter 436: The Indeterminable Appointment

Finally, Otto met the legendary Prince Roland of the Kingdom of Graycastle.

After confirming he was a nobleman of the Kingdom of Dawn, Carter brought him into the castle. Then, as the attendants served him with toiletries, new clothes, and some hot food, Carter frisked him.

This might be the most offensive reception that Otto had ever seen.

Prince Roland was in a north-facing room on the castle's third floor. The French windows, which occupied half of the wall, first came into sight as the door was opened. The snow-covered landscape brightened up the room, which was particularly warm, despite there being no lit fireplace.

The prince was sitting at a mahogany table, reading a black-covered book in his hand, which Otto realized was his own notebook. In addition, the diplomatic documents and the family seal were set on the side. It seemed that the hotel that he was staying in had been searched thoroughly.

Although Prince Roland had the same gray hair as Timothy, and there was some resemblance in their features, they gave people an entirely different impression. Both his sitting position and expression seemed to be very casual which conformed to the rumors that Prince Roland liked to persist in his old ways.

Noticing Otto, he closed the book, smiled and said, "Are you the envoy from the Kingdom of Dawn? Have a seat."

Otto bowed in accordance with noble etiquette. No matter how awful the prince behaved, he had to do this—after all, although Prince Roland might not care if he was treated as a joke, he represented the royal dignity of the Kingdom of Dawn.

"I have read some of your notes," the prince laughed and said. "Some were recorded in great detail, so it's not surprising for them to mistake you for a spy. Also, my people didn't know where you were from, and they enthusiastically reported you to me because of my orders. I'd like to apologize to you here."

"The people... reported me?" Otto frowned and thought. However, no explanation could excuse rudely offending a noble, not to mention that the offender was just a man without any title of nobility. If it wasn't for his mission, he would definitely ask the prince to bring the man who assaulted him to justice. Otto restrained his innermost negative emotion and said, "No, you don't have to. Your Highness, you just do this for the peace of the people. It's just... that it may hurt innocent strangers, and I'm afraid most people couldn't provide documents to prove their identities like me."

"You don't need to worry about that. The collection of evidence by the judicial department is irrelevant to the identification documents, and we have all kinds of measures to protect the innocent people." Prince Roland waved his hand and continued, "What's the saying? We would never wrong a good man or let a single bad one go." At this, he smiled and said, "I heard about your arrest—if you did as they commanded, then you wouldn't have been harmed. The process was a little brutal but it's also done with reluctance. You know, some of the most vicious people may take out a weapon and fight back at any time. Since the winter, two police officers have been injured while making arrests. "

"Police officers... It might refer to those patrols. What's a judicial department? The administration to supervise patrols?" Otto wondered and asked, "Does this kind of thing happen often?"

"Once or twice a month," said the prince, "and it's probably because Timothy is so bored in this endless winter."

The prince openly showed his hostility toward the new king. Otto realized that the contradictions between the two sides couldn't be reconciled. Then he hesitated for a while and said, "When I went to the King's City, I heard a rumor... Your Highness, are you really going to overthrow Timothy's authority?"

"Did the rumor say that the new king's throne is hung by a thread?" The prince said bluntly, "Timothy shouldn't be the new king—in order to usurp the throne, he murdered his father, blamed it on his elder brother, and expelled Garcia out of the Kingdom of Graycastle. The entire Southern Territory was destroyed in the war, and the people became destitute and homeless—these are all the crimes he had committed. The only way to restore the past prosperity of the Kingdom of Graycastle is to overthrow him."

Otto held his breath for a second and thought, "Roland Wimbledon is more active than Timothy; at least Timothy's fighting resolve isn't so strong... It seems to be a reversal of both status and momentum."

He cleared his throat and said, "So, as a friendly neighbor, the Kingdom of Dawn hopes that the Kingdom of Graycastle could soon regain peace. I came here at this time to bring the alliance agreement of Deegan Moya, the King of Dawn."

"Oh?" said the prince with interest, "Where is it?"

