

## Witch 581

### Chapter 581: Late Night Talk

Late at night, Wendy called all of the witches into her bedroom.

The usually spacious room was now packed.

It felt like *deja vu*. A year ago, Wendy had done the same thing. She had gathered all of the witches to inform them of the situation in Border Town and quell their uneasiness.

At that time, only seven of their sisters were able to escape from the Barbarian Lands. The witches were left traumatized, and were unsure and afraid of what was in store ahead. Many came to Border Town with a mentality that "We've suffered so much that whatever happens next is a blessing". To them, survival itself was a difficult game, not to mention dealing with the church which perpetually hung over their heads like a shadow.

This time, the looks and feelings of everyone in the room were completely different from a year ago.

At present, the witches' consideration was gradually shifting away from focusing on survival to maintaining their relatively carefree lives.

There were no more oppression and hostility from other people.

And no more worries about food and safety.

In essence, this place had become the witches' "Holy Mountain".

Furthermore, if they could help His Majesty Roland to defeat the church successfully, all of their nightmares would vanish and they would be truly liberated forever.

Wendy waited until everyone's eyes were fixed on her before she began. "The church is coming."

The daytime meeting did not offer much in the way of intelligence. Wendy quickly finished telling the witches about the contents of the secret letter, and the room fell into an awkward silence.

"Will His Majesty... win?" After some time, Mystery Moon asked almost inaudibly. "I'm willing to spend all of my time generating electricity for him at the factory area..."

"Oh come on, His Majesty would have to arrange someone to take care of you if so." Lily smirked. "It's best you don't give him more trouble at a time like this."

"What trouble!"

The witches in the room started to laugh. Now that the first person had spoken, more and more voices were heard in the room.

"I'll work even harder to produce white liquor." Evelyn resolved.

"But, would so much liquor be needed while we're at war with the church?"

"Aye... is that so?"

"I believe His Majesty won't lose. Didn't Carter also manage to severely injure Ashes, the Extraordinary Witch?" Hummingbird mooted. "And the God's Punishment Army isn't nearly as powerful as Ashes."

"Is that true? Even the invincible Ashes has lost before?" Softfeathers, who rarely spoke, looked surprised.

"I won't consider it a loss. Carter was battered to be unconscious while Ashes was completely incapacitated. It's more like a tie."

"As far as I know, it wasn't a fair fight." Agatha disputed. "Had the Extraordinary used equivalent weapons to Carter's, she would have been in a stronger position."

"But Sleeping Island only has one Extraordinary, while there're thousands of soldiers carrying guns."

"Hold it, sisters. Your debate's heading in the wrong direction." Scroll shook her head in disapproval. "We're talking about the church and His Majesty now."

Wendy quietly heaved a sigh of relief. Although everyone was anxious, nobody seemed afraid of fighting against the church. This would have been completely inconceivable a year ago, when the might of the church seemed to be as steady and unshakeable as a huge mountain. None of the witches who fought against them was able to survive. The Witch Cooperation Association had to hide in various places, and only managed to shake off the chasing enemies by advancing towards the secluded Impassable Mountain Range.

Of course, this mentality change was, for the most part, down to the fact that His Majesty had never lost a foreign war.

"All in all, this war will be crucial to the future of the Witch Union." Wendy inhaled a deep breath. "Has anyone thought about what will happen if His Majesty completely defeats the church?"

Everyone in the room turned silent, but a strange and indescribable twinkle gleamed in their eyes.

"The entire kingdom... and maybe even the entire continent, will become safe for witches to reside in. In His Majesty's territory, we'll be able to create a new world together with other people, one where everyone enjoys equal honor and status. This is also what His Majesty has mentioned several times. I just didn't think that it could all be possible so soon."

Wendy paused for a short while. "However, going by His Majesty's usual way of doing things, I urge everyone not to work too hard. Just do your jobs as usual. We'll not fail if we can keep this confidence."

She did not comprehend sophisticated ideas, nor was she among the Union's most able and brightest witches. Now that His Majesty had placed her in charge of the Union, she simply did what she could. Every time before an expedition, His Majesty would give an impassioned speech to the First Army. Wendy could never think of a way to inspire the witches in the same way as him. In the end, she always resorted to speaking what she felt at the bottom of her heart.

"The intention to be considerate of other people is more important than anything else." She firmly remembered these words of Scroll.

"This place is our home and will serve as the turning point for the fates of all witches. I'll give all of myself for it!"

Wendy stretched out her left hand, with the back of her hand facing upwards.

Scroll was the first to press her hand on top of Wendy's.

Then, Nightingale and Anna followed.

"For His Majesty and City of Neverwinter!"

All of the witches gathered together with their hands stacked on top of each other's. The witches of the Bloodfang Association had hesitated for a while, as though they were unsure whether they would be accepted by everyone else, until Leaf pulled them into the circle. As per convention, they were only considered truly integrated into the group after they made hand contact with the other witches.

"I really don't wish to have to deal with this annoying bunch before fighting against the demons."

Although Agatha voiced her displeasure, she also stretched out her hand and joined in.

Lastly, Wendy placed her right hand on top of the stack and looked around at everyone.

"For the Witch Union!"

"For the... eternal Holy Mountain!"

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After the witches departed, only Wendy and Nightingale were left in the room.

As Wendy was closing the door, she suddenly felt a breeze of cold wind behind her back.

She turned her head back, only to see that Nightingale had silently opened the window, and was now sitting on the sill and looking into the night sky. The night breeze blew her hair upwards, while at the same time, a faint fragrance whiffed by.

"Are you also worried about this war?" Wendy walked over to the window and asked.

"Worried?" Nightingale turned her head to face Wendy. Under the glow of the Stone of Light, scorching rays gleamed in her pupils. "The only thing I'm worried about is that I'll laugh myself to death."

"L-laugh?"

It was only at this time that Wendy felt the piercing aura that emanated from the latter's body. Unlike most witches, Nightingale could release her magic powers even when she was not actively using her abilities. To her, these powers were no longer elusive and intangible things, but instead were like sharp blades which created inaccessible regions of space. It was as if her misty world was slowly eating into the space around itself and beginning to take hold of the physical world. Ever since she came to Border Town, this feeling was becoming more and more pronounced to the people around her.

To an enemy, this would be the greatest portent of danger.

"I've waited a long time to take proper revenge on the church," Nightingale slowly explained. "Our sisters who wrongly died at the church's hands must also be looking forward to this day. The taste of revenge, from my experience, is truly unforgettable."

It was hard to imagine that this was the same woman who lingered in bed and did not want to wake up in the morning. Fortunately, she wasn't an enemy of the sisters.

Wendy reached her hand out to Nightingale. Upon contact, the piercing aura disappeared. She proceeded to cuddle Nightingale in her arms.

"You can continue to do whatever you want. Just remember to take good care of His Majesty... and also yourself. Is that understood?"

"Yes." Nightingale closed her eyes and replied softly. "I will."

## Chapter 582: Military Strategy

Once the war order was issued, Neverwinter immediately went into overdrive.

Bags of wheat plundered from Fallen Dragon Ridge quickly filled up the previously-empty granaries. A portion of these would be shelled and powdered into rations for the soldiers participating in the war.

Other than food, there were also firearms and ammunition. The soldiers recruited during the Months of Demons had already completed their basic training, and the outstanding cadets were hastily incorporated into the ranks of the First Army and given new weapons and uniforms. Those who performed average were placed in the reserve force and assigned to one of Roland's cities, where they replaced the veterans stationed there.

By doing so, Neverwinter's available military strength was rapidly increased to 5,000 men. In theory, this put them on par with the Judgement Army's numbers. However, due to limitations on transportation capacity, the further the battlefield was from Western Region, the fewer the number of soldiers who could enter battle would be.

Because Roland assessed that the Tooth Extraction Campaign would not be too difficult, he eventually decided to send out 1,500 men, with Iron Axe serving as the commander. In this expedition, the Adviser Department was absorbed into the First Army, and the key members were made up of nobles, knights and commoners from Longsong Area. This included Sir Eltek, who was Morning Light's father, and Trevor, Chief Bodyguard of the Honeysuckle Family. The criteria was that they had to have experience in artillery warfare, or had served in the Second Army.

