

## Witch 771

### Chapter 771: Desert Promise

"What is... a chief?"

"Sounds like the head of all the clans..."

"Isn't that the same as the Three Gods Emissary?"

The crowd began to discuss. At that moment, the head of the Black River clan that had descended to fourth place, jumped onto the platform and questioned loudly, "But the king of the northern kingdom you mentioned, Roland Wimbledon, is not a Mojins. How could he rule the entire desert?"

"Here it is," Ashes thought. "This is one of the key problems that they have to deal with if they want to put the Southernmost Region into the prefecture of Graycastle. I'll see how Echo handles it."

Echo looked at him and asked peacefully, "Were the Three Gods Emissaries who used to rule the desert... Mojins?"

Her voice was not high, yet with the help of her magic power, it traveled to everyone's ears. The head of the Black River clan was startled when he heard it. "Um, well..."

"We all know that the answer is negative." Echo noticed his silence, so she looked under the platform and said, "The Three Gods Emissaries were real giants. It's said that they didn't have uniform looks. One of them had four feet and three hands and another had more than one head. Undoubtedly, they were not Mojins."

At this point, she began to speak in a much higher pitch, "The few words left by the emissaries have become principals that are abided by all Ironsand people of the Mojin Clan. The laws carved onto the slate tells us about the desert rulers, one is being blessed by the Three Gods, the other is opening up boundless oases and keeping all the clans away from hunger, thirst, and death. Anyone who could accomplish any of those can become the ruler of the Southernmost Region."

The discussion in the crowd quieted down. Nobody wanted to object the laws left by the Three Gods Emissaries at the Land of Fire. In fact, the holy duel was a way to decide power distribution originated from the laws.

"But the Three Gods Emissaries did bring green land to the desert." The head of the Black River clan did not want to be neglected. He pointed at Echo and raised his voice, "It's said that 1,000 years ago, this area was an oasis! Is the king of Graycastle capable of that? Don't be deceived by false benefits. Anyone who owns that kind of power is not different from the deity."

"So as long as he could bring new oases to the Sand Nation, you'd admit that His Majesty is qualified of ruling the Southernmost Region and consider him as the chief, right?" Echo said with a smile.

"That's right. Not only me, I'm afraid all the other clans would agree with me!" The head of the Black River clan kept his mouth shut for the first condition and took most of the audience's opinions as his own.

"Indeed, His Majesty can't convert the Southernmost Region into a green land, but he's willing to take our land into the territory of Graycastle and offer us residences near lakes and forests to keep us from the threats of thirst and sandstorm forever." Echo returned to the platform and said word by word, "This is the promise His Majesty made. He'll bring you a new oasis, the vast and rich northern area is exactly the boundless green oasis whose color will never fade."

Everybody was startled and could barely believe what they had heard.

Thuram was equally shocked.

This is the real purpose of the Osha clan!

That is the meaning of the new oasis and new order Iron Axe mentioned!

It has always been every Mojin's dream to live in an oasis that is forever green. Such a temptation is unimaginable, especially to those small clans that are too weak to grab a piece of the Iron Sand City. Although big clans might be hesitant and unwilling to see a drastic change in the Southernmost Region's order, they could not prevent the transmission of this message, probably within half a month, this astonishing message would spread through the entire desert by the clansmen on spot from every Silver Stream Oasis!

"No, this is absolutely nonsense. It's a lie, a fraud!" the head of the Black River clan shouted. "Have you forgotten the tragic ending of the Black Bone Clan and the Sandstone Clan? Didn't they die out and become extinct because they easily believed what Garcia, the Queen of Clearwater, said? Offering us an oasis and the source of water? The cunning northerners will never do that. They'll only give you a pond, or a piece of land as big as my palm, making you fight for these resources unceasingly as you did in the Southernmost Region where you have to work to death for them."

Thuram imperceptibly sighed. "If it were before the holy duel, this speech could have suppressed people's aspirations, but it's too late now."

In five duels, no one was killed. The merciful image of the Osha clan had spread through the small oasis. People could easily imagine that the northern kingdom's king who was supporting Osha was equally merciful. Obviously, someone merciful would not oppress the Sand Nation people as the Queen of Clearwater had done.

Even challengers like Black bone and Sandstone were willing to sell themselves cheap to Garcia, which was an indication of how attractive a land of survival was to them. Even if it might be a trap, some clansmen would like to take the risk. If the King of Graycastle sincerely wished to take the Southernmost Region into his domain, those pioneers would definitely become the examples for other clans to follow. As long as it started, the northwards migration of the whole Sand Nation would become inevitable.

This king obviously had all his moves well planned, making a show of strength to draw the clans' attention, killing nobody in duels to build a merciful image, becoming the chief of all clans by indisputably winning the holy duels and making the other forgiven major clans reluctant to turn against Osha under everybody's attention.

Thuram thought he would play a fairly important role in the process of the Osha clan settling in the Iron Sand City, but now he found that his role was only to supply Osha with his clansmen and information

about the major clans in Iron Sand City. As to the real plan, he was totally kept in the dark. Echo did not take stationing in the Iron Sand City seriously and revenge was only as easy as lifting a hand to her. Thuram could not help but feel lost.

But after a short while, he rose with spirit again. If everything would go as the new leader said, Osha would undoubtedly become beyond the strongest clan. Then as a member of the Osha, he obviously would gain great benefits. In the face of this promising future, why bother feeling lost for the moment?

As expected, Echo slightly shook her head, "You're wrong, chief. What Garcia needs are mercenaries, not common clansmen, which was her biggest difference with His Majesty, which was also the reason why she picked Black bone and Sandstone who had stronger fighting capacities. Yet His Majesty won't do that. He considers all the Mojins as his own subjects, so any clans here can go to the Kingdom of Graycastle, regardless of how many young adults they have or whether they're powerful. His Majesty doesn't need the Sand Nation people to die for him, no merciful king would sit by and watch his subjects dying in vain!"

"What do you want in return? We ought to pay something for that." The Wildflame chief Geulz stood up and said, "He won't help the Sand Nation for nothing. I don't believe there is such a thing as free lunch!" He clenched the teeth, "Tell me. I'm willing to accept it."

"What His Majesty wants from you is simple, which is to work," Echo said frankly. "Like the other tens of thousands his subjects, work for the kingdom, work for yourself! You'll get paid, improve your lives, receive education and bring up children... That's all he wants."

"Is that... Is that all?" Guelz was startled.

"That's right. A way of living your life without fighting and struggling!" Echo raised her tone again.

"Everyone knows that there are fewer and fewer Silver Stream oases... In my childhood, I could occasionally see oases near the south point of the Endless Cape. But now, the white wasteland near the northwest area is constantly expanding. The oases are deteriorating into sandy soil. Even the small oases around the Iron Sand City have shrunk. Do Mojins intend to keep on fighting and killing for living places, immersing the yellow sand with your blood and eventually disappearing with the oases in the Southernmost Region? Tell me, are you willing to accept this consequence?"

"No, my Lady."

"I'd like to go with you, Lady Silvermoon!"

"Please take me with you!"

Noises, like rolling waves, spread from the center of the platform to the surrounding areas.

Looking at the extremely pretty girl on the platform who'd drawn most of the clans' attention, Iron Axe could not help kneeling down with warm tears shedding.

He had dreamed of this occurring countless times, especially that night when the Osha clan became qualified for a duel participant. But when he woke up, the clan had disappeared and the princess had become a slave. He thought he would not live to see this happening.

But now, what Echo had accomplished was even further than he had dreamed. Although he even dropped tears over this, within his heart he was fulfilled and proud.

"Osha finally gains the Three Gods' favor."

"I understand there are still people hesitating, but soon what I said will be proved." Echo raised her right hand and said, "Those clans who want to follow me to the southern territories of Graycastle may pack right now and meet me at the small oasis before departure. Those who can't leave right away need not worry. I'll leave staff behind to guide those who wish to find suitable living places in the northern kingdom. As long as you abide by the Graycastle laws, you're His Majesty's subjects and will be protected. Graycastle's door is always open to you."

Nobody knew how the cheer started. But it was like a drop of ink falling into water, soon it rippled and spread to the entire Land of Fire.

The major clans still remained silent. But compared with the crowd under the platform, they were insignificant.

