

Witch 591

Chapter 591: The New Journey

Heidi slipped and fell in the rain, the flowing rain pouring into her mouth, nose, and collar.

It was hard to describe her true feelings. Although she did not feel much pain in her body, she was powerless after the fall.

"Don't worry about me. Go and kill her!" she shouted out not even bothering to examine her injuries.

But Nightfall disappointed her.

The combat witch from the Bloodfang Association hesitated, then stopped and came back to her finally, asking, "My lady, are you alright?"

"Moron! We could only turn the tables if we seized them. If we couldn't, what was the point of staying unharmed?" She wanted to vent her anger but found that she was too tired to open her mouth and say anything.

Behind her, she heard Skyflare's scream, and the fights gradually died away.

It was very difficult for her to resist long when faced with the Extraordinary, Ashes.

The paralytic feeling in her body began to fade, but a nervous flush along her thighs which pricked painfully was very noticeable once she was soaked with the rain.

Heidi managed to look up but only saw Andrea walking slowly toward her.

"Don't you want to give up resistance?"

"Yes," Nightfall answered, she turned around and knelt down. "I give in. Please don't kill Lady Heidi."

Andrea wiped the water on her head and said, "If I intended to kill her, she'd be dead by now. Her Highness Tilly hasn't yet figured something out, so I must spare her life for now. As soon as all the evidence against her is certain, she'll be justly punished."

"Evidence?" Nightfall was at a loss. "Annie betrayed the Bloodfang Association's witches, this is why my lady planned to harm her."

"Oh? Is that what she told you? As far as I'm concerned, Annie never joined the Bloodfang Association." Andrea shrugged. "You'll know what kind of person she is when the truth is revealed." Then she turned and shouted to Shadow, "Go and fetch Pandora to stop the bleeding from her wounds, or she'll be doomed."

At that moment Heidi finally felt the pain, and her whole leg could not move. It felt like a mass of heaviness beneath her yet did not belong to her. A sharp pain in her leg replaced the burning feeling, making her feel a bit better.

It was over.

And she knew exactly what would happen next.

Tilly must have somehow learned the truth about her since she dared to do this. It was not difficult to find the truth with a bit of clue. Even if the Sleeping Island's witches could not find the truth, those people in the Western Region could.

She was afraid this had something to do with Iffy and Softfeathers.

She had belittled Tilly.

Heidi thought for a moment. Then she gritted her teeth and released her magic power with her last ounce of strength just as Andrea turned her head.

She could destroy anything hollow within 10 steps from the inside, whether they were living things or vessels.

She called it Power of Pulverizing.

Although a defeat was inevitable, Heidi was not willing to let Tilly win so easily. At least she wanted to teach Tilly an unforgettable lesson.

"No, my lady!" Nightfall noticed and cried out.

It was too late! Heidi sneered secretly.

But her power did not take effect.

An invisible barrier dispersed her Power of Pulverizing.

"You're wearing the God's Stone of Retaliation!" Heidi mumbled with dilated eyes. "Wait. The thing that had hurt me wasn't Andrea's new ability?"

"You do seem quite energetic, you incorrigible bi*ch," Andrea said with disgust, raising the iron bar and smashing it with all her might.

Heidi was instantly blind.

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"This is the end." Seeing Heidi Morgan and Skyflare being carried away, Andrea asked Ashes, "So how are things on your end?"

"It's okay, but I'm afraid that Skyflare may not survive until the day when we arrive in the Western Region."

"Lady Tilly said to keep them alive if possible. Why did you do it?" she said with a look of disdain.

Ashes licked the raindrop at the corner of her mouth and said, "I never thought she would be so desperate and risk her life to win. Besides, she does have technical fighting skills. Of course, I could have captured her alive, but I worried that something might go wrong at the essential moment. So I had to do it quickly."

"You..." Andrea was speechless.

The Extraordinary sighed. "If you had shown the Glassbead earlier, maybe they wouldn't have risked their lives in the end. But you chose to hold the flintlock, how could they know what it was?"

"Stop arguing. Lady Tilly is still waiting for your report." Shadow reminded them helplessly. "Besides, you can't stand in the rain and argue. What if you get typhoid?"

The two looked at each other for a moment, and then exchanged a despised look to end this argument, walking side by side to the palace.

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After giving her report, Andrea noticed that Tilly did not look well. After solving this great trouble, Tilly did not look happy or relieved. On the contrary, she seemed a little glum.

Ashes took her hands in hers and asked, "What's the matter. Are you sick?"

Tilly shook her head. "When I first saw Roland's letter, I didn't believe what was in it," she said with a sentimental tone, "We witches have finally found our own home. Why did they want to repeat the tragedy of the past years? Isn't it better to live in this place and be satisfied?"

"You've done a great job." Ashes comforted her, saying, "Not all the combat witches will unconditionally accept Heidi's way of doing things, especially when our living standards have improved. Some of them have already supported us, even members of the Bloodfang Association are no exception."

"She's right," said Andrea. Although she did not like Ashes, Andrea did not want to upset Tilly. "The fact that Nightfall didn't obey Heidi and fight to the death is proof. Given time, all the people will gather together firmly, just like the Witch Union."

"I hope so." Tilly took a deep breath. "Since Heidi did this, I can't indulge her anymore. But according to Iffy's view, most of the witches in the Bloodfang Association knew nothing about it, so later I'll ask Camilla to call them here. If they're willing to stay here and wait for results, we won't treat them as enemies."

The two nodded. Sleeping Island had finally become boisterous, so no one wished these people to leave.

"When the storm is over, we'll bring Heidi to the Western Region," she continued.

"To fight against the church?" Ashes was excited.

"Yes," Closing her eyes, Tilly said in a low voice, "To fight against the Judgement Army, God's Punishment Army, Pure Witches and the Battle of Divine Will. Just as Roland said in his letters, witches will embrace real liberation if we can completely crush down the church. I would help him even if he wasn't my brother, for it helps me too." She paused for a while. "Care to join me?"

"Of course," Ashes answered without hesitation, "I'll always be with you."

Andrea nodded, but oddly enough, the smell of ice cream bread appeared in her mind.

Chapter 592: An Unexpected Change

Roland sat in his office while listening to the news from the frontline.

"The drawbridge... beep... of Silver City had been put down... beep... We're going... beep... to break into the church... beep..."

"Got it, be careful," Nightingale replied.

"It seems that this is the maximum range of communication." Roland spread the map, drawing a circle on the position of Silver City. "We should set up a relay station here in order to directly contact the Eastern and Northern Regions."

He had been obsessed with the feeling of being in complete control of the situation from far away since he had Sigils of Listening. The quick exchange of information seemed to bring him back to modern times. At this moment, he felt like sitting in a command hall, controlling every phase of the war situation.

Just like Tracking Sigil, however, which could not guide accurately beyond its valid range, Sigil of Listening was also limited by distance. The voice would not keep clear and steady if one sigil was too far away from another. To deliver his commands to the whole country, he needed at least one transfer station.

"But the number of sigils isn't enough. You've only made four pairs, and an action like the Tooth Extraction Campaign would need two pairs. It's not easy to catch a demon twice," Nightingale said and placed a piece of dried fish between her lips.

Roland noticed this problem, too. As the sigils permitted only one-way information transmission, the witches had to hold two sigils; one for sending the information and the other one for receiving, in order to achieve the effect of an instant message system.

It could be considered extremely efficient compared to a carrier pigeon or human messenger.

According to Agatha, the sigils could be further improved,

Its quality depended on the magic power of the blood mixed during the making process. For example, the effect of Sigil of Listening produced by Anna was better. Given that, mixing her blood with a senior demon's blood during the process, created a pair of Sigil of Listening that was powerful enough to cover the entire Kingdom of Graycastle.