Although the people Roland selected were not professionals in this field, Roland trusted that they could learn on the job, and in any case, it was good to have a few more people to provide counsel to the commander. They did not possess any actual power to command. It was entirely up to Iron Axe whether to adopt their plans and advice.

After considering that the First Army might encounter the church's Pure Witch during the expedition, Roland decided that "Eye of Magic" Sylvie and "Confinement Cage" Iffy would be following them as well. The former could detect magic power and alert the army to the enemies' positions, while the latter could capture Pure Witch under the right circumstances. Sylvie would also bring along a Sigil of Listening so that she could contact Neverwinter at any time. As a result of these preparations, an army with modern military structures, firepower, and communication capabilities slowly began to take shape.

The Tooth Extraction Campaign was mainly targeted at Redwater City, Silver City and Impassable Castle, the three cities which were closest in distance to Western Region. The preparation for the expedition required four days of time. Apart from choosing which of his reliable guards to send towards the old holy city, Roland spent the rest of the time discussing various details of the war together with the commander and the Adviser Department.

One such detail, which Roland found difficult to resolve, was the location where they would intercept the enemy.

Everyone had their own views on this issue, and nobody could convince anyone else that they were right.

The commander of the gun battalion, Brian, was adamant that the army should intercept the enemy within Western Region. His reasoning was very substantial. "The battle has to be carried out in Western Region for the First Army to fully utilize its advantage in firepower. With our paddle steamers providing logistical support, we'll be able to replenish ammunition and manpower in less than a day. No matter how long the battle drags on, we can be assured of victory. This distance from their base will also be extremely disadvantageous to the church. If they cannot break through within a month, they won't even have any food left."

Conversely, Edith was the main advocate of fighting outside the Western Region. "Do you really think that they'll have no food? Do you know how many church believers there are in the Kingdom of Graycastle? Even if all of the churches are burned to the ground, the Pope simply has to issue an order and these people will bring all the food they have to the Judgement Army. Mid-July is also the ripening season of wheat. As long as the enemy occupies one or two cities, they'll surely have a continuous supply of food. And this is not the scariest thing. Don't we already know that the church possesses Pills of Madness which can turn ordinary people into enchanted monsters? If the war situation turns bad for them, they may willfully force the commoners in these places to consume these pills, and manipulate them to fight against our army so as to wear us down. What will we do then?"

"You don't understand anything about gunpowder weapons." Van'er was on Brian's side regarding this issue. "Transporting cannons and ammunition is very costly and difficult. They aren't like swords, which can be used many times. A single battle will require many ships to replenish the supplies that are expended. If we do as you say and intercept the enemy before they enter our kingdom, what will we do when we run out of ammunition?"

"I admit that I don't understand gunpowder weapons, nor the specific methods which your army uses to fight. What I do know is that the objective is the most important thing in a battle. If we cannot achieve our intended objective, even victory will be a failure." Edith remained unrelenting. "His Majesty needs every one of his citizens. How can you allow the church to enter our kingdom and wantonly destroy the populace?"

"If we cannot win the battle, everything else is meaningless."

"What we have to do is to solve those problems that seem unsolvable."

The only two people present who could provide a final verdict were Roland and Iron Axe. However, whenever Roland was around, Iron Axe would never speak more than he needed to. No matter what

order Roland issued, he would agree and execute it unconditionally. As both viewpoints in this argument had their pros and cons, Roland was not able to make a decision immediately.

The most effective way of using gunpowder weapons in battle was to set up a crossfire net and wait for the enemy to enter it. The Western Region was undoubtedly the ideal location for something like this. However, if the church indeed used his citizens as a vanguard for their army, his losses would be huge. While the army's weapons could easily subdue the enchanted people, the population loss would be hard to make up for in the short term.

It was only on the day before the army set out that Sir Eltek made a suggestion which brought an end to this dispute.

"Why don't we place our troops and supplies in the border cities in advance?" He suggested while stroking his beard. "This way, we can substantially shorten the transport distances."

Brian shook his head in disapproval without giving the idea a second thought. "That's only possible if we can know beforehand where the church will be attacking from."

"Sir, the Northern Region doesn't have enough riverways. If we gather our troops in the wrong positions, we may even be unable to catch up with the enemy's movement." Carter added.

"Furthermore, the border between Kingdom of Graycastle and Kingdom of Dawn is very long. We won't be able to keep watch on every passageway."

"It's true that we don't know where the enemy will attack from. But we can induce them to attack from a particular point."

Everyone was stumped when they heard this suggestion. After a long while, Brian frowned and remarked. "I'm afraid that only the Pope can do something like this."

Meanwhile, Edith revealed a thoughtful expression on her face.

Sir Eltek was unperturbed by the sarcastic response he received. He candidly replied, "The truth is, I got the idea from Miss Edith. If we can estimate the time of the church's invasion based on the transportation of food supplies, then the church would also be able to detect the approaching of war based on changes in our border cities."

"Coldwind Ridge!" Edith suddenly exclaimed.

"Indeed." The old knight laughed. "If we amass supplies in Coldwind Ridge and station the First Army in the nearby Deepvalley Town, we can be confident of directing the enemy to attack from a certain route, agree?"

"How so?" Brian remained puzzled.

"Because Coldwind Ridge is too near to the holy city," Edith explained. "Rather than wait for the church to attack, it's better for us to assume an offensive stance and compel them to concentrate their forces in this area."

"I see." Roland was quick to understand what was going on. Deepvalley Town was the only town connected to the central network of rivers. Although it was far away, his fleet of paddle steamers would be able to ship large quantities of supplies over there within one or two months, while the last leg of the

transportation journey, which had to be done by land, could be reduced to only three days. Although a number of supplies might not be completely sufficient, it would at least be able to maintain a large-scale battle for some time. Of course, a better way would be to set up a defense line below Coldwind Ridge and wait for the enemy to enter the position that was made up of bunkers, barb wires and trenches.

"What if they insist on not going this way?" Van'er enquired.

"Then the holy city of Hermes will be completely flattened," Roland answered.

#### Chapter 583: Anna's Secret

When Anna opened her eyes, she saw that all around her was a fiery red. Scorching hot air blew directly at her face and scalded her skin.

Blazing flames.

The blazing flames were everywhere. Smoke billowed from the lower part of the shed and caused her to choke.

She heard cries from the back room, but was unsure if it was just a hallucination. As wood came into contact with the flames, they let out a crackling sound. Every now and then, she would notice sparks and splinters fall from overhead. She got off her haystack and tried to make her way towards the back room, but was quickly repelled by incoming heat waves.

Eventually, she scrambled her way out of the shed, and watched helplessly as her house was engulfed by the raging flames.

Her neighbors started to crowd around as well. Some tried to help put out the fire. However, the nearest water source was Redwater River, which was located outside the town. The few pots of water which they did their best to fetch had no effect on the fire at all.

After Anna rushed back and forth several times, she suddenly saw the figure of her father.

He had hurried back from the mines. He was still wearing his soiled coat and his face was covered with dark gray dust. He stood beside the house, which had been reduced to its wooden frames, and stared blankly at it.

As though she saw her tower of strength, Anna could no longer suppress the fear and panic in her heart, and tears began to roll down her face like pearls. She cried and screamed as she ran towards her father and held on to him tightly.

However, her father did not comfort her as she hoped.

"Where's your mother?" He grabbed her by the shoulder so violently that it caused her to squeal in pain. "And your brother!"

Anna shook her head, but did not expect that what followed would be a slap on the face.

"Did you actually escape alone? Why didn't you rescue them?"

"Damn, how can you only care about yourself?"

Anna suddenly sat bolt upright in her bed, panting heavily. The scolding voice continued to reverberate beside her ears and refused to go away.

This dream again.

She picked up a cup from the bedside table and gulped down the cold water. It took her quite a long time to recover fully.

