

Witch 651

Chapter 651: The Auction

Perhaps that was the witch's ability.

Yorko realized that the eldest son of Luoxi family had only heard that a witch would be auctioned, but he had neglected her ability. A dangerous and eccentric ability would obviously reduce a witch's value, as no one wanted to be killed. Whether witches were affiliated with demons or not, they were not commoners and it was very hazardous to buy them off.

But the ability of this witch sounded not formidable. Self-cure was not able to hurt people, instead, it met some curious people's needs, so the price would be unexpectedly high.

"Sir, don't you want to bid a price?" No.76 firstly took the initiative to ask.

"Uhm... wait a moment." Yorko wiped the sweat from his hands, thinking, "Otto said that the Black Letter was money, but how much is it worth? 1,000 or 2,000 gold royals? If the witch's price turns out to be much higher than his Black Letter's worth, will the Black Money admit the deal? What if they ask me to pay the extra money?" A series of questions occurred to him and made him feel extremely anxious. He did not have even 100 gold royals, let alone 1,000 ones.

At this time, the bidding competition started to slow down. Each rise would be kept about 10 gold royals and intervals became longer and longer.

"1,260 gold royals!"

"Is there a higher bidding?"

Yorko knew that he would lose the witch if he kept silent.

He gritted his teeth, thinking, "If the Black Letter was maxed out, I'll show the Black Money my identity as the Ambassador of Graycastle. They won't dare to hurt a country's messenger. After that, I'll let Otto pay the extra money tomorrow morning."

"Bid, 1,500 gold royals," he said with a deep voice.

"Yes," No.76 raised her right hand instantly and said, "1,500!"

Hearing that, all the guests began to stir.

The significant rise of nearly 300 showed the buyer's resolution to get the witch. Besides, it also gave implications to other bidders that they need not bid anymore. Since only the wealthiest and most powerful people could get the invitations of the Black Money, it was much more important for the bidders to keep a good relationship than to bid a replaceable entertainment commodity. Under such circumstances, the other bidders usually would stop bidding.

He hoped that he could utilize this bidding technique he had learned from Denise to make other bidders stop competing with him.

However, he did not get what he wanted.

"1,800!"

A new bidding voice came out of the crowds instantly.

His heart abruptly sank.

The same jump bidding trick meant that the bidder was also as determined as him to buy the witch.

"Sir?" No.76 asked.

"2,000." Yorko tightly clenched his teeth.

After his guide said the price, the other bidder continued to raise his bidding price, saying, "2,300!"

Damn it! This price was crazy even for a witch with self-cure ability. In the slave market, a top female slave with good looks and excellent skills was less than 100 gold royals. With that much money, one can get a dozen of them, with worrying about violating the laws of the Kingdom of Dawn. Isn't that better than buying a witch?

With these thoughts in mind, he turned to look, and to his surprise, he noticed that the guide who had spoken for the other bidder was a male.

"A guide is decided by the bidder's gender, right? So the other bidder is a lady? Why does she want to buy a witch, just for watching?" Yorko indignantly asked No.76.

"What you've said about the choice of a guide is true, unless the guest has special needs," No.76 nodded and then asked, "Do you want to raise your bidding price again?"

"You raise 200 gold royals each time until she gives up."

Yorko decided to buy the witch at all costs. He did not believe that the other bidder was richer than the three families of the Kingdom of Dawn. After all, this was what Otto had asked him to do. If there were any trouble, Otto would take care of it.

As they were competing, the other guest whispered to each other, showing great interests in this scene.

When the bidding price amounted to 4,000 gold royals, the other bidder finally stopped bidding.

But the price was five times higher than that expected by Otto.

"4,000, the first time!"

"The second time!"

The host said steadily and slowly, which made Yorko even more anxious. He felt a desperate urge to replace the host to strike the small hammer that was used to decide the price.

Luckily, the nightmare-like bidding voice never sounded again.

"The third time and it's a deal."

Yorko took a deep breath and leaned on the bench, feeling his back soaked with sweat.

"4,000 gold royals...This witch costs a fortune that I can't make in my whole life. This is how the great nobles spend their money?" At this thought, he suddenly felt that his licentious life back in the king's city of Graycastle was nothing but a joke.

His guide smilingly said, "Sir, congratulations! No.10 commodity is yours now!"

People sitting around him all looked at him with respect, as he had just spent 4,000 gold royals on a short-term consumable commodity.

In the Kingdom of Dawn, wealth stood for identity.

Regardless of the anxieties and concerns during the auction, Yorko was very pleased to undergo this wonderful experience, because, for the first time, people fixed their eyes on him out of respect instead of contempt.

Yorko enjoyed this feeling for a long while and asked, "Are the following commodities all slaves?"

"Yes, except the last one. It's said to be a very rare thing that costs the Black Money lots of efforts to get," No.76 replied.

"You don't know what it is, either."

"Yes, my boss wanted to emphasize its mystic quality by doing so. He only told us that it's an ancient relic embedded with magic stones," she replied.

"So it can shine? You've told me that there aren't any magic stone to be auctioned," Yorko twitched his lip and said.

No.76 explained. "There's not only one kind of magic stones. Some stones can't shine, but they're the best-quality jewelry, such as the Blue Star sold out at the price of 3,400 gold royals six months ago. It was a magic stone that can't shine, but in the dark, you can see numerous shining stars inside it. It was much more precious than common gemstones."

"And it's far more expensive than common ones. What a beautiful magic stone could it be, as it's sold out at such a high price?" Yorko thought and could not help feeling curious. Now that he had finished what Otto had asked him to do, he planned to leave the rest of the time here to the eye-opening commodities which he could brag about to Denise.

However, seeing the last item on the auction, he felt quite disappointed.

It was a sword.

Four colorful gemstones were inlaid in the handle. He wondered whether the host was going to introduce it as a piece of jewelry or a weapon.

The host started to brag about it. He claimed that it had been found in an ancient monument located in the Impassable Mountain Range. Based on the wall paintings around the place where it had been found, the sword had belonged to an excellent warrior. She had been able to use it to change astronomical phenomena, and her enemies had been demons from the hell. Yorko laughed at these ridiculous words. "It would be more practical to sell those four gemstones alone. The host should not advertise the sword other than gemstones."

The sword was auctioned with a starting price of 50,000 gold royals, which made all the guest burst into an uproar. As a result, no one wanted to bid and this round of auction ended in a haste.

"Where's the witch I've bought?" Yorko shifted his attention from the auction into the witch. He touched the thigh of No.76 and asked, "Has she been put in my room?"

"Of course, Sir." No.76 chuckled. "The Black Money has arranged everything for you, so this way please."

Chapter 652: The Witch and Accident

When they were leaving the dark limestone cave, the guide held Yorko's hand and they walked straight into the cave with ease.

Yorko could hardly see the ground, but the guide did not even slow down. Moreover, he could feel that No. 76 was no weaker than himself. The bumpy calluses on her palm totally did not match her slender body. Other than serving the guests, she was probably also be treated as a guard for the underground exhibition. It would be nice if such a person could be purchased from "Black Money" as cultivating one was not easy.

Although Hill Fawkes looked smart, he definitely would not follow him forever as he was still the man of his old friend. Not to mention that it would be a little... boring for a man to be his guard. It would be more appropriate to replace the man with No. 76.

Of course, Yorko was simply thinking about it. After all, the Black Letter did not belong to him and 4,000 gold royals were far more than Otto's budget. Spending an additional amount of money privately would probably cause a fall-out with the Luoxi family, which was one of the three families.

After entering the cave, Yorko realized that most of the channels were naturally formed and the light of the torch seemed brighter due to the narrow terrain. Moreover, the dark sky could be faintly seen through many of the shafts at the top of the cave. The crisscrossing paths led into the deeper limestone caves where some were already transformed into hotels, while others were hung with barrel signs, just like an underground town.

