

Witch 811

Chapter 811: Battle in the Mist

"You mean these things are capable of cracking the mountain and the earth?"

Elena widened her eyes after she heard the Ice Witch's concise introduction about the explosives. She condemned angrily, "What if these things explode in Fran's stomach? How could they not think of that?"

Fran's giant body could not help quivering at the thought.

"It's the lab sample that easily explodes," Agatha said as she rummaged through the box for a bag of copper pipe and showed it to Elena, "not these kind of explosives, which won't ignite on ordinary impact or heat. The only way to make them explode is to put these pipes in explosive containers."

The explosives had aroused the other God's Punishment Witches' interest, who had heard of the splendid scene of the artillery exercise long ago from Phyllis, the God's Punishment Witch who they called No. 76. They had witnessed the First Army's battle against the incursion of demonic beasts a few times since moving to the Western Region of Graycastle and were not unfamiliar with gunpowder. But this was their first time to be so close to this kind of weapon.

"Is it really okay to burn it? The thing that can create such a loud sound when it explodes should be very volatile at ordinary times."

"It looks very much like a brick..."

"How to make it work? Does it explode once the copper pipe is put into it?"

"Who dares to do that?"

The questions troubled Agatha too, for she only knew the general principle of those firearms that His Majesty had made. Her knowledge of how to use it was no more than her Taquila fellows.

"The thing with the red mark on it is the detonator that must be ignited for it to work." Lightning suddenly leaned over and said professionally, "The blue-marked one is the detonator that is needed to pull out the string to trigger it. I remember there is another kind of detonator with a yellow mark that will be activated by electric current, but this bag only has the red and blue ones."

That got Agatha amazed, and she blurted out, "How did you know that?"

"Because I'm an explorer!" The young girl touched her nose. "I was basically present at every new weapon test that the First Army held."

"So, should we bury these things in the cave mouth beforehand and blow our way out or cast them along the way as we retreat and carry Fran with us?" Elena tried to work out a solution. "If the explosive could hold back the enemies, I believe 10 God's Punishment Witches are able to move Fran."

"It doesn't matter, leave me behind..."

"Shut up!" Elena cut in. "Even though we're not afraid of sacrifice, we'll never give up our companions easily. Don't forget what Lady Eleanor has told us."

"Every witch is of equal importance." The rest of the people joined in and nodded.

"I'm afraid... neither of your plans work," Lightning muttered. "One bag of explosives is enough to tear us into pieces if you set it to work at the mouth of such a small cave. But if we put the explosives in a larger cave, the explosion will be unsatisfying." She looked at the shovels and spades on the ground and went on, "The explosives should have been used to make caves or open passages. They're not formal weapons, and the fire and air current created in the explosion is only able to kill the beasts within 10 paces."

A silence came over them, who knew that the explosion might be fearsome enough to drive away general beasts, but not the swarm of demonic beasts that were obviously summoned by the monster on the dome of the cave. They'll never stand a chance to get out unless most of those demonic beasts were destroyed.

"Maybe we have one more choice." Nightingale chimed in suddenly. "Bring down their boss."

"You mean... the monster dwelling in the dome?" Elena frowned. "We can't fly."

"Even if you could fly, that's too dangerous!" Agatha said before Lightning found her words. "It's not a defensive battle where we have support whenever we ask. We all know that it's not uncommon that some hybrid demonic beasts are able to fly, and Lightning loses her speed and flying height considerably as long as she's load-bearing, so it's highly possible that she'll never get herself close to the monster once the enemies spot her and besiege her."

"I'm not proposing to make Lightning do it," Nightingale said word by word. "I'm planning to put this bag of explosive into the monster's mouth with my own hand, given it does have a mouth."

"You?" Agatha was shocked. "Don't be ridiculous... You should know that your Mist can't hide anything in front of Magic Eyes. Wherever you see it, it notices you too."

"Its ability to see me doesn't mean that its underlings can notice me. I'm confident that I can get through them, even if they are under their boss's order to intercept me." She paused. "Do remember that the Mist can do much more than concealing."

"But..."

A cacophony coming from the rock formation interrupted Agatha's next words. It sounded as though numerous cicada were eating leaves, or gravel was clashing, being smashed and ground.

The witches' faces changed. The sound was not unfamiliar to them.

"Damn it. They've sent the devouring worm," Elena said with a stern face. "The enemy is coming. Get yourself ready."

A worm carrier was hardly a threat, but as soon as their concealed vantage point was uncovered, they were to be faced with endless demonic beasts that traveled through the worm's stomach.

"Don't worry about me. No one is more competent in this kind of mission. Back at the time when the Witch Cooperation Association was running in the old king's city, my title was well-known everywhere in the central region of the kingdom," Nightingale said as she packed four bags of explosives in her bag and bound it tightly on her back. "At that time, people used to call me 'Shadow Killer'."

"Wait..."

"Rest assured. I'll finish that deformed thing before the worm tunnels its way here."

Before Agatha could say anything to stop her, she disappeared into thin air.

The last sight Agatha had of Nightingale was a thumbs up.

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In the world of black and white, directions meant nothing to Nightingale, and everywhere would become flat and level if she wished.

It felt as though she was the manipulator of this world where everything was under her order.

Passing through the collapsed stones, she straightway jumped up to the steep cliff and rushed to the dome of the cave.

Suddenly, her vision changed the angle by 90 degrees. The monster that should have been above her hid somewhere was ahead of her now. The turbulent underground river looked like a ribbon beset on the precipice, while the broad subterranean lake now rose up like a huge window.

By then, she had caught sight of the monster, and it had her in sight as well.

Nightingale did not look away.

With her eyes fixed on the monster's star-like eyes, she sped up to it. In the Mist, the glare radiated from the monster's powerful Magic Cyclone and looked like a bloody moon, outshining the crowded light spots.

This monster could not be a simple hybrid demonic beast, she thought.

Its magic power outperformed even Anna's.

For a moment, Nightingale sensed her mind had been connected with the monster's.

The feeling was chaotic and unspeakable, but she was sure that both of them had received the undisguised hostility from each other.

She grinned.

The monster raised its tentacles.

With a low roar, the demonic beasts in the cave flocked to her.

Chapter 812: Segmentation

Nightingale soon discovered that she was right.

Most demonic hybrid beasts could not locate her, so hardly any beasts could clamber onto the cliff to block her. The flying beasts swooping in the mid-air looked terrifying but always missed her like an arrow that missed its target. As long as she kept moving, it was uneasy for those beasts to hold her back.

The only beasts that could "spot" her were those mutated ones with sickle-shaped forelegs. They writhed their robust bodies and nailed their supportive legs in the stones so that they were able to move about the cliff. Under the command of the monster, they moved towards the dome of the cave, intercepting Nightingale and the alerted Magic Eye.

She had to destroy those beasts before meeting head-on the monster.

The vast dome of the cave had become Nightingale's personal battlefield. Fighting alone had been an experience she had not had for a long time.

She had been walking alone in the Mist in the past and had been forced to serve her wicked aristocratic relatives until Wendy had found her and helped her out of such miseries.

But her feeling at present was dramatically different from the feeling she had had when she had roamed in the Silver City.

Alone she was, she felt no boredom or hatred in the least, for she volunteered to participate in this dangerous duel without being compelled or threatened.

Her mind was saturated with the faith to protect her companions.

Nightingale did not feel alone at all, for she was in the protective suit made by Soraya, with the explosives produced by Agatha in her bag, and the gun designed by Roland around her waist, which was engraved with the words "To Veronica".

All of these gears gave her a feeling that everyone was fighting alongside her.

As she revolved a multitude of thoughts in her head, the enemies were drawing near. The beasts started to close up, their sickle-shaped forelegs in the air.

There was a total of 16 of them.

Nightingale took out the pistol, pulled the safety, and waited until the nearest beast was within a few paces. Then she went out of the Mist as she pulled the trigger.

The beast lurched to her at the same time.

Its powerful tail and supportive legs enabled them to dash forward. The strike was completed in a split second, as quick as a predator plunging at its prey.

It was more like that the beast struck the bullet itself than the other way around.