The sounds of the clans from every corner of the Silver Stream exceeded that of those from Iron Sand City for the first time.

A crack appeared on the primitive and stiff order.

A new order was taking shape at the riot of sounds.

Tiny and immature as it might seem, but it exuded infinite vitality.

The crowd began to kneel down to cheer for the new strongest clan, as well as to bow to the chief. Not everybody had the nerve to be a pioneer, but there were always people who were brave enough to sacrifice everything for the evergreen land in their heart.

On that day, the cheers spread unceasingly through the Land of Fire.

From that day on, the desert had a new leader.

Chapter 772: The Arrival of the Relics

With the help of a Sigil of Listening, Roland received the result for the last holy duel, including everything that happened in the Land of Fire, by that afternoon.

Instantly he summoned Maggie, Lightning, and Nana to his office.

"There is a severely wounded witch in the Iron Sand City who needs your treatment." Roland looked at the three energetic girls—no, two girls and one legal girl, and said, "Prepare tonight and leave tomorrow. No need for haste as long as you arrive at Fallen Dragon Ridge by tomorrow evening and reach Iron Sand City the following day. Ashes will be there to receive you."

"Do both of us need to go?" Lightning asked, indicating Maggie and herself.

"Yes. I feel better when you're together," Roland said, nodding. "Besides, Maggie needs to be assisted when tying Nana onto her back, doesn't she? Remember to wear more clothing, it's hard to fly in freezing weather."

Nana couldn't help but shiver when she looked out the window at the falling snow.

"Understood. I promise, she will be delivered on time!" Maggie said as she raised her hand.

"Flying there is not a problem..." Lightning pouted, "but, if you want to start exploring the snow mountain, please wait until I come back! Missing it would have me in tears."

"Um... the moment when a great explorer cries... that's definitely a scene worth recording." Noticing the serious expression on Lightning's face, Roland couldn't help but laugh. He knew that since the news about the possibility of a relic on the snow mountain had spread, Lightning had been looking forward to it. "Of course, you're all crucial members of the expedition. I can assure you of that."

"That's settled then." Lightning patted her chest in relief as she said, "You can counting on us, we'll cure the wounded sister."

"You can also tend to other Sand Nation civilians along the way. But, don't stay for too long." Roland kept on going, "You should return on the day Nana has exhausted her magic power and take the same route when you return. Understand?"

With the relocation of Taquila survivors drawing to an end, he should start an expedition to the snow mountain. However, without Nana staying in Neverwinter, he did not dare to hastily send the witches to that unknown land.

"Yes, Your Majesty!"

"Alright."

"Coo!"

The three of them answered simultaneously.

After they had left, Roland leaned on his chair and let out a sigh of relief.

Nightingale stuck her head out from behind Roland as she asked, "Does this mean that you've successfully taken over the Southernmost Region?"

"I'd say we've only taken the first step," Roland said, smiling. "There are still many things to do."

After over a month of fighting, the Desert Mission had come to a temporary truce.

Unfortunately, the following migration was going to be the challenging task.

Roland fetched the map from the corner of his desk and laid it out. His sight landed on the southern territory of Graycastle. He had conveyed his plan to offer the Sand Nation civilians a new oasis before Iron Axe had departed. The preferred location would be the border area that had lost a lord and most of its populace. It had been successively struck by civil wars, that had been started by Timothy and Garcia. The main cities like the Port of Clearwater and Eagle City had been turned into ruins. The surrounding small towns and farmland had also been destroyed..

With the refugees flowing into Neverwinter, the southern territory became a desolate wasteland. Rather than leaving them to ruin, Roland decided to let the Sand Nation reclaim them. They could start at the junctions, between the desert and green land, and gradually rebuild the Port of Clearwater.

By doing this, workers who were exploiting Blackwater could start off at the Port of Clearwater, and reach the southern point of the desert by sea. According to Iron Axe's report, most of the underground Styx's Rivers lay to the south of the Land of Fire, mostly under the Endless Cape. In that area, Blackwater tributaries flowed close to the ground and near the coastline. When compared to the danger-ridden land route, traveling along the coastline was much safer apparently. Given the present technology level of Neverwinter, the coastline was undoubtedly the preferred exploitation location.

It would take some time for these events to take effect in the Southernmost Region. Clans that heard the news might not leave for the Southern Territory immediately. Regardless, the temptation of an oasis would be irresistible to the Sand Nation civilians. Even if only a few clans move there in the beginning, eventually more would follow and ultimately become Roland's subjects.

Thus, not only would he gain a large labor force and prevent the land from going to waste, but the revived residence would also stop the roving bandits that traveled inland. This made it so Roland didn't need to deploy a large force of manpower to work in the desert and the subjects that wanted to live in the Southern Territory would also find an abode.

Of course, there were hidden dangers as well.

One challenge would be merging his people with the Ironsand people of the Mojin Clan.

Yet, Roland wasn't overly concerned.

Leaving aside the unawakened democracy, this world's religions were thought-provoking enough—they didn't require one to be too religious, but more like a pure nature worship. Both of the nations used the same language; the Sand Nation's lifestyle and customs were not so much a special culture, but more of an adaptation to the desert. Iron Axe and Echo were perfect examples. The two of them had roamed all the way to Border Town, and fit in well without too much difficulty.

As long as his law enforcement was strict and the punishments and rewards were fair, Roland believed that the Ironsand people of the Mojin Clan would also become qualified workers.

Just in case there was a rebellion, the First Army that had been stationed in the Southern Territory and Fallen Dragon Ridge happened to be more than mere ornaments.

The more pressing issue Roland cared about was following up on the hybrid demonic beasts Iron Axe mentioned, that had attacked the witches. If his recollection was accurate, it sounded like an unavoidable accident had caused the desertification of the Southernmost Region. Geographically speaking, this piece of pointy land adjacent to the mainland was not far from Graycastle, which made such an abrupt change happening highly unlikely. Unfortunately, for the moment, he was too short-handed to explore the Southernmost Region, so he would have to ignore this quandary temporarily.

While what the demonic hybrid did was inconceivable—this abnormal lifeform owned a modicum of intelligence. Roland had learned this from his own experience, so, what had driven it to attack the

witches despite the risk? If the inland demonic beasts had sieged the human cities under the influence of the relics of gods, then the Four-winged Eagle had obviously attacked witches for some other reason.

While Roland was thinking hard, Wendy and Phyllis knocked on the door before they walked in. "Your Majesty, the last batch of facilities that had been shipped from Taquila will arrive at the Third Border City soon. Pasha invited you to meet her underground."

"Finally they arrived." Roland became excited when he heard the news. The so-called Third Border City was actually an underground bunker that had been built under the Impassable Mountain Range. This place functioned similar to a city and essentially served as a secret stronghold. The last batch of facilities was the Instrument of Divine Retribution and the relics of gods. To ensure their safe arrival, the First Army that had been stationed at Neverwinter provided the escort.

"What about the demonic beasts? Any movement?"

"No sign of a massive gathering for the moment."

"Is that so..." Roland stood up and said, "Let's get started then."

#### Chapter 773: The Third Border City

The entrance to the cave was located to the north of Neverwinter. It could be found in the juncture between the city and the mountain range. On the nearby hillside, there was the ever-busy mining and furnace areas.

Near the foot of the mountain, a solid concrete wall appeared in front of everybody. Although there were many facilities still under construction, this place had already become the most heavily guarded area in Neverwinter. There was a watch tower on each one of its corners and wired netting lining the top of it. There was also a machine gun blockhouse on each side of the gate.

The guards saluted Roland as he walked through the gate and into the yard.

Upon walking into the yard, he faintly felt as if he had traveled back to the modern world.

What he saw in here was definitely not supposed to be in this era. There was a huge cave that had its entrance covered with concrete. The cave was over ten meters wide and over 5 meters tall. The two grand iron doors were oversized compared to the entrance and their thickness reached an astonishing one meter. They were not solid poured but were rather jointed by several layers of steel plates. This was on par with many doors at modern military strongholds.

Since the iron doors weighed so much, the entrance had to be modified and slideways were installed on the ground to support the doors. Even with the slideways, they could not be pulled open by manpower alone.

Due to this, one of the two steam engines in the yard was used to provide the driving force to move the doors.

