

## Witch 541

### Chapter 541: The Mists of Bloodfang Association

Two days later, Roland met Iffy in his office again.

Her complexion was much better now. In her eyes, they seemed to have more complex emotions, which made her look more fresh and alive, more "human".

"Heidi Morgan wants to see you, but she's not able to come over, so she asked Tilly Wimbledon to send us here." Iffy bowed to Roland, and her opening remarks surprised Roland slightly. "Lady Heidi doesn't like Her Highness, Tilly. She believes that combat witches are the real core of Sleeping Island, so the Bloodfang Association shouldn't just be treated as an ordinary witch organization. She wants to make a breakthrough with your help, and she promises to offer more than what Tilly offers. Of course... I know Your Highness doesn't need them."

"Tell me the details of the Bloodfang Association," said Roland with a hand propping up his chin.

"Yes..."

Her storytelling lasted about an hour, while Roland was frowning more and more. In the end, Roland could not help but ask, "Does Tilly know about all of this?"

"I don't know." Iffy shook her head. "Lady Heidi forbids us from revealing the past of the Bloodfang Association, and seldom talks with Her Highness."

"How about the other witch organizations in Sleeping Island?"

"They're closer to the witches from the Kingdom of Graycastle, especially after the building of the Sleeping Spell. Although some combat witches agree with Lady Heidi secretly, most of them don't want to confront Ashes."

"It turns out the pressure on Tilly's shoulders is not much lesser than mine." Roland felt impressed.

"Different from the situation that I'm the perfectly justified ruler of the Western Region, witches of Sleeping Island are more like in a loose organization based on covenants. Although Tilly is the organizer, she actually doesn't have the authority over those small groups who came to join her." Especially because of this, it showed Tilly's merits were superior to others—uniting most of the assistant witches, and positively establishing connections with the secular rulers of other islands. In particular, the invention of the Sleeping Spell gave her a chance to manage all the other witches.

After all, "Assistant witches are equally important" should not be just a slogan. The witches' bounty guild just offered those assistant witches with various odd abilities an excellent stage to present themselves. When they completed missions and obtained a large amount of remuneration, they could then use it to improve the quality of their lives on Sleeping Island. Such a mindset would be formed gradually. After all, no powerful combat witch would like to spend her days chewing salted fish. Especially when the assistant witches had their status promoted, they would naturally favor Tilly. When the time came, as the leader of the guild, Tilly would undoubtedly gain a great power of speech.

This was probably why Heidi Morgan could not wait any longer.

In addition, the Bloodfang Association was full of doubtful points. As the daughter of Archduke Morgan, how could Heidi not be able to afford a group of non-combat witches? It was only fair to say that she did not intend to take those "useless" people in from the very beginning. Different from the fact that witches from the Witch Cooperation Association wanted to be united to help each other, all that she wanted was a team which could fight for her benefits.

Plus her obsession towards the Kingdom of Wolfheart, all of these made Roland vigilant against her.

He should probably write a secret letter to Tilly, telling her to carefully watch out the moves of the Bloodfang Association.

"Didn't Heidi forbid you from revealing the secrets of the Bloodfang Association?" He lightly knocked on the desk. "Don't you want to follow her instructions anymore?"

Iffy bit on her lips. "I want to join the Witch Union."

Roland stopped knocking and looked at her in surprise. Although he knew that the exhibition of the powers of the thermal weapons would greatly strike the powerful and arrogant combat witches, he did not expect the effect would be so... extraordinary.

"But you hurt Maggie." He contemplated for a while. "Right now I can't..."

"About that, you can punish me as you wish."

Iffy unbuttoned her robe.

Almost at the same time, a pair of hands covered Roland's eyes from behind. But Nightingale seemed to have forgotten that she was in the mist and that her transparent fingers could not block Roland's vision.

Iffy lowered her robe and turned her back to Roland.

Roland could not help but gasp.

He could see, on Iffy's back there were all sorts of whip scars. The restored wounds looked like numerous earthworms lying crisscross on her back, forming a sharp contrast with the surrounding delicate skin. As the wounds had been healed, even Nana could not do anything to them with her healing ability. Those scars remained as they were.

When Iffy talked about the rigorous fighting trainings in the Bloodfang Association, she only used very brief words. Now when Roland thought back, he could vaguely smell the bloody atmosphere in her words.

"Put on your clothes," he said with a low voice.

"But, Your Majesty..."

Nightingale had shown herself and pulled up Iffy's robe to the shoulders.

"If you want to join the Witch Union, then don't bring the Bloodfang Association's ways of handling things here." Roland suddenly felt a suppression in his chest. "You can apply to Wendy. As to whether the other witches would accept you, it'll depend on your performance." He paused. "Anyway, City of Neverwinter is the home to witches. Even if you don't join the union, you can settle down here."

Upon hearing this, Iffy's shoulders loosened. "Thank you... for your kindness."

...

After watching her leave, Roland stood up, walked to the French window, and let out a deep breath.

Till now, his team for arresting demons was fully assembled and yet he could not feel relaxed.

"Actually, she's very lucky," Nightingale walked to him and said.

"Can that be called lucky?"

"Compared with her friend Annie, at least she survived. If the Bloodfang Association is really the only witch organization survived in the Kingdom of Wolfheart, then its members will end tragically in case they get caught by the church or the noble. That's also why the member witches yearned so much for the Holy Mountain."

A doubt suddenly emerged in Roland's heart. "Were those non-combat witches really sent to other witch organizations by Heidi Morgan? To avoid the exposure of their whereabouts, the witches seldom contacted one another, and their gathering places changed frequently. How did Heidi gathered such information? After all, the foothold of an organization is a matter of life and death. If not to particularly trusted persons, the organization leader probably won't tell other people of their gathering sites easily."

Even if Heidi knew all that, sending the witches to other organizations was highly risky of an exposure. Would the other organizations willingly accept whatever she threw at them?

The more he thought about it, the more he found it weird.

But Nightingale confirmed that Iffy was not lying.

Obviously, the problem lay within the founders of the Bloodfang Association.

In conclusion, Heidi seemed more dangerous now. Roland realized that he should convey the information to Tilly as soon as possible so that she could carry out an investigation and make some early preparations.

The daughter of Archduke Morgan was most likely not royal to witches.

Chapter 542: The Wicked Journey

"Sister, we've arrived." Cole Kant happily rushed into the cabin.

"I've told you twice during this trip to not call me sister." Edith raised her head and took a glance at him.

"Have you forgotten?"

"No..." Cole shivered. "No, I still remember."

"Then who am I?"

"My, my Clerk, Miss Edith."

"Who are you then?"

"Father... No, the ambassador sent out by Calvin Kant, the Duke of the Northern Region."

"Great. Make sure that you don't make the same mistake for the third time." Edith stood up, stretched her stiff limbs, and walked out of the cabin. "Call all the members of the emissary delegation. Let's go to the inner city."

This was a little trick Edith liked to play. She liked to secretly observe the person she was about to negotiate with and then only revealed herself after having a rough understanding of what kind of person the other party was. In doing so, she could take precautions beforehand and impress the other. If the one she negotiated with was male, he would most likely be interested in her.

She never tried to hide her gender; on the contrary, she used it as a social advantage.

Since she was called the Pearl of the Northern Region, she certainly needed to make good use of it.

"How about... the heads then?"

"Leave them on the boat, unless you want to hold them in your bedroom." She twitched her mouth. "They have gone rotten."

Walking off the trestle, Edith noticed that there were many boats on the canal. Many people were at the dock, most of whom carried big luggage. Judging from their clothing, they looked neither like slaves, nor businessmen. She was quite curious about it because as far as she knew, people in the other walks of life seldom traveled at the spring plowing season.

She sent for a servant. "Go ask them where they're going."

"What does it have to do with us?" Cole asked in bewilderment.

"Since Roland Wimbledon has taken over this city, he must have issued some new policies to declare his authority. What he said can, in a way, reflect his characteristics. So, it certainly has something to do with us." Edith smiled. "Of course you can pay a few gold royals for the Rats to gather the information, but I personally prefer first-hand information."

