

Witch 751

Chapter 751: [Devourer] Fran

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"Currently, the plan for taking the Southernmost Region is going smoothly. The Iron Whip clan has fallen. Echo entrusted me to send her gratitude to you."

"It takes some time to prepare for a holy duel, and I expect that the clans in the Iron Sand City will head for the Land of Fire in a week."

"During the interim, I've hired some clansmen to mark the location of the underground Styx River. I believe we'll soon find a Blackwater River relatively close to the coast."

"In addition, Your Majesty, how are you going to deal with the Divine Lady of the clan?"

"With my great respect, Iron Axe."

"Your Majesty, this is the message we received from the Southernmost Region."

The Sigil of Listening flashed slightly, emitting a red light. Countess Spear paused after reporting, apparently waiting for Roland's reply.

Then Nightingale handed another Sigil over to Roland.

She placed the Sigil next to her slim legs on the table where she was seated and Roland couldn't tell whether she did it on purpose or not. Even though it was not summer, she was still wearing a pair of skinny pants that accentuated her perfect figure. Roland would have to get close to her legs if he wanted to talk into the Sigil.

For Roland, this was a dilemma.

He did not know whether to gaze directly at her legs or glance at them casually.

"Ahem, well done... I mean, Iron Axe."

"Your Majesty, are you all right?" the Countess inquired. "Your voice is husky. Please, keep warm this winter. You aren't as strong as the witches."

"I'm fine," Roland said as he cleared his throat. "Tell Iron Axe to go forward with the plan if the situation is close to what we expected. As for the Divine Lady, he can endeavor to persuade her to come to Neverwinter. But, if she's unwilling to leave the Southernmost Region, there's no need to push her."

"Is that all?"

"Yeah. I'll let you know if I have other requirements."

"I see, then I'll take my leave, Your Majesty."

The red light from the Sigil went out.

Roland raised his head and exhaled gently.

Why was he feeling like he had lost something?

Nightingale smiled as she put away the Sigil before slipping off the table and returning to the lounge chair where she could continue to read the picture-story book, "The Witches' Story," while she chewed on dried fish.

Roland curled his upper lip and started to concentrate on the real business at hand. They had applied all of the Sigils of Listening in the Desert Mission. The Countess Spear Passi of Fallen Dragon Ridge is transferring the messages to enable them to reach an instant contact between Neverwinter and the advance troops—although calling was still somewhat inconvenient, it was much faster than the traditional way of delivering a message that would cost them a dozen days as well as a carrier pigeon which, though having saved them a lot of time, still took several days.

He finally felt he would be able to get an overview of the situation without going out of his territory.

Unfortunately, a Sigil of Listening would only work if a witch provided the power. Which meant, at least two Sigils and two witches are necessary for a conversation to transpire, meaning that it would never replace the current communication tools used by common people.

Currently, the laying of the first telephone line in the Western Region was underway. It would directly connect the castle office to the City Hall of the Longsong Area. Meanwhile, the second and third lines were also being planned, which, as expected, would connect the City Halls in both areas so that any commands could be passed with just one call in the future.

Erecting electrical poles was time-consuming and labor-intensive, and furthermore, even the finished poles were vulnerable to the snow and ice. Considering this, Roland decided to do it in a convenient and safe way by setting the cable along the mountains and burying them in the ground by Lotus.

Once the mountain defenses have been established, inevitably the lines would need to increase in order to connect with his office. However, by that time there would be a 10 hand-operated system in place.

Aside from that, Roland was also concerned about the relocation of the ancient Taquila witches.

Maggie and Lightning had taken on the role of patrol. They increased their scope of investigation to 30 miles north of the mountains. This way they could signal an early warning in the case of a large-scale demonic beast attack.

After all, the relic of deities that were liable to determine the life and death of the Taquila group deserved to be handled with care.

He had talked with Pasha many times over the past two weeks.

Their idea was very simple. They decided to let the worm carrier open up a mountain channel leading to the Western Region first, and then choose a place where the rock formation was stable and had fewer forked roads and there they would build a palace. After that, the ancient witches would gradually move carriers, materials, and shells for the God's Punishment Army to their new dwelling before transporting the Instrument of Divine Retribution and the relic of gods.

So far Fran had the best experience relocating, or perhaps Roland should call her... a devouring worm.

Roland was unexpectedly shocked when he saw her squirm her chubby body so she could squeeze before the phantom instrument to express her gratitude to him, mouth gaping.

Later, he learned from Pasha that witches who integrated into carriers would no longer be able to be stored in God's Punishment Warriors. Both, their perceptions and consciousnesses, were consolidated within the new bodies. The advantage was that the carriers could be used in a rush, but once their current bodies were damaged, they wouldn't have any other alternative carriers.

Indeed, if the witches did not use this method of bonding, they would not be able to manipulate the body even with a lifetime of practice—how would a person, accustomed to using fingers and limbs, learn to manipulate countless tentacles or a body that had to inch along like a worm? On the contrary, once they had adapted to their peculiar carriers, it was unlikely for them to return to their previous way of life.

When Fran was not in use, ancient witches had to put her soul back to the soul container where she would fall asleep forever, for the devouring worm must consume a large amount of food to keep alive. Certainly, it was not a good experience for Fran at all. In a sense, she sacrificed her future for the continuation of the Taquila group, and she had paid a higher price than Pasha and Alethea who had transformed into the original carriers.

At least the latter could always watch the world and feel the changes happening in the outside world.

So, her gratitude to Roland was palpable.

Another key point that made her feel so grateful was that Roland boasted that there would be ongoing work in Neverwinter waiting for Fran. That meant he would be offering her enough food to keep her energetic. Fortunately, the worm was omnivorous and could accept both cereal and meat.

"I want to eat hot and seasoned meat porridge, as well as a whole veal with its skin roasted to be greasy!"

As Fran said that, her mouth began to water.

Although the worm's appearance was a bit ugly, they, like the blob, could sense their external environment in a unique way, which included taste, pain, and temperature.

Roland accepted her gratitude in his heart with both laughter and tears.

It seemed that no matter the world, the construction industry would always be a huge behemoth that devoured gold.

Incidentally, he also asked Pasha what the original and central carrier ate to sustain life. Her answer was mud and high temperatures—which was why they liked to stay in magma.

The answer relieved Roland slightly. This meant he wouldn't have to be responsible for supplying food to those who were nearly immortal. Presumably, the blob was more like a plant in the way it gathered energy when compared to the devouring worms.

Just as he considered how to plan the mountain defense so the underground military facilities would have an effective connection with the current byroads or even the palace of the ancient witches, there was suddenly the sound of an explosion coming from outside the window.

Roland turned and looked out the French window in surprise. He saw black smoke, mixed with some looming flames, rising from the corner of town, where the school would be located.

"Nightingale!"

"I'll make Sylvie and Phyllis go and take a look. Your Majesty, please don't leave the office. I'll be right back!" As Nightingale said this, she entered her Mist and disappeared completely.

Chapter 752: Detective Group, Another Strike!

"Lily, Lily, have you heard?" Mystery Moon rushed into the bedroom and leaned over to put her face close to Lily's. "Something happened in the school district!"

"Stand away. You're blocking my light." Lily pushed Mystery Moon's face away and continued to adjust the focal length of her microscope, but she sighed inwardly, thinking that her duplicate test today was going to be chucked out again.

"It's said that there was an explosion as well as a big fire. Who do you think was responsible for that? The church or the demons?"

"The church has been defeated by His Majesty, and the demons are thousands of kilometers away from us!" Lily glanced up at her impatiently. "I suppose it was some idiots who stole the waste of the chemical lab and brought it into the classroom."

