

Witch 731

Chapter 731: The First Contact

In the center of the main hall, the phantom instrument had been completely laid out. With magic power filling it, its core gave off a somber and cold purple light.

After the instrument had been activated, it would activate a light curtain thousands of kilometers away. Unfortunately, such an ability was way beyond the power of the witches. This was directly endowed by God.

Pasha looked back and found that all of the blobs were hanging down and touching the ground. The God's Punishment Witches stood abreast the mounds with serious looks on their faces. The dead hybrid demonic beasts were deliberately placed on opposite sides and under the purple light, their light blue blood reflected fluorescent spots, it looked gloomy and terrifying.

If a group of common people witnessed this, they would have been frightened by such a hellish scene.

Pasha did not want things to turn out like this either. After the start of decomposition, the demonic beasts' remains were going to become sticky and disgusting, and difficult to clean up. Even though the God's Punishment Witches would be unable to smell it, she would sense it with her tentacles. Over 400 years, the hall had come to be their home and no one wanted to mess it up, but she had to prepare for the worst.

That was to say, Phyllis ran into danger and the ring had been broken by someone else.

If such a disaster really happened, it would be necessary to create the most horrific atmosphere to intimidate or even threaten those who might pose threats to her.

The western region of Graycastle was near the entrance of the Fertile Plains, so each year many lost demonic beasts would attack it. Whoever put Phyllis in danger, whether it was witches or common people, would conclude from the stockpiled dead demonic beasts that they were very difficult to deal with.

Only by making the other side clearly realize that the survivors of Taquila possessed great power, would they be able to bide time for a rescue.

"Activate the instrument," Celine said, "we need to figure out Phyllis' situation."

Pasha touched her main tentacles and gave an order to the instrument.

Everyone immediately noticed the purple light dim as a huge purple curtain made of light enveloped the whole hall and an illusion of a scene appeared on the other side of the phantom instrument and in it the Five-Colored Stone had been broken into pieces.

Pasha was stunned and puzzled.

The place in the scene was not a murky dungeon, nor a remote wilderness, but an open and spacious hall.

The hall was very bright and clear and a long wooden table stood in the center of it, topped by a white tablecloth that held flowers and teacups. There were no signs of fighting, so it looked like the place had been deliberately chosen to just destroy the Magic Stone.

Phyllis was currently standing by a window as she chatted with another witch. She noticed the light curtain and turned around with a very surprised face as she asked, "What happened? Was the hall attacked?"

"Uh..." Pasha didn't know how to respond at the moment. Phyllis' situation did not match her assumptions. Phyllis had not been attacked or tortured, and she wasn't even in danger. In fact, she was in higher spirits now than when she had departed. Looking carefully, Phyllis wasn't wearing that cheap and vulgar maid suit. Instead, she was wearing a fine fluffy cloak and against the gorgeous clothes, naturally, she had a good complexion.

Everyone was as shocked as Pasha. They glanced around at one another, but no one opened their mouth to speak. Luckily, they became expressionless after they became blobs, otherwise, it would have been very embarrassing.

"Recently, the demonic beasts launched an attack, but the magic core and the relics of gods are safe and sound. We're also all alive, so don't worry." As the most seasoned, Pasha was the first to regain her senses. She then added, "But, the bodies are many and we haven't had enough time to clear them out."

"Really?" Phyllis doubted.

"Of course, ahem..." Pasha waved her tentacles towards the God's Punishment Witches behind her for emphasis. "Well, you continue to clean up the remains and remove them from the labyrinth before their fluids dry to the ground."

The witches, who stood abreast with their serious looks, appeared to be extremely disappointed.

"How can we throw away so many bodies?"

"It takes us the whole day to pile them up."

"I don't want to touch those sticky and disgusting bodies."

"You're right. Although we can't smell it, they look incredibly disgusting."

"Stop complaining. Are you really willing to sleep with those bodies?"

"Can we throw them into the lava? At most, it'll only smoke like a fire."

"I can't believe you! Do you want to turn the entire ruin into a chimney?"

"Pfft..." The blue-haired witch standing beside Phyllis couldn't keep from laughing. "My guess is, they thought that you were in danger, so they arranged this scene to intimidate us."

Pasha found her voice somewhat familiar and when she looked at her carefully, her name suddenly came to her mind.

"Are you Agatha?"

"What?" Celine questioned in surprise. "The youngest Senior Witch in history?"

"That's impossible. She fell with Taquila, didn't she?"

"Even if she managed to escape from the Holy City, how could she still have the same appearance as she did over 400 years ago?"

Both of the promoted people temporarily living in the meat lumps and the God's Punishment Witches made sounds of perplexity.

"She's indeed that senior witch," Phyllis stated. "After she had been attacked by the demons in the research tower of the Misty Forest, she used the multi-layered frozen coffin to completely freeze herself and it killed all of her pursuers at the same time. When the Witch Union discovered the stone tower ruins, she was rescued."

And, that was what had happened.

As she heard this, Pasha felt instantly excited and an encouraging idea aroused from her deep heart. Phyllis had not fallen with Taquila and she quickly revealed her identity to the witches of Graycastle. Besides, she also encountered a promoted person from Taquila, so Phyllis must have a clear purpose to contact the maze. Perhaps, this Senior Witch would be the Chosen One they had been looking for.

Upon hearing this, Phyllis gave them a look of embarrassment and she hesitated.

She first glanced at Agatha before saying in a low voice, "Could you give us a moment? It won't take long."

Agatha nodded. "When you're done, I'll inform His Majesty." Having finished, she turned around and left the hall.

Then Phyllis took a deep breath and looked at Pasha again. "I've indeed found the Chosen One claimed by the Magic Stone, but he's different from the people in our plan."

"Wait a moment, he?" Pasha was stunned. Before she could ask further about it, Phyllis began to tell her about her absurd experience.

About how the witches could closely collaborate with common people.

About the powerful army that defeated the church.

About the powerful gunpowder weapons.

And, the most incredible thing... The Chosen One was one of the common people.

Chapter 732: An Ideal Beginning

When Phyllis told them the news, all the witches in the hall were excited.

"How can common people contact God?" Alethea's voice was full of astonishment and incredulity. "You must be wrong about that!"

"Are you sure that the orange beam of the light was from his body? Have all of the witches in the western region of Graycastle checked it?" Celine directly asked the key point.

These two questions were the exact thoughts of everyone.

"I've seen it personally. Besides, his Key is so much more complex than Pasha's requirements that the Five-Colored Stone can't contain the mountain-like orange light." Phyllis uttered her words slowly, "I couldn't believe it at the beginning either, but it's the truth."

"Does he have magic power?" Pasha asked with the last shred of hope in her heart.

"It's a pity that he can't activate the Instrument of Divine Retribution."

It was a great surprise to find the Chosen One, who has such a sophisticated key, in such short time, but what Phyllis had said disappointed all of them. Now that the surprise unexpectedly arrived, no one would have predicted that the Chosen one had the key, but did not have magic power, a discovery that completely overturned their previous idea.

Although the Chosen One had the Key, he could not connect to the core due to the absence of magic power, not even with the help of witches. They had fully proved in the Taquila age that common people could not endure the harm brought by magic power, even the tough ones could only sustain for about 30 minutes. They were unable to master the key points of using it.

She had thought that Senior Witches were likely to become the Chosen One and that it would be easier to find dozens of eligible candidates in the age when the Union controlled the Fertile Plains. However, what worried her the most was that the news brought by Phyllis totally broke her illusions. There were over 10 higher ascendants living in the small city of Neverwinter.

With such a surprising number of higher ascendants, the Witch Union was equivalent to some core organizations of the Union, such as the Quest Society and the Blessed Army that did not have more higher ascendants. Even so, Phyllis could not discover another Chosen One among them.