Even though the beast was shot, the shockwave of the bullet could still wound Nightingale.

But she had prepared for this.

The moment the bullet left the muzzle, Nightingale re-entered the Mist and stepped onto a fast receding borderline that represented the contour of the earth.

This was perfect timing.

An outsider might think she leaped backward all of a sudden for a few meters; but in fact, it was the ground underneath that was moving backward.

"Bang!"

The bullet smashed into the sickle monster's pointy head and blew it up. Its shell and brain splashed like a blooming flower. The magic glow dissipated quickly and its invisible body twitched and reappeared. The lifeless beast fell to the subterranean lake like a stone dropping into the water. Yet in Nightingale's eyes, the dead body moved headlong upward, as if it were sucked down to the bottom of the surging lake.

Taking advantage of the changeable lines in the Mist in this way, Nightingale chased and fought against her enemies. Even though the beasts moved very fast, they succumbed to the negative impact of the gravity. When Nightingale lured them into the battlefield on which they had had a fight earlier, they had to slow down to make sure their legs were deeply rooted in the rock, as the previous battle, which had left hundreds of holes in the rocky walls, greatly reduced the friction between their legs and the surface.

But her tactics were not flawless. Because she had to step out of the Mist and expose herself temporarily to fire at the enemy, she had drawn increasing numbers of beasts to her. What was worse, she had become more vulnerable to the flying demonic beasts because those deformed winged monsters had started to hover in the air close to the dome to bide their time, rather than "swoop down" blindly as they did before. When she fired at the enemies, those flying beasts would dodge the bullet so that she had to hide in the Mist again to relocate her target. Sometimes she had to rely on the borderline in the Mist to dodge the massive attacks from the enemies.

Nightingale got injured in less than seven minutes after the battle began.

After all, she could not find a good hiding spot in the Mist every time after she fired. The change of the lines in the Mist was not subject to her will, so the misty world was as perilous to her as to everybody else. A battle of such high intensity was a challenge both to her physical strength and her mentality.

The greatest injury was to her ribs.

She had failed to dodge a strike when being besieged by two flying beasts. Their razor-sharp claws had torn her coat, leaving a deep cut from her flank to her waist. The coated protective suit made by Soraya had saved her from being gutted, but the coating could not block the power of the strike. The pain almost took away her breath, and she had to rest for a long time to recover herself.

Evidently, it was Multi-eyed Demon that manipulated the frantic demonic hybrid beasts, for those hybrid beasts, which were usually prone to fight against each other, actually worked together and launched fierce and continuous attacks this time. That made Nightingale even more determined to destroy the demon. She did not understand why it would rather hide in this Great Snow Mountain than attack Neverwinter. But the demonic beasts with a commander would be a great threat to Prince Roland.

Her 10 bullets had all been used up, and there were still four sickle monsters left —10 of the beasts had been killed directly by the bullets, and two fell into the lake during the battle. Judging from the turbulent currents of the lake, Nightingale believed that the two beasts barely got a chance to survive and come back to the battle.

The violent attack from the demonic beasts left Nightingale no time to reload the bullets, and neither did she intend to. She tucked the pistol back to her belt and leaped over an invisible beast and reached its back when a swarm of demonic hybrid beasts came to her. She then pulled the invisible beast into the misty world.

The beast got shocked as his vision changed from the battlefield to the world of black and white.

Nightingale's magic power streamed from her fingertips. The following beasts that clashed with the first one were all pulled into the mist subsequently. As the number of the beasts entering the Mist increased, her magic power exceeded the consumption limit and began to drain. Just at that moment, one of the lines constituting the dome the misty world curled up and went flying toward her.

This was the moment she had been waiting for. As more beasts had been pulled into the misty world, her magic power quickly drained and the misty world became unstabilized. The twisting lines had thus become a lethal weapon, although at other times they helped her leap a few meters away.

The white line swept over the beasts, and their figures suddenly froze.

It was like those beasts had vanished instantly, and in a split second, a "blank space" emerged in the sky of the misty world. But when the beasts reappeared, the weirdest thing happened. The lower parts of their bodies remained in the place where they had disappeared, while the upper parts several meters away as if a sharp longsword had cut all of them into halves with one swing and the body parts had been transported and floated in the air.

The bodies suspended for a few seconds before they hailed down into the lake, creating numerous water columns.

Chapter 813: "Monster"

Suddenly, Nightingale's view was no longer obscured.

Seeing this shocking event unfold, the demonic beasts slowed down and instead of crazily trying to surround her, they refused to move forward as if they were scared of her.

These demonic hybrids were scared.

The monster hanging on top of the cave waved its tentacles and roared furiously, but it didn't achieve the desired effect. The only ones who still followed its orders were three sickle monsters. They were now powerless and could no longer threaten Nightingale. The tight line of defense had now been broken.

No enemy could now stop her.

Nightingale gathered what was left of her magic power and rushed towards the dome center.

As she was closing in, she finally understood what Fran meant by abnormal.

The opponent was not so much a creature as it was a pile of exposed organs. It had neither epidermis nor muscular tissue while vascular intestines, tentacles, and organs that couldn't even be named were all stacked up, looking both unstable and horrible.

Obviously, throwing explosives into the monster's mouth was not possible. Nightingale turned her gaze to a pack of vibrating "meatballs". Although she was not certain whether it was a vital organ of the monster or not, it was at least placed much deeper and had flowing magic light inside. She guessed that the explosion of the explosives would inevitably cause more damage there.

It was a risky plan, but she only had one chance.

This fight required one fatal blow.

The more she was closing in, the more she could feel its size. Those complex intestines were as thick as a house while the rest of the stacked up organs looked like a castle.

The only difference was that this castle was alive.

Seeing that the sickle monsters could not stop her, the monster started moving.

It shot several slender tentacles from within its body, trying to stop Nightingale. Some of the tentacles were like steel whips, which could easily break the rocks in the mountain, but were not very difficult to deal with. As long as she observed the silhouette of these tentacles in advance, she could use the empty spaces between them to avoid them. It was similar to penetrating a wall.

A few tentacles that contained magic power and could use different abilities were a different problem all together. Those colorful magical beams were particularly striking in the black and white world and Nightingale definitely did not want to experience what was like to get hit by them, so she used flash to avoid them. This, in turn, would greatly increase the consumption of her magic power.

Thankfully, the distance between the monster and her was not huge.

Only a few moments had passed before she stepped on the monster's huge body, who roared furiously, but in fear of hurting itself, stopped attacking recklessly with its tentacles. Nightingale instantly felt very relieved. She didn't hesitate to open her backpack, took out a pack of explosives, and rushed straight towards the meatballs.

She pulled off her next moves instantaneously. She pulled the fuse, stuffed the green smoked explosive and the backpack into the meatballs, and then returned to the misty world, hanging upside down. Then, she pushed with both of her feet and lunged towards the underground lake like an arrow.

The monster also noticed her movements but it did not seem to understand why the enemy would try so hard to get near just to leave a moment later without doing anything. As for the bag, in the monster's eyes, there was no threat at all. For a moment, it even forgot to move its tentacles to chase after the witch who was quickly falling.

The most dangerous place in the misty world was in midair. She would break into pieces if she hit some airflow silhouettes when she was falling and so she stopped exerting her ability and waved goodbye to the monster.

Curiously, at that moment, she thought of Roland.

Whenever they were testing gunpowder, he would always turn his back to the testing ground and say that real warriors never looked at an explosion. Even though both Agatha and her would roll their eyes at him, he didn't mind as if he had just completed a ritual that only he knew about.

Thinking about that, Nightingale couldn't help but smile.

But right now, she didn't want to imitate him.

It was not about being a real warrior or not.

She simply wanted to watch the monster explode into pieces.

Just as soon as the sound between the lake and the underground river meeting each other could be heard, a red light suddenly lit up the ceiling of the dark cave.

In a place where there was never daylight, a ray of light seemed as bright as the dawn. The darkness quickly faded, leaving behind the long shadows and for the first time, bright waves appeared on the lake's surface.

What followed was a thunderous roar—

Suddenly, the whole cave shook!