"In order to avoid the message being leaked, I didn't carry the document with me. However, His Majesty has granted me the right to sign the agreement." Otto repeated the alliance agreement again. "If the two countries can help each other, we can effectively hold the church in play and avoid going down the same road as the Kingdoms of Everwinter and Wolfheart."

"That's it?"

The response of the prince perplexed Otto. "What does 'that's it' mean? I've made myself quite clear," he thought. As he was about to repeat his words, the prince shook his head and said, "The project might not work. The determination of the church to annex the Four Kingdoms is much stronger than you think, let alone the combative God's Punishment Army and witches—your troops stationed along the border might be surrounded and destroyed by the enemy before they've even departed."

"God's Punishment Army and... witches?" asked Otto in surprise.

"It seems that you know nothing about the ambition of the church," said Prince Roland. He took a sip of tea and continued, "I'll tell you all the information we know, and I hope you can bring these messages back to the Kingdom of Dawn so that your king can re-examine the alliance agreement. If we want to defeat the church, we need not only a deterrent, but one big attack."

The meeting didn't come to an end until the evening when the Prince put his cup down, and the wilderness and forest behind him were all in the dark. A strange light lit up in the room, which was brighter and purer than a candle, but Otto had no mind to notice this. He felt his clothes soaked with cold sweat on his back, his hands inadvertently held into a fist, his palms were creamy, and the words of the prince were echoing in his mind.

"The extraordinary warriors created by utilizing wild witches, secret combat witches, and pure witches... And the purpose of the church to eliminate the Four Kingdoms at all costs is to usher in the coming Battle of Doomsday! The news was just too incredible!"

However, many details coincided with the information that he had collected, such as the Pill of Madness, which the church used to weaken the resistance of the kingdom; the carriages transporting female orphans to the Holy City; and their attitude towards the defeated nobles—if it was to completely

erase the influence of the nobility to achieve a completely united kingdom of the church, all these things would make sense.

"I... I can't make a decision," Otto stammered. "These matters are too important. I have to report to His... His Majesty first."

"Of course, this is a matter of life and death for the two countries," the prince calmly said, "and you can't be too careful. But don't forget, our time is running out."

...

Ready to leave, Otto went to the door, hesitantly turned around and said, "Your Highness, I heard that a group of witches was recruited to Border Town... I wonder if you've heard of the name Andrea."

"Ah, she used to be a noblewoman of the Kingdom of Dawn, but unfortunately she became homeless and came into the Kingdom of Graycastle afterward." The prince lifted his eyebrows and asked, "Why? Do you know her?"

"Yes!" answered Otto with his heart beating strongly. "Could you... allow me to see her?"

The prince nodded and said, "I can help to arrange it, but whether or not she'll meet you will be up to her."

"Isn't Andrea your..."

He shook his head with a smile and said, "The witches are just the citizens who live here, not my servants—I can't manipulate their minds."

Chapter 437: A Silent Farewell

After Otto Luoxi left the office, Nightingale stood by Roland. "What he's said isn't completely true, especially the part about his experience before he came to Border Town."

"No surprise. He must have negotiated with Timothy in King's City before coming to the Western Region." Roland smiled. "It would be very strange if he came directly to me first. A diplomat always hedges his bets. If I were him, I wouldn't put all my eggs in one basket either."

"You mean... they might not stand on our side?"

"At least, they won't hurry to make a decision." He picked up the kettle to refill his tea cup. "When the King of Dawn receives this news, how much of it do you think he will believe?"

Nightingale searched for an answer for quite a while until she finally said, "I... don't know."

"Me neither." At these words, Nightingale pinched Roland's shoulder. He was not telling the truth. "One thing is obvious though. The King of Dawn is probably not going to swing to us because of this news. It sounds terrifying but it's something that will only happen several years from now. Besides, we can't even give him an exact date. The threat of the church, however, is right under his nose. Given that the church may launch the attack in the coming spring, he's most likely to stand by watching battles

between Timothy and me until either of us wins. If he's clever enough, he'll probably be on good terms with both of us for future returns."