There were two totally different ideas in her mind. One was that it had been easier to eliminate the demons and that they had missed the opportunity, for they discovered the ruin too late. The other one was that they, in fact, did not have access to their targets at all and that it totally was their one-sided will to execute the plan of the Chosen One. If those Senior Witches could not meet the requirements of the Chosen One, would they be right to follow Lady Natalia and to determinedly resist the God's Punishment Army plan of the Queen of Starfall City?

Pasha felt terrified when thinking of this idea. She shook her head to calm the surging thoughts down and then asked, "Did you mention that the king of the common people wants to cooperate with us?"

"He wants to know us and is willing to fight against the demons with us," Phyllis said, "but I'll only know the detailed requirements after a negotiation."

"Do you think that he's capable of fighting against the demons?"

"I'm not sure... his weapons are astonishingly powerful, but I pitifully know little about that." Phyllis hesitated for a while and comforted them, "But Agatha is very sure about that. In her view, if

Neverwinter is given two or three more years, it's very likely to confine the demons to the west of the Impassable Mountain Range."

"What does she think of the relationship between us and Neverwinter?" Alethea asked in a deep voice.

"In Agatha's view, she's a witch of Taquila, but she'll work for Roland Wimbleton, the king in the secular world." Phyllis paused and spoke out her thoughts of the New Union, "She thinks that the most urgent mission at the moment is to defeat the demons. Additionally, all forces on the continent should be unified and fight together to face the third Battle of Divine Will."

"Working for common people? Has she lost her mind?" Alethea shouted, "Did she forget how we lost to the demons in the first Battle of Divine Will?"

There was a discussion amongst the crowd. Almost all members of the Union must learn that period of history. There might be one extraordinary person amongst the common people, but as a whole, they had behaved badly.

For example, they opened the city gate to surrender to the demons and they were all killed. The army of witches marched on from thousands of kilometers away to rescue them, but they were rejected outside the gate by the lord, who then witnessed those witches being killed by the demons. In many cases, common people were clambering to escape from the battlefield. Sometimes, a huge army had as many as 20,000 or 30,000 soldiers, but its fighting capacity was no better than that of a witch team with about 100 people. In some places, common people even utilized God's Stone of Retaliation against witches, which exacerbated the breakdown between them.

If not so, the human beings would not have been forced to withdraw from the big Land of Dawn to the Fertile Plains.

With such bad behavior and their struggle to get food and resources, it was quite reasonable for witches to completely replace the regime of common people.

Seeing Alethea wriggling the whole body to express her dissatisfaction, Pasha had the same concerns in her heart. From the descriptions Phyllis gave, Roland Wimbleton, the king of Graycastle, was probably an extraordinary person, but he alone could not change the entirety of common people. If other kings committed stupid and rudimentary mistakes, which side would he back? If the war lasted for 20 or 30 years, would he be as determined and energized as he is now?

Not all people would be willing to possess an empty body so as to lengthen their lives at the expense of senses. Even if he was willing to do it, would his offsprings agree with this in 40 or 50 years? Would they be willing to be heirs all of their lives?

These were all the questions that Pasha needed to think about.

Generally speaking, any cost would be worthwhile if they could defeat the demons. Both Alice and Natalia firmly believed that as long as the human beings and witches were alive, the witches would regain their glory one day, which was exactly the innate difference between God's Honors and common people.

However, what she was concerned about was that even though they paid a price, would they still totally defeated? After all, they would not get another chance to try.

"Let's first talk with Roland," Celine pressed on the indignant Alethea with her main tentacles. "When I was in the Quest Society, I had dealings with Agatha. Though she was sympathetic to common people, she would think twice before an action. Additionally, given that we were planning to communicate with the kingdoms in the secular world, now that there is a king such as Roland who doesn't discriminate against witches and makes preparations for the Battle of Divine Will in advance, isn't this an ideal beginning for us?"

"I agree with you. We alone can't defeat the demons."

"We can also expand our influence among all witch organizations with the help of common people."

"What's more, he's helping to rope witches in... so Phyllis is more likely to find another Chosen One."

"I'm curious about those gunpowder weapons. If we're equipped with them, will it be as easy for us to kill the demons as it is to kill demonic beasts?"

The God's Punishment Witches talked it over with each other.

"Celine was right." Pasha sighed and thought that since they had to collaborate with common people, such an open king like Roland, was the most suitable counterpart to discuss the matters with, regardless of the idea of the New Union. They could not decide their road afterwards until the discussion. Perhaps, Roland held the same thought.

Thinking of this, she nodded her tentacles toward Phyllis and said, "I know. Please let's talk to His Majesty Roland Wimbledon."

Chapter 733: The Time Before the Past

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When Roland stepped into the living room, his attention was suddenly drawn by the light curtain that sheltered half a wall.

The edges of the light curtain exuded a flickering purple light as if a passageway connecting with different planes was dug through the wall. On the other side, the scene was quite dark, which looked like a huge hollow cavity under the ground. The reflections of the red river which flew in thin streams like cobwebs, lightened the rocky walls and the dome, vaguely showing the ancient ruin and its silhouette. Judging from the vivid visual effect, it should not be a built-up illusion, but a live broadcast transmitted from tens of hundreds of kilometers away.

A giant sarcomatoid monster with its tentacles spreading was facing Roland. A strange voice sounded in Roland's head.

"I'm sorry for keeping you waiting, my respected king of Graycastle, Your Majesty Roland Wimbledon. I'm Pasha, one of the survivors of Taquila. I think you must've heard of us from Phyllis."

"Ah, this is what direct communication means." Roland sat down facing the light curtain while being joined by Nightingale, Tilly, Agatha, Wendy and Scroll. "It's good that you've talked to each other, I don't have to introduce myself."

"You don't seem to be surprised by my appearance at all." Pasha was a little surprised. "I thought it would take quite some time before you could accept the idea that I am indeed a witch."

"Because I'm really not a stranger to the sort of concepts such as appendages and prosthesis," Roland thought to himself, but he said in a peaceful voice, "With the Bloody Moon drawing near, time is precious for both of our sides. Rather than concealing from each other and suspecting each other, it's better that we just be honest with each other from the very beginning. Since you've been the rulers of the continent, I guess you all agree with me?"

Pasha was startled for a moment, then burst into a light laughter. "Phyllis was right. You're indeed a rare and extraordinary person."

"Only because I stand on the predecessors' shoulders," Roland said with his hands laid out. "Let's get to business. We have a common goal, and that is to fight against the demons. The purposes you sent Phyllis out with were, to search for the Chosen One and to communicate with the worldly kingdom, am I right?"

"Totally," Pasha admitted frankly. "At first we wanted to infiltrate secretly, then gradually recruit or control some common people to search for the Chosen One. But the failure of the church made us realize another way to success, which is to show ourselves above board and gather all the witches."

"So you chose Graycastle as your destination?"

"According to the information that we collected, the Sleeping Island in Fjords possesses the hugest witch organization, the leader of which is your younger sister. Moreover, Graycastle is a big country which defeated the church, so choosing it as our first destination in search of the Chosen One was quite plausible. But I didn't expect that Phyllis would connect with you so soon and bring us an astonishing message. To be honest, I thought it'd take us two to three years to achieve this."

"Great. It seems we've saved two to three years of precious time. Our meeting is worthy of being written into history for this accomplishment alone," Roland said, smiling.

"It seems so," Pasha also smiled and said, "but the premises are that we defeat the demons and then live and prosper in the Land of Dawn."

