

Witch 831

Chapter 831: A Decision with No Regrets

Two days later, a strange-looking concrete boat slowly departed the dock of Neverwinter.

There was a huge swell, which looked like a moving hill, on the deck of the boat. It was completely covered with burlap cloth and guarded by fully-armed soldiers standing erect on either side of the boat, and a dozen God's Punishment Witches.

The boat was the "Victory". It was en route to transfer the soul device to the Great Snow Mountain where the Taquila witches would complete their incarnation ceremony and be integrated into the worm carriers.

Out of the confidentiality reason, the witches did not bid farewell. No whistle was blown as the boat took off, and even the loading job had been completed the night before without being noticed by anyone.

Roland stood at the sodden dock built with bricks and slabs, watching the shadow of the boat gradually fade away. He knew once the conversion was completed, there would be three worm carriers in Neverwinter, which would provide great help for both municipal construction and the defensive line project. However, Roland somehow did not rejoice over the progress as much as he had anticipated.

The two volunteering witches were called Jasmine and Lyra. From their original appearances in the Dream World, the pair looked just a little over 20 years old, almost the same age as Tilly. They both have outgoing personalities.

In order to let them have a good time, Roland had taken the two girls, Phyllis and the other witches to the amusement park in the suburb, where they had hopped on a Ferris wheel, ridden a roller coaster, experienced the haunted house (during which Jasmine had accidentally broken a ghost's head dropping down suddenly) and taken a spinning pendulum ride. He had also allowed them to eat as much as they had wanted. Had Roland not earned some money by killing a few Fallen Evils a few days past, he probably would not have been able to afford such a revelry.

Jasmine and Lyra, in the past two days, had been in a total shock, but they had followed Roland submissively without raising a single question. They had screamed as everybody had when the roller coaster had inverted and had laughed like any girls next door when they had had strawberry sundaes. All in all, they looked no different than ordinary people.

If he had not known it beforehand, he would have never believed that these two girls had made a decision to sacrifice their human bodies and devote themselves to the battle against demons, just like the decision they had made 400 years ago at the bottom of the ruin in front of the magic core.

When the dream had ended, they had looked more serene than Roland had expected.

Roland had wanted to console the two girls, but words had caught in his throat. There was no point to dissuade them from converting to devouring worms, for it was an action neither in his interests nor in

the interests of the united front. Words, in this case, had all become frivolous and more sounded like feigned kindness.

In the end, Roland had become the one who had been offered solace.

He still clearly remembered their words and the expressions on their faces back then.

"Thank you," Jasmine had said with a smile, "and..."

"We don't regret it." Lyra had finished the latter half of the sentence.

At that moment, Roland could hear the throbs of their hearts.

They liked everything here.

But they did not regret making that decision.

"Your Majesty?" Phyllis, who came to send off her companions as well, looked at Roland. "Aren't you... going back to the castle?"

The words pulled Roland back to the reality. By the time he realized it, the "Victory" had disappeared from his sight, leaving a haze of fogs behind it.

Roland put the thoughts out of his head. He took a deep breath and asked, "They really can't disconnect themselves after being integrated into the carriers?"

As if to know what he wanted to convey, Phyllis lowered her voice. "A God's Punishment Witch is different from a carrier. The former retain some basic consciousness even without a soul transfer. Our conversion to a God's Punishment Witch was more like giving commands than a fusion. But carriers are different. They're specific vessels that seal the soul permanently once the integration is completed, although those vessels will become dormant if not used for a long time. Nobody has ever managed to get out of one up to this date, at least none of the witches, not even Pasha, is able to do that."

"But there're beams of light above the carriers, right?"

"That's right." Phyllis nodded. "Without magic power, those cumbersome bodies can't move independently."

"Perhaps one day, we can also find a way to have their souls return to the Dream World," Roland looked up at the distant, azure sky and said slowly.

After a moment of silence, Phyllis turned her eyes in the same direction. "Well... perhaps one day."

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To Lorgar, the jungles covered with snows in the Western Region were something completely new.

For more than once, she had heard from traveling tradesmen what snow looked like and envisioned them as some cold, white sand. When she saw it in person, however, she found snow was way finer and whiter than her imagination, even finer and whiter than the purest river sand in Silver Stream.

The whole world was wrapped in a different color.

According to Ashes, although the Months of Demons had passed, it would take at least half a month for the snow to melt completely.

Lorgar thought that was exactly what she wanted, for, in that case, she could see a pure white snow city.

There was little she could occupy herself with during the voyage. Lorgar had turned the steel ship inside out but still could not find its source of power. Even Andrea failed to give her a definite answer. She only said evasively that a machine that continuously boiled water was pushing the boat forward. As to its detailed mechanism, Lorgar was informed that only King Roland and Miss Anna knew about it.

Lorgar did not know much about King Roland, but she had heard from Ashes that Miss Anna had a place on the "Battle Strength Ranking of Neverwinter".

Princess Lorgar of the Wildflame clan thus became more impressed with and also more interested in powerful and intelligent Anna.

When she mentioned the ranking to Andrea, the latter, however, dismissed it with a scornful smile.

"A battle strength ranking?" Andrea cast a sharp, sideways glance. "A man is different from a wolf. No individual can compete with a group of people. Isn't it animal to only make an emphasis on individual fighting capacity?"

"Wolves are also social animals," Lorgar corrected her.

"Well, fine. Then just take another animal as an example, like tigers and snow leopards." Andrea coughed. "Anyway, Anna is the power source of Neverwinter. It was Anna's ability that enabled the First Army to quash the watchdog and Iron Whip clan with one blow. I bet Ashes didn't tell you that she was almost beaten by an ordinary man."

As Andrea had expected, the wolf girl was taken by surprise. Andrea went on, "That ordinary man used the exact weapon made by Anna. There's no point to discuss fighting capacities without talking about those weapons. If you want to become stronger, I suggest that you ask His Majesty to grant you a set of professional weapons." At these words, Andrea patted the long-barrelled gun on her back and said, "If you can carry these big tubes on your back after your transformation, that would be more useful than any combatting skills."

Lorgar did not really agree with Andrea, but she took a note of her advice.

Her father often told her to listen and observe, and also to always remember what she had wanted in the first place.

As they moved against the current and as the water suddenly rose, the iron ship slowed down drastically. On the fifth day after they had entered the Western Region, the wolf girl saw a beautiful, big, fat pigeon.

It hovered in the air for quite a while before darting straight toward Ashes at the bow.

When Lorgar thought she would have an extra meal for lunch, she noticed that Ashes, smiling, produced a bag of cooked solid food and fed the pigeon. The pigeon, on the other hand, nuzzled up to Ashes as if they were old friends who had not seen each other for ages. It was when the pigeon started to speak that Lorgar realized that it was actually a witch.

"Coo, coo coo!"

"I got it. Tell Princess Tilly that I'll be there soon."

"And me!" Andrea did not like being left behind.

"Coo!"

The pigeon gave a nod, spread out its wings and took off. It soon disappeared in the northwestern direction.

Lorgar asked, "She's..."

Ashes turned around. "Maggie. Like you, she's also a witch who can perform a full-body transformation."

"I see..." thought Lorgar, but she then suddenly remembered that Maggie should transform into a fierce, aggressive and frightful giant monster. She wondered why Maggie would turn into a pigeon.

While Princess Lorgar was still in a daze, Ashes patted her on the shoulder. "Time to pack up. We'll soon reach Neverwinter."

Chapter 832: An Encounter with the King

As the whistle blew in a low-pitched tone, Roland staggered to a stop at the dock. Lorgar noticed the passerby dock all came to a halt and raised their right hands, saluting the towering ship when she stepped onto the trestle. It was probably because the ship was named after the chief.

The soldiers from the First Army on the ship responded to the public with a salute in the same manner.

Lorgar gathered that should be a special form of greeting.

However, unlike any of the greetings she had witnessed, where there was usually a party more superior than the other, the greeting here did not stress such a status difference. The equality between initiators and receivers confused Lorgar. She did not understand why they had to greet each other with such a ceremonious air when they were equal. In her opinion, the whole point of formalities was to pay respects and submit to the receiver, no matter it was kneeling and worshipping, or placing a fist over one's heart.