"Is, is that so..."

"You need to observe more, think more, my dear ambassador." She said, "This is a rare opportunity."

On the other side of the city gate, the streets were filled with more pedestrians. There were booths on both sides of the road. He could hear constant cries from vendors. A few years ago, Edith had been to the king's city to participate in the fifth princess' adulthood ceremony with her father. This city had not changed much. It was still as busy as it used to be.

If it were in the City of Evernight, one could have never seen such a crowd except for a holiday or a celebration.

All of a sudden, a speaker on the street caught her attention.

"Hold on for a while." Edith ordered the troop to stop and joined the crowd with Cole.

"Can you saw wood? Can you lay bricks? Can you take care of cattle and sheep? As long you specialize in something, you're the talents His Majesty is looking for! Go to Western Region. There, His Majesty is building a new king's city—City of Neverwinter! Your talent will bring you a huge reward!"

"Talent?" Edith pondered on it for a while. "What an interesting name... However, what does it mean by a new king's city? The City of Neverwinter? Is there such a city in Western Region?"

Pacing forward a little bit, she saw another group of people.

"Witches are innocent. This is the repentance the High Priest wrote down right before his execution," another speaker said, waving the document in his hand. "They may be your close relatives, your daughter, your sister!" If you're still afraid of them, send them to the City of Neverwinter! They'll be well taken care of. If you hate to part with them, you can go with them! His Majesty has promised, the witches' families will get an accommodation to protect from wind and rain. Plus, you'll also get a decent job!"

"Has the High Priest been executed?" Cole said with his eyes wide open.

On the other hand, Edith frowned. "If this is Roland Wimbledon's new policy, the way he promotes it's quite melodramatic. Isn't he afraid to provoke the church to a full revenge? That'll be nothing like the fight among nobles, but a deadly war against the heresies.

No idea whether it's a blessing or a curse to serve such a king."

It took her an hour to walk through the street leading to the inner city. She found actually the street was full of such speakers who basically repeatedly told whatever His Majesty had done after conquering the king's city. Anyone who came to the king's city only needed to listen on the street for half a day to understand the changes His Majesty had made, without the need to get any help from the Rats.

"My Lady, I've found it out." The servant who was sent to inquire about the news caught up with the team, panting. "They're all going..."

"City of Neverwinter, right?" Edith interrupted him.

"You, you knew it?"

"Don't bother finding a hotel now. We're going to the palace to submit the emissary document." Her heart was filled with a vague sense of foreboding. "Now, hurry!"

...

"What?" Cole asked in surprise. "His Majesty left the king's city a week ago? Without even holding an inauguration ceremony?"

"That's what the receptionist said," the attendant reported. "At first His Majesty left a man named Barov Mons, his chief minister, behind to take care of daily affairs, but Barov Mons left the king's city yesterday too. Apart from the servants, there's nobody else in the palace. The receptionist said if you want to talk with the City Hall, he can pass the message for you."

"That's fine," Edith said in a cold voice. She did not expect her hunch was right. She had been traveling non-stop all the way, yet still was too late to catch up with Roland. "Roland was really planning to move

the capital, leave this splendid city behind, and rebuild a new capital city in Western Region! What's exactly in his head? To build a city on such a scale as the king's city would take at least 30 to 40 years!"

"What should we do?" Looking at the stunned members of the emissary delegation, Cole asked quietly.

After a long while, she said sullenly, "Turn around. Head for the City of Neverwinter!"

"They've left anyway. No need to hurry," Cole said with a bitter face. "It's been a week since I took a shower last time. I feel lice are about to grow on my body."

Edith turned her head and found her collar also smelled weird. Finally, she sighed. "Let's find a hotel for the night. We'll set off tomorrow morning."

In the next morning, when the emissary delegation arrived at the dock, they found their boat had been burned to a skeleton.

"What happened?" For the first time, Edith felt confused.

"Ahem, don't be mad, sis-Miss Edith. Observe more, think more..." Cole waved his hand and stopped a passerby. "The dock will catch fire as well?"

"Ah, you mean that." The passerby enthusiastically explained, "No idea who sneakily hid bodies on their boat. The Rats who tried to steal something from the boat smelled it." You know, people are very cautious about such stuff. After all, half a year ago a demonic plague struck the city, which was exactly caused by the bodies distributed by the church. Anyway, to deal with them, burning is the safest way. The captain has been arrested by the guards for interrogation. Oh, do you know him?"

Edith was startled, not knowing what face she should put on. After a long silence, she uttered, "I don't know him. Thanks."

"It seems we need to find a new boat." She thought. "I guess this trip of loyalty won't go as smoothly as I imagined..."

#### Chapter 543: The Turning Point

Barov was like a different person when Roland met him again.

He looked vigorous and radiant, and even his chest had risen considerably. His footsteps were powerful and conveyed a strong sense of confidence. He was not how a 50-year-old minister typically looked.

It seemed that the days he spent in the king's city was highly satisfactory.

"If I had known it, I would have called you back a little later." Roland joked.

"No, Your Majesty. Regardless of how prosperous the City of Dawn is, it can't compare with the City of Neverwinter personally created by you." Barov responded while smoothing his mustache. "Wherever I am, my heart will always be with you."

Why do these words... sound so weird and awkward?

Roland coughed twice and attempted to change the subject. "How's the situation over there?"

"Don't worry. With my students and the First Army around, the new assigned nobles aren't able to create trouble even if they intend to," the director replied smugly. "I've deliberately given them more space to fight for money and power among themselves. As long as they don't disrupt the normal livelihoods of the citizens, that is acceptable. I believe that, for a long period of time henceforth, they'll scheme and scramble among themselves to attain the tiniest amount of power—after all, they've had absolutely no qualification to enter the City Hall thus far."

"It's indeed a good idea." Roland commented and laughed.

Although he knew a thing or two about political balancing and other control strategies, he was obviously not as good at actualizing them as these old foxes who had been involved in politics for a long time. While they might not be the wiliest of foxes, they were definitely thick-skinned and vicious enough. It could be said that it was only now that Barov revealed the true extent of his talents.

As the king, Roland could stay out of dabbling in dirty political tricks himself. As long as he had the personnel, law and military power in his grip, nobody would dare to covet his authority.

"Your Majesty, may I ask where have you sent Treasurer Lauren Moore?" Barov revealed a little displeasure as he sighed. "The ceremonial officer told me that you didn't execute him."

"He siphoned off some of the relief rations distributed to the people, colluded with the former Prime Minister, and was involved in the exploitation of refugees." Roland shrugged. "His crimes didn't warrant execution, and while at his age, he wasn't suitable to be sent to the mines. The only thing I could do was to deport him."

"That's a real... pity."

"Why, you need him for something?"

"Of course not. Lauren was rather influential in the king's city. I was just afraid that the lower nobles wouldn't be able to handle him." Barov laughed and shook his head. "As my mentor, he bullied me for a long time. I regret that I didn't have the opportunity to see him begging for mercy."

Roland joined the laughter. "I believe that he could bring his whole family to the Kingdom of Dawn. Who knows, you may get to see him again one day." Let's not talk about this. I called you back because I intend to build a few factories. They're related to the upcoming series of major reforms in the City of Neverwinter."

"Do you need a lot of people?"

"Yes indeed, otherwise I'd only have to call Karl." Roland nodded. "I'll need at least 3,000 people."

Barov forced a smile. "Your Majesty, that's a huge demand worthy of you. In other cities, there's no chance that a project would require 3,000 people at the same time."

"The good news is, not every one of these 3,000 people needs to be literate. I'll only require more than 200 of them to have completed primary education."

"What do you want to build?"

Roland placed the records which were prepared long ago in front of the director. "A coke plant, a steel plant, and a forge."

"Is the steel produced by Miss Anna not enough?" Barov asked.