Similar things happened before. Such as the accident two weeks ago, when a researcher had brought the failed gun cotton back to his home and wanted to use it as a kindling for his stove. As a result, it was ignited by his child accidentally and nearly burned the house to the ground. Hearing about this accident, His Majesty blew up, scolding the person responsible in a voice so loud that it echoed throughout the whole castle.

After that, the regulations in the chemical lab were strengthened a lot. Lily had seen the new rules from Scroll. It turned from a thin piece of parchment into a book that was as thick as adult's forefinger.

"But this time there's an explosion. How can you be so indifferent to what happens in Neverwinter? This is our home!" Mystery Moon said eloquently.

"Stop bluffing. You are just too curious to wait for the answer!"

Lily was a little angry. "That's why we should leave it to some more professional people. By the way, what I'm doing is also for the development of Neverwinter!" She paused. "Yet, all you've been doing is interfering with my experiment and idling about all the time!"

"Oh?" Mystery Moon revealed a strange smile. "Then what have you achieved so far?"

"Er..." Lily suddenly felt short of breath.

"None, right? You've been staring at that microscope for more than a year and yet you've done nothing helpful for His Majesty, while my electromagnetic power has brought light to His Majesty so that the people could even continue their work at night," Mystery Moon said, having her nose high in the air.

"Oh... but I, as always, don't dislike you, my old friend. To find out the truth of the problem, is also to do His Majesty a favor."

"Please dislike me," Lily replied spitefully.

She still did not know why she still was still failing to transform the parent population into some specific types of tiny worms. She had already managed to control the shape of parent worms and make them as accurate as possible to the goal worm she wanted the parent worm to assimilate, but she still failed.

The young girl faintly felt there must be something missing between them, but she could not find any particular clues. So, other than healing some cold plagues, she had spent most of her time at the microscope after her ability had evolved. The fact that she could neither promote productivity in Neverwinter like Anna and Soraya nor bring joy to everyone like Evelyn still rankled in her mind.

Lily did enjoy observing the complex world that could not be seen with naked eyes, but... she also did not want to be a freeloader and contribute nothing to His Majesty, though she would never admit it verbally.

Thinking that even the fool, Mystery Moon had surpassed her in achievements, she felt so unpleasant that her heart wrenched.

"No, I won't. I'm sorry... Just take it as keeping my company, Okay?" Seeing that pushing Lily did not work out, Mystery Moon immediately changed her strategy. She recovered her beseeching face and held one of Lily's arms, crying. "It's not harmful to go out and take a walk. You'll be suffocated staying indoors all day!"

Lily found it was hard to turn her down when Mystery Moon acted like that.

She impatiently drew her arm out of Mystery Moon's holding and looked at her, sighing. "I know, but don't make trouble for His Majesty and Sister Nightingale."

"I promise!"

How did she not notice that Mystery Moon would become so clingy after they got familiar with each other?

If she had known it earlier, she would insist on being paired up as roommates with Leaf or Scroll.

"So... are we going there now?" Lily asked.

"Hang on for a while. Some sisters also want to find out the truth. I'll go and get all of them." As Mystery Moon said, she rushed out of the room, and after 15 minutes or so, she came back with several witches. "Now everyone's here. Let's go!" Mystery Moon announced.

Lily gaped at the five witches behind Mystery Moon. "You're going to take so many people there?"

"We also want to be of some help!" Amy raised her hand and replied. She, who bonded fast with others, looked even more sprightly than Mystery Moon.

"If His Majesty permits..." Margie, who was a little timid, expressed her idea.

"And, I..." Vanilla tried to say something. "No need to be curious about why she is here, for she must be forced by Mystery Moon," Lily said in her heart.

"The thing Mystery Moon said is very interesting. I'll go with you." Evelyn gave her reason. "Oh, God, even Evelyn is here... Doesn't she have to make wine today?" Lily could not help thinking.

"I suppose I'll just do it in the same way as last time, when we read the test papers in secret. I won't do my power with someone else staring at me." Summer said at last. She looked rather nervous, but more itching than last time.

"Doomed, these guys are all enchanted by Mystery Moon. But she came to you guys for nothing more than more shoulders to carry the responsibility in case of being blamed by His Majesty."

But Lily felt relieved to see Summer here, for she knew that if Nightingale or the Ministry of Justice did not take Summer with them to the scene, it meant that the accident in the school was not grave, which, as she had surmised, was witnessed by many people and did not cause any dire consequences.

At last, Lily decided to leave it at that and accompany them to hang around.

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Margie summoned the Magic Ark to carry the party to the school district. Through the ark roof, Lily could clearly see things on the ground, which was a fantastic experience for her. Traveling under the ground gave her a feeling of swimming in the seawater, as if when she looked up, she could see the pure blue, rippling sea surface.

A police cordon had been pulled up around the school and black-uniformed policemen were guarding each crossing. But this symbolic closure meant nothing compared to the Magic Ark, the party passed through the street and the walls and they entered the school.

It was originally a mansion belonging to an aristocrat of Stronghold. After being further expanded by His Majesty, it became the elementary institution of Neverwinter today. However, rather than the houses in the residential district that were made of red brick and cement, most of the rooms here were still made of wood. At this moment, the flame had long been extinguished. Judging from the burned outer wall, they located the place that caught fire on the second floor of the main teaching building, where some wallcoverings had fallen off and the ground was scattered with a pile of glass debris that was probably caused by the explosion.

The party waited for a moment under the ground, making sure that no one walked in the school and that the whole building was empty before letting Margie control the Magic Ark to surface from the ground near the school building.

Chapter 753: The Truth Reappears

They sneaked into the building and quietly made their way up to the second floor.

The smell of burnt wood was still present in the corridor where books and pieces of paper were scattered around the floor, presumably left behind by the students who left in a panic.

The group of witches followed the smell and soon found the site of the accident: a classroom located at the end of the corridor.

After entering the room, Lily noticed that a corner of the room had been charred black and the entire wall had cracked open. The cracks even reached the floor. However, the fire did not seem to have spread very far. Lily could easily see the marks on the ground that were caused by the changes in the intensity of the flames. The pitch black wood near the source of the fire and the obviously less burnt wood at the outer rims formed a ripple-like pattern on the ground. She knew that this was not a fire that started naturally.

But what Lily was worried about the most were the cracks that snaked down the wall.

They looked almost as if they were the result of ax swings, and the openings seem entirely carbonized. Lily could even feel a faint residual warmth when she touched it with her fingers.

"This must be the place." Mystery Moon walked around the corner and said, "Summer, we'll leave the rest to you."

"Okay... But please stop me if someone were to come," Summer walked into the center of the room and summoned her magic power.

Thanks to them knowing the exact time of the explosion and the fact that only less than a day had passed since the accident, Summer soon found the time right before the accident. As her magic power gushed out, the damaged walls recovered, and order was restored back to the messy room. Many students appeared in the room, some were taking a nap on their desks while some were happily chatting together. There was no teacher on the teaching podium, meaning that this was probably during a lunch break.

Margie and Vanilla, who saw this sight for the first time ever, gasped and could not help exclaiming, but they quickly covered their mouth as were of disturbing Summer. They became quite flustered and almost tripped over as they tried to step back to dodge a "student" who walked over and passed through them like a ghost.

"Don't worry. These are just illusions," Evelyn explained enthusiastically. "Summer can create flashbacks of scenes that have already happened."

"What... a great ability!" Amy praised with admiration. She wasn't scared at all even though it was also her first time experiencing Summer's flashback creating ability.

"Haha... it's actually no big deal." Summer touched her head bashfully. "My ability is nothing compared to Sister Nightingale's."

"Nightingale? Do you mean the blonde sister who always follows His Majesty around and barely shows up?"

"Yeah, she's the most powerful witch in the Western Region, or maybe in the entire kingdom!"

"Awesome!" Amy said with sparkling eyes.