Apart from that, she also noticed that even the children playing around the dock saluted in the same way, chest out and shoulders back. During the process, nobody looked reluctant or inferior. Instead, their eyes were all full of joy and energies. The salutation seemed to have built a connection between each other that words had failed.

Ashes broke the silence. "This is a military salutation. I didn't know why they did that at the beginning and thought it was an etiquette imposed by Roland Wimbledon to his subjects. Later I found it wasn't what I thought."

Lorgar raised her brow in surprise. "Does it have nothing to do with the Roland?"

"Correct. They'll salute voluntarily every time a boat carrying the First Army docks, because the return of the boat means their family members have come back home safe and sound from their expedition."

"But they don't look like... families," Princess Lorgar remarked hesitatively. If they were, the greetings should be more emotional. Plus, practically all the soldiers on board were male, but there were few females at the dock. Could every one of them happen to have a brother?

Andrea shrugged. "All the members of the First Army are from Neverwinter, which means most residents have a family member who has joined the army. There's also a lot of them from neighboring streets. The First Army is totally different from mercenaries who drift around looking for potential employers, nor do they work the same way as an enlisted militia. They take pride in their jobs. They celebrate the safe return of family members for each other. I believe this is probably what His Majesty refers to as the significance of a 'people's army'".

"So it's an army... built by all subjects?" Lorgar questioned herself in silence.

The wolf girl followed the witches into Neverwinter, still lost in thoughts.

What the new king's city of Graycastle first impressed her was its tidiness. Despite streaming pedestrians, both houses and streets in the city were aligned in straight rows, including roadside trees. The compact arrangement gave Lorgar a suffocating feeling. Although the city looked quite magnificent at the first glance, she did not feel as comfortable as in Iron Sand City.

Moreover, to her great disappointment, there was little snow in Neverwinter. Even the solid-surfaced road underneath was dry. She could only spy some remnant of snow at the tips of tree branches and on the roofs.

Her plan to visit a pure white snow city was frustrated.

Of course, there was still something appealing to her.

Lorgar was overwhelmed by the huge boards that overhung some of the houses on the street, on which various signs and logos were printed, such as Old Hunter Leather, Straw House, North Slope Gem House, etc., although some of the boards were blank.

In addition, she was surprised to find that there was a sign at every intersection, clearly showing where each branch head, as well as the name of each street.

For example, the street she was currently pounding was called Glow Boulevard.

The wolf girl soon found these signs very helpful to newcomers of Neverwinter. These street signs provided her with a basic structure of the city and told her where to shop and where to find a hotel, saving her trouble to seek local gangs or Rats for information.

During her conversations with tradesmen traveling between the Southernmost Region and the north, she had learned numerous entrepreneurial stories that stressed the arduous and laborious undertaking of establishing oneself in a foreign city. To expose your foreigner identity would immediately put you in a defenseless and disadvantageous position.

But the street signs, although trivial, greatly eased visitors' minds. She even felt a sense of embracement at the sight of these signs, as if the city were welcoming her.

Probably that was the reason the city appeared so vigorous and prosperous everywhere.

Lorgar, however, did not have much time appreciating this foreign city.

Because Ashes soon took her to the Lord's castle. After she waited in the hall for a while, a guard brought her a message from the King of Graycastle. "Please follow me. His Majesty has agreed to receive you."

For some reason, Lorgar suddenly felt a little nervous.

She took a deep breath in secret and followed the guard to the third floor, after which she found herself in a bright, spacious study.

Behind the mahogany desk close to the French window sat a ridiculously young man. He was wearing a plain robe, bare-headed, whose gray hair cascaded over his shoulders, with no rings or diamonds on any of his fingers. He was fondling a quill and studying her with great interest.

This is the chief who utterly routed her clan and turned the whole Southernmost Region upside down?

For a moment, Lorgar could not connect him with the person she had previously pictured.

She thought a knowledgeable man who possessed a profound understanding of martial arts should be at least 40 years old. His forehead should be wrinkled, his beard braids should reach his chest, and he should have fathomless eyes of an old man. Even if northerners did not like the idea of braiding their beards, he should not be this young!

At this very moment, Lorgar realized that she had inquired about everything including powerful warriors in Neverwinter, but had forgotten to ask about what the chief looked like, one of the most important businesses.

After a moment of hesitation, Princess Lorgar decided to salute in accordance with Mojins' customs.

Shaking her ears, Lorgar went to knees and slowly lay down on her stomach. She had heard that gray hair was a typical facial trait of a Graycastle royal descendent.

"You're the Divine Lady from Wildflame clan, right?" The king did not let her lie there for a long time. As soon as her forehead touched the floor, he broke the silence. "Please rise, sagacious wolf. Welcome to Neverwinter. I'm Roland Wimbledon, the King of Graycastle and also your chief."

Lorgar slightly frowned at the word "sagacious wolf". The addressing was simply queer. She had never heard people call a wolf sagacious before.

Yet she quickly got to her feet in an airy manner as if she had never heard Roland's words. "My name is Lorgar Burnflame. As to the title Divine Lady... I believe it was more appropriate to regard me as a witch here. Further, my father Guelz Burnflame sends his best regards on behalf of Wildflame clan, in hopes that your sovereign will be as long-lasting as the oasis."

This time, however, she did not hear a response at once.

Wondering, the wolf girl secretly raised her head, only to find that Roland's eyes were fixed on her long, droopy ears.

Chapter 833: An Unexpected Conversation

Lorgar's heart sank at Roland's unscrupulous gaze.

She knew what she looked like. Back in Iron Sand City, she had heard many people call her lycanthrope monster, half man or the Abandoned One secretly behind her back. Fearing these names would hurt the self-esteem of the third daughter of the chief, nobody had ever dared openly address her in that way.

But she was currently not in Iron Sand City and was no longer the princess shielded by the Wildflame clan, so she had to face these venomous comments on her own.

"Are your ears... and tail both real?" The chief hesitated for a long time before eventually blurting out. "Do you have to use magic power to maintain this shape, or they've become a part of your body?"

Lorgar bit her lip. Instead of answering the question, she pushed her hair back, revealing her one side of her face where her normal ear had disappeared. "I can't tuck them back, Your Majesty. I know they look very strange, but this is what I really look like. I don't want to hide my imperfection... If you insist, I'll try to avoid going to public places so that I won't scare people out."

Although Lorgar had resolved to embrace herself long before, she still had a mean opinion of herself on such an occasion when being directly questioned. Divine Ladies were viewed as powerful and beautiful beings by Mojins, who were favored by all the clans and admired by all young warriors, but she, unfortunately, was an exception.

She had been ignored after her awakening. Her legitimacy had been questioned even by her own clansmen, which was the reason her father had decided to name her as his heir. Lorgar dedicated herself to physical training and pretended that she did not care about those floating rumors, but sometimes, it was just hard to remain indifferent when so many people pointed finger at her back.

She had certainly anticipated these scenarios, but since she had chosen her path, she would not easily cede to her fate no matter what difficulties were awaiting her. The endless sand road in her dream had pointed where she should go. At these thoughts, the wolf girl erected herself, trying to look audacious.

The chief smacked his lips. "Strange? Why did you say that?"

Lorgar, who was prepared to receive any vicious remarks, stunned for a second. "Huh? Isn't it because..."

"They don't look like human ears?" Roland shrugged. "Ordinary men don't have magic power either, and these two ears aren't affecting your hearing or mobility. So, how can you say they're defective? They're simply a unique feature of yours, a very interesting one indeed. Don't you think these two ears look pretty?"

"Ahem, Your Majesty, please mind your language." At that moment, Lorgar heard a woman's voice behind the chief. The voice was very low and soft, but she still captured it.

Yet she was, at that time, too absorbed in the chief's comment to think about anything else.

Pretty?

Lorgar had never associated herself with the word "pretty". For a second, she failed to come up with an answer, her cheeks burning, her brooding courage almost gone.

How is a half man pretty?

