

Witch 551

Chapter 551: The Senior Demon

This is... the Sigil of God's Will!

Nightingale widened her eyes in surprise. But soon, she found something different. Through the Mist she saw a black hole formed in the enemy's palm instead of the characteristic dazzling light of the Magic Stones. It was not a sigil but an ability of the demon. Shining magic power was sucked into the black hole and became a fast-growing vortex which gave off such a strong light that it made it hard for the other witches to open their eyes. However, seeing it through the Mist, it was getting darker and darker.

The demon then thrust its sword into the ground, sending out a black shimmering light to cover the entire woods.

Instantly, the light of magic powers that were flickering like candlelight in the wind was put out. Nightingale's misty world was broken down again. Leaf was forced out of her Heart of Forest form and the trees promptly threw Leaf and Iffy onto the ground. Leaf was heavily injured. She was spewing blood and she was not able to stand up again.

Nightingale was shocked and she thought, "The demon sensed that the wood was Leaf!

No... Though Leaf hid well, it was still possible to see her movements from above. The really strange thing is why could it break the magic power like the God's Stone of Retaliation? Compared with Magic stones, the demon can release such magic power and is even more flexible in manipulating it, but there's no light when it was releasing the magic power!"

Nightingale did not have time to think about it anymore.

Enduring the discomfort after having her magic power broken off, she changed the cartridge and dashed towards the demon who was now walking to the paralyzed and defenseless Leaf after its previous black shimmering light attack.

When Nightingale came to a place about 10 meters away from the demon and was sure that she could hit it, she swiftly pulled the trigger.

The bullets hit its arm armor, creating sparkles and smoke. The demon seemed very annoyed at being disturbed by someone else at this moment. It roared in anger and then held its giant sword up in front of itself. Seeing this, Nightingale's heart sank. The bullets did not get into the demon's body through its arm to break its inner organs as she had expected. In fact, she was not sure whether the bullets had broken through the armor or not, let alone this giant sword which was as thick as a door plank.

As she had already used all the five bullets, she drew out her dagger and lunged towards the head of the demon.

In order to save Leaf, she had to try her best to stop it.

The demon promptly lifted up its sword to strike, with its eyes shining like bright red lights. Though it moved incredibly fast, Nightingale could still predict its action. She did not dodge the striking sword. Just at the moment when the blade was going to cut her in half, she disappeared in the Mist.

The demon's lightless wave could wipe out the effects of magic power in a large area, but it could not completely prohibit the magic power. After the vortex vanished, the witches could use their magic power again. Nightingale's keen eye caught this change immediately, as she had the ability to observe the flow of magic power.

In the world of black and white, she saw the giant sword's silhouette instantly distort and quickly found the "cutting point" in the blade. She slid "through" the blade and stabbed her dagger into a gap in the demon's helmet!

Surprisingly, the dagger cracked after a loud bang.

"This is... a Magic Barrier?"

"Damn it, how many kinds of abilities does it have!?" Nightingale hurriedly retreated and soon the Armored Demon caught up with her. It used one hand to raise its sword and struck again.

She played the same old trick, hoping to escape in the Mist, but this time she was not that lucky.

The demon lifted his other hand into the air.

It pull Nightingale out of the Mist, as she was moving through the sword.

When she was pulled out, part of the blade was still inside her body. As she was thrown out, blood spilled out from a long, deep wound in her waist left by the blade. Even the protective clothing that had been specially made by Soraya was torn. Nightingale gave out a choked cry. Without time to attend to the wound, she made use of the force of falling to roll backwards, hoping to dodge the demon's coming attack. Unfortunately, this demon could move over two meters with a single step. It was impossible for her to escape from such a strong enemy that moved as fast as an Extraordinary.

When the sword was about to cut Nightingale, many purple beams of the light suddenly appeared around the demon and then quickly contracted inward to tie the demon tightly.

That was Iffy's Magic Cage!

"Crush it!" Nightingale shouted.

"I can't do it!" Iffy grated. "It's too strong!" She had squeezed her hand into a fist, but the beams of the light could not contract anymore. Instead, the beams shook as if the demon was going to break them apart.

The demon gave out a deafening roar and threw up its arms. The cage split up, but before it could raise its sword again, beams of light came back to trap it once more.

"Miss An-Anna use the golden thunder now... Be quick!" Iffy said in a measured voice. It was easy to tell from her face that the cage could not trap the demon for a very long time.

However, the demon was not far away from Iffy. The golden thunder of the Sigil of God's Will would probably strike both of them.

"Now, Anna!" Nightingale shouted to Anna in a distant place. "Activate the Sigil!"

Anna caught Nightingale's eyes and immediately got what she meant. She used all her power to lift the metal sheet in her hand.

A strong bright light lit up the woods and some beams of light also came down from the sky.

The demon howled. It might have seen this kind of scene before, as now it sounded angry and at the same time frightened, struggling even harder to get free.

Nightingale knew this was their only chance to win, as the demon now could not dispel their magic power.

The golden thunder struck!

Nightingale pressed on her wound and moved into the Mist. Before the dark lightning struck on Iffy's head, she suddenly appeared behind her, held her up and leaped aside, swiftly pulling her out of the Sigil of God's Will's attack range. She saved Iffy in only two steps

The move needed not only determination and courage, but also teamwork between Nightingale and Anna.

If Anna struck in a wrong place, Nightingale and Iffy could hardly escape from the coming golden thunder.

However, Nightingale trusted her. She believed that nobody could overtake Anna in terms of magic power control,

and the result proved that Nightingale was right.

The strong golden light instantly covered the place where the Senior Demon stood and destroyed everything in the area, including the weed and vines.

Anna staggered. She finally couldn't keep her feet on the ground anymore and fell down.

"Anna!" Leaf cried out. She had just recovered a little and stumbled towards Anna.

"She's fine. She just exhausted her magic power!" said Nightingale. Every word she spoke was contorted by the searing pain caused by the wound on her waist. Luckily the inner organs were alright. As long as she avoided violent movements that would open the wound up again, it was not life-threatening.

"You... got injured? Let me bind it up for you," Iffy said. A mixed feeling was obvious on her face.

Nightingale nodded and she was about to roll up her clothing when suddenly... she froze, seeing a black figure slowly walking out of the smoke caused by the golden thunder.

Several thorns on the demon's helmet broke, looking like collapsed stone towers. Its delicate armor was cracked and covered by dirt. It had lost an arm and the giant sword,

but it surprisingly survived the fatal strike.

The demon hissed hideously. Nightingale was not sure whether it was smiling but she could tell from its voice that it sounded excited and murderous.

Although it seemed that the demon could not move as rapidly as before and with a much dimmer red light, would fall in any minute, Nightingale still thought no one could stop it now because herself and Leaf were paralyzed, Anna fainted, Lightning was missing and Iffy had nearly no power left.

Just at the moment, the witch beside her stood up.

"Hey, what're you doing?" Nightingale said in a low voice.

"Fight till the last moment," Iffy drew out a dagger and said. "It's the fate of a combat witch. Don't you still have some magic power left? Take them with you and hide. If you're unable to take all of them, at least, take one with you."

Nightingale suddenly thought of Roland's entrustment.

Yes... at least, I should take Anna back. That's what I've promised His Majesty. I have to do it no matter what.

A familiar howl from above suddenly interrupted Nightingale's thought.

"Aw..."

A huge shadow landed from the sky!

Chapter 552: The Supermagic

The demon looked up, and the next moment it was instantly stomped into the ground by Maggie. Nightingale felt that the strong impact even made the earth tremble a little.

And she thought that if it was an ordinary person, the impact would have definitely smashed its bones.

"Well done, Maggie! Stomp it to death!" Leaf said, clenching her hands into fists.

"Bite it! Whip it with your tail!" Iffy was so excited that she loudly shouted.

"Awh!"

Maggie howled cheerfully. She put Agatha down and was going to beat the demon again. Just at that moment, she uncontrollably transformed from a fierce Devilbeast back into a little girl, falling to sit on the ground, at a loss to understand what happened.

"It's a Supermagic!"

Agatha yelled. She was the first to react. She lifted up an ice spike from under the ground, which she crashed into the demon and sent it flying out, breaking several trees.