"Wait," Mystery Moon suddenly interrupted them. "Look!"

Lily frowned. "This is..."

"Bullying?" Evelyn whispered.

They saw five or six ten-year-old kids corner two girls, arguing fiercely. Each of the two girls reacted in completely different ways: one stood in the front, reaching out her hands to block the other kids away from the other girl, while the other was cowering behind her with a frightened look.

As the universal primary classes did not set a school age, the oldest student in the bully group looked like to be 15 or 16 years old, taller and stronger than the two girls combined. However, the short-haired girl was not intimidated by the other side's numbers or size and just stood on bravely.

The witches could conclude from lip-reading that they were quarreling about where they came from... insults such as "go back to the Eastern Region," and "dogs of the rebel king" were being thrown around.

Soon, they started to push at each other. The tallest kid struck first, intending to push the girl down to the ground, but as soon as he grabbed the girl's shoulder with his hands, his knee was kicked by the girl and he fell hard on the ground.

The situation in the classroom immediately turned awry.

The short-haired girl slipped out of the encirclement as agile as a slippery loach, and aimed another kick towards a fatty, drawing all the attention to herself.

At this moment, everyone stopped caring about the currently weeping girl. They all sprang together towards the short-haired girl, who, cunningly, used the other students in the classroom as cover to dodge the attacks. Her small figure helped her to accurately kick the pursuers' knees or ankles, making them hunch over in pain.

"What a ferocious little devil!" Mystery Moon was astonished.

"Come on. Knock them down!" Amy could not help clenching her fist as if she was actually at the scene.

"But... she doesn't have enough strength," Vanilla said with concern. "And continuing to attack the same places will do her no good, since it won't work a second time."

"Oh? How did you know that?" Mystery Moon looked at her in surprise.

"S-Sorry, I just used to..."

"The Church taught you that, right?" Evelyn comforted Vanilla. "That's okay. You've passed His Majesty's examination and proved that you're different from the evil Pure Witches."

Lily frowned without a word. She agreed with Vanilla. Although the students who had been kicked down looked flustered, they were able to struggle onto their feet after some time and continued to chase the girl. This time, they were more cautious and guarded their legs so that the girl had less of a chance to hit them.

Suddenly, the tallest kid lifted a chair and moved to strike her from behind with it while her attention was distracted by two other kids.

"Watch out!" Amy shouted.

But a warning shouted at someone who was in the illusion was meaningless, as the illusion only recorded what had already happened.

The chair leg hit the girl's head hard and knocked her down. However, at the moment she fell, the girl managed to roll out and away from the attacks from the two other opponents in front of her and squatted on the floor with her hands on her head and her teeth clenched tight.

The blood had stained her fingertips.

The blood slowly trickled down past her ear, and dyed her face red.

The tallest kid was a little stunned by the fact that the girl was able to take the strong blow. He hesitated for a while before tossing the chair away and then walked up to her.

At that moment when everyone thought that she was done for, her face suddenly twisted into an anguished look as she opened her mouth to shout out loudly. Although the witches could not hear her voice, they were able to gauge the pain she was in from her look, which she did not even display when her head was hit by the chair.

Then a bolt of lightning burst out from her fingertips and were soon followed by a second, a third... The lightning spread along the floor, leaving behind twisted orange-red trails, and as soon as it touched the window, it turned into a sudden burst of light.

In a split second, a blinding explosion occurred and a loud bang sounded. The window shattered, and a large hole was blown through the wall. Everyone panicked and ran away, leaving behind the short-haired girl shrouded in lightning.

Chapter 754: The Master of Worms

"This is... an awakening?" Evelyn said in surprise.

"Most likely." Lily nodded. The pain from the first awakening was far more painful than the gash on her head due to the magic power gathered in her body and it felt like a bite. Many witches would unconsciously exert their power at that moment, which would most likely expose themselves. If it was two or three years ago, those who awakened openly would almost certainly be doomed.

Soon the lightning vanished, but it had ignited the floor and outer wall of the classroom, leaving an orange-red trail of fire along with clouds of smoke.

The short-haired girl struggled to return to her stunned friend, shouted, and grabbed her hand to drag her out of the danger area.

Lily raised her eyebrow in appreciation. It was known that the first bite had a good chance of not being fatal, but it was a feeling that a witch had never experienced before. Usually, after the bite, a witch would be weak and sweaty. It was very rare for a teenage girl to be able to control her body under such conditions, let alone, remember to come back for her companion behind her.

Since the fire triggered by the lightning was very small, the flames did not spread very fast. By the time the second half of the classroom was enveloped in flames, all the people had escaped from the teaching building.

Seeing the truth of what had happened, Summer ended the flashbacks.

"Good, we have a new sister." Lily raised the corner of her lip. She could foresee that, regardless of her ability, the girl would be a rather good witch, at least, with respect to her bravery and her will. This girl gave Lily a feeling that not every witch would be as bad as Mystery Moon.

She deliberately turned to glance at Mystery Moon who, against her expectations, stood there shocked, without giving any visual clue that she was paying attention to what was being said.

Ugh. What's wrong with this fool again?

"We have to tell Sister Wendy immediately!" Amy suggested. "There's a new witch in Neverwinter!"

"Agreed." Evelyn nodded. "Let's go to the castle now."

"Wendy probably already knew," thought Lily and shrugged, but she did not speak her thoughts out loud. She had intended to return her bedroom to continue her observation of the tiny worms after the incident and the castle was on the way back.

"Mystery Moon?" When they were about to walk toward the castle, they noticed that Mystery Moon was still riveted to the floor.

"Ah... I'm coming." She shook her head clear of any distractions and went to keep pace with the others.

"Are you alright?" Evelyn asked as she touched Mystery Moon's head.

"I'm fine..." Mystery Moon replied under her breath, looking quite different from the excited version of her when she first arrived.

"Such an odd girl." Lily could not help thinking.

Lily twitched her mouth and then took Mystery Moon's hand through which she injected a magic parent worm into her body. "Although the fool should not be infected with a cold, what if she was?"

They traveled back to the Witch Building via the Magic Ark and immediately reported to an angry Wendy, who, as they had expected, scolded them.

"There was no need for you girls to investigate the matter. Sylvie noticed the magic reaction in school when she was in the castle and has since learned everything after questioning the people there." Wendy knocked every witch's forehead with her hand. "Sneaking through the police perimeter and entering a potentially dangerous place, you are spending too much time with Lightning. Do you want to be confined to the classroom and take three practice tests like her?"

Everyone's faces changed as they heard Wendy's words. They shook their heads immediately.

"Ah, I almost forgot." Evelyn suddenly clapped her hands and said, "I have to check the tavern's stock before dinner."

"I also have a problem to consult Isabella about." Margie bowed deeply. "I'll leave first."

"Me too." Vanilla hurriedly followed her out.

"Eh?" Amy stayed for a while, still failing to come up with a reasonable excuse and ended up being dragged out of the office by Summer.

Lily sighed at the sight. "Do you really think you could escape from punishment if Wendy really intended to penalize you? It's not even a bad thing to spend a night finishing three practice tests to review what we have learned."

After Lily pushed Mystery Moon's head forward so they could apologize with a bow, they left for their bedroom.

"Now can you tell me what happened?" After the door of their bedroom was closed, Lily rolled her eyes at her roommate who looked very sad. "Are you acting like that to gain my sympathy?"

"Lily..." Mystery Moon sniffed. "The new witch can let out electricity!"

"What is the issue then?"

"Electricity is magnetism and magnetism is electricity. In other words... I can be her and she can be me," she said worriedly. "What if her power is stronger than mine and His Majesty no longer needs me?"

"Pfft." Lily almost choked on her saliva. "Why would you say that? Even if both of you have the same ability, His Majesty will never deliberately kick someone to the side to be unused."