"Anyway, I don't require you to conceal your face or wear a hoody in public... You can do whatever you want." Roland went on, "Perhaps someone will point and stare at you at the beginning, but they'll get used to it eventually. One solution is to ask Soraya to draft a picture-story book about you, or you can join Star Flower Troupe to star in a play and become an idol. This would be the fastest way for the public to get to know you."

Lorgar was overwhelmed by a series of unfamiliar words like "picture-story book", "Star Flower Troupe" and "idol". She stood rooted to the ground, failing to utter a word. Fortunately, Roland returned to their previous subject just in time.

"Right, Ashes told me that you came here to defend against demons?"

Relieved, the wolf girl answered, "And also to train myself, Your Majesty. I've heard there's a witch called Miss Nana in Neverwinter who can treat any wounds inflicted during a battle. This is very important to a warrior. You must know that it's a warrior's dream to fight and gain combatting experience without the fear of getting injured. Of course, I'll not only fight against your enemies but also bear all the medical expenses incurred."

Roland nodded. "I see. If you're willing to join the Witch Union, you'll have a big chance to fight..."

"But I prefer to act alone, Your Majesty." Lorgar interrupted him quietly. "Like a mercenary, I don't want to be distracted by anything other than fighting."

She knew that was just an excuse. The reason behind her lie was that she wanted to have a better understanding of northern kingdoms before pledging alliance to the chief. Lorgar had not forgotten that she was essentially a Sand Nation. If Roland failed to keep his promise made at Land of Fire, those Sand Nations moving to the south would eventually sever all relationships with Graycastle. If things really got to that point, the King of Graycastle would be her enemy. Hence, she could not make her decision without a thorough consideration.

"Really..." Roland reflected upon her words for a while and then spread out his hands regretfully. "Then I can't satisfy your demand."

"Why?" Lorgar was surprised. She thought a mercenary with exquisite combatting skills would be popular everywhere, not to mention that she was willing to provide her service for free and bear all medical expenses. No sensible people would ever decline such a generous offer. How could he refuse her?

"Because this is going to be a full-fledged war, not some minor disputes between several clans."

Lorgar felt all her blood rush to her head. She was outraged at Roland's insulting comment where he basically renounced all Sand Nations' fights as silly jokes. She perked up her tail and was about to shoot back when Roland suddenly switched the topic. "You've fought with Ashes, right? What do you think of her?"

Suppressing her anger, the wolf girl replied indignantly, "Very powerful. She would be a first-class warrior even in the Southernmost Region."

Roland said slowly, "This is the power of an Extraordinary. There're even Transcendents much stronger than them. The latter has gone beyond all physical restrictions of the human body and possess an inconceivable power. In other words, nothing can stop them from improving themselves."

"Tran... scendents?" Roland's words completely had Lorgar's attention. She wondered how powerful that person had to be when even Ashes admired her.

"However, even with three Transcendents, dozens of Extraordinaries, and thousands of combat witches, we failed to stop demons, and a great empire thus collapsed overnight. Now, it's our turn." The chief's every single word seemed to directly go to her heart. "The reason I declined your offer is very simple. This isn't a one-on-one duel but a fatal war between two civilizations. No matter how strong you are, individual operations won't work... More importantly, I don't want you to die for nothing."

Chapter 834: Let's Drink and Celebrate

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Lorgar did not know how she had exited the castle. She watched people pass by in a great haste, leaving her standing in the middle of the street at a loss.

The encounter with the king was beyond her expectation in every aspect.

She had thought the chief would have held a hostile attitude toward her because of her abnormal half-human appearance. An unkind king would not hesitate to conceal his feeling, whereas a calculating one would normally remain expressionless. However, she was certain that his attitude would change once he was informed of the purpose of her visit, because a free warrior was highly demanded everywhere, not to mention that she agreed to help Neverwinter defy demons. Who would decline such a generous offer?

Lorgar envisioned that she would then settle down in the castle area, living in a hotel in the inner city and be treated as a clan guest. During her stay, she would get acquainted with more witches, especially the ones with great combatting skills, and obviously including Miss Nana. Although not everyone would like to know her, she believed there must be someone like her, who would like to advance their fighting techniques through dueling. This practicing method would benefit both parties and was certainly more efficient than punching sandbags.

When she got everything ready, she would then go find demons to further challenge herself. Ashes told her that those enemies were all hiding in the uninhabited Barbarian Land in the northwest. Lorgar was not afraid of camping in the wild, nor did she care about the treachery of the enemies' hiding places, because wolves were the ruler of the wilderness. She believed her acute sense of smell and excellent hearing would help her locate their lair.

But the truth was a total reverse of everything she had pictured.

It was Lorgar's first time to hear somebody praise her ears and call them pretty since her awakening. Even her father, who had never been averse to her appearance, had never appreciated her look. Often he said, "You'll definitely be one of the most stunning girls in Iron Sand City if you don't have that deformity."

Will wolf ears... really look good on her?

She had been so shocked by the unexpected comment that her head had been in the clouds during the latter half of the conversation. The chief had accepted her physical appearance but had refused her free service of fighting against demons. By the time she had left the castle, she had still not recovered from the blow.

"No, no, this is just a small defeat," Lorgar consoled herself. She patted her cheeks and took a deep breath. As long as she stuck to her path, nothing was impossible. Actually, when she thought it over, the rejection did not affect her initial plan very much. She could still explore the city, investigate demons and get to know other witches, except that it would take a little longer than she had anticipated. Although Roland had rejected her, he did not impose any restrictions on her and even hinted that she was welcome to the Witch Union anytime if she changed her mind. Since Lorgar had decided to act alone, this would probably work better for her plan.

At these thoughts, Lorgar pricked up her droopy ears, wagged her tail and clenched her fists. She thought to herself, "That's right! If demons are really that strong, why did the chief build his king's city here? If demons come from the northwest, the first human city they come across will be Neverwinter. Isn't it safer to stay as far away from such a danger as possible when there's no guarantee that he can conquer demons?"

The words "I don't want you to die for nothing" were probably a feigned kindness to dissuade her from challenging demons individually. Nobody knew who would gain the eventual victory until he tried out! If she really got injured, the chief would definitely ask Miss Nana to cure her, because if he did not, he would then break his own words.

Princess Lorgar of the Wildflame clan cheered up again after thinking over the matter in her head.

She still had over 100 gold royals, more than enough to pay the hotel bills. Even if the medical expenses were insanely high, she did not think they would charge dozens of gold royals at a time. The money she currently owned would allow her to live here for several years without her worrying about expenses on food, drinks, clothing, herbs and desert guides. She firmly believed that without the support of the King of Graycastle, she would still be able to pick on demons by herself.

Lorgar felt greatly relieved after she had a plan. She looked around, starting to study the boards that hung above the surrounding premises. Since she had determined to take things slow, the first thing she should do was to find a place of abode.

As it was still bright and that she was not in a hurry, she decided to celebrate her safe arrival in the Western Region of Graycastle in accordance with the customs of Ironsand people of the Mojin Clan.

A tavern thus became her first stop.

No sooner had Lorgar set out than a pretty board caught her attention.

On the wooden board was a lifelike drawing of several glasses, in which there were colorful drinks, topped with some fruits whose names she did not know. They appealed to her just by their looks.

Underneath the glasses was the store's name: Evelyn's Complex Wine House.

At the end of the board was an additional line in a smaller font: New release of Chaos Drinks. 50% off on your first drink. Feel free to try out.

Chaos Drinks?

Lorgar's brow went up. She thought this was a pretty lame name, for the two words bore no relationship whatsoever. A person who had never tried it out might not know what kind of drink it was. No wonder they had to put it on sale to attract people.

But the store name clearly suggested that it was a tavern.

Since the name suggested multi-flavor drinks, Lorgar believed they must offer wines. Judging from the spacious, bright interior and customers coming and going, she concluded the drinks should not be too bad.

Lorgar patted her money bag over her chest and headed to the tavern.

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"She wasn't telling all the truth," Nightingale commented while chewing her dried fish, "especially the part concerning the reason she refuses to join the Witch Union. I could sense a great fluctuation in her emotions. To make sure, it'd be better to ask Wendy to conduct a '10-question' test."