"Beep... There's something wrong... Beep... Just wait a minute..."

Sylvie said intermittently. Hearing that by the table, Nightingale and Roland brightened into alert attention.

"Pure witches? Or the moving black holes of magic power?" Nightingale swallowed the piece of dried fish and asked.

They could directly fire at the former, but the latter, which could be believers of the church who wore God's stones or the God's Punishment Army who could naturally resist the magic power, were hard to deal with.

"No... Beep... I didn't see the reaction of... Beep... God's stones..."

"No God's stones?" Roland asked, frowning.

"No... There's nothing... beep... in the church..." The sound paused for a moment. "We... are going in... Beep... The basement is empty..."

Nightingale and Roland looked at each other, speechless, wondering whether the church had escaped or not?

"It's possible," said Roland, and chagrined for a while. "I was too cautious."

As of now, the First Army was the most unstoppable in the country, and no noble was stupid enough to go right into the king's line of fire, but some might still send secret messages to the church. For the church, it was a natural choice to retreat with all the supplies of the city, thinking there was no chance of winning. Different from the battles which captured Longsong Stronghold and Fallen Dragon Ridge, the nobles probably chose to be onlookers during this war. After he seized Redwater City, the churches in the other cities may have already received messages delivered via pigeons, which noted: "Prince Roland is searching for God's Stones of Retaliation".

"If we'd divided the army into three groups to attack the three cities at the same time, we would've conquered them all," said Roland.

"It's hard to say. After all, only Sylvie can see through the ambushes of the enemies. If one group had encountered powerful pure witches, the troops would have suffered a heavy loss. Your decision wasn't bad," Nightingale said lifting a piece of dried fish to his mouth.

Roland was taken by surprise. He bit the dried fish and said, "You become comforting now."

She gave him a sly grin and said, "Do you feel better now? If not, I can massage your shoulders. Wendy taught me a massage technique that'll make you relaxed."

"Wendy?"

Nightingale raised her eyebrows and said, "She's very versatile. You know, the Witch Cooperation Association trekked a long distance and suffered a lot. It was Wendy who took care of our sisters and stabilized our team. No one could do better than her. If it was not for her, Cara's bad temper would have driven everyone away."

Roland rubbed his chin for a while. There were not any government affairs to deal with for now, and the First Army had successfully entered Silver City. Given that, he thought it was just the time to have a break.

He was about to accept Nightingale's massage when the magic stones in her arms alerted again.

This time the voice was very clear, like a shout in the ear.

"It's Lightning, repeat, it's Lightning, do you copy?"

As the witches were lacking in entertainments, Roland chose some wonderful stories for them in nature courses to improve their interests in studies and enrich their knowledge. Since Lightning heard the story that sky could be conquered by pilots, she had been addicted to their advanced conversation mode.

Roland, however, still felt a little awkward communicating this way. After Nightingale activated another group of magic stones, Roland cleared his throat and said, "I've got you, speak please."

"The Red Mist behind the snow mountain disappeared... No, it's disappearing!"

"What? Are you sure?" Roland and Nightingale asked simultaneously.

"Yes, Maggie is here, too. You can ask her!"

"The Red Mist has indeed faded away! Coo."

"It's not right. You should say 'this is Maggie', and then report."

"Coo coo?"

"Where are you now? Don't get close to Devil's Town, and hurry back now," Roland said, trying to control their impulses to explore. If they chose to fly directly into Devil's Town to investigate and encountered a senior demon there, they would be in real trouble.

"Got it!" Lightning replied quickly.

"Get Agatha for me. Maybe only she knows what's going on," Roland said to Nightingale.

Since the witches killed the Magic Slayer, he had been monitoring the demons behind the snow-capped mountains. There was one Animal Messenger in each troop who guarded the coal carrier ships that went to the source of the Redwater River in batches of four or five. Besides, he ordered Lightning and Maggie to practice between the snow mountain and the Mist Forest in case of a surprise attack of demons.

The demons, however, did not take their revenge, and now even the Red Mist began to fade away.

Agatha soon came to the office, but after listening carefully to the report from Lightning, she was also puzzled. "The Union could rarely get close to Devil's Town, and I'd never heard of their retreat during battles, even in the wars that lasted for several decades."

"Keep monitoring them for now." Roland made the decision at last. "Perhaps the Red Mist will come back, we should be cautious."

He did not want to put any witch's life at risk for now.

Five days later, Lightning reported that the Red Mist behind the snow mountains had completely disappeared.

Chapter 593: The Blackstone Forest

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A reconnaissance platoon was established soon after confirming no trace of the demons in the camp.

To find out the cause for the Red Mist's disappearance, Maggie led the probe into the camp carrying Agatha, followed by Soraya and Summer who were not capable of escaping were thus protected by 50 soldiers of the First Army.

"We're about to arrive. Get ready to land!" said Lightning, who made a gesture towards Maggie,

"Awh!"

Agatha poked her head up and the Rocky Beach gradually came into her sight. As the little girl said, the heavy Red Mist had vanished completely, revealing the dark brown earth. Different from the dark green forest around, no trees were there in the camp area which looked as if the soil surface was torn off.

This was the first time that Agatha had approached a residence of demons.

As a member of the Quest Society, Agatha could not help but feel a burst of excitement.

"Lightning is landing! Repeat, Lightning is landing."

"Be careful! Remember to escape immediately if there is any danger." Roland's voice came through the sigil.

"Lightning understands."

Folding her wings, Maggie dived sharply towards the ground.

Agatha saw the landscape under her feet changing rapidly, from the blue ocean to the off-white rugged rocky wall, and then to the humid brown land. After a sudden shock, Agatha found that the huge Devilbeast had already landed safely.

"Do the demons really live in such a place? Looking from the sky, there's nothing special in this place but now it really looks weird," Lightning clicked her tongue and said.

Agatha felt the same way.

The swarthy stone towers stood high on the empty ground everywhere, like a black forest in picturesque disorder. These strange buildings were the black spots that they had seen from above. The height of the higher buildings was about three to four stories and that of the lower ones were just taller than their heads. In terms of the density, these building far surpassed that of a forefront battalion.

It seemed that these stone towers had some functions other than the storage of the Red Mist.

"I don't know what happened to them, but it must have happened not long ago," she said.

"Why do you say that?" Lightning asked with curiosity.

"As the stone towers haven't withered completely." Agatha pointed to a nearest Blackstone Pagoda and said. "Their surfaces simply dimmed, far from being rough and fragile. They look totally different from the barren land that the Union conquered in the frontline. That means, the demons didn't intend to withdraw, or... they just made a hasty decision to retreat." She paused momentarily and said, "let's go to the center of the camp, the highest tower, where the Eye Demon lived. Maybe we can find something else."

"Hope Summer can find the cause... Ah!" Lightning screamed suddenly. She was walking in the front, but instantly sunk into the ground. Seeing the frightening scene, Maggie transformed into a pigeon to fly up immediately, and Agatha also conjured up an ice barrier in front of herself.

Before they took any further action, the little girl flew out of the hole in the ground and said, "I'm okay." She flapped her body to clear away the dirt and complained. "Who dug a trap here?!"

"What a naughty gremlin!" Agatha sighed with relief inwardly and prepared to disperse the ice barrier. Yet the following words of Lightning made her heart jump in her throat again.

"Uh! Here's a demon!"

"It's true, but the demon seems to be dead," Maggie perched on the head of Lightning and said.

"Maybe. Otherwise, I would be in trouble," the little girl patted her chest and said, still quite scared.

Holding an ice spear in hand, Agatha came over to have a look. As Maggie said, a Mad Demon stood in the soil pit with its head slouching, and a chunk of its bare skin had dried and curled, like the salted fish exposed to the scorching sun.