Giving the demon no chance to catch a breath, she immediately caught up with it and froze its feet.

"Now!" she shouted back at Maggie.

Maggie came to her senses and drew a pistol, aiming and firing continuously at the frozen target. Nightingale bit her lips and reloaded her gun. She asked Iffy to help her up to her feet and then walked to join Maggie. The demon's Magic Barrier shined on its armor, but it soon dimmed down. The red light in its eyes was flickering on and off.

Suddenly, it roared hoarsely and threw its hand toward Agatha and sent her flying backward without even touching her. At the same time, the ice crystals around its feet melted instantly. It jumped up and staggered, wanting to escape.

"Don't let it go!" Agatha shouted, "Maggie!"

"Let me stop it!" Leaf grabbed the Sigil of God's Will from Anna's hand. She had not consumed very much magic power in the previous fight, though she was severely injured when she was forcibly pulled out from her Heart of Forest form. During their regular tests, she was able to light up four stones of the Sigil, and now, immediately after she injected all her magic power into the Sigil, a bright golden light lit up the woods once again. The demon turned around and let out a strange sound in disbelief.

The golden thunder struck the demon again.

This time, he did not survive it.

...

"The demon is... dead?" Nightingale asked in a weak voice.

"Only half of its armor is left behind!" Maggie answered while dragging the "enemy" back. If it was not for the delicate glyph on the edge of the armor, it would be hard to believe that this charred mass was the demon itself. Apparently, it was not as strong as they had imagined.

Lightning was found, too.

When the demon released the black waving, she was affected and lost her magic power temporarily. She had fallen from above, hit her head on a branch and fainted. Luckily, as she had not been high up in the sky and the thick branches and leaves of the trees had acted as a cushion to her fall, she was not heavily injured, except for a bump on her head.

However, she still looked upset and disappointed because she missed the fight. After making sure that everybody was alright, she said, "I'll inform Brian of the situation here and ask him to send someone to fetch you."

"You survived. That's a miracle" Agatha exclaimed.

"Yeah, I don't know how to tell His Majesty that all of us got beat up by just one demon." Nightingale heaved a sigh, enduring the pain.

"No, Nightingale. This isn't an ordinary victory. The enemy is a Supermagic!" Agatha shook her head and continued, "Maybe several Senior Witches could confront a Senior Demon, but they could never defeat a Supermagic. Only the Three Chiefs of the Union could compete with it."

"Only the Transcendents?" Leaf asked, frowning.

"Yes." Agatha confirmed and added, "The Union paid with blood for this lesson."

"What kind of ability does a Supermagic have?"

"Supermagic is just a title, instead of a certain kind of ability." Agatha explained. "Every Senior Demon has many kinds of abilities, and different from witches, demons don't have to get their abilities through awakening. Someone in the Union once witnessed a Senior Demon, who had led the enemy to attack Taquila many times, that evolved two different Magic Cyclones inside its body in merely several years. That means it gained two more abilities during that time. No one knew how it did that. The demons seem to be more naturally talented than us in manipulating the magic power.

A Supermagic doesn't refer to a demon with certain kinds of Magic Cyclones, but refers to an extremely powerful Senior Demon, who can release power to create the effects similar to those of a God's Stone."

The last sentence from Agatha made Nightingale's heart skip a beat. "You mean... it can prohibit magic power?" she asked.

"To be more accurate, it interferes with magic power." Agatha corrected her and continued, "The Supermagic is able to break through the defense of the God's Stone of Retaliation and can obstruct or diminish the magic power attacks. They can also dispel or stop magic power effects. They're really tough opponents for all the witches."

"I... don't understand." Iffy was confused and asked, "Why is that not a special ability?"

"It's not," Agatha answered. "Take Anna for example. If she was a Supermagic, her Blackfire will remain effective even under the influence of the God's Stone of Retaliation, and at the same time, the place affected by Blackfire will become an interference region. That means, the other magic power effects near the Blackfire will be wiped out unless Anna's opponent is another Supermagic."

What Agatha said immediately reminded Nightingale of the demon's lightless black hole. She recalled the whole process of the previous battle, and remembered that there was only the dim shadow around the demon when she hit on its Magic Barrier and was caught by it in the Mist. She was surprised to find that the demon attacked as if it was the Sigil of God's Will, giving out absolutely no magic power light during the fighting.

She told Agatha what she had seen through the Mist during the fight and then asked, "That's why the first strike of the Sigil of God's Will didn't kill it?"

"Probably," Agatha shrugged and said. "But I'm not sure. This is the first time for me to encounter this kind of demon and the Union left no record about using the Sigil of God's Will to fight against a Supermagic."

"So the Chiefs of the Union depended completely on their own power to defeat the Supermagic?"

"Exactly," Agatha said while nodding. "Extraordinaries are really powerful, especially when they wear the God's Stone of Retaliation. They shine like the sun in the battlefields. Wherever they go, demons would melt like the snow in the spring, and Transcendents are the center of the sun. If you could see Lord Alice in a fight, you would be overwhelmed by her power."

Hearing that, Nightingale was deep in thought, "Counting all the Chiefs of the Union, there were only three Transcendents." She then asked, "No witch of the Union had become a Supermagic before?"

"As far as I know, no," Agatha answered, "and no one will. Witches and demons have fundamental differences. Numerous demons can evolve into Mad Demons, but not many of us can become someone like Alice, no matter how hard we practice."

Maggie, who kept fiddling with the demon's armor, found a little black box from the remains of the demon and said, "Look! What's this?"

Agatha took the box and tried to open it. "It's locked."

"Let me try." Nightingale observed the square metal box through the Mist and when its silhouette was distorting, she put her fingers into it and grabbed the contents out of the box.

Several glittering stones fell out of the air.

Chapter 553: The Trophy

"Gems? Coool!" Maggie parted the white hair covering her forehead to reveal her curious eyes.

"They're Magic Stones," said Agatha. She picked the stones up to take a closer look and added, "I've no idea what kinds of Magic Stones they are, but judging from their color, they must be high-quality God's Stones of Retaliation before being changed into Magic Stones by the Chaos Beast."

"The trophy we get from a Senior Demon must be something good," Leaf said while smiling. "I'm just surprised that it hid the box inside its body."

"Oh, you remind me. Are there boxes like this one in the other dead demons' bodies? Coool! I'll go and check!" Maggie said excitedly.

"Watch out for the tanks restoring the Red Mist!" Agatha warned.

In less than ten minutes, Maggie came back with two black boxes in her hands and said, "I found them in the demons wearing colorful clothes."

Nightingale pulled some Magic Stones out from the two boxes though they were dimmer and smaller than the stones of the first box.

Agatha gathered all the Magic Stones together and then could not help but frown.

"Is there anything wrong?" asked Nightingale.

"It seems that there are too many Magic Stones," Agatha answered.

"Isn't it a happy thing for you to get so many of them?" asked Nightingale.

Agatha shook her head slightly and explained, "The Union killed thousands of Fearsome Demons, but it was still hard to collect Magic Stones. That's why the Quest Society did everything to capture and raise Chaos Beasts. Why do they carry so many Magic Stones?"

"Maybe that's their savings, accumulated in over 400 years? It's just like an unlucky guy who pooled all his savings, hoping to start a peaceful life in his hometown, but got killed and robbed by us on the way." Nightingale suggested with a strained smile.

However, no one laughed. All of them knew clearly that if the numerous demons had been producing Magic Stones in the past 400 years, they now must have an incredible amount of war resources.

To break the dead silence, Agatha said, "Well, it's no use thinking too much. After all, we have to fight against them anyway. There're no two ways about it."

...

Guided by Lightning, the First Army finally arrived at the woods.

"Are you alright?" Wendy hurriedly jumped off Lightning's back to check the witches one by one.

"Anna..."

"Don't worry. She just fainted because of magic power exhaustion." Nightingale comforted Wendy.

"Everybody is alright."

"I've told her, but she just kept rushing me," said Lightning. Her head had been wrapped up, and only several wisps of hair could be seen on her forehead.

"Wh-What are these? Are they demons?" Brian asked in shock, looking at the bodies put in a row on the ground.

