

## Witch 851

### Chapter 851: An Invitation from the Neverwinter Exploration Group

Lorgar found that this wild, ugly flying monster who had hairless wings and terrifying strength sounded somewhat familiar.

"Wait, doesn't it sound like the white pigeon who's very close to Ashes?" The Wolf Girl thought. A fierce image of the bird she had imagined flashed across her mind again.

"Maggie?" The name slipped out of her mouth before she realized.

"The wolf can actually speak, cool!" The monster gave out a strange cry and hurriedly retreated many steps with its eyes widely open. Seeing this, the Wolf Girl froze in the place, unable to decide whether she should spring at it. She did not know why Maggie launched this sneak attack at her but still thought this incident was a good opportunity to challenge Maggie. However, the panicked monster's actions made her think that Maggie was the one being ambushed.

"It's a witch, idiot." A crisp, immature voice suddenly came from the monster's head. "Who're you? How do you know us?"

Lorgar looked up. She had to slightly narrow her eyes to look hard and found another witch floating in the air with the sun behind her. In the glaring sunshine, the Wolf Girl could only vaguely see her short blond hair flying in the wind and a weapon reflecting silver light in her hand.

Lorgar was surprised that this little girl seemed to have a lot of fighting experience. This technique of using dazzling sunlight to hurt an opponent's eyes was not very easy to master.

Knowing that these witches did not come to challenge her, Lorgar let herself relax. She liked challenges, but she did not want to pester her opponents. Besides, she still remembered what Ashes had said about Maggie, "All the people who challenged her could not get rid of bad luck". With this in mind, she decided to avoid this trouble when she was strengthening her fighting capacity alone.

She dropped the pack that was in her mouth and transformed back into her human form. "I'm Lorgar Burnflame from the Desert. I came here with Ashes and Andrea. Ashes mentioned you on the way, Maggie."

"Ah, I remember." The big monster shrank in the blink of an eye and turned into a little girl whose height was only up to her waist but had long white hair almost touching the ground. "I've met her when I went to pick up Ashes. Cool!"

"Didn't Ashes tell you anything about me?" The blond little girl grumbled.

"You're..."

"Lightning, the greatest explorer in the Western Region, no, in the entire Kingdom of Graycastle!" With these words, she plunged down and landed in front of the Wolf Girl. "You've got to remember it!"

"Coo... why did you take off your clothes?" Maggie curiously looked at the Wolf Girl's chest and then touched her own. "Is that something you can conjure up? Coo!"

Lightning gave Maggie a knock on the head. "Stop staring at her. That's just individual differences."

Lorgar put on her coat. "So why did you attack me?"

Lightning stopped being so confident and seemed even a little embarrassed. "I thought you were a mutated snowwolf. It's our job to keep watch on the northeast, eliminate wandering demonic beasts in the Barbarian Land, and bring fresh preys back to the castle."

"And stealing birds' eggs from their nests, picking honeycombs, and roasting food in the wilderness!"

"Those aren't our work!" Lightning instantly interrupted Maggie. "In short, there's almost no one in this area, plus the Months of Demons just ended, so..."

"I see." Lorgar nodded. She accepted this explanation since she had repeatedly heard that the border regions of northern kingdoms would become very dangerous during Months of Demons every year. After the fight against the Four-winged Eagle, Ashes had also told her many things about hybrid demonic beasts. It was sensible that these witches up in the sky had mistaken the big Desert Wolf she had transformed into as a wolf demonic hybrid.

"What about you?" the little girl asked. "This is the Barbarian Land. Many demonic beasts wander this place and something even more terrible may also hide here. What do you want to do out here alone?"

"Something more terrible... Do you mean demons?" Lorgar calmly said. "If so, I think I've come to the right place."

"You know about the demons? Coo."

"I'm looking for an abandoned city. I heard the demons have appeared there." She paused for a moment. "I want to hunt them."

Lightning was stunned for a moment and then looked at Lorgar with a strange facial expression as if she was trying hard to stop herself from laughing out. "Who told you that?"

"Is there anything wrong?" Lorgar asked.

"Demons did appear in Tacqilla, but it was over 400 years ago." Lightning grinned. "Of course, they may return at any time. That's why we patrol this area. But if you really want to go to the abandoned city, you'll have to run for seven or eight days. More importantly, the Barbarian Land is too large. Once you head in a wrong direction, you'll never see the city. You have to know that this place is originally called the Fertile Plains and it's larger than the entire Kingdom of Graycastle... no, even larger than the Four Kingdoms combined."

"Really?" The Wolf Girl could not help but frown. She did not worry about the long distance since she had once traveled in the wilderness for two consecutive months to practice her fighting skills. She did not worry about the time either due to being a seasoned hunter. She had enough patience to wait for the demons. In fact, she really hoped to live in the wild for some time as she would never spend her gold royals unconsciously here. However, failing to find the abandoned city was totally unacceptable for her.

"Yes, but I admire your courage and adventurous spirit!" Lightning stood with her arms bent. "You're brave enough to begin an exploration based on limited information. That means you've got the potential to become a good explorer. I don't know why you refused to join the Witch Union, but you can join the Neverwinter Exploration Group. What do you think? Do you want to explore this continent wrapped in mist together with us?"

"And to join our barbecue!" Maggie cheerfully raised her hands.

"No, thanks." Lorgar could not help but sigh in her heart, feeling that things had deviated from her expectations. For example, Maggie who looked as fierce as the Four-winged Eagle, turned out to be an immature little girl instead of a qualified warrior. Lorgar came here to challenge her own limits and climb the peak of fighting skills, not to play with some child. She decided to search for the city on her own and considered this as another challenge arranged by the Three Gods.

When she was about to leave, Lightning stopped her. "Wait. I'll take you to the Taquila ruins...if you join the Neverwinter Exploration Group."

"Have you been there?" Lorgar's ears erected at once.

"Of course, we're the only ones who've touched its city wall in over 400 years," Lightning proudly announced, "and I know much about demons and have even fought a very powerful Senior Demon. This will be unique information for you. Think about it."

#### Chapter 852: A Like-minded Friend

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When the sun was setting, the shadow of the Impassable Mountain Range started to grow gradually and it seemed as if the mountain range itself was growing constantly. In the end, the shadow together with the sky mixed in darkness which engulfed the predominantly brown land that was dotted with some green areas.

This was the first time that Lorgar saw such a scene. When flying in the sky, a huge monster like Maggie could only cast a small shadow on the ground. The darkness seemed to approach slowly, but they just could not get rid of it no matter how fast they flew.

The pure vastness of the Barbarian Land filled her with awe.

Lightning moved closer and whistled. "Let's go down. We're here."

"Ow!"

When the beast was going down, the Wolf Girl on its back felt as if she was about to float up in mid-air. This feeling frightened her. She could not help but firmly grasp the beast's skin.

Before long, the three witches successfully landed on a hillside.

"This is..."

"Our Exploration Group's secret base." Lightning waved at Lorgar. "Come with me."

The little girl suddenly disappeared behind a big tree stump. The Wolf Girl came up and found that the stump turned out to be hollow. It had a small door facing the steep slope and behind the door, she was surprised to see that there was a pile of firewood and some simple stone chairs inside.

"It'll take two days to fly to Taquila. We'll spend the night here and continue our journey early tomorrow morning." Lightning opened the window opposite to the door to let the air flow. Most of the decaying smell inside the stump instantly disappeared. "Now it's our barbecue time. Wait to try my yummy toast."

"Did you... build this place?" Lorgar curiously looked around. She had accepted Lightning's invitation and joined the so-called Neverwinter Exploration Group because the little girl had promised to bring her to the abandoned city and to provide her further information about demons, which precisely peaked her curiosity. After all, the Wolf Girl believed that the more she knew about her opponents, the easier it would be to defeat them. She had to force herself to leave the city knowing little about demons and the wilderness, but now as she finally met a reliable source of intelligence, she decided to make some "sacrifices" to keep it.

She felt it was not a big deal to spend some time playing with these two little girls.