Politicians often handled these kinds of issues this way. They preferred smooth gains to risky investments, especially in the case of wars which were normally highly profitable. If there had been no threat from demons, Roland would have been happy to join this game, setting a trap for his opponent and then reaping some profits. But he was not in the mood for this diplomatic game now. In the following year, Border Town would have to launch an attack and stabilize the situation. A storm was brewing, and the ones who had a narrow vision and concentrated on immediate interests would have no future.

"Is it... good for us to tell them the news?" Nightingale asked in doubt.

"The Kingdom of Dawn isn't our real enemy, after all. I'm not sure how much the nobles there will believe the story about demons, but they'll definitely spread the word about the church's ambition. It'll weaken the ruling of the church," Roland explained. "Without people's support, the church won't be able to use the kingdom's resources that easily."

When he broke the news to Otto, he only mentioned the part about demons, but not the part about the witches' empire and the two Battles of Divine Will.

The former was even more unbelievable than the existence of demons and might cause unwanted effects. It could be purposely distorted into a "witches' scheme" because of people's general hostility towards them.

The latter might shake people's confidence in fighting against the demons. They had failed twice before. What were their chances of winning this time?

Anyhow, he had already hinted that the two kingdoms should fight the demons together. As to the result, it would depend on the reply from the Kingdom of Dawn.

...

Three days later, Roland met Otto Luoxi again,

He could guess the answer from the disappointment in Otto's eyes.

"Personally, I'm more inclined to the alliance, but the priority now is to send the news to the Kingdom of Dawn as soon as possible instead of talking about the agreement details." Otto bowed and said, "so I'm here to bid you farewell."

"Hope to hear good news from you then." Roland nodded.

"Besides... Your Highness," Otto hesitated for a moment and said, "I would like to ask you a personal favor."

"What is it?"

"Please take good care of Andrea Quinn for me."

"Andrea was a witch from Sleeping Island. You should actually ask Tilly Wimbledon to do that, not me," Roland thought with a sigh, but still he gave his promise.

At the top of the castle, Andrea stood, facing the howling wind and looking south toward the Redwater River.

"Aren't you... going to the dock?" Shavi shivered in coldness, hiding behind her invisible barrier. "I hear he's going to leave by boat. As a childhood playmate, you should go to wish him a good trip."

"I can wish him one here, too." She heaved a sigh.

"A-Ashes said he never stops thinking about you."

"Don't listen to anything she's said," Andrea grunted. "She even praised that guy in front of Lady Tilly. A filthy mouth will never utter decent language."

"Eh, is, is that so?" Shavi said, her teeth chattering.

"Yes." She snorted. She noticed Shavi shivering. "If you feel that cold, go down now. You can come back to fetch me later."

"It's, it's OK, I'll wait for you here." Shavi shook her head. "If, if I catch a cold, Miss Lily will cure me and I can take two, two days off. Then I'll have more time to play cards."

"That sounds reasonable." Andrea gave her a thumbs up and turned her gaze to the Redwater River. Through the falling snow, she could vaguely see some rising sails and something red fluttering at the top of a mast.

It was the sailing signal.

This was good. Time would dilute all the attention and forgetting would be better for everyone, she thought.

Andrea somehow knew Otto's love for her, but she still chose to avoid him. Both he and Oro Tokat should marry someone more suited to their status. They were the most famous noble families in the City of Glow. A relationship with either of them was doomed from the start. Besides, she was not willing to return to the land which had abandoned her.

Avoiding him was the best choice.

"Farewell, my friend," Andrea thought.

The looming sails soon disappeared on the horizon.

After sending off the messenger, Roland threw himself into the construction of Border Town.

The Tee Project which included a water supply, a power supply, and a heating system had officially launched. The three pipes were embedded in underground tunnels, reaching every residential

community. It was easy to adapt each household because every residential house had been designed with reserve openings for the pipes. The key lay in the location of boilers and water towers.