Roland shook his head in amusement. "That's the screening procedure for an applicant. She hasn't even submitted her application to join the Witch Union, so there's no need to probe into her background. Plus, Lorgar came to Neverwinter to fight against demons and train herself, of which, you're positive, right?"

"She didn't lie on that for sure." Nightingale twitched her lips.

"So that's it. We founded the Witch Union initially to provide you with a place where you belong. There's no point to force people to join. Plus, it's normal for a person to take precautions when coming to a foreign city. Let her be." Roland waved away the subject, pretending that he did not care, although he indeed felt a little disappointed.

He had an urge to stroke the wolf girl particularly when he saw her twitchy, fluffy, long ears. Also, her waggy tail intrigued him a great deal. Roland wondered whether his strength would leave him as it did in the modern world when he touched the root of the tail.

But he managed to suppress his incessant crazy ideas in the end.

He had to act accordingly with a majestic air, definitely not because of the presence of Nightingale, but because he was a king.

While Roland was thinking about checking upon the construction of the "Miracle Building" at the scene, Barov, the City Hall Director, suddenly knocked on the door and presented himself.

"Your Majesty, the members of Joint Chamber of Commerce have arrived at the castle district. They wish to see you."

Chapter 835: Multiple Ways of Selling Chaos Drinks

It took Roland a while to remember that Joint Chamber of Commerce was a supply and marketing cooperative organization formed under his leadership, whose main members were wealthy merchants from several big Fjords islands.

Although they had reached a basic mutual understanding last fall, the number of Chaos Drinks produced by Evelyn at that time had not been high enough to meet a wholesale's standard. As a consequence, each Chamber of Commerce had simply taken a few samples and had yet to officially put them on the market. This time, they came here to finalize the unfinished business.

Since the whole Western Region was preparing for the unification of the kingdom and that Roland was preoccupied with the upcoming winter attack and the desert mission plan, Joint Chamber of Commerce seemed to have, temporarily, slipped out of his mind. Now their arrival saved Roland trouble to look for them himself.

"Take them to the drawing room. I'll be right there," said Roland. After Barov replied a "yes" and withdrew, he turned to Nightingale and said, "Send for Tilly and Wendy here as well, for this is essentially the first collaboration between the Witch Union and the Sleeping Island."

All the merchants rose and bowed to Roland when he entered the drawing room.

It took Roland some time to match the faces with their names, except for his old acquaintance Margaret, Gammon and Marleen from Chamber of Commerce of Crescent Moon Bay. The others were Nibelung from Chamber of Commerce of Shallow Water Town and Atiyer from Chamber of Commerce of Sunset Island.

As soon as they sat down, Nibelung ventured, "Your Majesty, the samples we took last time caused a big stir among merchants on the island. Everybody fell in love with it after he tasted it. I assure you that Chaos Drinks will be the most successful and popular commodity in Fjords in the history of time once we start selling them!"

Atiyer chimed in. "And it isn't just a drink. For example, that fiery red spicy juice. Although it doesn't quench thirsts, it's a great sauce for steamed fish or barbeques. Besides, it can warm you up and refresh your spirit in a more efficient way than your white liquor. At least, white liquor will make you dizzy if you drink too much and it doesn't come in handy when you're on a ship, whereas that juice doesn't have such problems!"

Margaret nodded smilingly. "True. Not only merchants but many explorers are attracted to Chaos Drinks. A drink that can keep them warm without creating any side effects may save them in the event of a shipwreck."

Atiyer continued, "In this light, I suggest marking Chaos Drinks with various price tags. A drink with special functions like this should definitely have a higher price tag if we do a bit of marketing, not to mention that the number is limited."

Roland cast him an approving glance. Apparently, Atiyer had viewed the drink as some sort of energy drink. It was indeed true that successful merchants from Fjords were all good at sniffing out great potential business opportunities. They were able to notice the distinctive features of various Chaos Drinks just through a few samples. They knew selling them at different prices was the best way to reap profits.

Roland clapped his hands. "Since it has a good reception, we can move onto its sale according to the contract we signed earlier. I think none of you has objections to the pre-order price or the distribution for each district. However, you need to put a 30% deposit to pick up your orders. You should have brought sufficient gold royals, right?"

Since they had reached an agreement on the primary terms on Joint Chamber of Commerce last year, there were now not many details left. The main reason Roland sent for Tilly to witness the signature was to prove that he did not tamper with the commission rate. Since Tilly had promised to stay at Neverwinter and had agreed to send the witches on the Sleeping Island overtime to the Western Region, Roland felt it necessary to return something to demonstrate his sincerity.

Based on the "win-win contract" signed during the Months of Demons, it was agreed that 30% of both the deposit and final sale profits should go to City Hall, the Witch Union and the Sleeping Spell.

"Of course, Your Majesty." Nibelung grinned. "There's no cargo on my ship this time, but only shiny gold royals plus some masons and sailors."

"Then let's go check the goods out." Roland smiled.

...

The drink factory specially built for Evelyn was across the alcohol plant. In fact, the building looked more like a fully-guarded warehouse than a factory.

It did not take a lot of spaces. The first floor was only a little over 100 square meters. The building itself was constructed of concrete and bricks, windowless, with a solid iron gate posed as its sole entrance. Like an invaluable military base, the premises was guarded by the new recruits of the First Army.

After Roland led the merchants across the yard, into the building and down the basement along the staircases, they found themselves in a spacious room around three or four times bigger than the ground floor. Like a villa's wine cellar, the basement was segmented by neatly organized wooden wine racks. To avoid fire losses, no open flames or connected wires were allowed in here. They used skylight for the wine cellar's illumination. Because of this, the place was a little dim.

On each wooden rack rested two rows of wooden barrels, but not every barrel contained Chaos Drinks. Evelyn only produced one barrel of drinks every day and there were currently just 100-odd barrels in total, minus those consumed by Roland and distributed to the members of the Witch Union monthly.

Roland tapped the barrel, and the liquid in it produced a dull churning sound. "We can provide 20 barrels of Chaos Drinks per month. Each Chamber of Commerce will have five barrels on average. As long as our production remains the same, you'll get the same amount of products every time, no matter how long it takes you to sell them out. Whether you come to pick up your orders every three months or half a year, our stocks won't change. All the 100 barrels you can pick up this time are here on the

wooden racks in the first row. Once you've checked the goods, I'll send men to deliver them to the dock area."

"You don't let us have a taste before the delivery?" Gammon was surprised.

"This isn't wine whose flavor grows mellower as time passes by." Roland shrugged. "Some Chaos Drinks do have a relatively long shelf life, but not every one of them does. Therefore, after the brewing is done, we have to first sterilize and preserve them.

"S, sterilize?"

"Like food, they'll go bad. The hotter, the faster. Sterilization can slow down the process. You don't need to know how it's done, but you ought to remember that once we open the wooden barrel, the drinks won't keep the taste as good as they initially do." Roland spread out his hands. "You can sell them as fast as you can or stock them. As long as you store them in shades and keep them cool, they should last for at least one or two months."

"But... as Atiyer has mentioned, each Chaos Drink is different. Some may be more popular than the others. If you don't let us taste them first, how are we going to choose the better ones?" Gammon questioned hesitatively. "Could you divide the drink in each barrel into four equal portions and then preserve them? In that case, we don't need to worry about which one we should pick."

Roland thought that would add Soraya and Lily's work by several times. He would certainly choose not to do something that consumed more industrial production resources but yielded no benefits. So he replied, "Sterilization isn't easy. If we divide the products into four portions, each Chamber of Commerce will have fewer stocks but more varieties of drinks, which would do no good to the sale. As to their flavors..." Roland paused for a second and then said, "The Northern Region and the Western Region have completely different needs for wines and drinks. The unpopular drinks here may be well received there. As merchants who transport goods to various places all the time, you should know it very well."

"Um, well..." Gammon was at a loss for words for a moment.