"I remember Sylvie once said that the demons were hiding under the ground, right?" Agatha said and further confirmed her judgement. Whether the demons decided to withdraw or met with some other incident at that moment, it must have been some emergency. Otherwise, these demons wouldn't die by exhausting the Red Mist underground little by little before receiving the new orders.

"We'd better fly to investigate. I don't want to fall in a trap again," Lightning mumbled.

Carrying Agatha on her back, Lightning flew forward slowly, remaining close to the ground. After they bypassed rows of stone towers, they suddenly got a wider view.

An open field in the camp appeared.

"It's..." Agatha gasped and said. Judging from the spot, it was obvious that the open field was not left deliberately by the demons, as a huge cavern could be seen in the center of it. It had a size almost equal to that of the square of Border Town, and many debris of the stone tower scattered around it. The three witches stood by the bottomless hole and looked down attempting to see where it led to.

"It seems the same as the place where we found you. How about let me go down and explore first?" Lightning smacked her lips and said.

"NO! You can't."

"No, coo!"

Agatha and Maggie stopped Lightning at the same time.

"Okay," the little girl said and sighed with a look of regret. She had restrained herself a lot from her desires to take risks after being punished by His Majesty to do test questions. "So, let's take a walk around it."

The rest of the place in the camp had slight differences. Of course, the exploration of the three witches was not fruitless. Maggie found a large number of Magic Stones in a flat-roofed stone tower and a

withered, dead Chaos Beast. Actually, she just wanted to perch on the top of the tower for a while, but happened to find a narrow entrance there, which may serve as an air duct that the demons used to imbue the Red Mist.

The First Army arrived at Rocky Beach two days later.

Lotus found a slit chapped in the mountain, and dug a path out in the rocky wall, which could allow only one person to go through. Maggie, at the same time, was responsible for transporting the important equipment like heavy machine guns. It took great effort to deliver 50 soldiers and witches into the inland area.

This was the first contact between the indigenous people and the alien demon race.

Even the hardest soldier would feel dread and panic at the sight of such an incredible scene. Roland had expected that and ordered his people to pitch a camp nearby the entrance to the rocky wall to avoid overstraining themselves. As for Summer's replaying work, the First Army was not allowed to watch.

According to Agatha's judgement, the time at which the high tower in the camp disappeared should be between one and half a weeks to one month ago. The consumption of Summer's magic power would be accelerated if the retrospective time exceeded one week. As for the events that happened one month ago, they could only be replayed once a day. Under such circumstances, there was no shortcut except for trying again and again.

Among the Magic Stones brought back by Maggie, there were some practical ones. The quality of these Magic Stones could not match with those obtained from Fearsome Demons, but it was better than nothing. Now the Spellcaster Tower to be completed soon only lacks a living demon.

It would take a long time to find the accurate time of the incident that happened to the demons. Roland developed new gadgets as he waited for the result. He received the second secret letter from the Fjords.

It said that Tilly Wimbledon was about to arrive at Shallow Beach of the Western Region.

Chapter 594: Shallow Beach and Reunion

"What a pleasant surprise," thought Roland.

Out of his expectation, Tilly herself would also come here instead of just sending several combat witches to help him. That meant she had already solved the trouble on Sleeping Island, or that she did not have to worry about the stability of the island for now.

The day after he received the letter, Roland waited for Tilly at Shallow Beach with Anna and the other witches.

After half a month, traces of chiseling could clearly be seen on the beach of sand and mud.

Simple wooden board houses and work sheds had already been built around the slope, which were the prototype of the future warehouse and sailor dormitory. The windward sides of the wooden houses were painted with an orange anti-corrosion coating to protect them from the sea wind, and meanwhile, the coating also made the houses look very nice and striking. A 30 meters long beachhead was leveled,

and its external side was made of bricks. It now worked as a temporary dock, and the natural deep-water harbor here even saved Roland the trouble of building trestle. Even the three-masted ships could berth here directly by the side of the dock.

As it was the first time for most of the witches to see Shallow Beach during the development stage, they all looked around with curiosity.

"Is that huge pit the collapsed shipyard? What're they doing over there right now?" Anna walked to Roland and then pointed to a distant place where many workers seemed very busy with their jobs.

"Uhm, you've heard about it, too," Roland said with a little embarrassment.

"Of course, Nana told me on the day that three workers broke their legs."

The collapse of the shipyard and the explosion of the coke oven in a test run were both major accidents of this year in the Border Area. The latter could be considered as a price he had to pay during development and exploration. The former, however, was mostly caused by his own careless mistakes.

Given the soft ground condition in Shallow Beach, Minister of Construction, Karl, had proposed that the shipyard should be built near the hills as the place could provide them a more solid foundation. Roland, however, had refused Karl's suggestion at once because of the time limit. As it had already taken a long time to build the slope by sinking the hills, if they built the shipyard in the old way, he would have to wait until the next year to begin building the steam vessel for Thunder.

As for the soft-foundation problem, he had thought it was not a big deal, as long as he let Lotus build a steel structure of the shipyard and poured concrete in to protect it.

The project had gone well as he had expected in the initial stage. The vertical walls which had been designed to protect the steel structure had seemed to be quite sturdy after the concrete had set. Roland had been very pleased with himself at the time, thinking that those civil engineering experts were just so-so. To his surprise, an accident had eventually happened when the workers had been installing the portcullis.

As soon as the one arm thick portcullis had been released by Hummingbirds, it had fallen down with the concrete walls on its both sides, burying the installing workers inside. Even though the Hummingbirds had immediately made the portcullis as light as a feather, the workers had already been heavily injured at the time. None of them could survive, if it was not for Nana.

Later investigation revealed that during the process of pouring the concrete, some sand and mud had sunk under the workers' feet and fallen to the bottom, as a result, the vertical walls had not tightly clung to the floor and the seemingly sturdy joining parts between the floor and the vertical walls were just a thin layer of concrete. The moment when the heavy portcullis had been set into the wall, the steel structure had failed to sustain the weight and collapsed with the walls suddenly.

In the modern time, that was a grievous fault of Roland. In this era, however, casualties frequently occurred during construction and no one would take it seriously, let alone blaming the lord for it. Only Roland himself would feel guilty and deeply sorry for the workers.

He cleared his throat to gather himself together and said, "They're building earth-retaining wall with wooden posts."

"To prevent the earth beside the shipyard from collapsing?" Anna soon got what Roland meant.

"Uhm, it's just like roots of a tree. The wooden posts are crossed and inserted into the ground to increase friction, so the vertical walls won't fall down," Roland nodded and said. This time, he would carefully check whether there were sunk sands and mud in the structure when pouring the concrete in, as he had already got his lesson.

"Look, here comes a ship!" Mystery Moon shouted in a sudden.

All the people looked at the place where the sea and the sky met and saw a sailing ship with a pink flag moving slowly towards them.

No doubt, a ship traveling round Southernmost Cape to the inland of the Western Region must be the Charming Beauty from Sleeping Island.

When the ship got close to Shallow Beach, it teetered on the sea for a while to readjust the direction before it berthed by the beach. Apparently, they had not recognized Shallow Beach at the first sight.

Roland met Tilly Wimbledon, Princess Tilly of Kingdom of Graycastle, again.

He gave his right hand to her, and then shook hands warmly with her. They had not seen each other for several months, but seeing the smiling look on each other's face, they still felt closely connected.

"What a wonderful reunion," Roland thought.

The witches did not greet Tilly and her witches in such a reserved manner.

Honey, Candle and Evelyn immediately came up and hugged their old friends. Andrea bent her arm around Nightingale's shoulders, completely neglecting the manner of a noble lady. Wendy held Ashes' hand, asking about her recent situation. Softfeathers, however, was greatly surprised as she found that a witch of the Bloodfang Association also came with Tilly.