Nightingale clearly saw, among the dazzling fireworks, the body of the monster convulsing fiercely, as if it was suffering greatly. Half of the "Bloody Moon" covering the dome suddenly disappeared and some of the organs were shot out like volcanic eruptions. As for the area close to the explosion, it was instantly set on fire, generating a thick, dark smoke.

Splash!

She crashed into the water.

The world momentarily became quiet, leaving only the sound of her beating heart.

The fast spinning of the water formed a bottomless black hole under her body and it seemed like it wanted to drag her into the abyss. In the face of such force, any struggle would be meaningless.

But, thankfully, Nightingale was prepared.

She released what little of her magic power that was left to summon the Mist and used the spiraling white lines to climb to the surface as if climbing the stairs.

At this point, the magic power in her body had been completely depleted and the after effects of overuse began to appear. Her brain was attacked by intense pain and dizziness, her limbs could not stop trembling, and she could hardly control her body anymore.

As she struggled to get to the lakeshore, Nightingale knew she was running out of strength. Before losing consciousness, she saw a worm breaking through the wall and a golden figure flying towards her in a hurry.

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"Nightingale... Is she ok?" Fran asked anxiously.

"It's nothing serious, she just exhausted her magic power," Agatha briefly examined Nightingale and then handed her to the God's Punishment Witch, "You carry her. We must leave this place at once."

When Nightingale left, everyone decided that no matter what, they would go to meet her after the explosion and decided to let Fran eat all their remaining food. Even though it was not certain she could find a way out, she could still crawl with them to the camp site.

But they did not expect the explosion to be so effective. It not only stopped the worm carrier inside the walls, but it also made the rest of the demonic beasts flee the area.

"Leave her to me," Elena personally took Nightingale. After witnessing the battle, the Taquila survivors became more respectful toward the blond witch.

"Don't we need to finish it off?" Lightning looked at the struggling monster, as if not satisfied, "It doesn't seem to be dead."

"Dying beasts are the most dangerous and you can only bring one pack of explosives at most, so it's better not take this risk," Agatha said with a deep voice, "by the time the First Army has been assembled, it'll be dead sooner or later."

"Uhm... fine," the little girl hesitated before nodding.

Just when everyone was ready to leave, the monster suddenly issued a cry. Following the dull and muddy sound, the lake suddenly changed.

Under the sparkling flames, a huge skeleton came out of the water and opened a row of rib claws towards the top of the cave. Even in such a fast current of water, it remained steady.

The monster loosened its tentacles that were clinging to the top of the cave and fell into the skeleton. The sinking skeleton suddenly stirred up layers of waves, making the lake water push toward the shore. Even the surging underground river flowed backwards for a time. The ribs began to close, as if wrapping up the monster into a package and then slowly sunk back into the lake. The instant it came into contact with the water, the burning flames on the monster turned into white smoke and emitted a pungent odor.

Right before the monster vanished, everyone saw its densely packed eyes. Although half of them were gone, the rest of the eyes expressed a strong sense of hatred toward them.

Moments later, the swirling lake engulfed the monster as if it had never appeared.

Chapter 814: Impartial person

"The demonic beasts have fled! They all fled!"

Cheers were heard across the battlefield. The demonic beasts that were previously gathered at the entrance of the cave had all fled away leaving several corpses behind them. The machine gunner released the trigger only to find out that his finger joint had gone numb. Because there was no time to

change the gun barrel, it had turned red which, according to the shooting regulations, meant that it was scrapped.

"Their numbers were intimidating, but once we start fighting them, they didn't look so scary."

"The Church's God's Punishment Army was much more fierce."

"They are only beasts after all."

"Beasts? Why are you talking nonsense? Go fight them with a bow if you dare. Three years ago, these things were terrorizing the Western Region. Everything changed because of His Majesty, do you understand!"

"Ye-Yes, Captain!"

"Instead of celebrating, change the gun barrel."

Edith was standing in the back of the battlefield. She had a thoughtful look while watching the busy yet orderly First Army. After following Roland's army to participate in the Tooth Extraction Campaign and the Church's destruction, she always tried to imagine how would she command the army in order to achieve the maximum effectiveness of the firearms.

Without a doubt, this was a completely new kind of army and so the combat strategy was different from that of the knightages and the mercenaries from before. It was not easy to forget her previous successful experience of fighting through charging, relying on excellent weapons, and personal bravery. But when she realized that knights could no longer compete against the new army, she promptly discarded all of her previous experience and started watching all of His Majesty's actions closely. Through today's battle, she was able to verify that her thinking was basically correct.

The most notable feature of the firearms was their ability to kill opponents with extreme efficiency before they could get closer without regard to the spacing between soldiers and their physical condition. Therefore, the narrower the shooting area, the more intense the firepower would be. As long as the ammunition supply did not stop, they could fire from morning to night.

Two platoons of soldiers could be arranged in a battlefield where previously only three to four knights would be able to charge from. They could only arrange three machine guns not because more could not fit but due to limited ammunition. But even so, their fierce firepower still made it hard for the demonic hybrids to advance—they did not even get tired or need to aim. They just had to pull the trigger. Whenever the opponents were too close together, she would even see a thick blood red mist arising in the entrance.

If His Majesty was in command, he wouldn't have done anything different.

The only thing she did not understand was the behavior of the demonic beasts.

Obviously, some of them had basic intelligence. When it got difficult to attack the cave entrance, many of the demonic hybrids began to wander outside the cave, occasionally howling, but still not advancing as if they were encouraging the other demonic beasts to sacrifice themselves. But since they had the ability to think, why did they still obey the weird commanding voices? The demonic beasts apparently did not need a relationship between lords and subjects, which was about mutual support and

protection. As long as they escaped into the Barbarian Land, they could totally survive alone, unlike humans who had to be part of a group in order to survive.

Could it be that there was an inexplicable connection between the demonic beasts and the owner of that voice whose importance was above the beasts' own survival?

It was hard for her to imagine that.

She thought she should ask His Majesty Roland after the search was completed.

Currently, the only thing in Neverwinter that she found surprising and hard to figure out was His Majesty's thoughts. Whenever they were talking, she would always ponder over the same question: how vast could the human mind be?

"Miss Edith, you were very helpful this battle..." Brian's voice interrupted her thoughts. She turned around and saw the young officer's face full of gratitude. "I'll definitely mention your contribution to His Majesty in the battle report!"

"I only did my job," Edith smiled, "I wasn't sure it would be successful at that time so you don't need to mention my suggestion in the report."

"Unacceptable!" Brian shook his head again and again. "His Majesty said that in the army, the result and not the process is the only thing that matters. A victory is a victory. If I don't mention your contribution, then I'm no different than a thief. Plus, it's also unfair to you!"

"Fine..." The Pearl of the Northern Region shrugged. "If you insist."

"Of course." At this point, he paused and then made a military salute. "Furthermore, I now understand more what you said before about trust. The First Army thanks you for your advice. I'll leave now as I also have many things to attend to."

Looking at the captain leaving, Edith suddenly understood why His Majesty chose a patrol captain of the border to serve as an important military officer. Battle achievements were the basis for the knights when requesting a reward from the lord and the last thing they would want was to share with others. There were countless cases that involved faking and lying, and not even her trustees could resolve them.

In general, though the First army was different in many aspects, promotions and rewards were still linked to battle achievements. She was not a member of the army so even if the other party had completely concealed this matter, she wouldn't have personally argued her case to His Majesty. To be able to calmly share with others whatever benefits he had gained just to be fair, in fact, compared to other knights, this former patrol captain was actually much more of a knight.

Loyal to his king and honest, this was probably why Roland entrusted him with such an important task. Commanding and knowledge could both be learned, but a person's character was hard to change. Edith had noticed very early on that the spirit and manner of His Majesty's First Army were completely different from those of the knights. It was something new completely. Probably the key to creating such an army was abandoning the noble's power and selecting only civilians to enlist, coupled with the ideological education in the primary textbooks.

And now, she had also left her name in the army.