"The problem is that it's too inefficient." Roland sighed. "Her magic power should be used for more sophisticated manufacturing, rather than wasted on preparing the materials for steam engines. I hope that I can "de-witch" the basic industrial productions this year."

At present, the industries of Neverwinter had reached an turning point. If a breakthrough was not found, it would be hard to progress. This was because the source power machines heavily depended on Anna's materials, and therefore the scale of production could not be expanded. In fact, the steam engines could be produced without using such a high grade of steel. The first generation of steam engines was made out of iron only.

Now, the preconditions for a breakthrough had been fully satisfied. The coal mine was able to handle all of the coking processes—coke was one of the primary ingredients of large-scale steelmaking. The dozen or so earth blast furnaces in the Furnace Area also supplied an abundant amount of iron ingots. Steel could be smelted using a simple converter, while the steam hammers in the forge could be used to create components that the other factories could directly process. If these procedures could be made into a cycle, Anna would be completely liberated from her duties, and only normal people would be needed throughout the production process.

After Roland outlined the important tasks of the three projects, Barov quickly understood the meaning of "de-witch".

"I understand, Your Majesty. However, are these things really possible?" He appeared unconvinced.

"Can we really obtain enough steel without relying on the demons'... ahem, witches' powers? You may not have known that in other cities, it's common for a piece of forged steel to cost 20 times the price of a piece of pig iron."

In this era, steel was forged by the blacksmith's hammer. The repeated hammering of the iron ingots caused excess carbon and other impurities to be oxidized until steel was formed. Of course, the efficiency of this process was unspeakably low, and a lot of raw materials would be wasted. A significant amount of iron would break off due to oxidation, and therefore several pieces of iron ingot were necessary to produce a usable piece of steel. This explained why a full set of body armor that was completely made of steel was the lifelong desire of many knights. It could even be passed down from generation to generation as a family treasure.

From a certain perspective, the laborious method of producing steel could give one the false perception that the effort put into it made it more exquisite and higher-grade. Now that City of Neverwinter could mass produce steel, believed by most people to be the witches' work, Barov's suspicions were not hard to understand. However, to Roland, steel was just iron with a different proportion of carbon.

"I won't say it's easy. Both coking and converter steelmaking require techniques that were discovered by trial and error. However..." Roland paused briefly. "These projects are definitely achievable. When they're completed, there'll be hundreds of chimneys in the industrial area. The monthly output of steel will exceed the current annual output. We'll then have an endless supply of steel to produce bicycles,



ships, all kinds of machines, and even houses. Everything that you see will be made of steel. It'll be in everyone's homes, and even the common folk will be able to use steel utensils and tools."

Barov remained speechless for a long time before he finally replied, "I'll draw up a recruitment plan and financial allocation plan for you to review as quickly as possible."

"Okay, you'll be in charge of the preparatory work for this," Roland said in encouragement.

As Barov walked toward the office door, he abruptly turned back and bowed down at Roland.

"It'll be my pleasure and honor to see a world like that, Your Majesty."

...

#### Chapter 544: A New Source of Power

"The prospect of a new world, huh?" Roland could not help laughing.

He then asked Nightingale to summon Anna in.

At these times, Nightingale would leave voluntarily to give the two of them privacy.

Anna was wearing a light blue one-piece dress, underneath which her knee-length black stockings were visible, and her feet were covered in a pair of moccasins. All these made her appear particularly lively. These modern-styled items of clothing were tailored under the guidance of Roland during his spare time using flow-coated fabrics that were provided by Soraya. They were extremely light, easy to wear, and highly durable. They were thus perfectly suitable for Anna to wear when she was crafting apparatus.

Whenever Roland looked into her sparkling eyes, he would feel a surge of happiness and smile uncontrollably.

Of course, he no longer needed to act as mannerly as he used to.

He wrapped his arms around her and sat her on his lap. Then he took a sniff of her hair and kissed her cheek before getting to the point. "I want to develop a new source of energy."

"Will it be something like the steam engine?" She turned her head back to face him. Her collarbone could be seen protruding along her fair neck.

Roland could not resist reaching his hand out to stroke her collarbone. It tickled her such that she began to laugh shyly.

"Your Majesty, be proper."

"Hehe, alright." He placed Anna on the seat and stood up to extract a stack of blueprints from the files on one side of the table. "Have a look at this first... How much can you understand it?"

"Um..." Whenever Anna was studying something, her expression would turn completely solemn. Roland would often feel an unexplainable sense of shame and inferiority when he observed her looking aloof—it felt to him as though he was sitting in a naturally well-lit classroom and peeking at the smartest student in the class.

In order to counteract this feeling, he thought of the naughty things he would do to her at night.

"I've more or less understood everything." After Anna looked through the last of the blueprints, she thought for a moment and nodded. "It's also powered by steam, except that the piston is replaced by windmill blades, and therefore saves energy on the reciprocating motion of the connecting rods. Am I right?"

"You're absolutely right." Roland discarded his wild thoughts and put on a serious face. "It's called the steam turbine. While it's also powered by high-pressure steam, its efficiency is much higher than the steam engine."

This was the revolutionary product which Roland had conceived for a long time.

It could be said that Anna was the main reason why he wanted to rid the basic industries of dependence on witches—only this way would she be able to focus on high-end mechanical production.

The steam turbine was his experiment within this field.

Turbines had many uses. They could be used to power ships and provide electricity, especially the latter—it could be foreseen that after Fallen Dragon Ridge was captured, Countess Spear would have to spend a long time sorting out government affairs. It would not be wise to rely solely on Mystery Moon's magic power to provide night lighting for the industry area, not to mention the residential area's electricity supply. Roland certainly did not want to admit that this was a planning failure caused by his lack of experience. In order to make up this mistake, he had to think of an alternative means of producing electricity.

Due to the natural flaws of the circulation principle, the electricity generated by steam engines was inconsistent. Furthermore, Roland had weak knowledge of voltage regulation. It was thus a more suitable choice to use steam turbines, which had more stable output power and higher thermal efficiency.

"What do I have to do first?" Anna asked.

"Remember what you did for the gunboat?" Roland showed her a blueprint of a blade. "You'll need to build an operable model of this. It only needs to be about one meter in length. The main problem you have to solve is the angle of the blade. It has to allow high-pressure steam to flow smoothly through every stator grille. If you can do this, more than half of the work would be done."

Yet, how could a usable end product be built without detailed data?

The only way was repeated trial and error.

As for the core of the turbine—Roland was not worried about the difficulty of altering the impeller because the cutting precision of Blackfire was much higher than any modern machining tool. He also did not worry about the strength of the materials—after all, impellers usually operated at a temperature of 500 to 600°C, and the alloy steel discovered by Lucia was more than competent for this task. The key problem was the angular coordination between the stator cascade and the impeller. The former was like a fixed barrier that could alter the angular direction of the passage of steam so as to prevent the steam from impacting with the impeller all at the same time. It also prevented directional disorder and the production of opposite forces. In essence, it was like a comb for airflow disorder.

If the model that Anna built was operable, Roland would mass produce it, and then there would be no more difficulties.

After the processing methods and the quality of materials were improved, the industrial results would be inevitably substantial.

"I understand." Anna's eyes gleamed, as though signaling that she was ready to begin work.

"No hurry." Roland held her hand tightly. "You should have heard from Wendy that I've decided to launch an attack to capture the demons."

"Yes," Anna replied, "will you be going along?"

Roland shook his head calmly.

"That's good." Anna rested her head on his shoulder. "The last time, I was almost frightened to death when I saw you injured."

"Really? But I've heard from Nightingale that you were the calmest person around. If it wasn't for your decisive plan, I might truly have..."

Before he could finish his sentence, Anna covered his mouth with her soft hand. "Don't say that word."

She only loosened her hand after Roland nodded in acknowledgement. He then continued, "Anyway, what I want to say is that you have to take good care of yourself, understand? If anything happens, use the Sigil of God's Will immediately without hesitation. It's okay even if you don't capture the demons... I'll be waiting at the castle for your triumphant return."