If the demonic beasts broke the defensive line set up by the Taquila witches, as long as the relic of gods got retrieved, these two doors could block any following demonic beasts outside.

Standing in front of the doors that were as big as a multi-layered building, Roland could feel their solidness. Almost 1/3 of Neverwinter's winter steel output was used to build these two doors. Their simple rectangular shape might seem easy to produce, but their size alone required a higher level of skill.

On the day the doors were installed, Roland had witnessed the scene as they were opened and shut. Listening to the toneless roar of the steam engine, the harsh grating on the sliding tracks, and watching the slowly closing doors, Roland felt as if he was in charge of the entrance that protected them from doomsday.

On each side of the two iron doors, there was half a line of words. Combined together, they meant the Third Border City.

Roland and the crowd of people that followed him walked into the cave. The light suddenly dimmed.

Phyllis took out the Stone of Lighting and walked in the front of the team. She began to lead everybody down the deep cave.

"Your Majesty, I don't quite get why you call this place the Third Border City." Wendy said with bewilderment, "If the outside Border Area is the first Border City, then where is the second Border City?"

"Because the third is the proper title," Roland replied.

"Ah?"

"Anyway, don't you think the number three goes quite well with a stronghold? Besides, it doesn't matter what name we give it. What matters is people can remember it," Roland said with his hands laid out.

"Alright, as long as you like it," Wendy said, twitching her mouth.

After they stopped talking, the only sounds in the cave were the echoing footsteps and water dripping.

Due to the lack of spraymechs, only the floor of the cave was paved with concrete. On the two sides of the floor was a ditch and a mine railway. If materials and food were needed, they would be transported by carts hauled by the other engine at the entrance. Roland had heard from Phyllis that the God's Punishment Witches were once interested in measuring the power of the machine, and they found out that even five of them pulling a rope together could not stop the steam engine from dragging them forward.

Since the walls and ceiling of the cave could not be covered with concrete, leaking became inevitable. Luckily, the temperature inside of the mountain would not get too low so the water inside would not freeze. While devouring worms would leave a trail of mucus behind while crawling forward, when its mucus dried out, it would glue the dirt together as if smearing a layer of paste on the surface of the walls and ceiling. Because of this, there was no danger that the cave would collapse.

After about a half an hour's walk, the cave got brighter.

"We're almost there." Phyllis slowed down. "Your Majesty, do you need..."



Roland knew what she wanted to say and interrupted her. "It's ok. Take me there now."

The God's Punishment Witch turned back and looked meaningfully at Roland, "... Ok, I understand."

Upon exiting the narrow cave, they entered a large cavern. In front of them was a spacious dome building that was the size of a football field. Throughout the cavern, tens of light beams were projected onto the dome and cast bright spots on the floor. With the help of this light, people would not feel oppressed in this area even though they were deep under the mountains. Besides the witches, the First Army was also dispatched to guard this place. Each of the soldiers had been examined by Nightingale personally to make sure they were Roland's strongest supporters.

The deeper into the dome they went in, the more they got away from this light. In the center of the spacious dome, there was only a few rhombus shaped magic cores. They were the three Taquila Senior Witches... or in other words, original carriers.

Roland walked to the three of them with a smile on his face. He stuck out his right hand toward the leading blob monster. "Finally we could meet. You must be Pasha, aren't you?"

At that moment, Roland could feel someone panting behind him and felt that a hand was on his shoulder. Undoubtedly, if anything went wrong, Nightingale would drag him into the Mist instantly.

The blob being fell silent for a while then a familiar voice sounded, "I'm surprised, Your Majesty. Before today, we've only been communicating through the Illusion Core. Perhaps the illusionary images weren't that frightening, but at this moment, in front of me, the calmness you're showing is astonishing. To be honest, you're the first one who's seen this shell and reacted as if nothing had happened. Even when the Taquila witches first saw this form, they weren't as calm as you are. I'm curious, aren't you afraid at all?" She paused, reached out a tentacle, and gently tangled it with Roland's hand. "But you're right. I'm Pasha. Thanks for supporting the Taquila witches."

"He hasn't supported us. It's hard to say whether the group of common people he sent are meant to help or supervise us," a cold consciousness came in. "It won't be too late to tell him after he finishes exploring the big snow mountain."

"Alethea! We made an agreement!" a third voice interrupted.

"Alright. I'll shut up."

It seemed the other two were Alethea and Celine, who often appeared beside Pasha. Roland did not mind their tones. Firstly, those ancient witches had lived in an era where witches were superior and so it would be difficult for them to change their mindset. Secondly, compared to having their attitudes changed, he wished more to make some substantial gains.

"The Fjords' most famous explorer once said that fear comes from unknown. No matter how you look, your souls belong to Taquila witches," Roland said, smiling, "and I'm no stranger to the latter. Agatha has become an essential member of the Witch Union and a beloved and trusted member at that."

Roland noticed that Pasha's tentacle was rather coarse and the surface of it was not as dry as it looked. The surface of her tentacle felt moist. Perhaps it was because she constantly crawled in the dirt. Roland could clearly feel the warmth beneath her skin. This giant blob in front of him was, undoubtedly, a fresh lifeform.

"...I see," Pasha's voice sounded sentimental, "and you're right. Our cooperation had begun long ago."

"Faced with the threats of the demons, everybody should let go of past prejudices and try hard to join hands." After some short casual conversation, Roland came to the main subject. "The relics of gods have arrived, right? Can I have a look at the things that determine mankind's lives?"

Pasha waved the main tentacles on top of her head. "Of course. Come with me."

Chapter 774: [Divine Land]

Roland curiously observed the Taquila Senior Witches as they moved. Their tentacles played different roles. The short ones twisted like snakes so they could stand and walk while the long ones constantly inserted themselves into the mud to correct directions. Some tentacles were amazingly long. Based on the height of dome's ceiling, the tentacles were over 100 meters long and could shrink freely like arms.

Even the strongest muscles could not support such long tentacles. Roland guessed that the magic power in the blob enabled them to walk freely, just like the giant demonic beasts that apparently broke the limits of gravity.

After walking a couple dozen steps and passing two magic cores, Pasha stopped in front of a cube which seemed to be made of gemstone.

"That's a God's Stone of Retaliation. I can't get too close..." Nightingale whispered in his ear to remind him.

Roland nodded silently and asked Pasha, "is the relic in it?"

"Yes. While keeping it locked up, we can limit its summoning range. If we did not put it in a box made of God's Stone of Retaliation, I'm afraid the residents in your city would be unconsciously affected by the relic." Pasha stretched out a few tentacles and placed them on the box without immediately opening it. "Before you have contact with it, I have to clarify some points lest you have an accident."

"Is it... dangerous?" Wendy stepped forward and subconsciously stood in front of Roland.

"Don't be too worried. As long as you don't stay alone with the relic, it'll be alright," Celine interrupted.

"What do you mean by that?" Roland asked, raising his eyebrows.

Pasha became more serious and said, "as I have said before, if you open yourself up in front of the relic, you can see some incredible sights. Either a witch or a common person can be summoned. But remember, what you see isn't completely fictional. It's different from the phantom instrument, what you see in the painting scrolls will have an impact on reality. That's the first thing I want to clarify. Don't accept the summoning of deities alone at any time."

Roland immediately felt a chill creep up his spine, thinking, "The sight in the painting can affect reality? Isn't that the same as Sadako Yamamura climbing out from television?"

"Why is it not dangerous when there are more people?"

Pasha explained, "Because once you're trapped in the Divine Land, you'll have some obvious reactions, for example, glazed eyes, dull body, ravings., etc. The people around you have to drag you out of the range of the relic. In the historical records, many people had once be summoned by the relic alone and then their souls could not return to their bodies. Two or three people having contact with it that take turns effectively reduces the risk."

Roland glanced at the Taquila witches and said, "I got it. In other words, since there are at least five people here, it's not that dangerous at all, right?"

Celine nodded. "If this wasn't so, we wouldn't allow you to watch it at close range."

Alethea coldly said, "there's another point we need to warn you about. You should know that the huge painting scrolls in the relic display the demon civilizations. If you have a chance to see them, they may... No, they'll definitely try to hurt you. We can help you wake up from the summoning, but we can't help you resist the horror of it." She paused for a moment and continued with a sneer in her tone, "if you're too scared and make a scene at that time, don't blame me for not warning you."