"Sure, as long as the commoners and witches could drop the misunderstandings and cooperate hand in hand, demons aren't an indestructible enemy." Roland paused and said, "I could also help you in your search for the Chosen One. After all, it's not a bad thing to have one more powerful weapon to compete with the demons, but our cooperation must rest on mutual understandings. What do you think?"

"Agreed." The tentacles on Pasha's body waved tidily. "If there is anything you want to know, please just ask, Your Majesty."

Roland turned around, looked at Tilly and all the other witches, then said slowly, "After hearing about the buried history, my biggest confusion is, what on earth did you find in the ruin? For that, Taquila took on the huge cost of breaking with Starfall City, which then led to the collapse of the Union."

This was also one of the key reasons why Roland decided to actively contact the survivors. The technique of Soul Transfer was something that even modern science and technology could not tackle. The Instrument of Divine Retribution which the witches believed could replace the God's Punishment

Army plan and thoroughly destruct the demons, must be extraordinary. He would not blindly believe the scientific and technological knowledge he possessed was perfect. Drawing on each other's merits and raising the level together was common sense to modern people.

As a matter of fact, he had always wanted to combine this seemingly omnipotent magic power with science and technology. When he saw the witch precisely transmit live images onto the western region castle with the aid of the objects taken from the ancient ruin, he was determined that this meeting was absolutely necessary.

There was no doubt that this must be beyond the witches ability limit.

"Pasha!"

"Are you sure you want to tell him all about it?"

"That's God's secret!"

"We made a big sacrifice to..."

Instantly, several voices full of worries or dissatisfaction rushed through his mind. Roland then realized that many other Taquila witches were also witnessing this meeting.

"It's exactly because we've made a big sacrifice... We shouldn't do that in vain." Pasha interrupted the crowd's discussion. "If we can't withstand the demons massive invasion, do you wish for us to bring this secret to the grave, like those tombstones we found?"

Her loud retort quietened the crowd. It was probably because she made a crucial point, nobody else stood out to object to her anymore.

This reaction drew Roland's attention. "It seems that what Phyllis said about the survivors was mostly true. They have, to some extent, eliminated the influence of class and status, otherwise, they wouldn't have argued about such a major issue on the spot. But generally speaking, Pasha remains of relatively high prestige among them."

"Sorry, this information is indeed of vital importance..." Pasha's tentacles drooped toward the living room as though they were expressing an apology. "Under these circumstances, it can't remain a secret anymore. At least not between each other." After a moment's silence, she added, "To be precise, it wasn't that we found the ruin, but it was the ruin which reached out to us."

Roland frowned, "It reached out to Taquila?"

"Not Taquila, but a time prior to ours... approximately not long after the beginning of the first Battle of Divine Will."

"By 'us', does Pasha mean the entire human race?" Somehow, Roland felt a chill spreading from under his feet. "That was almost 800 years ago."

"That's true. Unfortunately, we didn't get its meaning then." Pasha sighed. "What reached out to us was a civilization. One that had disappeared underground."

Chapter 734: The Root of the Divergence

"Underground... civilization?"

Roland could not help but think of the turnoffs on the North Slope Mine and the cluster of grottos running through the Impassable Mountain Range... In his memory, no geological movement could create such unique landforms. At first, he thought that they were created by some sort of mutant hybrid demonic beasts. But according to what Pasha said, maybe they were traces left by the underground civilization?

"At that time, people didn't realize it, nor did they intend to communicate with it. Our forms were so different that we even considered them as a new type of demon, which was why there was a huge deviation on the recorded history. It wasn't until the final phase of the second Battle of Divine Will that there was a breakthrough discovery." Pasha's voice was low and deep. "By then, Taquila was the only city left of the three holy cities. The Union had reached a vital moment of survival or extinction."

"What do you mean by a breakthrough discovery?"

"With the help of the remaining lithograph, the Quest Society figured out the way to store souls and verified it on an unhatched original carrier. Since then, the Three Chiefs embarked on the research for the transformation of the God's Punishment Army."

"I know nothing about that..." Agatha said surprisingly.

"Soul Transfer was the top secret of the Union. Its classification was even two levels higher than that of the God's Punishment Army plan in which witches were used as the experiment mice. At that time, only the Three Chiefs and a few senior officials knew of it," Pasha replied. "I only learned this astonishing information with the fall of Taquila."

"So Natalia supported the God's Punishment Army plan in the beginning?" Roland asked, frowning.

"What's an original carrier?"

"Because she was left with no choice. As to the latter... it's what we look like right now." Her tentacles drooped more and her body got closer to the light curtain. "My weird, ugly shell is the evidence that the underground civilization existed. It's the only tombstone that it left. It's a long story. Your Majesty, please allow me to slowly tell you."

Roland nodded, poured himself a glass of Chaos Drink, leaned back in the chair and began to sense the consciousness transmitted from Pasha.

"According to the clues on the lithograph, the evanescent civilization left a city in the Impassable Mountain Range. The Quest Society searched for a long time without gaining anything. Then one day it occurred to them that since this civilization was used to moving underground, could this city be built underground as well?"

"After extending the search area, the witches finally found this magnificent city. It consisted of four layers with an area of about half the size of Taquila. On each layer there were countless turnoffs and hollow cavities, which were as complex as a maze. Without the guidance of a witch who could sense directions, one could easily get lost and never get out. For this reason, the Quest Society also called it the maze ruin."

"Unfortunately before the Quest Society could carefully explore it, Taquila was occupied by the demons. Everybody had to escape from home. After paying a heavy price, we finally arrived at the maze. According to our plan, the Union would take away the original carrier stored in the maze, leave for the Hermes Plateau, and then build a new Holy City to restore orders at the east coast of the continent."

"But no one would've guessed what would happen next."

Pasha paused and the scales on her body dimmed. Even without looking at her facial expression, Roland could sense the grief in her heart.

After quite a while, she resumed transmitting. "Although it was after an interval, the Quest Society found the maze ruin that had been preserved in good condition. One can even say that it was an entirely new city. Besides the original carrier, the bottom layer of the ruin stored many unconceivable secrets, the most important three of which were the magic core, the central carrier, and the record of the evanescent civilization. Afterwards, the idea came to our minds that as early as the first Battle of Divine Will, the underground civilization had intended to lead us here." Pasha inhaled deeply. "The maze ruin was prepared for us."

"What for?" Tilly could not help but ask.

"For revenge." Another voice appeared in everybody's head. Compared with Pasha, this witch's tone was much colder. "It hoped that we could destroy the demons and take revenge for its clan's extinction."

"It's only Lady Natalia's speculation. It wasn't recorded in the document." Pasha waved her tentacles like shaking a head. "It could be that they simply wanted their civilization to be passed down. Anyway, from the remaining record, the Quest Society retrieved many research materials related to God's will and magic power. In order for us to understand the details, most of its conclusions were expressed in lithographs."

"And the record about the magic core is the very root of the divergence between the Queen of Sunchaser and the Queen of Starfall City. One of the most important messages in the lithographs is, 'magic power offers infinite possibilities and the pursuit of God's will is the ladder to mastering magic power'."

Roland sensed the key point coming. "What's the magic core? Does it have anything to do with the Instrument of Divine Retribution?"

"You can take the core as an artificial Magic Cyclone. It's not confined to a witch's body and can adjust its forms at any time. This bizarre device almost overturned the Union's knowledge system." Using one of her tentacles to point at the light curtain, Pasha said, "For example, the phantom instrument we're using for our communication is a minor scaled magic core. When necessary, it can be converted into other instruments. As to the Instrument of Divine Retribution, it's the biggest magic core in the ruin."

"I see..." Roland instantly realized the superiority of this instrument. Compared with the witches abilities which were inherently unchangeable, the magic core was virtually a universal terminal. Most of all, its effective distance far exceeded the five-meter limit. Either for production or for military use, it was way more powerful than the witches.