"I didn't build it. I just found a place created by nature." Lightning quickly made a fire, lighting up the room inside the stump. "It was eaten hollow by some worms and the upper part of it collapsed during a storm. Its branches and leaves happened to form a natural roof. As for the window and door, they were cut out by Maggie. We've many bases like this in the Barbarian Land. An observant explorer is always able to spot a shelter in the wild."

Upon hearing her reply, Lorgar felt this little girl was quite trustworthy.

In the flickering firelight, she noticed that there were bolts behind the shabby door and window that could be locked to ensure safety. She also saw that a part of the roof above the open fireplace could be opened for venting smoke and this outlet could obviously act as a double for an escape hatch in the event of an emergency. All the firewood was shelved in higher places to avoid being soaked in water and two ditches were dug out in the ground to ensure good drainage. Although there was a decaying smell in the room, it was not humid.

She noticed many other similar details in this room and it did not seem like these arrangements were made by a little child.

She started to doubt whether she had underestimated this exploration group.

Maggie took out some jerky from her backpack and cooked it over the bonfire while humming a tuneless melody. Lightning picked out many condiment cans which had been wrapped around her waist and evenly sprinkled them on the surface of the jerky. The smooth cooperation between them suggested that this was not their first time to do such a thing together.

Soon, a tempting scent spread throughout the stump.

"Try it." Lightning handed some roast meat to Lorgar.

Lorgar grabbed it and, after a little hesitation, slowly put it into her mouth.

Extremely rich layers of flavor immediately filled her mouth. It was warm and oily, and fresh and salty because of the spices being used. The meat was tender inside and it had a crispy crust. It was hard for the Wolf Girl to believe that something cooked in the wild could be as delicious as the food in the finest feast of the Iron Sand City.

She could not help but happily wag her tail and then breathed out the aroma lingering in her throat. "So...So yummy..."

"Of course, it's not common meat, cool!" said Maggie proudly. "It's the meat of a giant lake frog in the Icespring of the Great Snow Mountain. I made a huge effort to catch it! Each of its legs is the size of Lightning. It's so big that we can only preserve it and eat it slowly."

The Wolf Girl was stunned. "Lake frog? What's that? Is it really edible?"

"Don't worry. We explorers exist to explore unknown secrets and different food is one of them," said the little girl, as if she had seen through Lorgar's mind.

The Wolf Girl bit her lips but failed to close her mouth in the end. She closed her eyes and swallowed the remaining meat.

After enjoying the aftertaste in her mouth, she looked at Lightning and asked, "Are there only two members of this Neverwinter Exploration Group?"

"Currently, there are three," the little girl corrected.

"What about the other witches in the Witch Union? Why do you want me to join this group?" After thinking, Princess Lorgar still chose to be blunt. "I came to the Western Region to challenge strong opponents and improve my skills. Exploring the unknown doesn't intrigue me..."

Lightning fell silent for a while, which was rare for her. "That's because the other witches seldom leave Neverwinter. Even if some of them want to do so, few of them would like to wander in the wild. As compared to exploration, they've more important things to do... such as staying in factories to produce machines. My father said that one person alone could hardly complete a real adventure so I've got to build my own team to become a great explorer. You're the only witch we've met in the Barbarian Land."

Lorgar suddenly realized that this little girl was serious about the exploration group. This was not just a passing fancy for her but a dream she cherished. Judging from her lonely tone, the Wolf Girl could tell that most people just considered Lightning's plan as a childish game instead of something serious. This was similar to what she had thought in the first place.

For a moment, Lorgar saw herself in this little girl. Before she had won all those challenges and become a real warrior, few people had been able to understand her passion and dedication toward fighting since, even in the Iron Sand City, female warriors were rare.

With this thought in mind, the Wolf Girl slightly sighed and pretended to be casual. "Since I'm a member of the exploration group now, what should I do next?"

Hearing this, Lightning's eyes lit up. She fished out a parchment map in her pocket and gave it to Lorgar. "The areas that we've not yet explored are all marked on this map. If you happen to step into these

areas, please draw the things you discover on this map, such as bird's nests, honeycombs, wolf caves, etc. Anything will do."

"But you can't enjoy them alone, which is the most important rule of our exploration group. You've got to wait until we come back and we'll eat them together!" interrupted Maggie.

Lorgar opened the map and saw many bizarre drawings on it, with quite a few notes. For example, two chicken drumsticks and four eggs were drawn in a spot named eagle nest. Seeing this, the Wolf Girl did not know whether to laugh or cry.

Why do I feel that I've been deceived?

She put the map away. "Ahem... well, I got it, but what do you mean by 'come back'... Are you leaving for Neverwinter?"

"His Majesty Roland is about to send troops to the Eastern Region and Hermes. At that time, we'll probably leave with the First Army. It'll take at least a few months before we come back. After all, His Majesty has to depend on us if he wants to investigate the enemy's situation or carry out shooting corrections for the cannons." Lightning patted her chest. "When we're away, you'll be in charge of the exploration job in the Barbarian Land."

Chapter 853: Preparing for the Battle

After a night's sleep, the three witches set out on their journey again. After a half-day flight, Lorgar finally saw the "Abandoned City".

She could not help but hold her breath.

The city was much larger than she had imagined!

She saw a vast expanse of green land below and some damaged brown walls standing down there. Lightning had told her this city had been abandoned over 400 years ago, but even now, Lorgar could still discern the incomplete sections of the city walls.

She found that the ruins of this city covered an area that was five or six times larger than Iron Sand City and was big enough for over 100,000 people to live in. Looking at its fragmented wreckage, she could still sense its greatness. Based on the rule that each person in the city needed to be supported by 10 people in the surrounding towns and villages, she was surprised to find that there might have been nearly 1,000,000 people living in this wild land.

This is incredible!

How did a kingdom that built such a large city lose to the demons in the end?

Lorgar suddenly recalled what His Majesty had told her. "The Battle of Divine Will isn't a clash between two tribes, but a comprehensive war that determines which civilization can survive." At the time, she had been irritated hearing it, but now she somehow understood. At this moment, she now believed that the king had not been trying to intimidate her when he had said "I don't want to send you to die."

All of a sudden, she felt much better.

When Lightning gestured, they started to lower their height. In the end, they landed on a relatively complete section of the city wall.

The top of the wall, though damaged, was still as wide as 20 plus steps which was wide enough for two four-wheeled carriages to travel side by side. In the walls covered by moss and vines, they saw a few round holes and wondered how much force was required to create such damage to these huge stone walls.

The little girl came over and said, "You may know this already, but this city was the last line of defense for the witch empire. Unfortunately, they failed to resist the demons' attack in the end."

Does this mean that the over 400-year-old witches mentioned by Ashes are actually survivors of this witch empire? Did the Four Kingdoms and the church that treated the witches as heretics all rise after the failure of those witches?

The Wolf Girl suppressed these questions since she believed that the ones who knew the story must have been deliberately blocking this information. She had never heard anything related to it from the traveling traders and even the residents of Neverwinter seemed to know nothing about it. She thought she had better not get to the bottom of it as she was not a member of the Witch Union.

She opened the map Lightning had given her yesterday. "Is Taquila located on the edge of your patrol area? If demons want to attack Neverwinter, which direction will they usually come from?"

"They'll come from anywhere to the west of the ruins, but it's extremely dangerous for us to go that deep into the Barbarian Land even though we can fly."

The Wolf Girl asked, "Why?"

Maggie replied, "It's because of the mist. Sometimes even the sky will turn red."

"What's... that?" Lorgar frowned.

"It's a life-support thing for demons, just like the air we breathe." Lightning looked to the northwest.

"Today's a nice day, so the sky looks blue. But if it's rainy or cloudy, especially when dark clouds gathering in the sky, we'll clearly see the red mist on the horizon when we're high up in the sky. This mist is toxic to witches. Even if we manage not to inhale any of it, we may still get badly hurt simply by touching it. Since we don't know how far it can reach, we seldom cross Taquila to go further west."

After that, the little girl outlined some weak points of demons.

"I see." The Wolf Girls wiggled her ears. "As long as I can pull out the pipes behind them, they'll become weak and vulnerable."