"Yes, dead demons. You have to tell your soldiers to bring them back, including their remains, armors, clothes and weapons. None of those things should be left behind. That's His Majesty's order."

Nightingale shrugged and said.

"Yes! I'll take care of this." Brian's face suddenly hardened, hearing the order.

"What a pity! We didn't catch a demon alive. The plan to make Sigils has to be postponed again." Agatha said with a sigh.

"A living demon? There's probably one." Lightning tilted her head and said.

"What? Where?" All the people simultaneously turned to look at Lightning.

"I'm not sure, but if the demon can swim, maybe it's still alive," she said while blinking.

...

In the afternoon, the paddle steamers left the harbor and turned back to sail towards the City of Neverwinter.

The curious and surprised soldiers of the First Army crowded on the deck of a steamer.

"This is the enemy that we're going to fight against in the future?"

"It looks just so-so, except the huge, intimidating figure."

"Hush! What did you say? Haven't you seen that even His Majesty's powerful witches were heavily injured. Don't you know how powerful they are?" Someone interrupted.

"Yes, those dead demons must be fierce, at least, much tougher than the demonic beasts. Even the powerful lady Anna fainted." Another one added, "Yeah, she was the one who sealed the breach in the city wall and blocked a large group of demonic beasts on her own."

The other soldiers agreed.

"Yeah... I was there too. Lady Anna saved my life!"

"If it wasn't her, I'd already be stomped to death by the demonic boars."

"Unfortunately, Miss Angel isn't here. Otherwise, they would have been cured right now."

Hearing what the soldiers said, Nightingale and Agatha standing at the stern of the steamer looked at each other and then shook their heads with a smile.

Both of them found what they heard very incredible. Since she came from the time when the witches had ruled the human world and enslaved the common people, Agatha had a brand new feeling towards the ordinary people when she heard that they considered witches comrades-in-arms. Nightingale who had had to hide from the ordinary people for a very long time and had suffered from the coercion of the church also felt for the first time that the ordinary people were able to accept the witches and even willing to fight side by side with them.

"What do you think about it?" Nightingale asked.

"You mean the test target? I think we were so lucky to capture it alive when we believed that we were going back empty-handed." Agatha said with a smile.

The test target, the living Mad Demon locked in an iron cage attracted the soldiers to flock to have a look at it.

According to Lightning, the flames from the explosion of the hydrogen balloon hurt and battered this unlucky demon unconscious causing it to fall into the water. After it regained consciousness, it had struggled for half a day, trying to swim to the bank but had failed since it had been so badly injured. In the end, it was caught by Maggie who said that the Mad Demon must have mistaken her for a Devilbeast thinking that it had come to its rescue and had cried out loudly to catch her attention. It never expected that it would become the witches' captive.

As Iffy was pushed to the limit of her magic power and physical strength, she probably could not trap the demon for a very long time. After discussion, the witches decided to cut all its limbs and let Agatha freeze the wounds. By doing so, the demon could neither kill itself nor die before it used up the Red Mist.

"It's hard to believe that we can still complete the task after the sudden, terrible accident. We're so lucky." Nightingale twitched her mouth and said.

"Oh, don't you need some rest?" Agatha asked, pointing at her waist.

"It's fine after the herbal treatment. Before we met His Majesty Roland, Leaf took care of the wounds for all the sisters in the Witch Cooperation Association." Nightingale said lightly while throwing up her hands.

"I'm not prudent enough in this action. Fortunately, everyone is fine." Agatha said and heaved a sigh.

"You mean the Senior Demons? That's not your fault. No one could predict that they would appear in this remote place." Nightingale consoled her.

"And that's what makes me confused... The Senior Demons have never acted alone. They usually hid behind a huge army of demons and they were a few in number. During the decades of the battle, the Union had recorded all of the Senior Demons that appeared. There were less than 20 of them, including those killed in the battle." Agatha paused for a while and continued. "I thought I had to wait until the Bloody Moon came to see them, but now I'm not sure, after seeing the Magic Stones."

Nightingale soon got what she meant and that idea sent a chill to her heart.

"The demons' lifespan, growth limit, evolution way and reproduction way still remain unknown to us. What did they do in the past 400 years? Assuming they've accumulated so many Magic Stones, is it possible that they may also have many more Senior Demons now?"

...

Chapter 554: Reaching the City of Neverwinter

...

"There are so many boats here,"

Edith thought, lying beside the porthole of the poop deck. She glanced over to see the fleets that were coming and going on the Redwater River.

Since she entered the Western Region, she noticed that many strange Concrete Boats were sailing on the river with no wind sail, making the stream a very crowded one. And according to shipmaster's introduction, they were called paddle steamers. They relied on steam power to march forward and their speed could not be influenced by the wind. It was said that even if you sail upstream, they were faster than the sailing ship. A paddle steamer usually marched in front of other boats on the river with a string of black smoke lagging behind. No one could clearly explain how the steam pushed the big wooden wheel on both sides of the boat.

While one thing was certain, these things were made in the City of Neverwinter.

Edith secretly made some estimates that almost every hour there would be one paddle steamer passing by. If it was cargo that these ships carried, then there was no doubt that the amount of material the City of Neverwinter was importing would be astonishing. She learned from businessmen that a city could not be bigger than its ability to import materials. You could get a rough idea about how prosperous this city was and how many business opportunities it could offer, if you just stayed for a couple of days on the city's main road. You would even know what the most popular goods of the city were if you were good at communication.

Obviously, the Redwater River was the most important main road for the Western Region.

And watching this busy stream way, she believed all the propaganda she had seen in the king's city might be more than just Roland, His Majesty's brag.

In such a short time, Roland had integrated the Western Region into one new city whose permanent population and commercial trade had outperformed the old king's city. Such an outstanding heir to the throne actually had a bad reputation of being ignorant and stubborn... Thinking of these rumors, Edith was more interested in Roland Wimbledon.

"Miss Conrad, are you observing the boat again?" The door was pushed open, a well-dressed, brown-haired, handsome man walked in. "Want to go out to breathe some fresh air? You must be bored of staying here all the time?"

"No, this place is nice." Edith stood up and nodded to him. "Thank you for your hospitality."

"You don't need to thank me," he laughed and said, "I'm lucky to have such a beautiful lady's company."

Edith had heard too much of these kinds of compliments, but she still replied with a delightful look, "Without your help, I'm afraid I may have had to crash with the cargo and refugees."

"Of course I couldn't stand by and let this kind of things happen," the man sat opposite and said.

"There's no one jeweler who's willing to let jewelry be covered with dust, and you're just like jewelry to me."

This man was Victor, the owner of the Everspring boat. He was a jeweler from the king's city. After their original boat was burnt, Edith quickly picked out this two-master ship from all the ships that traveled to the Western Region. It was not a passenger boat, neither did it accept any employment. It was Victor's private ship. But for the Pearl of the Northern Region, as long as the ship-owner was a male, everything was fine.

She pretended to be a noble lady from the Northern Region, who came to the Western Region to find her missing relatives. With a couple of words, she made Victor feel sorry for her and invite her aboard the Everspring voluntarily. Compared with the common miniature sailing boats and freighters, the Everspring was spacious and bright, with a comfortable passenger cabin in the poop deck. Besides, it did not have the odors of the rotten wood that were caused by the longtime aquatic travel. Victor even arranged two servants for her, without charging a single gold royal from her.

Of course, the only price she needed to pay was to endure Victor's visits from time to time, showing his generosity and concern, but for Edith, who had been good at running around the circles of the noble, it was just a piece of cake, as she had already gotten used to it. And if he was good enough, she would enjoy the feeling of controlling him.

"Although these ships can sail without the push of the wind, it's all too crude," Victor said and poured a cup of black tea for himself. "I've boarded a paddle steamer and carefully observed it, it's noisy and shaking when sailing... it may be a good choice for transporting goods, but not the best choice for a long journey."

"Of course it won't be as comfortable as the Everspring," Edith laughed and said, "but why do I feel that these boats just popped out in a night? There weren't such kinds of boats in the Western Region before, I suppose?"