"Don't worry." Anna laughed. "I won't let them hurt the other witches either."

...

After Anna left, Roland stayed silent for a long time before he murmured, "Are you around?"

"Of course." Nightingale's figure appeared on top of the study table. "But I didn't eavesdrop on what the two of you said. I only returned after she left."

Roland stood up and walked over to the window. While looking towards the direction of the snow mountains, he explained to Nightingale the hunting plan that he had conceived. "Before setting out, you all will have to rehearse a few times to familiarize with the entire hunting procedure, as well as understand your own and one another's tasks. Moreover, this plan is only effective if you're facing a small number of demons. It'll have to be adjusted based on the situation." He paused briefly before continuing. "If you ever run into the worst kind of situation... and I mean the most hopeless and irredeemable situation, you must bring Anna back no matter what."

Nightingale did not say anything. Instead, she waited until Roland turned his head back to look at her, before replying with a disconcerting look on her face. "Is this the real reason why you aren't going?"

Roland could not deny the truth. "If not, you'd definitely choose to save me, right?"

"... understood." Nightingale sighed lightly. "I'll do my best."

"It's all on you." Roland patted her shoulders and enunciated.

Chapter 545: Battle Rehearsal

City of Neverwinter, north of the border city wall.

Upon reaching the former test site, Iffy found that many witches were already gathered there. Among them were Maggie and her perpetual companion, a golden-haired young girl.

"She seems to be called Lightning." Iffy thought.

When the young girl saw Iffy, she viciously shook her fist and grimaced, before tugging Maggie to a far distance away.

If it were three days ago, Iffy would have made it a point to lecture the two of them that they have to maintain respect in front of a combat witch.

But this time, she simply laughed silently.

The young girl's alert expression reminded Iffy of Annie. "When I was at that age, Annie was just like that girl. She was always careful and vigilant, and always walked in front to protect me."

It's clearly only by chance that the two of us sought refuge together.

Perhaps, this is what the Union calls... "sisters".

"Since everyone's here, I'll begin to explain the mission. It's codenamed 'Melting Point' and Miss Agatha will be the commander." Roland proclaimed before he walked into the middle of the audience. "Of course, many of you already know the details of the mission. However, for the sake of the newcomers, I'll explain everything all over again."

Do the newcomers... refer to me?

Iffy immediately gathered her focus.

No matter what, this is the first mission assigned by the new lord. Since he has asked me to take part, it means that there's some battle involved. This will be a good opportunity to demonstrate the value of my abilities. Iffy thought.

"In order to understand the enemy's strength and hasten the research of the Sigil of Magic Stones, you all will be heading to Devil's Town behind the snow mountains. You'll draw the demons out to fight, and use ambush to capture them alive..."

...

After Roland finished his explanation, Iffy was unable to collect her wits for a long time.

Surely there's nothing wrong with my ears! Jesus, is he serious?

Were these demons really responsible for destroying the witches' empire that ruled over the entire mainland? This blue-haired woman, who serves as the commander of this mission, is a senior witch from

over 400 years ago? The Battle of Divine Will shall decide the fate of mankind? These nasty enemies are hiding somewhere not far from the Western Region?

How is any of this possible!

She maintained a stiff face as she glanced over at the other witches. However, she realized that there was not a hint of surprise on any of their faces.

It was apparent that all of them knew of these things beforehand.

"Now, Agatha will talk about the things you'll need to pay attention to during the mission, as well as brief you on the tactical arrangement."

Agatha nodded and stepped forth. "According to our intelligence, there's a vigilant Eye Demon in the demons' camp. This is crucial to our plan to lure the demons out. Anyone who sees it will be seen back by it. If our position is adjudged to be far away, the first group of enemies to be expected will be the Flying Devilbeasts. There aren't many of these demons, particularly in such a remote place. The last time we went, there were only two. I don't expect the number to have changed."

"We are disadvantaged in aerial combat, and therefore the best plan is to draw them towards the ground. If so, I'll be able to handle both of them myself. However, the Mad Demons which they may carry on their backs will be left to Miss Iffy to handle." Agatha glanced at the latter. "If you manage to capture them, our mission will be considered a success."

"She seems to be only slightly older than me, but yet it's said that she has lived for over 400 years?" Iffy remained in a daze for a while before mumbling incoherently, "I, I understand."

"You've never seen demons before, and so it's normal to be doubtful." Agatha seemed to have read her thoughts. "Wendy has records of the Association's encounters with demons. After the rehearsal, you may go and have a look. This will save you from being completely stunned when you see them in reality."

These words made Iffy frown involuntarily. "Completely stunned? Even if the enemies come straight from hell, they'll soon be crying piteously in the cage I set for them!"

"How do we pull them towards the ground?" Lightning asked.

"Abandon the hot air balloon and enter the Misty Forest." Agatha crouched on the ground and used stones to create a visual diagram. "When Sylvie notices the enemies chasing, you and Maggie will immediately escort those on the balloon into the forest. I've confirmed this with His Majesty. If it's a hydrogen balloon, Wendy will be able to operate it alone. Together with Sylvie making eye contact with the Eye Demon, the two of them will be able to escape at the same time."

"As the Devilbeasts approach the balloon, you'll then be responsible to lure them into the forest. Because their lines of vision will be obstructed, they'll descend to the ground and hunt. Be careful of the enemies' spears. I trust that you'll be able to evade them easily."

"Ooh, this plan sounds exciting." Lightning exclaimed with a wide grin on her face. "Count on me!"

"The forest is Leaf's natural home ground. Once the demons enter the ambush area, they'll be trapped. I don't have to tell you what to do next."

"What if there are more than two Devilbeasts?" A witch with jade green hair asked.

"If there are several of them, the demons will probably split up and hunt. What you can do is to keep a few more people in the balloon to conduct aerial surveillance, while the rest enter the forest." Agatha paused for a moment. "If that's the case, Anna will handle any enemies in the air. But remember, the lethal range of the Sigil of God's Will is limited. It's best to activate the Sigil only when the Devilbeasts gather together. Furthermore, Anna won't be able to use her own abilities while activating the Sigil. During that time, Leaf, you must make sure to protect Anna."

"How about me?" Nightingale questioned.

"You'll accompany Iffy. Her ability is only effective within a range of ten steps, and therefore she's vulnerable to the demons' spears when in an exposed position. You'll use your Mist to shorten the distance with the enemies quickly."

"Okay..." Nightingale turned her head and took a good look at Iffy. The latter immediately felt the aura of the former's magical power. It was sharp and cold, as though it was a substance of its own. "Don't you be a burden."

Iffy could sense that the former was also a combat witch. Not only that the former had experienced many bloody battles and had a lot of blood on her hands.

"Alright, everyone shall begin the rehearsal." Agatha clapped her hands in encouragement. "We'll start with luring the demons out."

...

An hour into the rehearsal, Iffy already had a general understanding of the abilities of every witch participating in the mission.

She was surprised that there were many witches here who could be considered combat witches.

Take Leaf for example. She hid her in a tree trunk in the forest. She could manipulate the entire forest to do her bidding. This type of ability was almost inconceivable and was on a level that completely transcended the usual limits of a witch.

Or Wendy, who although was only in charge of controlling the balloon, could summon a small hurricane that turned stones and dirt into painful bolts.

Agatha's frost could serve both as a shield and a sharp blade. She was therefore equally proficient in offense and defense, at least when at close range.

Nightingale was even more terrifying. Once she entered her Mist, she could travel to almost any part of the world she wanted. The physical obstructions of the real world did not affect her at all. Having experienced the power of this ability, Iffy could imagine that in a real battle, it made its user invincible. By moving without trace and being impossible to guard against, Nightingale would make all enemies despair quickly.

Yet, the most curious talent of all was Anna. According to the mission plan, this young woman who looked like she was barely out of her adolescence was the real ace in the team. "How powerful does her ability have to be to vanquish all of the demons in one go?"