"But it's just the primary usage of the magic power. Just as the relationship between the original awakening and the high evolution, the lithograph predicted that with the deepening of the development of magic power, one day we could finally be equivalent to God..." Pasha said with a sense of loss as if she was not saying something significant. Instead, she sounded like someone who had lost their way.

Roland realized the point of her last words.

"But you ran out of time."

"You're right. At first, we didn't know how long it would take for that day to arrive. It could take a century or a millennium. In order to approach the magic core, several Quest Society members had lost their lives. Obviously, witches can't touch those bizarre instruments. We wanted to solve the problem, but didn't know how to do it, so our exploration came to a dead end. The lithograph could only show very limited information. If we were to carry out our research, we had to follow their instructions. Only when there were enough people integrated with the central carrier, could we comprehend their language so as to further read their more profound documents and records."

"But we didn't have enough time. We'd spent three years figuring these things out. Many common people who had joined us earlier tried to get rid of our control and knowing how many witches were needed to integrate with the carrier remained unknown. But at that time, our resources could only sustain one attempt of research. If it went on like this, the great plan of the Union to restore order would have lost its foundation."

"The most important thing is that Lady Alice's plan of the God's Punishment Army has an irreconcilable conflict with the concept recorded in the underground civilization's documents. If a witch abandons her body to become a God's Punishment Warrior, she'll not only lose the chance to be promoted," Pasha paused, then said, "but also lose God's Will forever."

Chapter 735: Legacy of the Civilization

Roland could easily guess what had happened next.

After knowing that God's Punishment Army was not the only way to compete with demons on the battlefields any more, the Taquila survivors who didn't want to reduce their own kind to the materials for shells must have caused a great conflict with Alice.

Given that, the Battle of Faiths recorded in the written history of the the church probably is just a story made up to cover the truth of this dispute.

As for the root of this disagreement, it did not just lie in the difference between the faith in God's Punishment Army and that in the Chosen One. At that moment, all the leaders of the Union must have been very clear that neither of the choices was able to guarantee their victory in the war against demons.

According to Phyllis, the plan proposed by the Queen of Starfall City to have God's Punishment Army rest in an everlasting sleep would indeed create 3,000 to 4,000 powerful, experienced extraordinary warriors before the third Battle of Divine Will, but the survivors of the Union had also noticed a fatal defect in this plan. As souls needed lots of time to adapt to their shells, once this army suffered an

inevitable loss during the wartime, it would be impossible for the Union to replace casualties with new warriors in a short time. As a result, this army might only be able to block demons for a decade, or even, by any chance, retrieve the ruined Holy City of Taquila, but they could never recapture the whole Land of Dawn.

As for the choice to search for the Chosen One, they had thought it as an even more risky plan because of its extremely slim chance of success. However, they had also seen the benefit of it. If they found the one, human beings would be able to win the war at little cost and would even get closer to the deities based on the records on the lithograph.

For the survivors of the Union, searching for the Chosen One meant betting on the future while the God's Punishment Army plan the present.

"What about the result? Did you defeat the Starfall City?" Roland asked.

"Taquila was not the final winner. No one would be in this conflict. When both sides lose their Transcendents, Lady Eleanor stood out to stop this internal disaccord and integrated herself into the central carrier. She was the first witch merging with it."

Shocked, Agatha asked, "You mean, in the ruins of the maze, all the Three Chiefs were..."

Pasha said plaintively, "Yes, the Union lost all the three Transcendents in this internal struggle. It was also the end of the Three Chiefs system. As a result, the ruins of the maze became an indispensable part of the Union. Both sides decided to stop fighting and then reached an agreement through negotiation. As agreed, the survivors of Taquila stayed in the ruins studying the magic core and those of the Starfall City went to Hermes and built a new Holy City there. Due to the limited number of the original carriers, the survivors of the Starfall City also agreed to offer us a certain number of empty shells in the next 100 years. "

"We also agreed that if we failed to make a breakthrough in the Chosen One plan or found no leads of her, they would have the right to take back all the research results in the ruins, including the soul containers and the original carriers. They claimed that by then they would come with their God's Punishment Warriors and that if we broke the agreement, they would never compromise again."

Notice something was wrong here, Roland interrupted, "wait... After 100 years, the church didn't come to you, did they?"

Based on what he knew, in the past hundreds of years, the witches of Taquila had hid underground and never had a say in the world. Meanwhile all the church's God's Punishment Warriors had been soulless. Despite the defect in the warriors, the church still greatly outnumbered the Taquila witches, yet it had never sent any troops to the ruins of the maze. Roland wondered whether the church people had totally forgotten about this agreement.

Pasha sighed. "For a long time we were unable to know what was going on in Hermes or any other things that happened outside the ruins of the maze since the original carriers could not be exposed to the sun and the witches who transferred their souls into new bodies needed a long time to adapt to them. When we were able to go outside, we were surprised to discover that they didn't follow lady Alice's will when building the new order."

Agatha said through her teeth, "I knew that! I knew lady Alice would never create such rules. As compared to her plan of God's Punishment Army, what the church did was destroying the foundation of the witches!"

All the Taquila survivors agreed with her at once.

Roland waited until they calmed down and changed the subject. "What's a central carrier? Is it different from the original carriers?"

Another voice started to explain, "They're all shells. As the living beings of the underground civilization were extremely fragile, they had to live in shells. These things were immortal, but we can't find any detailed information about where they came from in the documents left in the ruins. Based on what we know now, the original carriers are the most common shells, whereas the central carrier which looks similar to them stores many unconscious memories. You can consider it as an original carrier which had been used for many years but had no self-awareness. We need to integrate all the memories into it to understand the remaining documented experiment records in the ruins." She sounded soft and elegant, different from Pasha and the angry witch.

Listening to this voice, Roland quickly pictured in his head an academic woman who had a long thick braid and wore a pair of black-framed round glasses. He said to her, "Thank you for explaining this to me, you're..."

"My name is Celine, Your Majesty. I was a member of the Quest Society and used to work with Agatha."

Agatha got closer to him and whispered in his ear, "I'm not familiar with her. We worked in the same research tower but on different floors. I heard that she was a quiet girl, but every time when it came to magic power, she would become passionate, acting like a totally different person."

Hearing this, Roland thought, "Only someone like this woman would become a faithful follower of Natalia." He cleared his throat and asked her another question, "So, are the witches who merged with the central carrier still alive?"

Celine replied, "not really. Apart from the dozen witches who severely injured in the internal battle, there was another thirty-six of us who volunteered to follow lady Eleanor to merge with it. Not everyone was willing to turn into such a monster or spend the rest of her life trapped in a body that can't feel anything. Their sacrifice finally activated the central carrier, but unfortunately, it can only say yes or no in a dialogue but can't make a normal conversation."

Roland was intrigued at once. "It can answer yes or no to any question?"

Celine also grew a little more excited. "It only answers a question it understands and it'll respond more quickly if you specify your question. It enables us to mend or adjust the magic core. It's essentially a combination of all the Taquila witches' willpower. The more witches merge with it, the faster its reaction is. For us, to accompany Lady Eleanor was the last we can do to contribute to the search for the magic power."

Meanwhile, Roland was excited about something else. "Doesn't the mechanism of input and feedback sound like a primary bio-computer system? If I set all the conditions, will the central carrier be able to

solve an equation or complete some complex calculations by itself? I really want to take this thing to Neverwinter and thoroughly study it here!"

Knowing that it was not the time to make such a request, he decided to put those thoughts aside at this moment and express his wish in future negotiations.