"That's what you wanted to clarify?" Roland remained undisturbed. "Anything else you want to say?"

"You..." Alethea probably did not expect him to be so indifferent and could not help feeling slightly stifled.

"If not, then open it."

Roland sighed silently. As a modern man who enjoyed all kinds of monster, alien, thriller and horror movies, he had a much broader horizon than the ancient people. If he was unprepared, he might be scared. But what Alethea said was, in some sense, sort of a spoiler . As long as it would not cause him real harm, he did not think that he would give up exploring the mystery of the deities.

"I see," Pasha shrunk her tentacles and opened the God's stone box to reveal a spindle-shaped red crystal.

It floated up from the box by itself and then it, like the magic cores, quietly floated in the air about a meter above the ground.

"It can't get out of the range of the God's stone. You need to get close to it and relax, then you can enter the Divine Land."

"Your Majesty..." said Wendy, grabbing Roland's hand with some concern.

"Don't worry. It won't be dangerous since you're here. I know what I'm going to face," he said, gently patting the red-haired witch's hand to comfort her.

Other than the information given by the Taquila witches, he also learned some information from Isabella's memory and his exploration of Pivotal Secret Temple of the Church in the Dream World. They proved that something could indeed bring people into an incredible "Divine Land".

Roland sat down cross-legged beside the relic and closing his eyes.

...

Meanwhile, Pasha stretched out her tentacles to connect with those of her companions.

Their consciousness quickly connected together and reflected what they intended to say in each other's mind.

A furious Alethea said, "how dare he be so arrogant? I can't wait to see him scare and tremble. Otherwise, he'll never truly realize what terrible enemies he'll face. When he wets himself, I wonder what he'll say."

Celine glared at her angrily. "What good will that do us? Any ordinary king is very concerned about dignity and prestige. If you make him disgrace himself then I'm afraid he'll hate us. How can we explore the snow mountain and look for the Chosen One if we lose his support? Even worse, what if he becomes terrified of the demons? The whole world will lose hope!"

"He said he was not afraid of anything. Anyway, I warned him. Do you think you can stop him?"

Celine muttered, "it was a mistake to bring him here to contact the relic. I didn't recommend doing so from the very beginning. At least we should have waited until we reach a basic level of trust."

Pasha softly sighed. "So should we just hide it from him or prevent him from approaching the relic then? We'll never get his trust that way. Put yourself in his shoes. Would you trust an ally who is unwilling to allow you to know about the key that determines the fate of human destiny? No matter how you explain, he won't appreciate it. Only after he experiences it in person will he understand our sincerity."

"But..."

"But it's also unnecessary to be too worried. The demon and the Giant Eye don't show up every time. Besides, even if he's too scared and made a mistake, we can promise that we'll keep our lips buttoned and never reveal it to other people. I think he'll understand." Pasha said to reassure Celine and herself,

"What about the two witches coming with him? Will they keep that secret too?" Asked Alethea with malicious intent. She, undoubtedly, regarded it as a pleasure to see a common person lose face in front of witches.

"That's not our business."

...

When Roland opened his eyes again, he found himself in an infinitely spacious palace.

Chapter 775: Hello, World

The sky dome, the Bloody Moon, the Giant Paintings... They were all just as Pasha described.

All of them were extremely magnificent. No wonder they called it the Divine Land. Only when he was in here could he truly feel its vastness.

Was this a broadcast or perhaps a way of controlling the subconscious mind?

Roland squatted down to lightly stroke the floor. It seemed to be made of polished stones but it was as smooth as a mirror. He could feel both its coldness and toughness through his fingers. It appeared what he saw was real rather than fictional.

Due to having had similar experiences in the Dream World before, which was already extremely real, he would not freak out overseeing this.

Roland looked up at the dome. The huge Bloody Moon hanging above the Giant Painting was like a round pancake. With a careful observation, he could see the surging ripples on its surface. To be more exact, the moon was like a sea. It was not as bright and dazzling as the sun. Though it appeared to be scarlet, he could not feel its light or heat. The red ripples were waves or vortexes, densely covering the entire Bloody Moon.

The only problem was that this circle was a bit too perfect.

It looked like a flat circle rather than a sphere.

Perhaps the Bloody Moon was too close to him?

Roland stared at it for quite a while but failed to associate it with the Red Meteor observed by the astrologers. It was neither a planet nor a star. If the Battle of Divine Will was really caused by it, then how could it come to earth?

An idea suddenly popped into his mind.

If Astrologer of Dispersion Star, the Chief Astrologer, came to be summoned by the relic, could he figure out whether this stuff among the flickering stars was indeed the Bloody Moon?

Of course, he could not guarantee that the poor old man would not directly faint out of fear.

Roland shrugged, stood up, and looked at the four Giant Paintings around the Bloody Moon.

They showed a throne, a sea, a black screen, and himself.

Besides the underground dome in the Third Border City, he had already read the records of these paintings in the library of Pivotal Secret Temple. They were not that strange. A relic was like a recorder which constantly reflected the world around it. According to the description of Pasha, the Giant Painting that became a totally black screen was the eliminated underground civilization.

Roland greeted Wendy and himself in the painting, but they did not respond. They apparently could not hear him.

Seeing this, he wondered why Pasha said that the Divine Land would have an impact on reality.

He approached the painting of the throne and touched the painting scroll with his fingers. It felt like a soft and smooth cloth with a delicate texture. The image was just an image as he could not cross its border and walk into the painted world.

Roland walked around but made no further discoveries. He planned to walk outside the palace to find out whether the land was boundless when he suddenly heard some noises from the painting scroll behind him.

It was extremely loud in such a quiet place. It sounded like the rubbing of steel objects or the echo of a hard object hitting the ground.

He immediately felt the hair on the back of his neck stand up!

"What the hell! No one mentioned these giant paintings could also make a sound!"

He stopped and suddenly turned around.

In the first painting, a dark-armored warrior had suddenly appeared, sitting on the throne. His scarlet eyes looking down at him.

There was also some movement in one of the other paintings.

With many bubbles surging upwards with a soft gurgling sound, a huge eyeball emerged from the dark sea. It got closer and closer to the edge of the painting as if it intended to escape from the frame. There were three pupils in a triangular shape that stared at him at the same time. It was making him really uncomfortable at first glance.

Did you invite each other to come together?

Roland could not help feeling relieved. As long as they did not hide and play tricks on him, he was not afraid of these two monsters. They were not at all frightening in appearance.

They were just a Senior Demon and a guardian of the relic of an unknown civilization.

He walked to the center of four Giant Paintings and looked up to stare at the two alien creatures.

"Good afternoon. Did you also come to participate in the Battle of Divine Will?"

"Must we fight to the finish? Can't we just sit down and talk about it?"

"Can you understand me?"

"Say something even if you can't!"

"Hey, is this a winking game? If you wink, you'll lose?"

Roland tried to communicate with them some more but never received any response.

He did not know whether it was an illusion, but he felt that the demon was breathing more and more rapidly and the huge eyeball gradually trembled.

Was this the side effect of staring at each other? Were they just able to stare at him until their eyes felt sore? How could it be described as dangerous? It was not a problem for him to visit here alone.

He rolled his eyes and intended to end this boring staring contest by turning around, but noticed out of the corner of his eye that a group of black tentacles had suddenly appeared in the painting scrolls!

They stretched toward the demon and the eyeball, moving like a snake and wrapped around them very tightly.

"What... the hell?" Roland was stunned.

The demon finally moved. He tightly grasped the throne and screamed with a weird voice. Flames and transparent blades emerged around him to fight the tentacles; however, the tentacles outnumbered them. The soft and tiny hands at the end of tentacles could easily break the weapons summoned by the demon.

The demon seemed to be fighting a very powerful, invisible enemy and his screams became even fiercer. Roland could feel the tension in his tone. As an electric light burst out from the armor, the tentacles finally shrank and loosened their control. Taking advantage of this opportunity, the demon, with some difficulty, pushed himself out of the throne and ran out of the range of the Giant Painting without hesitation. He had even broken a piece of the throne's armrest in panic.