"But he'll always compare..."

"But you are never the same..." As Lily said that, she was suddenly stunned, "Never... the same?" The words resounded in her mind. Then she asked, "Wait, what did you say before?"

"Electricity is magnetism?"

"After that."

"Uh... she can be me."

"That's it!" Lily felt a lightbulb turn on in her head as a new idea emerged in her mind. No longer caring about Mystery Moon, she ran to the desk, picked up a drop of water from a cup, laid it under the microscope, and started to adjust the focal length intently.

"What do you mean by that?" Mystery Moon protested. "Hey, can't you comfort me for a little longer?"

"Leave me alone!" Lily waved. "If you don't want to be overlooked, start to study more attentively from now on. By doing so, you may have some hope."

There was always a difference when comparing things. She had drawn and compared many pictures for her target worms and created parent worms based on the pictures and compared the results. However, no matter how hard she had tried, she had still failed to create a replica of the target worm. This was because she could never draw out every detail of a target worm based on her observation. Once the

microscope was adjusted or a target worm moved, she would get a very different picture. A parent worm created by her based on this kind of observation would never be exactly the same as the original.

If she wanted to turn a parent worm into a particular worm, the two should first become the same thing.

Lily soon set a goal. A transparent worm looked like a rotten grape. They were very common in water and were often chosen as her test subjects.

She gently touched the slide and summoned a magic parent worm that was invisible to the naked eye. She first restrained the parent worm's urge to assimilate the worms around it and then slowly moved its tentacles toward the transparent worm. When the two worms stuck together, the parent worm started penetrating into the target worm until its whole body turned a light purple.

Now the parent worm was the target worm and the target worm was the parent worm.

When she let go of the restriction on the parent worm's assimilation power, for the first time, she saw the parent worm did not return to its original state as it usually did. Instead, it swam in the form of the transparent worm. As time went on, the worms around it were all transformed into transparent worms as well and soon enough, the transformation spread throughout the entire droplet.

Seven or eight minutes later, she could no longer find any other tiny worms except the transparent worms.

Chapter 755: Crisis Management

Barov and Scroll walked into Roland's office together. "Your Majesty, here's the statistic analysis of the accident."

"Oh? So what exactly happened?" Roland asked with concern.

"Fortunately, no one was killed in the accident. Six students were injured. Three got fractures as they were escaping from the classroom. Two lost their hearing, which should be caused by the deafening explosions and one got severely burnt. All of them were cured by Miss Nana." Roland felt relieved after hearing City Hall Director's report.

Scroll added, "It happened during a lunch break. Hearing the loud noise, the teachers in the office immediately organized the students to evacuate. Ferlin Eltek told them that it was the First Army on maneuver and that the soldiers were simulating a counterattack against enemies attacking the school. He ordered the students to calm down and act in coordination. By doing so, he successfully controlled the panicked students except those in class six. That class witnessed the awakening of the witch and the all the injured students mentioned by Barov were in this class."

Roland praised Ferlin at once. "He's indeed Morning Light. To take advantage of the prestigious First Army as a way to restore the order and calm down the students. What he did significantly reduce the impact of the accident. As long as we take some proper remedial measures afterward, most people won't think that the awakening of a witch may be a dangerous thing."

The newly awakened witch had done her best to control her power, this was to some extent, prevented this accident from turning into a disaster. The loud bang had been caused by electric current striking through the air which formed an electric arc with the metal bolt on the window. Similar to a thunder, it was something very loud but not extremely destructive.

Agatha had quickly come to the school after the accident. Naturally adept at fighting fires, she had frozen the source of the fire in several minutes to save the main teaching building. Despite that, Roland still considered replacing the old teaching buildings with modernized concrete in case similar accidents happened again.

Barov asked, "Your Majesty, what remedial measures are we going to take?"

Roland tapped on his desk and asked, "Do you have any ideas?"

The City Hall chief thought for a moment and answered, "We have to notice two points in this accident. The first one is the reason behind the students' fight. Based on our investigation, this conflict was caused by a quarrel between some kids from the Southern Territory and Eastern Region. They were fighting about whether the Eastern Region was the home of the rebel king, as Valencia was Timothy's domain. This area hasn't surrendered to you, so..." Probably not willing to talk too much about the infighting of the royal family, Barov paused for a moment before he finished his sentence and then continued. "The kids could never know these kinds of things unless their parents were talking about them at home. To avoid such disputes, we'd better punish the parents of those kids and ban any discussion about Timothy."

"Well... you can go ahead with that."

"My second point is how to prevent a witch's awakening from causing harm to the public. My suggestion is that no matter what you decide to do about this accident in the end, we should make it a rule in law to avoid disputes."

Without any comment, Roland gave Barov a meaningful glance, excited about his improvement.

These two years working as the chief of City Hall had indeed opened his eyes and helped him understand things in new ways. Now, he was not the assistant of the Treasurer anymore and was able to dig out the root cause of a fight among students.

However, Roland also noticed some limitations in Barov's thoughts. Times were different now, as a strong central power had started to replace the feudal aristocratic order. With greatly increased power, City Hall had to shoulder greater responsibilities. Writing a decision of the king into the law could not guarantee that everyone would uphold it. Sometimes, when it went against most of the people, making it a law would even sow the seeds of rebellion. This hidden crisis would break out sooner or later and become a thorny problem.

"What do you think?" Roland looked at Scroll.

"Your Majesty, I've some different views. Now that most subjects of Neverwinter are from different places across Graycastle, we're going to see various beliefs among them. If we ban all the disputes they have, the law will become too complex bogging down City Hall management. I suggest we guide them to

mediate and to know right from wrong. This approach may work better than the law in preventing this kind of disputes."

Scroll paused to think for a moment and continued, "Regarding the second point mentioned by Barov, I think you should ask Miss Agatha for suggestions, as Taquila must have rich experience in coping with these kinds of accidents caused by the awakening of witches."

Roland picked up his teacup and slowly took a sip.

He agreed with Scroll about guiding public opinion. As compared to a 'one size fits all' solution, namely the law, offering proper guidance to the people was a better choice and at the same time a very feasible plan. Unlike feuds fueled by nationalism in the world he had lived before. The disputes happening between these different regions were much simpler. Having never been infected by any form of nationalist sentiment, the human beings in this world would easily accept the propaganda that all the people in Graycastle and in the other kingdoms were the same. Thinking about this, he decided to deal with the students involved in the fight leniently.

He also planned to write this view into teaching materials to tell all his subjects that all of us were the same kind, honest people, except for a small number of rebels with ulterior motives and that innocent people should never be blamed for those rebels' sins.

For him, the really difficult part was how to harmonize the witches' relationships with the common people.

He wanted the witches to be well accepted and thought of as part of the people instead of being an isolated group. However, the witches were very different from common people, making it an arduous task which might last throughout the human history in this world. He could not think of a perfect solution to the problem at this moment, he decided to take it slow and follow Scroll's suggestion to learn from Taquila first.

Fortunately, this accident hadn't turned into a disaster, so he could still easily deliver his policy of integrating witches with the people.

With these thoughts in mind, Roland said, "Let's handle this dispute as an ordinary fight among students. The one who beat the girl and injured the witch with a chair must be verbally criticized and pay their medical expenses. The Witch Union will pay the medical expenses for the other wounded students in class six. City Hall needs to mend the teaching building as soon as possible to open the school again."

"Yes, Your Majesty." Barov and Scroll replied simultaneously.

"As for the remedial measures, let's do what Scroll suggested. Guide the people's opinions. I'll draft a plan for you later." He heaved a long sigh of relief. "By the way, that witch..."

"Her name is Sharon, Your Majesty. Do you want to meet her?" Scroll asked.