He drank all the Chaos Drink in his cup and said, "I see. Now I've got a basic understanding of your situation, but I still have one question. You, the church and those ancient books have repeatedly mentioned the Divine Will, and I heard that one could even feel the existence of the deities in a secret chamber exclusive for the Pope on the top floor of a secret temple under the Hermes Plateau. Could you tell me what the Divine Will is? "

Chapter 736: The Giant Paintings and the Divine Will

Pasha was astonished at Roland's question for a moment and then said, "Phyllis is right. You do know lots about us. As for the Divine Will, we didn't know much about it until the fall of Taquila, so it's impossible for you to get this information from Agatha."

Roland put on some airs by propping his chin with interlaced fingers and said, "Don't forget it, the church was defeated by me. All the Pure Witches who held management positions in the Holy City of Hermes now are imprisoned in Neverwinter."

"I see."

With these words, Pasha became silent, as if she were looking at Roland carefully. Even though she had no eyes, he could still feel her gaze. After a long time, Pasha's voice appeared in his head again. "I can tell you what the Divine Will is, but you have to promise you'll keep this secret forever and so do the others in this meeting. If people are running after or protecting something intangible, they won't easily fall into despair, but when this something becomes tangible, they'll probably get stressed out. I mean if this information is leaked out, it'll do no good to human beings."

Roland made an eye contact with all his witches to confirm that they would keep this secret and then asked in a deep voice, "So that's to say, the Divine Will is something tangible?"

Pasha slowed down, as if she was talking while recalling. "Yes, it looks like a transparent God's Stone of Retaliation, shaped like a spindle apparatus, but it can't affect the use of magic power or has any other special function. As long as you open your heart near it, you'll truly feel the call of the deities and see something incredible."

"Like what?"

"You'll see an infinitely spacious hall with the Bloody Moon high above your head and four giant paintings around you. The paintings seem to be alive and change all the time..." The ancient witch described the illusion created by the Divine Will in detail.

Tilly could not help asking, "What do those paintings stand for?"

Hearing this question, all of them held their breath waiting for the answer.

Pasha's tentacles stood up at once. "This question baffled the people for nearly 1,000 years. The Quest Society kept on looking for the answer but failed. We had no idea about it either until we decoded the contents in the documented records in the ruins of ruins. The four paintings the deities showed us respectively represent the mankind, the demons, some unknown enemy and the underground civilization. The shape of the Divine Will corroborates this speculation, as it's not a complete spindle apparatus but a quarter of a sphere which we called the relic of the deities."

Roland knitted his eyebrows. "Four Giant Paintings and a quarter of the relic of deities... Do you mean every civilization pictured in the paintings has a relic like this?"

"Not everyone. The underground civilization lost its part of the Divine Will. As a result, one of the paintings showed by the deities is always black. It turned black right after the end of the first Battle of Divine Will. According to the documented records in the ruin of the maze and those in the ancient documents of the Union, we surmise that the underground civilization is already removed from the Battle of Divine Will forever." Gooseprickles crawled up everyone's arms when they heard Pasha's answer.

They were shocked to learn that all the civilizations had fought for hundreds of years just for some relic, and more importantly, for each civilization, losing its part of relic would mean losing everything.

Hearing such a shocking news, Roland knitted his eyebrows even more tightly together. As compared to some unknown enemy in this war, what he cared more about was who had set up the whole thing. He wondered, "is it merely an accident or carefully arranged. Did it happen randomly or due to human being's doomed fate? What's the purpose of leaving behind this relic? Does it have anything to do with the Bloody Moon which emerges periodically? More importantly, did the Taquila survivors understand these things correctly?" He was lost in thought and meanwhile felt he caught a vague clue...

He thought, "What if I replace the word 'deities' in this story with something else?"

When he was absorbed in thought, Tilly asked, "If we collect all of the four parts of the relic, what will happen? Didn't the deities give you any guidance?"

Pasha calmly replied, "No one knows the answer, and the deities have never responded to our calls. The deities don't love people. They only favor the winner."

Wendy exclaimed in disbelief, "How come... we've fought for hundreds of years just because of a useless stone? The Divine Will is... so cruel."

The ancient witch tried to comfort her. "So it appears. I hope these words in the documented records in the ruins of the maze will solve your question, although they are quite hard to understand. 'All of us are the deities' children, but only a few of us will be able to see the dawn. Since we sensed magic power, we've been destined to lead a life uncommon. This competition has lasted for a long period of time. We are already one-in-a-thousand elite. Birds weren't birds, and we weren't us. Fighting makes things thrive, and competition makes living beings eternal.'"

Something flashed across Roland's mind like a bolt of lightning.

He abruptly interrupted, 'What did you say?"

"All of us are the deities' children?"

"No, something after this."

Scroll replied, "'this competition has lasted for a long period of time. We are already one-in-a-thousand elite.' Your Majesty, I've memorized all of it."

What does that sound like?

This thing described by the underground civilization resembles the process of evolution! From barbaric period to civilized age, every civilization that exists now has defeated numerous opponents during its development course.

And all the four different civilizations we know have a thing in common, which is they all know how to use magic power.

Among human beings, witches are the ones who can use this kind of power, and demons and the underground civilization seem to be even better at controlling it. Given that, the other unknown enemy must also be able to use it.

If that's true, everything will be consistent with the underground civilization's description. The "children" in the sentence "All of us are the deities' children" probably refers to the species who were gifted to manipulate magic power.

In this way, the Battles of Divine Will aren't caused by the deities' relic. Instead, they are just a means of accelerating evolution or the basic rules of this magic world. This also corroborates the underground civilization's conclusion that elevating magic power is the way to get closer to the deities.

Pasha's voice reverberated across Roland's head. "Your Majesty, are you all right? I feel your mind is a little out of order."

"Oh? Are you able to see what I'm thinking?"

"No, I can only know what you are thinking when you are ready to communicate with me through your mind. For example, now I'm willing to talk with you through my mind, so you are able to hear what I'm thinking." Pasha paused for a while and asked, "It'll be more efficient to communicate that way. Do you want to give it try?"

Roland shook his head, smiling. "No, I prefer to express myself using my throat and my tongue. As for the confusion... I just thought of something interesting. But relax, it won't affect our communication."

Thinking that sometimes rules were just rules and there might not be a reason for them, he felt it was acceptable to consider them as something created by the deities. As far as he knew, the origin of life and the Cambrian explosion on earth were also puzzling things. Life is said to form out of lightning and boiling water where organic molecules constantly collided, merged and split and then formed a molecular chain which could reproduce itself. The chance of that is as slim as that of a hurricane assembling a Benz sports car by whirling lots of metal parts into the air.

As for the Cambrian explosion, it was even more mysterious. A sea which only had had some simple creatures such as algae and mollusc for several hundred million years seemed to be filled with various kinds of animals overnight. In a short span of time in the Cambrian period, most major animal phyla of

the earth appeared in a sudden. No matter how living beings on the earth evolved in the following years, they can all be traced back to their origins that formed in this period of time.

As these two great changes which gave a strong impetus to the species evolution on the earth are both events of extremely low probability, some people attribute them to some mysterious power beyond description. They believe that it's an invisible hand that pushed the world on the earth to develop into what it's like today. What about this strange magic world? Does such power really exist in here?

Chapter 737: The Leader

Roland was clear that it was nothing but his own speculation.

I can't jump to a conclusion based solely on the documentation of the underground civilization since their contents still need further verification. For example, the underground civilization thought that they successfully survived a series of competition, but what about their opponents who probably were also able to use magic power? Where did they leave their traces? What about human beings? Did witches first appear before the first Battle of Divine Will— or rather, was the mankind gifted with the sense of magic when they were still primates or even at the beginning of the Mammalian age?

Maybe, human beings in this world didn't go through such a long process of evolution at all. Could they directly become what they are now through mutation after gaining a victory?