Iffy did not have to wait long to know the answer.

#### Chapter 546: The Mystery of God's Stones

Anna's task was completely separated from everyone else's.

She only began to practice using the Sigil of God's Will after everyone else was completely familiar with the entire hunting process.

Although Iffy could not comprehend what kind of ability the Sigil of God's Will possessed, she could observe that the witches were all extremely excited about the rehearsal that was about to happen.

Did they rarely get a chance to see Anna display her ability?

Iffy's curiosity grew.

She watched as Anna strolled towards the middle of the field carrying an odd-looking sheet of metal in her hands.

Anna did not look like a combat witch at all. Her calm expression resembled the crystal clear water of a lake. From her movements and gestures, it was evident that she had never been in a life-and-death battle before.

The sheet of metal she was carrying also puzzled Iffy greatly. It was only about the size of a palm and was perfectly flat on both sides. Glittering gemstones were embedded on it. In no way did it look like a weapon.

"Let the balloons fly." Agatha gestured towards the direction of the Misty Forest. After a short while, several colorful balloons emerged from the forest canopy and flew up high into the sky.

"Go! Shoot them down!" She shouted.

"Wait... this is probably too far." Iffy mused. "The distance from the field to the edge of the forest is at least 250 meters. How would Anna be able to shoot these things down without flying? Unless, she's also able to transcend the usual limits of ability, and deliver the effects of her magic power to the sky?"

Anna nodded at Agatha. She raised the sheet of metal and pointed it in the direction of the balloons.

Shortly, Iffy witnessed a scene that she could hardly believe...

The four gemstones emitted a dazzling light at the same time. In a split second, the sheet of metal turned to gold in color. Thunderous claps were heard from the clear sky, while rays of light weaved together in the clouds and spattered. It was as if a new sun was being formed in the heavens.

Her ability can actually manipulate the entire sky!?

Before the crowd could even exclaim in astonishment, a blinding beam of gold light burst out of Anna's hands directly toward the balloons. The light rays in the sky were also controlled, and immediately, numerous thunderbolts could be seen following along the trail of the golden light and violently sweeping through the locations of the targets. It all seemed like a punishment that only God could have

ordained! To Iffy, it was as though the deafening roars came from right beside her ears, causing her brain to buzz for a long time. By the time the light rays disappeared, she had yet to recover fully.

What kind of amazing ability is this?

Iffy's body continued to quiver uncontrollably as she stared at the empty sky above the forest. "Even if all of the combat witches of the Bloodfang Association gathered together, they would not be able to handle such a force. Did she rely on her own abilities or that sheet of metal to be able to do this?"

In the face of a show of strength like this, it would not make a difference if the enemies were the wild beasts which Heidi Morgan mentioned or just a flock of sheep.

Iffy suddenly remembered His Majesty Roland's suggestion.

Is this... the power of the senior witches?

\*\*\*\*\*

It turned out that it was also the first time that Roland witnessed a complete demonstration of the power of the Sigil of God's Will.

The initial light rays seemed to leave an invisible trail behind them, allowing the golden thunderbolts that followed behind to take the same path. Furthermore, the location of the first thunderbolt strike was situated at the edge of the forest. This probably meant that the user of the Sigil was able to control it such that it only split apart when near to the enemies.

Another thing that Roland observed about the light rays was that they were only about as thick as an arm when released, but they quickly expanded in the shape of a fan, and the eventual range of each ray was approximately 50 meters. During the age of cold weapons, this was undoubtedly considered an apocalyptic weapon of mass destruction.

"Are all of those light rays... created by magic power?" Roland looked at Nightingale.

"I guess, probably, yes." The latter hesitated for a bit before answering.

"Probably?"

"In the mist, I could indeed see the frenzied surge of magic power, but..." She revealed a puzzled look on her face. "Its color is different from any magic power that I know or have seen before."

"What color is it?"

"Black, or should I say, the color of no light." Nightingale frowned. "They looked like black holes formed by the God's Stone of Retaliation."

Roland shuddered. "How is it possible that the color of the magic power of the gold-glittering Sigil is black in the misty world? Does this mean that the characteristics of their magic power are the same or at least similar?" In his brief trance, Roland seemed to think of something. "There's a relationship between the God's Stones and Magic Stones." It seemed as if he was on the verge of an audacious theory.

After he returned to his office in the castle, he summoned Agatha in.



"How many times did your people research on the Sigil of God's Will?"

"Not many. I've already told you everything that we found out. After all, only our chiefs were able to activate this type of sigil. Because their magic powers were crucial to our battles, there wasn't much that could be spared for this kind of experiment." She then asked curiously, "What's the matter? Is something wrong?"

"You mentioned before that the Sigil was able to penetrate the defenses of the God's Stone of Retaliation, right?"

Agatha nodded. "Not all the time. It depends on the quality of the God's Stones."

"Have you never observed the characteristics of the Sigil of God's Will's magic power?" Roland asked softly. "In the Mist, the magical thunderbolts invoked by the Sigil are the same color as the God's Stone."

"No... we've certainly done this experiment before. It was necessary that we recorded the characteristics of the magic power. However, during the activation of the Sigil, the Stone of Measuring would lose its monitoring function. And because our chiefs could certainly not visit the Quest Society every day, we simply recorded the observed color as gold." Agatha blinked a few times. "Wait, are you saying that it has the same color as the interference area of the God's Stone?"

"Indeed," Roland replied unhurriedly. "I have a theory that the God's Stone of Retaliation does not create black holes that neutralize magic power, but instead, it contains a great amount of magic power such that it affects and nullifies the operation of magic in its vicinity. This is also why the Sigil of God's Will causes the Stone of Measuring to lose its effectiveness. It creates a similar interference area as the God's Stone of Retaliation within its range of influence, and therefore the Stone of Measuring did not have any effect."

"But the trainee who's responsible for observing magic power has explicitly said that..." Agatha suddenly paused halfway through her sentence.

"Her observation was obstructed by the dazzling light emitted by the Sigil, like shadows being covered by light." Roland quickly opined. "Whereas in Nightingale's misty world, only magic power possesses color. She can even stare directly at the sun without being affected. This is why you weren't able to make this discovery."

Observing magic power was a derivative skill of the witches. It was limited by the witches' individual visual level. Furthermore, observations done in the day and night would yield different conclusions. Sylvie could fully prove this point. With her Eye of Magic, she could discover magic activity performed several kilometers away. Her detection range was far superior to Nightingale's.

This was why the Quest Society heavily trusted the results tested by the Stone of Measuring. Its accuracy was independent of the person operating it and the environment it was operated in, and thus it provided an overall highly accurate assessment of the magic power involved. It was almost as good as being able to observe under Nightingale's Mist. Therefore, the Quest Society would only accept the conclusion of the observer when the Stone of Measuring was unable to operate.

Chapter 547: Operation "Melting Point"

Agatha exasperatingly paced to and fro in front of the mahogany table. "So, according to you, the Sigil of God's Will can penetrate the God's Stone of Retaliation because of its stronger magic power? The reason the Chaos Beasts modified the God's Stone was actually to reduce its magic power and thereby turn it into a specific type of Magic Stone?"

"That's what I think."

"No, that isn't right..." She paused abruptly. "If the dark hollow results from immense magic power, why does nothing happen to the witch?"

"The witch?" Roland was stunned.

"I mean Anna!" Agatha pondered and said, "Her magic power is strong enough to activate the Sigil of God's Will twice. She is even more powerful than the God's Stone of Retaliation. Her Blackfire, however, will still be affected by the God's Stone, and she cannot neutralize the magic power in her vicinity. It doesn't make sense based on your theory..."

"Well..." Roland was silent for a moment. A reasonable explanation to Agatha's question escaped him. A God's Stone of Retaliation of the poorest quality could easily render a witch powerless. Even Anna's Blackfire, strong as it was, would succumb to such a disturbance. Besides, Anna's magic power was shaped like a solid metal cube in the misty world, completely different from the hollow black hole.