Roland secretly twitched his lips. He certainly would not allow them to taste the drinks, for he had already put a lot of efforts in the distribution of the products itself. Further, according to their contract, it was agreed that the drinks should be sold in barrels and that there were no specific terms stipulating the product quantity. If there were a few unpopular drinks that they were not willing to purchase, Neverwinter would suffer losses, because every barrel of drinks required the same amount of Evelyn's magic power.

"Anyway, the flavor isn't the point, but your selling method is. You should get most out of each drink and find your niche." Roland tapped the barrels again. "Well, come pick the Chaos Drinks you like."

Chapter 836: Signs of Change

Despite some hard selling happening, the Fjords businessmen still finally accepted this method of selection. They all knew that if they quit now, the others would only take over their share. Eagerly

wanting to become distributors for these exclusive products, they did not mind such a little compromise.

And they also could not deny that what Roland said had some truth to it. The samples that they had brought back before, despite the notable differences in taste, could not be matched by the fruit wine or other drinks on the market. So the difference lay mainly in the amount of profit. Since they were all responsible for sales in different regions, the possibility of competition was not high, thus further reducing the risk of selecting an inferior product.

Roland was chuckling to himself as he observed Gammon and the others pacing back and forth around the barrel. Some were nose sniffing and even trying to find some residual appearance of the beverage. Though the buckets looked ordinary from the outside, the interior had a layer of membrane made by Soraya. This completely isolated the air inside and outside, therefore the nose would certainly not be able to smell any difference.

Taking advantage of the crowd picking out the Chaos Drinks, he quietly pulled Margaret aside and whispered, "The buckets on both sides of No. 10 and No. 24 have quite tasty drinks. At least I personally like them very much."

The latter looked astonished. "Your Majesty..."

"You can take that as a gift," said Roland with a light laugh. "If it wasn't for the first batch of businessmen that you brought, the Western Region might have taken two or three years more before it could look like this. Though your intention wasn't to do business with Border Town, the town still reaped the benefits, so this reward is nothing." He paused and said, "But of course, it would only be for this time. After all, if you get good cards each time, the others will certainly become suspicious."

He had pretty much said all the facts. At that time, the steam prototype had been cumbersome and difficult to operate, and had only been suitable for the simplest drainage and haulage work. There had not been too many sales markets in the Western Region. Had she not introduced it to the Silver City mineral traders, thus opening up a high-profit trade route, the initial accumulation would have been more difficult.

Not to mention Margaret's Chamber of Commerce was responsible for the sales in the Graycastle area, so monopolizing the local market through the first batch of higher quality products was also a good choice.

"In that case, I accept your gift." The businesswoman did not do much to refuse—in dealing with people, she really resembled Thunder who was cheerful, generous, and uncalculating. After briefly saluting Roland, Margaret laughed and said, "Since I have received your gift, I can't do nothing in return. I might as well reveal to you a good news."

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

"The first group of businessmen you mentioned, which includes my old friend Hogg, plan to visit the Western Region this period." She lowered her voice and said, "But from his letter, it seems that this time it would be more than just him—the machines that you sell have spread in the Central Region of the kingdom, and almost all the mining businessmen are now asking him about the rail-transport system. And in about six months, your plant will be busy all day long."

"Is that so?" Roland was a little startled, then smiled and nodded his head. "That does seem like a good news to celebrate."

However, only he knew that there was a heartfelt sense of accomplishment after hearing this news.

"This day has finally come," he thought.

Over the past two years, he had sold a total of nearly 100 steam engines, of which only 30% belonged to the kingdom. At the beginning of the establishment of Graycastle Industrial Co., the monthly output was only an appalling two or three units. This output could hardly meet the demand of his own domain, but he still sold a part of it to Silver City. He had been looking forward to this day.

Such a scarce source of power is almost negligible for the industrial revolution, but it was a sign of a change from manpower to machinery and of a new mode of production. When everyone noticed the power of this new source of energy and wanted to follow suit, the change would start.

He believed that this interest-based change was almost impossible to stop. Its effect would be more than 10 million times better than just selling and promoting products, and its energy would be enough to change the whole era.

Today, Neverwinter was no longer like before. The output of one day in an industrial park today was equivalent to one month's output in the past. After the plants adopted three shifts, it would grow even more. Most importantly, a large number of apprentices who had received elementary education were steadily turning into workers—they had never touched a hammer nor built a sword, but had learned how to use machinery to produce machines. As long as the time was ripe, there would be an unprecedented eruption of productivity in Neverwinter in this era.

From Margaret's news, Roland seemed to envision that this moment was now not far away from him.

...

Two days later, the Fjords merchants left Neverwinter with their selection of Chaos Drinks, and Barov eagerly went into Roland's office with a thick pile of books.

Judging from the chief's smiling expression that almost covered his eyes, Roland knew that the results this time must have been quite good.

However, after opening the statistics sheet, he did not linger on the deposit amount but instead focused his attention on the new arrivals.

According to the agreement of the last meeting, Sunset Island and Shallow Water Town would each provide 300 craftsmen in exchange for completing the transformation of the paddle steamer in five years. The wealthy Crescent Moon Bay was even more direct and used 2,000 people and 50,000 gold royals to purchase a steel ship with no sails. Although both were aiming to get the knowledge of shipbuilding technology, Roland did not care about this and instead treated it as a bargaining chip—as long as they were willing to leave their people in his city, he would be fine with giving them not only manufacturing methods and techniques, but even design drawings.

Therefore, they also made a lot of effort this time. According to Barov's statistics, the number of craftsmen brought by the Fjords trip was 10% to 20% more than the agreed number. Most of them were

old-timers with many years of experience in shipbuilding and carpentry, hence its intention was self-evident: Neverwinter did not prohibit technical skills from being mastered by other cities. This meant that when the contract was completed, other than those who were treated as part of the transaction, the others would learn all the skills and return to the Fjords.

Unfortunately, they did not understand the technical terms of the new era.

Roland could not help but raise the corners of his mouth. The people of the Fjords would soon realize that if they wanted to produce their own steamship, they would have to buy raw materials, equipment, key parts and components from Neverwinter... In the end, they would only be more dependent on Graycastle, like small countries without complete industrial capabilities in the modern world where he had lived.

He lifted the quill, drew a circle below the total number of these tradesmen, and returned the statistics sheet to Barov.

"Help the arrivals to settle in and call Karl Van Bate so that together you can make a financial plan based on what the industrial park is doing right now," said Roland. "We have to build a few more plants."

Chapter 837: Letter to the Sleeping Island

Tilly was at her desk, writing a secret letter meant for the inhabitants of the Sleeping Island.

Since she would be using the carrier pigeon, she had to reduce the size of the letter, and use the most concise language to express herself.

The content was actually not complicated and could be completed in two to three sentences, but, somehow, she could not stop writing. She was in an uncontrollable mood and felt like she was writing a long family manual—letting her thoughts run wild was certainly a rare occurrence for her.

However, Tilly unexpectedly found out that it was not a bad feeling to do so.

Since it was not a matter of life and death, she decided to go with this feeling.

Slim ink marks slowly moistened the letter, and she could not help but feel a sense of warmth.

"Dear Camilla,

"The Months of Demons is now over and the Western Region is calm again. Victory Day celebrations were particularly interesting. Do you remember the hot pot that I told you about? Roland moved this cooking method to the town square, with four huge woks of boiled soup, and then the meat, vegetables, whole chicken and Bird Beak Mushrooms were thrown into the soup. The fragrance could be smelt across the other side of Redwater River. He also said the pot was a feature of Neverwinter that definitely had to be tasted."

"With Roland's encouragement, everyone put all kinds of food in their pots. I have to say that with a thick soup, no matter what I ate, my mouth was full of flavor. There was no difference between City Hall officials, the Witch Union, or ordinary subjects. This scene would have been impossible in the past. It is

hard to imagine that a cruel war that will determine the fate of the world will follow this passionate scene. It is also precisely because of this, that this kind of joy was especially precious."

"I'm writing these to tell you that Neverwinter is really an incredible place—and I'm not trying to change your views of the nobility, but Roland Wimbledon is not a noble at all. Unsurprisingly, I just confirmed our speculation. He is exactly like us, the so-called noble identity was only a passage of time or a cover-up. So you should also take a look at this new city. Sleeping Island, certainly needs guarding, but I don't want you to view this responsibility like a cage."