In order to save materials and reduce loss during transportation as much as they could, Roland changed the plan. Instead of drawing water from the Redwater River, they would draw from underground springs. Given that Border Town was rich in underground water and the it was not deep, it was easy to dig wells. Besides, in this era, there was no need to take water pollution into consideration. With the help of Sylvie, Roland quickly picked out four spots as water access points for the town. They could purvey water not only for daily uses such as drinking and cleansing, but also for the heating system and boilers.

Chapter 438: Electricity and Light

Based on the construction plan, Roland set up a workroom with all the equipment to build an efficient Tee Project system.

The complete set of equipment included a steam engine, an electric motor, a power supply unit, a boiler, and two water tanks. Together with the water tower outside the room, they formed the workings of the Tee Project system.

The steam engine pumped the water up into the water tower and the water tanks. The former was to provide the residential communities with water for domestic needs. The latter was the water supply for the boiler and the heating system. The first-level water tank was higher. Limestones and washing stones which were used to soften the water by precipitating magnesium and calcium ions in it were put inside the tank. The water in it would then flow into the lower second-level tank through a filter screen specially made by Soraya, which would stop the floating objects in the water from entering the second-level tank.

The boiler's water supply was controlled by an electric motor. When the water level inside the boiler was too low, the ballcock inside would start the electric motor to bring water in until the water level got back to normal. This process was more stable than both the manual control and the steam engine system, saving the trouble to arrange someone to observe the site all the time.

The water supply and heating systems had already been successfully tested. Roland was confident that their construction would go smoothly. His current focus was on the power supply. It was a brand new thing for the town. Neither Karl nor other members of the Mason Guild had any idea of electricity. Given that Roland did not know much about electricity himself either, and that all his knowledge of electronic circuits remained at the high-school level, he decided to build a model in his courtyard first. If he succeeded, he would explain it to the Ministry of Construction.

Once he had a stable power supply, the first step then was to create that traditional emblem of electrical power: a light bulb.

With that in mind, Roland put on a thick coat and set out for his courtyard on the North Slope Mountain.

It normally would take a quarter of an hour to walk to the courtyard, but with the help of Nightingale's mist, they arrived in scarcely four minutes.

When the wooden door was pushed open, Anna and Lucia immediately noticed Roland. Anna, busy with her work, just nodded to him. Lucia happily ran to him and said, "Your Highness, good morning."

"Good morning," Roland nodded with a smile and then walked to Anna. "What're you busy with?"

"The new gun barrels and locking mechanism." She pointed to several long steel pipes on the desk with a serious look on her face, "Some aspects of your drawings don't make sense. I think it'll be better this way."

"My amazing Anna," Roland thought and could not help stretching out his hand, trying to touch her head but she refused it by rocking back and forth. "Well... this scene seems familiar." He coughed, banished his thoughts of Anna and said, "Good, do whatever you want."

Roland did not mind her questioning his designs. He knew and would naturally have mistakes and shortcomings based on his minimal design experience. He felt like Anna was not only more talented but also had a keener eye for fine detail and he was convinced that one day she would surpass him in skills.

After a while, Anna finished her work and put down her tools. She walked to Roland and lowered her head a little.

"Eh? Is it to make up for the touch just now?" Roland thought in surprise.

He ruffled her soft hair. Anna looked up in satisfaction, "What are we making next?"

"Ah... yes." The prince turned to Lucia. "How did your separation work of ores from the mines go?"

"Almost done and here are the results," Lucia gave him a stack of books and said, "but I'm afraid it'll take a long time to test on the mixtures of them and rolled steel. There are just too many individual elements."

"It's already pretty good," Roland encouraged her.

This was part of his material improvement plan. He had already improved the rolled steel quality by reducing carbon content and eliminating impurities, and now all the elements in the North Slope Mine area could be utilized. They had to try one by one. There was no shortcut.

Roland glanced over the books, looking at the features of the elements separated from ores in the mines. He soon found the element with the highest melting point. He poked his finger at the testing sample marked with No. 12 and asked, "Where are they?"