"Another question. Why can magic stones only be activated by magic power?" Agatha went on. "Even the magic power has become less intense, and the amount of the power left in the stone shouldn't have been reduced. In fact, common people cannot operate the stone at all. The Quest Society has also confirmed that the magic power in the magic stone is not transferable. Therefore, magic stones cannot be used as resources." She paused for a moment and then continued, "My supervisor believed only living beings can retain magic power. Magic power just won't work on dead organisms. Its proof is witches' and demons' blood. Most researchers thought so. I don't mind you overturning their conclusion, but magic stones are no different from ordinary gems before they're charged with magic power or become sigils."

Roland was silent. It seemed his assumption about magic power intensity was a bit irrational. The Thunder of the Magic Power, however, which looked like black light, was so similar to the God's Stone that there must be some connections between the two entities... What else had he overlooked?

It was a pity there weren't any reliable observation or analyzing methods in this era. The only way to study magic power was through witches' abilities or via Stone of Measuring. Even so, what he would learn through this method was merely a very generic description of the features of magic power, which was hardly helpful to further research.

Roland thought for a while and finally decided to set the matter aside for the time being, hoping he would be able to find an answer during the sigil manufacture process afterwards.

...

Three days later, the plan for the "melting point" operation was prepared. Roland sent off the soldiers at the dock in person.

This was the first military operation on a big scale where witches acted as chief combatants. There were two ships in total, both of which were filled with experienced veterans from the First Army. Brian was the captain. These soldiers all had fought with demonist beasts with Roland upon the city wall before, and fully respected and trusted their lord. When Roland was screening them, he had stressed over and over again that the enemy would be very likely an extremely fierce monster, even more dangerous than demonic hybrids. He had emphasized that anyone who did not wish to participate in the mission could speak up. Nobody had quitted, however, and Nightingale also confirmed that all of them made their decisions at their free will.

Despite their resolution and courage, Roland did not overestimate the fighting capacity of these hundred soldiers he was forced to choose, for people in this world naturally feared demons from the bottoms of their hearts. Unlike him, who had seen all kinds of violent scenes on television or in the cinema and would not be surprised by any ferocious monsters, these ordinary people would be horrified. The memory of this upcoming battle would possibly become a nightmare they would remember for the rest of their lives.

As such, the carefully selected soldiers would not directly participate in fighting, but would protect along the river two or three miles away from the actual battlefield. They would only take action if the witches were forced to retreat in the event of an accident.

The witches Roland selected were the most powerful ones in the City of Neverwinter, including Anna, Nightingale, Wendy, Leaf, Agatha, Sylvie, Iffy, Lightning and Maggie. According to Agatha, such a combination might be even more than enough to kill the Lord of Hell.

"Stay safe. Your personal security is your top priority." Roland remarked gravely. "You don't have to complete the mission. I'll wait for you all at the castle."

Anna went up to hug him. "Don't worry. I'll protect them."

"Me too, Your Majesty."

"Coo!"

The little girl and the pigeon hugged Roland, as well.

In the end, everybody hugged Roland except Agatha and Iffy.

Agatha snorted and muttered to herself. "It's just a simple hunting operation, not goodbye forever. If we bid farewell like you guys just did in Taquila prior to every departure, demons would have been right under your noses long before."

Iffy, on the other hand, was astounded. It was her first time to hear such a "casual" order—"You don't have to complete the mission but just need to come back home safely"—His Majesty was too lenient with witches. Was it not considered an encouragement of cowardice? When she was in the Bloodfang Association, she viewed every battle as a fight to the death. Indeed, there had unfortunately been a few combat witches killed in action during the past several years. The witches who had been unable to complete the master's tasks were severely punished, and were even regarded as useless by the Association members. Roland Wimbledon, however, appeared to carry a totally different attitude toward witches.

He treated witches neither as beasts nor lambs, but simply as "human beings".

...

Strands of smoke escaped from the chimney and with a whistle, the paddle steamer slowly thrust itself forward and took off.

Suddenly, Roland felt a pair of invisible hands holding his face. They were cold but soft.

"Take good care of yourself when I'm away. Don't leave the castle randomly." A familiar voice whispered in his ear. "I'll be back soon."

After, he felt something had lightly touched his lips.

Entirely different from the sensation on the face, the touch was a little sweet and wet. Above all, it was warm.

It was a fugitive and illusionary kiss. When Roland finally realized what had happened, he snatched at the air with his hand, only to find nothing was there.

\*\*\*\*\*

As the steam-powered boat was far slower than the balloon, it took them nearly two days to reach the end of the Redwater River.

At the sight of the towering snowcap, the group of people was awestruck by the magnificent scene before them. As the snow on the mountain melted much slower than that in the forest, the snow water had been accumulating for months. The water ran straight down from the precipice and branched off into various streams upon the projected rocks. From a distance, those streams looked like multiple thin and feeble threads. Upon further exploration, however, they found the streams were as broad as rivers. The water roared and thundered when it flowed into the lake at the foot of the mountain.

Obviously, the Redwater River was only one of the exits to the lake. Otherwise, the river would overflow due to the surging water.

After a night's rest, the hydrogen balloon rose into the air as it was inflated. In the meantime, the fleet also retreated somewhere three kilometers away from the bank and started to build a defensive front along the river.

The "melting point" operation officially began.

Chapter 548: Ensnaring the Demons

...

The Farsight carried Wendy and Sylvie to the Swirling Sea, while Lightning and Maggie hovered on each side of the basket, waiting to fetch them whenever needed.

Since their mission was not to investigate the Devil's Town, they did not fly too high. As soon as they flew over the snowcap, Sylvie could look straight through the rocks and cliffs along the bank and catch sight of the Eye Demon on the top of the Blackstone Pagoda.

According to Agatha, Eye Demons did not need to really "see" people, because they could sense and locate their enemies upon being noticed. Nobody could possibly escape their scrutiny, neither the invisible nor the ones descending from the sky unless blindfolded. Because of this, eye demons had caused a great number of casualties among the commando of the Blessed Army.

Another option was to restrain from looking at eye demons. However, this was fairly hard to achieve due to the fact that eye demons normally stood at the highest point of the campgrounds.

"How did things go? Did you see it?" Lightning flew over to ask Sylvie.

"I need to get a bit closer, otherwise I can't hold up well," Sylvie answered while rubbing her eyes. It took her a lot of magic power to look through obstacles with the Eye of Magic. Her sight was largely restricted, too. Although she had cautiously managed to reduce her vision to a straight line of sight, she still felt quite dizzy when she captured the details of the fractured precipice.

"I see." Wendy summoned a gust of wind. "Hold on."

As the rocks gradually got clearer, the thin red mist slowly entered their sights. Although it was a clear day, a cloud of mist still lingered around the cliff, except that it was a lighter color than the last time they had seen it.

Sylvie fixed her eyes once again on the mist. This time, she was finally able to see some earth through the dense mist. A few edifices shaped like towers loomed against the red mist, and the whole scene was like a deserted land.

She soon spotted the biggest black stone spire.

Compared with the random intrusion last time, the operation this time was carefully planned. They would first startle demons and then induce them to launch an attack. Unlike Lightning who was always airy and energetic, Sylvie just wanted to live an ordinary life. By no means, she wanted to be an explorer. However, as she was destined to fight the Battle of Divine Will, there was no way for her to stand by no matter how much she hated wars. Just like she had promised Tilly to come to Border Town for the purpose of checking whether Roland was manipulated by witches, she obeyed the order in the same way when Roland disclosed his attacking plan without much hesitation.

She had come to check upon Roland for the benefits of all the witches on Sleeping Island. Now she fought for the Witch Union and the entire Kingdom of His Majesty's.

Sylvie took a deep breath and moved her sight upward.

In an instant, hundreds of eyeballs came into her view. The black jelly-like monster was still sitting at its usual spot. Its body had fused with the tower top as if it had grown out of the stone. All of its eyeballs turned to Sylvie simultaneously. She could even catch a glimpse of her own face in those black gleamy eyeballs!