"No, let her have a good rest to recover for a few days. You can ask Wendy to see her and tell her the basic situation of the Witch Union."

"I see."

After Barov and Scroll left the office, Roland called Agatha and Phyllis next.

Before taking a seat, Agatha said solemnly, "Your Majesty, I've got something to tell you. The awakenings of witches in Neverwinter doesn't seem quite right."

Chapter 756: Magic Power Tide

Roland was startled, "Is there anything wrong?"

After a little hesitation, Phyllis said, "Here's the thing... We heard that within the last year, only one witch awakened here. Is it true?"

Roland took out a name list that was made by Wendy from his drawer. He could easily look up each witch's Day of Awakening and Day of Adulthood on it, it was prepared in the case that he would forget these important dates.

After checking the list, he nodded and said, "Yes, two witches joined the Witch Union last year during Months of Demons. One is Paper, who awakened three years ago, the other one is Summer, who awakened last year on her Day of Adulthood."

Phyllis knitted her eyebrows, saying, "That's not right, Your Majesty. How many people did Neverwinter have in the last year? 20,000 or 30,000?"

Roland could not help but feel proud when talking about the population growth. "Probably 50,000, and this year there are already over 100,000 people in the city."

"A city of over 100,000 people resembles Arrieta in the early days. When we retreated from the Fertile Plains, Taquila only had 250,000 people. However... do you know how many witches awakened every year in those two cities?" Phyllis' voice turned deep. "Even when the magic power tide touched the bottom, Arrieta had at least 10 newly awakened witches every year... Taquila's number tripled that."

"Magic power tide... touched the bottom?"

Agatha explained, "Yes. The magic power prevailing in this world has ups and downs like tides. Two years after the arrival of the Bloody Moon is the peak of magic power, during this period of time, new witches will awaken everyday. After the peak, the power will decline around the world. With the magic power at low tide, this period between two arrivals of the Bloody Moon will only see witches awaken during the Months of Demons."

Roland had heard it from Agatha that more awakenings of the witches would happen when the magic power was strong. However, he had only known that the power would have a peak every year during the Months of Demons and never thought that it had several-hundred-year cyclical fluctuations. He was surprised, saying, "But the third Battle of Divine Will is close."

Phyllis looked worried, saying, "This is what we're worried about. Fearful Beast of Hell appeared, which means the Bloody Moon is about to come. During this period of time, the magic power should get stronger than usual, and it will, according to Celine's test results. Given this, lots of witches should awaken now. If they are not in the city, they should awaken in nearby towns and villages. Back in the Taquila age, our domains around the Holy City offered more witches than the city did. Based on the

Union's experiences, a city with a growing population should see a significant increase in the number of newly awakened witches. But why don't we see many new witches appearing in Neverwinter?"

Agatha said slowly, "At first I guessed it might be because the city deliberately avoided recruiting girls or because the newly awakened witches were too afraid of the church to expose themselves and join Neverwinter. However, now it seems that I was clearly wrong. We've discussed with Pasha and come to a conclusion. We think that some unknown factor may be affecting the awakenings of new witches... and its influence is gradually expanding."

After a long thoughtful pause, Roland asked, "If that's the case, will you be able to find out the factor?"

Agatha and Phyllis looked at each other and then shook their heads.

He threw up his hands, saying, "As you don't know what to do about it now, let's assume that the deities are just having a rest. No matter how many witches awaken every year, we still have to drive the demons out of the Land of Dawn."

With that being said, he had to admit that if he had not established the basis of industrialization, which significantly reduced his needs for the God's Punishment Army or the Chosen One, this news would have been terrible for him.

Surprised by Roland's reaction, Phyllis remained speechless for quite a long while before she said, "You're... right. We've got to defeat the demons no matter what."

"That's it." He smiled. "Ah... by the way, I called you here because I want to ask you something about the Union. Recently, I'm a little worried about the harmful accidents caused by the awakenings of new witches. How did you handle these kind of things back in Taquila?"

"Your Majesty, it's simple. At that time, all the people knew the 'half-quarter of an hour rule'." Phyllis was now speaking to Roland with a greater respect.

"'Half-quarter of an hour rule'?"

She further explained, "Yes, Your Majesty. There's a warning before each awakening. The free magic power will need about half a quarter to cohere inside a new witch's body. During this period of time, she will initially feel a slight sting and a mild burning sensation in the stomach, after, the the pain will keep on getting worse until she feels the first magic bite. Usually, stronger girls will be able to endure greater pains, but even they will still feel a prick in the beginning."

She paused for a moment and continued, "According to the 'half-quarter of an hour rule', when a new witch loudly announced that she was about to awaken, all the people nearby had to leave as soon as possible. If they stayed in the place and thus got hurt or killed, the Union wouldn't pay them any compensation. We only paid for the damages she caused to a place."

Hearing this, Roland thought to himself, "This is indeed a nice solution, but it only works when everyone is very familiar with witches, especially young girls. They must learn when to announce their awakening instead of taking the sign as a common stomach ache."

He asked, "What if the new witch caused harm to the other witches?"

"If she didn't make the announcement, she would get fined or a caning punishment based on the damage she caused. If she did, the Union would take full responsibility for her. However, things like this were rare, since only a few of us were combat witches and a newly awakened combat witch could seldom cause harm to anyone."

"This is to say, back in the Taquila age, if some common people failed to escape from the scene where a witch awakened, the Union would only say it was their bad luck. It's understandable as witches were superior to the common people at that time, but not in this age," Roland thought and decided he simply could not copy this rule.

Meanwhile, he also noticed the good part about this 'half-quarter of an hour rule'. At least, it had raised the public awareness of the dangers that might be caused by the awakenings of witches and made the people understand that witches were human beings and every girl might have a chance to become a witch. This rule reminded him of traffic signals in the world where he had lived before, everybody knew red for stop, green for go and had to follow this rule to prevent damage.

As now it was not the Taquila age anymore, he decided that he could not let the witches get away with all the damage they caused during awakening. He thought, "I'd better revise this rule, treating the witches and the common people as equals. Let City Hall take care of the damages caused by a new witch who makes the announcement before her awakening. As for the witches who don't make announcements and cause severe damage, they must be put on trials for negligently injuring others... Or, I can formulate a special law to regulate the witches' behavior, which may be able to ease the tension between the witches and the common people."

Chapter 757: Sharon

...

Wendy walked into the hospital with a dinner box in hand and there she saw Nana's father Tigui Pine talking with a man and a woman. They bowed and then bent their knees, acting as if they were going to get down on their knees, but Viscount Tigui stopped them at once. This went on for quite a long while and then they bowed to him and left reluctantly.

When they got out of the hospital, Wendy came to him and asked curiously, "Who're they?"

Tigui shrugged and said, "Who else could they be? They're the parents of the new witch. They were worried about leaving her alone in the hospital and were asking whether they could take her home. After I told them it was the king who wanted her to stay here, they immediately changed their attitude and expressed gratitude to His Majesty." Wendy sensed a little disappointment and pride in his last sentence.

Wendy couldn't stop herself from laughing, "You think every parent is like you, who dare to break into the lord's castle for his daughter."

She knew why he felt disappointed. He believed that parents should never hand their kids over to anyone else, even if a king asked. When Nana had awakened, he had gone directly to Roland's castle without a letter of introduction. Fortunately, the kind and merciful Prince Roland had never intended to

do any harm to her, so this incident had ended up becoming a moving story. If he had intruded into the castle of Duke Ryan or any other great noble in the Western Region to save Nana, he would have never been able to get off so easily.

Although that story had happened before Wendy had come to Border Town, she had heard it from Nightingale repeatedly. That was why she naturally understood where Tigui's pride came from.

"At least, they're way better than Summer's parents," Wendy sighed.