Lucia quickly found them. They were a crude stone and a bag of elementary particles, both sealed in plastic bags.

Roland thought he recognized this crude, black stone from somewhere else.

"Wait, isn't it the same as the black stone sent to my office earlier? I gave it to alchemists and then totally forgot about it. I've never thought twice about it since then.

Could it turn out to be the mineral that has the highest melting point on the North Slope Mountain?"

Anna could not measure the exact temperatures at which the materials melted, so she described them roughly by words such as "normal", "high" and "relatively high". Only the melting point of No.12 testing sample was described as "extremely high."

The elementary particles in the bag were silvery white, similar to most of the other metallic elements.

He thought, "Is it wolfram?"

Whatever, as long as it is difficult to melt."

Roland let Anna make the particles into very fine wire, twisted the wire into a spiral and fix it onto a glass shelf which was then put into a glass bulb. The main part of an electric lamp was completed.

To make it a stable light, there were two more steps which were also considered to be the most difficult part in making electric bulbs. The first one was to evacuate the bulb, preventing the filament wire from reacting with oxygen. The second was sealing it to ensure that the air could not enter the bulb.

Without a doubt, only witches could realize those two steps.

Roland soon thought of Agatha.

The filament would become extremely reactive at high temperatures. It would easily oxidize, produce new oxides, and eventually melt down. That was why the bulb needed vacuum inside, but filling the bulb with inert gases could achieve the same or an even better effect.

Pure nitrogen was an excellent choice for this.

As nitrogen was lighter than the air, using a simple downward exhaust method, the bulb could be easily filled with nitrogen. It was much simpler than the vacuuming process. When the other end of the exhaust was also pure nitrogen, Soraya quickly sealed the bulb. A simple incandescent lamp was made successfully.

Looking at the electric bulb as small as his palm, Roland felt all sorts of emotions welling up in his mind. It was something outdated but now represented the most advanced manufacturing skills of the town.

The following night, he summoned all the members of City Hall to gather in front of the castle and ordered his guards to put out all the torches in the courtyard.

In this dark, snowy night, Roland switched on the circuit.

All of a sudden, at the center of the courtyard, an orange light lit up. It would not sway and extinguish in the wind like the light of a candle and it never flickered like fire. Though it could merely light up within a radius of a few meters, a stable light in the wind was something that the people had never seen before.

At this moment, everything was self-explanatory.

The fixed look on everyone's face and the silence of the scene told everything.

He had brought electricity to this world.

Chapter 439: The Crime Scene

"Brother Vader, is... this really Okay?" Firehead said while fiddling with her own clothing. "Chief Knight said that our uniforms are the symbol of our status, and thus we must wear it neatly when we're on duty."

"What's more, there's a punishment for dirtying the uniform, let alone for not wearing it." Whistle kept looking left and right as if he was afraid of being spotted by a colleague.

"Stop nagging. It's symbolic enough to wear it. Standing in the midwinter snow in the black uniform will alert everyone in the vicinity that policemen are around. How are we supposed to catch any criminal?" Vader spat on the ground and then continued, "You're both from Border Town, right?"

The two policewomen became more spirited the moment Vader mentioned this. "Yes, I am. My father was a hunter who used to live on Old Street, and his skill was remarkable. He was able to strike the neck of a fox scampering about in the woods with only one arrow."

"Me too. But my father often told me that hunting was an unstable career, and he preferred I became a miner. He'd even prepared a hoe for me. Had His Highness Roland not become the new Lord, I would have spent my days in the mines."

"I can tell." Vader shrugged his shoulders. "Only the children of hunters would have such uncommon nicknames," he silently thought. "Since you're both locals, surely you're more concerned about the public order in the town than I am, right? If even I'm not afraid of being punished, why are you afraid? Is wearing the uniform more important than enforcing the rules and laws laid down by His Highness?"

"Hmm..." The duo hesitated briefly, before they replied with conviction, "You're right."