Lightning added, "But it's not easy to do so. Just like the Senior Demon I told you about last night, it has almost no flaws in a fight. If you really meet the enemy, you'd better retreat immediately and inform His Majesty, Roland."

"Don't worry. I know how to deal with it properly."

Lorgar patted her own chest, full of fighting spirit.

Demons are tough opponents, but that's what makes fighting stimulating and rewarding. Besides, being invincible as a group on the battlefield doesn't necessarily mean that they're strong as individuals. I can seize a chance to hunt a solitary demon and even if no demons appear on my journey, I can still fight the hybrid demonic beasts.

She had already spotted several big demonic beasts when she was on Maggie's back flying up in the sky. She looked out at the uninhabited wildland, feeling excited about her journey again.

The road she had dreamed about had become much clearer now. It extended further, with the sand replaced by green areas.

She believed that she was going to stay here for a long time.

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Every day, Roland had one or two meetings to attend since he had issued the order to go out to battle. From the battle plan to the logistics arrangements, everything needed his approval. He had enjoyed this tingling feeling of absolute power at first, but he soon got overwhelmed by the heavy workload as he got deeper into this preparation process.

Now that Neverwinter managed more than just a city, a whole team had to work on plans that had previously been made by one person. After discussing such trivial matters everyday, Roland gradually came to understand and even sympathize with those "brainless leaders" in the history, who did not like to deal with state affairs. Imagine that you have to listen to some people nagging about things that you neither remember nor understand every day. You would naturally get annoyed with it. Had Scroll not integrated and filtered the numbers in the reports for him, he would have also preferred to be a distant leader.

After all, he had been just a mechanical engineer before traveling into this world.

As compared to the complicated logistics arrangements, he paid more attention to the battle plan proposed by the Ministry of Defense.

The First Army planned to concentrate all its fire on the Holy City of Hermes that was surrounded by tall and thick city walls. They made a plan based on their experience in the Great Snow Mountain and were going to prepare enough cannons and ammunition for this attack. It was a joint operation involving the First Army soldiers, witches and the Taquila survivors.

Roland had to admit that the Pearl of the Northern Region was indeed talented. In the plan, she put forward the concept of collaborative operation, such as utilizing the abilities of the witches and Taquila survivors to launch surprise raids in all directions. She suggested that by doing so, Neverwinter troops could quickly disrupt the defensive formation of the enemy and could attack them from both the sky and the ground. Though many of her ideas were not yet prepared enough, they were certainly impressive ones to have in this era.

Roland believed that it was a wise decision to put her in the Ministry of Defense.



To successfully implement this plan, he had to make sure that the God's Punishment Witches of Taquila would willingly obey orders rather than doing whatever they wanted regardless of the commands.

This was the first problem he needed to solve while everyone was busy preparing for the battle.

The solution was very simple.

For instance, he could invite all the survivors who were going to participate in the upcoming battle to enter his Dream World.

#### Chapter 854: An Unexpected Invitation in the Dream World

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They say that practice makes perfect and Roland was inclined to agree. He was now very adept at getting into the Dream World. As long as he thought of something specific from the Dream World with his eyes closed, he could quickly activate the huge beam of light and then wake naturally up in the morning of that world.

However, this time, he was woken up by cellphone's ringtone.

Fortunately, this was not really sleeping and so he didn't really feel tired. He sprang up and picked up the phone on the bedside table. To his great surprise, it was Garcia.

"Hey, do you know what time is it?"

"It's 6:30 in the morning, which is not too early," Garcia interrupted, "and how do I know whether you'll have some other relative who suddenly came to visit?"

The corner of his mouth twisted, knowing that she was still sore about being stood up by him last time. "Uhm... is there anything I can do for you?"

"Didn't you always want to know what the Erosion is? The Association has set a time for new members to visit this afternoon. After you finish your breakfast, come to Room 0827."

"Didn't you say it's in the afternoon?"

"You're not the only new member. It takes time for us to go join the other new members from the other districts." She raised her voice. "What? Are you going out with some relative again today?"

"Yes, and more than one," he replied in his heart but did not dare to speak it out loud otherwise she would definitely come to stand in his doorway. More importantly, he was indeed very curious about the "Erosion", so he answered, "Oh, I see, but I slept late last night, so... you know, I don't smell very nice. Let me take a shower first. Sorry to keep you waiting."

"..." She was silent, but he somehow still felt her contempt for him. "Please be quick!" she shouted and then hung up the phone.

Now he had to hurry up.

He put on his clothes, walked into the living room, and found Zero busy frying eggs in the kitchen. She skillfully used the spatula in her hand, not looking like a junior high school girl at all.

"Good morning," he said, "I'm going out now, but I'll be back very soon."

She revealed a suspicious expression. "Uncle, are you going to do your morning exercise?"

"Well, yes..." he replied casually, "by the way, there's a staff meeting in the afternoon. I may come home late today so don't wait for me to have dinner."

"Got it," the little girl pouted.

Outside the apartment building, the street was bustling again. Wisps of steam were coming out of the rice noodle restaurants and fried bread sticks were sizzling in the work at the stall. There was also broadcast sounds and traders' peddling. It was late autumn and most people wore thick clothes, however, some elderly people, who wore only short-sleeved shirts and sweatpants, kept practicing in the morning. They were running as fast as young men around the apartment building.

Roland walked into an alley not far from the apartment building and stopped in front of a closed shop. On the door, there was an eye-catching leasing advertisement with a big word "rented" written on it.

He took out a key and opened the side door.

Inside the shop, more than 20 witches simultaneously knelt to him saying, "Your Majesty!"

For a moment, he felt as if he had returned to Neverwinter.

Walking into this shop was like entering another world for him.

"Welcome to the Dreamland," he nodded and said.

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"Do you mean to say that we have a special task today?" On the second floor of the shop, Phyllis, Faldi, Ling and Dawnen were waiting for him to give further orders. As the first batch of pioneers entering this Dreamland, they had known something about this world and would serve as guides for the rest of the Taquila survivors here. They could tell them how to enjoy the life here and could instruct them how to hunt Fallen Evils, which reduced the burden on Roland.

This store was one of his rewards for the last hunting trip and he had hired an agent to rent this place. Compared to the warehouse before, it was much more spacious and private.

He told them about the Martialist Association's invitation. "According to Garcia, the association is planning to tell the new members the inside story. We'll be taken to the association's headquarters whose location has remained a secret so I want to take this chance to find out the base where they store the Force of Nature. I need your help."

"Let my bug stay with you." Faldi summoned her Magic Bug Nest and picked a bug. "So I can know where you are all the time."

After he agreed, the witch placed the beetle on his collar. It quickly climbed into his long hair to hide. Though he could clearly feel a thing on his neck, he still looked the same from the outside.

He suppressed the feeling of discomfort and turned his head to look at another two witches. "Phyllis and Ling, please come with me. Do you remember how to take a taxi?"

Phyllis nodded. "Wave to stop a taxi and tell the driver to follow the car in the front. Then pay him when we arrive."

"Don't chat with the taxi driver and no matter what he asks, we'll just remain silent." Ling added, patting her chest, "Rest assured, Your Majesty, we remember it clearly!"

"Good," said Roland, "when you arrive, let Ling try to sneak into the headquarters first. Although there's no God's Stone of Retaliation in this world, the Martialist Association may have some other methods to affect your magic power. If you can't break in, don't force yourselves. Your most important task is to keep yourselves hidden. Got it?"

"Yes, Your Majesty," the three witches replied simultaneously.

"So... Your Majesty, what about me?" Dawnen pointed to herself while eagerly looking at him.

"You stay here and take care of the other Taquila witches." He took out ten 100 ¥ bills from his wallet and gave them to her. "Here's the money for takeouts, including breakfast, lunch and dinner. Let's postpone the entertainment plans until tomorrow. "

"What... But I'm also very good at sneaking into places." Dawnen was disappointed.

"That's why you have to stay here. If something unexpected happens, you're the only one who can lead the witches to leave this place without being noticed." He patted her shoulder. "Of course, if you successfully take care of everyone here today, I'll choose a day to take you to a movie theater."