On the first day of every month, Anna would dream of this scene. It was as if there was someone in her brain who had to constantly remind her of the past. She turned her head and examined the calendar on her desk. Today happened to be the last day of the first week of summer, and also the day of the month that the Witch Union distributed the salaries.

She washed herself simply and put on her clothes. Then she walked out of the castle and headed towards the Witch Building in the backyard.

"Sister Anna!" Ring grinned upon the sight of her. "You've come so early!"

"Good morning." Wendy greeted and laughed softly. "The weather today seems good. Will you still be going to the North Slope Mountain later?"

"Lady... Anna." Her two former classmates hurriedly bowed in respect.

"Call me Anna, just like the old times." She waved her hands, took a seat at one side of a long table, and pondered for a moment before answering. "I have some other things to do first. I'll only be going in the afternoon."

"Oh? That's rare." Wendy revealed a spirited expression. "Could it be that you and His Majesty Roland are..."

"Are they going shopping!" Ring shouted excitedly.

Pearl and Grayrabbit, who were listening on one side, laughed uncontrollably.

Anna shook her head in denial but did not say anything further.

Neither did Wendy continue to ask. She took out an envelope from a drawer and placed it in Anna's hands. "This is the month's salary. Two gold royals."

"Thank you."

Witches did not have to prepare what they ate or wore, nor did they have to pay for rent or transport. They would even be given free prototypes of the luxury goods sold in the convenience market, and could request for more or newer items easily. Therefore, most witches felt that their salaries were not of much use, and did not understand why His Majesty insisted on paying them. Only Anna was able to guess why Roland did so. Furthermore, this measure inadvertently did her a favor.

She walked back to the castle hall while holding onto her salary envelope. When she reached, she saw that the Chief Knight, Carter Lannis, was already waiting there.



"Miss Anna." Carter stood up and greeted her. "Shall we proceed as usual?"

"Yes." She took a gold royal out of the envelope and handed it to the knight. "Let's go."

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During the reconstruction of Border Town, the natives were each given a new lodging. Anna's father was no exception.

After he sold Anna for a price of 25 gold royals to the church, she never had any contact with him again.

From that moment, she no longer considered him her father.

However, there were some things which Anna could not completely walk away from.

For example, the gold royal which she let Carter pass to her father as the cost of living.

Like most poor people who suddenly received a windfall, her father did not hold on to the sale money for too long. Within half a year, he became penniless by gambling, as well as being a victim of fraud and theft. At that time, Anna was not yet well known, but her talent was spotted by natives when she used her fire abilities to mend the gaps in the city walls. Her father tried to depute a neighbor to visit Anna, but was invariably rejected and ridiculed. When Carter, who was then in charge of organizing the militia, heard about this matter, he disclosed it to Anna.

From then on, she knew that she had to do something in order to keep her father quiet.

She did not wish to see him cause trouble to Roland.

She walked with Carter to a quiet neighborhood in the east of the city and went up to the second floor of a building.

Carter turned his head back to face her. "Miss Anna, wait for me here."

"Sorry to trouble you."

"No, it's nothing much." He walked up to a door and knocked forcefully on it.

After a while, the door creaked open. "Ah... it's you, Knight Sir, I..."

"Why did you take so long to open the door, are you deaf!" Carter yelled. "Move aside and don't stand in the doorway."

"Yes, yes..."

Perhaps this is the way things should be.

Anna leaned against a wall along the corridor and heaved a sigh of relief.

In all honesty, she did not want to care about her once father at all, but she knew that matters would only get worse if she completely disregarded him. Furthermore, she could not approach him by herself, or else, this bigoted and conceited man would act as though he was still her father, and the deterrence effect would be lost.

Rather than pleading him not to do anything, it was better to let him know that there was now a world of difference in their societal status. As the renowned Chief Knight, Carter was considered to be a great noble among the commoners of the Border Area. By having him deliver the gold royal as hush money together with a few sentences of harsh warnings, it should be sufficient to keep the old man quiet, and thus ensure that there would be no trouble for Roland.

Anna did not understand this kind of relationship in the past.

After she was captured and imprisoned, she lost interest in everything and her world turned completely dead gray. It was only when Roland rescued her that her world became colorful again. After living in the castle for a period of time, she gradually understood the complex relationships between people, and also the reasons why her father was angry at her.

But she abhorred these kinds of convoluted things.

She could only be truly relaxed when she was with Roland.

Or when she was reading the books which recorded intriguing knowledge—although they appeared complicated and incomprehensible at first, after prolonged reading, one would discover that the relationships between different things were simple and direct, and would not change because of new interests or desires. She wondered why the real world did not turn out to be as clean and tidy as the formulas which explained its workings.

The door opened again. After a brief moment of flattering voices urging him to stay, Carter returned to her side and said, "Miss Anna, it's done."

"Okay." Anna could breathe a lot easier now that the matter was settled. "Don't tell His Majesty."

"Of course... I understand."

She nodded in approval and turned to walk downstairs.

Although she could never get rid of these terrible feelings, she knew that with Roland, the pleasant things in life would only keep increasing. She could not wait to proceed to the North Slope Mountain to continue her research work.

That was a place she was actually fond of.

Chapter 584: The Estuary

After nearly four months, Lotus had a different feeling when she returned to Border Town.

The town had developed rapidly, and even the heavy snow did not stop its expansion. She had this particular feeling every time she was on the Redwater Bridge.

The factories located on the south bank of the river were arrayed like a neat square, and the dock area across the river had expanded more than several times. Concrete boats with black smoke moving back and forth on the river almost covered the glittering surface of the river.

"It's much more crowded than Sleeping Island. There are a lot of people, and they look like ants down there." Honey leaned against the railings of the bridge looking down.

"I agree," said Lotus. She had not understood why His Highness had wanted such a broad bridge and felt that it had been a waste of materials when the bridge was being constructed. Now, however, she thought that his decision was proven to be right.

Occasionally, people moving across the river via the bridge would glance up at them, curious about their odd dress and appearance.

In other cities, Lotus would think about how to escape at moments like this, but she did not need to worry about her safety here.

In addition to the changes one could see, there were still many more improvements in life, naked to the eye.

For example, the heating system that made people feel warm, the electric lamps that lit up the night and new, delicious food like ice cream and so on. Evelyn and Candle could talk about those changes in their life with her for a whole day, but those were not what surprised Lotus the most.

She thought the biggest change was the relation between witches and ordinary people.

And this could be seen in Evelyn's tavern.

The tavern was funded by the Witch Union. Evelyn was the manager and bartender, serving guests who visited the Western Region delicious blended wines. It was His Majesty's idea that they should spend some of their savings on business instead of keeping it hidden inside their drawers.

Lotus had been invited by Wendy to have two glasses of iced apple fruit wine. The taste was exquisite, much more aromatic than oat wine and mixed with a delicate fruit flavor. The drinks also looked quite attractive, and you could see the clear pale green liquid through the transparent crystal glass. The environment there was not like that of the ordinary pubs which were often noisy and chaotic. Instead, the guests were sitting elegantly in their own seats, and the floor, tables and drinking vessels were all clean and tidy. She would not consider the place a pub, if it were not for the row of barrels behind the counter.

Of course, the experience corresponded with the high prices of the drinks.

Evelyn stood in front of the counter, having conversations with her guests and nobody reproached her because she was a witch. Instead, many foreign businessmen came over to drink due to curiosity. Lotus had seldom seen Evelyn smile so happily, and she knew Evelyn really liked the job.

Lotus recalled that most of the activities of witches had been basically within the castle area before she had left, and the witches had often been protected by His Majesty's bodyguards when they needed to go out. But now they were gradually being assimilated into every part of the town.

It was incredible that such changes could be made within just one season.

Talking with Wendy that evening gave Lotus a deeper understanding. She believed perhaps that was the reason why the witches of the Witch Union were willing to do their best.

They were not only building Neverwinter for His Majesty Roland, but also building their home.

"Let's go. Today we'll complete the transformation of the estuary if everything goes smoothly," Lotus said to Honey.