The Giant Eye was not doing any better as several tentacles had already pierced into the eyeball. Roland could even feel its pain when looking at it. Light blue liquid flew out from the holes like tears. Instead of screaming like the demon, the Giant Eye constantly gave off harsh lights from its three pupils to block most of the tentacles.

Suddenly, all the pupils of the Giant Eye simultaneously opened and a looming ripple dashed toward the Giant Painting. Roland immediately felt an overpowering stench blowing towards him and he could not help but take a step backward. At the same time, the tentacles let go the eyeball and the eyeball quickly retreated back in the direction where it came and disappeared into the darkness in a blink. The rippling blue water turned darker and darker as the eyeball sank and it became completely black after a while.

"Uh... What happened?"

Roland glanced at the painting of the throne, which was a mess, and observed the painting of the sea which had turned dark again, not knowing how to respond for a long time.

Chapter 776: Contrary to Common Sense

"It has been nearly ten minutes, it seems that he hasn't met anything," said Celine in relief,

"It's a pity that he has really good luck." Alethea responded much less excitedly.

Celine complained, "I don't want to count on chance. Please choose a safer method next time."

"Let's not talk about what has already happened. Let's guess how long the king can stay in there. Isn't the longest record for a common person less than 15 minutes even taking into account the those who tried in the Land of Dawn?" said Alethea, changing the topic.

"Witches do not fair any better. How long you can stay in the Divine Land has nothing to do with your magic power. Even in the Union, the relic was constantly monitored by a group of common people in turns. However, considering the king's age and experience, he should come out soon."

According to all the records that Celine had read through, the warriors who had been to the battlefield and fought the demons generally persisted longer, whether a witch or a common person. The highest record was held by Lady Alice, who had stayed there for almost two hours. As a king who had never been to the battlefield, Roland had to be very skilled to last so long.

"Maybe he'll want to stay longer. After all, it's his first time to witness such a marvelous scene."

"Then he'll feel dizzy and even fall unconscious." Celine suddenly realized something and looked at Pasha. "Did you forget to tell him that?"

"A coma isn't too bad and won't cause him any real damage." Pasha shook her tentacles and said, "on the contrary, when he runs out energy, this kind of unpleasant thing can reduce his interest in getting in contact with the relic again. It's better for everyone this way."

"So... you didn't forget to tell him?"

Pasha did not directly answer. "Sometimes it's better to not explain. None of us would like to have so many restraints when we explore the Divine Land."

"I now understand why Lady Natalia chose you as one of the candidates for the Three Chiefs," said Alethea, smacking her lips.

Celine agreed with Alethea. Compared to the disgrace of being scared, a coma due to energy exhaustion could be regarded as a result without side effects. It could reduce the curiosity of the common people while not destroying their relationship with them. Pasha obviously had more foresight than them.

After a while, she began to frown slightly and asked, "It's been more than a quarter of an hour. Is he okay?"

"It seems... nothing is wrong. This king seems to be full of surprises." Pasha replied after glancing at the sitting Roland Wimbledon.

"It's a new record for common people. Should I say congratulations?" said Alethea, shrugging her main tentacle.

Celine gave no response. She felt a little uneasy like something was wrong.

The waiting that followed seemed to validate her guess.

Another 15 minutes later, Roland still remained motionless and she was getting more and more anxious.

Having lived for over a hundred years, she should feel disconnected from time; however, the almost constant heart pulse of her shell could accurately tell her the change of every second. A 45 minutes exploration was too long for someone who was not a warrior or an Extraordinary. He should have run out of energy by now.

Celine wondered, "was... there some unobserved accident in the Divine Land?"

Wendy could not help step forward and try to wake up the king, but was immediately stopped by Pasha.

"If you get too close to the relic, you'll be affected by it too."

"Then let me enter the Divine Land and bring His Majesty back!" She insisted.

"Even if you go there, you can't bring back your king. No matter how many people are simultaneously summoned by it, they'll see a different Divine Land."



Celine noticed that the other witch that had been hidden had begun to move. From the vague magic reaction, Celine knew that she had taken something out of her pocket. Based on the information collected by Phyllis, it should be a unique weapon of Neverwinter.

She passed her concerns along to the other two and then Pasha nodded and took immediate action. She stretched out her tentacles to wrap around the king and pulled him back to Wendy. Though it was not the ideal way to end the exploration, the safety of Roland was top priority. If both sides conflicted with each other, the consequences would be disastrous.

...

As the relic was put back into the God's Stone box, Roland suddenly opened his eyes.

"Your Majesty... Are you okay?" Wendy asked eagerly, helping him to stand up.

"There is nothing wrong... I'm fine," he answered, rubbing his sore legs. "I met alien monsters who were guarding the other two relics and talked to them. Unfortunately, they did not understand my words."

Celine was shocked. "Wait, what are you talking about? Did... you meet the demon and..."

"And a huge eyeball. It seemed to stay in a boat that can move underwater... but I'm not sure if it's a boat or something else," Roland answered.

Even though she could not see her companions' expressions, she could feel their shock through their shared connection, especially Alethea's. Among all the survivors, she had stayed in the Divine Land for the longest time. Her experience in Blessed Army enabled her to persist for about an hour but only when nothing appeared in the painting scrolls.

If she met the demon or an unknown enemy, the speed of energy consumption would be doubled!

"What happened then?" Pasha continued to ask.

"I'm not really sure. Anyway, some black tentacles suddenly popped up in the painting scrolls and attacked them. Those tentacles were so powerful that the monsters had to retreat from the paintings. It happened in only a few minutes."

Did he mean that he had met the guardians of the other two civilizations at the same time and defeated them while not being injured at all?

Celine felt as if she was listening to a fairy tale.

She was not surprised by the presence of black tentacles. As the energy of the user declined, the relic would have an greater impact on them. He might hear imaginary sounds, see imagery scenes, tentacles or something else one by one. They were not merely mental disturbances but they could do real harm to the body. That was why Pasha emphasized that they were more than illusions. If they interrupted the summoning before any real harm was caused, the user would not have a serious problem.

Of course, it was impossible for ordinary people to defend themselves against the spiritual erosion. Even a witch who had experienced thousands of battles would quickly feel tired and eventually lose control of her body.

But what Roland faced was a completely reversed situation and the black tentacles had rushed toward the enemy. She had never heard of such an instance.

Looking at the king, who seemed not to care about what had happened, Celine suddenly had an incredible guess.

Was this ordinary person comparable to Lady Alice, Queen of Starfall City and Head of the Three Chairs, in terms of mental power?

However, he did not seem to be aware of it. After stretching his arms and legs, he laughed and said, "Anyway, thank you for pulling me out. I intended to see if there was any border to the Divine Land, but it was too large and I did not want to walk all the way back."

The three witches remained speechless for a long while and then Pasha finally broke the silence. "Ahem... that's all right. Do you still want to continue exploring the relic?"

Roland shook his head and said, "not right now. There are just four painting scrolls and it won't make much difference to have another look at them. Take me to the central carrier."

#### Chapter 777: Question and Answer

Ever since the previous meeting with the Taquila witches, Roland had looked forward to meeting with the central carrier.

To decipher the literature left by the underground civilization, many Taquila survivors had sacrificed themselves by merging their souls, but it could only answer yes or no questions. Otherwise, it was basically a useless object. Thinking of this solemn story, he felt that an air of mystery shrouded this central carrier.

When Roland finally saw it, he gasped in shock. It was chained up in a secret chamber under the hall.

This blob, much bigger than any original carrier such as the one occupied by Pasha, was heavily chained. Its thickest tentacles were forced apart and nailed to the walls or the ceiling. From its badly scarred skin and its broken tentacles, he could tell that it was not the first time she was treated this way.

He remembered that it was able to feel things just like the original carriers.

It was able to feel the heat and cold, taste the sweet and bitter, and feel pain.

He could not help knitting his eyebrows, asking, "Why? I remember the volunteers integrating with the central carrier were all witches, even including one of your Three Chiefs, E..."

"Lady Eleanor, Your Majesty," Pasha sighed. "We had no choice. Carriers are as powerful as God's Punishment Warriors. Their tentacles can drill into the earth and build a light well in the dome. They can also attack enemies and tear a prey in half. If we don't keep her here, she'll subconsciously move around and cause us lots of trouble. If that happens, she'll be even harder to deal with than those hybrid demonic beasts."

