

Witch 91

Chapter 91 Heart Prison

The corridor was shed by the moonlight which fell through the windows, yet only half of Anna's face was visible. Her eyes reflected the faint blue light, looking like two stars within the dark. Anna leaned against the door, with most of her body hidden in the shadows, but her outline was still visible – good nutrition had completely changed her previous thin and skinny body, turning it into the body of an adult woman. Her body was just perfect, containing the right curves of her age but also the unique charm of youth.

Roland put on a calm face, stepped slowly forward until he was discovered by Anna. Finally, he stood in front of her and they looked each other into the eyes.

"It was just an accident, I didn't know she would do –" Roland began.

"I know."

"The other is still a minor, so I didn't care –"

"This, I also understood."

Anna reacted completely differently than Roland had expected. It didn't seem like Anna was at odds with him, he couldn't detect any trace of displeasure on her face, there was only a serious look. There weren't any waves within her lake-like blue eyes, Roland realized that she was still a straightforward woman, she didn't like any camouflage and didn't need to hide anything. Sure enough, she took the initiative, and said: "I cannot be like Lightning, in front of so many people I don't dare to show such... bold behavior, so I had to wait for you here."

After this sentence, her cheeks gained a touch of blush, but even so, she didn't shrink back and her eyes were still focussed straight on Roland's. Her look could even be said to be incomparably serious.

For two beats Roland's heart set out, he wanted to say something, but he felt that at the moment everything he could say would be meaningless. She may mind the action of Lightning, but grieving or complaining wasn't her way of acting, she would simply express her own feelings.

Upright and hard-working children shouldn't be rejected, he thought. So Roland bent down, coming close to Anna's cheek, even feeling her breath on his face, like a spring breath fiddling his heartstrings. Within the quiet environment they could clearly hear each other's nervous breathing, then, soft lips slightly touched Roland's cheeks.

"Good night, Your Highness," Anna whispered.

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Wendy set on the bed looking at some books.

For her, moments like this where she had leisure time were very rare. During her time in the Witch Cooperation Association, she also would have never thought about leading such a life.

It wasn't long since she started staying within the town, but she had already developed the habit to: Before going to sleep she would clean her body. And then she would put on a silk gown, which wasn't

fastened around the waist nor wasn't buttoned up. Sit cross-legged in the bed, with a soft pillow between her back and the wall, read books she had borrowed from His Highness.

It had taken her a lot of time until she got Lightning to rest, so afterward she did not intend to return to the back garden to continue the celebration, and instead she washed herself and went to bed.

At the moment she was reading a history book about the origin of the Church.

Although she grew up in a monastery, yet this was a theme that she didn't know much about. The nuns had always warned them to obey the teaching of God, but they never mentioned God's name – during her childhood this discrepancy had always puzzled her. Everything had a name, so why of all the things does the noblest God not have one?

What was recorded within the books she had read and the rumors she had later heard told of basically the same thing. At the beginning of the history of the mainland, there were three major religions, which thought of each other as heretics, believing that their gods were the only ones. This battle of faith lasted for nearly a hundred years, and in the end, the Church took the final victory. They declared that the other Gods had been destroyed, and that calling God with any other name was forbidden, this was the word of God itself.

The following pages described the glory and immortality of the church, including the building of the Old Holy City and the New Holy City, and their victory over the evil witches. To Wendy this all seemed very strange.

She had also borrowed the books, "The History of the Kingdom of Graycastle" and "A brief History of the Mainland" from Roland. The first one almost unequivocally recorded the Kingdom's establishment, development and major events. Such as the name of each king and the marital status and whereabouts of their children. The family with all their branches were described in such details, that it nearly looked like a detailed genealogy.

"The brief History of the Mainland" focused more on the evolution of the four kingdoms, their alternations in handling their powers and the inner and outer political struggles. However, they still put very much importance into the ruling families.

Yet within the History book about the Church, there wasn't mentioned any of the Popes' names, or it could be said that it was the same thing they had done with God's name. They just replaced their former names with the title Pope. So throughout the whole book, it just looked like there was only one Pope during all of the hundreds of years of history. This wasn't consistent with common sense, instead of calling it a record, it would be better to say it was a deliberate delusion.