"Yay!"

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When the last piece of rock sank into the ground, Lotus wiped the sweat off her forehead and took a deep breath.

"Awesome, you really made a road through the mountain." Honey applauded.

Meanwhile, the row of birds crouched in the treetop above her head tweeted.

"Of course, there's nothing I can't do," said Lotus proudly.

Unlike the reefs surrounding Sleeping Island, the rock layer here was much deeper and harder, so it was much more difficult to transform it. Fortunately, she did not need to transform the entire mountain into flat ground. According to His Majesty's plan, she just needed to build a passageway that could allow five or six carriages to pass side by side. Thinking of the iron bridge, this time she did not consider such a spacious road a waste.

Since the hills were more than forty meters above sea level, the easiest way to build the road was by sinking the ground gradually until it turned into a long, gentle slope.

In order to facilitate the passage of carriages, she purposely pressed the rock layer on the surface of the hills into a level road surface. By doing so, even if it rained, puddles of water would not form on the surface of the road.

Now, if you were standing on top of the slope, you could see the golden shallow beach and the blue sea, and you could feel the cool sea breeze blowing along the slope with a familiar salty smell.

"Did you bring fire?" Honey bounded toward her.

"No, what do you want to do?"

"Roast fish, of course!" Honey smiled and added, "How about you drive them out to the top of the water's surface when I attract them here? We can just put them under the sun for two days if we don't have fire."

The birds above her head tweeted even more merrily.

Lotus rolled her eyes and said, "I don't want to smell salted fish everywhere! Besides, haven't you got bored of it? You ate so many on Sleeping Island!"

"Hmm? I feel it was quite good," Honey said while tilting her head.

"Anyway, putting fish under the sun is forbidden here. His Majesty doesn't like the smell of fish, either." Lotus suddenly remembered Ashes and was not sure whether she was still plagued from eating fish soup

on Sleeping Island. "His Majesty said he plans to build a harbor, so Lady Tilly can come here anytime she wants, and she won't need to come by hot air balloon anymore."

When Lady Tilly was mentioned, this attracted Honey's attention. "So... will she come?"

Her expression was even simpler than that of an animal. Lotus patted her fluffy hair, saying, "I have no idea, but soon His Majesty has to fight against the church, so she must come to help her brother."

Actually, Lotus was not sure, especially after she had heard all the details of the Bloodfang Association and Heidi Morgan. In the past, she had not liked the pompous attitude of the combat witches, but now it seemed that they were also quite pitiable.

After she stopped holding prejudice against them, she realized that they were actually not that different from herself. At least now, she could have a short conversation with Iffy once in a while. The combat witches on the island, however, would not be persuaded by Tilly easily.

"Yay, that's great!"

Lotus sighed inwardly. This little girl knew nothing about war. If Lady Tilly failed to solve the Bloodfang Association's problem, and the church attacked His Majesty Roland at the same time, it would mean big trouble.

Despite that, she still wished that Lady Tilly could come to Border Town again.

And she also wished Lady Tilly could stay here forever.

Then the wish she had made in the winter would come true

"Thus, all the witches including myself could live happily in Border Town," Lotus thought.

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## Chapter 585: The Day of Embarkment

Three days later, 1,500 soldiers of the Tooth Extraction Campaign boarded their ships and headed for their first destination, Redwater City.

At the same time, according to strategic planning, the other soldiers of the First Army would escort the ammunition and food to the Northern Region. They would follow the inland water path, pass through Redwater River, the King's City river, Sanwan River, and reach Deepvalley Town in the end.

In order to cope with such a large-scale deployment, Roland gathered all the paddle steamers in City of Neverwinter and also rented 30 sailing ships from Margerie's Chamber of Commerce to deliver war materials.

By doing so, he could send three thousand soldiers and artillery ammunition to the Northern Region within a month, which was even before July. In the modern world, transporting a few thousands of people could be completed by just three or four ferries in one trip. But in this era, this was an incredible initiative.

The vanguards would also move towards the Northern Region after they had accumulated enough God's Stones of Retaliation during the Tooth Extraction Campaign, and finally 4,500 soldiers would gather at Deepvalley Town and force the church to have a war with them at Coldwind Ridge.

Of course, there was always a plan B, in case the church responded too quickly, sending a troop of God's Punishment Army to move southward across the Impassable Mountain Range and launched a surprise attack at City of Neverwinter, or that they abandoned Holy City and tried to enter the kingdom from the border between Kingdom of Dawn and Kingdom of Graycastle.

The five hundred men defending City of Neverwinter were prepared for the first situation. Defenders always got a certain advantage, especially with the 152 mm stronghold cannon. As for the second situation, it would result in a lose-lose situation. Under such circumstances, the First Army would resort to a war of attrition and Kingdom of Graycastle would lose lots of people, meanwhile the church would lose Holy City of Hermes and their faith and status would also suffer.

Fortunately, it was almost impossible for the second case to happen. The population of Kingdom of Graycastle would increase after the war, but the church could not afford to lose Holy City, their foundation. As long as the pope was not frantic, they would never abandon their Holy City.

The Pearl of the Northern Region, Edith Kant, followed the first fleet to leave, too.

"Please don't worry Your Majesty, I'll write a letter to inform my father to send half of his grains to the soldiers, and the Lord of Deepvalley Town will also try his best to fulfill any request from the First Army."

"Aren't you going back to the Northern Region?" asked Roland.

"I'd like to follow the first army and to participate in all the coming battles instead of going back home," said Edith, who stood on the side of the ship. She raised her hair and bowed, saying, "Please take care of my brother for me."

"I'll take care of him."

"Thank you, Your Majesty, I'll wait for you in Deepvalley Town, for the real great war."

After the ship left, Nightingale complained. "Tut-tut, the war is a life-and-death matter, but she talks about it as if she's going to a date."

"Uhm... does she?"

"Don't you realize it? The action of raising her hair... There's no wind blowing. Why did she take the trouble to do it?" Nightingale snorted and added, "of course, it may be her habit to seduce men with such a gesture and it's already a habit."

"Are you still upset by the letter?" Roland shook his head and did not know whether to laugh or cry.

"I've told you, it's impossible. By the way, did she lie?"

Nightingale reluctantly replied, "Basically, no. At least when she expressed allegiance and talked about those combat arrangements, she said the truth."

"That's enough. Let's go back to the castle." Roland took a breath and said.

City of Neverwinter was under pressure due to the coming war, but there was good news too. The projects that had been planned during Months of Demons were completed one by one, and the basic infrastructure was greatly enhanced.

The most important finished project was the Western Region's own estuary.

After the estuary was completed, Roland informed the Ministry of Construction immediately. Soon some houses, warehouses and temporary docks were built on deepwater port. With a natural deep-water harbor, larger ships could now be built, but as Anna had already focused on producing military equipment, the shipbuilding plan would be postponed until the end of the war.

The supporting hub project, the construction of Highway 67, had also started. That road would begin from the bank of the Redwater River Bridge and connect the industrial area with the south of Shallow Beach. Its construction team was the same as that of the Kingdom Main Street project. Roland also fulfilled his promise, to make nearly half of the workers, that performed outstandingly, qualify as residents of City of Neverwinter and issued identity cards to them.

Besides, the first coke oven in North Slope Mountain was also put into production mode during this period of time.

To be precise, it could have started earlier, but it had had many setbacks during the test run. For example, at the first time of trial, the furnace had not been vented and the air used for dry distillation burnt directly. At another time, the temperature and timing had not been well controlled, resulted in coking failure. There had even been a serious accident, when the exhaust pipe had been clogged with dust and the flame had got out of the furnace. Fortunately, as Summer had the ability to playback what had happened before, the problems of the process were quickly identified and fixed. A new batch of improved coke ovens was in full swing construction.

Besides basic infrastructure, military production also stepped up.

The howitzer, an important new weapon designed for the war, was finally a success.

Despite the limited size of its shells and the limited speed of reloading, it was still a fatal weapon in the radius of ten meters. Combined with debris, it could affect an even bigger area, twice or three times as large as the original coverage.