Summer's parents had hurriedly sent her to the castle to get one gold royal when she awakened to be a witch. They had treated her like a slave they had sold to the king and the Witch Union and warned her not to refuse any of their requests. If it hadn't been for the money they would've got, they probably would not let her return home.

Disappointed by her family, Summer did not return home as often as before once she got used to living with all the sisters in the Witch Building.

As a witch, she could be considered as lucky.

However, as a daughter, she had been abandoned by her parents.

Tigui nodded and agreed with Wendy. "Indeed, they are. One of them works in the Furnace Area and the other is a handyman in the construction team. They had no idea what happened to her until they finished their jobs, but as soon as they heard the news, they hurried here without even having dinner. I can tell from their faces, they do care about the girl."

Wendy smiled and said, "It looks like I was right to bring this dinner box with me. Could you take me to Sharon?"

Tigui touched his beard and said, "Of course, please follow me."

...

After the restructure and extension, this hospital now had an inpatient department, but only a few patients would stay here, as Nana and Lily could cure most of the patients in Neverwinter in a short time. They usually just needed to stay in the hall of the hospital for a while to fully recover.

Considering that the influence of the church might still exist, Roland had asked the hospital to let Sharon stay. He was not sure whether all the people who had immigrated from the other districts of Graycastle could accept the witches as one of them. By keeping her in the hospital, at least, he could ensure that she would not become homeless or get hurt by her family.

Tigui and Wendy came to the recovery ward. He gently pushed the door open and waved to Nana by the bed. "It's time dinner. You can talk to your friend later."

"She's not going to have dinner with us?" Nana asked surprised. She then saw Wendy and said, "Sister Wendy. You also came."

Wendy smiled and patted the dinner box in her hand, saying, "I brought her dinner."

Nana said, "Oh, I see. You guys talk first. I'll come back later." She said goodbye to Sharon and left the ward with her father.

Wendy walked to the bed and put the dinner box on the bedside cupboard. She turned around and met Sharon's eyes. The new witch was looking at her, her face curious. Wendy asked, "How do you feel about becoming a witch?"

The girl had a childish face and short rosy hair. It was a rare hair color in Graycastle and reminded her of a rosebud. Wendy knew for sure that she would become more beautiful after her awakening. She could already imagine how extraordinary she would look once she would enter adulthood.

Sharon replied, "I felt that something got into my body... Miss Nana told me that was the magic power." She pursed her lips and continued, "Are you a witch, too? Does it always hurt the first time?"

Though her second question could cause some ambiguity, she knew exactly what she was talking about. "Yes, I'm a witch. You can call me Wendy. As for your second question, not really... It's not that important anyway. As long as you learn how to use the magic power, it'll become part of you, like your arms and legs." With these words, she opened the iron dinner box and put the steaming food on the bedside cupboard.

Sharon swallowed twice to prevent herself from drooling, but she could not stop her stomach from growling.

She blushed with embarrassment at once.

"Are you hungry?" Wendy smiled and immediately placed a Bird Beak Mushrooms soup in front of the little girl.

Some scallions were floating in the light yellow soup. The oil on the surface was shimmering in the firelight. Compared to a light vegetable soup, the smell of the meat made this soup much more tempting.

Wendy had learned this trick of using nice food to reassure people from Roland who liked to hold a banquet to welcome new witches.

Sharon nodded vigorously.

Wendy said softly, "Drink some soup to warm your stomach first before you eat other food."

Soon the little girl started to gobble down her dinner, making even Wendy feel hungry, too.

She asked, "Where's your friend? Did she go home?"

Sharon said while devouring her food, "I don't know... probably yes."

Wendy was surprised. "Didn't she come to see you?"

"No..." Sharon shook her head. "She probably did not trust me completely. After all, I also came from the Southern Territory like those students who bullied her."

Wendy was startled. "What? You're from the Southern Territory?"

"Yeah." The little girl stuffed a piece of Bird Beak Mushroom into her mouth. "Mapleflower Town, a small town near Eagle City... but now it's uninhabitable."

Wendy exclaimed, "I thought you're from the east just like her. I thought that was why you helped her."

"I shouldn't help her as we're from different regions?" Sharon blinked her eyes and said seriously, "the disputes among the nobles obviously have nothing to do with her. Those guys just wanted to find some excuse to bully her. No matter where we came from, wrong is wrong. If I didn't stand out to stop them, nobody would correct such a mistake."

She remained speechless for a while, lost in her thoughts.

Your Majesty, you were worried about nothing. This girl doesn't need me to comfort her.

I can tell from the expression in her eyes—She's absolutely certain about her decision.

Chapter 758: Inherited Belief

"Did you learn this from your parents?"

Sharon nodded and said, "Yes, mainly from my father. He often told me that many things in the world were wrong because no one corrected them, and then people would get used to these wrong ideas as time went by. He taught me that many common things might be wrong and that if none of us stood out to fix them, we would repeat these mistakes and thus make the world worse and worse."

Wendy said slowly, "But unfortunately nobody would be willing to stand out unless the bad things happened to himself. Just like before, when the church persecuted the witches, most people only cared about the gold royals they could get from the church instead of thinking whether those hanged kids were really evil."

Sharon said, "What they did is wrong. They thought those mistakes would do no harm to themselves, so they could repeat them for their personal interests. However, the mistakes will make the world worse, and then it'll become everyone's problem."

Surprised by Sharon, Wendy could not help but feel curious about her parents. She pretended to ask casually about them but instead got an unexpected answer. "They're not my real parents," Sharon said.

"They're not?"

As the girl began to talk about her parents, she started eating slower. "Well, my parents are dead. The war destroyed Eagle City and the order of the Southern Territory. After that, homeless refugees and beggars were everywhere and so were robbers. My parents were members of the patrol team, fighting against them, one day, they just didn't... return home. In the end, the lord of the town fled. Seeing that, all the townspeople left, too. Nowadays, Mapleflower Town had already become a deserted domain."

"In other words, this tragedy was caused by the 'Royal Decree on the Selection of Crown Prince' ." Just as her father said, this absurd decree which seemed to be irrelevant to the people turned out to be a disaster for them."

Wendy gently touched Sharon's head to comfort her, saying, "I'm sorry... for bringing up these things."

The little girl quickly stopped mourning her parents' death. She dispelled her sadness and recovered, saying, "That's alright. They were already prepared to sacrifice themselves... My father often said that since mistakes would cost us greatly in the end, we'd better pay the price to correct those mistakes in the first place, which was an honor actually."

Wendy was moved, thinking, "Honor... Most patrol team members wouldn't give a damn. They behave like Rats, placing personal benefits above those of the public. When order and discipline stand in the way of personal interests, they won't hesitate to break them. Given that, Sharon's real parents were really rare and respectable."

After a long silence, she said, "Those people who came to see you..."

Sharon licked her fingers and said, "they're my father's friends. He helped them before. In the past two years, I've lived with him, uncle Cormac, and his wife. They don't have any kid and treat me like their own daughter."

Wendy fell silent, thinking, "They did do their best to take care of Sharon. That's quite a rare thing for an ordinary family."

After that, she did not say anything and just looked at Sharon eating her dinner.

The little girl finished her last deep-fried pork cutlet and heaved a long sigh of relief, looking satisfied. 'Thank you. This is the best dinner I've ever had."

Now that Neverwinter was able to provide plenty of food for the people, no one in the city was worried about being hungry anymore. However, meat was still a rare thing on tables of ordinary families. People of which would feel greatly satisfied to simply have a piece of dried meat in their oatmeal. As for this kind of deep-fried half lean meat, only highly paid people such as the alchemists and officials in City Hall could afford them.

Wendy took out a handkerchief to wipe Sharon's oily mouth and said, "after you join the Witch Union, you can eat dinner like this everyday."