At this moment, Nightingale suddenly appeared within Wendy's room. When Wendy discovered her she put down her book and looked at the other one with interest: "It's already so late, and you're only now free to talk to me?"

Nightingale rubbed her tensed neck, and went to the bedside to sit down, "I just finished my job of bringing Nana home, how did you fare with Lightning?"

“On the way she was nonstop talking about her father, yet when she hit the bed, she immediately fell asleep, I didn’t even need to read some stories to her.” Wendy shrugged. “She always acts like she is already a big girl, but in truth, she is still a little child.”

“In your eyes, everyone is still a child,” said the Nightingale teasingly and took the book Wendy had previously in her hand. “His Royal Highness had said that you shouldn’t read at night, especially that you shouldn’t read when sitting in bed. The lighting isn’t good enough and will hurt your eyes.”

“Yes, your Royal Highness did say that.”

The two of them talked for a long time. They talked about the time when they traveled together from Silver City to the Impassable Mountain Range, what happened when they heard about a soon to be killed witches, how they survived the Months of Demons. Nightingale had a lot to say, so much so that Wendy was only occasionally able to throw in one or two sentences. During the last five years, this two were so inseparable that they had developed a tacit understanding between each other. So the time passed slowly until finally the candles were about to extinguish. Seeing this Wendy began to laugh and asked, “How is it? Can’t you sleep because of Lightning’s actions today?”

“What are you talking about...?”

“What else can it be,” Wendy smiled and shook her head. “Veronica, we are witches, you should know what that means.”

“...” Nightingale kept silent, and even after a long time she didn’t know what to say, “Well.”

This fate, there was no witch who could escape it. Wendy put away her smile, sighed and then said, “Roland Wimbledon is the kingdom’s 4th Prince, and we have to do everything possible to ensure that he will take over the throne. Then when he rules the kingdom, he will be able to present us sisters with a shelter against the Church.

But that would also mean that he has become the King, and then there will come the time, where he has to marry a Duke’s daughter or the princess of another kingdom. Then they will get children, maybe one or several. If it’s a boy, he will inherit the country, and if it’s a girl she will be married off to another noble family.”

Here Wendy paused for a moment, giving Nightingale time to prepare since she had to say words, which no witch wanted to hear, “Veronica, we are witches, witches cannot give birth to children.”

“Even with the most optimistic outcome, where there is no difference between an ordinary person and us witches, where we can freely walk along every road through the kingdom even after the death of His Highness. With occasional cases of outstanding witches gaining the right to enter the upper ranks of society, maybe even get canonized as nobles. There will still always be the case that we witches will never be able to have any descendants. And without any descendants, we are unable to continue the family’s glory, so the nobles won’t even consider marrying any witch. So we will gain some things, but at the same time, an important part will be taken from us. ‘This is our fate,’ she whispered, “I wish I didn’t need to tell you this.”

“I see,” Nightingale whispered.

...

When Nightingale had finally left, Wendy didn't feel so good. But she believed that Nightingale would still be able to overcome this setback, after all, she had already crossed so many difficulties, she surely will also be able to cross this threshold.

Of this, Wendy was convinced.

Chapter 92 Army Rearrangement

"With this, our service period is over, right?" asked Cat's Paw who was clearing the square of the burning debris of the bonfire, and then continued with a voice full of regret, "I really don't want to go back to the mines and work in a hole. I have to say, I already miss the Months of Demons, a little."

"Yeah, and I don't want to deal with those stones again either," Jop immediately agreed, "The most important thing is that the difference in salary is too much. When we were assigned to the artillery, we had meat every day and a salary of 15 silver royals each day."

"Don't say such foolish words," said Van'er while holding a torch high to illuminate the surrounding "His Highness provided all this food to us so that no person would starve to death during the Months of Demons. You only need to remember what happened the previous two years, not even half of the people from the old district were able to survive! Did you already forget this? I'll say it once more, it's unlikely that the team will be dissolved, His Highness just put us into the artillery team and burned so much gunpowder to train us, do you think that was all without reason?"

"But the Month of Demons is over, so, why would His Highness still need the artillery?" asked Rodney while leaning on a broom.