Several 152 mm artillery could hit targets nearly ten kilometers away, which meant that they were able to strike the rear of the enemy directly, and now the shock waves and debris of the howitzer could destroy the defenseless enemy there completely. This kind of war was completely beyond the imagination of the people in this era.

Unfortunately, a heavy howitzer could only be delivered with the assistance of Hummingbirds and when there was no hard-surface concrete road, only two howitzers could be used on the battlefield.

Even so, Roland was not willing to give up such a powerful firepower.

In contrast, the news about the successful operation of the steam turbine was not so important.

After all, whether it was a new type of steam-powered boat or thermal power generation, there was not enough manpower for research and development. In a sense, after receiving the message from Kingdom

of Dawn, City of Neverwinter had entered the wartime system, and all of the resources had to divert to give way to the preparation for war, Anna being no exception.

In the morning, she processed artillery shells and fuzes, and in the afternoon, she cut key parts used in heavy machine guns. Those were what she had to do everyday.

The arsenal operated on three shifts for the production of bullets and revolving rifles. Thanks to Mystery Moon and Candle, all kinds of machine tools ran at maximum capacity in production without a big problem.

Shortly after returning to the office, Roland received a letter carried by the carrier pigeon from Fjords.

This is... the reply from Tilly?

Roland quickly opened the letter and soon finished reading the contents. Pondering for a moment, he asked Nightingale to get Maggie.

"Bring Soraya to catch the leaving fleet. Let Iffy do what's suggested in the letter."

"Coo!"

#### Chapter 586: The Battle of Redwater City

After two days of sailing, blocks of villages and farmland began to appear on the desolate green field, and the city wall of Redwater City gradually came into sight.

As the biggest city in Redwater River, its population and resources could compare favorably with the old king's city. If it was not for the advantage brought by the minerals in Silver City, ancestors in the Wimbledon family would have made Redwater City the king's city instead of the current City of Dawn.

Brian observed through a telescope for a while and asked, "What will we do when we arrive at the wharf? How about shocking them first with the naval artillery?"

"It may provoke their lord's hostility." Iron Axe shook his head. "Our main target is the church. Other things can be put aside. According to diplomatic process, we present the documents first."

When the fleet arrived at the suburban wharf, great turmoil began at once. The gate closed quickly, and the drawbridge of the moat was pulled up while the soldiers concentrated in line outside the wharf.

Brian sent out the documents and received a prompt reply.

"He said His Majesty's army is welcomed by the lord, but we are required to send an envoy into the city to explain the conditions. He will not open the gate and let us enter until he verifies the cause of the matter," the soldier reported.

"What conditions? We've already explained very clearly in the documents," Brian said crossly, "We are only against the church. Does he want to help those church scoundrels escape?"

"Is this also your rule?" Iron Axe turned back and looked at the accompanying members in the Adviser Group.



"Um... yes, it should be if they're nobles," Petrov's Chief bodyguard Trevor answered, "and it's normal for them to be skeptical, after all, His Majesty, Roland himself hasn't come and Redwater City is not in his jurisdiction. We only need to send an envoy with suitable status to explain clearly."

"Suitable status?"

"Someone from a large family who can earn the lord's trust," Trevor explained further, "like the Honeysuckle family in the Western Region."

Iron Axe, Brian, and Van'er looked at each other with embarrassment. Before they'd become the commanders of the First Army, one was of the Sand Nation, the other two were civilians. They didn't know how to properly converse with the nobles, nor did they have a suitable status which could help them to talk to the castellan equally.

"Why not blast the gate directly with cannons," Brian got angry and said, "Once they feel our attack they'll know what the right way is."

"Allow me," Edith said, "The Kant family is an aristocratic family in the north and my father is also a duke. I'm qualified."

"What if it's a trick?" Van'er hesitated and said, "If the Lord of Redwater City colluded with the church long ago, they might arrest you when you enter and force us to withdraw."

"It's not good for him and you won't compromise, will you?" Edith smiled and said, "As long as he is in his right mind, he won't plan such a move on the envoys or he would arouse other noble's antipathy. And it can't affect the overall situation. On the contrary, if he had colluded with the church, the city would have been blocked in the state of battle. There hasn't been any hot oil or bonfire set up in the top of the city yet."

"I'll go with her," Sir Eltek said, "I was once a knight and I can take care of her if there's a danger."

"I appreciate your concern, but the Pearl of the Northern Region doesn't need any care," Edith said with confidence.

"Bring a team of soldiers with you." Iron Axe made the final decision. "If we hear a shot, we'll start an attack."

...

An hour later, the gate was opened slowly, and the drawbridge was lowered.

They were stunned when Miss Edith and a chubby middle-aged man came out under the escort of a small group from the First Army and a group from the Silver Armored Knights. The man was well-dressed but courted Edith like a henchman from his obvious expression and behavior.

"This is the Lord of Redwater City, Earl Delta," Edith introduced the lord to them and added, "I also asked him to send the patrol to surround the church in case the priest and believers escape." Then she shifted her head and said, "These are the commanders of His Highness's First Army, Lord Iron Axe, Mr. Brian and Mr. Van'er."

"Iron Axe... and what?" The earl was stunned for a while to hear such kind of introduction for the first time.

"Never mind." She laughed. "This is His Highness's terminology."

"Ahem, I see." Delta cleared his throat and said, "I have heard that Prince Roland... no, His Majesty acts in a different style, really not common. So... welcome to Redwater City. Excuse me, His Majesty indeed just wants to wipe out the insurgents of the church?"

This was the Lord of the Redwater City? Brian wondered in amazement. He was quite different from what Brian had imagined.

"Yes," Iron Axe answered in earnest, nodding, "I think it's clear in the documents of His Majesty that the church is trying to occupy the Four Kingdoms and their rebellion has become a fact. You should have heard the calamity that happened in the Kingdoms of Everwinter and Wolfheart. We'll leave once we clear out the church's people."

"Well, it is not necessary to be in such hurry," Delta rubbed his hands and said, "and tonight I'll hold a grand feast in the castle. I hope all of you can attend."

Although he was inviting everyone, his eyes focused on the Pearl of the Northern Region.

Brian was going to refuse but Edith accepted without hesitation. "Thank you for your invitation. It will be an honor but we have to complete His Majesty's task first."

"Sure." The earl smiled with slanted eyes.

...

The First Army entered the city in order under the guidance of the knights. Avoiding the earl's attention, Brian walked close to Edith and chided her in a low voice. "Why did you accept his invitation? He definitely has other, indecent intentions!"

"This is the normal communication between the nobles. It would be too rude if we refused," she replied in a dismissive tone. "I don't know why His Majesty excludes the nobility from his army, but you represent His Majesty, Roland so you can't refuse these things entirely. And it'll be much easier to recover Redwater City on the basis of a good relationship with him. As for his indecent intention..." She twitched her mouth, "Is there any other facial expression a male noble can show?"

"Err..." Brian swallowed with difficulty and sighed after a moment. "So, you're used to this kind of life?"

"It's not bad, just a tad boring." Edith said with a little satire. "Well, haven't you ever admired the life of a noble?"

"I..." He opened his mouth but could find no words.

Suddenly, there was turmoil up ahead. It seemed that someone was shouting, and they could hear something fall to the ground.

"What happened?" the Earl called out.

Iron Axe clenched his right hand into a fist and shouted, "All soldiers, stand by! On the alert!"

The troops stopped marching immediately. The soldiers took their rifles from their backsides expertly and changed quickly from columns to rows.

At this moment, Sylvie warned from the middle of the team with a loud voice. "Watch out! There's magic reaction in front!"

Chapter 587: A Nameless Victim

"Magic reaction?" Earl Delta turned around and asked, "What's that?"

"Tell your knights to step aside now!" Brian had no time to think about etiquette and shouted at him.

He had barely finished speaking when a group of believers, in indigo robes, popped out from around the corner and rushed into the guiding knights. The force was so great that the horses were immediately knocked over and several knights found themselves pinned under their heavy mounts before they even realized what had happened. The other knights immediately drew their swords and began to fight with the believers.