"Why did you come here?" Softfeathers walked to a witch who looked a little pale and asked, "Did Heidi Morgan send you here because she did not get any report from Iffy and me?"

"No, Lady Heidi is on the ship now," the witch answered while shaking her head.

"What? You mean she also comes to the Western Region?" Softfeathers exclaimed in surprise, catching everyone's attention.

It was not hard to tell from her voice that she was frightened.

"Who's Heidi?"

"She seems to be the leader of the Bloodfang Association?"

"Ah, yes. Iffy mentioned her."

"What's she going to do here?"

Roland looked at Tilly and asked, "Have you settled your differences with her?"

"If you mean controlling her right now, yes I do. My plan worked and Heidi did try to kill the Annie we faked. But she refused to tell me where the witches rejected by the Bloodfang Association went. She said she would only tell you when she saw you," Tilly said, spreading her hands.

"Me?" Roland asked confusedly.

"Yes, I guess she considers you her last life-saving straw." Tilly blinked her eye and continued, "Now you're the ruler of Graycastle, representing the secular nobles. She probably thinks if she gives you enough profits, you'll save her or even help her to regain her power in the Kingdom of Wolfheart."

"Are you reminding me of what I should do?" Roland could not help but laugh. He had to admit that Tilly was quite cute when she pretended to be careless and beat about the bush. "Trust me. If I'm a man who'll exchange witches' lives for profits, you'll never bring her here. Well, so who's this witch I'm going to meet? I think I've never met her before."

"Nightfall, a combat witch of the Bloodfang Association. If it's not for her who uses Seed of Symbiosis to sustain Heidi's life, I'm afraid Heidi won't make it to City of Neverwinter," Tilly answered.

Chapter 595: Germination

"Did Heidi get hurt during the capture?"

"Uhm, she got shot in her leg. We've stopped the bleeding, but she probably can't walk for now."

"How is everyone else?"

"A witch of the Bloodfang Association named Skyflare died last night." Tilly sighed and said. "My witches are alright."

Roland nodded and said, "I'll tell Nana to cure her. As for the other things, let's talk about them after we get back to the castle."

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Compared with interrogating the leader of the Bloodfang Association, the church invasion was the top priority for Roland now. After he returned to his office, he asked first about the situation of Sleeping Island and then showed the letter from the Northern Region to Tilly and the other witches. Ashes and Andrea were also there as the three big families in the king's city of the Kingdom of Dawn were also involved.

Since Roland received the secret warning letter, he had contacted Hill Fawkes twice to get a clear idea of what had happened. After he told the witches all he knew, Andrea could not help shaking her head and said, "Foolish Otto, he still behaves just the same as he did when he was little. He would never dare to enter the palace without Oro."

"But at least, he succeeded in revealing what the church was doing to us. Besides, he did it mainly because of you," Ashes shrugged and said.

"Have you replied to him?" Tilly asked Roland.

"I urged him not to act rashly. As even the God's Stone of Retaliation could not affect the witch, it's almost impossible for ordinary people to defeat her. Besides, Prince Appen mentioned that there were God's Punishment Warriors too. The Kingdom of Dawn is too far away from the Kingdom of Graycastle. I can't offer him any help directly. Under such circumstances, it's a wise decision to pretend to know nothing about the church's secret until the church focuses on the Kingdom of Graycastle," Roland said while pouring tea for everyone.

"He may not be able to control himself well. Acting on impulses has been a habit of Otto Luoxi ever since he was a child," Andrea said with a frown.

"He'll control himself well, because I told him something else." Roland smiled and added, "I told him that Andrea was safe at my place, and the enemy could hardly hurt her, even if she had to fight against the church. I also warned him that if he died, he would never have the chance to meet his Andrea again."

"Very persuasive," Ashes whistled and said.

"Enough," Tilly promptly spoke at this moment in order to prevent a coming spat. She stared at Roland, blaming him for making fun of this matter and then changed the subject by asking, "What're you going to do about the church's invasion?"

"Ahem... I'm going to build a defensive line with guns and cannons under Coldwind Ridge," said Roland. He took a map out of his drawer and spread it on the desk. He pointed at the border of the Northern Region, saying, "Since I got the news, I've already sent the First Army to deliver war materials to Deepvalley Town and at the same time, to wipe out the influence of the church in my kingdom. Given that, Holy City of Hermes will soon sense the intention of Graycastle to garrison Coldwind Ridge."

"Do you want to purposely reveal your actions to your enemy? I hate to be blunt, but most of the time, the information deliberately leaked to the enemy must be false and delusive, right?" Andrea asked.

"But it's the only way that I can ensure where the church is going to attack first, and by doing so, my people will suffer less. A head-on confrontation is also what the First Army is best at in battles," Roland explained his plans.

"I see. It's a pretty good idea," Tilly nodded and said.

"But there's still a hidden danger, the pure witches. With strong firepower, we don't have to worry about the visible enemies but the witches of the church may cause unexpected troubles for the First Army, as we know nothing about the pure witches. Only our witches with magic power can guard against them," Roland added.

"That's why we're here. Trust me, my big brother. The witches of Sleeping Island will fight with you," Tilly replied.

Back at the Witch Building, Tilly had returned to her original apartment that she had lived in before.

The living room and bedroom looked exactly the same as she had seen them the last time. There was no dust on the table. Apparently, Roland must have often had this place cleaned.

Three wooden basins used for bathing were prominently displayed near the door. Clean clothes were nicely folded and placed in the basins and beside them, there were sandals that were easy to wear. Brought up in a royal family, Tilly had accustomed herself to taking baths regularly, but even she had never bathed so frequently like she did at this place where the warm water for bathing was available all the time.

When she followed the aroma of fresh food to open the cupboard, she found it was filled with various kinds of seasoning, dried meat floss and bread. She could easily fill her stomach any time she felt hungry.

Princess Tilly had never been a person who really cared a lot about material comforts, but she could not help but feel warm in her heart seeing the scene.

"Ah... I can use scented soap for bathing again. Huh, the towels in the basin seem to be brand new," Andrea talked loudly in the living room.

"Isn't it good for you to have new towels?" Ashes questioned.

"Yes for me, but not for you. It's a waste to offer you a new towel."

"What did you say?"

"I think that rag you brought will do. Why does a person who can tolerate bathing in salty, smelly sea water need a towel?"

Hearing the familiar bickering voices, Tilly smiled silently. She thought that everyone seemed to like Neverwinter, and even the Bloodfang Association witches changed after they came here.

She felt that she also liked this city as everyone else did.

The improvement in life quality might be one of the reasons for the other witches' changes, but not for Princess Tilly who had been adored by King Wimbledon III. Compared to her life in the palace, the life here was just fresh and interesting, but not luxurious.

What attracted the witches the most must be another thing.

Staying in this city, Tilly would naturally feel relaxed, and yet she had no idea about why she would feel this way until today. When Roland had been pouring tea for the witches himself, she had suddenly realized.

Roland truly accepted the witches and treated them as friends instead of just pretending to be friendly to witches who could offer him help.

No matter who he was, the lord, the prince or the king, Tilly could tell that his attitude remained the same all the time.

He did consider witches as his friends, which he was not faking at all.

"Are you alright?"

Hearing Ashes behind her, she turned around and saw that she gently closed the door of the kitchen.

"Huh?"

"Why did you call him big brother today? On Sleeping Island, didn't you say that you helped him only to help yourself? And... you said he was not like Prince Roland at all," Ashes hesitated and asked.

"I don't think he's the stupid, cowardly elder brother of mine and I don't care whether he's him or not." Tilly paused momentarily and asked, "Have you ever considered the meaning of this war against the church?"

"Retaliation?"

"No," Tilly shook her head and said, "It means freedom of life. Have you ever thought of moving here?"

Chapter 596: Home of the Free

Greatly surprised, Ashes said, "What did you say? I've never thought of leaving you."