"But, Brother Vader, you're not an outsider. Haven't you already received your identity card? His Highness once said that anyone who possess the identity card are considered to be his subjects," Whistle muttered.

Vader laughed and did not say a word. Instead, he fixed his gaze on a row of cave dwellings on the eastern side of the temporary housing area.

After serving as a policeman for nearly three months, he had grown fully accustomed to life in the Western Region. Before he became a policeman, he thought that a "patrol team" would have nothing to do apart from extorting and cheating the people. Little did he know that there would be more work than could possibly be completed every day.

The police were required to accept refugees and handle disputes among the citizenry. It was also the police's duty to catch criminals and spies. Whereas, apart from fighting against the demonic beasts, the First Army did not help or intervene in the internal peacekeeping of Border Town.

This was completely different from what he had initially expected.

In Valencia, the patrol team was more like the city guards' backup. They handled menial tasks and were not of much use. This was the reason why many patrollers would seek money from illicit sources. However, in Border Town, the police and the First Army belonged to different systems. The former handled internal affairs while the latter handled external ones.

What surprised Vader more was that the majority of the patrol team's targets came from public reports instead of direct orders from their superiors. Indeed, the citizens of Border Town had changed his perception of commoners. This bunch of lazy and stupid people would actively watch out for suspicious characters and report them to the City Hall. Whenever a foreign merchant ship arrived in the town, the Ministry of Justice would receive a handful of such reports.

Vader soon realized the tremendous power that lied within the town—no foreign spy could shut himself off from the public or integrate into society quickly unless he grew up here. With everyone serving as a vigilant watchdog, what enemy could hide among the populace?

But of course, not every arrest operation would be successful. For example, the sneaky characters whom they arrested during the previous operation turned out to be a noble from the Kingdom of Dawn. Vader was prepared to be punished, but his superiors showed no reaction and seemed unperturbed that he had beaten up a noble. This served to consolidate his current mentality towards his job.

"Gold's here!" Firehead exclaimed softly.

"Ignore him and just pretend that you're sweeping the snow," Vader said calmly. "He didn't bring any goods, which means he's only here to check on the situation."

"Gold" was the code name of their current target. The Ministry of Justice received a report two days ago that a serf was trafficking grains. His Excellency Carter attached great importance to this issue and immediately assigned the task to Vader. He demanded that the serf was arrested alive together with the goods, and called this the "Gold Hunting Mission".

However, the mission did not start out smoothly. After making some inquiries, they began to uncover the identity of the target. Subsequently, a team of six people took turns to monitor the temporary housing area, but not a single trace of the target was found.

To Vader, it was clear that the reason for the lack of development was because the policemen's uniforms were too conspicuous. He had lived in the Western Zone for some time, and naturally knew that whenever a City Hall official was in the area, news of it would spread rapidly among the residents. It was no different in the Eastern Zone. The people who lived here were serfs, and thus the black uniforms of the policemen were as striking as fireflies in the night sky.

That explained why he was adamant that Firehead and Whistle should take off their uniforms and put on a tattered coat. In this way, they could disguise as snow sweepers and stand on the thoroughfares of the Eastern Zone and Border Town. The suspect would not be able to escape their sights as soon as he appeared.

They saw Gold walking around the Eastern Zone briefly before returning to a cave dwelling. When he reappeared, he was carrying a large sack on his back.

"He's indeed trafficking wheat..." Whistle clenched her fists tightly.

"Damn it! He simply doesn't respect what His Highness has said." Firehead cursed angrily. "We shall arrest him right now!"

"Don't be rash," Vader said and beckoned with his hands. "His Excellency Carter said that he wanted the target arrested alive together with the goods. We shall split three ways and act." His instructions were in

accordance with the previous operation to surround Rat. "Firehead, you'll mobilize immediately and go to the old city wall area first. There's only one route for him to enter the inner city."

"Yes."