He was afraid that to answer these questions, he would need a great number of outstanding explorers like Thunder.

As compared to those researches, his top priority still remained to be human survival, but he believed that it was just a matter of time for him to find out the answers.

He looked at Pasha, asking, "Before you moved this part of relic underground, had it been kept by the church... no, I mean the Starfall City all the time?"

Now that he knew the importance of the relic, he started to care about its safety.

"Yes. Due to the existence of the giant paintings, burying it underground can't prevent the Divine Will. Therefore, it's always kept by the most powerful witch organization. During the Months of Demons when magic power reaches its peak, demonic beasts will come for it. That was why they launched frenzied attacks at Hermes during those months before." With these words, Pasha moved her giant body away, revealing the scene behind her. Two piles of dead bodies of demonic beasts stood there with light blue blood dripping down and flowing all over the ground. Pasha continued, "After we knew the Starfall City had suffered a serious setback, we took back the relic as soon as we could. Now it's very safe in our hands."

Wendy gasped at the sight. "How did you kill that many hybrid demonic beasts?"

"The Instrument of Divine Retribution can deprive the targets of their magic power, and these monsters will die soon without the power in their bodies." Pasha briefly described how this instrument worked and continued. "But it'll only become a mighty weapon when it's activated by the Chosen One."

Roland caught the keyword immediately. "Deprive them of their magic power? So does it mean that it'll do no harm to normal animals? Can God's Stones influence the instrument?"

"No, it directly affects magic power, and God's Stones can't do anything about it at all."

Learning that this instrument could affect an area within a radius of over 5,000 miles without causing any side effects to living beings without magic power, Roland had to admit it was really an environmentally friendly weapon. Unfortunately, however, its start-up requirement seemed too harsh.

He wondered whether the underground civilization had really tested this instrument's power or not. "Maybe they've just done it in theory? Otherwise, they wouldn't end up losing its relic in the war. Wait, did they create something they couldn't use? This kind of absurd things will only happen in this strange magic world."

Thinking that the underground civilization had an advanced magic theory and demons were able to cultivate various kinds of abilities, he realized human beings seemed to have no advantage in manipulating magic power at all. The witches were not a stable group. Their awakenings happened randomly among people and their abilities were hard to predict and control. Given that, he believed they still need a long time to evolve, but now there was not much time left for human beings.

Roland suspected that by the time the Taquila witches found the Chosen One, Neverwinter's armies equipped with advanced steel weapons had already gained an upper hand in the war against demons.

Despite all those thoughts, he would never try to deny the existence of magic power in this world.

He decided to carry out research on both science and magic power at the same time. In this way, the new findings of magic power would increase their productivity. In the meantime, the development of productivity would generate more resources for the studies on magic power.

He believed all research projects could be successfully carried out as long as there was plenty of money and manpower, including the one on magic power.

Now that he knew the basic situation of the Taquila survivors, he thought it was time to negotiate with them.

He said, "Pasha, thank you for telling me your situation and research results. As demons are obviously our common enemy, we should work together and pool our resources to fight against them. How about we building a united front of Divine Will to further our cooperation and coordination?"

Pasha tapped with her tentacles. "I agree. We only hope Your Majesty will continue your policy to gather more witches. All the Taquila witches want is to find the Chosen One among them. We'll send another God's Punishment Witch to bring you a new Five-Colored Stone."

"I'll continue the policy anyway. Even if you don't say that, I'm still going to expand the witch organization in my kingdom, but..." He paused for a while. "I think you'd better move to another place, such as the western mountains near Neverwinter."

"Well..."

Before Pasha gave her answer, all the witches in the reception hall stirred. "Your Majesty?"

"What about demonic beasts?"

At this moment, all the witches were staring at him. Some seemed worried and some nervous. Only Agatha gave him an approving look as if she had known that he was going to make such a request.

Roland surveyed them and signal the witches to calm down and relax. After that, he turned to look at Pasha on the light curtain again and said, "To be honest, I can't agree with your plan to protect the relic on your own. Once you lose it, all human beings' efforts will be wasted. Demonic beasts aren't tough enemies, but without the defensive line in Hermes, are you sure you can protect the relic when demons launch a surprise attack on you?"

Having heard that the underground civilization diminished probably because they lost its part of the relic, he thought it was better to put this thing under his own protection or somewhere near him. He would feel better if he would be able to send an army to support them immediately when they were attacked.

Celine seemed to be disagreeable. "As long as we change the annihilation core, demons will become easy targets as demonic beasts."

"No, they won't. Demons are way more powerful and intelligent than demonic hybrids. I can tell from the packed dead bodies that those demonic beasts were once very close to your core region. If I guess correctly, the Instrument of Divine Retribution isn't far away from the phantom instrument." Roland noticed that the little tentacles on Pasha stiffened for a moment when she heard this sentence. "If some Mad Demons who can throw spears attack you guys, how many magic cores will be able to remain intact?"

"But..."

Roland continued to explain patiently, "If you still think I won't do any better than you or worry about that demonic beasts would be attracted by the relic, you can settle down on the side of the western mountains close to the Fertile Plains and I'll build a road to connect your place with Neverwinter. In that case, I'll be able to help you whenever you're in trouble: Trust is the foundation of cooperation, and placing the relic where both parties regard as safe is the first step to build our mutual trust, isn't it?"

Pasha remained speechless with her tentacles intertwined with those of the other blobs. They seemed to be communicating with each other rapidly in this way. After seven or eight minutes, she started to talk again.

"Before I give our reply, I'd like to ask a question first. If we do form a united front of... Divine Will as you said, who'll lead us to fight against demons?"

Chapter 738: Only One Leader

Surprised by this sudden question, Roland fell silent for a moment and then asked with a smile, "You seem to have something else to say?"

Pasha replied, "As this united front is related to the survival of all human beings, we hope that every decision we make here can be given full consideration. To this end... we the survivors of Taquila suggest

we adopt a co-governance mechanism for the united front. Under such a system, all decisions will be jointly made by the heads of the most powerful groups after negotiation. By doing so, we'll be able to avoid misjudgment and ensure an equal interest of every party."

"Uhm... it sounds like the Union's Three Chiefs system."

The ancient witch further explained, "A triumvirate can ensure a quick and well-balanced decision-making process, but it's not the only choice. Regarding the current situation, we'd better build a system to include the Four Kingdoms and all the witch organizations. In the early days of the Union, there were 11 leaders planning our military campaigns at the roundtable."

Hearing this, Roland had to admit they were quite clever in this matter since this co-governance mechanism they proposed would surely guarantee their own status in the united front. At this moment, except his Graycastle, all the kingdoms and witch organizations such as the Witch Union and Sleeping Island could hardly compete with the Taquila survivors who had taken over all the magic power instruments left by the underground civilization and owned over 100 God's Punishment Witches. They had accumulated rich fighting experiences during a decades-long battle against demons and were overwhelmingly powerful when fighting with other witches and common armies.

Roland believed that if he agreed, the Taquila witches would naturally become one of the policymakers of the co-governance system. They would further ensure their own interests by stressing their identities as witches to gain recognition from and establish good relationships with the other witch organizations.

He thought that they made such a request probably because they wanted to protect themselves not because they were planning something like restoring their rule over human beings or overthrowing the kingdoms. He understood that every group would be prudent and want such a self-protecting measure before joining in a large organization. If he had been the old Prince Roland who had recently become a lord of Border Town, he would have accepted this suggestion of the Taquila witches, but now he was different.

With an air of authority, he said, "An interesting suggestion, but the united front won't adopt a co-governance mechanism. It'll have only one leader. That is me. This is the most efficient and reliable way of managing it."