It seemed necessary to arrange a guide for each customer or it would be very time-consuming to even look for a room.

"By the way, how do I pay for this auction?" Yorko softly asked while there was no one else around.

"You can simply pass the invitation letter to me before you leave the underground, after you confirm the goods are fine," No. 76 said with a smile, "I'll complete the rest of the procedures for you. You can also visit our pub, casino and hot tub. 'Black Money' provides any services, both for fun and relaxation."

"Is all the money written down in the Black Letter?"

"Yes."

"What if someone wants to buy the guide?"

"You just need to pay 500 gold royals to 'Black Money'," No. 76 smoothly answered as if she was accustomed to such questions and asked, "Sir, do you want to buy me?"

"Getting along is not about how long we've spent together, but how much fun we've got," Yoroko avoided the question and said, "what do you think?"

"You're right." She chuckled.

"Anyway, may I see what you look like?"

"No way," No. 76 shook her head and said, "Unless you buy the guide, the guide isn't allowed to privately take off their mask. It's the rule of 'Black Money'."

"But you mentioned that you can provide any services..."

"Of course," No. 76 touched her red lips and flirtatiously said, "it doesn't hinder me from serving you, sir."

Yoroko felt even more excited.

"We're here. This is your room." No. 76 brought him to a wooden door at the end of the cave carved with 'No. 76', the same as her number. "The room is divided into the inner room and outer room. I'll sleep in the outer room tonight. You can call me whenever you need anything."

Yoroko lifted his eyebrows and asked after he opened the door, "This is the outer room?"

The cave was narrower in the front and wider at the back, and the outer room was only big enough to accommodate one person. It was probably similar to sleeping in the stable, as the ground was only covered with a layer of wheat-straw.

"After all, it's difficult to find a suitable room under the ground." The guide indifferently waved and opened the second room door for him.

Additionally, the inner-room was not spacious either. It could not accommodate anything other than a big bed and two soft chairs.

"Mmm! Mmm!"

Yoroko saw the witch he bought from the auction once he walked into the house. She was firmly cuffed by the iron hoops on the wall with both her arms and legs opened wide while her mouth was stuffed with a piece of clean white silk. She struggled with fear once she saw that someone walking in.

He was immediately scolding "Black Money" in his heart while twitching his lips twice. He thought that the house was at least divided into several compartments with a cage especially used to imprison the slaves, but it turned out to be so shabby.

"How could I enjoy a long night with No. 76 in this case?"

"Performing a live porn in front of a witch?"

"Give me a break. It'll be even worse than directly doing anything to her." Yoroko frowned even deeper when he thought of Otto's order to earn the witch's trust.

"Does 'Black Money' have other rooms? I mean those with extra charges," he helplessly asked.

"Considering some of the customers have higher requirements of the room, we also offer the semi-open houses which are closer to the ground and rooms next to the underground river."

The way that businessmen make money was indeed outrageous.

"How much is the cheapest room?"

"Three gold royals per night."

"This price is enough to pay for a half-a-month stay at the hotel in the inner city of the King's City." Yorko unspokenly criticized. "However, this amount is nothing as compared to 4,000 gold royals. Otto Luoxi shouldn't mind. Consider it as a processing fee."

"You go out and wait for me for a moment," he pondered for a while and said, "I have something to talk to the witch about. I'll call you when I'm done."

"Yes, sir," No. 76 said respectfully and left the room.

As Yorko took off his coat and walked toward the witch, she struggled even harder and looked terrified.

He sighed while covering her body with his cloth and said, "Listen, I'm entrusted by someone to come here to save you. As long as you don't make any noise, no one is going to hurt you. Everything will be fine. Please nod twice if you understand."

The witch stopped struggling and stared at Yorko for a long while as if she could not believe what she had just heard.

The ambassador had to repeat it as softly and slowly as possible. The witch was very beautiful, but the childish little girl was really not his cup of tea.

She finally nodded this time.

Yorko was relieved and he reached out to remove the silk cloth from the witch's mouth.

"Who're you?" she asked after coughing slightly.

"Someone who has come to save you," Yorko sat down on the bed and asked, "do you have a name?"

"Amy," she paused and said, "Why don't you release me if you're here to save me?"

"What if you run away? I don't have another 4,000 gold royals to buy you again if you get caught," Yorko opened his arms and said, "You'd better be chained for safety and it'll prevent raising any suspicion. I'll set you free tomorrow after we leave, okay?"

"Really?" Amy suspiciously asked.

"She's so gullible. No wonder she was discovered and reported," he quietly thought. "She's lucky to bump into me this time."

"Not only that, I'll introduce you to a place where the witches gather. There are a lot of companions waiting for you. You don't have to keep hiding," Yorko stood up and said, "So, you just need to patiently wait until tomorrow. Do you understand?"

"Hold on, where are you going?"

"I'm going to enjoy a sweet night, of course." He grinned.

When Yorko was just about to call for No. 76, There was a sudden noise in the outer room along with the noise of heavy items muffling. It happened very quickly and the outer room returned to silence after a few seconds.

"No. 76?" He probingly asked but no one answered.

Chapter 653: An Unexpected Guest

Damn it!

Yorko was not sure what had happened outside but it definitely would not be good.

"Is 'Black Money' not supposed to be a regular auction, organized by the powerful local businessmen except for the goods being illegal?" He cursed Otto for 10,000 times in his heart. "The auction price was first wrongly estimated and now someone is coming for me. I wouldn't have agreed with him if I knew it would turn out like this."

Yorko looked around and tried to find something to defend himself, but there were no weapons in the room except for some tools to torture the slave.

At this moment, someone pushed open the door and nipped in.

Yorko knelt on the ground without any hesitation and said, "Please spare my life! I'll give you anything you want..."

However, the person did not stop but pounced towards him.

After he finished saying, he subconsciously held his head down and leaned to one side, hoping to dodge the attack.

"No, Annie!"

Amy shouted at the same time.

The cold wind that swept by his cheeks suddenly stopped along with Amy's voice, Yorko tilted his head and noticed that it was a wooden stick, which looked like it was broken off from the chair.

He would probably immediately pass out if he was really beaten.

Then, he was pressed onto the bed from the back after he was grabbed by his shoulder and held up high by a big hand.

"Did he hurt you?" The voice sounded a bit hoarse and it was difficult to distinguish between men's and women's.

"He said... he's here to help me get out of here."

"You've been cheated again, Amy," she said while shaking her head. Then, she twisted Yorko's arms to his back and expertly tied them. "Saving a strange witch with 4,000 gold royals? It's not a small amount of money. It's a lifetime of savings even for your father."

"Aye... Is, is that so?"

She was really the one who was bidding with Yorko as she knew the auction price so clearly. However, how could she recognize Yorko and follow them all the way to the room No. 76 when everywhere else was dark other than the bright displaying booth in the limestone cave?

Yorko knew that it was about his life and his persuasion this time would be for himself instead of his old friends or damn Otto.

"I didn't lie to her! I'm the Ambassador of Graycastle, and saving the witch is the king's order!"

"Ambassador of... Graycastle?"

Yorko knew that this approach worked when the hand that was holding him down from the back slightly shook.

"Yes, have you heard of Roland Wimbledon? The fourth son of King Wimbledon III, King of Graycastle who's especially kind to the witches! He firmly believes that there are no differences between the witches and ordinary people, and he even fought against the church in order to allow the witches to freely live in his domain! These're all true, I swear!"

Annie might not know who was Roland, but the news that the church was defeated by the Kingdom of Graycastle in Coldwind Ridge was indeed well-known among the people in the city of Glow. He even knew that the news was spread by Hill Fawkes and his assistants. The church had always been the greatest enemy of witches, it was likely that whoever defeated the church would win the witch's kindness and respect for whatever reasons.