"That's not what I mean. To tell the truth, this place is not bad... and you like it, right?" Tilly explained, finding out that Ashes misunderstood her.

After a moment of hesitation, Ashes nodded and said, "The Witch Cooperation Association must have their reason to stay here and work for Roland, but we're different. We have our own home..."

Tilly interrupted Ashes, saying, "There are only three possible endings for us in this war. The first is that we get defeated by the God's Punishment Army and die in the last ditch in the Northern Region. Under such circumstances, neither Sleeping Island nor Neverwinter matters to us anymore."

"I swear, by my life. My lady, you'll never die at that kind of place," Ashes said and hurriedly covered Princess Tilly's mouth with her hand, and even used the honorifics in her haste.

Tilly kept looking at Ashes with a smile until Ashes removed her hand, and then said, "That's just a hypothesis. I don't think I'll get killed by the church, either."

"So don't say it out loud. A frequent saying of yours is that..." Ashes said with worry.

"It'll become a self-fulfilling prophecy," Tilly added. She walked to the small window of the kitchen to look at the castle backyard which was full of energy and vitality, and she continued, "That's why I tell you this hypothesis at first. The second possibility is that Roland loses the war but we survive. That way, the Kingdom of Graycastle will no longer be able to resist the church, Neverwinter will be caught in fire and Roland will have only one place to go."

"Sleeping Island?"

"Yes, we'll continue to fight against the church on the island until the Battle of Divine Will began. Maybe the human species will be extinct hundreds of years later but there's nothing we can do as we can't live that long."

"What about the third possibility..."

"If we defeat the church and take over Holy City of Hermes, all of the witches will be free from bullying and persecution, and the Sleeping Island's mission will be fulfilled."

"Ful-fulfilled?"

"Yes, it's just the witches' hide for now. If the church is destroyed, we won't have to confine ourselves on an island of the Fjords any longer. The Fjords can't offer us a pleasant environment to live because of its limited supplies and unpredictable weather... But, of course, we won't abandon Sleeping Island and we'll continue our Sleeping Spell. The only change is that we'll be able to choose to live in the cities we like, right?"

"I'll always stay by your side even in hell and besieged by numerous demons.

"And in the world full of salted fishes and fish soup?"

"Uhm..." Ashes suddenly did not know what to say.

Tilly could not help but laugh. She said, "Relax, eating too much of them makes me feel sick, too. I'll probably come to live in Neverwinter for a while every now and then. I also want some changes in diet."

"Hey there, what're you talking about?" Andrea pushed the door open, craned her neck to look inside and asked. She wore a bathrobe and carried a wooden basin on her head.

"What're you going to do?" Ashes asked, frowning.

"To take a bath," Andrea twitched her mouth and said, "I have stunk after staying on the ship for over ten days. Of course, it's not surprising that somebody just can't notice even such a strong smell of fish. Lady Tilly, are you going with me?"

"Yes, wait for me. I'll change my clothes," Tilly replied.

"Ahem... so am I." Ashes pretended not to hear the satire and expressed her intention to join the bath.

"Come on, I did not invite you," Andrea rolled her eyes at Ashes and said.

"I'll accompany Tilly, not you. Don't take me wrong."

Looking at them who gazed at each other in a speechless confrontation, Tilly relaxed and began to imagine that all of them would be able to live easily and happily like they did now after they defeated the church.

Roland had been in a daze in his office for a long time until Nightingale came in with dried fish in her hand.

Out of his expectation, Tilly who had not recognized him as her elder brother the last time when she had been here suddenly called him big brother today. Roland felt overjoyed and at the same time confused, wondering whether she really considered him as Prince Roland or just a reliable friend and guardian.

"Yeah, she called you big brother. It's not a big deal. I can call you like that if you want," Nightingale said incredulously.

"You're three years older than me. Aren't you nobles value your integrity?" Roland sighed inwardly and thought, "but it's not bad to have an elder sister as my... No, stop thinking about this anymore." Roland banished those thoughts and asked, "What do you think that changed her attitude towards me?"

"Who knows? Maybe she saw your sincerity, as you didn't use the Bloodfang Association witches to split Sleeping Island and you quickly declared war on the church. Compared with empty promises, those actions are more convincing. But that's just my guess. Maybe, it's just a slip of tongue," Nightingale shrugged and said.

"Yes, the reason isn't as important as the facts. No matter what made Tilly change, she did get closer to me. That also means I've gained wider recognition among the Sleeping Island witches," Roland thought.

Then he said to Nightingale, "Now. it's time for us to meet Heidi Morgan."

...

Roland stepped into the jail in the basement of the castle and saw Heidi lying unconsciously in a bed made out of straw. The wound in her leg covered with black and red blood stains healed perfectly.

"To ensure Nana's safety, I knocked Heidi Morgan out before Nana started to cure her. Otherwise, it would be too dangerous to take off the God's Stone of Retaliation on her. I heard from the other Bloodfang Association witch that she tried to hold Andrea as the hostage when she was besieged," Nightingale whispered in Roland's ear.

"I see. You did a good job."

There were iron hoops mounted with God's Stones of Retaliation around Heidi's neck and wrists, and it was impossible to unlock it without special tools. They did this to her because she was a very powerful combat witch.

She could cause fatal damages to all the objects within ten steps by making them collapse inwards. According to Tilly, this kind of collapse won't be affected by any other factors, as no matter what kind of vessels Heidi used her power to affect, they would collapse. A wooden one would be crushed, while a metal one would be squashed.

And abdominal cavity and thoracic cavity of a living being would also collapse and squeeze the soft inner organs out, which reminded Roland of squeezing toothpaste out of a tube.

From Roland's perspective, Heidi should work in the factory instead of combating,

Since she could act as a punching machine to process the raw material with molds, which was the most basic use of her ability. Roland believed that her potential would be great if she realized that there was a space between moles and between atoms during her studies.

But unfortunately, he also knew that it was too late for her.

"Wake her up," Roland said.

Nightingale nodded and dashed into the jail to lift Heidi up and drag her over to the steel bars.

Roland looked down at her, saying, "I'm Roland Wimbledon, King of Graycastle. I've heard you wanted a private talk with me. You can talk to me now."

Chapter 597: Blood and Fang

It took Heidi quite a long time to figure out what had happened.

She first touched her thigh which had already been cured and then looked Nightingale up and down. After that, she finally turned her gaze to Roland and asked, "Your Majesty, did you cure me?"

"Yes, otherwise you'll make Nightfall exhausted," Roland replied. He then found a chair and seated himself in front of the jail, asking, "Tell me, where did you send the witches rejected by you?"

"That's... what Iffy told you?"

"Yes, the witch named Annie was her friend."

Instead of directly answering Roland's question, Heidi clenched her teeth. At the moment, Roland saw the hatred in her eyes.

"You could have given them a shelter. Archduke Island is the domain of Archduke Morgan and you're his successor. It's impossible that you can't even afford a dozen of assistant witches. Even though all you needed to do at the time was to offer them some gruel a day, you still chose to abandon them. You thought they were useless, but, in fact, assistant witches are far more powerful than you can imagine. The gun Andrea used to hurt you is a weapon made by assistant witches and ordinary people. It's very easy to operate. Even a farmer who's worked in the fields for all his life can easily use it to kill an experienced knight," Roland said.

Hearing that, Heidi's face changed. She lifted up her head promptly, asking, "What did you say? Even ordinary people can use it?"

"Do you still believe I totally depend on the witches to capture the king's city and become King of Graycastle?" Roland leaned back in his chair and added, "If they had such a strong power, they wouldn't have been suppressed by the church and the secular lords."

"So... how did they make the weapon?"

Roland coldly stared at Heidi until she realized that she had asked an inappropriate question just now. After that, he mocked. "What? Do you think we're talking at a palace banquet?"