"Yes, you're right. They just sprang up overnight," Victor twitched his lips and added, "I used to travel for businesses to Longsong Stronghold and there weren't these kinds of strange things back then. After just a winter, they're everywhere now."

"Making 20 or 30 paddle steamers in one winter?" Edith thought in surprise. As the heir of the Kant Family, she knew exactly what the meaning of it was. Since a big city needed to import a lot of material, the city expansion was limited by the ability of its transportation ability for material. These kinds of non-sailing boats which could be produced so quickly were obviously good to improve the city's transportation ability, as they could continually transport food and commodities from everywhere to the Western Region. Given that, the expansion speed of the City of Neverwinter would naturally be beyond everyone's imagination.

As for the noises and shaking, it was not worthy of mention.

"Look, Miss Conrad, no need to worry about those ugly Concrete Boats. I have something more interesting here. It may help you to kill the time." Victor called the maid beside him, whispering a few words in her ear and then she nodded, turned around and left the room.

"What's it?"

"Something that can match with your beauty," he gloated and said, "it's also my old profession."

The maid quickly came back to the poop deck with an exquisite album in her hand. Victor spread it out in front of Edith. "Which one do you like?"

There were many dazzling crystal pictures on the parchment, which were definitely lifelike, with fine brushwork and bright colors. Obviously, the painter that made this album was an expert in doing his job.

"Are these... gems?"

"Precisely, they're rough stones." Victor explained to her patiently. "I set the prices in accordance with the album's standard when I purchased them. Compared with the polished jewelry, the rough stones have their own charms... If you're interested in any kind of rough stones, please let me know. Of course, if you prefer the polished jewelry, I could ask some jewelers to use these rough stones to make some jewelry for you when I get back to the king's city."

Nothing original, Edith just flipped over the album and then gave it back to him. "Thanks, but no."

Victor was surprised when he got the book. "So aren't you interested in these at all?"

"My relatives are missing. I don't have the mood to pick these luxury gifts. Please forgive me," Edith answered in a low voice. If she promised him now, he would pester her when they arrived in the City of Neverwinter, which would be a hindrance. Although most of the females would give in to these sparkling things, she would rather appreciate the steam engine that drove the paddle steamer. Compared with the jewelry which only spread among the nobles, those were much more valuable.

...

Soon after Victor left, there came a series of deep and rich ringing sounds from the direction of the bow... It seemed that a big fleet was about to leave the harbor.

Looking to the harbor, Edith could see the bulk head line becoming clearer and clearer in front of her.

Chapter 555: The Beginning of the Negotiation

So this is Border Town... no, City of Neverwinter?

Edith could not help but feel surprised, seeing the busy and orderly scene in front of her after walking down the gangway ladder. She had had many assumptions prior to her arrival, but found that she had belittled this city. The harbor was three times bigger than that of the king's city. One side of the dock was crowded with sailing ships and concrete boats, busy unloading cargo. Mountains of minerals and coals were heaped up in the yard.

On the other side of the dock, 10 paddle steamers were departing in a row from the trestle. Many citizens stood beside the shore to see them off. All the crews wore uniforms, standing in straight lines along both sides of the boat. Edith could feel their high morale. There was a kind of expression on their faces, the same kind that appeared on knights' faces when they came back after defeating their enemies. Yet there was no doubt, these people were definitely not the noble.

The center of the dock was the gathering place for businessmen, refugees and migrants, most of whom had arrived via various types of sailing vessels. After they disembarked, they were separated by a group of men in black. They were asked to stand in line to pass the barrier after the examination. The floating population in the dock area was over 1,000. Even the king's city was overshadowed by such a splendid scene.

"The dock has grown longer again." Victor commented with surprise. "Does His Majesty plan to turn the whole river bank into the dock area?"

"Again?" Edith noticed his words.

"The dock wasn't this wide last autumn," he opened his arms and said. "There weren't so many people, either."

"What're they doing in the barrier, taking taxes?"

"There're no downtown taxes here. You need to pay taxes only when you have sold out your commodities," Victor enthusiastically explained. "Besides, in the downtown, people are not allowed to set up stalls unofficially. All transactions must take place in the Convenience Market. Those men in black act as patrol teams for the other cities. They set a barrier to register people's identities and to eliminate demonic plague."

"Not to blackmail?" Edith asked and winked at her brother who nodded and took out his wallet, ready to give money to pull strings.

"No, no, Miss Conrad, I said they're just like a patrol team." The jeweler, Victor laughed and waved his hand. "In fact, they never charge extra money. I know it's hard to believe, but this is the truth. I was as

surprised as you when I passed the examination for the first time. Come with me. It's quicker to take the businessman pass."

Just as Victor had described, after the men in black verified his identity, they let them all pass the barrier without charging even one bronze royal.

"I need to find a clean and comfortable hotel to check in, and then I'm going to pop into the Convenience Market," Victor said and turned around. "What about you, Miss Conrad? If you're unfamiliar with this place, I'm at your service."

"Thank you." Edith put on a grateful look, lifted her skirt and bowed, saying, "You've done me many courtesies during this journey. That's enough. I'll go to the City Hall to ask for help. I should be able to get some information about my relatives there."

"It takes no effort, My Lady. Besides, it's my pleasure to know a distinguished noble woman like you. Please don't mention it."

After several evasions, Edith finally got rid of Victor, but the businessman continued to wave at her while leaving. He said if they were in any trouble, they could go to the Holy Mountain Hotel to find him anytime.

"Sister, how popular you are." Cole smacked his lips.

"Hmm?" Edith glanced at him. "What should you call me?"

"Ugh, well, Miss Edith." The Duke's second son could not help shuddering. "Shall we find a hotel and check in?"

"No, we should go to the castle to hand over the document," she said without hesitation. "We should get in contact with His Majesty as soon as possible."

"But we don't have the heads anymore." Cole reminded her in a low voice.

"Then we'll do things under no-head circumstances." Edith shrugged. "Remember the things I've told you? Show our sincerity and the two heads alone won't represent the Kant family's loyalty."

Besides, even if we did have the heads, they would likely be rotten and smelly by now. It was not a good idea to offer two rotten heads to His Majesty. Everything had deviated from its original track since His Majesty left the king's city.

What we did next depends on the specific situation. In the end, it would be the negotiator's ability that determined the negotiation result.

"Your Majesty, an emissary delegate from the Northern Region is waiting outside the castle, and they want to see you," guard Sean walked into the office and reported. "The leader claimed to be Cole Kant, the second son of Calvin Kant, the present Duke of the Northern Region. Mr. Barov has already verified their voucher document and emblem. They weren't forged."

"The Northern Region?" Startled, Roland put down the design drawings. "Wasn't that Timothy's territory? Have they stated their intentions?"

"Yes, Sir Cole said that the Duke is willing to pledge his loyalty to you." the guard answered with excitement.

"Voluntarily pledge his loyalty..." Roland frowned at this news. It was a nuisance, for he did not need a federal Lord's loyalty. It offered no help in the development of the country and would have an impact on the present centralized system. Roland actually wished they would stay in their domain with a sense of chance, waiting for him to eliminate them all. Only when the old forces were completely annihilated, could the new centralization of authority be built up smoothly.

However, he could not just refuse to see them. They were emissary delegates asking for cooperation. If he ignored them intentionally, the other nobles hearing the news would stop expecting a fluke and gang up to fight against him. Though it was not a problem in the military aspect, he still worried that it might influence the citizens of the Eastern Region and Northern Region. Roland already viewed them as his treasure, and of course, he wanted to keep more population.

After a thought, he nodded slowly. "Bring them to the living room, and let Barov stay with them."

"Yes," Sean answered excitedly.

Looking at the guard's expression, Roland pondered what the guard might think was that in this way the whole kingdom would soon be ruled by him. Unfortunately, it was not as simple as it looked.

At the same time, he made a decision.

No matter what they said, he would stick to his principle and take back the feudal nobles' rights. This point must be conveyed to all the nobles clearly to show his determination for the implementation of new policies and the reform. If rebel nobles dared to lay their hands on the citizens, he would ensure they paid a heavy price for it.

...