The hand that was holding him down on his back was a lot more relaxed as expected. And then, he had been turned over and pulled up from the bed. Yorko could only see the attacker's appearance now.

Annie... was probably a woman but she looked extremely handsome and her body was exceptionally burly even when it was covered by a cope. Both her dashing eyebrows were slightly pointing upwards and her narrow eyes looked energetic. Her hair was tied up into a high-ponytail and her forehead was clearly shown. Yorko would believe that she was a man if her voice was deeper; however, her look made him a little jealous.

"In this case, why didn't you unlock Amy's lock latch?"

"It's the same question again..." Yorko had to repeat the previous statement again. "It's for the sake of her safety. It'll be even more dangerous if she doesn't believe me and sneaks out."

"Where are you going to take her?" Annie, who was obviously not as easily persuaded as Amy, was doubting Yoroko's statement. "Giving her to the King of the Kingdom of Graycastle?"

"Of course... not." He quickly changed his words after saying half-way. "My old friend doesn't treat witches as slaves. There were a lot of witches living in his domain like the normal people and they even formed an organization to specialize in protecting the witches' right."

"Enough!" Annie angrily interrupted.

Yoroko quickly shut his mouth. He heard all these from Hill when they were talking. He heard that His Majesty curbed the disease spread by the church with the witches' help during the outbreak of demonic plague in the king's city. It was obviously a good thing, but Yoroko was not sure why Annie did not look so happy about it.

"It sounds just like the Bloodfang Association," Annie coldly said, "They used to promote themselves in this way as well."

"Blood... what?" Yoroko startled but his heart sensed something wrong.

"Witches can only believe in themselves, not the noble's promises." She scanned the room and quickly found the key hanging on the wall.

"Wait, are you bringing her with you?" It's underground here. Don't you see the guards outside the cave when you came in? How're you going to get out?"

You don't have to worry about it. I have my way." Annie unlocked and released Amy. After that, she grabbed Yoroko and locked one of his foot on the verel.

"You really don't want to think about it?" Yoroko got bolder when he realized that Annie was not trying to kill him. He was trying to convince her for the last time while he obediently let Annie lock him up. "It's more appropriate for me to bring her out and I'll give her to you when we leave the courtyard. It'll neither easily raise any suspicion nor causing any problem in this case."

"It does sound great, but it's also possible that I'll be welcomed by swords and God's Stone instead," Annie remained unmoved and said, "I had made a big mistake because of my credulity before and it won't happen again."

After Yoroko was firmly locked, Annie dragged No. 76 in. She tied both her hands to her back and locked one of her foot as well.

"Why didn't you kill her?"

He could see the blood stained on No. 76's head, who was apparently badly beaten up and still currently unconscious. However, she was still alive judging from the slight movements of her chest.

"It'll not be too late for me to kill both of you after I rescue Amy." Annie's words made Yoroko shivered.

"But I'll not kill you now as we perhaps owed the King of the Kingdom of Graycastle a thank for defeating the church. However, it doesn't mean that I'll believe him unconditionally."

"I'll bring your words to His Majesty. Besides, you can come to the embassy to look for me if you need any assistance." "Of course, it's best not to as we can also save a lot of effort," Yoroko quietly thought to

himself, "and it may be for the better as I've tried my best. Even my old friend can't blame me as I can't force them if they're not willing to go to the Kingdom of Graycastle."

Annie turned around and stared at him for a long while before she carried Amy and left the room.

Chapter 654: The Compensation of [Black Money]

"Hey, are you okay?" Yorko pushed No. 76 with the other foot, but the latter was completely unresponsive.

He sighed, drew close to her, and then picked up the coat on the ground with his mouth to cover both of them.

"Forget the romantic night. Just suck it up for this single night."

After such unexpected turns, he found himself surprisingly calm. The underground auction, the 4000 gold royals he wasted on a witch, the public attention he drew, and then the attack of the witches... Over one night, he experienced more than he had ever experienced during the past twenty-some years of his life.

"Hmm.. this thrilling and stimulating feeling seems not to be as bad as I imagined?"

Of course, Yorko would never agree to experience it once again.

He had a fitful night. It was already noon the following day by the time they were found by a servant of the "Black Money".

Then Yorko was quickly transferred to a spacious and comfortable room. Not only was he served soft bread and freshly squeezed juice by the servants, but he was checked by the maids from head to heels as well, even including his manhood between his legs.

Also at his request, Otto Luoxi, who had been anxiously waiting outside, was taken into the limestone cave.

"What happened?" As soon as Otto saw the Ambassador, he asked eagerly, "I heard that you got injured."

"I need a private minute with this gentleman." Yorko dismissed the servants sent by "Black Money" before describing the whole story in detail, "I was almost killed because of you. It was so close! I nearly lost my life! Fortunately, they found I was so kind and tender to the witch that I bought at the auction. If it were someone else, he would certainly be dead and cold now!"

Complaining had been an ace up his sleeve, which brought him good fortune in the Kingdom of Graycastle for many years. Even if he could not get any practical benefits, at least he could make others feel guilty or sympathetic for him, which he might take advantage of in the future. Otto seemed to be so worried now, so he would certainly do something to compensate him.

As expected, Otto appeared very uneasy and said, "This happened due to my negligence. I will certainly compensate for it after we go back."

"What about the 4000 gold royals?"

"The witch escaped from your room. That's the territory of "Black Money", so I guess they won't charge you for the auction."

"Then didn't you save a lot of money?" Yorko teased, "you saved the witch, and at the same time made good use of the Black Letter."

"The black letters will be re-made for each exhibition, so I can't say it's wasted or not," Otto forced a smile and said, "but it did save us the gold royals."

Yorko suddenly remembered what No. 76 had whispered in his ear.

"You just need to pay 500 gold royals to Black Money."

"Sir, do you want to buy me?"

Compared to 4000, 500 seemed to be a more reasonable number. Perhaps he could let Otto pay again as the compensation for the shock he experienced.

Yorko cleared his throat and prepared to speak when the bedroom door was pushed open. A man with a silver mask came, accompanied by two attendants. He appeared to be quite old, as his dark brown hair was mixed with white hair. He wore a loose silk robe with a particularly eye-catching black dragon head logo on his chest.

"I'm in charge of the exhibition. You can call me Silvermask," he said with a slight bow, "'Black money' apologizes for what happened to you. Fortunately, you were not injured in the accident. We have begun to investigate how the witch fled, and we'll inform you once we found her whereabouts. We won't deduct the payment from the Black Letter unless you still want the witch when we capture her."

"Ahem... I see," Yorko cleared his throat. After all, he, instead of Otto Luoxi, was the one who bought the witch, so he had to continue to feign his interest in her, "Don't give her to anyone except me. The 10th round will always be valid."

"As you wish."

"By the way, I wonder how the attacker got in the exhibition."

"These villains hijacked other visiting guests. At an outskirts house, we have found two other victims who were robbed of the Black Letter," Silvermask replied.

"More than one villain?"

"Yes, this was a premeditated act," he nodded. "We didn't expect the witch has other accomplices, or that they dare to launch a raid under King of Dawn's intense search of witches. Did the villain who hijacked you leave any clues?"

"Well... No, she fled after hearing that I was the Ambassador of Graycastle." Yorko shrugged and said, "Haven't the 'Black Money' ever thought of a more reliable way of checking the identity? If anyone can enter just by an invitation letter, I am afraid it is not the first time that this kind of thing happened?"

"You're definitely right," said Silvermask with laughter, "but it's also the charm of 'Black Money'. Compared to the risk, people prefer to get their favorite goods without revealing their identity. Of course, when issuing Black Letter, we will carefully consider our clients, including how much they care about the Black Letter and their ability to keep it. No matter how the two hijacked men got the Black Letter, they certainly won't have a second chance to get invitations."

