

Witch 671

Chapter 681: The Preparation of Sleeping Island

Sleeping Island in the Fjords.

As the winter approached, the sea breeze swept through as the island became colder. Tilly could hear the sharp howling when the cold wind blew through the gap even with the window closed.

Not many people would stroll outside the house at this time. However, there were always celebrations in the square of Sleeping Island with a grand bonfire that lasted for several days and pots of boiling hot fish soups. The witches had transformed the square into a lovely paradise with their abilities.

Tilly also wanted to join the carnival and share the joy of the church's defeat, if only she did not have so many things to deal with.

The witches' life had changed radically since she brought the news back. It was not the change of their living conditions but they had become mentally different. Everyone seemed to have their burdens lifted off their shoulders with more vivid eyes while they had clearly looked and spoke more freely and comfortably.

They finally did not have to live in fear and worry anymore. The stress that had been pressing on them had finally broken down and the densely-gathered clouds disappeared. Their enthusiasms could not be dispersed even by the howling cold wind.

"This is probably the 'liberation' Roland mentioned," Tilly thought.

This was when Camilla Dary, the Chief Butler of Sleeping Island came into the house after knocking.

"Your Highness, I've completed the preliminary statistic for the witches who're willing to go to the Western Region," she said while sitting crossed-legged opposite of Tilly and she put a list down on the low table, "and almost half of them have signed up to help the Western Region."

"Really? It's better than I expected. You've done a good job." Tilly smiled and nodded while picking up the list to take a detailed look.

Regarding the relocation to the Western Region, Princess Tilly had told the witches that they could go to support the construction of the city of Neverwinter in order to withstand a greater catastrophe, which was the Battle of Divine Will.

In order to make sure everyone voluntarily made their choices, Tilly did not hide the facts about the witches' empires, the Union, and the demon. She had told everyone that the church was only part of the Union and that the real enemy of the human beings was the demons instead. They had no mercy or pity, so helping the Western Region was also helping themselves. Of course, she also made it clear that they could live a peaceful life on the island, if they did not want to leave.

She had initially thought that many sisters would decide to stay on Sleeping Island as they might be intimidated by the new enemies or they had become fed up of dealing with the common people or they had doubt about the uncertain future. However, the statistical results showed that nearly half of them

had decided to help. The demons that they had never seen were far less scary than the church and the witches' wish for the broader outside-world had not extinguished.

"They're interested in Prince Roland who defeated the pope and wanted to see how the lord who eradicated the witches' enemy looks like." Camilla helplessly sighed. "And, most importantly, your elder brother also gained a lot of extra points for himself with this identity and they had transferred the same trust they have in you to him."

"You seem worried."

"Of course, he's a noble and a common person after all. He's fundamentally different from us... And, to be honest, blood sometimes can be a hurdle to the benefit." The chief butler frowned and said, "Your Highness, I'm neither questioning your decision nor saying that your brother is a hypocrite, but what if... I mean what if what he seeks is in contrary to the interests of the witches, and kill us like the other nobles?"

"I understand your concern, this decision was made after my repeated consideration." Tilly put down the list and held Camilla's hand. "The witches may be different from the common people but we all have the common goal under the threat of Battle of Divine Will which is to stay alive. Why not we take this opportunity to integrate into the world while forming an integral community of interests with the common people rather than completely dodging it? As our abilities go deeper into all sectors, Roland can't leave the witch's power even if he regrets and wants to cancel the agreement with Sleeping Island."

"However... will he let go of his control on us?"

"Based on what happened in the past six months, Roland did not seem to impose any additional restrictions on the witches. Otherwise, the Witch Union in the Western Region would not be supporting him without holding back." Tilly smiled. "And, I believe in my instincts more than these general principles."

"Instinct?"

"Yeah... I don't think he'll do that," she slowly said while tapping the table.

Camilla hesitated and finally laughed as if she was surrendering. "Thinking about it now, your instincts are never wrong since I knew you."

"It'll be the same this time." Tilly smiled.

"I understand, Your Highness. I'll finish the preparatory work for the witches' relocation as soon as possible," the chief butler said with a hand covering her chest.

"Thank you."

Princess Tilly was clear that Camilla who was born as a noble had lost her confidence to the noble as she had seen them stop at nothing to get powers and interests. However, she did not know that Tilly could feel that Roland was obviously not simply a traditional noble through her deeper contact developed with Roland. Roland treated everyone differently, not only the witches as compared to the noble. She

called him "brother", not because of the relationship between her and the previous Prince Roland, but she simply liked this kind of barrier-free and unbiased relationship.

When she talked to Roland, she could always feel relaxed and comfortable which she had not felt for a long time. She believed that the other witches also felt the same.

"Oh yeah, I recently heard some bad rumors." Camilla changed the subject.

"What's the rumor?"

"It's about the news you brought back. Some of them think that they should also imitate the Union and create an organization with witches as the superiors to regain the glory of their ancestors since the witches had once created a huge empire that rules all the common people."

"The source?" Tilly lifted her eyebrows and said, "Is it the witches from the Bloodfang Association?"

"No... they believe in loyalty to the strong. The Western Region could defeat the seemingly invincible enemies, and Iffy, Softfeathers, and Nightfall further confirmed them in this belief. The combat witches were the first to register to go to the city of Neverwinter." Camilla shook her head. "I've surveyed and the source should be some other witch organization."

The witches in Sleeping Island were a large aggregation which was similar to the Witch Cooperation Association in Seawindshire. There were a few scattered groups other than the Bloodfang Association. These groups were generally built to evade the church's arrests and to help each other before Tilly's appeal. However, they did not have the power of Bloodfang Association and they had rarely gossiped about her policies.

"I understand." She nodded.

"Do we need to talk to their leader?"

"No, let them be," Tilly said, "and they'll naturally understand that the Union has become history when they reach the Western Region. And, a completely new path is waiting for us."

Chapter 682: A Never Lonely Road

After Camilla Dary left, Ashes stepped out of the study.

She sat on her knees on the rug, hands stretching out to Tilly, and said, "come here."

"I'm fine..."

"Don't pretend to be okay. There are no other people." Ashes interrupted her.

Tilly twitched her lips and finally moved her body. She thrust herself into Ashes' chest, back facing her.

Hearing the strong heartbeats of Ashes coming through her clothes like rhythmical drumbeats, Tilly felt calm and reassured.

"Thank you," Tilly said softly.

"Don't push yourself too hard. If we make a wrong decision, the worst scenario is that we go back to the Sleeping Island." Ashes gently smiled and said, "If you leave, I'm sure Roland Wimbledon won't stop you, for you have all the witches in the Witch Union backing you up." She paused for a while and continued, "besides, you don't need speak so resolutely. In this way, you don't need to suffer such great pressure now."

Princess Tilly shook her head and said, "I must be convinced before persuading the other witches to trust me. If I'm somehow hesitant and confused, the decision will go nowhere."

Though she appeared to be very confident in the decision, she was still a little concerned. She was not worried about Roland. In fact, he had expressed his attitude when he had agreed to continue to use the Sleeping Spell to manage the immigrated witches. She was only concerned about two things. After living an exclusive life for nearly two years, could those 300 some witches smoothly fit in Neverwinter? When the Battle of Divine Will was over, would common people change their views about witches?

These were unknown risks and also the problems Tilly had to think about. In the eyes of the other witches, she looked very confident and spunky, but only several witches understood her concerns. After all, from now on, she had to bear responsibilities for over 300 witches, not just for herself. It could be said that all the witches on Sleeping Island felt more relaxed after the church was defeated, except her, for her responsibilities were even greater.

"Just do what you've thought." Ashes embraced her from her back. "The immigration won't start until the end of the next Months of Demons. If you still feel worried, you can spend the remaining months conducting a thorough investigation."

"Is the Charming Beauty ready to sail?"