There were only two people in the emissary delegation, now seated on one end of the long table when Roland walked into the living room. One of them was the Duke's second son, Cole Kant, and the other, a gorgeous woman. She appeared to be an assistant to Sir Cole, but in Roland's eyes, she was more outstanding than Sir Cole himself.

Of course, witches were the shiniest pearls when it came to appearance, so Roland did not pay much attention to this. After all, in this era, a female assistant might also play the role of a mistress or maid.

"Your Majesty, I bring my father's regards to you." Cole stood and bowed respectfully to Roland, and then he expressed his intentions. "The Duke of the Northern Region has a gift for you."

Chapter 556: The Bottom Line

"A gift?" Roland said, raising his eyebrow. "What's that?"

"The Hawes Family and the Lista Family from the Northern Region... Your Majesty, both of the earls were not only disobeying your rules, but also attempting to collude with the other nobles to rebel. My father looked through their scheme and punished both of the families." Cole said regretfully, "However, I didn't expect you to come back to the Western Region so early. Due to my negligence, their heads working as our evidence were destroyed on the way."

"Hold on, your father directly executed both of the earls?"

"Uh," he looked at his assistant and said, "yes."

The Kant's effort to offer his service was stronger than what Roland had expected... "Taking the heads of the two earls as tokens of pledging allegiance shows that they could hardly gain further support from the nobles in the Eastern Region. In this case, the possibility of them joining up to resist his rule of their domain was greatly reduced." Roland thought to himself, "However, I'm not sure if he's lying at this moment without Nightingale being around."

Pondering for a moment, he whispered to Barov beside him, "Are the two families mentioned in the Northern Region?"

"Both Horsehead Hawes and Double Guns Lista were reputable families of the Northern Region, even more influential than the five big families from the Western Region. Among them, Lista's ancestors armored up and went on an expedition for the Wimbledon Family. The double guns on the Kamon were taken from the Kingdom of Graycastle's flag." Barov unhurriedly said, touching his beard, "Of course, these happened more than 200 years ago. However, the name of the Kant Family was not very famous, I remember the family only appeared about 50 years ago... It was unexpected for Timothy to choose Calvin Kant to be the person-in-charge of the Northern Region. It may cause dissatisfaction with the older families. If the difference of their strengths were too much, it would be less effective, even though it's to pin down the two families."

"So what he said is true?" Roland automatically ignored the latter section the old director mumbled to show off his vast knowledge.

"Uh... it's unlikely a lie," Barov whispered. "However, this is a matter of the noble's glory. If it came through as a lie and you've accepted their allegiance, Northern Region will have botched it for themselves."

"That makes sense." Roland nodded slightly. "It doesn't really matter if it's a lie; the bottom line lies within ourselves. It could easily be discussed if the surrender of land ownership could be accepted. However, even the most expensive gifts are meaningless if it's about seizing power."

Thinking about it, Roland looked at Cole and smiled. "First of all, I'd like to express my gratitude to the Duke. Defending the honor of the royal family is the responsibility of every noble. Your father has done a good job. Secondly, both of the earls have received the punishment they deserved, and the kingdom won't further look into what Duke Kant has done."

"Is, is that so? Father will be very happy to hear that." Cole seemed more than relieved. "He's always wanted to serve the true King and he finally has the chance now."

"Is it? I'm also very happy to accept the allegiance of Duke of the Northern Region... But he must agree to obey the new regulations of Graycastle."

"The new regulations?" Cole was slightly surprised. "What're they?"

"The regulation to retrieve the manor power of the noble." Roland was looking at Cole to measure his expression. He said word by word, "There'll no longer be any noble title in the kingdom. All the domains within the Kingdom of Graycastle will only have one lord, who is the King himself from now on."

"What?! Your Majesty, this..." Cole's expression drastically changed, he turned around and looked at his assistant again.

"Is he really the second son of the Duke? Although he looks a little younger, he shouldn't be worse than his female officer... His assistant at least managed to keep calm although she was shocked with her mouth slightly open. Of course, it was also possible that she couldn't understand what I said." Roland thought.

"No worries, nobles are still nobles. The munificent life you live won't change and you'll even have a chance to hit a new peak." Roland clapped his hands, summoning the attendant to prepare the "promotional manual". "Longsong Stronghold has fully implemented a new set of regulations. You can see many stories regarding the change and some real-life examples of the nobles in the manual. Although it may seem that the nobles have lost part of their privileges, in fact, it has also released the nobles from the manor to engage within the kingdom and even the dance floor of the entire continent."

Cole was totally lost. "But... I don't know..."

Cole's expression was slightly disappointing to Roland. "However, thinking about it, it's normal. As the second son of the Duke, he is after all just getting into his adulthood. He's probably just a messenger for this trip without the actual power of making any decision."

"Anyway, you can always send the message back to Duke Calvin. You can also stay in the City of Neverwinter and enjoy the unique scenery here while waiting for his answer—I think you'll love it here."

Although the Duke sending his second son on behalf indeed showed sincerity, Roland was not planning to waste it, so he was temporarily detaining the son to prevent the Duke from being reckless.

He thought that the meeting had come to an end, without expecting Cole to make another request.

"Your Majesty, may I have a tour within your domain to see how the paddle steamer and steam engine are made?"

It was a novel request. Roland looked at him with interest and said, "Are you interested in it?"

"Yes, I've heard about such a strange ship when I was in the king's city. I realized that they're everywhere here in the Western Region. I'm curious to learn how a paddle steamer moves without a sail." Cole said with one hand covering his chest.

"I see." Roland nodded with a smile and said, "I'll get Director Barov to arrange it."

...

Roland returned to the office after dealing with the northern envoy. He was just about to complete the drawing in his hand when he heard a rapid knock coming from outside the window. He turned around and saw two unexpected figures.

Lightning was lying on the windowsill while Maggie was crouching on her head, pecking on the glass window.

Roland's heart suddenly tightened. "It's only been three days. The paddle steamer shouldn't be able to return so soon. Could it be an accident?"

"Why did you come back first?" He opened the French window and impatiently asked, "What about the others?"

"Your Majesty! We've captured a demon!"

"However Anna, Leaf, and Nightingale were injured, coo!"

"Luckily, there's nothing serious!"

"However it's pretty painful, coo! Can you please allow Miss Nana to come with us?"

Listening to both of them scrambling to finish the story, Roland felt as if he was on a roller-coaster. He sighed and said, "Nothing serious?"

"No, coo!"

"I'll order people to fetch Nana." He turned around and walked out of the room. "Remember to finish telling everything at once next time!"

...

The next evening, two paddle steamers finally appeared at the west end of the Redwater River.

The First Army stayed behind and evacuated the No. 22 trestle, and prepared a covered carriage in order to prevent the crowd from becoming panicked at the sight of the demon. A temporary barrack was set up in the castle backyard, as a laboratory and a study of demons and Sigils, under Leaf's supervision.

Roland felt completely relieved when he saw Anna and Nightingale walking down the trestle. It was only four days since their departure, however, it felt like months to him. The time went by especially slow when he heard those two were injured.

"It's a difficult task this time." Roland grinned and opened up his arms to Anna.

Anna did not say anything but ran into Roland's arms and hugged him tightly.

Nightingale sighed. "You said you'd be waiting for us in the castle... The pier is not safe, Your Majesty."

"You too," Roland said and laughed. "You had a long day."

"Well..." she uncomfortably shifted her head and said, "It was actually alright."

Anna let go of Roland and pulled Nightingale in as well.

Followed by Wendy, then Leaf...

This time all the witches took turns to give Roland a hug, including Agatha and Iffy.

The figures of the crowd looked extremely long under the reflection of the maroon-colored setting sun.

Chapter 557: Damage Testing

After dinner, Roland immediately rushed to the castle's backyard even though he really wanted to have some private time with Anna first. However, the Red Mist from the demon was limited and the experiment had to be carried out immediately.

Almost all of the members of the Witch Union were present, even those who were not taking part in the test did not want to miss out on the chance to take a closer look at the enemy.

The dissected Mad Demon was already under Breeze's control, quietly lying in the middle of the shed's floor. This was the first time Roland got to see an alien being that was different from a human. It had a huge body and was even taller than Iron Axe by a full head's height. Its frozen arms were as thick as a human's thighs, with ridges of clearly defined muscles, fully-covered by blue blood vessels that showcased its great strength.