"Alright," said Yoriko, shrugging. "So how did she escape from the underground cave? I remember there were many guards in the passage from the cave to the yard, and she could not possibly get out while carrying an injured witch. Is it possible that they still hide somewhere in the cave, waiting until you're off guard?"

Silvermask shook his head, "They crept out of the vent. Several iron bars were burned, which should be caused by a witch's ability."

"So this is the escaping route prepared by Annie. And it seemed that more than one witches participated in this rescue. Otto did everything for nothing." "In that case, there's nothing you can do about it," said Yoriko. He then pretended to ask casually, "how's my guide now?"

"She'll be severely punished by 'Black Money'. As a guide, it's her responsibility to protect her distinguished guests. She's no longer qualified for this position."

"Can I see her?"

"Do you mean... you want to punish her personally?"

"No," Yoriko looked at Otto. "I want to buy her."

"But she's already a prisoner of 'Black Money'," Silvermask said hesitantly.

"500 gold royals? I'll pay it with the Black Letter."

"Wait a minute... Mr. Ambassador?" Otto asked in surprise, "what guide?"

Yoriko pressed Otto's hand but did not answer.

Silvermask nodded after a moment of silence, "I see. If you insist, we'll give No. 76 to you as a gift."

"A gift?" Yoriko was first stunned and then felt very pleased.

"Since she can no longer be a guide, it's a better choice to give her to you. Just take it as the compensation of 'Black Money' for this accident," Silvermask bowed again and said, "I hope we can meet here again."

Chapter 655: In the Depth of the Limestone Cave

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Holding the Stone of Lighting, Banach Lothar walked step by step toward the depth of the Black Money.

It was such a steep ramp that he had to stumble along it even with the help of his servants.

"I've finally become old." Sadness suddenly appeared in his heart. Since he was 20, he had taken over the family business and had created a giant Chamber of Commerce which was rich and powerful. His struggle and excitement during those years were beyond description. Even if he only received an honorary title as a knight, his reputation and status were not lower than that of the three noble families in the Kingdom of Dawn.

However, it did not mean that his great achievement could be passed down to future generations. In fact, as the scale of the Chamber of Commerce continued to expand, the foundation was already at stake. In those days, in order to consolidate the strength of the Chamber of Commerce, many large businessmen, even the upper noble, were invited to join the chamber. When he was alive, they might be reliable supports or worthwhile tools, but what if he passed away? Would they be willing to stay in their current position?

There was hardly any need to answer this question.

Banach had five sons and one daughter, among whom the most outstanding one was his fourth son, Victor Lothar. Even though he was only 21 years old, he had shown extraordinary business talents. But at this age, he could not overpower those crafty partners yet. The Chamber of Commerce was not the private property of the Lothars; therefore, if he forced them to accept Victor to take over his position, he was afraid that he would face strong oppositions.

By that time, the Chamber of Commerce would be broken into pieces, and what was worse, his children might lose their lives.

What if he abandoned the giant chamber he had created in his whole life? Banach was indeed unwilling to do so.

Pondering over this, he suddenly slipped.

"Sir, watch your steps!" The servants around him immediately held him on his arm.

Banach stumbled about a few steps before he managed to stand steadily.

Obviously, his body had lost the vigor of youth.

He was already 69 years old, and how many times could he try to walk along such a steep ramp? He had to hurry up.

Once he thought of the promise given by the Oracle, flames of hope were lighted in his heart again.

Only after he became one of them, could he solve this seemingly insoluble problem forever.

Gradually, the ramp downward became flat, and the air became moist. Banach faintly heard the sound of the undercurrent hitting the rock like continuous thunder, dull and solid. Honestly, he did not like such a place, which was secretive enough but gave no sense of security. He always feared that one day the water would crush the cave walls and completely engulf the cave.

In fact, quite a few similar cases had already happened in this cave group. Several tunnels had turned into deep pools due to the flow backward of the undercurrent and eventually had to be closed. The Black Money only occupied a small part of the cave group. If Banach had enough time, he could even make it into an underground city.

When he arrived at the bottom of the ramp, the light instantly became bleak. The Stone of Lighting was still shining, but it was no longer bright enough for him to see the rock walls on both sides, as the size of the cave suddenly increased several times larger.

The sound of the undercurrent became extremely loud. It seemed that a branch was passing underfoot.

In the deep cave, two yellow flames were shining in the distance. They were the guards sent by the Oracle to pick him up.

"OK, stop and wait here."

"But Sir, it's still a long way..." the servants said with worries.

"That's all right. I have to walk the last part of this road by myself," Banach slowly said.

The servants dared not to persuade him anymore due to his years of authority, so they just said, "Yes, Sir, please mind your steps!"

After leaving the cave hole, he carefully walked to the center of the cave. The cave at the bottom of the limestone cave group was very strange, which was shaped like an island. It was surrounded by bottomless gullies and the central bulged Rockhill was connected with the ramp by a narrow stone bridge. When he walked through the bridge, he was surrounded by darkness while the Magic Stone could only illuminate as far as several dozen meters. If he were not directed by the yellow light at the end of the bridge, Banach would even feel as if he was walking in the abyss of hell, and the roaring sound of water at the feet was the whining of the ghosts and evil spirits.

Mist gradually rose around, and the scope of the light was further reduced due to the too much water vapor. He knew he had to be particularly careful, as green moss was likely to grow on the bridge. If he had slipped down from the bridge, even the Oracle could not save him.

In the moist air, Banach Lothar finally reached the central stone island.

He was panting when the guards of the Oracle turned to walk backward and said, "Come with me. Master Oracle has been waiting for you for a long time."

Having no time to complain, he took a deep breath and followed the two guards' footsteps.

The top of this isolated island-like Rockhill was about 100 paces wide, and the place to meet the Oracle was located within the Rockhill. Before stepping on the rock stairs around the hill, Banach noticed that behind the limestone cave there was an extremely spacious cave which echoed with the ramp he had met earlier to form a straight line. That cave was larger and much closer to the Rockhill. In the light of the Magic Stone, he found that it was a standard round cave and its edge was very smooth as if it was carved by men.

If he guessed right, the guards of the Oracle entered the Kingdom of Dawn through these underground passages.

When he finally entered the Rockhill, he had been too tired to stand straight.

Fortunately, the Oracle would not mind his posture when meeting him. The guards brought a soft cushion and asked him to sit down in the stone room which covered about 10 square meters. Then they drew the heavy cloth curtain to block the sound of the undercurrent.

"Are you ready?" One of them asked.

"Yes, please allow me to meet Master Oracle." Banach wiped the sweat from his forehead. Though his body was exhausted, his heart was full of expectation.

At these words, the Stone of Lighting on his hand suddenly flashed, and so were the magic stones in the hands of the two guards.

Then the three magic stones were extinguished in turn, and darkness enveloped the stone room. As it was not the first time that he had seen such a scene, Banach did not feel surprised; instead, he was full of amazement and awe at the power of the Oracle. Soon a purple light curtain rose from the ground, turning the darkness around into a different view.

It was also the deep underground, but red lava flowed beneath it. Countless rivers of flames gushed from the rock holes and converged at the bottom to form a cobweb-like picture. Above the flames was the body of the Oracle, a giant sarcoma hanging on the rock wall with numerous plant-like roots. The tangled epidermis bulged rhythmically as if it was breathing hot air.

It had neither eyes nor mouth, but it could see and talk to him by directly echoing in his mind.

This was the real appearance of the Oracle.

It did not need to transform into a human figure because itself meant extraordinary.

Banach Lothar respectfully lowered his head.

Chapter 656: The Oracle and the Chosen One

A female voice directly appeared in Banach's mind. "Please feel free to talk to me. What happened above?"