"And by the way, during this Months of Demons, our witches finally no longer just stood idly by. Roland's plan of the Southernmost Region was carried out by Ashes, Andrea, and Echo. As for the interesting things happening in the desert, I won't go into details here and we can talk about it later on. I believe that the Sleeping Island will inevitably become even more important after the other sisters have come."

"To the Chief Butler of Sleeping Island?" Just then a hand suddenly came out from behind Tilly and placed a cup of azure drink in front of her.

"Well," she smiled, and she knew that it was Ashes without turning her head. "I was just writing about you. Would you like to take a look?"

"I'd better not," Ashes rubbed her shoulders and whispered. "I still have to prepare today's dinner."

"Then you'd better go. I look forward to your delicious dishes," Tilly laughed. The witches generally dined with Roland in the castle's living room, so the small kitchen in their apartment was less likely to be used. But since they had been separated for months, Ashes wanted to share their dinner alone, and of course she would not refuse. Not to mention that Ashes also mysteriously claimed to have obtained a magical condiment from the Southernmost Region.

After she drank the Chaos Drink that was refreshing as an icespring, she then continued writing.

"After chitchatting so much, now let's talk about serious stuff."

"According to my agreement with him, spring is when the relocation will take place. The time has come for action, and my idea hasn't changed. Everything has gone as expected and even more perfectly than anticipated, hence we should just follow the plan—I believe you are already well prepared."

"After the Months of Demons ends, the Fjords' trade roads will soon be busy and I'm afraid it will be difficult to hire enough ships and sailors. If you encounter such a problem, you can ask Thunder for help. He's currently seeking Sealine adventurers, so ships and people are not a problem. Before the steel ship that Roland built for him is ready, Thunder will remain at the Fjords. As long as we can get in contact with him, he will surely help us."

"In addition, do not forget to advertise to the lords and merchants of Fjord Islands about our whereabouts. Also, inform them that the Sleeping Spell will continue to be open to all. Don't worry that, after the relocation, part of the witches will be too far away from the Fjords. Now that Western Region's Shallow Beach has been put into use, and Roland also intends to build a new port in the Endless Cape for replenishment, this means Neverwinter vessels can easily reach the Fjords."

"I have a hunch that it will not take long before this route becomes the busiest trade route between the mainland and the islands; it will become a normal thing to cross the Straits, especially once the converted paddle steamer in the harbor is completed."

"It is important to remember this, Camilla. Migration to the Western Region does not mean giving up the Sleeping Island." Neverwinter is the front line against the demons and the most dangerous place once the battle of Divine Will starts. As a part of humanity, we should try our best to make a contribution to fight against the enemy. Even Roland cannot guarantee victory. When the Western Region is captured by the enemy, the only place we can go to would be the Fjords islands."

"Although it would be better if such a thing did not happen. Anyway, we still have hope as long as the Sleeping Island is still there."

"Take care,"

"Tilly Wimbledon."

Princess Tilly let out a deep breath after writing. Camilla Dary, originally a noble of the old king's city, knew quite well the dirty secrets among the nobility and that caused her to completely lose faith in them. Although Camilla still supported all the decisions she had made, the last time that they had spoken, the housekeeper had faintly hinted that she would stay behind in the Sleeping Island forever.

However, Tilly felt that although Sleeping Island was important, it should not be a place to stay alone. The guardians could take turns, and everyone should have the opportunity to come to Graycastle to re-experience normal life. This was what she would like to see. Of course, this letter might not completely convince Camilla, but as more and more witches came to the Western Region, she believed that Camilla would change her original view.

Tilly put down the quill, rolled the paper into a circle of paper, and then fastened the string.

When Honey was called over, she was shocked to see five or six scrolls of paper on the table.

"Will they be sent to the Sleeping Island?" she asked.

"Yes, and all of them have to be sent to Camilla," said Tilly, nodding her head, "... Is that too much?"

"It doesn't matter, since it's Your Highness Tilly's letter, it'll have to be sent no matter what!" Honey patted her chest and said, "now I'll go to catch two seabirds for you. Whether it's a secret document or even a honey grilled fish, it can also be sent!"

Looking at the girl jumping up and down as she left the room, Princess Tilly could not help but walk to the window and look towards the direction of the Fjords.

Before long, the witches that were forced to leave their homeland would once again set foot on this piece of land.

Starting with Neverwinter, everything thought about witches would change for the better.

By that time, the Western Region would be even more livelier than it was now.

She was sincerely looking forward to that day.

Chapter 838: A Special Day

When the sky was just turning white, Broken Sword was already completely awake.

She stood up, walked to the window and pushed it open. The slightly chilly morning breeze suddenly poured into the room, bringing with it a chill of melting snow, with the fragrance of the coming spring. The faint blue sky was not yet completely illuminated, but from the sparse clouds, it could be seen that today would be a good day.

After putting on her clothes, she walked to the living room and discovered that a plate of roasted nuts and a can of vegetable soup were already laid out on the table for four people—amongst them, Annie always got up early, and would not only be the first to finish washing, she would also occasionally make breakfast.

After they officially joined the Witch Union, they moved from the Foreign Affairs Building to the Witch Building and could have their meals anytime at the castle, but Annie still chose to prepare breakfast herself sometimes. In the first month after receiving her salary, she went to the convenience market to buy cooking materials such as firewood, butter and salt. She also went to the wild to collect some wild fruits and vegetables every week.

Broken Sword curiously asked why she did so, and Annie's answer was simple. She said survival in the wilderness

was a skill, and if not practiced for a long time, it would be forgotten. If it was time to escape again, how could they ensure survival?

Broken Sword could not understand why Annie was always ready to wander. But having said that, occasionally tasting these wild fruits was not bad.

"Good morning." She sat at the table and pulled at her nuts. "Are you going to the factory today?"

"Yes." Annie nodded and finished the remaining hot soup in the bowl. "There are some big objects that can't be pushed out by the workers. The machine can't plug in that big thing, and it can only be joined by small iron pieces. Miss Anna was doing it all before, but it's all up to me now."

From her voice, Broken Sword could hear a trace of vague satisfaction and sense of accomplishment, which was probably the most significant change since the four came to Neverwinter—their ability was no longer something meaningless. Working for His Majesty and getting paid was like a craft. The experience of relying on oneself instead of swindling or relying on the charity of others gave Broken Sword a sense of being reborn. She believed that Annie had the same feeling, or she would not get up early every day and be the first to head to the factory, even without any pressure to survive.

But today was a special day.

"Don't forget that today Hero..."

"I know." Annie looked a lot more serious. "Rest assured, I'll finish my chores earlier and come in time."

Broken sword became more relieved. "Well, she can feel more at ease with you around."

"Then I'll make a move first." She got up and left.

"Go, I'll take care of Hero."

"The hot water is in the kitchen and the rest is up to you." Annie did not speak much and quickly left home.

Broken Sword went to the kitchen to get a basin of hot water after eating her share. She crept lightly into Hero's bedroom. As Hero had lost her legs, she would still sleep with Annie even if there were enough rooms. In the daytime, the other three witches would take turns to take care of her. Miss Iffy and Lady Wendy would also come to help sometimes.

What was surprising to her was that Hero was already awake and sitting on the bed. She was looking out at the brightness through the window. The soft shimmer of her lilac hair and fair complexion made her look extremely pleasant. And under this light, it was hard to imagine how brutal a treatment she had been subjected to.

However, Broken Sword quickly regained her senses and realized that Hero might not be as calm as she looked on the surface. That could be why she woke much earlier than usual.

"Good morning," she said.

"Ah... good morning," said Hero, as if she was recovering from a daze, and said apologetically, "sorry to trouble you again."

"It's no trouble at all," said Broken Sword, sticking out her tongue. "No one would think so. And maybe after today, you'll be able to do it yourself."