Roland quickly understood Pasha's feelings of powerlessness. He guessed that this tentacle blob might be a combat unit created by the underground civilization, but if it lost its mind and got out of control, it would be a serious threat to the relic of gods and the magic core. He believed that the Taquila survivors did not want to take this risk and as a result, they had no choice but to keep it trapped here.

However, knowing the reason did not make him feel any better.

He felt sad for the witches who had willingly sacrificed everything for Taquila only to end up imprisoned in this dark corner.

Seeing Roland contemplate these emotions, Pasha said with a mixed expression of gratitude and sadness, "We tried to ask about their feelings, but we were unable to get a response. The souls merged with the central carrier cannot be separated again by the magic core, so we have no idea whether they're able to feel what's going on."

Alethea who remained quiet suddenly spoke again, "All the Taquila witches, including us, have determined to follow Lady Eleanor forever. You don't have to feel too bad for them. They knew the what they were going into" Roland somehow felt that her voice wasn't as cold as before.

Well... If it had been as cold as dry ice, it's now only cool as iced water.

Celine added, "When we asked the central carrier whether we should chain her, all her three main tentacles answered yes. If she hadn't agreed to this, we would not have tied her up so tightly."

Roland nodded and said, "Maybe the Witch Union can help you with this problem. Soraya can produce flexible fabrics to replace the iron chains, and a little girl named Softfeathers can stick things together. If they work together, they may find some way to constrain her without hurting her. If you don't mind..."

Pasha slightly lowered the main tentacle on her head and said, "That will be great. You have my gratitude."

"Don't worry about it." Roland replied then asked. "What did you mean by 'all three main tentacles answered yes'? She can say yes with one main tentacle and no with another at the same time? When that happens, how can you make sure of what she's trying to say?"

"Let Celine explain that to you."

Hearing that there may be a way to alleviate the pain of the witches in the central carrier, Celine seemed quite excited and answered, "The central carrier is different from us. It has three main tentacles, which enables her to express more complicated information without communicating through telepathy, which is what I'm doing right now."

With these words, Celine's main tentacle on her head emitted a beam of dim red light.

"Oh? It can even shine?"

"Yes, before we learned how to communicate through thoughts, we often used this method to express our feelings and emotions. But now we don't use it as much anymore." She moved to the center of the secret chamber, pointing at the three main tentacles which were hanging from the central carrier's head and were nailed to the ground. "Without consciousness, she can't express her feelings. She's only able

to reply yes or no through the red light. If a main tentacle shines, it means yes. If it doesn't, it means no."

She continued to explain, "However, when we were deciphering the literature of the underground civilization, we realized that a simple yes or no couldn't quickly help us find the correct answers. For example, if we mistake the sentence 'I'm a Taquila witch' for 'I'm a witch' or 'I'm Taquila', she'll answer no. With this method, we would have to spend a lot of time on confirming each simple sentence."

Roland immediately understood what she meant. "So you counted her shining main tentacles to see how close you got to the right answer."

Celine exclaimed, "You really are smart. That's right. When we read her something closer to the right answer, she would show us more red lights. When all three of her main tentacles shone, it meant that the answer was either 100 percent correct or she couldn't agree more."

Roland felt touched yet again by these witches, thinking, "So that was how this fusion of all the witches' souls including Eleanor's confirmed that they should be constrained underground? Even though it was unclear whether these souls made this decision for the sake of safety or based on their own feelings, this choice was still quite moving."

He took a deep breath, asking, "May I ask her some questions?"

Celine moved to the side and answered, "Yes, of course. You can just ask her directly."

Roland approached the central carrier and asked slowly, "Suppose now I've two baskets. Each basket has two apples inside. After I dump out all the baskets, there are four apples on the ground. Is it right?"

All the three tentacles shone at once.

Celine was startled, "Uhm... Is that what you wanted to ask?"

Wendy also felt a little embarrassed at this moment, asking, "Your Majesty, what're you up to now?"

"It's just a test," Roland remained calm and continued to ask the second question. "Now suppose that I've got 12,345 baskets, and each basket has 54,321 apples. If I dump out all the baskets, how many apples are there on the ground?" He took out a paper strip and continued, "I guess there are this many apples. Am I right?"

He read out the correct answer he had prepared in advance, which was a nine-digit number. The calculation required to get this number should be considered quite complex at this age. He believed that people who had never gone through Neverwinter's Mathematics education could never get the right answer in a short amount of time. This can be seen from the shared silence amongst the Taquila Senior Witches.

However, all the three main tentacles of the central carrier shone red without delay after hearing what he said. Just as they did to the first question.

Chapter 778: Commandeering a Meeting

Amazed by the result, Roland was lost in thoughts.

This central carrier can figure out a nine-digit multiplication! No matter the method she used, whether it be using summation or column multiplication, she managed to find the correct answer instantly. This must mean that her calculating skills far surpass those of the common people. Even if she's only able to answer yes or no, she'll still be of great assistance to the Arithmetic Academy. At the very least, she can check the calculation results of the academy members which can help minimize the mistakes of large and complex calculation projects.

He squatted down excitedly and with a child-like grin, patted a main tentacle of the central carrier, "You're brilliant."

The red light went out.

Pasha reminded him, "Your Majesty, she can't communicate with you directly."

"She can understand my words and even give me yes or no answers. This already counts as a kind of communication." Roland believed that communication, in essence, is just the receiving and sending of information. The central carrier can at worst be described as having troubles expressing her thoughts and thus couldn't "communicate" as a normal person could. He was not discouraged by this in the slightest and intended to continue finding out whether the central carrier was really limited to just giving out yes or no responses.

After pondering for a while, he said, "Now let's suppose lighting one main tentacle means one and lighting two tentacles means two. Can you give me a three with your red light?"

The question seemed to be much simpler than the five-digit multiplication, but it served an entirely different purpose. If the central carrier could display a correct answer to this question, it would mean that she was able to give more elaborate feedback to questions. Moreover, she might also be able to display calculation results directly in some way.

However, the central carrier did not instantly answer like before. After a few seconds, one of her tentacles started to glow, another one only glimmered, while the last one remained dark.

According to Celine, the central carrier meant that what Roland said was 30 percent correct.

However, this signal did not last for long.

The light of the glimmering tentacle went out very quickly and was soon followed by the glowing one.

"So the answer is a no?" He wondered.

"This is..."

Celine slightly sighed and explained, "This is beyond her capacity. She had to express her agreement in a more complicated way to your question and thus got confused." She paused before continuing, "We've tried to ask her to express simple ideas and even some short sentences. However, once she found out that she could not answer a question simply with a yes or no, she would respond much slower and also easily get confused like how she just did."

Roland said, frowning, "Does this mean I have caused some sort of a logical barrier in her brain? Is she... alright?"

Celine waved her tentacles, answering, "she'll be alright after a moment of rest. I once tried asking her some contradictory questions. As a result, she ignored the rest of our questions for several weeks."

Now Roland was certain that this bio-computer was going to be difficult to handle, but he still did not want to give up his plan of creating a new communication system to help the central carrier express more complicated ideas by answering yes or no. As she could check the calculation result, he thought that she must have known the correct answer and just did not know how to display it with her tentacles.

However, formulating this system was well beyond his area of expertise. As engineers and programmers tend to not get along very well, he knew very little about computer programming. After a bit of thought, he decided to give up on the idea of studying this central carrier all by himself.

"By the way, I remember that you said the carriers needed mud and heat to continue functioning. Is there any magma here?"

Pasha replied, "Fran hasn't drilled that deep yet, but we've found a boiling underground river here. So we should be able to find lava flow nearby soon. Also, I often smell sulfur from this underground river. It's good for us to take a bath in it, too. As for the central carrier, we pump water from the river to shower her every few days, so you don't need to worry about this."

Hearing that magma was not a must for the carrier and that hot water could be used as a replacement, Roland was excited to think that he would only need a boiler to heat some water for this central carrier if he wanted to move her to the Arithmetic Academy one day.

He knew it was still not the time to make this request, as it would feel like he was overstepping his boundaries with the Taquila witches who had just moved here and had not yet joined the united front with Neverwinter. Besides, he was worried that those astrologers from the academy wouldn't be able to keep their composure once they saw this gigantic tentacle monster.