Instead of speaking, he only needed to whisper in his heart to give the answer. He found that although this way of communicating was hard to get used to in the beginning, it was actually a faster and more effective way. Meanwhile, he also found it harder to lie in this way.

Banach told the oracle what had happened through his thoughts. "Holy oracle, something unexpected happened. They didn't accept the invitation from Ambassador of Graycastle. This is my mistake. I didn't expect that it would be so hard for them to drop their guard."

The oracle did not blame him but said wistfully, "it's hard to predict what people are thinking. Do you have any remedial measure?"

"They've got to accept the ambassador's invitation. It's just a matter of time." He paused for a moment. "Because of His Majesty Appen Moya's new policy."

"Tut... common man."

Banach was startled and asked, "what can I do for you, holy oracle?"

"I don't like this witch removal policy. Can you guarantee that nobody will be hurt?"

"I..." Banach did not know what to say, because he knew that once this policy was implemented, it would be inevitable that some witches were caught or even killed. Given that the oracle had only ordered him to drive the witches to go southwards into the Western Region of Graycastle without ensuring the safety of their lives, he thought it would be none of his business to care about how many would survive during the journey.

"Is this what you think?" The oracle raised her voice in a sudden. All her tentacles wriggled and the underground hot lava started to surge, showing her anger. "Don't forget what I said. Before the doomsday, every witch is crucial!"

From the way she reacted, Banach gathered something had gone wrong and then realized that he had been talking with her through the thoughts. In this way, everything he thought would be directly transmitted to her. He quickly explained, "no, holy oracle, I remember every word you've said. I don't want to hurt anyone innocent, either, but if I do it that way, it'll take a longer time and require rearrangement of my people. After all, not everyone has the courage to defy the king's rules and at the same time keeps this secret."

The oracle quickly replied, "I'll send my guards to help you. How long will it take?"

Banach breathed a sigh of relief, as he had witnessed those guards' abilities. Generally speaking, knights were not able to compete with them at all, and some less capable ones could not even see their movements clearly. If two or three guards fought together, they could easily defeat 20 to 30 knights, which also showed the extraordinary power of the oracle.

"I can complete the third step of the plan in two weeks."

"All right, just do it."

"Holy oracle..." Banach hesitated and continued. "Are the witches that important? Do the deities only bless them? In terms of wealth or power, I'll make a better—"

The oracle interrupted, "a better choice for the Chosen One? You've got no idea. Neither wealth nor power will be useful when the doomsday is approaching. The deities are looking for a savior who knows how to use the divine power instead of a secular spokesman. Common man, you're helpful, indeed, so when the mission is completed, I'll give you an appropriate reward, such as immortality, but you also need to recognize your own position."

Banach knew about the doomsday. Every 400 years, a bloody moon would appear in the sky and then the Gates of Hell would open. Demons would come swarming out of the gates, slaughtering the human beings across the continent, and the person who could resist these cruel enemies was the Chosen One. Today, he knew more about the Chosen One through the talk with the oracle. She seemed to be searching for someone who can directly connect to the powerful deities and this someone must be a witch.

Not wanting to give up now, he asked again, "but... are you sure that the Chosen One was definitely among the witches in the Kingdom of Graycastle?"

The oracle remained speechless for a while, which was an unusual thing. After that, she said, "no one knows the answer. This is just another try, and we've tried this for many times in the past hundreds of years."

"What if we still can't find the one this time?"

"We'll keep searching until the doomsday when the human world is completely destroyed."

Thinking that it would be meaningless to become immortal if all the human beings died, Banach smiled bitterly and promised, "I see, I'll do my best to complete the task."

All the sarcoma's tentacles danced simultaneously, which indicated that the oracle was content. "Here's another thing I want to ask... Is the church really defeated?"

Since the news that the church had suffered a crushing defeat had reached the Kingdom of Dawn, the oracle had paid particular attention to this issue. She had even ordered Banach to send his men to the Coldwind Ridge to confirm it.

"Yes, at the foot of the Coldwind Ridge, the battlefield looked as if it had been trampled by demonic beasts, with deep pits and trenches everywhere. Around it stood thousands of grave mounds. According to the locals, they were built by the King of Graycastle. He had bought all the dead bodies of his soldiers back to the Western Region and burnt and buried all the church's dead people at the spot. Merchants who came back from the Hermes Plateau told us that prosperity had already left the Holy City and there was only a dead silence in it."

Hearing this, the oracle's voice instantly turned soft. "This is their end..." After a moment, she quickly recovered and said, "that's all for today's conversation. I'm tired."

"Yes, holy oracle," Banach bowed and said.

The underground scene went out like ebbing tides, quickly leaving them in darkness. The Magic Stones flickered several times and then lit up the stone room.

Everything that had happened was just like a dream now.

A guard came up to Banach and gave him a porcelain bottle, saying, "here's the medicine for this time. Drink it. Holy oracle was very pleased with your recent work."

"Th-Thanks, your holy oracle." With great excitement, Banach took the bottle and swigged down all the liquid inside it.

Right after this, he felt a warm torrent flow out of his stomach to rejuvenate his whole body. This medicine could make him feel dexterous and quick in action, but this effect would not last for a very long time. It could not make him live longer, either. Based on what the oracle had said, it could only improve his health and relieve fatigue and restore the body's vigour in a short time. She had said that before he was bestowed immortality, he needed to take this medicine to mend his weak body. Otherwise, the great pain during the process of turning into an immortal would tear him into pieces.

Her honesty in telling him the truth about this medicine further strengthened his faith in her, as he believed that if this was a fraud, she would only need to offer him this magic medicine whose rejuvenating effect could attract lots of noble men and wealthy merchants like him.

Three years ago, he had had to move around sitting in a wheelchair pushed by a servant. Now, at least, he could stand and walk on his two feet. This was the improvement the medicine had brought him.

He was confident that if he could get immortality after completing the mission the oracle had given him, all the knotty problems he had now would be solved smoothly.

He lifted the curtain door and walked toward the rock stairs of the hill with his back straight and his head held erect.

Feeling totally different from the time he had walked to the stone room, now he felt energetic even in the humid cold winds. His steps were steady, and the roaring underground river sounded like horns encouraging him to move forward.

Chapter 657: A Secret Shared by Two Girls

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Roland poured himself a cup of tea and looked at Nightingale. "Would you like some?"

"Yes, thank you."

Lying on the couch, she was reading a newly written play by May with great interest. She was holding the book with one hand and a piece of dried fish with another hand.

Since Anna had talked to her, she had disappeared for two days. When she returned, she looked relieved, free and easy, as she had been before. Since her return, Roland felt that she kept smiling at him and sometimes peeped at him with eyes full of vitality.

Took what she was doing now as an example.

She put her feet on the tea table and moved her robe to one side, revealing her long slim legs in black tight stockings. She did not avoid him at all and would only conceal herself when someone else came into the office. This attractive posture made it hard for the prince to focus. He could hardly stop his eyes from involuntarily moving to the side sometimes. As a result, he had not finished even a single blueprint in the first half of the morning.

He complained in his heart, "I knew I shouldn't have asked Soraya to paint these stocking-like leg warmers."

He took a cup of delicately fragrant tea to her and said, "here's your tea."

She put down the book and took the tea with both hands. She sniffed at it and said, "ah... nice tea. Could you please add a lump of sugar for me?"

He found that she enjoyed both salty and sweet food, and no matter how much she ate, she would never get fat. When he had been in his lethargy, she had lost lots of weight and looked much thinner than before, but after he had woken up, she had quickly gotten back her normal weight. Her weight seemed to have an upper limit. When she reached it, she would stop gaining any more weight.

He had nagged her to stop eating too much or she would get fat, but now he realized that was not a problem for her at all.

He added a lump of sugar to her teacup and returned to his desk. After painting several strokes on the paper, he still could not stop himself from being curious and said, "Nightingale..."