For a second, all her hair stood up on its end, and a chill went down her spine.

"They're coming!" She withdrew her power and shouted aloud.

"Let's go!"

"Aw!" Maggie immediately turned into a gigantic devilbeast and paused below the basket. Sylvie jumped off the basket and landed firmly on Maggie's broad back, while Lightning carried Wendy on her back and flew toward the Misty Forest. Unlike the last trip where they had been panicked and frightened, this time they were fully prepared. According to the plan, Lightning would return to where the empty hydrogen balloon was alone and further lure the demons into their traps.

Meanwhile, Sylvie turned around and looked back.

Five black dots emerged on the cliff. This number was higher than what Agatha had predicted, but it was still within the safe limit.

Nevertheless, she noticed something unusual with the help of the Eye of Magic.

Out of the five enemies, only four rode devilbeasts, and two of them were very different from regular mad demons. They did not have a big body build, nor did they have strong arms. They were not wearing animal skins or armors as mad demons usually did either, but were in a colorful cope that glowed like a rainbow. Sylvie could not figure out what the cope was made of at first glance. However, she could see something swarming and wriggling underneath the cope like numerous vipers.

The heads of the two demons were bigger than those of regular mad demons. Yet, their eyes and noses were not distinctive. Their faces were the creepiest kinds she had ever seen. They looked like two big scars, with red furrows and ridges extending from the center.

When she rested her eyes on the last demon, Sylvie was stunned.

The demon was wearing a weighty but delicate armor, with a giant heavy sword on his back. Nonetheless, he was not slow in the slightest but flew right after the four devilbeasts.

His face was totally covered by a helmet. Unlike the skull helmet mad demons normally wore, this particular helmet was made of metal, in perfect match with his armor. On both sides of the helmet engraved sophisticated patterns. Several sharp horns, which looked like Blackstone Pagodas at first sight, stuck out from the top. The part where his eyes should be was gleaming with red light, making the demon look vicious and aggressive.

"What kind of demon is he?" thought Sylvie.

Sylvie was taken by fright and horror. As Agatha had never told her how to cope with this situation, she wondered whether she should still follow the original plan.

Sylvie felt terribly uneasy.

She followed Wendy to the deep forest. When she descended from Maggie's back, she saw a golden figure sprang up into the air and flew toward the balloon at a tremendous speed.

It was impossible for her to stop Lightning.

After some hesitation, Sylvie felt necessary to inform Agatha of the news. She patted Maggie on her wings and said, "Take me to the ambush area!"

"What's wrong?" Wendy trotted to her. "Don't we need to meet with the First Army next?"

They had been instructed during the maneuver to leave the main battlefield and meet with the First Army as soon as possible after successfully luring demons into the ambush, given that they two were not strong enough to compete against demons.

"I saw some strange demons." Sylvie shook her head. "The enemies are not only mad demons. I've got to tell everybody!"

"But the ambush area is pretty large, aw!" Maggie threw herself flat on her face. "It may take you a while to find them even if you go."

"That's fine. Just take me there." She returned to the beast's back and turned to Wendy. "You go meet with the Army at the riverbank. I'll be right back."

...

Lightning flew as fast as she could. The wind whistled in her ears. She saw the earth, woods, rivers and beaches below quickly shrink and obscure, turning into various color blocks and distorted lines.

She must get back to where the hydrogen balloon was before the demons did so. In order to attract the enemies' attention, she had to pretend to be fleeing in a hurry.

When the vast ocean gradually came into her view, she finally caught sight of the Farsight, as well as the demons.

#### Chapter 549: Agatha's Decision

Lightning flew to the bottom of the balloon, found the powder sac affixed to the airbag and pulled out the fuse. Upon seeing the white smoke exiting the powder sac, she immediately flew straight towards the sea.

It was a simple self-destruct device. Once the enemies began following the balloon, the decoys must destroy the "Farsight" to avoid an embarrassing situation where the demons became too occupied by the novel device instead of chasing the witches.

There was a loud explosion just as Lightning touched sea. With a flash, the sky lit up.

Lightning looked up and saw the airbag puff up and become a huge red fireball with a bright orange color in the middle with dark red smoke rolling on the edges. The flames, like the setting sun, stayed ablaze for quite a long time.

She watched a demon come too close to the roaring flames. It flipped over and set itself on fire before falling to the sea with its mount.

The other four demons, who fled from the smoke below, sprang up toward Lightning.

Until now, everything had been going as planned.

The demons were not that clever after all.

Lightning raised the corner of her mouth and flew close to the sea towards the forest.

The plan was to lead them to the depth of the woods where Leaf could control everything.

Everything was ready in the hunting ground, and Leaf was waiting quietly for the demons to fall into the trap.

The dense branches, vines and saw grass would inevitably be a nightmare for the enemies

—if they could dream.

...

Sylvie used the Eye of Magic to search the ambush area. The woods under Leaf's control glowed green. From the sky, it was like a flask had embedded in the earth with its mouth facing toward the Swirling Sea while its neck remained several kilometers away.

Despite feeling dizzy, she scanned the inner part of every tree. The numerous details swarming around her head caused great pain. Sylvie finally found Agatha who hid in a large tree close to the mouth of the flask.

"Why did you come here?" The trunk cracked open as Maggie fell to the earth. Agatha poked out her head and asked, "Was the plan for enticing demons unsuccessful?"

"No, it worked. Five demons followed." She jumped down from the mount's back and lifted the white-haired little girl who had returned to her human form. Sylvie hid in the tree hastily. "But three of them are different!"

"What's the difference?"

Sylvie detailed the odd demons she had seen and found Agatha in shock.

Her heart sank. "Are they difficult to deal with?"

Agatha took a long time to recollect herself and then said with an anxious look. "The demons with ropes are Fearsome Demons, they are horrible killers to common people. But witches don't need to fear them, as long as we avoid looking them in the eye. Underneath their charred face hides the real eyes of Fearsome Demons."

"I see," Sylvie muttered. In ancient witches' stories, their enemies would be terrified immediately by these demons and then they would feel afraid, timid, confused and desperate. A mortal troop of around 100 men could often be routed by only three or four fearsome demons. Most people were too fearful to think. They just knelt down in tremor waiting to be slain. Even if the God's Stone of Retaliation could weaken this effect greatly, it could not remove such feelings completely. The demons seemed to be born with this ability to control people's emotions, and no obvious fluctuation of their magic power could be perceived.

"What about the Armored Demon? It can fly alone, is it the Lord of Hell?"



"No!" Agatha spoke in a rough low voice. "If your description is correct, my guess is that it's probably a Senior Demon. We're in trouble."

"Senior Demon?" Sylvie was bewildered.

"The Union knows little about them, except that they possess many abilities and look like humans, except they are much larger. Both their strength and magic power are quite strong." She swallowed hard. "It's said that only Transcendents can compete against them."

"Transcendents? We don't even have an Extraordinary now." Sylvie was nervous. "Inform Leaf to stop this plan. We should retreat and meet the First Army."

Agatha bit her lip. "It can fly alone because of the Stone of Flight. In fact, it's not a big problem if there's only Lightning and Maggie because they can fly. However, we're impossible to escape from their attack once we're out of Leaf's protection. Although I've never seen a real Senior Demon, I was told by Alice before that witches must be concentrated on fighting with these crafty and strong demons, or we're likely to die because of just a tiny miss."

She beat the trunk until Leaf's voice came from above. "I'm listening. What's up?"

Agatha said firmly, "The plan has changed. Please inform all the witches we are changing from plan A to plan B. Let Nightingale watch over the Armored Demon. Don't hesitate to kill it if Anna gets the chance."

Plan B meant dropping the plan of capturing and using the Sigil of God's Will to wipe out all the enemies.

"Will we really combat with the Senior Demon?" Sylvie could not help holding Maggie tight.