The black-blue color of its rough skin was supposed to be normal, considering that the demon's blood was blue in color. Roland reached out his hand to feel its body. Clearly, the demon's body was warmer and that meant that their metabolism rate was faster. In other words, the higher their metabolism rate was, the lower their environmental adaptability would be.

Since the Mad Demon had a respirator which was connected to its helmet, its appearance was temporarily hidden. However, judging from its entire appearance, it was obviously an advanced chordate. A Mad Demon at least had a human-like appearance, especially when compared to the ridiculous Fearsome Demon and the Lord of Hell.

Of course, according to Agatha, the Junior Demon had lower intelligence and could not be compared to humans. When speaking of cunning and trickery, though, the Senior Demon was more like a human.

"Among the five demons, the Supermagic was melted by the Sigil of God's Will and one of the Mad Demons was dissected by Anna. Two bottles of Red Mist came from the remaining three and they were used on the way." Agatha rubbed her forehead, looking a little tired and her voice was much softer than usual. "The mist will only last until tomorrow evening. So, the experiment should be carried out before tomorrow afternoon, if we want to make the Sigil. I'll still need half a day to melt down the base of the Sigil and I may fail a few times during the process."

"The Red Mist is fatal to witches. How did you manage to change the gas tank?"

"We turned to the common people for help." She pointed at the sclerotin container that was set to the side and said. "I've brought back some of the empty storage tanks in case we needed them in the future."

Roland nodded and turned around to look at Breeze and said, "Can you control the magic power it used?"

"If it can do it," Breeze seriously answered, "I don't need to specifically manipulate its every move, but rather just give it an order and force it to follow the order. This command is beyond the limits of language and thought, so even the demonic beasts would follow it. But of course, it shouldn't be too complicated."

"That's good." Roland then instructed Nana. "Connect the limbs so I can see the power and intervals of a Mad Demon spear thrower."

"Hold on. In the castle?" Lily frowned.

Mystery Moon, Hummingbird, and the others immediately hid behind Wendy. However, Paper and Summer, who had not experienced the destruction of the Witch Cooperation Association did not have much reaction. Their expressions showed curiosity instead of fear.

"Will there be an accident?" Softfeathers muttered.

"Don't worry. We're watching it," Iffy calmly said.

Roland had roughly understood the process of the Melting Point Action during the dinner. The unexpected appearance of a Senior Demon caused a panic among the team, leading them into danger. However, the witches finally managed to defeat the strong enemy. Iffy played an important role, especially after the Sigil of God's Will became ineffective. Her determination to make time for everyone to escape had changed the others' perspective towards her and her attitude towards non-combat witches also became softer. However, it was so subtle that even Iffy herself probably did not notice the slight transformations.

Perhaps it would take a little longer for her to be accepted as one of the team. However, Roland could see the opportunity for both sides to reconcile.

Nana reluctantly squatted down to start treating the demon.

There was absolutely no way to complete the "surgery" with conventional medicine. In a situation where there was a lack of an anti-freezing agent, it would only prevent the limbs from becoming rotten, but it would not be able to prevent the cellular structure from becoming burned by the freezing. However, the poor condition of the broken limbs was clearly improving and even the mottled burns were fading, bit by bit, under the unreasonable magic restoration.

Once the limbs were completely re-connected, the originally black-colored skin was gradually turning green which signified the blood was starting to re-circulate.

After half an hour, the demon quietly stood up from where it had been lying on the ground and slowly walked out of the shed.

The witches followed it out one by one and this was different from their former swarming manner of just rushing in. Now they formed a long line behind Wendy and Scroll. The mixed expressions of fear and curiosity on Mystery Moon's and the others' faces made Roland laugh uncontrollably.

Leaf had already prepared the "shooting range" which was a target around 200 meters away from the wooden shed. There were a steel plate and a cuirass, which were hanging down from the grapevines

located at the end of the garden fence after passing through the two rows of olive trees which lined both sides. It was also the conventional combat distance for a revolving rifle.

"Start." Roland signaled, looking at the demon with the bone spear.

"Yes."

Breeze just finished her words when the arms of the Mad Demon started to swell. The Magic Stone mounted on its arms was glowing with a faint yellow light. The demon stepped forward, with its body bent, and it threw the bone spear towards the target.

There was a flash of white, followed by the crisp noise of the cuirass, ringing in the distance.

His arms quickly shriveled, as if it had exhausted all its strength.

Probably due to its severe injuries, the recovery time was far longer than usual. Its arms only returned to their normal state after about an hour.

Of course, its throwing power was not weak.

The bone spear had completely penetrated the cuirass and it was firmly pinned to the fence. Pulling the bone spear out, it could be seen that the spearhead was broken from the impact of throwing. There would be more damage if it were replaced by the iron short spear. However, looking at the dressing of the Mad Demon, the enemy probably had less of an understanding of metal utilization compared to humans. Even the armor of the Senior Demon did not look like it was made of pure metal.

After thinking about it, it was probably due to the high-temperature flame needed to smelt the metal, and the Red Mist happened not to be resistant. If the information given by Agatha was accurate, the demons must be very careful with their use of fire. If the human civilization had originated from fire, then the demons were probably born to hate their fire.

The next test was the quick throw.

The Mad Demon was forced to throw two bone spears within a short interval of time. However, it was roaring in pain. Although its body was controlled, the sharp pain caused by the overuse of Magic Stones was not removed. Its arms were paralyzed after it finished throwing. They looked shriveled and dry like bark and could not recover again.

Both of the bone spears had been crushed against the three millimeters thick steel plate.

Thus, the most threatening technique of the Mad Demon could be compared to revolving rifles using black powder bullets, which if replaced by the bolt rifle, could easily pierce through a steel plate.

Chapter 558: Beauty

After reaching the conclusion, Roland felt slightly relieved.

The basic combat capability of the demons did not exceed the combat efficiency of the conventional firearms as the machine gun and cannon were enough to crush all the enemies within the distance of 500 to 1,000 meters, while the spear thrower attack was obviously unsuitable for the trench warfare.

Mad Demon would not even stand a chance as long as the bullet production kept up with the pace since it would take three to five seconds for the Magic Stone to charge up and take effect.

It implied that at least the humans would be competitive on the frontlines of the battlefield.

"It would be nice if you were born in Taquila." Agatha sighed while staring at the weapon in Roland's hand. "The number of common people on the Fertile Plains is 100 times more than those in the Kingdom of Graycastle, so is the number of witches. If every one of them had a spear in their hands, the demons would have probably run back to where they came from."

Roland smiled but he did not agree with it in his heart.

After all, it was a witch-dominated empire 400 years ago. He thought, [If there were really a weapon that gave the common people power beyond the witches, would the seniors of the Union have lightly accepted such an existence? Witches have always been the minority—there were millions of humans yet only thousands of witches. This has been the case since the Land of Dawn until the Fertile Plains. Would the long-oppressed common people willingly set foot on the battlefield? Once the actual strength was reversed, the disintegration of the dominance hierarchy would inevitably lead to civil strife. The idea of fighting for the survival of the human beings was still extremely vague after the awakening of nationalism, not to mention a group of humans who had been living like slaves to have such a lofty ideal.]

Of course, Roland would not talk about these conclusions in the public and Agatha was simply a researcher of the Quest Society, so it would be better not to involve her in the political matters.

After the damage test, Anna amputated the demon again and put it into a steel cage.

"Is that all?" Agatha asked.

Roland shook his head and said, "That's all for today. The injury test shall begin tomorrow morning."

"What's that?"

"We're going to test the resistance ability of the various parts of the demon to shooting, as well as the effects of the chemicals, Pill of Madness and Dreamland Water," Roland answered. "Oh yeah, and get Lucia to separate the composition of Red Mist and see what we can get out of it."

[Unfortunately, the demon can't be kept alive for the long-term. Otherwise, more comprehensive data could be collected by using Nana's healing power on the demon.]