Sharon's eyes shined and asked, "Really? I'll be able to have meat every day?"

Wendy put the dishes back into the dinner box and said, "of course, and you'll have fresh boar meat instead of the cured meat in the Convenience Market. His Majesty prefers the streaky pork, but not every boar has that quality... Only the extra fat ones will have this kind of pork. If it's steamed, it'll be soft and tender and melt in your mouth. If it's fried, it'll be crisp and smell really good. Ah, by the way, he likes to call this kind of pork 'Five flower meat'... but I really don't get why it's related to some flower."

Thanks to Lightning and Maggie who liked to hunt and toast their preys in the wild whenever they were on patrol. The Witch Union members could enjoy the tasty food every day. In the past, they could only bring back few toasted rabbits and bird eggs, but since Maggie had the ability to evolve into a Winged Devilbeast, the number of their preys had increased drastically. They could bring back boars and snow wolves now, and if Roland required them to bring meat back, they could fill the castle's basement with their preys within a day.

Wendy once had wondered why His Majesty had called the Misty Forest a great treasure trove which had not been fully utilized yet, but now seeing the tasty food on the table everyday she believed what he had said.

"How come you know this sort of thing? Could it be..." Sharon asked surprised, with her hand covering her mouth.

Wendy could not help but smile. "Yes, that's right. As long as His Majesty isn't very busy, he will always eat with the witches."

"What about the one gold royal..."

"That's also true."

The little girl pointed to herself. "May I..."

"Join the Witch Union?" Wendy chuckled. "Of course, you can. The union will guide you to use and improve your ability and at the same protect and take care of you. We accept all the witches who're willing to work for His Majesty and Neverwinter as our sisters."

"After joining it, do I have to live in the castle?"

"It's up to you. If you want to spend more time with your family, you can still live at home," Wendy explained. She could tell that Sharon had already taken uncle Cormac and his wife as her family, though they were not related by blood.

"What about the school..."

"The union offers special courses for the witches. As we're able to learn faster and need to learn more, the universal education doesn't suit us." Wendy paused to think for a moment. "In your case, you'll be required to practice your ability in the beginning, as you're still very young. As for the courses for witches, they're usually arranged in the evening. If you can manage to go to school at the same time, you'll be able to finish your universal education and get a diploma."

Without any hesitation, Sharon nodded vigorously, saying, "I want to join the Witch Union. I want to become someone like Miss Nana."

Even if she hadn't said it aloud, Wendy could still see the answer from her eyes' expression—Just like in her questioning before, the girl was certain about every decision she made.

Wendy thought, "It seems that I can move up the date of her ability test and the contract signing."

Chapter 759: Second Transformation

The next day afternoon, Roland received Sharon's ability report.

"That's fast." He raised his eyebrows as Wendy handed him the test sheets. "Has she accepted that she's now a witch?"

"Yes, and in a calmer way than we'd expected." Wendy laughed as she recounted the meeting from the previous night. "I've to say, her parents have brought up a fine child."

"Hmm..." Roland was rather impressed himself. In this era, someone who could make such far-sighted considerations would already be considered a pioneer. Perhaps, this was how history had always been driven. As a belief was passed down the generations, more and more people were imbued with the same aspiration, and when the numbers reached a certain level, the world would undergo an extraordinary change.

As they say, a little spark can kindle a great fire.

Perhaps, Mankind had reached civilization by taking small steps like this.

He examined the details of the test, particularly the evaluation of magic power. As a witch who was awakened at the young age of 15, Sharon's magic cyclone ability was of an above-average standard. It was even noted in the report that this was comparable to adult witches in Taquila. Evidently, Phyllis was present during the test - among the witches in Neverwinter City, she was often the one who was most receptive to the arrival of new witches.

Sharon's ability was to generate electric currents. However, Wendy's write-up on this section was rather vague, perhaps because the study of electricity was one of the more difficult topics within elementary physics.

When she increased the intensity of her electric currents, the consumption of magic power would rapidly increase, but her electric currents would become strong enough to break wooden planks and melt iron. At a weaker intensity, she would need to touch the object to produce an effect, such as lighting a light bulb, albeit she was prone to burning the filament.

As Sharon had only recently awakened, her control of magic power was very unstable. Wendy's conclusion was that she was most suited to be a combat witch, while also having potential to assist in production.

Roland had no plans to do a retest. After all, he had no tools to measure electrical voltage and current, and therefore would not be able to obtain exact values.

Furthermore, Sharon would have to expend a lot of magic power to release high-voltage electric current. Her ability to maintain the transmission of electricity was obviously not as good as Mystery Moon's Dawn I, let alone an electromagnetic gun.

But most importantly, all effects that were produced by magic power, whether it be Anna's blackfire or Sharon's electric current, did not necessarily comply with the related theories. Only when the abilities were transformed for a second time into other effects would they correspond with the knowledge he had.

In sum, it was already clear that Sharon's ability had a lot of potential. Roland was certainly eager to know what kind of progress could be made when the essence of electric current was fully understood, as well as to see how much Sharon's magic power would improve by as she grew older. But for now, it was best to follow Wendy's recommendation to allow Sharon to practice on her own and focus on her studies, in which she had some catching up to do.

Roland thought about her strong sense of justice, and suddenly had an idea to admit her into the judiciary one day.

"An electricity-generating young lady patrolling the streets and arresting criminals... this seems to be exceptionally familiar."

Without revealing his thoughts aloud, he nodded at Wendy and said, "We'll do as you've recommended, many thanks."

"My honor, Your Majesty," Wendy bowed.

...

When Roland returned to his office after dinner, he discovered that Lily and Mystery Moon had joined Nightingale in the room. The trio were gathered around the desk and seemed to be in an argument.

"Take a look at this." Nightingale gestured towards Roland. "My goodness, they look so real!"

"What is it?" Roland walked up to the desk curiously, and only then noticed the two pots of bird beak mushrooms placed on the table.

"Eh... what's with these mushrooms?" One pot of mushrooms seemed rather shrivelled like kitchen stock, while the other was much fresher and juicier. He pinched a mushroom stalk from the latter, causing its sap to gush out immediately. "This is quite fresh. Were these recently picked by Lightning?"

Nightingale and Mystery Moon turned to look at Lily in unison.

Lily shrugged her shoulders. "I used my magic power to create them."

"Oh... magic power?" Roland casually replied before he startled violently. "Wait... what? You used magic power to create them?"

"Your Highness, her cohering ability has changed somewhat," Nightingale explained. "If, let's say, it was only a purple worm after the first evolution, it has now added patterns on its back. Her magic power capacity has also increased." After a brief pause, she continued, "In other words, Lily's ability has evolved a second time."

"But still, they're worms!" Mystery Moon chimed in. Of course, this provoked a look of disgust from Lily.

"Is this so?" Roland joyfully picked up another mushroom and examined it carefully. He quickly understood how she had created them. "You're now able to make a magical swarm of worms turn into a particular form that you want?"

"Yes. But they must at least be visible through a microscope, and a suitable target must be found, before the next step of assimilation can be transacted." Lily nodded. Although she acted very calm, the glimmer in her eyes gave away her inner delight. "Because the worms produced by bird beak mushrooms are relatively easier to observe, I chose them for this experiment."

She was most likely referring to fungal spore, which was also the building block of fungi. Roland started to feel excited. Perhaps, to Lily, organisms which were invisible to the naked eye, such as microscopic bugs, could now be controlled.

"Excellent!" He reached out his hand and caressed her forehead.

Unexpectedly, Lily did not move away or roll her eyes at him. Instead, she lowered her head and accepted his compliments.

"How is that any good." Mystery Moon grumbled. "Your Highness, my bedroom is no longer inhabitable! There are bird beak mushrooms everywhere, even on my bed, which now resembles the Misty Forest after a rain!"