"I... got it." When she heard this special reward, she suddenly cheered up. "Please leave it to me."

He had taught the four witches how to order take out food and all the quick learners had already mastered this skill. He believed that as long as Dawnen was here, they would be alright.

Now he was well prepared for his trip to the headquarters of the Martialist Association.

#### Chapter 855: Power and Responsibility

After making all the arrangements for the trip, Roland rushed back to the apartment building as fast as he could. Unfortunately, he underestimated Garcia's diligence.

In the corridor, he saw a familiar figure leaning against the wall near Room 0825 while talking on the phone and watching the bustle downstairs. She wore a gray and white T-shirt, loose black pants, and ankle-high skate shoes, looking both youthful and full of energy. If he had never known her, he would have thought of her as a girl-next-door type of woman, a lively and cheerful character often seen on TV.

Judging from her face, she was still a little angry but not cold and harsh as the Garcia he remembered. He could not deny that Princess Garcia Wimbledon, Queen of Clearwater, looked surprisingly good in this sports outfit.

When he came close to the door of the room, she saw him. "Alright, I've got something else to do. I'm hanging up and don't call me back if it's only to try to persuade me."

"Is the Clover group calling you again about the demolition matter?" He pretended to be casual and asked.

"It has nothing to do with you." She put away the phone, her expression skeptical. "Where have you been? Didn't you say that you wanted to take a shower?"

"Do you know how many ways there are to get rid of an odor? One is cleaning, another one is covering it with a new odor." He talked nonsense while keeping a straight face. "The tenant, that little girl living with me, needed to use the bathroom. She didn't want to be late for school so I really couldn't fight with her. I thought I could get some sweat to cover my smell so I went running outside." "But, surprisingly, this body just doesn't sweat very much. Now I see why you martialists always look neat and clean. Well, this isn't important at all. Anyhow, I didn't sneak away. You see that I'm standing right in front of you now, don't you?"

"..." Garcia stared at him for a long time before opening her mouth. "I don't want to interfere with your private life, but it's not good to indulge yourself. More importantly... it's also about education."

"What?" Roland was stunned.

"I mean those girls who came out of your apartment... Why can't you get things done somewhere else? Why do you have to bring them home? Have you already forgotten that there's a little girl in your home," said Garcia, frowning, "

He almost choked upon hearing such words. He had deliberately arranged the Taquila witches to cut off their consciousness and get into the Dreamland once Zero had left for school, but he had never expected what the other residents would have thought about these women coming out of his home. Garcia had the complete wrong idea based on what she had seen.

"It's true that some martialists will become less decent when they become famous. In the face of money and fame, a man will easily lose himself, but don't forget that we're fighting for this world and always have to maintain a high morale. Overindulgence will only make your movements slow..."

"Ahem, I got it." Feeling that she wanted to give him a moral education lecture, he immediately interrupted her. "We can talk about this matter later. Could you please let me change my clothes first? I don't want to be late for our visit."

She closed her mouth in displeasure and glared at him. "...Be quick."

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He dressed up by putting on his new suit. Under Zero's gaze, he put a fried egg into a sandwich bag to eat as breakfast and walked out of the apartment.

"You..." At the door, Garcia blinked at him.

"It's my first time visiting the headquarters and I thought that I should dress formally." Roland shrugged. "I'm a new member of the association and casual clothing seems disrespectful for such an occasion. What do you think?"

"Hah... whatever you want." She shook her head. "But to my surprise, you look... quite good in this suit."

"Of course, you get what you pay for. This trim custom-made suit cost me a lot of my 'robbery income'. After all, the clothes make the man. An ordinary-looking man would look great immediately after dressing up and, as an added benefit, I'm slim and have nice long gray hair. Back in the world where I lived before, people would believe that I'm an elf prince," he thought to himself.

They went downstairs together and waited outside the residential area. A large bus soon came to fetch them. He noticed that it did not have a number plate and all its windows were covered by black curtains. He could not see anything inside it.

"Get on the bus," Garcia whispered. He somehow felt that she looked much more serious now.

When he stepped onto the bus, he pretended to casually look back at the street side. He saw that Phyllis had already stopped a taxi.

When the door was closed, he found that it was surprisingly bright inside. All the lights along the aisle were turned on and quite a few people were sitting on the bus.

Most of them were dressed in various styles and looked like a group of performance artists. Only a few seemed like normal people, but they all were engrossed in their own affairs instead of greeting Garcia. He soon noticed that some guys, who obviously harbored ulterior motives, had fixed their eyes on him since he had gotten on the bus.

Garcia did not say anything. She held Roland's hand, which was very unusual, and walked with him directly to the back of the bus.

"Are they your colleagues?" he whispered to her when they sat down.

"The Martialist Association isn't a company." She rolled her eyes at him. "Most people in this bus are newly awakened people just like you. It's also the first time for me to meet them."

"So many of them?" He was a little surprised. He roughly counted and found there were over 20 people in this bus.

"Yes, there are quite a lot of them. The last time I went to the association, there were only five or six new members... but that's not surprising," she replied. "although ordinary people know nothing about the changes in the world, the ones awakened with the Force of Nature can still sense them. I've told you that not all the awakened ones choose to join us. The centrists aren't less than the association's martialists. Now, as the Erosion intensifies and the number of Fallen Evils rapidly grows, the situation has become more dangerous for the centrists. More of them are going to join our association in the future."

"So you mean most of them are wild martialists or self-training martialists?"

"You did find more appropriate words to describe them." She curled her mouth into a smile. "I guess so, but that's just between us. Don't call them that publicly. They don't like restrictions. That's why they refused to join the association. Gaining great strength will boost a person's ego, making him or her become arrogant. This not only hinders their progress but also gives them a very odd attitude."

"As for the odd attitude, I think I've already experienced it," he said casually.

"In the past, a conflict had happened where some wild... martialist joined the association and killed several martialists when they were performing a hunting job. In the end, the Defenders stood out to kill the wild martialist. You'd better ignore their provocations as the association will severely punish such behaviors."

"The wild martialists are that strong?"

"Yes, these people often get attacked by Fallen Evils and, compared to newly awakened ones, they're much more experienced in actual combats and are better in reacting quickly in emergency situations, but they're usually obsessed by worldly affairs. If you stop overindulging yourself and practice hard, you can rapidly improve yourself."

She sighed and continued. "The Force of Nature is a gift from the deities. It's an ability to protect ourselves rather than a tool to exploit others. If we fail to stop the Erosion, the entire world may cease to exist. Many awakened ones just enjoy the pleasures brought by their power, but completely forget their responsibility."

He found what she said sounded familiar... He thought for a moment and realized that perhaps this was also the reason that those witches, who had been aware of the harm caused by demons, established the Union 800 years ago.

Suddenly, it quieted down outside. The grating sounds made by the bus wheels rubbing against the road became deep and simple as if the bus was traveling alone in a spacious tunnel.

Half an hour later, the bus finally stopped.

Just when he thought that they had arrived, the bus started to shake slightly and he felt weightless all of a sudden.

The bus was sinking into the ground.

Chapter 856: Prism City

"This is..." Roland looked at Garcia.

"It's a lift," she proudly responded. "Wait a moment, soon you'll be able to see."

No long after she had finished talking, the light outside of the window turned from red to green and then the curtains were automatically lifted, revealing the view outside.

Roland immediately understood the reason for her pride. The bus was parked on a huge iron plate, surrounded by yellow and black warning signs painted on concrete walls with five or six metal orbits embedded in, which continuously issued a gear grinding sound.

They were traveling down a tunnel with each descending level marked by dazzling spotlights and huge number signs. Within a few minutes, they had descended more than 100 meters, but the numbers were still growing.

Seeing the continuously rotating orange alert lights in the outer edge of the iron plate, which was like a scene from a sci-fi movie, he suddenly felt that as compared to this sophisticated way of entering, his way to get into Third Border City was way too backward, which was still reliant on hemp ropes and steam engines.

His respect for an organization that could construct something like that was instantly increased by a few levels.