Agatha yawned and said, "Up to you. However, I'll need two witch assistants to help me make the Sigil and the materials must be prepared in advance as the blood doesn't last once the demon is dead. It's better to start melting the God's Stone of Retaliation when the demon is still alive." She paused and said, "By the way, what kind of Sigil do you want to make?"

"We can make any of them as long as we've sufficient Magic Stones?"

"Of course," she nodded and said, "the failure doesn't consume the stone itself but I... Oh no, nothing."

Roland raised his brows and asked, "What's with you?"

"Never mind. It was simply a slip of the tongue," Agatha curled her lips and said. "At most you'll only be losing some raw materials."

Roland did not continue pressing since Agatha did not want to go on. "Let me come back to you with an answer tomorrow morning after I study the 'Magic Stone Collection'".

It was bound to be a sleepless night.

Edith Kant was standing by the window, overlooking the city under the night sky. [Businessmen always refer to candlelight as wealth; the brighter a place is in the night, the wealthier it is.] She thought that within the Inner City of the king's city, the scene of a brightly lit night would only exist near the taverns and theatres.

However, she could never really grasp the true meaning of brightly lit night here, within the Southern Coast of the Redwater River.

Looking from afar, the shore was as bright as if it were lit. However, it was not the orange-glow of the bonfire but a soft-yellow light, looking bright yet stable as if it were a yarn-covered sunlight.

The entire factory area would be continuously producing a variety of goods at night, goods that they called industrial products.

The steam engine was one of them.

The afternoon visit had left Edith feeling an indescribable shock. A shock which was beyond the shock left by the fight on the battlefield or anything else... It was even beyond comparison with the removal of land command mentioned by His Majesty.

When she entered the factory, she saw some rough iron ingots that were being spun and drilled one by one, her attention was instantly caught, especially when the dirty iron slabs that were full of grease and scrapes transformed into shiny components that had been given a sense of newborn beauty.

The hard materials were processed into different shapes by the roaring machines that could work by themselves after being put together in a unique way—what a wonderful sight it was.

The factory was not a wonderful place with the running sewage and metal scraps all over the floor, in addition to the noise and humid air, but Edith had stayed there for an entire afternoon.

And, she could clearly remember the City Hall officer who brought the emissary delegation to visit was looking impatient and wanted to leave the noisy place early. The officer felt relieved when the group of people finally intended to leave and there was a statement she could freshly remember, "What's so interesting about this machine? Only His Majesty Roland will think that there's a hidden beauty within these black blotches."

[Hidden beauty?]

Edith suddenly felt a strong resonance.

That was right... It was the beauty that was brought by the pure power and that could knead and transform the metal without any restraint. There was an additional kind of beauty with the aid of a natural trend, especially after she understood the operational principle of the steam engine.

The beauty was far beyond the beauty of colorful gems and exquisite luxury clothing.

She could only feel that something had faintly touched her heart.

[How does His Majesty know these pieces of knowledge? What else does he know?]

Suddenly, a knocking sound outside the bedroom interrupted Edith's thoughts.

"Sister, I've done bathing," Cole stuck his head in and said, "and the water is still warm. Do you want to take a bath as well?"

"Get the servant to boil a new basin of water." She ordered. "Do you understand the principle of the water intake here?"

"I've sent someone to ask around. The water of the pipeline seems to flow out from the standing iron tower." Cole touched his head while walking into the room. "As for how the water flows upwards from the well, they didn't really say anything about it. Oh yeah, there was something in the bathroom that you must try. It looks like a special fat but it smells really good after soaking in the water. It feels fantastic to clean the body with it. I can assure you that even the milk and rose bath is not as comfortable!"

[Is this deliberately arranged by His Majesty?] Edith could not help but ponder. The residence of the emissary delegation was located near the castle district. It was a four-story building with a top floor that was higher than half of the castle; not only could they enjoy the night view of the City of Neverwinter from there, but even the layout and facilities of the rooms were quite ingenious—although it was not big, it was comfortable to live in. A reception officer from the City Hall mentioned that it was the hotel His Majesty specifically prepared for the foreign emissary, which was calling the Foreign Affairs Building.

From what she could see, it was Roland Wimbledon's intention to show off with both the clear water that was pouring out from the valve once it was unscrewed and the washing material that Cole was praising about.

Chapter 559: A Discussion about the System

"What do you think of it?" Edith sat back to the bed.

"The bathroom?"

"No, the new laws."

"Um..." Cole was a bit hesitated. "I'm going to write father a letter tomorrow and tell him His Majesty's terms. I don't think he'll agree."

"Really?" Edith neither approved nor disapproved.

Seeing Edith did not refute him, Cole ventured more confidently. "I've read the booklet distributed by His Majesty. Let's put aside the credibility issue for now and just look at the example. The top-ranking noble listed as the example is just an earl's son, who is currently equivalent to a duke without lands. To be honest, I'd definitely make the same choice if I were merely a knight. However, our father is the designated ruler of the Northern Region, Duke of the City of Evernight. He has far greater power and more distinctive social status than the oldest son of the Honeysuckle Family. If he agrees to His Majesty's terms, it means he's consenting to hand over his domain. This isn't a promotion, but a demotion instead."

"Good reasoning." Edith nodded with a smile, but soon went on before her brother could feel good about himself. "But you've missed one thing."

"What?"

"Whether we're able to keep our current status and power is uncertain."

Cole was a little stunned.

"You've apparently focused on the story in the latter part of the booklet, but I care more about the paragraph at the beginning." Edith picked up the advertising pamphlet from the nightstand and flipped over the cover page. "If this is really His Majesty's idea... I have to say it's quite interesting."

"The cause... of feudalism?" Cole peeped over her shoulder. "Have you figured out what it means?"

"It's just a made-up word. You can call it the current system or the system of nobility."

Cole looked confused.

Edith shook her head in silence. It seemed quite strange to put such an awkward paragraph at the very beginning of the booklet. The writing did not really flow at first glance, and the contents were also much drier than the following examples. Nevertheless, after probing into its underlying meanings, she realized that this opening statement was the basis of Roland Wimbledon's decision to implement the new laws.

It was her first time to come across such an innovative and eloquent argument.

"Have you ever thought of the reason we grant lands to subordinate knights and vassals?"

"To have them remain loyal to the Kant Family," Cole mumbled, "and also to attract more courageous men to work for us."

"What if our father becomes the sole ruler of the entire Northern Region?" Edith continued to ask.

"Do you mean to have all the lands go to our family?" Cole shook his head after some contemplation.

"That won't work. If we hold all the lands, these knights will lose their properties and thus leave for somewhere else to seek employment, so will the lower nobles. The Kant Family will then become the only nobles in the town."

"Isn't it nice?"

"Of course not!" Cole winked, failing to understand why his sister asked such a self-evident question.

"The Northern Region is way too large to handle by ourselves. It takes the guards around half a week

just to march from the City of Evernight to the Palisade City in the event of an attack, not to mention the extra time we need to deliver messages. Plus, it'll be rather problematic to collect taxes and food. We can't wait for those lowlifes to voluntarily make the payment, can we?"

"So, we constantly increase our subordinates to keep our lands is fundamentally due to the potential war requirements and our limitations of management. These two factors are also what His Majesty thinks the main cause of feudalism." Edith said while caressing the booklet, "However, things have changed. No matter how we arm ourselves, it's futile to resist His Majesty's unstoppable army. Meanwhile, His Majesty firmly believes a powerful City Hall will be able to manage the whole region. As a matter of course, there'll be no need to grant lands to the nobles."

"Well..." Cole groped unsuccessfully for adequate words, failing because he did not know what to respond.

"Roland Wimbledon thinks such a change is inevitable." Edith pointed to the last sentence of the opening statement. "A well-functioning centralized government will unavoidably replace feudal nobles, because a unified management system will make better use of resources across the whole region and maximize people's potential, and thereby largely increase the productivity of the entire kingdom. Productivity determines the dominant power of the state."

"Nonsense." Cole bellowed. "What's productivity? Farming skills? A knight can knock 10 farmers down. Besides, where does he get so much manpower to... administer the whole country and take charge of tax collection? He still, after all, needs to rely on the nobles. In that case, what will be the difference? Those lowlifes won't care about who their King is."