He agreed that modesty was a virtue but also knew that now was not the right time for him to be humble, since he was clear that the Three Chiefs system might be a good choice for the Union but not for him.

He was the only one in this world, who knew what industrialization was and how to make the best use of all the resources in his domain.

To see rapid industrialization, he had to make all his administrative departments do what he said and work together like a set of machines toward the same goal. He wanted that every order issued by his City Hall to smoothly reach all his subjects and all the resources within his domain to be allocated and managed in accordance with his plan. Adopting a co-governance system under which he would have to explain and convince all the other policymakers to carry out a policy obviously would slow down the process of industrialization.

Seeing Roland reject Taquila's idea outright and bluntly, all the people in the meeting were left in an awkward silence, including those ancient witches.

Roland cleared his throat and calmly continued. "The united front is built to guarantee that we'll work together to fight against demons, but I don't require you to join in it at the very beginning. I want you to move to the Western Region to build mutual trust first. As compared to some oral agreement, the facts you'll see here will be more convincing."

"What... are we going to see?"

He explained, "You're going to see our strength and determination to fight against demons and the current situation of some other organizations, both those that are a part of the united front and those not. After that, you can make a decision to join in or not. Even if you don't join in, we'll still be able to cooperate on many other projects, such as experiments and the search for the Chosen One. I promise I won't interfere with your internal affairs."

Celine interrupted, "You won't mind if we don't give you the relic and the magic core?"

"No, and in fact, I've never planned to depend on those instruments in the ruins of the maze to defeat demons. Regarding the relic, as long as it's kept in a safe place, I won't have a problem with it. Like I said, working together to look for the Chosen One and protect the relic is the first step to build our mutual trust. As for further cooperation, we can take it slow."

The cold voice which remained silent for a long time appeared again. "I've got to say you're very uncommon, you common man, but have you ever thought that controlling the united front on your own can be very risky. If the Battle of Divine Will lasts decades and during this period of time you inevitably become old and weak, how can you ensure that your successors will follow your will to lead us in the war? Only a co-governance mechanism can effectively prevent such a problem."

"I don't think it'll be a problem at all. I'm not sure how long will the war last, but I'm afraid my life will be longer than all of yours combined." At this moment, he felt he needed to bluff, although he was not sure whether he had got Zero's lifespan as he obviously did not get her magic power. He knew that to convince these ancient witches, he had better explain his decision with some incredible power rather than persuading them that a special system which they had never heard of would guarantee that his successors would carry on his work.

He described to them the Soul Battlefield in detail and many witches chimed in. After that, there was a long silence.

He saw that the tentacles of the blobs knotted together again and the scales on their bodies turned from grayish brown to reddish brown, which indicated that they had a heated discussion now.

After a long time, their tentacles hung down.

Pasha said solemnly, "I understand, but we need at least a month to move all the things we need. I hope you can offer us some building materials as one cave isn't enough for all our things. We need to build a palace and a laboratory inside the western mountains."

Roland was surprised and asked, "Wait a minute, how can you build something like that underground?" It was not easy to conduct an underground construction, for the environment below the earth was wet

and dark. As such he had planned to ask Lotus to connect some underground caves in the western mountains for the Taquila survivors since their bodies would not require very comfortable living conditions. However, they seemed to have mastered better construction skills than him and even planned to build a new palace underground.

Pasha explained, "Our devouring worm will do the job. It's a big shell looking like a wild beast. We've got one in the ruins. That was the shell we used to sneak into the City of Glow in the Kingdom of Dawn."

Chapter 739: The Handshake

Roland felt a jolt, thinking, "Why do these things sound similar to the giant demonic beast in the snow mountain?"

When he was about to raise this question, Agatha asked Pasha, "Are you the ones who entered the Devil's Town and devoured the Blackstone Pagoda?"

Pasha was confused, saying, "Devil's... Town? No, we didn't. We've only used our devouring worm to mend the ruins and build the tunnel to the City of Glow. We can't afford to use it so frequently since it eats a lot."

Roland described the witches' adventures in the Misty Forest and the Devil's Town located to the west of the Western Region. After that, he asked Scroll to take out the pictures of the scenes drawn by Soraya and explained, "this monster, much bigger than any wild beast, seemed to move toward the great snow mountain."

Seeing the vivid pictures, Pasha took a deep breath and said, "Yes, it's indeed a devouring worm. I'm afraid that there're also some ruins left by the underground civilization in the snow mountain you mentioned. According to the literatures we read here, this civilization once could be found everywhere in the Land of Dawn. This record is reliable, as now we can easily find tracks and numerous tunnels left by devouring worms in every high mountain."

"But you think the underground civilization has already perished."

"Yes, we do, but the worm was just a shell like an original carrier. A soul can get into it and then move it."

Hearing this, Roland's heart sank in a sudden. He glanced around and found all the witches in the reception hall looked solemn at this moment. Obviously, everybody guessed that the one who sent the worm to Agatha's research tower and the Devil's Town must be the unknown enemy in the Battle of Divine Will.

Roland wondered whether this enemy had happened to find the ruins and some worm shells in the snow mountain and transfer souls into those shells.

If this was the case, he believed it would not be a big problem.

However, if they had also found some magic cores and a central carrier, he believed he would have big trouble. Will these things drastically improve their magic theory and even enable them to create some Instrument of Divine Retribution against the witches?

He thought they had an excellent chance of finding some shells and even instruments in the snow mountain. Unlike the Impassable Mountain Range and the Dragonspine Mountain Range, it did not stretch very long, but its major peak was the highest mount in the Western Region. According to Pasha, such a great mountain was a perfect place to build a large underground city for the underground civilization. Given this, he decided that he must do something about it.

Celine anxiously said, "Your Majesty, please assist us in exploring the snow mountain as soon as possible, in case there're some remaining instruments."

"And the various kinds of shells recorded in the literature. If the unknown enemy gets them, I'm afraid it would cause us lots of trouble." Compared to Celine, Pasha still sounded calm, but all her tentacles were waving rapidly, showing her anxiety inside.

This news apparently caused a stir among the blobs, as it was getting noisy behind Pasha.

Roland quickly got why they were so excited.

Living in the God's Punishment Warriors' bodies for hundreds of years resembled being imprisoned in endless emptiness, which explained why they were so interested in the new carriers. However, compared with living in the bodies of God's Punishment Army, the carriers at least enabled them to have some feelings including a sense of smell, though they would not look like human beings anymore.

Roland pretended to hesitate, saying, "I see your point. I'd been planning to explore the snow mountain of the Western Region, but as I didn't have any suitable means of transport and didn't want the witches to take any risk, I had to postpone in the end. If I could get the help from your devouring worm for this exploration, I think it'll be a good opportunity..."

Pasha immediately promised, "We'll start to move as fast as we can."

Roland, who had been thinking about how to start the cooperation with the Taquila survivors, was also happy to get this chance. In fact, even if they didn't ask him to explore the mountain, he would do it sooner or later in order to eliminate potential threats around Neverwinter and satisfy his own curiosity toward the big carriers which were able to drill huge tunnels underground.

He could easily think of a long list of things these carriers could do.

He had planned to use the Impassable Mountain Range as a natural barrier against the demons, but current engineering techniques did not allow him to do so. The transportation of cement and bricks alone would be a tricky problem, as the mountain paths were rugged and sinuous and the weather condition there was very unstable. If some soldiers were garrisoned on the mountains, he would have to build barbette for them. Near the military facilities, he would also need to build barracks, roads, and necessary living facilities, which would be a big challenge for Hummingbird and Lotus.

However, if he had a devouring worm, he could solve all those problems by drilling a straight underground tunnel connecting the barbette on the mountain with Neverwinter and building underground ammunition reservoir and barracks which could keep them away from the snow storm. He could even build a railroad in the tunnel so that steam trailers could be used to transport soldiers and goods.