"Uhm?"

"What indeed... did Anna tell you?"

"Well..." She nimbly slipped out of the couch and instantly appeared on his desk. "It's a secret."

"Can't you even tell me?"

After a little hesitation, she shook her head and said, "no, I've promised Anna. If it's just about me, I'll tell you whatever you want to know, but this is not... She asked me to keep it up my sleeve for now."

"Well, I see." Roland took a sip of his tea and stopped asking. He could go to ask Anna directly, but as a person of normal EQ, he knew he must stop mentioning this thing repeatedly.

At least, from Nightingale's reaction he could tell that Anna was not angry.

When he picked up his quill again, Nightingale suddenly said, "thank you."

"What?" Rowland was stunned and looked up, his gaze met hers.

In the warm autumn sunshine, her long blonde hair shone, her skin glowed and her face looked exceptionally beautiful. Time seemed to stop at this moment.

"Thank you for telling her what I feel."

...

In the afternoon, good news came from the Ministry of Construction. Neverwinter's first converter steel mill, a steelmaking facility recently designed by Roland, was completed at the North Slope Mountain.

Despite that it was called a steel mill, it looked more like a simple iron shed with a large new equipment in it. Different from all the previous furnaces, this equipment was made of pure steel, supported by an angular grate and covered with heat resistance coating. Its surface was dark gray and dull, making the machine look towering and thick in the sunshine.

When Roland arrived at this new Furnace Area with his City Hall officials, this new furnace had been surrounded by a large number of curious experienced workers.

"Your Majesty, can this stove make steel? It doesn't even have a fire place." Lesya of the Ministry of Construction had asked the same question, but he had still built it up in strict accordance with Roland's design. This converter's components were all processed by Anna. With Hummingbird's help, their heavy weight had not caused any trouble during the construction which was finished in just a week.

Roland smiled and said, "in the nature, fire isn't the only thing that produces heat. Let the workers get ready for the equipment's first test run."

Roland had compared three most frequently used steelmaking facilities, open hearth furnace, converter, and electric furnace. He had firstly ruled out electric furnace because of the lack of necessary conditions and decided on a converter after a long and thoughtful consideration.

With the simplest structure among the three choices, an open hearth furnace was similar to a traditional smelter in terms of operation, but it also had a significant drawback in energy consumption. It required a huge amount of fuel in steel making, which would definitely pose a threat to Neverwinter's limited supply of energy resources. Given that its coal mines were located far away at the source of the Redwater River and that its coking plant was just put into use and could barely meet the demand of the blast furnace iron smelting, adapting open hearth steelmaking would soon lead to an acute shortage of fuel.

Choosing a converter would avoid such a problem, as it hardly cost any fuel. It kept the liquid iron at a high temperature to continue the smelting process, using the heat generated by the oxidation of impurities contained in pig iron, such as manganese, silicon and carbon.

The other shortcomings of an open hearth furnace included occupying a too large area and a long smelting time. To make the best use of fuel, a regenerator should be built for an open hearth furnace to heat the air in advance, and making each batch of liquid steel would took this facility over half a day. By comparison, a converter took up less room, as it needed no additional device and its orbit could double as a transmission line for the liquid steel. It also worked more efficiently. Each of its smelting process only took dozens of minutes and this smelting time could be further shortened to 15 minutes when the technology was mature.

In view of these two points, Roland decided to choose converters as the main facilities for Neverwinter's steel production.

The workers used an steam engine to put a batch of crude iron ingots into the furnace shaped like a pear.

"Anna, make a fire."

She nodded and walked up the stairs to the top of the converter. She summoned her Blackfire to melt the Iron Ingots into liquid iron in a short time, and the hot red liquid soon lit up her face.

He planned to use the liquid iron produced by the blast furnace for this steel mill in mass production. That was the reason why he built it here in the Furnace Area.

He said to the leader of the steelmaking team, "now, follow my instructions. Insert the blowing pipe into the furnace mouth."

This was the first time for them to use a converter, but for these experienced workers who had operated similar equipment, controlling this pipe was as easy as controlling a trailer. In the booming noise of the steam engine, a steel pipe slowly fell into the furnace from the top.

The other end of the pipe was connected to a coated flexible tube which led to an air pump driven by an steam engine. When the oxygen-rich air was inhaled into the converter, raging flames sparked to life at the furnace mouth. Orange sparkles splattered from the furnace, looking like fireworks. Glaring white flames made it hard for people around to open their eyes.

All the officials marveled at this spectacular sight.

Roland got a sense of fulfillment, feeling the hot air blowing on his face.

He saw these flames as an emblem of human beings' entering a new era.

Chapter 658: Dreams and Steel

As the liquid iron rolled over and over in the converter, the silicon and manganese in it were oxidized first after which it was the turn of the carbon in the pig iron.

At a temperature of nearly 1,500 degrees, the carbon reacted with the oxygen in the air, producing carbon monoxide and a lot of heat which made the liquid boil in the furnace. The flames gushing out of the furnace mouth almost enveloped the blowing pipe and the grate. That was why Roland made them coated with heat resistance coating.

A large amount of hot carbon monoxide were forced outward. It mixed with the air outside and burnt violently, looking as if the furnace were set afire. The noises caused by gas expansion even drowned the booming sounds of the steam engine. As this scene easily evoked an image of an erupting volcano, all the people moved backward simultaneously in fright, except Roland who still stood in the place, with both of his hands behind his back. He faced the strong hot winds, totally besotted with the awe-inspiring roars of the surging steel liquid.

He thought it was a pity that he could not use pure oxygen in this process at present due to technological limitations. Otherwise, the flames would shine even more brightly.

When oxides of phosphorus and sulfur, which were the last elements that were oxidized, reacted with limestone and became furnace slags, the flames began to dim and the liquid iron became molten steel. As the furnace slags were lighter, they were floating on it. The workers could pour the liquid steel out through the steel-tapping hole by tilting the furnace as easily as pouring a cup of tea.

To prevent the slags from entering into the steel ladle, a modern steel mill would use a slag-stopping ball, a slag-stopping spear or infrared detection, which was beyond Neverwinter's technical capacity. Given that, Roland came up with a simple solution which was not pouring out all the liquid. He instructed the workers to erect the furnace when there were still some liquid steel in it, and then he asked them to dump all the left liquid steel together with the furnace slags. As he was not pursuing productivity efficiency, he did not care about such a little waste. Besides, when he collected enough wasted liquid steel, he could put them back into the furnace to make steel again.

To ensure the quality of the steel, the last step was to eliminate excess oxygen in the liquid steel.

The alumina poured in Neverwinter from Longsong Stronghold could make excellent deoxidizers. A bucket of pure aluminum extracted by Lucia was added to the liquid steel, and soon aluminum oxide furnace slags and excess liquid aluminum started to float to the surface. At this moment, the whole steelmaking process was accomplished.

Seeing the bright molten steel being poured into the mold and turning into steel ingots, all the officials of City Hall were too stunned to utter a word.

In this era, people usually relied on blacksmiths to hit on the hot iron repeatedly for a long time to produce steel, and a whole set of steel armors would be treasured as a family heirloom. No one had seen that steel could be made this way. "Star of Steel" had been able to produce lots of steel, but it was run by magic powers. They all knew that without Anna and Lucia, it could hardly produce anything.

However, this time was different, as converter steelmaking required no magic power but common workers. They realized something after witnessing this whole manual operation.

They were clear that they could not create another "Star of Steel", but they could certainly build more converters and train countless workers.

Given that, steel was no longer a rare material. A huge amount of this solid metal would be produced at the foot of the North Slope Mountain to replace those soft and fragile materials, such as wood and bronze.