"Anytime."

"Don't forget your textbooks and exercise book. You can learn some new knowledge on the way."

"Uhm...If I read books in the cabin, I'll be seasick."

"If you want to protect me, you have to become stronger than this. For example, you can try to be a legendary Transcendent... How can you be stronger without studying?"

Ashes mumbled agitatedly, "OK, ok, I got it."

"Don't worry. If there is something that you can't understand, you can ask me at any time. You should know that I have nothing to do on the ship."

"Yes, yes, yes. As you wish, Your Highness."

"Fortunately, I am not alone anymore." Tilly thought.

No matter what will happen to them afterward, someone would always accompany me.

"Yeah," Tilly replied her. She closed eyes and felt the warmth coming from her back. It felt like her heavy responsibilities were greatly reduced.

The wind was still chilling outside the windows while the inside was warm like in spring.

To establish a Joint Chamber of Commerce was a complicated matter, for each treaty needed repeated amendments. Roland left it to Barov and Edith and then turned his attention to the winter operation plan.

Undoubtedly, Months of Demons of this year came much later than that of last year. Today was the last day of late fall, but there were no signs of snow, except for a grey sky outside the windows.

It was good news to Neverwinter. The later the Months of Demons came, the more residential buildings would be built by the construction team.

Based on the reports of City Hall, the Western Region was richer in all materials this year than past years, especially in grain. The Stronghold Area had yielded ten times higher grain than the average amount of the past years. Luckily, Petrov had built grain storages in time and half of the wheat was sent to the Border Area, as the stronghold could not house such a large amount of grain.

With enough grain, he felt more secured to do anything.

Besides, there was enough ammunition. After Anna had improved the new generation machine tool and processing machinery, they were first used to process and load bullets, so the productivity had enhanced a lot. At the same, the shortage of bullets after the battle with the church was pretty much filled.

Due to the fact that he had enough grain and weapons, Roland could not help thinking of other plans.

The First Army took priorities to prevent demonic beasts and guard Neverwinter, but it seemed a waste to have thousands of soldiers all in the city. After all, most of demonic beasts would attack the big breach of Hermes while only a small part of separated beasts would attack one side of Misty Forest. Additionally, the firepower capability of the First Army was more than ten times stronger than that of last year. In such a case, some common demonic beasts could not even approach the city wall.

Besides, why he was eager to make other plans was that there were no rivals on the whole continent against the First Army, not even demonic beasts. When fighting against Duke Ryan, he had had to spare no efforts and used all guns and cannons. But now, he just needed to dispatch a team of 500 soldiers, and they could defeat all knightage who dared to directly confront them.

So when an army defended the city wall, he could also dispatch another unit to open a second battlefield. Was it possible to be a way of reducing the burden of next year's expedition?

Roland found it not a tricky question. As before when Months of Demons came, endless heavy snow completely blocked the entire Western Region. However, since Neverwinter had dozens of cement carriers, land transportation was no longer a problem. Further, the First Army could also utilize Redwater River to transport soldiers and materials to their destination.

As long as he made a good plan, Neverwinter could be totally capable of winning two battles at the same time. "Ah, it sounds somehow a monopoly."

After receiving Hill's letter, Roland ordered the Northern Region to be ready for a war. That was not a bluff. If the King of Dawn, Appen Moya, indeed neglected his warnings and arrested the messenger's

party, he would have to change his plans and take the priority to force Appen to free them. However, a cross-border war required a considerable logistic support. If there were fewer soldiers, they could not continue fighting. Plus, Hermes Plateau which was guarded by the church would fall apart at any time. Therefore, it was not an appropriate time to declare a war to a neighboring country at this moment.

But luckily, the delegation arrived safe and sound, so he could target a place closer to the Western Region.

"Your Majesty, did you request to see me?"

As the door of the office was open, Iron Axe strode in.

"Are you interested in returning to your hometown in winter? If you go back now, it won't be so hot there yet." Roland spread out a very roughly-drawn map of the Graycastle and pointed to the bulging corner in the south. He smiled and asked, "I remember that both you and Echo come from the land of the desert?"

He wanted to conquer the Southernmost Region in winter, the habitat for Mojin Clan.

Chapter 683: The Desert Plan

"Your Majesty, do you plan to go on an expedition of conquest to Southernmost Region?" Iron Axe's ever peaceful face showed a rare agitation. "But the Months of Demons are drawing near..."

"How many soldiers do you think should be left in Neverwinter to tackle the swarming demonic beasts?"

"Well..." Iron Axe deeply inhaled to suppress his agitation. "Judging from the number of demonic beasts from last year, 1,000 soldiers would be able to guard the city wall."

"So to be on the safe side, 2,500 soldiers would be sufficient to guard the city. Besides, a new round of recruitment has begun, which will safeguard Neverwinter," Roland said, and then walked to the French window, "so tell me about Southernmost Region. You should be the most familiar with the people there."

"Yes, Your Majesty." Iron Axe saluted. "Over a half of the land in the Southernmost Region is composed of yellow sand. Oases are scattered along the western side of the desert along Silver Stream. Over 90% of the Mojins live amongst those oases. There's a city built on top of the biggest oasis, which is also the only city in Southernmost Region—Iron Sand City."

"So Silver Stream is a river?"

"It could be counted as half a river." Iron Axe explained. "Most of it is buried underground, just like an underworld Styx's River; the parts that appear above the ground have formed oases. For this reason, the Mojins also call it the River of Life."

Roland turned around, asking curiously, "Where did it come from? Judging from the map, there were no high mountains or lakes near it."

"It originates from the sea, so it's a gift of the Sea God." Iron Axe walked to the desk and pointed at the juncture of the west of Southernmost Region and a piece of green land. "There's a huge limestone cave located here where the sea water constantly flows backward into. One could feel the trembling underneath the feet when standing on the ground."

"Do you mean Silver Stream originates from the sea? But it has bred oases."

Since it breeds oases, it means Silver Stream is freshwater—seawater contains too much salt, which makes it unsuitable for irrigation or drinking. So what Iron Axe said did not make sense.

"Mother Earth absorbed the salt in the seawater. White salt residue can be seen on the ground all over that area, which also isolated the grassland of the Kingdom of Graycastle. When people need salt, they only need to lift a bucket and scoop the salt from the ground."

"Is this the superb craftsmanship of nature? The dirt underneath the yellow sand filtered the salt and made the area into saline-alkali soil." Roland could not help but exclaim. It seemed that besides petroleum, now he had one more sort of resource to exploit.

"How many residents are there in Iron Sand City?"

"Around 40,000."

"Even more than the old king's city of Graycastle?"

"Your Majesty, the city of the Sand Nation is different from the king's city." Iron Axe smiled. "There's only one nuclear urban area which provides residence for the power-holders of the six clans. The surrounding areas are filled with tents or thatched cottages. After layers of extension, the city became the way you see it now—as soon as one steps onto the oasis, one enters the domain of Iron Sand City."

"Then how about the Mojins that live in other oases? There should be quite a few of them, right?" Roland asked. Human resource was the key to quickly convert the local specialty into a practical resource. But it was unlikely that he would send a lot of people from the city of Neverwinter to mine petroleum, so he had to rely on the locals to work for him.

The commander-in-chief nodded. "There are no statistics about it, but I think there are at least 100,000 residents."

Then I could build several mining stations and one pipeline, which should be enough. The next problem would be deciding how to control the residents.

"Well, last time you mentioned the holy duel. What was it about? How did the Mojins determine the right to rule?"

Iron Axe gave a very detailed reply to those questions. It took almost half an hour before Roland finally understood the Sand Nation's ruling structure and succession.