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Half a day later, Roland received intelligence that the situation had been resolved. At this point, the one hundred emergency reinforcements had already embarked on the boat while the rest of the reinforcements were also preparing their belongings, waiting for the dispatching order. Even the newcomers of the Witch Union—Annie, Broken Sword and the rest were prepared to go support them. From the City Hall to the First Army, the whole of Neverwinter was nervous as if the city had been attacked by demonic beasts, but in the end, it all proved to be just a false alarm.

The messenger was, once again, Maggie. Looking at her tilted head and slightly opened mouth, Roland did not know whether to laugh or cry. He took out some beef from the drawer and threw it on the table. She immediately picked it up happily.

However, taking morale into account, he eventually did not order the first platoon to return but instead replaced Annie's team with Soraya and Summer in order to conduct a more comprehensive exploration of the ruins.

Chapter 815: Discoveries and Decisions

In the next three days, the reports and messages about the exploration in the Great Snow Mountain had been sent back to Neverwinter one after another

. Roland had felt his heart skipping a beat the moment he had heard that Nightingale had exhausted her magic power and passed out during a fight. Fortunately, she had been alright when this news had arrived. In order to reassure His Majesty, she had also asked Maggie to let Roland know that she was alright.

The exploration results showed that inside the Great Snow Mountain there was indeed a city in ruins, which was left by the underground civilization. However, as compared to the maze inside the Impassable Mountain Range, this city was not that well preserved. Most caves in the newly discovered ruins had collapsed long before, and several intact compartments were just filled with spoiled food, bug eggs and corpses. Near the underground lake, a broken magic core was found by the Taquila witches. According to the scouting team's reports, they found no documented records there, and the best part of their journey was the discovery of an original carrier and two devouring worms inside the mountain.

He was surprised by the results.

If this monster with many eyes was just a dumb beast who happened to settle down in the ruins, he would never find its destructive behaviors strange. However, it was obviously not just a stupid animal. He still remembered that something in this Great Snow Mountain had sent devouring worms to swallow Agatha's laboratory and the Blackstone Pagoda in the Devil's Town. These actions were clearly not just for food. In this exploration inside the mountain, the team had also spotted both human beings and demons trapped in the strange bug eggs. These facts made him believe that the unknown enemy must have been trying to collect information about the other two species it was going to fight against in the Battle of Divine Will.

When he received the first batch of "bug egg corpses", he noticed that their decomposed skin was apparently not caused by corrosion but corpse wax formed by long-term storage. That meant these corpses had been kept in the egg for a very long time and were apparently not stored as food.

Only an intelligent individual would make other creatures into specimens. In that case, he really did not understand why the monster had destroyed this underground city.

He wondered whether it was because that the monster did not care about the things treasured by Taquila witches.

He scanned through Soraya's pictures of the scenes inside the mountain and became lost in thought.

He found that the moment before the monster sank into the water, its remaining hundreds of eyes seemed to be filled with resentment. He did not know whether this was a false impression or not. He felt its eyes became different when it was severely wounded. In the beginning, those eyes appearing on the cave roof were simply gazing at the witches, but after they hurt it badly, its eyes showed an obvious emotional expression. When he put those two pictures together to compare, he felt as if the monsters in those two pictures were not the same one.

As for the underground lake in the bottom of the ruins, where the monster sank in, Sylvie confirmed that it was connected to a water vein leading to the Swirling Sea.

On his current technical level, he was not able to track the enemy once it entered the Swirling Sea, and let this monster successfully get away. What he could do next was to block the water vein by collapsing the dome of the ruins with powerful explosives. By doing so, he could ensure the safety of Neverwinter.

The exploration team had also sent him good news.

In Lightning's reports, he read about some bugs. They looked the same as the "egg bugs", but had once gushed out very sticky jelly to tightly trap Fran. The mucus they spat out was able to become a consolidated, sticky thing like spider silk in certain circumstances. These bugs were neither intelligent nor aggressive. According to Agatha's studies, they were not from the Fertile Plains.

In other words, these bugs were probably brought here by the "monster".

However, what intrigued Roland most was not the origin of these bugs but the fact that their mucus could solidify quickly. According to Lightning's description, these bugs could be bred in captivity.

Therefore, in his reply, he asked Agatha to make a detailed report on the living and eating habits of these bugs and to investigate what kind of harm they might cause. He also required the team to collect the strange plants and fungi in the ruins. He was particularly interested in the fruits which gave out dim, cold light in the dark and the giant mushroom as big as an adult.

When he was about to review the wonderful pictures of the underground caves, someone knocked on his door.

Phyllis walked into his office.

She bowed and said, "Your Majesty, Lady Pasha would like to talk to you about the ruins."

He immediately nodded to agree. He had sent all the exploration reports of these days to the Taquila survivors and he also really wanted to hear the ancient witches' views of the monster.

"Good, let's hold a video meeting."

"Vi... what?" Phyllis was stunned and took a few seconds to realize what it was. "You mean a meeting through the phantom instrument?"

"Yes, in the usual place at the reception hall on the first floor." He could not help but grin as he was so happy to finally find someone who could understand his "nonsense".

"I got it." She laughed and said, "I'm going to inform Pasha."

...

When he walked to the reception hall, Faldi and all the other God's Punishment Witches all rose and bowed to him with both hands on the chest as if they were saluting a higher ascendant. They looked solemn, and were completely different from the they looked in the Dream World.

Since he had taken them into his Dreamland, he was now venerated as someone similar to the Three Chiefs of the Union. He could tell from their etiquette and attitude toward him that now they did not consider him as a common man anymore, though they still used the phrase "common people" to describe his subjects.

Though they had agreed not to care too much about etiquette as he had required, they still saluted him more formally than his own guards. Seeing this, he had no choice but to let them do whatever they wanted.

Inside the hall, he saw Pasha through the light curtain waiting for him.

"First of all, I have to express my sincere gratitude to you." She said while bending her main tentacle.

"Your help is of great importance to Taquila in exploring the ruins and in restoring the God's Punishment Witches' lost feelings."

"I'm helping myself by helping you since we'll be fighting together in the upcoming Battle of Divine Will," he replied with a smile. "Well, what're you going to do with the newly discovered shells in the ruins?"

"There're only two ways to deal with them... Moving them here or moving the soul instrument to where they're located." She paused to think for a minute and continued. "I prefer the second method."

When the magic core was turned off, it would look like some dry skeleton. He could use a concrete boat to carry it, but he was afraid that he could not transport shells, even empty ones, in this way. The big blob and worms were too scary for the common people. He was clear that the universal education of Neverwinter had not yet prepared them to accept these dreadful shells that looked like monsters from hell.

Roland agreed with Pasha's suggestion of the second method, though the transportation of the instruments still posed a problem.

"So have you picked out the witches who're willing to accept the Soul Transfer?"

Half a month ago, Taquila survivors had been eager to search for ruins left by the underground civilization in the Great Snow Mountain, since they had earnestly hoped to find new shells in the ruins. Most of the God's Punishment Witches at that time had longed to merge with them to regain their long-lost feelings, such as touch, taste and smell, even though they had known that by doing so, they would look like monsters and would never change back into human forms.

However, now the situation was different, as they had another choice.

Chapter 816: [Deep Sea Demons]

Now everyone in the Third Border City knew that a God's Punishment Witch could regain her appearance and feelings when she entered the Dream World by cutting off her consciousness. Roland had repeatedly heard Phyllis describe their enthusiasm for the Dream World. According to her, every time she got back to the underground, they would follow her and keep asking about her experiences in that world.

He wondered whether they would still be eager to merge with shells when they found out this new method to restore their feelings.

However, it was not a perfect solution to their problem, as they could only regain their appearance and feelings in their sleep. By contrast, being in shells, they could always have some feelings, and these shells were almost immortal unless they were heavily damaged.

It would be difficult to make a choice between these two alternatives.

He thought of another possibility for them. If they had kept the news about the Dream World a secret, they would have been able to send the instrument and God's Punishment Witches there to carry out their Soul Transfer. This way, the volunteers would never be able to go back even if they regretted afterwards. However, he believed that Pasha would not delude her witches into accepting the shells. Based on his observation in the past month, though the Taquila witches had lived in seclusion for hundreds of years, they did not turn into a conservative organization. They were still open to new things and had abolished class inequality in their group. Apparently, the sacrifice of the Three Chiefs had deeply moved them, and the threat posed by demons had kept them working to make greater progress.