Heidi swallowed hard and said, "This lady beside you is..."

"Nightingale. She works for me, not for Tilly. I want to ask you again. Where did you send the witches rejected by you?" Roland said in a deep voice.

"I let them go to find the other witch organizations. I've no idea of where they went. Some of them might return to the nearby towns and cities, and some might go to the Kingdom of Dawn..."

"You're lying. None of this is true." Nightingale suddenly broke in before she finished.

"No, Your Majesty. She knows nothing about me..."

"Save it, Heidi." Roland shook his head and continued, "Nightingale can tell truth from lies. You can't lie about anything in front of her. Now, you know why Tilly brought you from the Fjords to the Western Region. You'll be tried here and if you don't want to suffer, tell me what you did exactly. My patience is wearing thin."

In the dim firelight, the expression seemed uncertain on Heidi's face. Apparently, she did not expect that Nightingale had such an ability. After a moment of silence, Heidi grabbed the steel bars and shouted, "Your Majesty Wimbledon, the Kingdom of Wolfheart has been annexed by the church, the king has been lost and now I'm the only descendant of the Morgan royal family. If you help me regain my kingdom, I'll bring you countless profits! Gold royals, gems and... yes, witches! The Bloodfang Association will also be at your command!"

"Is this what you want to tell me at last?"

"I'll give you half of the Kingdom of Wolfheart! The land on the west of Blackstone Cliff will be yours!"

"Stop!" Roland interrupted impatiently. "I just want to know where the witches went!"

"What? My kingdom can't yet compare with those witches?" Heidi said in disbelief.

Roland was fed up with this and said, "Can't you understand me? The Kingdom of Wolfheart isn't yours and I've no interest in the land far away from me. Due to the basic manner of a noble, I'm here to ask you first, but I have many other methods to make you tell the truth. As for torture, I think you know more than me. It'll do you no good, so tell me what you did to those witches when I'm still here. Maybe, I'll spare your life."

Heidi took Roland's last sentence as a life-saving straw and confirmed. "Your Majesty... you'll really spare me?"

"I'm a man of actions."

Heidi lowered her head and said after a long hesitation, "I sent them to the nobles."

Roland's heart sank a little and then he asked, "Didn't you sell them to the nobles?"

"No, the whole thing is a trade-off." She took a deep breath and continued, "I could have never recruited enough witches for the Bloodfang Association if I had depended solely on the witches awakening on the Archduke Island. To attract more witches to come to me, I have to spread the name of the association throughout the Kingdom of Wolfheart."

"You could hire Rats to do the job for you. How come was this related to the nobles?" Roland asked. He had also tried to draw witches' attention via propaganda, but as Tilly started to spread the news earlier than him, he did not succeed in recruiting many witches.

"Rats themselves are manipulated by nobles. Besides, once the church had found out the secret of Archduke Island, I would have been in real trouble."

"So, you pay back with witches to the nobles?"

"Yes, I did this to ensure that the nobles and I were on the same boat. When they illegally kept witches, they would naturally notice the actions of the church and control the Rats properly. They would even deliberately divert the Holy City's attention from me. Only after making sure that the local lords were willing to accept witches, I would spread information in their domains. By doing so, I could minimize the risk," Heidi said in a low voice.

Roland did not have to ask to know what had happened next to those non-combat witches. They must have been locked in the dark rooms for the whole life, and most of them had died young when the magic power bit. Even for several lucky witches who made it to the adulthood, their fate had also been sealed. They must have been dead in the hands of the nobles who had used them just to sate their own lust or in the hands of the church who had forced the nobles to hand out the witches.

At the time, Heidi clearly sensed Nightingale's anger and impulsively moved backward, saying, "Your Majesty, you've promised!"

Roland stopped Nightingale with his arm outstretched and continued to ask, "Who did those things for you? Iffy said that you've never met Annie."

"Skyflare... she was killed by Ashes."

"Anyone else? Did the other witches of the Bloodfang Association know nothing about this?" Roland asked.

Heidi nodded.

"Say it out!"

"... yes."

Roland secretly let out a sigh of relief and said, "The last question. What's the purpose of your Bloodfang Association to recruit combat witches everywhere?"

After a short silence, Heidi said, "I just wanted to help my father seize the throne which should belong to him."

Heidi stopped, but Roland could easily guess what she was to say. After the death of Archduke Morgan, the Bloodfang Association had become Heidi Morgan's tool to fulfill her own desire for power.

Walking out of the basement, Nightingale hold Roland's hand in a sudden, asking, "Are you really going to spare the life of that murder?"

"Heidi Morgan is a witch of Sleeping Island. It's not appropriate for me to execute her. Tilly wanted me to help in finding out the truth. That's why she took Heidi to the Western Region."

"You mean..." Nightingale's eyes started to shine.

"As for whether Sleeping Island will spare her or not, that's not what I can decide," Roland said, spreading his hands.

Chapter 598: The End of Her Dream

The following day, Roland told the news to Tilly and the other witches.

"How dare she use witches as a reward to those filthy nobles?" Failing to restrain her anger, Ashes broke off before Princess Tilly could speak. If Andrea had not stopped her, she probably had already rushed to the dungeon straightaway.

"Has Miss Nightingale checked the credibility of her testimony?" Tilly asked placidly.

"She spilled everything after a few preliminary questions," Roland said and told them what had happened in the cell in detail. "I thought it'd take a while for us to get her to surrender, but she's weaker than we expected." He had not expected to obtain a full confession from the prisoner yesterday, for the questioning was simply a sort of intimidation commonly practiced before the official interrogation. Because of this, he did not take the God's Locket of Retribution off Heidi, and Heidi did not know that Nightingale actually detected lies through magic power rather than voices either.

"I see." Tilly nodded. "Thank you for doing this for me."

"Don't be silly. I'm your brother." Roland immediately grabbed this opportunity, trying to sound somewhat intimate. "Plus, Heidi Morgan is also, so to speak, a witch on Sleeping Island. She should be handed over to you."

"Fair enough..." Tilly was silent for quite a while. "What would you do if this happened in the city of Neverwinter?"

Roland gazed at her gemlike eyes and noticed more silent rages than poignancies in her gray pupils. She had already made her decision.

"I'll do the same thing." Roland comforted her.

At this remark, Heidi Morgan was sentenced to death.

Tilly no longer hesitated. She whispered something in Ashes' ear. The latter nodded and left the office.

"I'll now excuse myself, brother."

Roland could tell that Tilly was greatly depressed by the incident, but he did not know what to say in this scenario. When he was about to escort her to the Witch Building, an exhilarated scream pierced the silence. It was from the Listening Magic Stone in Nightingale's chest.

"It's Lightning, copy. It's Lightning. Summer has found out when the incident occurred."

The little girl's report stunned everybody.

"Um, what did she see?" Roland asked.

"Two monsters, big mouth, and tentacles. I don't know how to describe them." From her voice, Roland knew she was extremely hyper. "This is something we've never seen. Good Heavens... Your Majesty, you'd better come see it yourself!"

"What's it..." Tilly was bewildered.

"They're exploring the Devil's Town behind the snowcapped mountains. The Red Mist there completely disappeared a week ago," Roland explained, "and I wanted to tell you about it today, but..."

"I almost forgot about demons." Tilly took a deep breath. "You can fill me in with the details on the way."

"On the way?" Roland was slightly surprised.

"Can't I go with you?" She winked.

Princess Tilly had indeed been strong since her childhood. She knew how to adjust herself and manage to be impersonal when facing something of great importance. Roland was secretly amazed at how quickly she could restore the tranquility of her mind upon a crisis, an essential quality for a ruler, which he, unfortunately, still had a lot to work on.

If he took Tilly with him, Ashes and Andrea would certainly tag along. The trip would be, therefore, much safer. He had no reason to reject her.