The people on the street panicked and ran, causing many to fall and get trampled by the fleeing crowd. The sounds of people crying for help could be heard everywhere and the site was a complete mess.

"Tr... Treason!" The Earl was shocked, at first, and then he became furious. "Damn it! Kill all the rebels!"

But, a piece of flying slate shut him up.

It had been part of the pavement and more pieces of slate rose up in the air and swiftly headed toward a knight. It happened so fast that all anyone could see was a fleeting green shadow. The first person who was hit quickly started to bleed profusely from his joints and eyes. His armor immediately crumbled and it would have been impossible for him to survive.

After that, more pieces of slate flew around, even taking out some of the believers. The vertical pieces of slate were shattering peoples bones, while the horizontal slates were cutting them in half.

Before Earl Delta could even feel shocked, Brian quickly pulled him aside.

"Fire!" Iron Axe ordered.

Gunshots continuously rang out across the street.

The people who were still standing erect got mowed down like a wheat crop and once the gunpowder plume dissipated there was a littering of wounded knights and believers across the battlefield. For a short time, the field had been pure chaos, now there were bodies scattered everywhere, some of them were still gasping feebly while others moaned in pain, continuing to writhe on the ground.

"Where are the enemies?" Brian stared at the street corner without so much as blinking, as if he were facing a formidable enemy.

"Enemies... They all fell, didn't they?" the Earl asked bewildered, apparently in shock. He obviously had not expected that His Majesty's troops would be so strong. A dozen silver armored knights and unstoppable believers became disabled in almost the blink of an eye.

"It's coming!" Sylvie said in a hoarse voice.

As if responding to her warning, a woman appeared from around the corner, she was rolling up the street slates like giant carpet wheels and making them float in the air one by one.

Heavy gunshots rang out again. Most of the slate was torn apart immediately while one piece of slate spun and swept along the crowd like a thick, unmanned sword.

Oh, no! Brian's heart sank. From the way it appears, a flintlock isn't going to break down the rotating slate quickly enough. He didn't want to imagine what was going to happen when the soldiers were hit. They were not wearing armor like the knights and the casualties were going to be significantly higher. And, yet, they had no choice but to continue fighting.

Just after Brian had this realization, a purple light suddenly appeared in front of the troops.

It was a cage made of magic power and it enveloped the incoming slate, shrinking rapidly, stopping the rotating rock abruptly.

"Is this an enemy... or a witch?" Earl Delta stood in a daze.

It wasn't until all of the floating slate had finally fallen did the First Army cease-fire.

The cloud of heavy smoke from the gunpowder blurred their eyesight. The smell of sulfur pervaded the air, but no one dared to rub their eyes or even cough. Except for the sound of guns loading, the field was completely silent, for the moment.

"Was it Miss Sylvie?" Iron Axe asked.

"The Magic Power... It disappeared," she said slowly.

This meant that either the enemies had fled the battlefield or they had perished during the fight.

After the smoke dissipated, Brian could see what had happened.

A woman was laying on the pavement in a pool of blood, her thick, curly, dark green hair mixing with the sanguine fluid.

Brian loosened his grip on the terrified Earl's shoulder and walked towards the woman, her red and white priestess' cloth revealing her identity.

There were two palm-sized wounds penetrating the stomach and abdomen of the Pure Witch, from which dark streams of blood drained. Apparently, the bullet still had force after penetrating the slate and had torn straight through her body. The multiple slices on her arms and legs must have been caused by the ricocheting stones.

Even though her enemies had the God's Stone of Retaliation, she was still able to roll up the slates and use them as shields. This way she could attack the enemies with the remaining slates and keep her enemies at a distance. However, she had not expected the flintlocks to be that powerful.

Looking back now, she might have been shot during the first round of gunshots but she was still able to manipulate the slate. Her willpower had been remarkable.

"Is she really a witch from the church?" Delta moved closer, cautiously.

"Wasn't His Majesty clear in the pamphlet that was distributed in King's City?" Brian replied with annoyance. "The church not only poisoned the common people with the Berserk Pills, but they also train witches to serve them in secret. Only the innocent girls that were framed by the church stand on our side. Have you not heard any of this before?"

"Actually, I had heard this before, but it seemed unbelievable..."

This is just a small portion of the despicable acts committed by the church, and the nobles weren't much better Brian thought to himself, but he didn't say a word.

Edith was also shocked by this brief conflict.

This was her first time seeing the combat abilities of the flintlock troops. The whole process looked like a storm and all the soldiers needed to do was stand still. In this regard, His Majesty's troops were physically at an advantage. One could imagine that the larger the scale of warfare the more obvious the guns advantage would be.

There was no doubt that the traditional combat forms, where soldiers fought with thick armors and sharp weapons, had now shifted to a newer model.

Moreover, with those machines roaring day and night, they could keep producing these weapons in the western region. This made it easy to imagine how great a war potential His Majesty had in his domain.

It wasn't until Iron Axe had ordered the troops to keep moving, that Edith was able to recover herself.

However, her belief was firmer that her choice was the right one.

The First Army took a turn at the street corner and soon came to the church's front door. There were several bodies lying on the ground and judging from their clothing, most of them belonged to the patrol team.

They soon realized what had transpired. Just as the patrol ordered the blockade of the church, more than two hundred enchanted people were suddenly killed and the lords were swept away. Some of the believers stayed to wrestle with the patrol team, while others created chaos in the outer city, where some people were attempting to break through the gate. Fortunately, the First Army was less than 300 feet from the church and they were able to confront the Pure Witch. If they had been even 15 minutes later, the Pure Witch would have likely escaped during the chaos.

Brian immediately lead a team into the church, where they eliminated the remaining resisters.

Next was ransacking the place to find any documents, letters, or usable goods. According to his Majesty, taking anything of value was a requirement.

Then, under Sylvie's guidance, the soldiers used small packets of explosives to blow up the iron gate blocking the basement. The people that were present all strained their eyes to see what laid behind the slowly falling gate.

In nice orderly rows, there were over ten boxes of the God's Stone of Retaliation, and surrounding it were tidy stacks of gold.

## Chapter 588: A Knight and You

At night, the halls of Redwater City Castle were glowing with light. Servants carrying wine glasses were walking through the crowd. Musicians were singing softly while plucking on the strings of their instruments. Enticing dishes were set on the table one by one, and goblets filled with red wine shone brightly.

The noblemen and women split into groups of two or three and chatted happily with wine in their hands. Edith was the focus of people's eyes. She was moving around in the hall with Earl Delta and very much seemed to enjoy such a social event.

Brian, however, felt totally alienated from the whole crowd.

He felt the collar of his buttoning shirt choking him and his slim fit coat restricting the movement of his arms, not to mention the extremely uncomfortable pointy toe high heel boots on his feet. He could not really understand how come the nobles could dart around on the very slippery floor wearing those shoes.

Brian could not help but envy Van'er who did not have to suffer from this as the guard of the First Army's battalion,

but he immediately stood taller when he thought that Edith had reminded them that they were here to represent His Majesty Roland.

Someone suddenly patted his shoulder, saying, "You look quite tense. Is this the first time you've come to attend a banquet like this?"

He turned around and found that it was Sir Eltek who dressed in broad shoulder formal attire with a white scarf around his neck, looking completely different from his everyday look.

"Relax, you don't have to be so nervous."

"I'm not..."

"It's not a bad thing. No one is good at everything. It's not a big deal," Sir Eltek threw up his hands and said.

After a moment of silence, Brian asked, "where is Lord Iron Axe?"

"He's escorting the witches, Miss Iffy and Miss Sylvie. They seem as popular as Miss Edith." Eltek pointed to the other side of the hall and said.

Brian looked at that direction and saw the witches. They also looked very stiff in the dresses that Edith found for them in the last-minute rush. However, they were still attractive and seemed to be even more beautiful than the Pearl of Northern Region. "Those people have no idea who they are, and Lord Iron Axe is actually not protecting the witches," Brian said.