Roland was happy to see the surprise and excitement on the officials' faces. He believed that they would not be excellent leaders if they were not thrilled by this brand new steelmaking process. Common workers might only be amazed by the steel ingots in front of them, but the officials should see the changes and the future brought by this new technology.

By now, Neverwinter's coal & iron compound manufacturing industry had been formed. Mining, ironmaking, steelmaking and steel-casting processes could all be completed by common people. With a fast-growing population and a rapidly expanding education, Roland now felt that he could hear the steel wheels rolling over the ground, ushering in a new era.

As to the quality of this first batch of rolled steel, he decided to let Lucia check it. After that, he could base on her results to adjust the air blowing time and to improve the slags removing methods. He felt good seeing this achievement.

...

However, he did not want to have a rest after that, as he still had lots of work to do with the memories he retrieved in the Dream World.

As he had completed all the primary textbooks, he planned to search for some professional books on machinery. He needed high-performance processing equipment as Neverwinter would soon be able to produce a large amount of steel. Those simple machine tools he had made previously could hardly process some high-end products, such as Longsong Cannons, heavy machine guns, and grenade fuze.

Where could he find those books?

He believed that the library of the school was the place he should go. It had been said to be a place full of romantic encounters, but he had had none during all his visits to that place when he had been a student. Despite that, he had really read lots of books there, including many on mechanical design.

After dinner, he went to bed early.

As traveling in the Dream World could not count as a rest, he would be very tired for the first day in that world. Besides, it was impossible for him to take an afternoon nap in his apartment there without an air

conditioner in hot weather. Under such circumstances, he had to sleep early and save energy for his activities in the Dream World.

Waking up in that world, it was still a clear sunny morning in the midsummer.

He looked at his mobile phone at the bedside and saw a dozen missed calls. He touched the screen and found that all of them were from secondhand goods dealers. They had also sent him many text messages.

"Hey, bro, do you have any more armors? One of my friends wants to buy some to shoot a film. If you do, call me."

"I can offer you a higher price this time, 700 yuan. How's it?"

"The price for the swords will also be increased by 200 yuan. I'm a true pal, right? But don't sharpen the blades. Otherwise, that's way too scary."

"If you're unsatisfied with the prices, we can talk about it."

"Come on, bro. Could you give me an answer?"

Roland slid to the last message. It was from his bank, telling him that the remaining balance of his account was 3,600 yuan and 1,500 yuan of it was remitted by Zero's parents as her living expenses.

The money could support him for quite a long time.

He tapped with his finger to delete all the messages and put on his T-shirt and shorts before going into the living room.

At this moment, Zero was still in bed.

Not wanting to wait for the little girl to wake up and make breakfast, he directly walked downstairs and found a small rice noodle restaurant in the lane.

He sat in it and said, "a big bowl of rice noodle with shredded meat, please."

"Yes!"

He thought that as he had money now, he must give himself a treat which was not available even in the king's city of Graycastle. After all, the kingdom had no rice at all.

Soon, a steaming bowl of rice noodles fresh from the pot was served for him. While eating the breakfast, he looked at the apartment building.

By now, he had only visited the secondhand bookstore and the small Internet Cafe two blocks away, busy with making money and memorizing books. This was the first time for him to have leisure to sit down and observe the residents of the Apartment of Souls.

Chapter 659: Rules of the Dream World

Apparently, the Dream World had accepted all the losers in the Soul Battlefield, as no one in this world found it strange seeing their various hair colors and different facial features.

For example, Roland himself had long gray hair, light gray eyes and a straight nose with a high nose bridge, which would attract all the attention when he walked in the streets of the community where he had lived in modern times.

However, in this world, all these strange looking people lived just like the common ones. On their way to catch buses, young men were rushing about with their newspapers and briefcases under their arms, while chewing deep-fried dough sticks. Elderly people gathered in twos and threes on the open space in front of the apartment building. Some were moving their limbs and doing their morning exercises. Some laid out Chinese chess boards, ready to play with their friends.

The chirping of cicadas, the city noises and the sounds of morning reading, babies crying and hucksters shouting were all wafted to his ears by the morning breeze, creating a characteristic symphony of the tube-shaped apartment building.

Roland cherished the scene which was full of life.

Right at this moment, a woman running along the lane was getting near to him.

Seeing this woman, Roland nearly dropped his chopsticks involuntarily. To his great surprise, she was Garcia Wimbledon.

She tied her hair up and wore light sportswear, baring her white thighs and hanging a towel around her neck. Her sweat had soaked her collar and pinpricks of sweat covered her arms. She must have been running for quite a long time.

He was more surprised seeing all the people in the lane fixing their eyes on her and some even whistling at her. These people looked so excited as if they were looking at a star.

However, Garcia did not give a fig to the crowd. She continued running through the lane as fast as the wind and disappeared into the corridor entrance of the apartment building.

"That's Garcia!" someone in the rice noodle restaurant exclaimed.

"Now you believe what I told you. If you get up early, you'll get the chance to see her. As long as the weather is good, she'll run for an hour here."

"It's the first time for me to meet a TV star."

"She looks much better than on TV."

"Oh yeah, Garcia will have an important match very soon."

"I'll support her anyway. I hope that she'll win the final."

"Of course, she will. She's such a genius!"

Everybody was talking about her, leaving Roland dumbfounded. He wondered why all the residents here were so familiar with Garcia and what the match they were talking about was. He thought, "is she a rising sports star or something?"

To confirm his guess, he took out his wallet after drinking all the remaining soup in his bowl and asked the owner when he came over to clean the table, "what was going on? Is that woman famous?"

The owner looked at him in disbelief, saying, "you're not living here, right? Who in this Tongzi Street doesn't know Miss Garcia?"

Hearing this, he became even more curious and said to the owner, "I've just moved in recently. What does she do?"

"She's a martial fighter!"

"Pfft." Roland nearly spat in the owner's face. "Ahem... what?"

"Come on, go to watch TV by yourself. She's the most famous person in this area, and it's because of her that we can continue to live here."

"Why?"

The owner pointed somewhere behind Roland and said, "look there."

He turned around and noticed something he had missed when he had come here. On the wall opposite to this restaurant, there was a big word saying "Removal".

"House removal?"

"Yes, some development company has long wanted to pull down the whole Tongzi Street to build a new skyscraper here. That company said that this block was too old and unsightly for a downtown zone. Bullshit, it's clearly a cultural relic building!" The owner sighed while searching his bag for Roland's change. "Those guys want to relocate us all to the suburbs. If Garcia didn't expose their plot on TV and gain wide support for us, the developer would start to drive us away at this moment."

Roland's mouth twisted. "That's really... an outrage."

"That's why all of us support Miss Garcia." The owner smiled and tamped the change into his hand. "Since you're now a member of the Tongzi Street, you'll become her fan soon!"

...

Roland understood that the Dream World might use some incredible methods to piece together irrelevant memory fragments, but what had happened just now was too bizarre to believe.

What's a martial fighter? Some new Olympic event?

And demolition of Apartment of Souls? No kidding! All the doors connected to the memory fragments are here in the building, and so is the creator of this world!

And I have to thank my elder sister for making it possible for me to live here?

With complicated feelings, he returned to his No. 0825 apartment, and Zero happened to get out of her bedroom with sleepy eyes.

Her hair was in a mess and her dress was wrinkled. One side of the dress's neckline dropped down, revealing half of her shoulder. She said, "uncle, you get up? I'll go to make breakfast right now."

"No, I've had breakfast and I bring you something to eat."

He put the omelet, steamed pork dumplings and milk he bought on the table and then turned on the television.

With a puzzled expression on her face, she sat by the table and asked, "why do you get up so early recently?"

"I told you that I got a job, so I can't sleep late in the morning anymore. You parents remitted your living expenses to me, and my company paid me my first month's salary. We don't have to worry about money for now."