Pasha seemed to read his mind. "You don't have to worry about this problem. With more shells, we'll be better equipped to defeat the demons. Original carriers can operate the magic core, and devouring worms can speed up the construction of the defense line. They'll do everything to win the upcoming Battle of Divine Will without hesitation. In fact, the volunteers have decided to go to the Great Snow Mountain together with the instrument."

"Volunteers aren't afraid of any sacrifice..." Roland thought while biting his lips. "It seems that I've worried too much. I'll send ships to transport the instrument for you when the exploration has finished."

"Thank you for helping us," she said happily.

He nodded and laid Soraya's pictures on the table. "All the information I've sent you before were written materials. I finally received these pictures of the ruins today. I would like to know your thoughts on this monster."

"Please wait for a moment." She waved her tentacles to summon Celine and Alethea, who had been repairing the Instrument of Divine Retribution. Three blobs came to the light curtain to study the pictures together."

With their tentacles connected, they remained silent for an unexpectedly long time, and communicated through their minds. As they were not able to show any expression on the outside, he felt as if this video call had already disconnected.

After a long time, he finally heard Pasha in his head again. "Sorry to have kept you waiting. We're shocked by some pictures, so we have to discuss them thoroughly."

"It's neither a demonic beast nor a demon, right?"

"Yes," said Celine, "and the skeleton that fell into the water has appeared in Lady Natalia's description about the Divine Land."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes. We've stayed underground for hundreds of years, but we would never be so foolish as to forget such an important piece of information. In fact, carriers have a much better memory than human beings," said Alethea, grumpily. "Lady Natalia saw the sea and skeletons in the third painting scroll. This thing in the pictures matches her description. More importantly, this lake is connected to the sea. We can be sure it's the thing mentioned by Lady Natalia."

"So, now we can say it's from the unknown civilization?" He asked while touching his chin. He was not surprised at their conclusion. When he had found the devouring worm also swallowing things in the Devil's Town, he had suspected that it must have been sent by some neutral party who had decided not to help anyone in the Battle of Divine Will. Alternatively, it could also have been the unknown enemy in the upcoming battle. He had made up this exploration plan not only to help the Taquila survivors but also to eliminate hidden threats for Neverwinter and spy on the unknown enemy.

He had read a similar description in Zero's memory fragment, but it was vague. Now, as the Taquila witches also thought the monster belonged to the unknown enemy, he could confirm that suspicion.

"It's highly possible, but..." Pasha hesitated for a while and continued. "There're still many things we don't understand, such as the demonic beasts."

"These beasts across the Land of Dawn are mutated animals. They should have been affected by the Erosion of magic power, just like witches. But why did they follow this monster's orders? It's different from the demons who enslave the demonic hybrids. The beasts seemed to willingly obey this monster's orders."

Roland had also pondered over this question. He thought that if the unknown enemy were intelligent creatures who had demonic beasts as part of their civilization, they would have accumulated these hybrids first and then used them to eliminate both human beings and demons. He could not understand why the unknown civilization wasted these beasts in the Months of Demons every year.

Maybe the origin of those mutated beasts might not be as simple as they had believed.

"We'll know the answer when the Battle of Divine Will starts." He shrugged his shoulders, pretending to be relaxed. "They'd better be the monster's relatives. In that case, we'll never see these ugly beasts on the snowy plains after we have defeated all our enemies in the battle."

Pasha was stunned and then started to chuckle. "Yes, you're right indeed. No matter where they come from, we'll still have to defeat them in the Battle of Divine Will."

After that, they discussed the defense line construction project and the method to block the underground river in the newly discovered ruins. When the meeting was about to finish, Roland suddenly raised a question.

"Ah, yeah, as we've caught some clues left by the hidden civilization now, we have to give it a name, don't we?" He cleared his throat. "Just like what we did with the first painting scroll. We call the guys in it demons."

"Is this important?" Pasha tilted her main tentacle. "Demons is just their most widely known name. They were also called Blood Beasts, the Deformity or Polluters back in the Union."

"Of course, a proper name is very important for propaganda and motivational campaigns. We should make it sound as evil as possible so as to arouse the people's indignation."

"So... do you have any idea?"

"Well, since these hidden enemies stay in the sea for most of the time, shall we call them 'Sea Monsters'?"

"..."

All the people in the meeting fell silent.

"Uhm... isn't that good?"

"I thought the name 'the Third Border City' was bad enough. I never expected you to make up something even worse," Alethea mocked, "'Sea Monster'? It sounds like a giant octopus."

"Alethea!" Pasha moved her main tentacle to give Alethea a knock on the head. "Your Majesty, if you think it's alright... I think... we don't have a problem with it."

The ancient witch agreed on the name, but reluctantly. Roland picked up his cup to sip some tea whilst trying to conceal his embarrassment.

"Ahem." Scroll who was by his side and taking notes for this meeting coughed suddenly. "Your Majesty, how about calling them Deep Sea Demons?"

"Deep Sea... Demons?" He repeated.

"Yes, since the concept of demons has been deeply rooted in the hearts of the people, they'll understand what this new name refers to without us clarifying. This way, we don't need much efforts to describe the unknown civilization for the people. It's better for the City Hall to carry out the propaganda campaigns, and the people won't feel that we've got to fight many enemies at the same time," explained Scroll, with a quill in his hand.

Though he was unwilling to accept the fact that someone else came up with a better name, he still twitched his mouth and said, "It seems to be a little better... Let's use this name."

Now the civilization depicted in the second painting scroll got a formal name.

Chapter 817: Meeting Ashes Again

Lorgar slowed down when she saw the first forest in her journey.

For the first time ever, she set foot in the domain of a northern kingdom. She had heard many people describing the evergreen woodlands, flourishing grasslands and steadily flowing water in this place. According to them, one would feel how soft and moist the soil was by simply inserting a hand in it, and would never have to worry about being bitten by some hidden sandworm when fetching water. The north was said to be a place full of life and vitality, like the Southernmost Region in the past.

However, she did not feel the same way about this place.

She thought perhaps it was still the Months of Demons, so this domain did not look any greener than the Iron Sand City's big oasis. The trees here had nothing but stark branches, and the ground was covered by withered weeds. Only the dark brown soil under her feet reminded her that this place was not a desert.

She looked around and quickly found a place of shelter from the wind. In this shelter, she transformed back into a girl and put on her clothes. After that, she continued to track the caravans by following their smell that was left in the air.

That was how she traveled these days. When night fell, she would transform into a wolf and run toward the north. She lived on sandworms and Giant Scorpions and had even attracted some Desert Wolves along the way. In the daytime, she would walk on the Silver Stream trade route in her human form. This way, she could get her water bag refilled when she ran into some merchants there.

Her journey was not smooth sailing all the time.

Princess Lorgar of the Wildflame clan was always generous, thus she would attract some people who were coveting her bag of gold royals. But she had vigilant ears that were erected on her head, so she was always able to know the merchants' ulterior motives in advance. At the very beginning of her journey, she had made all the vicious guys pay a bitter price, but now she decided just to follow those caravans from a distance and used the smell they left to confirm their direction.

Half a day later, she heard the sound of sea waves.

As this new harbor town built by the northern kingdom did not have thick city walls, she could see everything clearly by standing on a high slope. Tents stood along the river. Many people gathered near the sea and seemed to be busy with constructing some square, flat buildings. What she found most surprising about this bustling scene was that most of the workers were northerners. She could only see a small number of Mojins there.

Shortly after stepping onto the territory of Port of Clearwater, she found the First Army's camp.

She identified herself to the guards and soon met the black-haired woman again.

This woman she had been eagerly looking forward to seeing was Ashes.

Before she could think about what to say, Ashes opened her mouth and said calmly, "I knew you'd come." Her golden eyes gave the Wolf Girl a feeling of familiarity, making her feel as if they had just said goodbye to each other yesterday.

Lorgar could not help but shake her ears. "How did you know?"

"Because you're just like the old me." Ashes curled her lips into a smile. "In your heart, there's a goal you want to pursue."