Without substantial economic and political power in the background, a bunch of martialists would never be able to construct something like that.

No wonder Garcia was so proud of it.

Even those strange tempered wild Awakened were stunned by the scene. They started discussing in the bus while looking out of the window, as if they wanted to explore how deep the place was actually hidden.

"This was actually a good move," Roland thought. The closed curtains before were probably meant to keep new people from knowing the specific location of the headquarters, but after entering the ground there was no such need anymore, so they could let everyone admire this spectacular project, which could also pose as proof of the association's power.

He was curious to see if Ling who was following them could find a chance to infiltrate.

When the number became 235, the iron plate finally stopped descending and many holes appeared on the wall. Then, the bus moved again and headed into one of them.

The trip was very short this time as they soon reached their destination.

Roland followed Garcia out of the bus and discovered that there was a wide underground square in front of him, being illuminated with dense headlights, almost as bright as daylight. If not for the previous part of the trip, it would have been hard to believe that he was deep underground. A sculpture was erected in the center of the square. At first glance, it looked like a big hand holding an irregular polyhedron. There were also several buses parked next to the statue. It seemed that they were not the only newcomers.

"Are these people from other cities?" Roland pointed at the crowd around the sculpture.

Garcia nodded in agreement, "the association owns many divisions, but it's only two Headquarters. In order to get into contact with the Erosion, one must come to these two places."

He was briefly stunned, "The erosion from the outside world... Can it be seen directly from here?"

Not only it can be seen, but you can also touch it—though you would never want to do that." Garcia rolled her eyes. "Did you think that we're just a cult which asks people to fight the evil? The purpose of visiting the headquarters is to show newcomers the real danger that the world is facing. Some things, unless seen by your own eyes, are impossible to believe them—disaster is close at hand."

Just then, the lights above them suddenly dimmed down and darkness suddenly came from all directions, making everyone's vision to focus on a small area in the center of the square. As though a

curtain was opened on stage, two bright beams of light fell from the dome, one shining on the sculpture and the other shining on a black dressed lady.

She was standing on a platform at one side of the square, looked around thirty years old, wearing a classic Martial Arts garment with her long black hair tied up on her head. One of her eyes seemed to have been damaged and was covered by an eye patch. The Force of Nature in the Dream World was not limited to gender, and it did not have the kind of effect that the magic power had in affecting the appearance. She looked no different than an ordinary person, not too tall, but with more of an imposing manner.

The woman waved at everyone and then said loudly, "Dear Awakened ones, good afternoon. I am Lan, Chief Disciple of the Rock's defender. Welcome to Prism City!"

"Prism... did she mean the polyhedron on the sculpture?" Roland thought and heard whispers coming from the wild martialists, who appeared to be quite dissatisfied with her words.

Before he could ask Garcia, Lan continued, "Of course, welcoming the new students was the responsibility of Defenders, but unfortunately, Sky City encountered some problems so my master and the other three defenders all left two days ago. In order to avoid wasting time, I'll be the one to welcome you all."

"I know that some of you awoke many years ago and can't be treated as real newcomers. However, the situation has changed drastically. Since you're willing to come here, it means you've approved the ability of the association and you should naturally put all the past temporarily behind you. Combating the Fallen Evil should be your priority now. The association doesn't care about your past identity and status, but only your future performance—the more critical the crisis is, the more the awakened should be united. If you don't accept the practice of the association you're still free to leave right now!"

While she was talking, the black dressed woman made a waving gesture, but no one in the square moved, and even the noisy discussions quieted down.

"This Chief Disciple is quite adept," Roland smirked. With the increase of the Fallen Evil, the endangered wild Awakened had no choice but to apply to join the Association. No matter who they were before, they could only follow this option now. The woman was aware of that, so deliberately acted as if giving them a choice, but in reality, gave them no choice at all.

Strength was an important criterion when persuading an opponent. Being the Martialist Association that could protect others, demonstrating their own strength would be the most effective way in this case.

Garcia looked at Roland with a perplexed expression for a while and said softly, "She's my master."

"What?" He was stunned. "Your master?"

"She's the senior that I mentioned the other day," Garcia sighed. "Unless you have to, try not to be around her too much. My master doesn't like irresponsible and not punctual people."

"Oh, so that was the case," Roland thought.

"Since you've all made your choice, then the association welcomes any new blood." Lan gazed upon the square and nodded with satisfaction. "I'm not going to say much. Nothing is more impressive than



personally experiencing it. Now, please come with me and see for yourselves the imminent crisis of the world—you'll soon realize that the Battle of Divine Will isn't far away from us! "

#### Chapter 857: The Nature Of the Erosion

Hearing those words, Roland could not help but tremble.

Why would there be Battle of Divine Will in the Dream World too?

He looked at Garcia but her expression didn't change at all as if she already knew or she didn't care about it.

Roland could only keep his doubts to himself and under the lights, followed the crowd towards the square.

Reaching there, he noticed that there were many passages embedded in the towering rock walls like the structure inside a honeycomb. Whether it was entering from the ground or transitioning between the aisles, people had to take elevators on the rails. Now that the square was not as bright as before and his sight got used to the darkness, he could see dozens of elevators going up and down like floating fireflies. They gave off a feeling of a futuristic city.

Even though this design was beautiful, it was extremely inconvenient to use. If it was built in the city center as a landmark it would be alright, but buried under the ground like this, who would be able to see it? And in case of a fire, power outages and other emergencies, it would even be hard to escape from here.

Of course, building the Headquarters underground was already irrational even when considering the aspect of preventing others to infiltrate or the necessity of keeping it a secret.

There must have been another reason to do that unless the Martialist Association had too much money to spare.

As they entered the aisle number 24, Roland realized that the ground he was standing on was actually a moving ladder and he only had to stand on it to keep moving.

Adopting such a design in an underground structure was actually quite shocking.

As if realizing his doubts, Garcia shrugged her shoulders. "There used to be a mine here, and we used the abandoned mine tunnels to built all the elevator aisles you see on the walls—but of course, part of them were newly excavated. This depends on the speed of the Erosion.

"The Erosion happened in the mine?"

"Not exactly but for now you can think of it as such."

"So the reason for building the Headquarters underground is to prevent the Erosion from developing?"

Garcia looked at him with a weird expression, "No, it's not to prevent the Erosion from developing but to guard against Awakened ones with an ulterior motive."

When she saw that he wanted to ask more, she shook her head and said, "You'll soon understand."

The passage soon led them into another hall, which looked a lot like a lecture hall, with descending levels, forming a podium at the bottom. The defensive measures here were obviously much better. There were martialists everywhere, wearing the same cloths, standing expressionless on either side of the hall and staring indifferently at the newcomers, showing no welcoming gestures.

"Aren't warriors supposed to be straightforward and passionate? With an attitude like that towards the newly awakened ones, no wonder people weren't willing to join them," Roland thought.

Once everyone has sat down, the Chief Disciple Lan stood up on the podium.

Without saying anything, she opened a curtain on stage, exposing the bottom of a huge glass chest.

Roland couldn't help but frown.

A dark red "crystal" was placed inside the chest. It seemed weightless as it floated midair. It reminded him of Taquila's magic core. But the Force of Nature in the Dream World was not displaying ever-changing effects like the magic power. Additionally, this crystal did not seem to be realistic. It actually looked like a bad sample of a 3D-model. But seeing Lan's serious expression, it didn't look like she was joking.

"This is..."

"Erosion," Garcia said with a deep voice, "or actually a 'loophole'".

"What?" Roland was stunned.

"The one on stage is just a small part of it," she sighed, "Our world is becoming riddled with holes. That's the essence of Erosion."

"I think some of you may have already guessed or felt it—" Lan gazed through the audience and said word by word. "An evil force has entered our world. It allows the Fallen evil to multiply in numbers quickly, posing a serious threat to the safety of the awakened ones. But as far as I am concerned, this notion is incorrect. It was never an evil force, but rather an... overlay from another world. "

The audience suddenly uproared.

"What do you mean? Can you elaborate?"

"What's this other world?"

"When did the Martialist Association become an academy of science?"