"Use your money wisely. Who knows how long will it last. Besides, we haven't finished the food stored in the refrigerator yet." Having said that, Zero still quickly devoured her breakfast.

Roland asked her, "by the way, do you know Garcia?"

She twitched her mouth and said, "of course, sister Garcia is such a talent. She joined Martialist Association at the age of 20, and I heard that she held an unbeaten record in the preliminaries. All my classmates regard her as an idol, but I think it's boring to watch this kind of fighting matches on the stage. "

Though he was a little bothered by the fact that he was called uncle while Garcia was called sister, he still put this aside and focused on what he wanted to investigate. Based on what the little girl had said just now, the martial fighters in this world even formed their own organization.

He asked, "are there... many martial fighters?"

"There are only a few." Zero darted a look of disapproval at him. "Uncle, please stop thinking about it. Not everyone has such a talent. Only those awakening with Force of Nature will get the chance to become martial fighters, and awakening is just the basic requirement. Without determination and perseverance, even an awakened talent will become a puppet of some great power and bring troubles to the people. "

"Uhm... how do you know so much about them?"

"Our teacher told us. He also said that as compared to imagining ourselves becoming martial fighters, we'd better do more exercises and try to become useful people for the community." She went to the bathroom to get washed and then walked to the door carrying her schoolbag. "I've got a full day today, bye."

When Zero left, Roland opened his hand, feeling the strange power in it.

Is this Force of Nature?

His interest in the Dream World increased dramatically. The "puppet of great power" somehow reminded him of a magic power bite. He wondered how this world integrated all the devoured memories and what the rules behind it were.

He had planned to go to the library of the school.

However, now he had a new idea.

Chapter 660: Manifestation of Power

Roland spent the whole day searching every TV channel.

He watched several martial arts fighting programs. Different from the traditional fighting matches, this kind of competition was held in an arena as large as half of a football field. With no judge in the arena, the fighting was extremely intense. It was not a rare thing to see the fighters break the floor in the heat of a match, and loud sounds like muffled thunders could be heard when the fighters exchanged blows, which were like special effects added to this match.

In terms of competitiveness and charm, it was indeed better than boxing and freestyle fighting. All the martial fighters fought in a literal sense, with no rounds being counted for them and no half-time intervals interrupting the competition. No wonder the audience would get so excited watching this kind of fighting. Roland could not help but knit his eyebrows whenever he saw a martial fighter spit out blood or get massively injured, thinking, "these martial fighters really go too far. Aren't they worried that they'll die before they get the chance to spend their competition bonuses?"

Those matches aside, what he was most interested in was still the martial fighters themselves.

They obviously had much greater physical strength than the common people, and the Force of Nature seemed to give them some special abilities other than just improving their power or speed.

Each of such abilities would be given a special title which would be promoted as the martial fighter's nickname. For example, in the show Roland was watching, there was a man named Hurricane. His nickname was Mighty Storm, as he could punch numerous times at a super high speed in a second.

Roland was surprised by this propaganda method which would clearly show the trump card of a fighter to his or her opponent before the match began.

He was even more surprised when he saw a demon in this fighting match.

It was a typical Mad Demon which was tall and had big arms. As it wore no mask nor iron gloves, all the audience could see its fangs and three-fingered hands, which were obviously not human features. However, no one seemed to be scared and the commentator referred to him as a foreign martialist.

Roland was amazed by this weird and powerful Dream World again.

To rationalize the existence of the demon devoured by Zero, this world even made it a racial minority. Roland could not help but wonder what would the hybrid demonic beast become in this world, and then quickly thought of Lifts-her-tail who was full of vigor.

When he heard his own stomach growling, he suddenly noticed that the sun was setting.

He could not help frowning.

Zero usually came back long before this hour.

He had read her diary and knew her school was located at Zhongshan Road. It was only three kilometers from this apartment building. If she took a bus, she could get home in 10 minutes. Her cram school was over at 5:30 pm, but now it was 6:15 already. He got a little worried, "anything happened in her school?"

After a thought, he decided to get out to buy something to eat first.

He thought she might be hanging out with her friends right now. As in a summer day, it was not going to get dark until 8:00 pm, she probably went to a park or some game room to play with her friends.

Given that, even if he came to her school right now, he would probably not meet her there. As her landlord not her nanny, he did not want to be nosy.

She's just a little girl. No matter how hardworking she usually is, sometimes she may also want to relax.

So I'll cook... no, I'll buy today's dinner for us.

Right at this moment, the image on the TV flickered and the martial fighting broadcasting was changed into The News Studio.

"Good evening, viewers. Now, we interrupt our programs for a newsflash."

Holding a stack of papers in hand and with a worried look on face, the host said, "a No. 29 bus was hijacked at Zhongshan Road. The hijacker had a knife. Now traffic police have sealed the road. We warn all the city residents living in that area to avoid going out for now. We'll broadcast follow-up reports on the most recent progress of the case."

After that, it was swiftly switched to the crime scene on the TV. Roland saw a big crowd gathered outside the police cordon, who showed no inclination to leave.

Wait, isn't this Zero's regular route?

At this thought, his heart sank in a sudden. Is she abducted?

That was not good news to him. He was worried what would happen after the death of a key figure of the Dream World like Zero. Based on his other dream experiences, when subconscious failed to rationalize a thing, it would stop working. To avoid causing such a trouble to the subconscious, he was even reluctant to delve into Zero's family background.

He was afraid that when the subconscious stopped working, he would wake up and forget everything happened in the dream.

He did not want to finish this dream before he dug out all the information in his deep memory.

More importantly, he would be able to know more about the real world if all the residents of the Apartment of Souls had doors connected to their memory fragments as he guessed.

It was also possible that Zero's death would not change the Dream World, but he did not want to take this risk.

Now that he had this strange power surging inside his body, he decided to go to the crime scene to help.

After he left the Tongzi Street, he ran all the way through the busy roads, feeling a warm flow circulating inside his body. Surprisingly, he did not feel tired and could easily control every part of his body while running at a high speed. He dodged all the pedestrians with agility and arrived at the spot in merely eight minutes. He felt this three-mile long-distance running was like a 100m Sprint.

Out of his expectation, when he finally squeezed himself into the crowd, he found that the hijacker was already captured. In a flood of tears, he was telling the reporter that he just did this on the spur of the moment. The crowd responded with boos and catcalls and then quickly left. Traffic police began to clean up roadblocks, getting ready to restore the traffic.

With his mouth corner twisted, he complained in his heart, "who says that policemen always come after the problem is solved."

Besides, he did not see Zero in the hijacked bus. He sighed inwardly, "it looks like I've run all this way for nothing."

When he was about to leave, he heard a vague call for help coming out of a narrow lane on the side of the road.

He was startled and looked into the lane. At this moment, the sun did not completely fall behind the mountains, but the lofty buildings on both sides of the lane blocked all the light. It was dark inside. He saw nothing in it.

Was that an illusion?

After several minutes, when he slowly walked past the entrance of the lane, he heard the weak voice again.

There must be someone inside!

I should ask the police for help.

He turned around, only to find that all the policemen had got into their cars with the hijacker and were driving away. It was too late to stop them now.

Should I pretend that I've heard nothing?

However, he clearly felt something inside the lane was attracting him.

The moment he had got near to the entrance of the lane, the warm flow in the body had started to surge. It felt like an uproar or an excitement, which urged him to get in.

He stepped into the narrow lane.

After his eyes quickly adjusted to the very weak light inside, he saw nothing but a man who stood with his back toward him.

"Are you calling for help?" Roland asked, frowning.

The man did not answer or turn around. Instead, he rotated his head 180 degrees to look at Roland. Seeing this movement, he sucked in a breath of cold air.

He was even more shocked seeing the man's face.

With black skin and lots of blisters, it seemed as if it were burnt. A dark red cyclone shining in the dim light was twirling on his forehead.