He would first have to build trust with the witches during the exploration of the snow mountain before he could make this sensitive request.

After Roland left the secret chamber and ended his tour of the Third Border City, he began to contemplate about the plans for this place. At present, only a rough frame of this underground city had been constructed, and it could only serve as a temporary underground residence for the witches for now. Only after tunnels connected the numerous peaks of the Impassable Mountain Range could they consider this a real hidden stronghold. With the artillery installments and military fortifications above ground, it would then be incorporated into part of Neverwinter's outermost defense line.

As soon as he returned to the castle, he summoned all the department leaders of City Hall to his reception hall. A purple curtain of light slowly materialized in front of them before eventually enveloping the whole room.

Despite the fact that Roland informed them in advance about what they were going to see, the officials' faces still drastically changed when they saw this incredible scene. The young Minister of Agriculture, Sirius Daly, even accidentally knocked over his teacup on the table in shock; Barov kept on wiping the

sweat from his forehead; Kyle Sichi and Astrologer of Dispersion Star stared at the light curtain in fearful disbelief. If it had not been for the king who was still sitting calmly in his chair, they probably would have already run away with their tails between their legs.

Roland glanced around and found that the only person who remained relatively calm was the noble lady from the Northern Region, Edith, who only jumped a little from the scene but at the same time her eyes seemed to be filled with excitement and curiosity. He also noticed that she was now looking at him with more respect in her eyes.

He had to admit that trying to figure out women was quite the difficult task.

Aside from Edith, all the other City Hall officials' reactions were within his expectations.

As he was determined to form a united front with the Taquila survivors to fight against the demons, he knew that he could not hide them from the officials forever. Given this, he thought he had better introduce the witches to the officials before anyone in the City Hall noticed something strange in the mountains to the north of Neverwinter.

He also believed that two years of working in the City Hall should have broadened their outlooks and made them more open-minded toward new things.

However, after he explained to them who these tentacle blobs were, why they came here, and how he planned to explore the snow mountain together with them, most officials did not seem to be much supportive at all. If they had not been familiar with the witches in the Witch Union, they would have already treated those ancient witches as alien creatures like the demons.

Barov, the City Hall Director, said that it was too late to come up with new budget plans for this exploration since it was already the time for the Finance Department to work on the final accounts of the year. He also expressed his worries about Border Area's possible vulnerability if they were to dispatch additional troops for this expedition, given how a force was recently just sent to the Southernmost Region.

With an obvious distrust in the Taquila survivors, Chief Knight Carter doubted the safety of this joint action and even argued that dangers might arise due to internal conflicts of the expedition team.

Sirius, Minister of Agriculture, stuttered about how the grains in stock could hardly support this plan alongside the ongoing military expedition and this news about the shortage of food might cause panic among the residents of the city.

Karl, the Minister of Construction, expressed his concerns about the instability of the mining area above the place hollowed out by the ancient witches in the mountain range.

Hearing them giving various reasons for canceling this exploration, Roland was clear that all they were doing was persuading him to think twice before cooperating with those tentacle monsters.

The discussion had become bogged down over this contentious issue.

If this had happened in a place such as a democratic parliament, he would not have been able to carry out his plan.

However, he did not forget that he was the lord of Neverwinter, the king of Graycastle and the one who had the final say in this matter.

He knew that it was now time for him to take over the meeting and forcibly carry out the plan.

Just like he did when he decided to protect the witches in his domain.

Chapter 779: The King's Decision

Roland knocked on the table and everybody in the hall instantly quieted down.

He rose from this chair and paced over to stand behind the officials. "When the Months of Demons end, we'll welcome the new year as the most important year for Graycastle. I'll unify the entire kingdom and hold the coronation ceremony to officially become the king and you'll all become my ministers to help me govern this country. "

Two years ago, everyone would have considered Roland's promises to be the crazy ravings of an arrogant prince.

One year ago, they would have thought that his plans were long-term goals.

However, today, no one doubted what he said.

All officials rose and placed their right hands on their chest almost simultaneously. They lowered their heads and said, "Your Majesty, it's our honor!" Suddenly, all their complaints and doubts disappeared. They looked excited as they understood the power of Neverwinter after working these two years in City Hall.

They knew, for sure, that once His Majesty made up his mind to unify the whole kingdom, he would definitely bring all the regions and areas of the kingdom into his control.

When that happened, they would rise from the officials of a city to the most powerful ministers of a kingdom.

Roland made a gesture, indicating them to sit down and said, "It's more than that. My Graycastle will become unprecedentedly large. My kingdom will include the Hermes Plateau in the north, reach the Endless Cape in the south, expand westward to the Barbarian Land, and eastward to the Fjord Islands."

He further explained, "To make that happen, the First Army will become the busiest department and thus leave fewer soldiers to guard Neverwinter. Given this, I've got to explore the snow mountain now to eliminate hidden threats to the city. I don't want my king's city to be attacked by some unknown enemies from the mountains when the main force of the First Army isn't here."

Carter suggested to the king in a low voice, "Your Majesty, maybe the First Army and the Witch Union will be enough to explore the snow mountain..."

Roland interrupted, "No, in a dark underground cave where the landscape is extremely complex, guns and cannons have only a limited effect. We don't have any maps of the cave or any preset firing position



there. If they happen to meet some demonic hybrids, how much do you think it will cost the First Army to defeat them?"

The Chief Knight fell into silence at once.

"This is why we must work together with the Taquila survivors. Their God's Punishment Witches and the Witch Union have complementary advantages in this exploration. The First Army will set sentry posts along the way and cover their retreat if need be. This is the most prudent arrangement." Roland paused and then suddenly raised his voice. "You all listen to me carefully. Don't tell me it's difficult to implement this plan. You're sitting here to solve problems for me! If you can't, my City Hall doesn't need you anymore!"

He paused and looked at the City Hall Director. "Barov Mons?"

Barov shuddered, answering, "Yes, Your Majesty!"

"Is there any problem with the final accounts and logistics for the exploration?"

"No... I believe." The old man wiped the sweat from his face. "I'll give you a plan five days later."

"Three days," Roland corrected him with an air of authority. After that, he turned to look at Minister of Agriculture. "Sirius Daly?"

"Yes, Your Majesty."

"If Border Area's food stocks are low, you can get some from the Longsong Area. We've got enough concrete boats for this. Do I make myself clear?"

"Ye-Yes, Your Majesty!"

"Karl Van Bate!"

The Minister of Construction answered immediately, "Your Majesty, I'll carefully check the geological condition of both the mining and furnace areas."

"Good..." Roland smiled. "Then the next one."

...

This time, all the problems could be readily solved since all the officials saw the king's determination and accepted the tasks without any hesitation.

After assigning the tasks to the officials, it was time to decide who would go for the exploration.

Pasha's voice resounded in everyone's head again. Most of the officials got scared again, but as soon as they saw Roland calmly talking to the tentacle monster, they calmed down a little and did not flee the hall in panic.

Since they had already promised His Majesty to work with the Taquilla witches, they thought that all they needed to do at this moment was force themselves to remain seated and listen to the voice. To avoid seeing the tentacle monster, they all closed their eyes and lowered their heads, pretending that

they were engrossed in their thoughts. They acted as if the sound was some evil spell from the hell instead of a female voice.

Seeing them, Roland did not know whether to laugh or cry.

Edith was the only official who dared to look at the light curtain.

Sometimes, she even tried to talk with the Senior Witches of Taquila like Roland did.

Not wanting to be upstaged by his opponent, Barov managed to lift up his head several times but failed to say anything in the end.

Roland had expected this and had planned to not get the City Hall officials heavily involved in the conversation.

At last, the Taquila witches agreed to send 50 God's Punishment Witches to team with the Witch Union and these witches were the main force for the exploration. The First Army would send a group of 500 soldiers with Brian as their commander to join this exploration as well.

The remaining troops in the city would be temporarily handed over to Carter and continue to fight against the demonic beasts at the border.

When both parties agreed on these arrangements and Roland was about to end this meeting, Edith suddenly raised her hand.

"Your Majesty, I wish to apply to join the Snow Mountain Exploration Team and go to the Western Region snow mountains together with the First Army soldiers."