Her eyes lit up immediately. "You were pursuing combats, too?"

"No... I just wanted revenge." The Extraordinary shook her head and turned away. "Come with me. Echo will be very happy to see you again."

"Revenge?" Lorgar was stunned and thought to herself. After a while, she finally realized that Ashes had just meant that they both had goals but not the same one. The Wolf Girl caught up with the Extraordinary and asked, "Who did you want to get back at?"

"Church of Hermes." Ashes shrugged. "At first, I did this just to vent my hatred. As time went by, it became a habit until I met Her Highness Tilly. She made me see that there were more important things in this world than killing all the church people."

When Ashes mentioned Her Highness Tilly, the Wolf Girl perceived a feeling of tenderness in her tone, which was rare for the Extraordinary. She guessed this Tilly who was able to change such a determined and strong-willed person must have been very uncommon.

She secretly bore this name in her mind.

When they passed a flat building under construction, Lorgar raised another question. "I heard that the Port of Clearwater has become burned ruins ever since the Queen of Clearwater left this area. These people aren't local refugees, are they? Why do they seem to outnumber the Mojin immigrants?"

"Of course, they aren't. They all come from Neverwinter."

The Wolf Girl could hardly believe what she had heard. "Neverwinter... you mean the domain of King of Graycastle, Roland Wimbledon? He ordered his own people to build residences for the Mojins here?"

"He didn't need to force anyone. All of these people came here voluntarily because the construction project here pays them better. They can get a pay raise of five to ten silver royals by working here. The workers said that soon after the Ministry of Construction issued a recruitment notice for this project, City Hall was packed with applicants."

The Ministry of Construction? City Hall? The Wolf Girl felt lost hearing these strange words. She wagged her tail and asked, "What about... the Sand Nation?"

Lorgar remembered the first batch of immigrants consisted of several small clans and were about 2,000 to 3,000 people. She wondered why the great chief still wanted to send his own people traveling all the way from the north to the Southernmost Region when he had so many Mojins to work for him. She started to doubt his true motives.

"As His Majesty wants to build a new city in Endless Cape, most Mojins went there," Ashes answered quickly, "so did the people from Osha clan. Only by participating in the construction task, could the Mojins get new homes and food supply just like the subjects of Neverwinter."

Lorgar was surprised to hear that the king planned to build a city in the uninhabited wasteland which had no oasis. If it was not for Ashes, a proud person who was loath to lie, she would never believe this.

"What's the King of Graycastle thinking about?" she wondered.

"Then... what about the people who are unable to go there?"

"If they've got to stay due to health problems, they can help the construction team here to build the Port of Clearwater. By doing so, they'll get the same treatment. In other words, as long as you're willing to work, you'll never have to worry about going hungry." Ashes sighed with mixed feelings. "Her Highness Tilly once said that the ideal world in her mind was a place where you reaped what you sowed and made a fortune by your own hard work instead of exploiting the others. It sounded incredible, but her useless brother did make it happen."

Lorgar automatically ignored the last comment made by Ashes. "But... why does the great chief want to build a city in Endless Cape? That place has nothing..."

"There's Blackwater. His Majesty wants to collect as much of it as possible," Ashes said while spreading out her palms.

"That's the reason?" The Wolf Girl was stunned, rooted to the ground. "He did so much work just to collect Blackwater? He can simply buy it from the Iron Sand City, just like the Queen of Clearwater used to do!"

Lorgar did not believe in goodwill for no apparent reason. Most dominators just wanted wealth and lands, but the king apparently was acting contrary to this principle. He gave the land to the Sand Nation and spent a lot to reclaim the desert and to station troops in this place. She believed that the money he spent on these things was enough to buy hundreds of barrels of Blackwater.

"If what Ashes said was true, then the king's deeds were really strange," she thought and then started to worry about her father's decision.

She expected Ashes to refute or explain further, but the Extraordinary just raised her brow and said, "Yes, that's true... Who knows what the hell he's thinking?"

"What?"

Ashes said casually, "Even in Neverwinter, there're only a few who can understand his absurd theories. Andrea may be able to know what he's thinking. After all, they're both nobles, and their friendship is one mind in two bodies. The others probably won't be able to explain this to you. Anyway, who cares. I'm not here for him. As long as Lady Tilly thinks it's a good idea, I'll be fine with it." She stopped walking after saying these words, and then said, "Here we are."

Chapter 818: The Neverwinter Power Rankings

Just like Ashes had said, Drow Silvermoon was overjoyed at Lorgar's arrival. The Osha princess immediately gave her a warm hug. The Wolf Girl was surprised and did not know where to put her raised hand. Usually a chief of a clan only greeted another chief with a hug. Lorgar had intended to greet the new chief of Osha clan by bowing to her with a hand on the chest, though Silvermoon was one or two years younger than her.

During their conversation, the chief did not put on an air of superiority. When she heard that Lorgar was planning to go to Neverwinter with them, she immediately regarded her as a sister. She asked the Wolf Girl to call her Echo and happily introduced her to the new life of the witches in Neverwinter.

Lorgar did not believe everything that Echo had said. According to what she knew, no matter how abundant Graycastle's resources was, it could never eliminate hunger. She guessed the chief might be exaggerating by describing the place as a Kingdom of God, where no one worried about hunger and illness which could be cured by witches.

Though this was the first time she left the desert, she had heard many tales about the northern kingdoms. She knew the kingdoms were just like the Iron Sand City where only a small group of people in high places could lead a luxurious life. She believed that as a Divine Lady who was no longer an heiress to the Wildflame clan, she would never be as lucky as the Osha princess who had gained the king's appreciation.

But this was not a problem for Lorgar.

She just wanted to improve herself by fighting all those strong opponents in Neverwinter.

When she told them that her clan also considered moving to Port of Clearwater, they did not appear pleasantly surprised as she had expected. Iron Axe, Osha's faithful dog, even knitted his eyebrows. Only Echo smiled and asked, "Really?" The Osha princess seemed excited and continued to say, "Great! As soon as the Wildflame clan comes here, it won't be long before Port of Clearwater restores its prosperity of the past. His Majesty's goal can be achieved earlier!"

"Ahem... Lady Echo." Iron Axe eyed Echo. "It's just their plan, and it won't necessarily come true."

"Ah, yes, I was too impatient." Echo smiled, slightly embarrassed.

Lorgar immediately understood the reason for their cold response. As the former strongest clan, Wildflame had more than 5,000 people in total, significantly outnumbering all the Mojin immigrants here. More importantly, she believed that the northerners must have found that these small clans who were competing with each other were much easier to control as compared to some powerful big clan. She thought that they probably never expected that a clan in the Iron Sand City would decide that quickly to move here since the six big clans in the city did not have to worry that their oasis would dry up. These big clans were considered to be the most reluctant ones to leave the city, and most people even believed that they would never turn to the King of Graycastle.

She did not continue talking about this matter for she knew that the Wildflame clan moving here would increase the northerners' influence and at the same time change the balance of powers in this area. She had to admit that it was not a bad thing if the Osha clan or the king failed to control the situation at that time and let her father grasp the power.

After all, she was still Prince Lorgar of the Wildflame clan.

...

In the next few days, Lorgar would walk along Clearwater Bay whenever she got a chance. As she had met Ashes here, she was not that eager to leave for Neverwinter. She decided to use this period of time to examine carefully this evergreen land where Wildflame decided to settle down.

She soon discovered that the construction speed of Graycastle's workers was way beyond her imagination. On the bank of the river, they built a row of hemispherical furnaces which could produce a new batch of bricks each day with a mixture of earth and river sand. And these furnaces did not burn wood but some gray-black stones shipped from the northwest. They only needed to be filled with these stones once in a day, since these stones could keep burning all day long, which seemed much better than charcoals.

Brick production was the part where more Mojins, mostly women and seniors, were involved. They were divided into several groups, digging earth or carrying black stones. For each basket a worker dug out or carried, the supervisor would press a mark on his or her arm. According to the Wolf Girl's observation, the marks determined how much food a worker could get each day.