"I'll follow the target. This requires a lot of skills, and thus I'm the most suitable for this role." He licked his lips in anticipation. "Lastly, Whistle, you shall stalk me from about a 100 steps back. Remember not to make eye contact with Gold."

"Understood."

"Then, let's begin!"

Although the three policemen were similar in rank, they acted in full compliance with Vader's plan.

Vader carried a broom and calmly walked a couple of steps in front of Gold. According to his experience, following the target from behind would easily arouse the target's suspicions. Instead, by "leading the way", the target would be much less cautious. If he was fairly certain of where the target was heading, this would be the safest method of tracking. He fully concentrated on Gold—he was confident that the instant that he heard a slight change in the target's footsteps, he could trip the target and prevent him from fleeing.

After passing through the old city wall, Gold stopped walking and rested by the corner of a street. He was ostensibly aware that if he headed towards the center of the town, there would be a high chance of encountering policemen. Vader took a dozen more steps forward and turned into a side path, where he waited for the buyer to show up.

A short while later, a local who was pushing a handcart appeared. He looked around the vicinity before he slowly walked up to the serf. After inspecting the contents of the sack, he took out a handful of coins to close the deal. At that very moment, Vader gestured for the two policewomen to act.

The three of them dashed towards the target from different directions. The dealer was so dumbstruck that he did not move at all.

Vader pressed the serf down on the ground, accompanied by the clinking sound of coins scattering all over. He yelled, "You're arrested!"

Chapter 440: The Court Trial

Roland was studying the power grid layout of a residential district when he heard the news. After Carter had concluded his report, Roland put down his quill pen and sighed lightly. Although he knew that something like this was inevitable, he felt helpless and sad that it truly happened. He had repeatedly publicized the strict ban on private sales of food, yet there were people who still took the risk for the sake of a small profit. As this was the first case of its kind, it was clear to him that a heavy sentence should be issued to deter others.

In addition, he felt the urge to finalize the laws, and then to recruit specialized legal officers to conduct interrogations and handle cases. After all, when the city was fully constructed, criminal cases would only increase, and he would not have time to play judge to all of them.

It was decided that the trial would be conducted in the castle hall.

Roland had requested for Barov to come to the castle, and together, they would hear the case of this food smuggling crime.

In the hall, the two suspects knelt on the floor. Their ghost pale faces and vacant eyes suggested that they were new to this sort of occasion.

Roland took his seat on the throne, cleared his throat, and said, "Explain everything that you did. You'll be doubly guilty if you hold back or lie about anything."

"Yes, yes, Your Highness." The two suspects seemed as if they had just awoken from a dream. They scrambled between themselves to tell their personal accounts of what happened, particularly the serf, who shouted at the top of his voice, "Your Highness, Lord! I know that what I did was wrong, but if I didn't sell the wheat... I wouldn't be able to live on! Those officials didn't buy wheat according to your demand. I'd no choice but to do this!"

The case turned out to be very simple, and Roland cleared his emotions halfway through listening.

In order to reassure the citizens, the City Hall had set the individual quota for purchasing grains to be slightly higher than the actual consumption. Therefore, there would be a small excess of wheat every month. Parker, who resided in the Sixth Residential Area, smelled a business opportunity. He would grind the excess wheat into flour and add in a few of his self-grown herbs to make savory pancakes. It sold well—fortunately, the sale restrictions in the Convenience Market only applied to staples, while poultry and eggs could be freely sold in the stalls.

The business brought in some silver royals for him every month. However, there was only so much excess wheat, and hence, he had to reduce his own consumption in order to expand the scale of the business. Parker thus set his sights on serfs who did not sell all of their food to the City Hall, and soon got in touch with "Gold" to establish this trafficking deal.

However, the serf's final words puzzled Roland. "Why didn't the officials purchase wheat according to the rules? Does this affair involve the City Hall?"

Roland looked at Barov. The latter faced him back and said softly, "The Ministry of Agriculture is in charge of purchasing. The minister is Sirius Daly, whom I believe is unlikely to have made such a grave mistake. You can call him in for questioning."