Barov's mouth corner twisted, saying, "Come on, you're not a witch or a soldier. Don't mess up His Majesty's plan."

She insisted, "I used to serve as a fencing coach in a knight battalion and defeated each of my opponents including demonic beasts within five rounds. I can protect myself."

Roland asked curiously, "What's the reason for this request?"

Edith explained, "The Battle of Divine Will is getting closer to us, but none of the officials sitting here know what the demons or the underground creatures look like. As we know nothing about our opponents in the upcoming war, I'm afraid that the City Hall won't be able to reach Your Majesty's expectations. I know that someone may think that since the First Army will fight against the demons, his own department won't get involved into the war-related stuff. However, once the battle begins, all the departments such as the Ministry of Construction and the Ministry of Agriculture will have to satisfy the needs of the war effort. This is inevitable and so to do a great job in City Hall, we also have to know our enemies well."

"You..." The City Hall Director wanted to retort but did not know what to say at this moment.

Roland could not help smiling, thinking that what she said might sound a little belligerent but was quite interesting. He also derived an inspiration from her statement and thought it might make a great new rule that only allowed promotion of the officials who had worked in the cities located on or near the front line during the battle. In this way, he could guarantee that the officials of the City Hall would never

underestimate the importance of this fatal war or make some unrealistic government decrees during wartime.

Besides, he believed that it would be alright to let Edith join the First Army's action as she indeed had battle experience.

He nodded to the Pearl of the Northern Region.

"Well, please go get ready for the exploration."

"Yes, Your Majesty." Edith smoothed back her hair that was hanging beside her ears and bowed with a smile.

#### Chapter 780: Edith's Little Game

"Sister, are you... going to some place far away?" Cole Kant's voice could be heard from behind Edith.

She continued sorting out her clothes without turning her head back to her brother. "Not very far away. I'll just hang around somewhere in the Western Region."

He came to her side and asked again, "How long will it take?"

"I don't know."

Cole started to look at the clothes piled on his sister's bed. "You didn't pick any formal dress, girdle or your favorite corset... Aren't you going to visit some nobles or attend banquets?"

Edith gave him a quick glance. "You've got stronger observation power now, but you don't always have to tell the others everything you notice."

The boy winced at once and said, "You were the one who taught me how to improve my observation ability."

"Now I'll teach you another thing. When you're talking to a woman, remember to remain graceful all the time and choose your words carefully, understand?"

"But you're my sister..."

"If I wasn't, you would suffer a lot."

Cole shuddered and said, "I, I see."

"Good." Edith shrugged. "How do you feel working in City Hall?"

"It's alright... Just like you instructed, I've never revealed my identity as a noble. All I do there is just writing and recording, which are easy for me. But I really don't understand..." He hesitated. "Why didn't you put me in your department?"

Since Cole Kant had watched the artillery drill, he had given up the idea of returning to the City of Evernight. He and Edith had also moved from the Foreign Affairs Building to a spacious house near the lord's castle. Now they were official residents of Neverwinter. As a noble who had received a traditional

education, Cole had found a job easily in City Hall. Including the hundred or so scholars and servants from the Northern Region, Edith managed to gain a certain status there.

These people would not stay here forever, but she knew that His Majesty would never reject more people from the Northern Region coming to learn the new system. The young king was thirsty for talents, and now the Northern Region was the only one that was willingly providing him with talented people. As long as her father kept on sending new people here, she would always keep her status in the new system of the king.

Edith smiled and answered Cole, "Because it's not necessary and it may cause us troubles. The City Hall Director always keeps an eye on me. If I put you in my department and he manages to find out your mistakes, I'll be faced with a dilemma. If we ruin the Kant family's reputation, it'll influence His Majesty's opinion of me." She paused for a moment and continued. "Even if we don't get along with each other, the others will still think of us as a whole as we share a common surname. So no matter what you do in the future, you've got to remember you represent the whole family, not just yourself."

The boy looked down with a contemplative expression on his face. Edith did not know how much he could understand, but she had said all there was to be said about this matter. Even when the feudal aristocratic order was totally replaced by Roland's new system, their family reputation would still have a long-term influence on them and might even draw more attention to them in the short run.

Their common surname had replaced their noble identities to become the most important thing for them now, just like the way the moon became the brightest thing in the sky after the sunset.

After quite a long while, he nodded and said, "I'll be careful."

Their father had said that Cole was timid, irresolute and weak, therefore not a suitable heir for the Kant Family. He was worried that this son would not be strong enough to lead his knights to guard the domain as a lord, and if it was wartime, his style would easily put him in an invidious position.

Edith knew another point that the duke had never mentioned.

Cole Kant took after his father in personality.

If Timothy had never planned to ally with some less powerful noble in the Northern Region to break the existing order there, the Kant family would not have been able to get where they were today.

Now that they were no longer a lesser noble family in some remote place of the Northern Region, their father thought a more capable child, Edith, was a better successor and thus had great expectations of her.

However, Edith was clear that Cole's shortcomings were not going to hold him back in Neverwinter. On the contrary, being prudent, introverted and a fast learner meant that he would adapt well to the job in City Hall.

The moment she had known that a group of common people with snow powder weapons in hands had captured Timothy's city in merely one day, she had realized that personal strength and courage were not that important as before. This was also why she had insisted on keeping her brother in Neverwinter to learn new things.

Cole casually picked up a long dress and lifted it in front of him, acting as if he were checking whether it fitted him or not. He asked, "Oh, sister. Where're you going indeed? I don't want to stay in such a large house alone. I'll get bored."

"But it was you who asked me to buy a big house. It's five hundred gold royals, which is quite expensive even for me. Now you think it's too big?" Edith asked him in a cold voice.

The boy was startled and almost dropped the dress on the ground. "No... no... I'm very satisfied with this house."

"Wait until next summer. Our little brother will come here to keep you company." She glanced at him and found that the dress seemed to suit him well. "As for where I'm going, it's a secret of Neverwinter, but it's not something I can't tell you. According to the old rules, you have to pay a price for this."

Cole hesitated, as he was familiar with this little game and had been tricked into doing many silly things this way. However, in the end, his uncontrollable curiosity still took over his fear. He said to Edith, "I want to know."

She smiled and said, "I'll go to the Great Snow Mountain of the Western Region with some soldiers from the First Army."

He was surprised and asked, "You mean the source of the Redwater River? Is there anything special?"

"Some unknown demonic hybrid monsters or alien species. We'll probably meet anything there." Edith said and then continued to describe the Taquila witches she had seen during the meeting. "Now we've entered into an alliance with those tentacle monsters. I can't wait to witness our monster allies fighting against the monster enemies."

Cole listened with his mouth agape and then stuttered, "Wait... wait... Aren't you afraid of those things? And His Majesty made a deal with some monsters? Even the demons don't look that scary, do they?"

"So?" She threw up her hands and said. Not seeming to care much about her brother's worries, she continued to ask, "Isn't it a good thing for us?"

He could not believe what he had heard and asked, "A good thing? Sister, are you crazy?"

"What?"

"No, I mean..."

Edith sighed and explained, "Do you remember what we want to achieve by serving the king here?"

Cole replied with great care, "To achieve... greater power?"

She looked at him with shining eyes and said, "Not exactly, but at least it's not wrong. Greater power comes from a bigger domain and a larger population. If the ancient witches, some alien species and even the demons all rush to the king's side, the power of this kingdom will extend from the human world to some alien lands. Do you understand?"

He gasped at what she had said.

She continued and said, "A lesser noble who owns just a village can easily remember the names of all his subjects, but a lord of a city can never do that. The diversity of the people in a domain indicates how vast the domain is... and I remember no king had ruled over any alien species in the history. This is the new opportunity our family wants to seek. We left the remote and backward domain for this, so why are you worried about it?"

Hearing this, Cole stood at the place for quite a long while before he could open his mouth and said, "But..."

Edith interrupted. "But they're not our kind. That's what you want to say, right?" She twitched her mouth and continued. "As long as His Majesty is still at the helm, he will be able to do whatever he wants with those alien creatures."

Her words made him sense a chill in this warm room.

"Now, it's time for you to pay back." With her eyes squinted, Pearl of the Northern Region pointed at the long dress and said with an affected drawl. "Put it on and let me have a look."