Putting aside the promotions within the clans, strength was the only thing that was considered trustworthy to those aliens who upheld force. The ruling parties in Iron Sand City were usually constituted by six clans who did not get their powers by inheriting but by fighting with strength. But in order to avoid the clans from losing too many of their own whilst pursuing power, which would

consequently weaken their combined strength in the face of external danger, picking a few representatives to duel became their best choice.

Over time, this rule was universally acknowledged over the Sand Nation and was bestowed with a sacred meaning—the big clans which were stationed in Iron Sand City and the newly born small clans that lived in oases all respected the result of the holy duels. Anyone who tarnished the duels would be condemned by all the civilians of Sand Nation.

"Do you mean the prime rulers of the Mojins are the leaders of each clan?" Roland asked in confusion, "Don't you have a figure like the chief?"

"The chief?"

"I mean a leader who rules all the clans, someone like the King of the Kingdom of Graycastle."

"Well..." Iron Axe hesitated. "Among the clans, they used to say that there were two ways that the Sand Nation civilians would obey willingly—one was to get the acknowledgment and blessing of the Three Gods. The other was to open up the unmeasured vastness of oases for the nation to eliminate the overwhelming sandstorm, so as to remove the threats of thirst and death for the Sand Nation."

"The acknowledgment of the Three Gods... How does that work?" Roland asked, frowning.

"In the Land of Fire, one is supposed to offer the sacrifices to the Three Gods who're the Giant Scorpion with Armor that governs the earth, the Unicorn Sea Beast that dominates Southernmost Cape, and the Four-winged Eagle that rules the sky." Iron Axe stopped for a while. "These three beasts appear and disappear mysteriously. They've taken numerous lives yet their dens remain oblivious to the humans. Baits and traps don't work on them—I assume they're some sort of hybrid demonic beasts which might have gained basic wisdom."

"Both ways aren't easy to achieve, especially the second one. To make an oasis out of a desert is almost like the power of God." Roland fell into a deep meditation. By making Echo the chief again as revenge for being framed five years ago won't help much with my integration of the entire Southernmost Region. Although the six clans have different social status, they don't have a direct affiliation, not to mention those Sand Nation civilians scattered in the oases. I have to find a way to make myself the Grand chief of the Mojin Clan.

Besides, I should also consider the way of the holy duel. The First Army probably could defeat the guards of Iron Sand City like smashing rotten wood, but to make the Sand Nation civilians submit to me willingly isn't that easy.

The most suitable way to annex would be by following the rules made by the Mojin Clan itself.

"Can an outsider be invited to attend the duel?"

"That's not a problem," Iron Axe replied with affirmation, "I'm a mixed-blood, but I could also attend a duel representing the Osha Clan. As a matter of fact, brave gladiators are usually well-liked by the big clans. This is also the only hope for the small clans to have a chance at climbing the ranks—if there are three or four brave warriors among their descendants, they have a better chance to get a good rank during the holy duels."

"Is that so?" Roland said with a smile, "That makes it easier."

Chapter 684: The First Winter Snow

Three days later, namely the second day after winter arrived, Barov delivered the message that the Joint Chamber of Commerce contract had been successfully signed.

The result of the negotiation was that Margaret got the dealership of the inner land of the Kingdom of Graycastle; Sunset Island and Shallow Water Town got the dealership of their own lands, Kingdom of Everwinter, and the Kingdom of Wolfheart; Crescent Moon Bay got the dealership of the Fjords islands and the Kingdom of Dawn.

To Roland's surprise, he saw an equation on the contract, which set some conditions into unknown numbers that would be determined according to specific circumstances. In this way, the annual shares could be derived for that year.

"Who wrote this?" Roland asked with curiosity.

"My student," Barov smilingly replied while stroking his beard, "While summarizing the numbers, he found a complex annexed table which could be better expressed by this formula and all three parties agreed with its precision."

"But I remember such a formula wasn't covered by the universal education."

"Didn't Your Majesty start an intermediate class? I bought each of my students a set of maths textbooks and asked them to attend Lady Scroll's class whenever they had time." Barov exclaimed. "I'm too old to catch up with these young fellas at learning, so I had to leave this opportunity to them. If I were 10 years younger, I would carry these materials that Your Majesty wrote and study them all day."

Roland was very much pleased by this flattery. His minister must have had good foresight if he realized that maths could be helpful to finance and administration.

"How about Edith? How did she perform during this negotiation?"

"Just so-so." Barov coughed twice. "Although those merchants were fascinated by her, when it came to the specific trade terms, she clearly showed a deficiency in experience. I guess she had little contact with maritime merchants. After all, the commerce and trade in the Northern Region are underdeveloped, unlike the old king's city where the Treasurer had to attend to visiting the Fjords merchants every day. There was a time..."

"I see." Noticing Barov was starting to reminisce, Roland immediately interrupted him. "Since that's the case, please put more effort into teaching her."

The old minister was startled. "Um, this... Your Majesty, actually she's..."

"It's decided," Roland said gloatingly. Judging from the frequency that Nightingale pinched the back of his shoulder, he knew that Barov was not telling the truth. But he did not meddle with such little snitching tricks among his subordinates, as long as they did not screw things up. "Well, what's the increase in population in Neverwinter? Has it reached our expectation?"

Although there was about one month before the end of the year, since the winter had come, the immigrant emissaries would gradually return to Neverwinter so it led to a drastic reduction of people moving away. The current figure would already determine whether the goal of population increase had been realized.

Once this was mentioned, Barov's face expanded into a smile. The wrinkles on his face were almost squeezed into ravines and the awkwardness also vanished into thin air. "Your Majesty, City Hall has made a calculation. The subjects that immigrated from other places exceeded 80,000, with 50% of them coming voluntarily. If we include the natives of the Border Area and the Longsong Area, the population in Neverwinter has now reached 110,000."

"Oh?" Roland was elated. "50% of them came voluntarily?"

"Most of them were from the center area of the kingdom and the Eastern Region. It was not obvious in spring and summer, but in autumn this percentage began to increase. At this rate, those Rebels who support Timothy will become anxious next year."

This must have been a result of Theo spreading the message of the church's defeat in the Eastern Region, but yet Roland had hoped that those nobles would resist longer. He was looking for an excuse to eradicate them altogether so as to give the Eastern Region subjects a stable and orderly new kingdom.

"Have you made preparations for winter?"

"Yes, City Hall completed preparations two months ago," Barov replied with complete confidence, "The Ministry of Construction had entrusted Miss Lotus to build a batch of cave dwellings between the Impassable Mountain Range and Redwater River, in replacement of the air-leak shanties. We've also hoarded a large volume of charcoal to ensure every civilian gets one basket."

After Roland's repeated emphasis, City Hall had finally gotten used to the slogan of "no one freezes or starves to death" as their administrative goal and implementing it to every policy.

Roland nodded with gratification and said, "Good. Please pass my word to Scroll and tell her not to forget about education during winter."

"Yes, Your Majesty."

"Besides, I plan to wage a minor scale war on the premise, obviously without affecting the normal operation of Neverwinter. My target is the Southernmost Region. When Iron Axe has done the specific battle plan, please coordinate with him to assemble the supplies." Looking at Barov who was hesitating about replying, Roland walked to him and patted him on the shoulder. "Don't worry. I've everything under control."

...

After Barov left, Nightingale showed herself. She asked with bewilderment, "Are you sure this is alright? What he said about Edith was clearly far from reality. One doesn't have to use magic power to figure that out."

"But if I criticize him for that, he may never dare to suppress Edith openly again," Roland said with his hands laid out, "In order to maintain the balance in City Hall, there has to be someone who can restrain the Pearl of the Northern Region. As far as I know, Barov is the only one capable of that."

"But why do you want to restrain her? If she has the capability of managing City Hall, it wouldn't do you any harm."

"Because..." Roland opened his mouth but did not know what to say.

Right, why would I want Edith to be restrained?

Am I worried about her getting too strong?