Lily's cheeks suddenly reddened. She glanced at Mystery Moon and said, "I... I don't know why it would be like this either... At first, the worms couldn't turn into bird beak mushrooms at all, and I even thought that there was a problem with the parent I was using. After I changed the parent, I didn't imagine that the whole house would grow full of mushrooms."

When Roland understood the whole story, he could not help but laugh aloud. From the little knowledge of biology he remembered, unlike a seed which could grow into a large tree, a single mushroom spore could not grow into a mushroom, no matter how much assimilation was done. Only after the parent mushroom was changed, two spores might combine and grow into mushrooms. The reason why they grew everywhere was likely to be because the parent was discarded within the room, where it drifted around and assimilated bacteria into bird beak mushroom spores.

"We shall have a mushroom feast for lunch tomorrow." He announced gleefully.

Indubitably, after Lily's second transformation, her ability was no longer limited to sterilization and disinfection. Any observable thing could be wholly transformed for next to no cost, and could be multiplied and expanded like a regular microbe, so as to form a complete 'microscopic' army of its own. Whether it be food production or war preparation, she would be able to play a great role from now onwards.

Chapter 760: Land of Fire

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Flames spouted out of the ground like monstrous giant trees. The flame tips were the branches, while the billows of thick smoke were the leaves. These "trees" were interconnected in such a way that they formed a vast black canopy.

As Thuram walked underneath these fiery trees, he felt the temperature around him continuously rise. Pea-sized beads of sweat sprung from his forehead, while he felt that his entire back had already turned sticky. This place was a world apart from the cold desert outside, all because the chilly winds of the Months of Demons had no way to encroach into the core area of Mother Earth.

"Is this why it's called the Land of Fire..." The golden-haired Divine Lady looked around the place curiously. "I never thought there would be such an interesting place in the Southernmost Region."

Having interacted with Iron Axe's party members for a week, Thuram was beginning to know them a little. For example, the Divine Lady who spoke was called Andrea. Her excellent proficiency in archery

was a class apart from even the most seasoned hunter in Sand Nation. There was no doubt that she would be participating in the imminent holy duel alongside the almighty Lady Ashes.

"Interesting?" Ashes puckered her lips. "I feel that this place is like a steamer, where any ordinary person would turn into cooked food after just two days."

"I'm not surprised you would say this sort of thing." Andrea shrugged her shoulders. "Someone with no taste and style would naturally be unable to appreciate the ambience here."

"Did you lose your towel? You don't look any stylish with all that sweat on you."

"Buzz off!"

Thuram felt a little affinity with Lady Andrea. To him, the most beautiful place in Southernmost Region was not the Silver Stream Oasis where the Mojin Clan lived and reproduced, but instead, was the flame-spouting Land of Fire as well as the Endless Cape. Although these places were fraught with danger, they also symbolised great strength and were the habitats of the gods, and therefore were the sources of the Ironsand people's faith. The former of these places was used to contend for status and power, and was where clans showcased their bravery and tenacity to Mother Earth. The latter was used to make offerings to the sea deity, in hopes that he would bless the clanspeople and inject more blood into the Silver Stream so that new oases could form in the desert.

The terrain of the Land of Fire was caved downwards, with a slight upward bulge in the middle. Its shape was like that of an inverted basin, and its size could accommodate several Iron Sand Citys. The ever-raging flames had caused the surrounding sand to harden and consolidate, such that walking on the sand felt as though stepping into a palace paved with stone bricks.

On both sides of the wide and firm pavement were dark abysses and shafts. The underground fire spouted out of these shafts and continually baked the earth. The most astonishing thing was the colors - the first time any Ironsand person walked into this holy ground, they would certainly be fascinated by the gorgeous hues. Beginning from the abysses, the palisades on each side displayed varying tints of a crimson luster, which became darker as they approached the surface. This assortment of colors was akin to that of a carbon stone which had been burned until it was bright red and underwent continuous cooling.

However, once the palisades reached the surface, the color abruptly changed into a bright verdure, such that the sand seemed to be paved with a layer of glittering jade stones. The glass-like bodies, which were created through the melting and recrystallization of the gravel, refracted a dazzling glow under the flames.

Above that was, of course, the timeless motif of the place - the orange-red raging flames. A dozen pillars of flame spouted out of the basin and, as if to welcome the arrival of a new challenger, encircled the high platform in the central zone, which served as the most important place in the Land of Fire: the site of the holy duel.

Here, shades of red and green intermixed, and were further complemented by the underground blackwater and the faraway golden dunes. At first glance, it seemed like all the colors of the desert were gathered in this place. If it wasn't during the Months of Demons, one could even see the sun rays

permeating through the dense smoke in the sky. Only the underwater Endless Cape, which also roared with flames, could compare to this extraordinary sight.

"I agree that this place is really beautiful... but it would be even better without the fighting and bloodshed," Thuram's new owner and the princess of Osha, Drow Silvermoon, suddenly spoke. "As His Highness Roland said, if it simply remained as a scenic place, it would have been a famous..."

"National natural park?" Another petite Divine Lady, Hummingbird, suggested.

"Yes. That's what His Highness said after he checked out Devil's Town behind the snow mountain."

"It's certainly fitting of a king to think exactly like me." Andrea tipped up her chin.

"C'mon, have you ever seen the place he was talking about?" Ashes scoffed.

"It doesn't matter if I didn't because I have a good imagination. From his words alone, I'm sure it's a place of magnificent scenery. Of course, a person with limited experience won't understand."

"Heyy!"

Whenever Iron Axe or the Divine Ladies spoke, they would inadvertently mention the King of Graycastle's name. Thuram was terribly curious about exactly what kind of person Roland Wimbledon was, that the Ironsand people and the Divine Ladies trusted him this much, particularly the latter. He once heard a traveling merchant comment that the Divine Ladies revered by the Mojin Clan were actually evil figures being hunted down by the church in the Four Kingdoms. Yet, judging from the way they spoke of the king, things were considerably different from what the merchant had said.

When the party climbed on to the platform, the awaiting Cut Bone clan warriors started to make hissing noises, while the other clans looked on contemptuously. There was no question that the thunderous might of Iron Sand City had greatly frightened them. It was later on that Thuram learned that the Stone Castle which the chief of Ironwhip, Rubaka, lived in had collapsed amid the explosions, causing him to perish along with his kin and men. Thus the six large clans swiftly became five, and for a long time, this loss could not be replaced.

However, revenge was an unalterable part of the Ironsand people's identity. The blood feud between the Ironwhip and Osha clans was no secret. And, as no warrior of a different clan had ever invaded Iron Sand City, Drow Silvermoon's plan for revenge seemed impeccable. Thus, the other clans could only watch on with shock and fear, or otherwise remained as indifferent as possible.

What they did not know was that this time, the Osha clan's goal exceeded everyone's imagination. Thuram mused, "The Cut Bone clan is only the beginning. Every one of the clans present will be challenged to a duel sooner or later. They'll either have to try their best or be crushed by Drow Silvermoon."

The chief of the Raging Flare clan, who was serving as the duel's arbiter, walked in front of the audience and announced, "May Osha's chief step forth."

Drow inhaled a deep breath, took a step forward, and slowly replied, "I am."

The former nodded stolidly and continued, "Great. This isn't your first time participating in a holy duel, and thus I expect that you already know the rules. Cut Bone clan shall be sending out 22 men for this

battle. You may start to select weapons for your warriors. While the promise you made to the Three Gods mustn't be broken, you're allowed to give up or surrender at any time. Otherwise, the side with the last man standing will be declared the winner, and be conferred the right to enter Iron Sand City. The duel shall commence when both sides are ready."