"Oh, is it?" Sir Eltek shook his beard a little.

Brian nodded and explained. "To be more accurate, he's protecting the nobles. If Miss Iffy is irritated, they'll suffer."

They then looked at each other and giggled simultaneously.

"Look, now you're relaxed and natural."

"I..." Brian froze for awhile and said, "thank you."

"Hah, you're welcome," Sir Eltek said and then he beckoned a servant. He picked up a glass of wine and turned to Brian, asking, "would you like a drink?"

"No... His Majesty has said that a military man on duty should never drink wine."

"No wine, even when he's resting?"

"It's a rule."

"Alright." Sir Eltek sipped the wine alone and added, "what a pity."

"You think..." Brian hesitated and continued. "What Miss Edith has said is true?"

"Such as?"

"A knight should never refuse invitations to such occasions at his will, because he represents His Majesty."

"Uhm... That's true." Sir Eltek nodded and said.

Brian felt dejected, suddenly saying, "I'm not qualified to be a knight. I can't behave in such a natural, relaxed manner like her on these kind of occasions."

"It's okay," Sir Eltek said while spreading his hands. "Some people are just naturally good at it and some are not. Indeed, a knight who stands out at a banquet can bring his lord glory, praises and even diplomatic advantages, but that's not all about being a knight. Actually, my son is also bad at social events for the nobles."

"You mean... Dawn Glory?"

"Yes, he seldom spends time with the other nobles and was even frequently absent from social events held by the lord. However, no one can deny that he's an excellent knight."

"I don't know this side of Mr. Ferlin," Brian said in great surprise.

"There's a lot you don't know about him." Sir Eltek smiled and added, "he's stubborn as a stone. He filled me with rage by marrying a civilian woman. I cut him off at that time but then I found out that I was wrong. I could find no fault with Ms. Irene. She's as good as any noble lady, except that she doesn't have a noble title. It was hard for both of them at that time." Sir Eltek stopped and changed the subject, "I heard that you fought a bloody battle against the rebels to protect the grain preparation for Border Town?"

"Uhm... Actually, it was Lady Nightingale who stopped them. If it was not for her, I'm afraid I'd already be dead in the basement." Brian said with a little embarrassment.

"But at least, you stepped forward, right? It's much braver than most of the other nobles who have only the titles but not the courage to fight against their enemies. I think that His Majesty did not dub you a knight for your social skills. You're a qualified knight as long as you remain who you are."

"I see," Brian felt touched and said, "thank you for telling me that."

"It's all right. Take it as a casual chat between us. Seeing you reminded me of Ferlin, so I couldn't hold my tongue," Sir Eltek said while touching his beard.

After a while, Brian asked in a muffled voice. "So, what about the other thing that Miss Edith has mentioned? The social activities of the nobles are boring and dull..."

"You really care about her, don't you?" Sir Eltek watched Brian with interest.

"No, no! I'm just curious." Brian promptly waved his hands and explained, "she disapproved of these kind of activities at that time, but now you can see that she seems to enjoy it very much."

"Well," Sir Eltek smacked his lips and said. "What should I say? Some people can handle everything properly, even when they don't like to do some of those things. I think Miss Edith is a strong performer among those people."

"Properly cope with unenjoyable things?"

"It's not a rare thing," Sir Eltek shrugged and continued. "They're gifted and naturally good at many things, but that doesn't mean they like everything that they have to do. After all, as a Duke's daughter, social skills are already in her blood."

"His Majesty needs someone like her," Brian sighed.

"Maybe," Sir Eltek said noncommittally, "But that doesn't mean His Majesty doesn't need other kinds of people. As I've said before, no one is good at everything. Focusing on what you're best at is not worse than covering everything, as there's a limit to a man's energy. That's why you're also well recognized by His Majesty..." Eltek paused momentarily and added, "I think he's right based on the changes I've seen in the City of Neverwinter."

Chapter 589: The Storm in the Fjords

A storm was brewing on the sea to the east of the Fjords islands.

Every now and then, lightning struck through the gray clouds that hung low in the sky. Muffled thunders like the angry roars of the gods in the sky sounded as if they came from far away.

Heidi Morgan's mood was no better than the weather.

She had not received any news since she sent Iffy and Softfeathers to the western region.

She understood that the long distance would make it difficult to send any message back, but she also knew that Honey was there in the western region of the Kingdom of Graycastle. That meant that they could threaten her and seize one of her animal messengers to send a message.



"What's really going on in the domain of the lord?"

Heidi thought and irritably shut the window to block the howling wind.

The situation on Sleeping Island was getting worse and worse for her. Since Tilly started the Sleeping Spell, all non-combat witches were on her side and facts had also proven that the ordinary people of the Fjords showed a greater need for assistant witches. As this place did not face any enemy now, the local chambers of commerce hired witches mainly for commercial purposes or opening new water channels.

Under such circumstances, the status of the weak witches was raised rapidly and now seemed on equal terms with the combat witches.

Besides, there were common people.

"Damn it, how come I didn't think of this," Heidi thought bitterly. She had thought that if she represented the combat witches all the time, she would not lag behind Tilly, as there were only two groups of people on the island. However, as more and more ordinary people immigrated to the island, the third group formed. Those people recognized and trusted only Tilly since they were only influenced by the local chambers of commerce. As a result, Tilly left the island almost routinely to visit the other islands as a distinguished guest, especially after she gained Thunder's support.

The thought drove Heidi into a blind rage. She believed that Tilly made friends with ordinary people in the name of promoting integration only for the purpose of increasing her own influence.

Heidi thought Tilly was deceiving everyone.

Tilly was selling the home of witches to the ordinary people bit by bit.

If things went on like this, she would never be able to replace Tilly Wimbledon.

This was the first time that Heidi found there was little she could do about a 20-year-old girl. Heidi's intention of leaving Sleeping Island with the combat witches was stronger than before. She wanted to ask Camilla, the Chief Butler of Sleeping Island, when could the Charming Beauty take them to the western eegion. But just at the moment, her door was pushed open.

"My lady, I've something urgent to report!" Skyflare rushed in and said, looking anxious.

"What's going on?"

Seeing the look on her face, Heidi could not help but feel surprised, as Skyflare was the best and had followed her for the longest time among the witches of her association.

"There's a new witch here on Sleeping Island. I heard that her name was Annie!"

"So what?" Heidi said in confusion. It's not a rare thing that wild witches came to Sleeping Island after the merchants got the news out.

"She's from Kingdom of Wolfheart!" Skyflare said in a muffled voice, "I've met her before!"

Thunder suddenly crashed in the sky!

Heidi's heart skipped a beat and soon realized what Skyflare meant by 'urgent', saying, "you mean she's the one Bloodfang Association has rejected. It's impossible! She may just be her namesake."

"I thought that way at the beginning, but she looked very similar to the Annie I had met several years ago. I hid in the crowd to steal a glance at her when she was carried into the palace."

"Are you sure?"

"My lady, I'm not sure about the other witches but Annie is different... Back then, she brought a friend with her. That was Iffy." Skyflare grated and continued, "Iffy cried all the way for Annie, wanting to go back, so I remembered her appearance."

"How could this happen? They should be..." Heidi grabbed Skyflare by collar and asked, "did you let her go?"

"No, my lady, I did what you ordered me to do! Please believe me. I'll never betray you!" Skyflare argued.

Heidi looked into her eyes and then slowly released her, asking, "what happened to her? You said that she was carried into the palace just now."

Skyflare took a breath and said, "she seemed to be infected with a cold epidemic and was seriously ill. The keep has already sent someone to invite Della."

Della cannot cure a cold epidemic but she could calm a patient down by cutting off the pain. Heidi paced back and forth in the room for a while and asked, "Tilly isn't here on the island, right?"

"Yes, she went to Twin Dragon Island two days ago. She seemed to be busy with the preparation for the exploration of the sea."

Heidi stopped and said, "bring Nightfall here and let Shaji go to get more information. Shaji has never seen Annie, so she won't be recognized."

"Yes, my lady!"

...