"I'm as curious as you are in this regard." Edith curled up her lips into a smile. "But don't you think the person who is capable of jotting down such a plan will have full preparation for the implementation of the new laws?" She paused for a moment and then said, "Let's call on him again tomorrow. I'll do the talking this time."

"That fast?" Cole was surprised. "Don't you usually reveal your true identity only after they inquire about it?"

"I can't wait till then." Edith shrugged. "Also, don't write to father just yet. You've heard that he's let me take the lead on this meeting."

"Are you... going to agree to His Majesty's proposal?" Cole gasped. "Father will kill you!"

"Huh?"

"Um... No, I mean he'll resent you." Cole soon corrected himself. "After all, he sent you primarily for the purpose of keeping his title as a duke."

"Don't worry. I'm not that amenable." Edith raised her eyebrows. "Since the king has already placed his bid, surely I have to negotiate a better price, don't you think?"

The following day, Roland received multiple injury test reports in succession.

Demons were by no means physically stronger than witches. Although both guns and swords could fatally injure them, toxin could not due to their different physiological structure.

For instance, none of the chlorine, nitric oxide and carbon monoxide had any impacts on demons. Even they did, it resulted from the decrease in the effective ingredients in the Red Mist.

Neither the Dreamland Water nor the Pill of Madness worked. The Dreamland Water had failed to make the demon fall asleep, and the Pill of Madness did not drive him crazy.

As to the ingredients of the Red Mist, it was composed of various gases and water. Kyle Sichi had confirmed through experiments that one part of the ingredients was flammable with an unpleasant odor. Another part was nitrogen, and the rest was unknown. However, demons appeared to depend on the feeble magic power swarming in the Mist rather than these ingredients to maintain their lives, which was also why the Red Mist could only be preserved for a short period of time.

Furthermore, the Red Mist would break down faster at a temperature of 300 °C and would even burn at 800 °C.

Roland folded the reports and put them in the drawer. It seemed that other than regular firearms, the fire also lethal to demons. At least, its high temperature could effectually break down the Red Mist. Given that, it seemed that they could instantly reverse the situation by setting a great fire on demons' campgrounds.

Chapter 560: Uncovering the Truth

Roland was debating which kind of incendiary weapon was easier to manufacture when a guard came in. "Your Majesty, the ambassadors of the Northern Region requested to see you."

[It has been just one day...] Roland thought, feeling a bit surprised. [Are they planning to directly turn down my offer without even letting the duke know?]

"Bring them to the drawing room." He instructed after a momentary silence. "Also, ask Carter to block all the exits to the Foreign Affairs Building and stop the emissary delegation from getting out."

"Yes, Your Majesty."

Since they had refused to agree to his policies, it left him no choice but to detain them by force.

...

When Roland entered the drawing room, he noticed that the pair across the long table had switched their seatings. The lady, who claimed to be the assistant to Cole, was sitting in the guest of honor seat, whereas Cole was sitting next to her with a book in his hand.

"Your Majesty, I'm the first daughter of the Duke of the City of Evernight, Edith Kant, Cole's sister. Please accept the best regards from the Kant Family." The lady rose and performed a perfect curtsy. "Please forgive Cole for not introducing me during our first meeting."

"Calvin's daughter?" Roland was intrigued by this turn of the events and after a short pause said, "So you're the real leader of the emissary delegation?"

"Yes." She placed her hand on her chest. "My father has authorized me to act on his behalf with respect to all matters concerning this visit and has also given me his seal."

It was fairly rare for a woman to participate in political affairs in this era, especially for a young and pretty one. Judging from Edith's confident expression, Roland could tell it was evidently not her first time to deal with heads of state. Every trait of her demeanor was impeccable. As to holding back her real identity, Roland knew it was simply a little trick to draw his attention. It was not a deliberate act of concealment or deception whatsoever, but just a disguise to mislead the other party. Most nobles would view it as a bold and playful move, which he had to admit was really effective.

"In other words, you can make the decision on behalf of your father?"

"Yes, Your Majesty. More accurately, he'll follow my advice."

[That's such a confident answer,] thought Roland, who was amused to see Cole scratching his head beside his sister.

"Alright... So, Miss Edith, what's your purpose of this meeting?"

Roland had thought she would politely decline his terms or talk him out of implementing the new laws using a more "playful" tactic, but he did not expect to see her taking out a booklet from her backpack and spreading it on the table. That was the exact booklet he had drafted.

"I have a few questions to ask you." Edith came straight to the point. "You said feudal nobles will be obsolete as the centralized power increases. However, how are you going to guarantee the effective management of all the local authorities in the Kingdom without the assistance of nobles?"

[Is she... planning to discuss politics with me?] Roland thought.

From her sincere look, Roland knew she was serious.

It had been a long time since he had heard such an interesting question.

"By people and the development of technologies," Roland answered after pondering for a long time.

"Do you mean free men? What's the development of technologies?"

"Correct. A management team trained, paid and disbursed by the City Hall. Since the City Hall will provide labors and necessary equipment, administrators aren't required to have large properties or affluent manpower. Therefore, it doesn't matter whether they're nobles or not." Roland started to explain what a centralized government should look like and how ordinary people could get promoted, as well as the practical significance of technologies in domain control. It took him an hour to detail everything.

"How are you going to avoid dereliction of duty among the administrators of the king's city?"

"How will the trade be distributed after the unification of the Kingdom of Graycastle?"

"And can you really evaluate the performance of your policies with productivity?"

"..."

Edith's eyes glistened with excitement as she raised more questions. It had been about noon by the time they finally closed their conversation. She heaved a sigh of relief. "I see. You did have a thorough consideration before writing down the opening statement."

Roland sipped the tea in satisfaction. As a person who did not major in political science, this was all he could talk about regarding politics.

"Thank you very much for your time, Your Majesty. I didn't expect you would answer my questions in such detail."

"The very basic requirement for a City Hall in the new era is to publicize the policies and enable everybody to have a comprehensive understanding of its contents. Only in this way will things go well when it comes to the implementation."

Edith gave an approving nod and then switched the topic. "Could you provide the Northern Region with the equipment and workers for manufacturing steam engines?"

"I'm afraid I can't provide the workers as the City of Neverwinter is also short of manpower. But you're welcome to send your men to study here, provided that the nobles in the Northern Region waive their feudal rights and agree to be under the supervision of the City Hall."

"You'll also teach them how to manufacture paddle steamers?"

"Of course. As long as they're willing to pay gold royals, this won't be a problem. However, it'll be hard to move the production line to the north in a short period of time without the assistance of witches."

"I'm very surprised by your honesty, Your Majesty." She meditated for a while. "But there's one thing I don't quite understand. According to your plan, you can easily unify the whole Kingdom of Graycastle in ten years. By then, the new policies won't face any backlash from the public and you won't really need to care about our opinions. Why are you so anxious to implement these new laws?"

Roland was silent. It took him quite a while to reply. "Do you really want to know the reason?"

Edith did not expect he would speak in such a grave tone, so her manner tightened into formality as well. "Yes."

"Then follow me." Roland rose. "I'll show you one thing."

...

Roland led Edith to the backyard in shadows of trees and took her to the wooden shed at the center of the olive woods.

A demon, whose limbs had been amputated, was lying on a long table. There were all sorts of vials and flasks piling around him. Agatha was taking his blood samples to complete the final step of the preparation.

"My goodness, what's... this?" Edith had cried out in a low voice in disbelief, but Roland noticed she was simply shocked but not afraid.

"I should have locked the shed and asked Leaf to surround the whole yard." Agatha frowned. "Don't tell me that you plan to let a common people participate in the sigil manufacture. If I were integrating the God's Stone, I would have probably failed already."

"Of course not... We won't be here long." Roland coughed to conceal his embarrassment and then turned to Edith. "The creature you see is of a different race. It's what you rumored as a demon. They live to the north of the Impassable Mountain Range and are also the biggest enemies that human beings are to face. The war between the demons and mankind has nothing to do with domains or wealth, but with life and death."

"Demon? A war of life and death?" Edith muttered involuntarily.

"Right. It's a long story that the church has been keeping as a secret. It can be dated back to 1,000 years ago when people called it—the 'Battle of Divine Will'."