That's highly unlikely. As long as I'm the king, I could get her replaced with one word. Besides, City Hall isn't allowed to interfere with the army, so even if she controlled all the departments of City Hall, she would still not pose a threat to my throne.

As a matter of fact, since all the employees in City Hall were selected according to the recruitment notices and paid by the treasury, the possible influence caused by replacing a manager would be minimized.

Am I worried that she would go behind everybody's back to falsify my policies?

At least it would not happen in Neverwinter because all the comments on his policies would reach Roland's ears. And since the city's area was limited, messages traveled in real-time.

Before he arrived in this world, check-and-balance was the method that he hated the most. Especially in his workplace, his boss regarded it as the Monarchy trickery, and thus he viewed his boss with contempt. But when he came to power, he began to realize its importance... If Nightingale had not reminded him, maybe he would have become the kind of person that he hated the most.

Indeed, check-and-balance was needed but it should not be achieved by playing the game of powers with another person or several other persons. Instead, it should be regulated by policies, structure and laws. Without violating any of these frameworks, an employee should be encouraged to put his or her ability into full play.

Roland let out a deep breath and curled his lips. He was about to thank Nightingale for her reminder when he realized she was staring outside of the window wholeheartedly.

"Look, it's snowing." She whispered.

Roland looked over and found that countless white flakes silently appeared from the gray sky and slowly descended as soft-footed elves.

The Months of Demons had begun.

Chapter 685: Overwhelming Disaster

Underground Pivotal Secret Temple, the Holy City of Hermes

Tayfun had not slept well for over two consecutive months.

Every time he closed his eyes, the screams of Ayr Archbishop would reverberate in his ears. She had got shot in her stomach by the enemy's weapon and been dragged back by the Judgement Army. All her intestines had been in a mess, and no herbal treatment in the holy city had been able to cure her wound. After two days' struggle, she had finally died in great pain.

Tayfun had become skeptical about the Graycastle's real power when the church's spearhead led by Soli Daal had suffered a sharp defeat. He had repeatedly suggested His Holiness Mayne think twice and do more investigation before the action, but the Pope had remained unmoved and ordered the church's main force to immediately launch an attack against the defense line of Graycastle at the foot of Coldwind Ridge.

He had expected that the church was going to pay a price for this hasty decision, but he had never thought that it would be such a terrible price.

More unexpectedly, the church's elite troop, the invincible God's Punishment Army had also been defeated.

The moment he had heard this unbelievable news, he had coughed out blood and passed out on the top floor of the Tower of Babel.

He had found out more inconceivable things after that.

None of the Pure Witches had come back and His Holiness Mayne had been nowhere to be found after the war. Not until he had taken a bold decision to break into the Pivotal Secret Area had he known the truth from the guards there.

They had told him that Mayne was not the real successor of His Holiness O'Brien and the one who had received scepter and crown from the previous Pope was Pure Witch Zero.

Given that, the Holy City had even lost the Pope at that moment.

Under such circumstances, the only thing that Tayfun had been able to do was to keep this secret underground forever. He had made all the people who had come down here with him join the Pivotal Secret Temple. He himself had started to serve as the Pope temporarily.

In the following month, Tayfun had spent all his time on restoring the order of the Holy City and reading the secret history stored in the Library.

His reading had enabled him to know all the truth, including the secret reasons for hunting and killing witches, the creation of God's Punishment Warriors, the origin of the church and the collapse of the witches' empire.

These records had overthrown his worldview.

He had never thought even in his wildest dreams that the church had been built by witches.

Such a powerful witch empire ruling the whole Barbarian Land still failed to eliminate the demons. What about the church? The God's Punishment Army and the Sigils of Magic Stones we treasure are nothing but a legacy of those exiled ancient witches.

Tortured by these unsettling thoughts, he had quickly fallen into a torpor. After two months which had seemed like two years to him, his face had become heavily wrinkled like the old Bishop and his movement slow like a dying man.

However, knowing that if he fell down now, the church would be finished, he had kept on working and refused to stop.

He had promoted many soldiers of the reserve force as Judgement Warriors and chosen new Archbishops from middle-ranking believers at the fastest speed. He had called on his people to defend the Holy City to the last man, stabilizing the situation at a very difficult time.

However, he himself was clear about all the troubles behind the stable facade. Nothing could rapidly compensate for the loss of the God's Punishment Army. The young soldiers from the reserve force could hardly compete with the experienced warriors in terms of fighting capacity. If it was during peace-time, he would get a chance to make up for the loss; but now Months of Demons were approaching, if he could not stop demonic beasts, the church would have no future.

To survive the coming Months of Demons, he planned to assemble all the nobles' troops in Wolfheart and in Everwinter to defend the Holy City in the same way the Four Kingdoms had jointly defended on the Hermes defense line before.

He expected that it would not be an easy thing. When those nobles who still kept their domains and knights got the news about the church's defeat, they would probably plan to fight against the church again. Given that, after most of the Graycastle's army left the Northern Region, he sent out the remaining God's Punishment Army of over 100 soldiers in the Holy City to the kingdoms with the emissary delegations as a means of forcing the nobles to obey his orders.

After those God's Punishment Warriors left, both the old and new Holy Cities' defense was weak as never before.

Now, Tayfun had no choice but to pray that the emissary delegations would bring Hermes reinforcements before demonic beasts started to attack.

He rubbed his sore eyes and closed the ancient book about the incarnation ceremony of God's Punishment Warriors. When he was about to make himself some coltsfoot tea to relieve his headache, he heard an outburst of fighting sounds.

Trembling with shock, he dropped his teacup and smashed it into the ground.

How come invaders could get here?

With this question in mind, he walked to the window and looked down. In the dim light of the prism of magic stone, he saw a crowd of people continue to move toward Pivotal Secret Temple.

They were incredibly fast and killed every guard who came up to stop them with only one strike. The guards' armors seemed completely useless in protecting them from the invaders' blades. Soon, the grayish-white steps were covered with blood and the invaders arrived at the gate of the temple in the blink of an eye.

At this moment, he heard a loud bang on the door. A Praetorian Guard rushed in and said to him, "Your Eminence, Pivotal Secret Temple is under attack. Please leave right now!" This guard was the Pope's bodyguard. He was followed by a dozen God's Punishment Warriors.

Tayfun shouted in a hoarse voice, "how did they get in here?"

He could not believe what he saw. "To come down to this underground area, they've got to take the cage or get through the secret stronghold of the old Holy City. Nobody, even the soldiers of the Graycastle, can unobtrusively capture both the old and the new Holy Cities and control the entrances to this place unless they have wings!"

The Praetorian Guard looked pale. "The enemies are from the depths of the cave. Please, Your Eminence, come with me immediately. Otherwise, it'll be too late."

"The depths of... the cave?" Tayfun echoed in disbelief, as he knew that place had nothing except some circular holes.

Shocked and puzzled, he followed the Praetorian Guard to a secret tunnel along the wall and quickly got to the bottom floor of the temple.

The Praetorian Guard opened a stone trapdoor at a corner and said to him, "Your Eminence, as no one guards the cage, it may not be a safe passage now. I'll escort you to the tunnel leading to the old Holy City. Please take more people here to defend the Pivotal Secret Temple as soon as possible."

When he got of the tunnel, his heart sank to the bottom.

A dozen invaders already waited there with their swords, seeming to have known they would come out from there.

A man came up and said, "I thought I would never get a chance to set foot in the Holy City again. The successors of the Queen of Starfall City are nothing more than this." He wore strange-looking armors which looked like a stack of sheetmetal and carried a sword whose blade was stained with black-blue blood.

When Tayfun fixed his eyes on the man's face, all his blood froze in a second.

He had seen this man before.

"He's Ellington, the Chief Justice of the Sixth Legion's advance force. This brave man volunteered to join God's Punishment Army three years ago. Before he went to his incarnation ceremony, he came to say goodbye to me," Tayfun recalled.