As for the construction work, she seldom saw Mojins engage in it. The northerners did everything. They mixed the water with some gray powder to make paste and used it when they stacked bricks. Each house was built with the same size, style and method. She could notice new changes in these buildings almost every day.

Another thing that greatly surprised her was how differently the Mojins and the people from Graycastle reacted when they saw her half-animal looks.

Since leaving the Iron Sand City, she no longer covered her fluffy tail and ears. Most Mojins would avoid her eyes when they saw her and try to back away from her, even though they had the same skin color. She was no stranger to this kind of reactions and was prepared for this.

Whereas the people from Graycastle did not show even the slightest bit of fear or hatred in front of her. Some braver ones even took the initiative to say hello to her and seemed to be used to this kind of looks.

She was baffled by their behavior and asked Ashes about this.

"Ah... you mean this. Isn't it a usual thing for the witches?" The Extraordinary said while spreading out her palms. "Half human and half beast isn't a rare thing. Someone can even totally transform into a beast." She continued to explain, "For example, there's a witch named Maggie. She looks much more scary than you after transformation. However, after she acted as a rescuer several times, everyone got used to her looks. Even if you don't look human, they won't ostracize you."

Lorgar wiggled her wolf ears and thought, "Uhm... Is that true? In that case, my determination to embrace my defects and accept my true self was not necessary at all?"

She suddenly thought of another question. "Ah, are you the strongest witch in Neverwinter?"

"Well..." The Wolf Girl did not know whether it was an illusion, but she did feel that Ashes looked more serious now. "That depends on the types of my opponents. One type of witches can wear God's Stone of Retaliation. The other type of witches usually don't wear them."

"They're not able to use their abilities wearing God's Stones, are they?"

"Yes. Without God's Stone, I'm not sure I can defeat some witches in the Witch Union."

"Even you can't defeat them?" Lorgar was shocked.

Ashes nodded. "I believe I could before they evolved, but their improved abilities were beyond common sense. They're not something you can fight with using just speed and strength. For example, there's a witch called Leaf. When you fight with her within the area controlled by her Heart of Forest, she'll become as powerful as the deities. It'll be extremely hard to escape from her trap in the woods, even if you wear God's Stone of Retaliation. If I have to fight against the witches of Neverwinter, she's definitely the last one I want to meet."

The Wolf Girl was thrilled when she heard this. "Who else?"

"Anna. Although she's not good at combat, her ability is impeccable. Without God's Stone, I can't imagine how to defeat her. I mean in a duel. But since she's the most important witch in Neverwinter and Roland's sweetheart, you'll never get a chance to fight her." Ashes continued while counting on her fingers. "And Nightingale. If you often challenge the Neverwinter witches, you'll definitely attract her attention. As she's touchy and has a really weird ability, you'd better avoid fighting her."

Lorgar wagged her tail, imprinting the names on her memory one by one. "So... what about Maggie? You said she could transform into a big beast?"

"Yes, she'll make a well-matched rival for you in a duel, but I'd advise you not to do so." Ashes seemed to think of something and smiled meaningfully. "That's because all the people who challenged her could not get rid of bad luck, and if you accidentally hurt her, you'd incur the wrath of the entire Witch Union."

Chapter 819: A Graceful Lady

Lorgar nodded to Ashes as she considered Maggie as one of the top dogs in the Witch Union. In her mind, the witch was still an ugly, cruel, but very formidable beast.

"So... what about the witches wearing God's Stones of Retaliation?"

The Wolf Girl knew that once her opponent used God's Stones, her ability would be significantly limited. Under such circumstances, she would not be able to freely transform all her body parts. If this opponent were just another warrior from the desert, it would be fine. However, if they were an Extraordinary like Ashes, it would be impossible for her to come out on top. Her ability was useless when she was faced with such a strong witch who also wore God's Stone. Given this, she had ranked Ashes as the best fighter amongst the witches from Neverwinter.

The Extraordinary remained silent for a while before replying. "Suppose there's someone whose strength and speed is in no way inferior to those of an Extraordinary. At the same time, she's an almost

unlimited lifespan and will never be harmed by any injuries. Even if she suffers fatal blows, she'll be able to completely recover, given time. How strong do you think she would be?"

Lorgar could not help but gasp in astonishment.

Being an experienced warrior herself, she was well aware of the importance of fighting skills and experience.

In the holy duels, the toughest opponent to deal with wouldn't be those brave young fighters, but instead, the seasoned warriors who were in their 30s. These veterans were usually the backbone of a clan, and they often served as combat tutors and supervisors for a clan's newer generation. She would never underestimate such warriors who not only matched the younger fighters in strength but were also much more experienced, having gone through numerous life or death situations. However, when warriors turned 40, their body would inevitably become less agile, and the wounds suffered over the years would gradually accumulate and worsen. Even if their skills became more and more refined over time, they would no longer be able to move as fluidly as they once had done.

Lorgar wanted to go to Neverwinter to hone her fighting skills was because she knew that there was an overpowered healing witch who could heal all sorts of injuries. Now she was more intrigued by her future trip to the Western Region as there was even a witch who was impervious to pain and had an unlimited lifespan.

She believed that anyone who lived long enough would be able to become a very accomplished fighter. Even just thinking about going against such a warrior made her scared... No, excited.

"Is there really such a person in Neverwinter?" Lorgar asked excitedly.

"Yes, there's this witch in the city who's called Phyllis," Ash replied, "I've never fought her, but..."

"But what?"

The Extraordinary said slowly, "One time when I was practicing with my sword in the castle's garden, she happened to pass by and give me a few suggestions. Later, I tried practicing again while following her pointers and found that my sword strokes did get noticeably smoother. Unfortunately, I left Neverwinter soon after and haven't gotten a chance to ask her for more pointers."

"Did she really only watch you practice for a short while?" Lorgar's tail wagged even faster. Most tutors, even the very experienced ones, had to exchange a few moves with their students to spot the errors in their movements. That was the reason the big clans built their Halls of Military Affairs for their fighters to train in. The more a student matched a tutor in his or her skills, the more difficult it was for the tutor to find faults within the student's techniques. Ashes was undoubtedly an excellent fighter, so the Wolf Girl believed that the immortal witch, Phyllis, was indeed a mighty warrior for quickly finding Ashes' shortcomings just by watching her practice.

Lorgar thought that now it seemed like Phyllis was the best fighter in Neverwinter. Since when it came to a real battle, no one could rely solely on the off chance that the opponent was not wearing a God's Stone of Retaliation.

She ranked Ashes as the second because she was also immune to the effects of God's Stones. This powerful Extraordinary was the ideal role model that she was chasing after. As for the witch who was

blessed with infinite life, the Wolf Girl believed that it was some miracle created by the Three Gods and that it was not something that she could ask for.

Lorgar couldn't wait to find out how she would fare against these powerful fighters.

She was now, even more, looking forward to her journey to the west.

Ashes seemed to see through the Wolf Girl's mind and smiled meaningfully again. Instead of ending their conversation right there, she patted Lorgar's shoulder and slowly said, "By the way, I forget to tell you. There are over 100 witches like Phyllis in Neverwinter."

"What?"

Princess Lorgar of the Wildflame clan was stunned and began to wonder, "Over 100 witches with infinite life? When did the miracles of the Three Gods start happening so frequently?"

"Come on." Ashes curled her lips into a smile. "You've still got a long way to go. You'll never have to worry about finding a suitable opponent there."

...

Beside Ashes, Lorgar also occasionally ran into another witch, Andrea. She had witnessed this blonde witch's powerful Magic Longbow on the Burning Stage. Though she had never fought against her, she thought Ashes was quite right about her. She was a noble just like the King of Graycastle. They were cut off the same cloth. The Wolf Girl always felt distanced from Andrea, as if she was living in a different world.

Every move Andrea made was so graceful, be it when she was talking to the others or when she was gazing far out to the sea by herself. Watching her, Lorgar began to notice that she had a lot of shortcomings in comparison to Andrea.

Princess Lorgar decided to give it a try anyways and said hello to Andrea when nobody was around. The blonde witch greeted her calmly, not showing as much warmth and hospitality as Drow Silvermoon did.