"Yes, of course you can." Roland agreed with a nod.

Heidi was leaning against the bars, waiting for Roland to get her out.

The Bloodfang Association was over. Tilly would definitely not allow her to return to Sleeping Island. However, as a member of the Morgan royal family, she had found a new path for her resurrection to the throne.

That was to rely on the imperial power of Graycastle and regain her throne.

Heidi had higher hopes for the reward she was going to propose than Roland's own promise. Roland did not directly make any promises probably just because he was Tilly's brother. He owed an explanation to Sleeping Island as to the whereabouts of these missing witches.

Heidi firmly believed that no noble could possibly resist such a great temptation. Half of the territory of Wolfheart would certainly bring Roland enormous fame and fortunes, and his name would also be passing down the history and become immortal.

As for herself? Her notoriety would be remembered by nobles in later generations. Nevertheless, she did not care about it. As long as she could successfully become the king of Wolfheart, she could abandon everything else.

Only in this way could she officially start her revenge.

She must avenge her father and herself on those nobles for their betrayal.

She swore she would hang those traitors one by one and hung their heads above the city gate, showing the public the fate of those who had framed Archduke Morgan.

The iron gate of the dungeon was suddenly flung open. Its squeaking sound appeared to be especially loud in the deadly silent dungeon.

Heidi immediately got to her feet and looked toward the end of the hallway by the bars.

The person who entered her sight, however, was not Roland Wimbledon, but sullen Ashes.

A chill went down her spine at that very moment.

"Wh-what're you doing here? Where's His Majesty?"

"You know exactly why I came here." Ashes slowly approached the cell. Heidi retreated as each step Ashes thrust forward, but she soon realized there was nowhere for her to take refuge. "You should have anticipated this when you handed those innocent witches to nobles."

"No!" Heidi shrieked. "His Majesty promised me he would let the matter go. He's already pardoned me. You can't disobey the king's order! Where's he? I request to see him!"

Ashes grabbed the iron bars and pulled them apart by force. She went into the cell while bending over. "Those witches came to the Bloodfang Association for your help, in hopes of having a good rest and being fed. Yet you failed them and sent them to hell with your own hands. The witches escaped the church's search but were betrayed by their own kind. Even if Roland has forgiven you, I can't just let it go like nothing has ever happened."

"Did Ashes... overhear the conversation between Roland and me? Or did Roland tell the secret to Tilly and the other witches?" Heidi thought. She snatched the God's Locket of Retribution on her neck in horror, but the locket was embedded in an iron ring. It was impossible for her to take it off barehanded.

"Let me help you." Ashes drew close to Heidi. She reached out her hand and lifted Heidi off the floor by her neck.

The iron ring started to tighten up and Heidi soon felt suffocated. She twisted and wriggled like a fish out of water, attempting to gain a foothold on the floor but in vain. Gradually, as her vision blurred, Ashes' figure started to become distant.

Why did I end up like this?

I don't want to die here. I'm the only successor to the throne, the future king of Wolfheart.

The Throne of Tusk seemed to be drifting away from her. She could once again hear the mockeries of nobles ringing in her ears.

At a "crack" sound, the iron ring sank into her neck and stopped all her struggles.

Chapter 599: A Retrospection of Magic Power

By the afternoon, Roland was prepared to head to the snowcapped mountains.

The equipment he would take with him included a tent, adequate food, and a concrete paddle steamer. Since Devil's Town was coastal, he must set off from Shallow Beach. As usual, Hummingbird would be responsible for transportation.

He had to admit it was a pretty queer thing that Hummingbird, who was as petite as Nana, could hold up the entire concrete boat above her head. The scene reminded Roland of an ant moving rice ten times bigger than its own body. If Hummingbird happened to be on the other side of the boat, he would see a boat silently shifting by itself on the shore like a "ghost ship".

As long as Hummingbird kept her hands attached to the boat, she could help with the transportation continuously. It was a much more efficient way to move stuff compared with her earlier method, with which she had to spend a great deal of time reducing the weight of each item. The new method also saved Hummingbird a lot of magic power. The only drawback, however, was that she needed to follow enchanted goods, which meant she could only move two items at a time.

The paddle steamer heading to the west passed endless mountains and ridges. It arrived at Rocky Beach two days later.

Last time, Roland took a bird's-eye view of this land from a distance on the "Cloud Gazer". Now when he finally set foot on the beach, he found it was nothing but a vast and desolate wilderness.

Rocky Beach, merely ten miles apart from Shallow Beach, was a completely different world.

There were animal remains embedded in layers of gravel and crushed stones all over the place, some of which had corroded due to exposure, while others were in the process of turning into new rocks. A few bones, which Roland failed to determine their owners, were quite big, almost in the same size of an adult.

The steep precipice was also bizarre and mystic.

Numerous sharp stalagmites grew out of the rock surfaces. Unlike the ones suspending from the top of the cave, these stalagmites, which looked like countless hooks hanging upside down at first glance, were all sticking out horizontally with their tails pointing to the ceiling. They were totally unbounded by the gravitational pull. Roland did not see them clearly last time on the balloon; but now, as he was personally on the beach, he felt the hair on the back of his neck all stood up at the sight of this disturbing view.

No signs of life could be found on the long beach. No seagulls were nesting in the vicinity, and no seaweeds or clams were discovered either. Even at the rear of the rocks was an endless expanse of open country, as if demons' Red Mist had taken away all the lives on this land.

Roland and the others located the narrow crack leading to Devil's Town with the help of the marks left by Lotus. It was actually more of a fracture than a crack. As the gap, fathomless and confined, almost split the whole precipice in half. Lotus created a narrow path of one and a half meters wide at the opening.

When they stepped down the stairs and passed through the crevice, Nightingale involuntarily burst out an exclamation.

"What's the matter?" Roland asked.

"Look over there." She pointed to the bottomless crack. "There's a hole in the rocks."

They all stopped and took a peek. Close to the inky bottom, Roland spotted several round holes, which seemed to be manually drilled. "What's that?"

"I don't know. But I've seen similar holes in the Impassable Mountain Range, except the ones there are slightly bigger." Nightingale hesitated for a moment and then said, "I feel something is looking at me deep down there. The deeper I probe, the stronger this feeling is."

"...Something?" Roland was a bit surprised.

"There is more than one." Nightingale nodded. "In the valley on the way to the camps of the Witch Cooperation Association, there's a path leading to the bottom of the ground. I've never been down there."

"Take Sylvie to the Impassable Mountain Range after she's back." Roland took another look at the bottom of the fracture, managing to suppress the desire to explore. He then ordered the team to continue to marshal forward.

Although this continent was a part of Land of Dawn, on which human beings had settled as early as 1,000 years ago, they had a very minimal understanding of the world, as if mankind had deliberately forgotten to explore the outside world. Roland once told Agatha about drawing a map of the whole continent but was informed that the Union had done so for Fertile Plains. They had very roughly sketched out an outline of Land of Dawn. As to the land beyond, they knew nothing about it.

That was why Roland fully supported Thunder to explore lands overseas. He had thought it would be a matter of time to understand the whole world, but now he realized he was ignorant of even his own territory, the Kingdom of Graycastle in the Western Region.

Unfortunately, he had to leave these thoughts behind for the time being, as the war against the church was pressing.

They soon found themselves in an open field after passing through the crack. The First Army who garrisoned there led them to their camps at once. Roland then saw Agatha and Soraya.

"Where are Lightning and the others?"

"She's flying around with Summer." Agatha sighed. "She's too perky to be quiet just for a second. Devil's Town has almost turned into her playland."

"It really would be a national park that you need to buy tickets to enter in the modern world," Roland exclaimed.

"What did you say?"