He felt that a strange chillness crept up through his spine and burrowed into his head. Terror seized him and made it hard for him to move his tongue.

"Wh-What... monsters... are you?"

Chapter 686: The Legacy of Deities

The man who looked like Ellington sneered, "monster? Isn't this body created by you? You made this kind of extraordinary warrior with the witches' blood and God's Stones of Retaliation, but unfortunately, they were defective. Because of the lack of key steps, they don't have souls, but you still placed great hope on them. You believe these soulless semi-finished products can compete with demons on the battlefields, but now when you see a real finished product you call it a 'monster'?"

"A real... finished product?" Tayfun's heart began to thump, as he found this man seemed to know better than himself the process of creating God's Punishment Army, a top secret of the church.

"All-out attack, kill them all!" the Praetorian Guard ordered.

The ten God's Punishment Warriors following him quickly came to the front to protect the Archbishop. They moved incredibly fast, lunging at the invaders.

However, these invaders were also God's Punishment Warriors and even stronger than them.

They did not outnumber church's warriors, but they fought much more skillfully. They lured them close and broke them apart. Every time one of the church's warriors was fighting against someone in front of him, he would soon get attacked from behind. Under such circumstances, even Tayfun could tell it was better to retreat. However, a church's warrior would not know how to react unless his controller, the Praetorian Guard, gave him further order. Controlling 10 warriors at the same time, the guard was unable to take care of every situation in this fight, so the church's warriors were clearly at a disadvantage to the invaders who were equally strong but could act independently.

These extraordinary warriors of the church soon lose their combat capability when they were separated.

The invaders quickly killed them all without any casualties.

The leader of the invaders, the "Ellington", easily hacked the Praetorian Guard to death at the end of the fight. After that, he lifted his sword and put it on the old Bishop's shoulder, who was standing petrified with shock.

The black-blue blood of the church's God's Punishment Warriors and the red blood of the Praetorian Guard mixed on the blade and dripped into Tayfun's collar.

Tayfun said with a trembling voice, "you... can't kill me. If I die, the Holy City will collapse... When that happens, who will stop demonic beasts? If they break through the defense line of Hermes, I'm afraid the four kingdoms will fall into—"

The leader of the invaders interrupted, "fall into ruins? Save it. You can deceive ignorant believers with this story, but we know what those demonic beasts are looking for. If it was not you that have brought it here, why would those dumb beasts swarm to this trap of ice and snow during Months of Demons when the magic power peaked in the year?"

"What... I don't understand what you mean..."

This leader looking like Ellington shrugged and said, "what? It seems that you've not even seen the relic. What a pity."

The bishop was about to say something, but suddenly he felt cold in his neck. Soon endless torpor and coldness occupied his mind.

Elena kicked the old man's head up, sending it flying and saw his body slowly fall down to the ground. She took back her sword in satisfaction and said, "let's go. Time to finish our task."

Someone pulled her back from behind, saying, "wait, you're hurt. Stop the bleeding first, or your body will get out of control."

"Where's the wound?"

"In your waist. You've got to take off the armors first."

Elena cursed, "this damn body. It doesn't feel a thing at all." She took off her chest and back armors, revealing a well-built upper body.

"Gee, look at this. It would cost at least fifty gold royals back in Taquila. To be honest, have you ever looked into the mirror and..."

The one who was treating Elena's wound interrupted, "come on, Betty. Isn't that kind of fantasies like torture for us? I don't even dare to recall the days in Taquila. As compared to the life in the past, my life now resembles being imprisoned in a cage of endless void."

Someone immediately agreed with her, saying, "Carol is right. If someone can make me feel what it's like to sleep with a man again, I'll give anything to marry him... No, I'll even treat him as my lord."

"A man? Come on. I'll be satisfied if I can eat delicious fried steak with butter again."

"I just want to do some sunbathing..."

"Damn it, who brought up this subject?"

"Miss Betty."

"I just wanted to make some casual conversations. This is the body I wanted to have in the first place..."

Elena got a little upset and shouted, "stop it! Don't forget the purpose of our trip! The others were still waiting for us at the top of the tower. Concentrate your mind!"

She led the team into the secret tunnel after Carol finished treating the wound.

They got up to the library through the tunnel. Another group of witches looking like God's Punishment Warriors were waiting there.

These witches were the remaining members of the Union.

Elena sighed in her heart, "lady Natalya, have you seen? We win in the end."

She asked, "have you found the location of the relic?"

Zoe, the leader of the other team, came up and said, "the old place. Everthing is arranged in the same way as that in the Holy City of Taquila. By the way, why did you spend so much time down there? Are you sure that you didn't let go of a person?"

Elena coughed twice and said, "of course, everything went well, so by agreement..."

"We'll touch the relic together."

She nodded, saying, "that's it. Let's get started."

This relic, the deities' legacy, was the origin of Battles of Divine Will and the top secret of the Union. In fact, before the collapse of the witches' empire, none of them had known about it. When the old order had disintegrated and they had hidden underground, all the survivors like them had finally heard it from the Three Chiefs.

From then on, they had become equals and formed a classless group searching for the way of defeating demons, as they had been clear that each and every survivor of the Union would have been equally important in this process.

Thinking that she was going to touch an object created by deities, Elena felt her heart was beating faster.

However, she knew it was just an illusion, as she could feel nothing in this body.

Following Zozey, she walked through a trapdoor behind a book shelf and got up to the top of the library.

Up there, she saw a narrow room without a window, which had nothing inside except a Magic Stone giving out dim blue light above her head.

"Is this the Prayer Room mentioned by Pasha?"

"Yes." Zozey lifted up an iron hammer and smashed it against the wall. With a dull thud, it left only a small white spot on the wall.

"It doesn't seem to be here." she said and chose another position to hammer. After several attempts, the wall area opposite to the entrance cracked.

"Find it! Come here to help me," Zozey said.

Elena drew out her long sword and came up. They struck at the wall together and soon opened a gap which was half their height.

Looking at the gap, they found that the broken wall was almost as thick as half an arm's length and both sides of the wall were brushed with a thick layer of mortar. Given that, they could never find this section of hollow wall simply by knocking at the walls and listening to the knocking sound. Looking through the gap, they found an even smaller secret chamber instead of another passage leading to the underground.

In this chamber, Elena saw the relic of deities.

Chapter 687: The Secret of the Relic

The relic was a piece of transparent carmine crystal. Similar to the magic core in the maze ruins, it was also a spindle apparatus, but it was much smaller, only half a man's height.

When Elena stepped into the chamber, however, it looked different. Its smooth spherical surface changed into a sharp right angle. From above, it seemed to be a quarter a sphere.

It stayed afloat by itself in the air as the magic core did, which proved it was uncommon.

"Is this the thing that determines the fate of the mankind?" Elena thought.

She was filled with doubts and at the same time felt a little irritated about the deities.

According to Pasha, no one knew how it had appeared in this world, but the moment it had come, it had been bound to the fate of human beings. If the mankind loses it, all people including witches and the common people would die in an instant. In order to protect the relic, countless people had fought bloody battles against demons and died on the battlefield. Seeing the suffering of the mankind, deities, however, had never given people any instruction. They just kept watching what was happening in silence, waiting for the ultimate winner.

Elena felt disgusted at this game.

At this moment, Zoey asked her, "are you ready? Remember what Pasha said to us? Control our minds and never try to connect with the deities when moving the relic."

Elena replied with a nod, "don't worry. I remember. I'll count to three and then we'll move it together?"

Zoey gestured a "yes".

"One, two, three." They lifted the relic while moving outward. It could float in the air, but was not as light as a feather. With a strong body of a God's Punishment Warrior, Elena still felt it very heavy on her arm when she lifted it. It was exhausting.