However, when she put forward the question that Ashes failed to answer, Andrea suddenly became enthusiastic.

The blonde witch said, "As for this question... of course, Ashes wouldn't be able to tell you anything. That muscle-brained witch can barely count to a hundred, she knows nothing about managing a city. His Majesty Roland's policies are way too complicated. I had to ponder about them over and over before understanding their logic." She paused for a moment and asked, "But are you sure that you really want me to tell you? It's much harder to understand than fighting."

"Yes." Lorgar nodded seriously. "My father said that there's a common truth in everything. Learning knowledge in other fields can also promote my fighting skills."

"It's obviously nonsense..." Andrea rolled her eyes back and slightly sighed. "Fine, I'll tell you. If the king just buys Blackwater with gold royals as you suggested, Neverwinter will have to spend some of its wealth to get what it wants, right?"

"All transactions in the world are like that," Lorgar confirmed.

"So let's assume that these deals go flawlessly one hundred percent of the time, and 20 years later, the king will see no change in his kingdom, except the loss of a large number of gold royals."

"Lo-Loss?" The Wolf Girl was startled. "Why do you call it a loss? Doesn't his current plan cost him much more?"

"Of course not." Andrea put her hair up, bent down, and started drawing on the ground with a stick. "Now that the Mojin immigrants in the Southern Territory have been assimilated into Graycastle, any expenses they make will eventually be circulated back into Graycastle's economy, this is because all the things the Mojins need to buy come from Neverwinter, therefore, the income they receive will eventually make its way into His Majesty's hands in a process known as "the circular flow of income". During this process, the overall amount of wealth circulating in the kingdom will gradually grow and eventually reach an astonishing amount over that 20 year period. To achieve this, His Majesty only needs to invest in this initial stage, but even this initial investment can't be considered a loss as the wealth is circulating through the cities of the kingdom."

Chapter 820: The Journey

Lorgar stared at the circles drawn by Andrea on the ground for a good while before she voiced out her thoughts. "But if you want to keep this circulation going, you've got to keep investing money... so, there's still a large amount of wealth that isn't in the hands of the great chief."

"That's it... This is what makes His Majesty different from all those other nobles, and it took me a while before I could figure out this point." Andrea then drew a larger circle around the small circles. "From the very beginning, he's regarded the entire Graycastle as his own domain. Given that, no matter which city accumulates the wealth, it still belongs to him."

"But he's the king, so shouldn't it be natural for him to think that way?"

Andrea retorted, "When Wildflame was the strongest clan, were you able to lord over clans in the Silver Stream Oasis? I'm guessing you couldn't even control the other clans inside Iron Sand City. It's the same for the Four Kingdoms. The nobles are like your clan chiefs. They won't let anyone else intervene in the affairs of their land and neither would they consider any other noble's domain as their homeland."

"..." Lorgar remained silent for a while. "We can't control our subjects simply by thinking them ours."

"Yes. You're much smarter than Ashes. Stay away from her in the future or your brain will be slowly filled with mud, like hers." Andrea patted Lorgar's shoulder. "The key lies in the combination of military might and the implementation of His Majesty's policies. The former can discourage the nobles from having any second thoughts, while the latter will gradually help to centralize the kingdom's power. This is a brilliant innovation. What's even more amazing, is that the king had already put this into practice since the beginning. Only having stayed in Neverwinter for so long can I now recognize the intricacies of this plan."

"It's indeed a bit... complicated." Lorgar scratched her head, and she was a bit surprised. She never expected that this blonde-haired girl who usually distanced herself from the others would answer her question so enthusiastically and in such great detail. Her guess was that Andrea might have been eagerly

looking forward to sharing her findings and thoughts with someone else, but had failed to find a person to talk to.

"Of course, politics is 10,000 times more complicated than fighting." said Andrea, proudly, "and that's just one part. The other part is that the king is going to acquire more than just wealth—he'll also have you guys. "

"Us?"

"This principle is much simpler. When Mojin immigrants get food and houses through working for the king, they would become part of this circulation. You'll gradually get used to this lifestyle of using your wages to buy all kinds of goods and comforts produced by Graycastle. In the end, you'll never be able to stop living in this kind of a comfortable manner and will eventually become a genuine citizen of the kingdom."

Andrea impaled the wooden stick into the ground, wiped her hands clean, and stood up. "This is inevitable. The oases are shrinking, and the survival of the Mojin clans are being threatened. Under this circumstance, the king has offered you a way to survive without fighting each other for water, so more and more Mojins will choose to leave the desert. Meanwhile, there are many deserted lands lying in the Southern Territory. It's only natural for the king to bring the Mojin people there to reclaim those lands—and create wealth for him."

She paused for a moment and asked, "Now do you understand? By doing so, 20 years later, His Majesty Roland will not only get all the Blackwater that he desires but also an accumulated wealth as well as most of the Mojins of the Southernmost Region. Do you still think that buying Blackwater from the Iron Sand City would be a better option?"

Lorgar did not answer but instead faintly felt her heartache. As compared to the answer itself, what shook her more was Andrea's attitude—She believed that Andrea revealed all the reasons behind the king's arrangements probably not out of trust, but because no Mojin could reverse this situation.

Lorgar admired this intelligent blonde witch who could actually figure out the king's true intentions. However, she respected the great chief himself even more. He always thought of the bigger picture and was able to become an irreplaceable figure in his subjects' hearts through meticulous planning. Not to mention his revolutionizing ideas. She believed that if he had been born in Iron Sand City, he would have definitely become an outstanding warrior.

Perhaps he was the example she should chase after.

"Thank you for your guidance, I feel my fighting skills have been further enhanced!" Lorgar said while making a fist.

"My pleasure, as long as you can understand... wait, what? Did you just say fighting skills?"

"Yes. I'll go practice now, so please excuse me." Lorgar said before she turned around without a moment to spare and hurriedly ran for a nearby dune. There just happened to be an open and gravelly ground that was suitable for combat training.

"So you turned out to be just like Ashes... an idiot."

After running for more than a hundred steps, the Wolf Girl still could hear Andrea call her an idiot, but the blonde witch did not sound as cold as she had been before.

A week later, Echo informed Lorgar that the Wildflame clan had officially decided to move to the Southern Territory. As agreed by both parties, this immigration plan would be carried out in three phases to reduce Graycastle's burden, and the lands the clan was granted with were the most fertile fields near the estuary in the old town, which were located between Clearwater Bay and the port.

The whole migration process would last more than a year, and the first batch of immigrants would arrive in several weeks. In order to properly settle the former ruling clan, the Osha Princess, who was missing Neverwinter the most, volunteered to extend her stay in the Port of Clearwater. Her decision was approved by the king, but Ashes, Andrea and Hummingbird would still leave as planned, taking "The Roland" to the Western Region.

As for whether Lorgar would leave with the witches or stay behind to wait for her clan, Echo allowed her to choose for herself.

The Wolf Girl did not think twice before she chose to leave with Ashes.

She believed that her father and brother could properly handle inter-clan affairs without her. The Southern Territory was no longer a place where survival opportunities needed to be won by force and duels. In this place, even small clans could manage to get their stomachs full, not to mention the Wildflame clan. More importantly, she did not want to cause any misunderstanding by meeting them shortly after she abandoned her right of succession. As she had to leave sooner or later, she decided to leave earlier with the witches.

The things about Neverwinter and the Witch Union which she heard from Ashes and Andrea, filled her heart with wild expectations. Be it the legendary combat witches, the formidable enemies in the wilderness hiding under the cloak of the Red Mist, the great chief who did not have enough strength to strangle a chicken(according to Ashes), she looked forward to meeting them all.

The next day, Echo sent them on to the steel ship with a smile.

Standing on the deck, Lorgar felt that those large Concrete Boats were nothing as compared to this steady steel ship. The amount of metal used to build the hull for this ship might already exceed that of all the Mojins' weapons and armors. With mixed feelings in her heart, she held the railing on the deck and dropped her fluffy ears as she nodded to Echo to say goodbye.

With a deep whistle from its horn, "The Roland", carrying the witches and Princess Lorgar of the Wildflame clan, slowly but steadily sailed towards the Western Region.