"So what're the Fallen Evils, aliens?"

In sharp contrast with the real newcomers, those who had awakened the Force of Nature long ago started yelling loudly, without respect to the Chief Disciple.

"Quiet, " Lan said unmoved, "I'll answer your questions after the following demonstration."

As she said that, the glass chest slowly rose, exposing the "crystal", and then three hanging rods fell on top of the podium with a camera hanging from each of them. At the same time, the wall behind Lan also

lit up—it turned out to be a huge screen showing three different pictures, shot respectively from the three cameras.

Roland quickly noticed a phenomenon that shocked him.

No matter from which direction you looked at it, the crystal always showed the same appearance.

How's that possible?

In order to look like this, it's got to be a perfect sphere.

An angular thing represented discontinuous changes when it was rotating. It should have appeared visually different on each side. However, he was stunned when he didn't find any difference or movement in the three pictures as if it was not a moving object but rather a red spot on the screen.

His brain had subconsciously identified it as a virtual image as if the crystal itself didn't exist.

But Lan's next move once again surprised Roland.

The Chief Disciple took an iron bar and inserted it straight into the red crystal. However, the stick did not penetrate the virtual shadow as he expected but instead disappeared in it in front of everyone. Through the screen, they could see that all the three cameras captured the original look of the iron bar, clearly showing its polishing traces and angles, but the red spot in the three pictures looked still the same. It seemed as if there had been three iron bars inserted from a different angle... into one same spot.

When Lan pulled it back, the bar in her hands had become shorter.

The hall suddenly went quiet.

Seeing such a strange scene, everyone remained silent as if someone had clamped hand over his or her mouth.

After a while, someone said, "Can I come up to see?"

"Help yourself." Lan nodded.

The man walked to the podium and stared at the red crystal for a long time. Suddenly, with a shout, he reached out to it—his skin was lightly colored in Silverlight. Apparently, he was using the Force of Nature. Not many warriors could achieve that. Garcia had once mentioned to Roland that those who were able to spur out the Force of Nature like that, resembled a lot the Fallen evil. Normal weapons were unlikely to hurt them. To be able to master such a skill, one had to be extraordinarily talented, or very experienced through life and death situations over the years. Thus, they were far stronger than the average martialists.

This was probably the reason for their arrogance.

Lan stood still, without any intention of stopping him.

His palm went through the crystal unobstructed, without catching anything, and just like the iron bar before, it disappeared. Soon after, the man screamed—he raised his hand, showing only the half of a bloody palm!

Everyone gasped in astonishment.

Roland finally understood what Garcia meant with those words, "You definitely don't want to touch it", because everything that came into contact with it turned into a void.

After the victim was taken to be treated by the martialists, a couple more stood up, hoping to come up and have a closer look. Lan allowed all of them, but they were much more cautious while observing. In the end, the Chief Disciple simply arranged for everyone to take turns to experience the incredible phenomenon from a close distance.

Roland was no exception as well.

When his turn came, he acted carefreely and circled twice around the crystal, but he suddenly felt his heart sink.

Its internal red rippling light seemed very familiar!

He had once seen a similar scene in the Divine Land too.

But in that domain, the red light hanging above him represented the Bloody Moon.

Chapter 858: The Membrane Overlaid

"You're Roland, aren't you?" When Roland was contemplating the "Erosion", Lan suddenly spoke.

"Ah... it's me." He recovered from his solemn thoughts and Garcia's words flashed across his mind...

"Hang on, would she be trying to find trouble with me for having stood her up?"

"I've heard Garcia mention you several times." She did not face Roland, so he could not see her expression. "She said you're a rare and independent awakened who's not disturbed by desire and ambition. This is very rare for the average person, so she's very happy that you've agreed to join the association."

"Uh... Is that so?" Roland replied reluctantly.

It was clear to him that Lan must have been implying that he was a 'wild' Awakened when she said 'independent', but he wondered why she said that Garcia was elated when he agreed to join the association. He clearly remembered that Garcia had been expressionless when she had let him fill out the application.

"Although I hate people who aren't punctual, this is a common problem for many. After all, you can't feel the change of time nor can you hear it ticking, so for some special people, it's not an unforgivable flaw."

Inexplicably, Roland felt that there was a glimmer of emotion when the Chief Disciple said these words.

"There's one thing you should know about special people. Though they're uncommon, there're still quite a number of them. If they don't treasure their special feature and maximize it, they'll be eliminated sooner or later."

"Is this a warning that I should work wholeheartedly for the association and not cause problems like the other wild Awakened ones?" Roland secretly frowned as he really did not like this kind of preaching. Perhaps he would not have minded it before, but after he became the King of Graycastle, he had also changed his mentality.

"After you've finished watching, you can leave," Lan finally turned around and said calmly, "listen carefully to what I'm going to say next as it might help you. Next—!"

Roland twitched his mouth and did not take this brief conversation to heart.

He was overwhelmed by a cloud of confusion.

Whether the Martialist Association could defeat the Erosion and save the world was something he did not care about.

After returning to his seat, he still frowned.

What are the "deities" thinking about?

According to the research data of the underground civilization, the Bloody Moon is the key to transforming the magic power, and also the basis for the existence of the Dreamland—in a certain sense, it's the equivalent of the mastermind behind the scenes, existing like a background. Even if one wanted to annex the Dream World, there's no need to show their original appearance, right?

The witches can see the real body of the Bloody Moon because that's the real world, yet this Dreamland is a domain purely founded on his and Zero's memories. Wouldn't this mean that the mastermind had seen the circuit signal operating behind the world?

Or could the speculation be wrong? Or maybe I had misunderstood some information that had pointed me in the wrong direction?

"So do you believe it now?" Garcia glared at him. "That's definitely not something that can exist in reality."

"I've never doubted you." Roland shook his head and tried to suppress his distractions. "But your master wasn't as scary as you'd described."

"Was there something wrong with the master?" She was a little surprised.

"She said quite a lot about how special I was and how the association thought highly of me," Roland said sarcastically, "by the way... she said you were elated about me joining the association. Was that so? I really couldn't tell at all."

He looked at the ex-Princess Garcia in anticipation, as he wanted to see what kind of expression she would reveal. Would she deny everything completely or attempt to conceal herself hurriedly? No matter what she did, it should be very interesting.

But he never imagined that she would portray a look of "you're really such a fool".

"What're you talking about?" said Garcia as she rolled her eyes. "When you were on the platform, the master didn't speak at all... Do you think that I'm blind?"

Roland could not help but be stunned.

"This distance might be considered far for ordinary people, but I'm a martialist. I could even see clearly how many strands of beard you had on the stage. Don't try to lie to me. You're still too inexperienced," she said with a note of disdain.

Didn't... speak?

Just as he was about to ask more questions, Lan had already re-closed the glass chest. She clapped her hands and made everyone focus their attention on the podium—this time round, there was much less talk in the hall.

"Our world isn't flat, it's a membrane. Some can understand this and others can't. But it doesn't matter. Just listen to me." She turned around so that the screen behind showed what was being said. "The membrane has a curvature that, in popular terms, is like an arc—and in some places, this change is even more pronounced. If there are other worlds beyond this one, then there'll be a possibility that the two worlds will intersect, and this intersection is the Erosion."

"Of course, this is only a speculation, but it's the only explanation for the vision that we saw—since the Erosion was discovered, all nations have kept up their research on it, but unfortunately the world there has completely different rules. Any means of detection are declared null and void, and even the matter here can't be stabilized beyond the borders. As you've seen for yourselves, the iron bar was the proof."

"Huh? What's the connection with the Fallen Evils?" someone asked.

"Of course there's a connection. The strength they gain comes from another membrane—and that's why the Fallen Evils aren't afraid of ordinary weapons in this world. The overlapping membrane temporarily connects the two worlds, and I don't know what kind of effect that would have on the other world. But for us, the rules still work: the movement of energy from high to low creates a series of phenomena that is incredible." Lan raised her voice and said, "To be exact, not just the Fallen Evils, any Awakened person would be related to this energy."

"What did.. you say?"