If Pasha had never told her the truth about this feeling, she would have been thinking that it's her senses long time forgotten coming back to her after hundreds of years.

This "sense of fatigue" was mental.

The relic attempted to connect with them.

Elena shook her head, trying to banish those thoughts, but suddenly she remembered that she should not empty her mind. Given that, she thought she had better think about something during this process.

What should I think now? A man... or tasty food... or a soft bed?

A voice got into her mind all of a sudden. "What you want is feelings, comfort, happiness, pains, coldness, hotness, and so on. I can give them to you. Relax and look at me..."

"What to look at? No, no!" Elena's eyes widened in surprise. "Who's talking? Is it the relic?"

She turned to look at Zoey and found her eyes dull. Now she seemed like an empty shell without a soul.

"Damn it, what's going on? Pasha didn't tell us that something like this would happen!" Elena thought anxiously.

The voice in her head started again. "Don't worry, she just follows her own heart and integrates into me."

'Let her out!'

"I can't. You must come in to take her out..." The voice in her head started to change, from a raucous sound to a soft female voice. For a moment, she could not tell whether she was communicating with the relic or with herself.

"Get in to take her out?"

At this moment, Pasha's warning flashed across her mind.

"Never try to connect with the deities."

But she could not just stand by seeing Zooney lose her mind. A shell without a soul would die soon. Given that, she decided to pull Zooney out of the relic first.

"I just need to look at the relic?" she wondered.

She took a deep breath and then looked at the carmine crystal.

She saw it distorting, and then darkness possessed her. When she started to see things again, she found she was in a totally different world.

It was an incredibly lofty and spacious hall. Its dome was the scene of a starry sky with a Bloody Moon in it. She could see magic power flowing on the surface of the Bloody Moon like boiling lava, and then four giant paintings silently draped and surrounded her.

The hall, the Bloody Moon and the paintings filled her with awe beyond description. She had only heard about this world from Pasha. This was the first time for her to witness such an unbelievable scene.

"Zooney! Where are you?" she shouted.

But no one answered.

The paintings were the only things in the hall now.

She forced herself to calm down and look at the paintings.

Immediately after she cast a glance at them, she felt her back was covered with cold sweats, as she found they were looking back at her at the same time.

In the first painting, she saw a demon wearing fine armors stood up from its throne. Its pupils were giving out dreadful red light, and it was moving toward her step by step.

In the second painting, she saw a giant eye, in which there were many pupils arraying in a triangle shape in the eyeball. They opened at the same time like giant mouths that were going to devour people up.

She could not help moving backward, but she still encouraged herself in silence, "don't panic. They are just moving pictures."

However, she lost her composure in just a few seconds.

All of a sudden, six or seven black tentacles which had small hands at the end poked out from those two paintings, trying to grab her.

Too frightened to react, she was caught by them.

Each group of tentacles tried their best to pull her into their own painting, not wanting to give her to the other group as if she were a rare trophy. Hung between the two painting, she felt she was going to be torn apart. The unbearable pain made her scream.

Wait... I feel the pain?

At this moment, she was shocked to find her appearance had changed back to a witch again.

So the last feeling I get before death is the pain of being torn apart. That's alright... at least, I won't die in an empty shell, in a God's Punishment Warrior's body. Her consciousness slowly escaped her as the pain increased.

Before she blacked out, she found something strange in another painting.

She saw that the God's Punishment Warrior shell she had was lying on the ground with twitching limbs, and Zoey was holding her legs and dragging her toward a trap door.

She wondered, "what's going on? Didn't that silly girl merge with the relic?"

Right at the moment, the hall collapsed instantly. The Bloody Moon, the paintings, the tentacles and her pain all disappeared in a sudden. She blinked her eyes and found she was in the library again.

"Is that a... dream?" she murmured.

Zoey gnashed her teeth and said, "what dream? You really disappointed me. Remember what Pasha told you? Never try to connect with the deities! I reminded you before we moved the relic!"

"But I saw you lose your mind..."

Zoey interrupted impatiently, "and I saw you being swallowed by the relic. It was nothing but an illusion created by the deities! If I didn't pull you out, you would stay inside forever."

Thinking of the powerful tentacles, the demon and the giant eye in the paintings, Elena found it hard to believe they were just illusions. She still felt uncertain. Since Pasha had never personally experienced the relic, it was reasonable that she had not reminded her of those illusions. However, based on what she had experienced just now in the relic, it was not an illusion at all, as the things in the painting had noticed her the moment she had glanced at them.

Betty interrupted, "sorry, I don't mean to butt in, but what should we do next?"

Zoey glanced at Elena again and said, "someone else need to come here to help me move the relic out. The Prayer Room has been broken in. We've got to put the relic into the God's Stone box as soon as possible, otherwise, those demonic beasts will follow us to the underground caves."

Chapter 688: Arrival at the Western Region

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After nearly half a month, the ship finally reached the Western Region.

The north wind became much stronger after they sailed past Willow Town. Lying in the cabin of the ship, No. 76 could still hear the sound of the sail fluttering in the strong wind.

"It's snowing outside!"

Amy excitedly ran into the cabin with some snow in her cupped hands, but before she showed it to No. 76, it had melted into shimmering water drops and dripped through her fingers. "Everything outside is white. I've never seen such a big snow."

No. 76 struggled to sit up in her soft bed and said, "really? It seldom snows in the City of Glow in the Kingdom of Dawn."

Meanwhile, she thought to herself, "but it wasn't a rare thing for Taquila. Every year in Months of Demons, we needed to clean up the snow repeatedly, which was pretty tiresome; but fortunately, the demons would postpone their attack during this period of time, making this white scenery more adorable."

Amy said with a big smile, her eyes in the shape of a crescent moon, "I know. The city of Glow is warm as spring all the year round. Do you want to go to the deck to have a look? I can carry you out."

"Stop it. Her wounds haven't recovered yet. She can't stand cold winds," Broken Sword interrupted, who was decocting some medicinal herbs aside.

"Oh... sorry."

No. 76 shook her head and said, "it's fine. What about enjoying the snow together when I recover? His Majesty's city is more on the west side than here. We are going to see more beautiful snow scenes there."

Hearing this, the two witches by her bed looked sad, but Amy quickly dispelled her sadness and nodded to No. 76 vigorously. "No problem. I promise."

No. 76 was not surprised seeing them feel sad for her. As she had a God's Punishment Warrior's body, all the superficial wounds she got would heal in three or four days. In order to cover up her identity, she had smashed her own thighbones and elbow to prevent this body from having a perfect recovery. By doing so, she made the others believe that it was lucky enough for her to survive. They all thought that if she failed to meet a witch who could heal her in the Western Region, she would not be able to move around by herself and spend the rest of her life suffering from physical disability and mental distress.

They had no idea that this body was merely a tool to complete a mission for No. 76, and as soon as she went back to her underground maze, she would get a new one. Facts proved that the story she had made up was very convincing. She could tell from Annie's eyes and actions that she felt guilty seeing her seriously injured, and the other witches all showed trust and gratitude to her, especially Amy. Since they had escaped from the "Black Money" together, this little girl had taken her as a companion and almost followed her everywhere. Every night, she would come to No. 76 and coax her to sleep by telling her folktales in a soft voice.

However, every time this little girl would fall asleep before No. 76 did.

No. 76 was satisfied seeing this result, as she needed the witches' trust. In this way, she would get to know more witches and find out the Chosen One, which was the mission Pasha had given her.

Broken Sword walked to her bed with an earthen jar in her hands, saying, "time to change your wound dressing. You may feel a little pain, so it's better to close your eyes."

"Don't worry. I can take it. You can start now." No. 76 pretended to be suffering from a great pain by clenching her teeth, but in order to react properly, she did not close her eyes. As she had no feelings, if she did not look at it, she would never know whether Broken Sword began to dress her wound or not.