It began to pour. Raindrops pattered against the window, and Heidi sat by the table speechlessly. Skyflare and Nightfall stood aside, waiting for Heidi's order. The atmosphere was quite tense.

A burst of rapid footsteps broke the silence.

The door was opened and then shut again. Shaji returned and leaned against the door. She took off her wet clothing and straw hat and then heaved a long sigh. "That witch called Annie is already asleep. According to Della, her condition is not good, as the cold epidemic has already infected her lungs. She must have been ill for quite a long time."

"Is it? So what's Camilla planning to do?" Heidi said in a grave tone.

"She said there's a witch in the western region of the Kingdom of Graycastle who could cure all kinds of diseases. She's going to send Annie to the western region when the rainstorm stops."

Heidi felt so irritated that she wanted to laugh. Hiring One-eyed Jack for a round trip in the Fjords would cost nearly 100 gold royals. Camilla always found excuses to refuse her requests for traveling to the other islands or to the Kingdom of Graycastle, but now for a useless, strange witch, she was willing to send out the Charming Beauty?

There was another thing she found completely intolerable. If Annie went to the western region and met Iffy, what she had done before would be exposed.

No matter what, she had to make Annie stay on the island or shut up forever.

Heidi contained her anger and turned to Nightfall. "You can make her sleep forever, right?"

Nightfall winced and said, "you mean... Seed of Peaceful Death? Yes, I can, but why..."

"Because she's a traitor of Bloodfang Association! You don't have to know the details. Just remember she can't be excused." Heidi impatiently interrupted.

"Is she also a combat witch? Why not wait for Tilly before making the decision? If it's found out, we'll get in trouble." Nightfall questioned.

Heidi squinted, saying, "Bloodfang Association will 'take care' of its traitors. If we hand her over to Tilly, will the naive girl punish her? What's wrong with you? Do you want to disobey my command?"

"Of course, no... My lady, I'm willing to take care of this traitor for you." Nightfall shivered and promised.

#### Chapter 590: The Witches War

"Damn it," Heidi thought indignantly, "These witches' minds have already begun to fall apart, and they would have never bothered to ask why they do what they do when they were in Archduke Island. The enemies of the Bloodfang Association must be taken care of."

The environment could influence a person. The ferocious cliff wolves lived in the mountains, and the dumb dogs lived in the warm house. Through the Sleeping Spell, assistant witches brought in many gold royals and goods for the island, turning this place into a haven. Even the combat witches had started believing Tilly's nonsense talk. Apparently, she did not have much time left to deal with it.

"You can control the attack time of the Seed of Peaceful Death, right?"

"Yes."

"Well, when you implant the seed in Annie's body, don't make it take effect instantly, and kill her silently when she boards the Charming Beauty," Heidi nodded and said, "Now we shall visit this traitor, Annie."

When Annie died on the ship as if from the cold plague, the crews would throw her body into the ocean to avoid infection. No one would ever know the truth.

"Shall I attack her in broad daylight?" Nightfall was surprised.

"It would be more suspicious if you did it at night. Besides, I'm not sure whether Camilla will let me into the palace or not." Heidi glanced over at her. "Shaji just learned that a witch from Kingdom of Wolfheart is sick. Isn't it pretty normal that the Bloodfang Association which represents Kingdom of Wolfheart come to visit her?"

"You're right, my lady." Skyflare lifted the Hood from behind her cope. "If anything happens to Annie, Tilly and Camilla would still suspect us even if we weren't there."

Opening the door, the harsh wind mixed with rain swarmed into the room. Putting on her raincoat and waving to the two of them, Heidi walked out into the storm.

She was determined to do it.

...

Camilla Dary appeared in the doorway as the three of them walked into the palace's compound. "What do you..."

"I heard from Shaji that a Kingdom of Wolfheart's witch has arrived here." Heidi Morgan shrugged. "It's said that her condition is pretty bad, so we came to visit her."

"Annie has fallen asleep under Della's conciliation. I suppose you'd better leave her alone."

"Her name does ring a bell, so we just want to have a peek. We suppose maybe she was a part of us and got lost when we ran away from Archduke Island."

"This..." After a moment's hesitation, Camilla said, "Okay, come in."

Heidi was fed up with this conversation. A common witch dared to treat this place as her own turf and considered herself as the Chief Butler of Sleeping Island. Heidi sneered secretly. This woman was just Tilly's dog. If she had not said 'come in' at last, Heidi would have taught her a lesson.

On Sleeping Island, most of the abodes relied on Lotus to rise from the underground, so there were very few multi-story buildings here. Tilly's palace was no exception.

Going through the long corridor to the side room, Camilla leaned over and said, "She's in the room."

"Mm." Heidi could not wait to walk into the room. She shook her head to give a signal to Skyflare.

After carefully examining the girl who was lying in bed with her eyes closed, Skyflare nodded slightly.

"So, who sent her here?" Heidi came up to Camilla and whispered to her. It looked like an act of concern, but it was actually to block her view, so Nightfall could implant the Seed of Peaceful Death into Annie's body.

Instead of answering her, Camilla gave her an odd expression.

"Why are you trying to kill her?"

Heidi was confounded. Before she could do anything, Nightfall behind her had already cried out, "This witch is a fake."

Turning violently, Heidi saw that the girl lying in bed had already disappeared, Nightfall could only see the magic power cohere as a small black ball suspended in midair.

"Seed of Peaceful Death. You really can go so far." Camilla shook her head. "I thought you were just speaking of the combat witch, but I didn't expect that you're a brutal murderer."

"Shut up!" Heidi's anger was out of control. She used a fatal magic power and flew at Camilla. But by the time she could reach Camilla, the girl's figure had turned into mist.

Now Heidi knew what had happened.

"Shadow, come out." She gritted her teeth.

There were hurried footsteps rising from the corridor. The witches hiding in the dark were evacuating from this place fully.

"Skyflare, get her!"

"Yes." The latter dashed out of the side room, took a deep breath, and breathed out a stream of red flames. The flames crept along the walls and chased the targets as if it had its own consciousness. It burnt the windows and doorframes along the way.

"Ah!" A scream came from far away.

Nightfall hurriedly said, "My lady, we need to get out of here as soon as possible! They lied to you. This whole thing is a trap!"

"Get away from the window." Shadow's scream made Heidi feel better, but she also knew that they could not stay here very long. She just could not understand how Tilly could know what had happened to the Bloodfang Association years ago.

Out of the palace, the three of them stopped.

In the heavy rain, a black-haired woman stood in the courtyard. Her eyes shone like golden stars, which could be clearly seen even in the mist of the rain. The three of them felt fear even though she stood without weapons.

It was the Extraordinary Ashes.

Usually, she would stay with Tilly Wimbledon.

Turning her head, Heidi saw two familiar figures appear in the palace's doorway,

Andrea and Shadow. Shadow was making faces at the three of them nonchalantly. Apparently, the previous scream had been fake.

If they were both here, it meant that Tilly had not left Sleeping Island at all.

Heidi was at an absolute loss after realizing the truth.

"Don't bother to explain. I can spare your life if you give in now," Ashes said this word by word.

No one would think she was bluffing. As an Extraordinary, she was a natural enemy of all witches as long as she wore the God's Stone of Retaliation. Heidi would have taken action earlier if it were not for her.

But there was still a chance they could win.

The breakthrough was at the palace's doorway. She could threaten Ashes if she could capture Ashes' two partners.

Without hesitation, she grabbed Nightfall and rushed toward the front door of the palace. "Skyflare, stop Ashes!"

As a combat witch, dagger and crossbow were the best weapons she could use when her magic power could not be exerted. Skyflare pulled out her dagger and dashed toward Ashes. Nightfall knew her intentions so at the same time she summoned the Seed of Symbiosis.

A threat was useless unless fear supports it. Heidi had already made up her mind to kill one of them, and leave one as hostage. Of course, Shadow who had taunted her for such a long time, was her main target.

But seeing Andrea hold a long bar in her hand calmly, she was shocked.

What was that?

Then a loud roar made her fall into a deep torpor.