"My power belongs only to me. It's not related to any goddamned membrane!"

"Does the Martialist Association think that we're the same as the Fallen Evils?"

The hall suddenly burst into a commotion.

This time Lan did not say anything to stop the commotion but waited until everyone became silent by themselves before she went on to say, "Of course there's a difference, we can control it, yet the Fallen Evils can't. But we have to admit that in some sense were quite similar to the Fallen Evils—especially on this point about being able to resist injuries caused by ordinary weapons. Has everyone considered another point? How come the martialists can't dominate the entire world even when they can freely manipulate the Force of Nature and can't be hurt by ordinary weapons?"

"Well... " The crowd started to whisper.

"Because the Erosion won't last forever," Lan said straightforwardly, "as the curvature changes, the overlapping membranes will gradually separate until the next reunion—the cycle can be long or short. A

short one could be a day while the long one could be millions of years. And we encountered the Erosion about 2000 B.C. and the overlapping lasted only less than a century. Once they separated, the Force of Nature will disappear without any trace. Given that, even the Awakened ones managed to dominate the whole world, two thousand years of interval would be enough for this empire to vanish."

"How can you be sure about what happened thousands of years ago?" Although someone still questioned her theory, his attitude was much less aggressive.

"I don't know," said the Chief Disciple, frankly. "It's just an assumption. Even 2000 years ago, there wasn't even a scientific way of observation and recording. If you want to validate it, we'll have to wait until 2000 years later. But we mustn't forget that history is always full of surprising coincidences. By comparing the biographies and history books of different regions, you'll find that many epic heroes and legends were born during that period, and then further on the myths emerged—and most myths were related to doomsday and the salvation. Can we assume that it was the Erosion that caused this?"

There was a brief silence below the stage, and after a while, someone asked, "And even if those epic heroes are the Awakened ones of the Force of Nature, what does that have to do with us? According to what you said, the Erosion will end by itself, so what's the purpose of the propaganda of your association against the Erosion?"

"Don't forget that apart from us, there are also the Fallen Evils," Lan answered quietly. "This is what I said at the beginning. There's no evil force. The energy just spreads according to the rules. It has no malice, but that doesn't mean the affected people will also have no malice. We're just at the beginning of the membrane overlap, so such loopholes will continue to increase and expand. The Fallen Evils will also increase in numbers. And only the Martialists that use the same kind of force can defeat them—this is a competition of the survival of the fittest, and only one party can survive. If we can't defeat the Fallen Evils, not just the Awakened ones, but the whole human existence will be completely destroyed by them."

Chapter 859: Two-Pronged Attack

...

"Your Majesty... Your Majesty?" Nightingale's voice woke Roland from his daze. "The City Hall Director is still waiting for your reply."

"Ah, I already know about this," said Roland as he blinked his eyes, trying to concentrate. He handed over the report in his hand to Barov and said, "Let's proceed according to what you said."

"Yes," said Barov. As he saluted Roland, he also solemnly added a sentence before leaving. "Please take care of your health, Your Majesty."

After the chief left the office, Roland asked Nightingale, "Does my face really look that bad?"

"Well, you look okay," said the latter after some deliberation, "it's just that you've been daydreaming more recently. Could this be related to the Erosion of the Dream World?"

Roland shook his head. "The changes in Dreamland can't really affect me. It's just a few strange things in retrospect that have been bothering me. There's nothing to worry about."

"That's good to know," said Nightingale while she pursed her lips.

This was already the fourth day since he had left the Dreamland. Although Faldi had succeeded in locating the headquarter of the association, Ling had failed to sneak into it—according to her, there had never been a place like that one. It was built underground, but it had been impossible for her to find any hiding spot there and some shiny "light band" had covered her head. It had just kept glowing, no matter how long she had waited.

Afterward, Ling had even despondently requested for Roland to punish her for failing her task, but naturally, Roland had refused to do so.

The next play plan had been executed smoothly, and Roland had brought more Taquila witches into his Dreamland, but what he had seen and heard in the headquarters that day still troubled him immensely.

The whole incident had so many strange factors that could not be explained.

The first was the conclusion about the membrane world.

He had always believed that the Dream World would present a modern society filled with the Force of Nature in order to integrate both his and Zero's memories and keep his internal government self-consistent. In other words, no matter how many weird phenomena there were, they were all rules based on the needs of being self-consistent—most of these rules came from his consciousness, which he understood and was able to accept.

However, those words spoken by the Chief Disciple Lan completely exceeded the scope of his knowledge reserve.

The only thing Roland knew about the membrane theory was that it evolved from the superstring theory. These two theories were particularly profound and he had never carried out in-depth reading on them. Unlike Quantum mechanics, he had at least read through one or two popular books about it. In the Dream World, these theories should have been hidden as if they were invisible, just like those blank books that only had covers.

However, both Lan's explanation and the derivation formulas and evidence displayed in the lobby screens seemed to be logical—this was the first time he saw something totally unintelligible in the Dreamland, as if a High school student had dreamed about the Grand Unification Theory in physics which was absurd and incredible.

This even made him think that the Dream World today was completely different from the world when he had first entered.

As if something was growing wildly out of his sight.

Another weird thing was the Chief Disciple herself.

After Garcia had reminded Roland, he had recalled that the vision, hearing and reaction of the martialists was better than ordinary people. If Lan had spoken to him on the stage, not only would the defenders, but even the first two rows of new people in the lobby have been able to hear something.



But the fact was that no one at that time had shifted their attention to them. It had not sounded like a whisper to him, yet, surprisingly, it had not attracted any attention. At that time, he had not paid any attention to this point. But later on, when he thought about it, he questioned why a newcomer who was shown special attention by the Chief Disciple did not cause public concern?

The things Lan said also left him scratching his head.

"Listen carefully to what I'm going to say next as it might help you!"

How would the knowledge about the origin of the Erosion, the relationship between the martialists and the Fallen Evils help him? Even if he wholeheartedly wanted to join the association and become a savior of the world, knowing these would still not be important to him, right?

All these weird signs made Roland form some resistance toward the Dream World. He intended to temporarily stop the connection with Dreamland, once all the God's Punishment Witches had gone in once to enjoy themselves.

It would be better to behave cautiously whilst the Battle of Divine Will was approaching.

"Your Majesty?" Nightingale's voice once again could be heard, but this time with some urgency. "You look like you're in a daze again."

"Ahem, I'm fine," Roland shook his head and threw his distractions behind him. "It's just that I've got a little more things to consider lately and so I'm a little sleepy."

"But why do I feel that you're hiding something behind those words," Nightingale sat on the table, propped her feet up and said, "don't tell me that in the Dream World, you and the witches..."

"That's impossible!" He suddenly felt dumbfounded. "I just took them to experience the taste of different flavors only!"

"Well... that's true," Nightingale blinked and revealed a cunning smile. "I'm a bit worried about that world that I can't enter. There's no way to protect you at all times, and in case they suddenly make trouble, that would be problematic. After all, they've passed hundreds of years of unconscious days. And now that they've finally recovered their senses, I'm sure they would try to revisit all their past feelings. But that's more than 20 women. How could you cope if they all swarmed towards you?"

"You're getting more ridiculous." Roland glared at her and said, "Who did you get these ideas from? Can't you spend more energy on studying?"

Nightingale covered her mouth and said, "I was just joking."

"If I had your ability, it'd surely remind me loudly that you were lying," Roland snorted and said, "from the very beginning, you wanted to ask this, right?"

"Well, I admit it... But this was not just my own opinion," Nightingale stuck her tongue out. "I was also asked by someone else to raise this question."

"Asked by someone else?" Roland did not have the time to ask who it was as there was knocking on the office door.

He had to temporarily withdraw his questions and said, "Come in."

The door opened and a tall man quickly walked in, neatly closed his legs and then raised his hands to salute Roland. "Your Majesty, Iron Axe is here to report to you!"

From Port of Clearwater to Neverwinter took almost four or five days, and by boat it was a rather laborious thing. But on the face of this foreign officer, he could not see a trace of exhaustion. His eyes reflected an energy that was full of war spirit.