The herbal medicine out of the jar looked like sticky mud. From the looks on the faces of Amy and Broken Sword, she knew it must smell bad.

Applying the stuff all over her wounds in such a tightly enclosed small cabin was not an easy task for the witches.

After the treatment was finally done, No. 76 heaved a sigh of relief and lay back in her bed, sweating.

She had quickened her heartbeat to raise her body temperature and speed her blood flow, making herself break into a sweat. Together with her trembling limbs and facial expressions of pain, she made everyone believe that she was suffering.

She did not care at all whether this common people's remedy would work for her wounds or not.

After a long while, she said, "thank you."

Amy picked up a towel to wipe the sweat on her forehead, saying, "no, don't say that. This is what we owe you. We are the ones who should say thank you."

Broken Sword added, "Amy is right. Have a good rest. When we arrive at Neverwinter, everything will be all right."

When they left, No. 76 touched the magic stone ring on her chest, which she had hid under her clothes, and slightly sighed, lost in thoughts.

Only when we find the the Chosen One, everything will really be all right.

If we fail to defeat demons, all of us will die. No one can escape from the predestined war, the upcoming Battle of Divine Will.

However, until now we still have no idea whether the Chosen One exists or not.

In accordance with the descriptions in the remaining documents in the maze ruins, magic power was a gift bestowed on uncommon people by the deities. Everyone who could use it must have a Key to unlock the Source of Magic Power. That was why only a few could use this prevailing power.

More importantly, each Key was different.

Some witches were extremely powerful, who could summon strong storms or make the dead come back to life, but some were only able to use their power to cook a bowl of oatmeal or mend broken clothes.

What caused such great differences among the Awakened?

This question had baffled the Union for hundreds of years until the remaining witches of the Union had found the documents in the maze ruins. By studying those records, they had found a vague explanation for this phenomenon.

The differences in the witches' abilities and power were caused by the differences between their Keys.

A Key had nothing to do with a witch's magic capacity but was closely related to the essence of the magic power. Every time a witch used her ability, she would turn part of the magic power into reality. As this was an extremely complicated process which could not be completed by the witch alone. The deities would also take part in it.

However, as the deities had a preference for some witches, the Keys varied in terms of how complex the processes were. Some were very simple, but some were exceptionally complicated. A Key's complexity determined the upper limit of the amount of magic power a witch could use.

No. 76 had not quite understood this explanation until Pasha had given her an example, the Magic Stones. A witch could use them to realize various magic effects without any change in her own Magic Cyclone. That meant the magic power used by different witches who had various abilities was actually the same thing. No matter she was an Extraordinary or a Senior Witches, she used the same power.

If that was the case, would it be possible that witches had a chance to prevail demons when there was an omniscient Magic Stone that could enable witches to realize any effect they wanted?

A magic core worked just like this. It mimicked the workings of a Magic Cyclone, trying to ask for power from the deities directly. In some sense, it could be considered as an extremely powerful man-made Magic Stone, way stronger than the Sigils, simple and crude toys as compared to a magic core, which could only increase a witch's power. However, experiment results showed that deities would never give a Key to a lifeless thing. Only a witch who had a matching Key could activate this thing.

Such a witch was the Chosen One.

Chapter 689: First Contact

Using this colorful magic stone ring, No. 76 could observe the "dialogue" a witch had with God as she performed magic.

This dialogue appeared as a pale orange light which connected the witch with the vast sky.

According to the documented records, demons and some hybrid demonic beasts could produce the same type of orange light.

God did not show tender care for the world.

Every time she thought about this, she became worried.

When compared to the innumerable demons, the witches were not as powerful a nation. Their powers could not be inherited and also could not be cultivated. The only way of awakening a witch's power was luck. Moreover, their magic powers were weaker than that of the enemies.

Fortunately, the Key was not a predestined thing.

They could change the Key through a High Awakening. By doing this, they could receive a more powerful force through God.

Since leaving the Kingdom of Dawn, No.76 had observed the orange lights of Amy, Annie, and Hero. Hero was the strongest of them, while Annie was the weakest. However, in general, the differences between the three was negligible. They were all about the same size, the width of a finger, and they were all far away from the request of starting the Instrument of Divine Retribution.

She had reasons to believe that a Senior Witch was the Chosen One.

The cabin door opened suddenly and Yoroko, the Ambassador of Graycastle, entered. He arched his eyebrows, went to the bedside and said, "The smell of this herb is more nauseating than the latrine. Why would someone use such a malodorous thing in medicine?"

"Maybe the sailors thought that the demonic plague could be cured by its pungent smell," No.76 said as she smiled smugly. "Regardless, my body feels better and my wound is just a scar now."

Of course, this had nothing to do with the medicine, rather, it depended on the individual bodies of the wonderful God's Punishment Army.

"If it's useless, I'm going to absolutely put their heads into the latrine. So they can become familiar with the smell of this medicine." Yoroko chose a bench and sat down.

"Those poor sailors," she whispered. "Amy told me that you asked them if they had any special prescriptions."

"Ahem. Lying to a noble is a grave crime and they can only blame themselves," the ambassador said. "If you can't get a real answer, just tell them to drink it with hot water and honey. Even if it doesn't cure their wound, they will still leave smiling and satisfied. Oh... I'm not referring to you!"

No.76 smiled with abandon. During the long boat trip, Yoroko visited her at least once a day. The visits were short, but they always had a nice talk. She thought that perhaps Yoroko was an average person, but when he spent time with a woman, he was more humorous than many of the other nobles. Even if they were in Taquila, he would have become famous. After she lost most of her senses, verbal communication had become one of the most pleasant ways to pass the time.

After chatting for a while, the ambassador unusually became quiet.

No.76 thought for a moment before she propped up her body with one hand and tentatively asked, "Sir, do you need me to serve you? Although my body is inflexible..."

"I've said it many times before, you aren't my maid. Don't use the word 'serve' every time you meet with others. You're a free person in Graycastle now, understand?" He held his forehead and said, "You're still wounded and I'm not one of those upper nobles who have a morbid addiction."

"So, you just want to talk with me?"

After hearing that, Yoroko's facial expression changed a little. He cleared his throat and said, "Er... Actually, I have a question to ask you. After you arrive at King's City, what do you plan to do?"

"Er... Go to a tavern and become a maid? Maybe work at the gambling house, that would also be OK." No.76 tilted her head as she said, "That is if the witch can finally cure my body."

If she could stay in Neverwinter, she would be able to do anything. She had gained the trust of the witches of the Kingdom of Dawn, so she would finally get a chance to become familiar with other members of the Witch Union.

"You should do something else," Yorko dissuaded her, "since you are free, you should try something new."

"How? The 'Black Money' only taught me how to serve men. Although I wanted to become a guard, my repaired limb won't be as flexible as before."

"The people from Neverwinter will teach you. I heard from His Majesty that his kingdom provides everyone with formal work." Yorko said, before pausing... "If you meet with any difficulties in the future, you can come to me at any time, as long as I haven't left."

"Did he hesitate for so long time, only to say these words to me" No.76 couldn't help feeling a little emotional. When she was in the Kingdom of Dawn, she clearly saw how troubled a person he is. Perhaps making a promise like this was difficult for him.

"Um... I'll try." She lowered her head before saying, "Thank you!"

...

After four days had passed, the sailors brought good news. They had finally reached the new city in the western region of Graycastle— Neverwinter.

The witches all gathered in No.76's room, they were anxious and waiting for their next order. Among them all, Annie was the most anxious. She opened the window and glanced at the dock every now and then. If she found something worrisome, she would get everyone to jump into the cold river without thinking.

But, No.76 felt it was too noisy, the loud bugle was incessant and the river continually lashed the side of the ship and there were like a thousand other boats floating around them.

"It's the Months of Demons now. Even though it is summer, how is the dock so busy?"