Suddenly, Hero's eyes flashed a very complex look of tension, anticipation, fear, and excitement... After a while, she managed to control her emotions and forced herself to smile. "I don't know if I can—I have forgotten completely the feeling of walking, even if in a dream, I..." She bit her lip and continued, "I can only crawl forward."

"So you can learn from the beginning. It's not a big deal," said Broken Sword, pressing on her shoulder. "Even God's Punishment Witch can do it, and surely you can as well. Come, try to raise your legs."

Hero took a deep breath, opened the quilt, and saw two thin, branch-like legs exposed—they were different from a few months ago. Her legs which had been severed from the knees grew much longer, almost to the ankle position, and the ugly scars had also become smoother. They looked crumpled and different from normal legs and seemed as if they could snap off at any moment. But at least, they were much better than before.

This result was the joint effort made by the Witch Union.

At first, Nana could only recover minor wounds such as severed fingers, and the regrowth of the whole limb could not be achieved until the four witches joined the Witch Union. Broken Sword followed the instructions of His Majesty Roland to complement Nana with her strengthening ability and achieved a breakthrough—holding a sword which Broken Sword transformed into, Nana's healing ability had been fully upgraded, and even a hunting dog with broken feet could grow new claws.

This new discovery brought a ray of hope to Hero's recovery.

However, the test that started later was not that easy.

First of all, Nana's healing effect only took effect on the wound, and Hero's broken leg had already healed. If they wanted to recover her legs, they had to create new wounds in them. Secondly, even with Broken Sword's magic, treatment could only last for dozens of minutes, which meant that the recovery process had to be carried out in several stages. The combination of these two points posed a formidable challenge to both the healer and the patient.

Hero had to repeatedly suffer the pains of wounds in her broken legs, and Nana had to cut her legs several times to make them grow. This treatment program was problematic from the beginning.

Fortunately, Lady Wendy noticed this problem and mobilized the entire Witch Union.

Broken Sword realized for the first time that they called each other sisters and this was not just a term, but they felt like a family from the bottom of their hearts. Though the four of them came from the Kingdom of Wolfheart, and joined Neverwinter not too long ago, they were not stingy about their affections for each other.

Miss Leaf used a special plant called the sleeping fern to cultivate unconscious herbs that when consumed, one would not wake up for hours. Thus this helped to relieve Hero's suffering.

Cutting was carried out by Miss Anna. Under the sharp Blackfire, the formation of a new wound could be completed instantly, and Nana only needed to focus on her ability.

Finally, Marquess Spear Passi, the lord of a city, did not return immediately after the meeting at Fallen Dragon Ridge because of Hero. The previous treatments had been cautious—Nana's magical powers had been depleted every time to recover sections of legs which were as short as a half of a finger. Once her ability had been exhausted, the open wounds would have soon become lethal. Therefore, the recovering process had been extremely slow. With the help of Marquess Spear, recent treatments had made considerable progress.

If everything went smooth, Hero would regain her full feet after today.

Chapter 839: Hero's Tears

Broken Sword put on the protective socks for Hero, and carried her to the wheelchair. She gave Hero a simple wash and breakfast... Amy, her next door neighbor, also woke up. When everything was ready, they pushed the wheelchair and went to the hospital.

Hero was much more nervous than usual and hardly spoke along the way. Fortunately, Amy helped to make the atmosphere more lively, so that the tension would not affect Broken Sword.

As for Amy herself... probably optimism was her nature, so she could smile at any moment, even when she was fleeing to the Kingdom of Dawn—this always made Broken Sword envious.

It was almost 9:00 am when they arrived at the hospital. When they had just entered the courtyard, the three of them saw Lady Wendy waiting at the entrance.

No, not only Wendy, but there were also Scroll, Anna, Leaf, Mystery Moon and Lily... Almost all of the Witch Union members were gathered there waiting for their arrival.

Although she was not the patient, Broken Sword still felt a sudden surge of warmth. She even felt her eyes getting sour and tearing up.

There was a slight tremor in the wheelchair and she knew that Hero was becoming emotional.

"His Majesty and Marquess Spear have been waiting for you in the medical room," Wendy said with a smile, touching Hero's head. "Don't worry, you'll regain your freedom soon."

"His Majesty?" Broken Sword sounded surprised. "His Majesty Roland has come?"

"Who else could it be," exclaimed Mystery Moon, "only His Majesty could make Lily put down her microscope and the weird worms."

"Don't talk nonsense!" Lily shouted and tried to cover Mystery Moon's mouth.

This made the three chuckle, and eased their nervous mood a little.

Wendy shook her head reluctantly. "Let's not let His Majesty wait too long."

Broken Sword pushed the wheelchair into the medical room, and after saluting the king and the Marquess, carefully carried Hero to the bed.

Just as Hero was about to take the herb, Annie finally rushed over.

She grasped Hero's hand gently, just like in the past and said, "I'll be here until you wake up."

This sentence seemed to have an incredible magic, as Broken Sword saw the girl finally settle down on the bed.

On the long flight to the Kingdom of Dawn, it was Annie who had been busy taking care of these three girls that had no experience of the wild and had brought them safely there. In the process, they had all regarded Annie as the backbone, believing that as long as she was there, any problems could be solved.

Shortly after swallowing a pill, Hero fell asleep.

"Let's get started," Wendy said to Broken Sword.

She nodded and closed her eyes—in an instant, the five senses disappeared instantly, just as if they been thrown into the void. However, this feeling lasted only for a few moments, and soon she "watched" things around again—through the eyes of Miss Nana.

Her experience after exerting the ability was amazing, and she could even see herself as a short, thin "dagger," with vibrant, greenish soft lights flowing between the blade.

This willow-like dagger was a suggestion made by His Majesty. He said waving a sword in front of the bed was too weird, and it would be better if she could become a short dagger. He also gave this kind of weapon a weird name, a scalpel.

Suddenly, a surging magic burst into her body, and her sense of fullness made her start to hum. Of course, only the girl holding her could hear this slight moan.

"Still very uncomfortable?" Nana brought the scalpel in front of her.

"Much better than the previous ones," Broken Sword took a deep breath—though it was only her subconscious move. After all, the weapon did not breathe. "It doesn't matter. I can stand it. Feel free to use it."

This powerful magic Broken Sword felt came from Leaf when Spear Passi connected the two of them together. Fortunately, Miss Leaf's ability itself had the characteristics of vitality and moisture, so after adaptation it would not be too uncomfortable. This was unlike Anna's Blackfire, which was hard, sharp and cold, as if it were covered with steel needles. This, plus her magic capacity, was almost unbearable for Broken Sword.

Therefore, when working with witches, only a few cooperated with Miss Anna.

After becoming a blade, she could have a conscious connection with the user but also became faintly aware that the witch's magic and her own character were not unrelated. Most witches' temperament could always be felt from the fluctuation of magic. So it was very difficult to understand, how Anna who looked so approachable and smart, though she spoke very little, could give her such a feeling magically.

Anna removed Hero's socks, and her fingertips showed a dark, thin line, that bound her legs like a rope.

Broken Sword could not help but shiver.

She had seen it with her own eyes, that when necessary, this Blackfire was able to instantly melt the metal and burn it up. But for now it felt just like Anna's magical power, a hard and cold icy filament.

The black line soon vanished, and Broken Sword knew it had shrunk into a tiny black spot. In this shrinking process, in which the skin, blood vessels, and bones were neatly cut—because the cutting surface was too flat, so it took a while before a circle of bloodstains gradually emerged.

The sliced amputated limb was less than a finger thick, and Nana already stripped off the epidermis, driving the magic to wrap the wound.

Broken Sword has seen the next treatment many times.

Bloody red wounds began to grow forward under the old skin and grow out new pink skin. The magic of the two bodies also flew quickly, without a steady input from Leaf, they would soon be depleted.

About half an hour later, a complete pair of feet finally appeared in front of everyone.

Nana's energy also reached its limit, throwing off the scalpel. She was holding the bed and gasping with her forehead covered with fine sweat beads.

And Broken Sword was not much better. The whole process for her, was like constantly inflaming the internal organs. Even after the restoration of the original appearance, the whole body was still sore.

The little girl was brought by Wendy to the next room to take a break, but Broken Sword insisted on staying.