With reinforced concrete blockhouses on the ground and convenient transportation lines underground, that would be the natural chasm defense line he wanted.

This devouring worm could also be used to build underground utilities and sewage discharge system for the city. When that happened, he would proudly announce that in this age, Neverwinter was the first city to have an underground drainage system in which people could walk freely. He believed that this worm would be praised highly as a magic tool in the civil engineering field before the invention of tunnel boring machine and would be considered as important as the magic core and the bio-computer.

Roland rose and walked to the light curtain, extending his right hand toward Pasha. "I hope this is the beginning of building our mutual trust."

"Your Majesty, this is..."

He looked at this monster who was several meters taller than himself and calmly explained, "It's a handshake, representing a preliminary agreement between us."

After a little hesitation, Pasha dropped the thickest tentacle on her head. It moved in a spiral and touched his palm in the end.

He thought, "What a pity. Soraya isn't here to witness and record this moment worthy being memorized forever."

When the image of Pasha started to distort, he suddenly asked, "Ah... wait, you said every high mountain might have ruins left by the underground civilization. What about the mountains in the deep sea?"

Pasha was surprised, saying, "Are there mountains under the sea? According to the literature, they did not go to the sea and only lived on the Land of Dawn. I think they might not be able to move around in the sea, as most of their carriers were heavy and clumsy. Why did you ask about this?"

"Nothing, I'm just curious." Roland shook his head and lost in thoughts.

They only lived on the Land of Dawn... so the weird underwater spire and telescope have nothing to do with the underground civilization, but who owns the Giant Stone Gates that Thunder saw through the old telescope and the land which only appears during flood tide? The unknown enemy in the Battle of Divine Will?

I hope Thunder can find the answer.

At this moment, the purple light curtain distorted and then disappeared.

The reception hall got back to normal.

Chapter 740: A Beautiful Night

As night fell, Wendy went to the door of Scroll's bedroom.

She held out her hand, hesitating whether she should knock or not. However, just at that moment, Scroll opened the door.

"I knew you would come find me." Scroll smiled. "I also wanted to talk to you, just like we used to."

Scroll had apparently taken an early shower as her long, wet hair was randomly hanging over her shoulders instead of being tied up. She had also placed a towel on her shoulders in order to avoid getting her night robe wet. At first glimpse, she appeared to be a little younger, with her flowing hair covering the wrinkles on her forehead. After leading an increasingly comfortable life in Neverwinter, she looked more mellow.

Only her wise and mature eyes remained unchanged.

Wendy could not help smiling and asked, "In your bedroom or mine?"

"Yours. Nightingale will come back much later than Leaf."

"Ok."

"You serve the Chaos Drinks."

"What?!?"

"Of course you do, whoever initiates the conversation is also responsible for the drinks. That's our old rule and you know it."

"So that's why you waited for me behind the door?"

"That's right. Patience is the most important thing and also one of the lessons I draw from life. Now, have you learned your lesson?"

"Fine..."

As they went back to Wendy's bedroom and cleared up the desk, Wendy took two glasses and a bottle of Chaos Drink out of a drawer and poured it into the glasses. The orange-red drinks reflected a flame-like light against the light from the Magic Stone.

"That's what you got?" Scroll took a sip of it. "You're lucky. In winter, it's as good as Fire Dragon Wine..."

"I'm jealous of you." Wendy stretched her hands.

"Don't put it like that. We can enjoy such a drink thanks to Miss Evelyn."

Roland figured out a very interesting way to distribute the Chaos Drinks of various tastes to each witch of the Witch Union. Each witch in each month had an opportunity to pick up a bottle of the Chaos Drinks created by Evelyn. No one knew what kind of flavor they would get as they would only see a number before the draw was revealed.

Therefore, on that day, the witches used to exchange their drinks or drink others'. Somehow, Maggie always got the most popular drink, making everyone wonder if Evelyn had revealed it to her.

As they took their time to enjoy the orange-red drink that warmed their hearts, they heard the sound of the cold wind outside the windows. They felt tipsy in the warm bedroom. They talked little as they could understand each other just by looking at one another.

In fact, Wendy had nothing specific to say and just felt very happy at the moment. When she closed her eyes, Roland Wimbledon's earlier declaration would appear in her mind.

"Only I can be the leader."

Before this, Roland, in her opinion, was very approachable. She was concerned that he would mess up or show weakness on some critical issues, which was unbecoming of a king. But now, he was much better than she had expected. Judging from his tone and expression in dealing with other people, he had become more mature and developed his compelling authority thanks to the last two years of experience.

To her surprise, Roland was much better at being a dominator. Even so, he treated the witches and common people the same as before. It seemed that it was his nature to be nice to witches, which was very odd, especially for a royal noble.

She knew that Scroll also had felt this change, so she had waited at the door for her.

It was a habit they had kept since they were in the Witch Cooperation Association. When they had some good news to share, Wendy, Scroll, and Cara would always get together to drink some cheap ale and talk about it overnight. However, they had to drink wild fruit-water instead of ale when their conditions became worse later on.

Sadly, they gradually talked about their concerns and problems instead of good news or plans because Cara had a different purpose from them, leaving Wendy and Scroll behind. As the eldest witches and the founders of the Witch Cooperation Association, Wendy and Scroll had to be strong because if they gave up, all witches would lose their faith in seeking for Holy Mountain. That was how they survived through all the suffering and tough times.

And now, those times became the past once more.

Wendy drank out of the drink, let out a deep sigh, and said, "Well, after the meeting, I handed the test results of the witches from the Kingdom of Wolfheart to His Majesty."

"Oh? What kind of abilities do they have?" Scroll leaned on the bench and replied casually.

Wendy gave a general description of each of their abilities but was deliberately vague when it came to Broken Sword. "Can you guess who he assigned Broken Sword to?"

"Uh, probably Nightingale or Ashes...only they can make full use of Broken Sword's power." After some more thought, Scroll said, "Anna and Leaf indeed have strong magic power, but they and other witches aren't able to fight against enemies face to face. Additionally, there are few combat witches in the Witch Union."

"Great minds think alike, but His Majesty didn't think so." Wendy revealed her gentle smile. "He didn't assign Broken Sword to anyone."

Scroll was stunned. "Why?"

"According to him, a weapon needs to be carried by the owner personally at all times, but in that case, Broken Sword would have limited freedom. Besides, the enemies won't always launch an attack at her working time and her sword's aura isn't as powerful as gunpowder. Hence, she can partner with each

witch to test their overlapping effects rather than to be a weapon. Then, based on how interesting the combination is, His Majesty will assign her job."

"Assign her a job based on how interesting the combination is?"

"Yeah, those were His Majesty's words exactly."

He attached more importance to her feelings instead of giving her a role that limited her. Perhaps, that was the reason why Nightingale chose to support him with her wholeheartedly.

Now in hindsight, it was fortunate that they chose to believe Nightingale's judgment.

Thinking of this, Wendy could not help smiling. After filling her glass again, she held it before Scroll. "To us, for finding such a good king."

Scroll smiled, holding the glass to gently clink hers. "Yes, to our Holy Mountain."

"Ah... it's empty." Having drunk the last sip, she found that the bottle had been emptied out when she wanted to fill the glass again.

"Do you want me to return to my room to get mine?" Scroll also wanted to continue drinking.

"No, we must follow the old rule." She waved her hands and took a bottle from another drawer. "But next time, I'll wait for you to knock on my door."

"Wait a moment. Isn't that Nightingale's?"

"Yes, but she doesn't mind at all."

They cheered up again and continued to talk on this warm and wonderful night.