However, she couldn't move, so she couldn't see the scene outside her window.

"Where are the sails on these boats, Sister Annie?" Amy was asked in astonishment.

"Maybe the sailors are rowing under the deck." Annie suddenly stopped and leaned against the window, "Be quiet! Someone is coming!"

Broken Sword felt anxious and asked, "How many people are out there?"

"Only four people, I don't think they noticed us." Annie knitted her brow, "And... they're all women."

"They're all witches?" Amy stood up suddenly, "I knew that Mr. Ambassador hadn't lied to us!"

"The members of the Bloodfang Association are all witches, but they aren't the same as us," she said in a low voice, "essentially, just follow my non-verbal orders like before."

"OK!" Everyone nodded.

Soon someone knocked on the door and the four girls entered the room. The leader was a red-haired lady. "Welcome to Neverwinter, sisters!" she said with a smile.

Annie was astonished, she hadn't thought they would be so friendly. Even No.76 looked surprised. Although in Taquila the witches were abundant, they were not friendly enough to welcome a newly awakened witch... "Do they even differentiate the witches abilities?"

The fact a combat witch could be compared to a non-combat witch was an unrespectable thing.

At that moment, No.76 suddenly found a blonde-haired girl looking directly at her. Her beautiful smile confirmed her identity and her sharp eyes seemed to see through them all.

Chapter 690: Witches vs. Witches

No. 76 pretended to be timid and shifted her head.

She had prepared to be examined by the Witch Union if she wanted to have contact with them. The Union knew the abilities of the witches the most, and it was normal that an organization with such a large scale had some detective means like the sense of magic and Magic Stone of Observation. She had no need to trek to the Western Region of Graycastle if she could not pass the examination.

Different from the senseless God's Punishment Army soldiers, she could easily control every part of her body and the release of anti-magic areas. Any witch could master this skill after two or three years' practice. As long as she did not use her magic power to cause any distorted barrier, she would appear the same as common people.

After all, the anti-magic areas and the blue blood of the God's Punishment Warriors were all caused by the magic power. If they were senseless, they would behave like beasts and fight by the instinct of the transformers. They naturally did not know how to use the ubiquitous magic power, either. Only after the shell was possessed by a witch's soul, it would be fully utilized. Even though the witch could not cohere the Magic Cyclone as in the past, and would lose her combat instinct, the immortal soul could gain power and skills no worse than the Extraordinary through years of training.

"Why don't you... ask about our abilities first?" Annie asked after a long silence. Obviously, she was extremely wary of them.

No. 76 was equally intrigued to know their answer. During the journey, she had a deeper understanding of the suffering of Annie and other witches. She heard that Annie was once refused by a witch organization due to her ability defect and was almost sold by them to the nobles.

It was well understandable for No. 76 that the combat witches were highly valued. Especially when the wild witches were severely suppressed by the Starfall City, self-protection and protection of the organization were necessary means of sustaining the organization. However, it also indicated that these witches just had a primary understanding of the magic power. The High Awakening could bring great

changes to some non-combat witches after their promotion, and their seemingly useless abilities could experience transcendent transformation. Therefore, it was an extremely stupid choice for the Bloodfang Association to refuse the non-combat witches and even sell them to the nobles.

But it was also too weird if they did not care about the abilities at all. It could be described as jumping from one extreme to another one. After all, High Awakening was always rare, and thousands of witches could not be promoted throughout their lives, not to mention that the combat witches also had the promotion opportunity. Therefore, in any case, the status of combat witches was always higher. Their equal treatment was simply incredible in the eyes of No. 76.

No wonder Annie would be so wary of them.

"The ability test is usually arranged in three days," the red-haired witch laughed softly and said, "after all, you must be tired after such a long journey. We'll wait until you have a full rest, so the test results will be more accurate. What do you think of it? By the way, my name is Wendy, and I'm in charge of the Witch Union. You can come to me if you have any questions later."

Annie did not relax at her words. She continued to ask, "What if the test shows that... our abilities are useless?"

The witch, who claimed herself as Wendy gently responded, "Both His Majesty Roland and the Witch Union hold the notion that 'there is no useless power'. I know what you're worried about, and this is a process which most witches joining Neverwinter will experience. In fact, an ability test is just for His Majesty to know your situation better. It doesn't mean that you have to be a member of the union."

Annie was stunned. "What do you mean?"

"It means that, even if you don't want to work for His Majesty, you can still live in the city like common people."

No. 76's heart skipped a beat at her words, as she knew that emergence of Senior Witches relied heavily on a relaxing environment. For example, in Taquila, every witch could practice her ability as she wished, and anyone with even a little talent would be specially cultivated by the Union. In the Holy City where the more the witches were in charge, the more witches were promoted to get a higher ability.

And if a witch had to flee from a place to another and lived in horror, she even had few opportunities to practice her ability, then how could she be promoted? If they were not lying, and Neverwinter indeed provided the witches with a free and stable life, then they really had the conditions for the birth of Senior Witches in a sense.

Maybe the Chosen One was not among them now, but what about several years later? No. 76 was full of thoughts now. "Maybe I should find an opportunity to talk with the Witch Union in private and it's the best choice to make them a branch of the Union."

"Can I choose not to work for the King?" Annie seemed not to believe what she had heard.

"Yes, Witch Union won't force any sister to sign the contract. But if you're a member of the union, you'll benefit so much and your work will also be easy, so everybody joins this family now."

"Sorry, Lady Wendy..." Broken Sword said, "Can you tell us what a witch's daily job is?"

"Don't call me Lady," Wendy shook her head with a smile. "We're sisters, aren't we? As for work, it depends on your ability. For example, Miss Evelyn can brew delicious wine, so she opens a wine factory in the city. And Miss Mystery Moon is responsible for the light in the factory, as she can magnetize objects. And Miss Nana Pine... Her excellent healing ability makes her an angel in Neverwinter. I heard from Mr. Ambassador that some of you need curing, right?"

"She didn't give any examples related to combat witches," No. 76 frowned and thought, "Don't they care about the differences between the abilities of the witches? Then how did the king of Graycastle defeat the God's Punishment Army of the church?"

"Can you really cure the feet of Hero?" Amy immediately became excited.

"We have to let Nana try first," Wendy nodded to the blonde witch. "But before that, can you introduce your backgrounds and names?"

No. 76 did not care about whether she could be cured. Instead, she had focused on the other four witches.

The colorful magic stone on her chest became slightly hot, which meant that someone was using magic power. The heat was not from the skin contact, but a direct response of the soul.

She realized that the examination started.

From Annie to Hero, everyone briefly told their past story. Wendy also raised several questions, while the older brunette witch recorded the contents on a notebook. The magic stone remained the same temperature during this period.

When the inquiry was over, Wendy looked at No. 76.

"Are you... not a witch?"

"She's our friend," Amy said. "If it were not for her to stall the knights of the Kingdom of Dawn, we would've all been taken back to the dungeon."

"I used to be a guide, or a waitress, in an underground exhibition in the City of Glow. And Mr. Ambassador bought me from the Chamber of Commerce." No. 76 slowly uttered the words she had prepared. She had a vague awareness of their means of examination now. Those questions were not casually raised, but had clear purposes and could not be replied with vague answers.

Some of them might be able to detect the lies.

No. 76 was not worried about it. She could accurately control every movement of her body and also temporarily cut off her control of any part of her body. The usual subtle changes when people lied did not exist for her. Her words would be impeccable unless they could directly invade her mind,

Her guess was proved.

After her answers, Wendy did not show any strangeness, "I see. Thank you for saving them, and if you have no other place to go, you may live with them in the Foreign Affairs Building."

"Thank you for your consideration," she said gratefully.

"Wait..." Just then, another green-haired witch who had been silent before suddenly asked, "Can you tell me where you got the ring on your chest?"