She wanted to be with Annie and Amy, to see Hero wake up for the first time.

...

After the sleeping fern's effects faded, Hero slowly opened her eyes.

"How are you feeling?" Wendy helped her sit up in bed, softly asking, "Can you feel them?"

She shook her head first, as if she wanted to throw the drowsiness out of her mind, then widened her eyes and stared at her own feet where there had only been bald broken legs with ugly scars, nothing else.

Everyone held their breath, and cast their gaze on the back of her foot. The medical room was silent for a moment.

Suddenly, her slender toe trembled slightly.

Broken Sword's heart also fluttered. She even thought it was her own illusion so she blinked and looked again.

The toes fluttered twice and like rusty scissors that had not moved for a long time, jerked and slowly bent.

Her uneasy heart finally felt assured and she just wanted to cheer. But she saw Hero's eyes flash two drops of tears. She was stunned, as even during the most difficult period, she had never seen Hero shed a tear.

"Than..." Hero swallowed as soon as she opened her mouth, and for a long time failed to complete her sentence, but all the people present understood her meaning. "Thanks... thank..."

Annie leaned over and Hero burst into tears in Annie's arms.

Chapter 840: Black Blood

After Roland returned to the castle, Roland still could not feel peace in his heart. As the saying goes, people would shed tears of delight. But in his view, Hero cried not only out of delight but it was also a way to pour out all her suppressed emotions after suffering years of unfair treatment, pain, and false accusations.

In other words, the fact she put on a tough look did not necessarily mean that she did not feel pains. It was rather a mask underneath she hid all her true feelings. It was not an abnormal reaction for a girl who had just come of age before the misfortunes had weighed upon her. She had done very well in being strong and hopeful.

The treatment turned out successfully, and she regained a pair of normal feet. After being unable to walk for such a long time, it might take a while for her to control her feet again. However, since she could feel her new feet after the treatment, her feet nerve must have been well connected with her spinal nerve. With rehabilitation, she would be able to walk again sooner or later.

This treatment had also helped Roland to further confirm Broken Sword's ability—to increase the witch's "magic power limit".

Every witch had her power limit. Take Hummingbird's ability for an example. There were limits to the volumes of the objects of which she reduced weights, the lasting power of her magic and the extent of weight reduction. Once she passed one of the limits, the consumption of her magic power would multiply. It was like a rising index which could not go far beyond its normal value. To think it in another way, Hummingbird was unable to turn a huge mountain into something as light as a feather, nor could maintain her power effective forever. It would probably require an unimaginable amount of magic power to achieve that.

The same applied to Nana. The magic power she needed to regrow the limbs was far beyond her magic power limit. That was why she could replant broken fingers but was unable to regrow limbs, not even with Leaf's help.

Broken Sword's ability helped increase such limits so that something that had been impossible became nearly possible. With Broken Sword's help, the witch did not have to consume a considerable amount of magic power at a time but they only needed to apply their ability several times.

From the drawer, Roland pulled out a stash of Wendy's reports that recorded the test results when Broken Sword worked with other witches and spread them on the desk.

The result showed that most witches' abilities sharply strengthened with the help of Broken Sword. The heightened limit enabled them to enhance the effectiveness of their work. For example, the Dawn I enchanted by Mystery Moon would work longer, from the previous five days to the current two weeks. The improvement was highly precious for Neverwinter, for the city was not in a position to generate electricity on a mass scale at present. After all, as the number of plants grew, the power supply for lighting was hitting a bottleneck.

Also, the consolidation effect enchanted by Candle could maintain longer with the Broken Sword's support, which was quite beneficial to the increase in service life of machine tools as well as the advancement the processing level. Now that so many green workers were sent to the plants, it was no surprise to see them break a dozen of boring cutters or several machines every day if Candle did not help.

In addition, Broken Sword also offered significant assistance to witches like Soraya, Agatha, Lucia, Paper, etc. who worked in the plants. Thanks to those witches, the industrial development in Neverwinter was still phenomenal even without a well-established regulatory agency and sufficient labors. Without the witches, there would be more accidents and breakdowns of the system due to the dangerous and primitive production methods. Now with Broken Sword joining in, the production process would be safer and more efficient.

Roland concluded his report with his prediction that Broken Sword would be one of the busiest witches in Neverwinter.

In the afternoon, his guard Sean entered his office.

"Your Majesty, the Minister of Chemical Industry, Sir Kyle, hopes you can pay a visit to Lab Four. He said that there has been some progress in what you asked for."

"Oh?" Rowland's eyes brightened. "Rearrange my schedule. I'll be there immediately."

"Yes, Your Majesty."

Roland, escorted by guards, arrived at Lab Four.

With the establishment of the acid plant and the nitration plant, the humble bungalows, which had been originally constructed as small workshops for both experiments and production, had become the veritable research center of Neverwinter. Now near the Redwater River, walls had been set up to separate the buildings. The research center was now guarded, equipped with a logistics team, and even the interior had been renovated. The outer wall of the building was repainted in a cream color, looking magnificent and grand.

Kyle Sichi did not show up at the gate of the building of Lab Four to greet Roland. Only the vice minister Chavez stood there, looking a little embarrassed, but Roland did not take it as an offense. He had known the Chief Alchemist a long time ago and was aware of what kind of person he was, so he just waved his hand and entered the building without a word.

Kyle was standing before a long lab table, his eyes glued to the liquid in the condenser pipe as it trickled down the beaker. The amber liquid was transparent, giving off an old and familiar smell. There were some more beakers around it, in which there were liquids of different shades of colors.

Roland could not help drawing a deep breath.

It had been a long time since he smelled the scent of gasoline.

Certainly, gasoline was an inappropriate name for this crude product that was definitely incomparable to the widely used fuel in the modern world, although they did have the same scent. Roland still had a long way to go before it became a steady energy supply.

"Your Majesty." The Chief Alchemist, who just noticed Roland, placed his hand on his chest. "You're right. The Blackwater in the Southernmost Region indeed contains many liquid components. I've done some experiments according to the approaches described in 'Intermediate Chemistry' and found out that the components could be separated through distillation, but..." He paused to point at the beakers on the table. "If the sample is further distilled, the composition of each component present little difference."

"That means you did it right," Roland said carelessly, for he knew that they were all hydrocarbons, and Lucia would obtain the same result if she did the experiment. "Did you dig out something else?"

"The components are all combustible, and the upper layer of the liquids obtained from the distillation are more volatile in nature, like this one..." Kyle picked up the beaker with the amber liquid and slightly shook it. "It's like an explosion when it's ignited! Your Majesty, are you planning to make a more powerful explosive out of it?"

Roland chuckled as he gazed at the animated old alchemist, who, in his opinion, had finally improved and become a real chemist, because now, he could associate combustible materials with explosives.

In fact, the Blackwater was sampled in Endless Cape.

From the very beginning, he suspected it was the eruption of oil wells that caused the so-called underground fire to burn constantly. Oil belonged to a big family. As oil was the lifeline of the modern

industry and the essential material that had greatly influenced the World War, Roland had learned a lot about it. In fact, the difference between the oil sampled in the east and the west continents was so great, even greater than the skin colors of people in these two areas, that they could be considered as two entirely different liquids. The color of the oil varied dramatically, from golden, dark green to black, maroon, and even transparent. Some of the oil was as runny as water, while some thick and sticky; some could not be burned directly, while some highly inflammable...

In terms of their components, any mixture of hydrocarbons consisting of hydrogen and carbon could be taken as a kind of oil.

So, it was not strange to classify Blackwater as oil.

In other words, it did not matter whether Blackwater was similar to the oil in the modern world, as long as they could obtain combustible oil from it. After all, even people in the modern world had not been able to completely figure out where the oil came from, neither had they completed a thorough research on all the members of the oil family. Roland had heard people proclaim that oil would be used up in 50 years when he had been young, but it turned out that the reserves of the new oil fields discovered every year grew much faster than the consumption of the oil. Moreover, the summation of all the reserves of discovered oil fields had far exceeded the amount of the oil calculated based on the biotransformation hypothesis.