"No... nothing." Roland coughed to conceal his embarrassment. "I'll use the Sigil of Listening to ask her to come back. Now take me where the collapsed stone tower is."

When the group of people reached the center of the relics, Lightning, Maggie and Summer arrived just in time.

"Lightning is landing!"

The blonde little girl slowly came down to the ground while stretching out her arms to the sides. She turned around and gave Roland a big hug.

Roland did not know whether to laugh or to cry since Lightning had reached puberty.

"Aw...!" Next Maggie joined, who stretched out her wings in the same way. She fell straight to the ground, almost shaking Summer off her back.

Roland understood that Lightning was one of the youngest witches in the Witch Union. So, it kind of explained why she was always so airy and jaunty. Maggie, however, was an adult witch. It did not make sense that she still acted like a child. There was only one plausible explanation: Lightning's fluttering manner was somewhat contagious.

"Since everybody's here, let's get started." Roland eyed Summer, whose legs were still trembling.

"Yes... Your Majesty." Summer stumbled to the hole and closed her eyes.

In a second, the large hole in the ground was replaced by a giant black stone tower. Meanwhile, the air was permeated with red mists as thick as blood.

Roland stepped back involuntarily while at the same time holding his breath.

"This was what it looked like here 26 days ago, right before the incident," Agatha explained, "If Summer traces back the time only once, she can maintain the illusion for nearly an hour. It thus allows us to see what exactly happened from the beginning to the end."

"Where's that Eye Demon that you talked about? The one with eyeballs all over that will attract the demons' attention once it sees you?" Tilly asked curiously.

"At the top of this stone tower." Agatha pointed to the high sky above. "The stone tower is too high for Summer to reach. We can't see it now."

Roland looked up and found the space above the tower was blank, as if it had been chopped off. It appeared that Summer could only reconstruct the area within a radius of five meters.

Just then, the ground started to shake.

"It's coming!" Agatha shouted in a low voice.

Chapter 600: A Shocking Event

"Coming? What's coming?"

Before Roland had time to inquire about the details, the ground beneath had risen and cracked. The black stone tower was lifted into the air in a second. A giant gray monster jumped out of the crack and opened its huge crimson mouth, trying to devour the stone tower. The slimes on its skin spilled all over the place.

As Summer could only reconstruct the scene but not sounds, Roland felt like he was watching a vivid but intense silent movie. The witches, who had never been to a theatre, reacted more dramatically. They all

cried out in fright and stepped back a few paces. Ashes even automatically pulled out her sword and stood in front of Tilly, in an attempt to protect her.

What was more horrid, however, was that there was more than one monster.

Underneath the black stone tower hid a Tentacle Monster, whose gleamy black body was almost completely fused with the stone tower, with only its tentacles poking out of the bottom of the tower like innumerable feet. Its scale, which glistened in a deep red light, was the only indication that the creature was alive.

Tentacle Monster was pretty much as big as half of the castle, but it was incomparable to Megamouth Beast who could engulf the entire tower. To avoid being swallowed, it strove to keep the megamouth beast from shutting the mouth by waving its tentacles. Meanwhile, clouds of blood mists that burst out of the scale started to gradually erode the skins of the beast. Evidently, the thick mist, almost of a black color, could cause harm to its rival.

Nevertheless, the megamouth beast was simply too large to defeat only via the red mist corrosion. As the stone tower was lifted off the ground little by little, the tentacle monster was finally crushed by the tower and became the megamouth beast's food. After that, the black stone tower slowly slid into the giant mouth as well. In the end, Roland saw the eye demon, which appeared to take no notice of the megamouth beast and sat motionless at the top of the tower during the whole process of being gulped down without the slightest intention to escape.

The illusion stopped at that moment. The red mists and the giant monsters vanished instantly. Peace was restored. They saw a massive hole in the ground and realized what they had seen did occur at some point in the past.

Roland heaved a long sigh. He was further convinced that he had done the right thing not to include the soldiers from the First Army. His heart was beating so fast as if it were going to jump out of his chest while he was watching. Even if the "movie" was now over, the fear still lingered.

"This is... the wriggling monster that ate Miss Agatha's lab?" After a long silence, Tilly broke off. "Why would it attack the Devil's Town?"

"We might be wrong earlier. It's probably not a demonic hybrid enslaved by demons. At least, it isn't controlled by the demons behind the snowcapped mountains..." Roland looked at Agatha and said, "What do you think?"

"I agree." Agatha nodded, apparently having been thinking about it for a long time. "There were no records of this kind of demonic beast whatsoever during the two Battles of Divine Will. If demons do have the ability to subjugate them, we won't be able to hold up long, and Taquila would have been devastated long before. Demons just need to order a few megamouth beasts to carry some senior demons and enter the city from the underground when launching an attack."

"If not demons, then who does?" Tilly's brows furrowed. "Judging from the transparent mantis that Miss Nightingale found, it's obvious that these demonic beasts have some sort of plans."

"Can't it be a random action?" Nightingale spread out her hands. "Hybrids are by no means ordinary demonic beasts. Based on their performances during the Months of Demons, they have already developed critical thinking skills. Perhaps they'll be even smarter than us if they live long enough."

Everybody laughed at her comment and felt less strained at once. Clearly, nobody would believe that those savage monsters, which knew nothing but wrestling in muds, would be more intelligent than fed and clothed human beings. The idea just sounded too ridiculous.

Only Roland remained silent. He gazed at the deep hole, dealing with crowding thoughts in his mind.

Was Mankind the most intelligent species?

He would not be so presumptuous as to boldly assume mankind was the smartest creature, especially when he was currently in a completely foreign world. When the living environment and the requirement for necessities changed, what was considered to be intelligent might be distinctive as well. Take demonic beasts for example. They would certainly not regard silk and bread as essential.

"Why was the eye demon unresponsive?" Andrea asked in confusion. "Didn't you say the whole campground will be startled once it sees you?"

"Because nobody saw it," Agatha explained, "Eye demons will see us only after we see them. But to that megamouth beast, it simply had no eyes. It has nothing but a big mouth."

"Because it doesn't need an eye." Roland continued, "Like an earthworm, the beast lives underground all the year round. It doesn't need an eye to see things. Naturally, it won't specially grow any light-sensitive organs."

"Grow... what?" Tilly questioned curiously.

"Light-sensitive organs, such as eyes. Some animals use skins to detect light." Roland did not go further but squatted down and pointed to the deep hole. "Lightning, do you want to go down there to take a peek?"

The little girl nodded immediately.

"That's too dangerous." Ashes attempted to stop her. "We don't know what's hiding down there at all."

"You don't need to probe into the tunnel, but just look at where the beast is heading," Roland said, "and Nightingale will stay here while monitoring magic reactions. It's going to be fine."

"Um, don't I need to follow it into the hole and catch it?" Lightning pouted.

"Not this time. He devoured demons after all, not Agatha." Roland stressed once again. "Get out of there and report to me right after you find where the tunnel leads. Do you understand?"

"Yes." Lightning took out a portable torch from her knapsack and plunged into the deep hole after lighting the torch.

"The exit is over here!" After a few minutes, Lightning's voice came out of the magic stone. "Do you see the torchlight?"

Nightingale soon found out the direction in which the tunnel ran based on the location of the torch. "It's good now. You can come up."

Roland's brows deepened when he glanced at Nightingale who was standing to the southeast of the hole, and the lofty snowcapped mountains behind her.

Apparently, someone shared the same view.

"It looks like we were indeed wrong." Tilly shrugged. "The wriggling demonic beast we met in the Misty Forest did not intend to go to the Devil's Town, but maybe to this snowcapped mountain?"

"It seems so." Roland looked up. The summit of the mountain loomed against puffs of clouds. The snow on its peak shimmered in the rays of sunlight. "It appears that we have to thoroughly look into this highest mountain in the Western Region."