"Fine," Roland nodded reassuringly. "I think you already know about Neverwinter's combat plans?"

"I've heard Brian talking about it," said Iron Axe. "The First Corps will be divided into two roads from east and west to regain Graycastle before crossing the border, and striking Kingdom of Dawn's Glow City. But there's something that I don't understand. If you asked Brian to take over my task and stay in the Port of Clearwater to protect Miss Echo, who's responsible for the Eastern Front?"

It seems that even before the task had been assigned, Iron Axe had already placed the responsibility of leading the Western Front attack on his shoulders. Roland could not help but smile. "Brian is still lacking in experience. Leading a garrison isn't a problem, but he could still be prone to accidents if he had to lead an entire army alone, so Eastern Front Army will be your responsibility."

Iron Axe was slightly stunned and replied, "Then what about the Western Front..."

"I'll lead it personally," said Roland slowly.

#### Chapter 860: Their Respective Journeys

When the last statistics report was handed over to him, the City Hall Director finally let out a deep breath and waved his hand toward his subordinate. "You can leave now."

"Yes, my Lord."

The latter bowed respectfully and closed the door of the office on his way out.

The only person left in the room was Barov.

He opened the drawer and removed more than a dozen forms from inside, flattened them on the table, and neatly stacked the newest one on top.

As a result of this recent addition, all the necessary supplies for His Majesty's expedition were now fully prepared.

Barov gently rubbed the paper, as if he were stroking a girl's tender, smooth skin. The rows of numbers seemed like a complex password to ordinary people, but in his eyes, it was a wonderful music score.

It took only a week and a half, for Neverwinter to complete a large-scale logistics transfer. Whether it was food or gold royals, they had surpassed the quantities of any previous expedition. Through his proposals and statistical tables, he could see ships carrying wheat flourishing from the inland river to the Northern Region. And he could hear the melodious sound of gold royals colliding with each other.

He was unable to control this feeling of indulgence.

If he wanted to name this score, "power" would undoubtedly be the most appropriate name.

Now, the power lay in his hands, and he could play in any manner he wanted.

After only three years, Neverwinter's prowess had reached an incredible level—not just in terms of military might, but also in all other aspects. When he had been an assistant to the Treasurer in the old king's city, he had known a great deal about the financial situation of Graycastle. And it was precisely because of that, he realized how amazing Roland Wimbledon was.

Now Neverwinter's resources were probably equal to all the other cities' strength in Graycastle combined.

Unfortunately, no one could share this joy with him.

Barov removed his monocle and glanced at the empty table opposite him.

There was only one other person who could understand these figures and experience the joy that came with it: the Pearl of the Northern Region. Sometimes he felt that the latter was the same type of person as he was.

However, this regret dissolved very quickly. Compared to the option of possessing exclusive power, everything else paled in comparison.

He stood up and walked to the window. He pulled out a peculiar coin from his breast pocket and flattened it in his palm. Engraved on the coin's surface was a mountain. It glittered in the late spring sun.

This was the emblem of the Witch Cooperation Association. He had found this coin three years ago in the forest of the Western Region.

He secretly retained it. He originally wanted to use it as evidence of the Lord colluding with witches in return for his own safety, when the church attacked the Western Region. But now, this emblem had become his lucky charm.

His Majesty, who protects, the witches is evil? Of course not! The evil ones are those who were defeated by His Majesty. They had no strength, but they still acted arrogantly. This was the biggest crime as even the demons in the Barbarian Land were not as bad as them.

Fortunately, this situation would not last too long.

Although His Majesty's plan to attack the Kingdom of Dawn was delayed by a little, he had already waited for two decades, so waiting for another year was not an issue at all.

Graycastle should be handed over to a more capable man.

Barov knew that the day His Majesty unified the kingdom and was officially crowned as king, he himself would also climb to the pinnacle of power.

He touched his beard and could not help but laugh.

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"Today's test will stop here. Have you packed your luggage?" Agatha asked while sorting out the experimental data, "Tomorrow is the day of departure, so don't forget anything."

"I don't have many clothes and I don't need to carry any items," Isabella shook her head and replied calmly. Living in Neverwinter was much simpler than she had imagined. With the exception of repeatedly displaying the god stone to allow the ice witch to observe the records, she controlled the rest of her time as long as she did not leave the diplomatic building. She was neither harassed nor humiliated. She had thought that the witches would have treated the Pure Witches very differently. However, sometimes she felt that Agatha's attitude toward her was the same as the other witches. There was hardly any difference.

"By the way," she said and added another sentence, "about what happened last time... thank you for telling me."

"You mean the news about the church?" Agatha shrugged. "If it were me, I'd still think of going back and taking a look, whether it'd be a farewell or a break. But let's not talk about that now. You can't go on your journey like that... This is certainly due to my negligence as I've just found out that you've been wearing the same thing all this time." She dropped the notebook and frowned as she walked over to Isabella. She grabbed Isabella's sleeve and felt it. "It's gone all white, and it's winter clothing. When the weather turns hot, aren't you going to get overheated?"

"That's nothing." Isabella wanted to say that she had been subjected to more rigorous training, but thought for a moment and decided to hold her tongue.

"This expedition isn't just a matter of a month or two. Let's not mention the fact that you might not be able to wash your clothes daily on the road and even your companions won't be able to stand it." Agatha said decisively, "Now that we still have time, I'll take you to the convenience market and we can pick a few pieces of clothing."

When she heard the words "companions", she became slightly surprised and hesitated for a moment before answering, "But... I've got no money."

She was atoning for her misdeeds, and naturally, she would not get a monthly payment like the members of the Witch Union.

"Well, I do," said Agatha nonchalantly. "You can think of it as a loan," she said.

"But it'll be after five years..."

"Five years is a short time compared to the Taquila witches waiting for hundreds of years, isn't it?" The Ice Witch interrupted by saying, "The Battle of Divine Will won't end that easily. You won't always remain like this unless this is what you want." She placed her hand out. "So what're you hesitating about?"

Isabella did not answer. She suddenly felt that the sunset rays were a little dazzling.

Through the golden rays, Agatha's body gradually faded away, and only her hand could be seen.

Isabella lowered her head and took the latter's palm.

At that moment, the sun seemed to be linked with her.

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"Are you sure it'd be alright for me to come with you?" Anna asked while she was lying in Roland's arms, blinking her lake blue eyes.

As he had been busy settling the God's Punishment Witches recently, it had been a long time before the two could spend some quiet time together. It was exactly for this reason, that even late at night, the two were still whispering, trying to catch up on all the words that they had missed during their absence.

"We've been preparing this for such a long time, and besides, it's alright to take a rest at times," said Roland, stroking her smooth back, "furthermore, this expedition isn't just for the sake of combat. Propaganda is also very important. For example, when socializing with everyone and attending banquets, it would be unacceptable if I weren't accompanied by a female companion."

Anna nodded in agreement and buried her head shyly. Roland saw a touch of pink on her cheek due to the bright moonlight.

It was clear that Anna was intelligent enough to understand the meaning of this remark.

In formal occasions, appearing as a king's female companion was a statement.

"I said that one day, all the subjects of Graycastle will know who you are, even if you are a witch," he said earnestly.

Anna did not ask questions such as "Is this really alright?" or "What if everyone opposes it?" Instead, she replied in the same earnest tone, "Even if I'm a witch, I want to be with you, no matter what happens in the future."

Roland lifted the corners of his mouth. This answer was really in her usual style.

"So we're both in agreement."

...

The next day, the Neverwinter port was crowded with concrete boats that shipped the First Army and their war supplies. They were arranged neatly in a column before slowly leaving the Redwater River.

At the front of the fleet was "the Roland". At the top of the flagship, the symbol of the Graycastle, a High-Tower and Spears flag, was waving in the wind and attracting everyone's attention. Everyone in Neverwinter knew that when their Lord returned again, he would become the only king of the land.

Someone shouted "long live the king", and the whole pier continued to shout out in unison.

It sounded like thunder rolling over the sky, or the horn of departure.

The war began in the midst of the lively voices of the people.