"Escape only leads to death while there will be a chance to survive if we try our best to combat with them." Agatha spoke slowly. "A Senior Demon always comes out with a number of other demons, but now they just have two Fearsome Demons as the guards. So we are likely to win even if there isn't a Transcendent!"

"I see Lightning," Leaf said again. "They're coming."

"Shh..."

Sylvie held her breath. She heard roaring sounds from the treetop, and then she heard heavy objects falling to the ground in front.

The sounds of the demons' rapid paces echoed in the jungle, and soon died away. Only the Devilbeasts' low roar remained.

"How is it going now?"

"The Armored Demon hasn't landed yet and it's still following Lightning. The other demons left their mounts outside the woods and followed her too. Wait! A demon is missing." Sylvie looked carefully at the surroundings. "There were only three Devilbeasts left near us."

"Good! Let me kill these fool reptiles first so that they can't escape even if they want to." Agatha opened the crack. "You're not a combat-witch. Please just stay hidden here."

"But they can fly!" Sylvie worried. "What if they want to escape by flying?"

"Take it easy." She looked at the little girl who wanted to join. "Don't worry. We have Maggie."

...

A "Devilbeast" suddenly fell from the sky, appeared behind them, spread its wings while rotating its tail and roared loudly at the three Devilbeasts.

They were distracted immediately.

To Sylvie's surprise, the three Devilbeasts imitated Maggie and also spread their wings and wagged their tails, as if they were dancing! In order to gain more performance space, they pushed each other and refused to back off.

Were they entertaining her?

On the other side, Agatha snuck out of the forest. A layer of white ice crystal formed on the ground.

Chapter 550: The Slaughter

It was Sylvie's first time seeing such an incredible method of movement.

As Agatha moved, a mirror-like road, paved by crystal ice, would appear just ahead of her. She seemed to be floating along the road, almost as if the ground was pushing her forward. In a flash, she had arrived at the rear of the first Devilbeast.

When Agatha stretched out her hands, the frost suddenly appeared around the grassland and it even started to snow! After a moment, the Devilbeast gave out a shriek and it tried to fly, only to find it could not move at all. Each of its four strong limbs had been frozen in place and the ice crystals continued to move up along them, completely freezing its body and wings in no time.

Almost simultaneously, Maggie threw herself onto the back of the dancing Devilbeast and snapped at its neck with her huge crimson mouth. The Devilbeast was in such a panic and it wanted to get rid of Maggie. However, Maggie was much larger. The Devilbeast was like a baby beast that was being suppressed by a full-grown beast. Then, Maggie got a grip and broke its neck completely. At last, the Devilbeast was defeated and with a final swish of its tail, it shattered the poor frozen beast, smashing it to pieces.

At this moment, the third Devilbeast began to realize what had just happened. Although it did not understand why its kind would kill each other, he knew something bad had happened and it spread its long wings and rose into the air.

But it was too late.

Agatha followed it and also "flew".

Or rather, she was walking in the air.

The ice crystals also extended to the Devilbeast and for a while, it formed a bridge in the air. Agatha ran along the ice bridge and soon she was close enough she could use her magic power to attack this Devilbeast.

Sylvie could not help but cover her mouth in shock.

Like a swift Viper, the ice bridge froze the tail of the Devilbeast and then quickly turned the rest of it into an ice sculpture.

Probably due to the heavy weight of the frozen beast, the end of the ice bridge tilted, cracked, and then snapped. Agatha began to fall from the bridge, fortunately, Maggie caught her. However, the ice sculpture fell to the ground and broke into thousands of pieces.

It took less than 20 seconds for them to kill all three of the demonic beasts.

This was the way in which senior witches engaged in a combat!

Sylvie could not help but feel envious of Agatha.

...

"Kacha."

After checking the bullets in the barrel, Nightingale shut the cartridge.

Just then, she heard Leaf's warnings about the changes made to the enemy attacks, and that plan A for the Melting Point Action had changed to plan B.

That meant Iffy's task had been canceled and it was her turn to combat these enemies.

But, what was most important was for them to provide opportunities for Anna to discharge the Sigil of God's Will.

Nightingale could not help but recall Roland's words once she thought of Anna.

"Anyway, take her back, please."

"I'll leave it all to you."

She clutched her chest and bit her lip.

This plan should be completed with ease but she found an indescribable emotion in her heart.

As the task became increasingly tougher, the emotion became unexpectedly stronger.

"If the most terrible thing happened, that would mean Anna could also die..." she thought.

"Oh, no—unless I die." Nightingale shook her head and suppressed this horrible idea. Roland trusted her the most, so she could not let him down. Even if Roland did not instruct her to do so specifically, she would protect Anna at all costs.

In a sense, Anna was the savior of all the witches in the Witch Cooperation Association.

She would never forgive herself if Anna died because of her selfishness.

"The enemies are coming!"

Leaf gave her a warning and Nightingale gathered herself. She was ready to outflank the enemies as soon as their direction was pointed out by Leaf.

Her world of mist was commonly a desolate and dull place. Anything mundane and not related to magic power would become nothing more than twisted lines and changeable black and white blocks. This was her first time seeing so many colors, thanks to the demons.

Beside the green forest, she could see a muted yellow arm from one of the Mad Demons and its inside emitting a shade of light blue. The other two demons should be the Fearsome Demons that Leaf had just mentioned. They had a stronger magical resonance and she could see many magic swirls inside their bodies, the one on their forehead was the most obvious.

Another Senior Demon, which they needed to keep a particularly close eye on, was not among them. If their intelligence was correct, it should be monitoring everything from above the forest.

Without a doubt, the Fearsome Demons, which would cause fear, should be the first to kill.

And, it should be done before they opened their eyes.

After the three demons passed through the ambush points, Nightingale held the gun with both hands and used her instant leap to travel more than ten meters in the twinkling of an eye. She pointed her gun at the back of the Fearsome Demon's head.

It was so close to her that she did not even have to leave her Mist. As long as she had some luck, the gun barrel would not be split in half by the powerful magic.

She immediately shot and for a moment, there was a thunderous roar.

In the Mist, the Fearsome Demon's head abruptly puffed up, as if the unstoppable bullet had been shot from inside of its head and blown outward. Its brain exploded, spilling brain matter in all directions. Next, a hail of fog soared skyward—Nightingale noticed its red mist vessel was hidden directly inside its body.

The other Fearsome Demon turned around quickly, and its bloody scar expanded across its face, trying to reveal its fearsome eyes. Suddenly several vines shot from the top of a tree, intertwining its head and pulling its head back before the eyes could be revealed. At this moment, a Mad Demon in the front turned around at the sound of the gunshot and ended up staring at the Fearsome Demon and could not help but tremble with fear.

Nightingale shot the three remaining bullets into the Fearsome Demon which had been forcibly pulled back by Leaf. Meanwhile, Anna leaped from her hiding place in the tree and cut the beast into pieces with her black fire before the Mad Demon could recover itself from the fear.

"Be careful!"

Lightning, who had been enticing the enemies into the air, shouted.

Nightingale looked up and found that a large sword was about to slash her.

She instinctively tried to enter the Mist, but unexpectedly, her misty world was broken into pieces by the enemy who was wielding the sword.

"What's this ability? It can break my magic power?" she thought.

It was too late for her to escape. Suddenly a black curtain spread out above her head and withstood the sword's attack. Unlike an actual curtain, it seemed to have more of a mirror-like surface and she could even see her shocked expression reflected on its surface.

This is... the Blackfire!

"Bang!"

The sword hit the Blackfire fiercely and Anna looked pained, her body shaking, but her Blackfire remained intact.

Without any hesitation, this time, Nightingale caught Anna quickly and summoned the Mist again, escaping to a safe place over 20 meters away, instantly.

Meanwhile, the armored demon also slowly fell towards the ground.

The death of its partner did not seem to have any impact on it. The demon calmly lifted the large sword, engraved with a strange pattern, and suddenly the magic power surged toward the blade of the sword.

The blade gave off a dazzling glow!