Roland nodded and had his guards summon the Minister of Agriculture to the castle.

Sirius Daly rushed to the castle hall, and after making a very impressive Knight's bow towards Roland, he enquired if His Highness had any decree for him. His mannerisms retained the style of the Wolf Family's knights.

The prince delineated the parts of the case which he did not understand. "Did you ever refuse to purchase the serf's grains?"

"Your Highness, this was what happened," Sirius answered without hesitation. "As per your demands, we didn't stop the purchases after the bumper harvest. However, we lowered the purchase price

according to the diminishing quality of the wheat. In the first two months, there was little difference between our purchase price and the original price."

Sirius paused before he continued, "After winter arrived, because the majority of serfs didn't have proper storage places for the wheat and they were relocated from the shacks to the temporary housing areas, the quality of the wheat deteriorated substantially. When we do the purchases, we would often find wet, discolored and moldy food, and therefore our purchase prices reduced by 20 to 30 percent. The food of this particular serf was largely wet, moldy, and couldn't be stored any longer. Therefore, the price that I offered was five times less than during the bumper harvest."

"Your Highness, that's as good as not buying!" The serf shouted. "I spent my entire year working on the farm. This price was even lower than what I would get on Black Street! Didn't you say that the prices wouldn't change?!"

"But you have to sell it on time, idiot!" Barov snapped angrily. "Do you think that nobody knows why you hoarded wheat? Had there been a food supply problem in town, you would have sold your stock at three to four times the usual price!"

Everything about the case became clear. However, the result slightly surprised Roland. He had thought of it as a simple issue of food trafficking, but instead discovered a case of black-hearted food selling. Parker was obviously aware that this batch of grains was of extremely poor quality, and yet he was fine with buying it at half the price on multiple occasions. He probably did not care whether the moldy wheat was actually edible.

While there was no doubt that the serf had committed a grave crime and should be punished heavily, Roland was uncertain about how to punish Parker. He had heard Scroll's stories about the life of the poor. When they had no food to eat, they would satiate their hunger with branches, grass and leaves, let alone moldy bread. This was precisely why Scroll had repeatedly emphasized what a noble and great thing it was for all citizens to be able to eat wheat. Parker used to be poor too, and he was probably not aware that it was a severe crime to use low-quality ingredients to make pancakes.

After discussing the issue with Barov for a while, Roland finally passed his judgment.

He stood up, looked over the entire audience, and then said solemnly, "I pronounce... the two men guilty! The serf disobeyed the ban and trafficked grain. He knowingly violated the law and hence is doubly guilty. I shall sentence him to ten years of labor in the mines. If his performance and behavior are good, the number of years may be reduced."

"Resident Parker also violated the ban, and furthermore used low-quality wheat to make pancakes which he sold to other citizens. For these two crimes, I shall sentence him to ten years of labor, and a fine equivalent to three times of his earnings from the sale of pancakes. My judgments shall be enforced immediately!"

The two convicts turned feeble and fell on the ground as if paralyzed. The guards standing on one side walked up to them and dragged them out of the hall.

The prince then instructed Sirius. "Write this matter into a bulletin and then hand it to Barov for review and publication. I want to let all citizens know the entire sequence of events, and make sure that this never happens again."

"Yes, Your Highness!"

After the trial ended, Roland summoned Chief Knight to his office. "Did you hear that the person who arrested the criminal was Vader again?"

Carter nodded. "However, they overdid it this time. They took off their uniforms while arresting the criminal, and in the process, they were also reported for getting into a fight with commoners. I'll warn him about this."

"Don't do that. In fact, you should commend him," Roland said, stroking his chin. "Isn't it expected of a plainclothes policeman to adapt to the situation and to understand how to apprehend a criminal? Vader was formerly a patrol team member, and also understands the Black Street Forces well—he's, quite simply, a natural born talent for inspection work.

When the time's right, I shall recruit him into the Security Bureau." Roland quietly thought.

"Nightingale's lacking some manpower after all."