That's because the artillery isn't meant for the demonic beasts, Van'er thought, but in the end he said out loud, "Soon we'll know more, tomorrow we'll hear the answer," he yawned then waved his hand impatiently, "Okay enough, quickly clean everything up, I'd like to go back to bed soon."

The next morning, the teams were assembled and Van'er's previous statement was confirmed.

When everyone was there, Iron Axe went in front of the lined up team and said loudly: "You have completed the first stage of the task – which was to defend Border Town against the demonic beasts. After three months and six days of fighting, you all earned His Highness' recognition! Because of this, the militia will be promoted to His Highness' regular army, but in case you don't want to fight any longer, you just need to stand up and leave now. His Highness had said that everyone who leaves now, will get all of your outstanding payments, and additional a payment of twenty-five silver royals as... "Iron Axe had to think for a moment, then he said," right, retirement fee."

From the three hundred militia members, no one moved, only the Cat's paw raised his hand and said: "Report."

This was also one of the odds rules the Prince had introduced during the training, no one was allowed to whisper in private if they wanted to say something they had to shout.

Iron Axe nodded, "Speak."

"What do you mean by being promoted to the regular army, do we become knights?"

Van'er couldn't stop himself from laughing, but he quickly set up a serious face again.

Becoming Knights? That would mean becoming part of the aristocracy, not only getting an estate and a squire, but also their own territory. By asking this question, he had really lost a lot of face for the artillery.

“No,” answered Iron Axe and began to patiently explain, obvious to him since he had also previously asked His Highness, “The regular army is a professional fighting force, only established for the protection of His Highness and his territory. In other words, when miners work in the mine, you will be training, when the farmers harvest their wheat, you will be training. And when the merchants sell their goods, you are still training. All the training is to win all the future battles, just like you did against the demonic beasts during the Months of Demons.”

“Then what is the difference between the regular army and the militia?” Asked Cat’s Paw.

“More frequent training, stricter training methods, and a greater reward.”

“Report!” Hearing all this Rodney couldn’t help himself and asked, “What does a greater reward mean?”

Van’er sighed, why was his group of young men so impetuous? But in all honesty, he would also like to know this answer.

“The regular army will get an officer-led structure, and soldiers who fulfilled their given task according to the previous plan during the battles will get the chance at a promotion, and soldiers who performed extraordinarily well,” said Iron Axe, “for example, could rise to my position.”

If this was what His Highness said... Van’er thought to himself, and this was the way they implement it, it would be better to not offend one’s superior, right? He quietly looked around, it seemed that no one realized the general problem, instead, they still listened with keen interest and pleasure.

“Officers won’t only get a higher payment, they will also get... their own territory.”

After the last word fell the crowd burst into an uproar, Van’er was also no exception, he even had doubts if he heard everything right. If they could get their own territory, then, would there be any difference between them and the knights?

“But remember that once you choose to become a member of the regular army, the system you will follow then will be completely different from the system you are used from the militia. Such as in the case you aren’t able to complete the given task, escape, start a rebellion or any other violation of the disciplinary codex will be severely punished. This isn’t like the previous punishment of not getting an additional egg to eat instead it includes extra labor, imprisonment and even hanging. Also, every previously awarded position can be taken back.” Iron Axe paused for a moment, “Now is your time to quit.”

The crowd fell into silence, and also Iron Axe tensed up, but still, no one moved. He couldn’t help himself he began to grin: “Well, then from today on, you all are placed directly under His Royal Highness Roland Wimbledon’s orders!”

Van’er himself felt incredible, if he had heard these terrible punishments three months ago, he would have slipped away long ago. What is the use of promotion, what is the use of owning one own territory, if you aren’t able to save your own life? But now, he almost did not hesitate to choose the fixed

position, compared with returning to the North Slope Mine to collect gravel, or to stay in the old district only able to wander idly around, it was clear which was much more to his interest.

“Your perception is pretty good, what’s your name?”

“Mr. Van’er, I hope you continue to do well.”

His Royal Highness encouraged him to train hard and he also reaffirmed his idea that he belonged to the militia and now Van’er would continue to fight for His Royal Highness as a member of the regular army.

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Iron Axe quickly announced today’s first training program: Field training.

At the beginning Van’er felt very disappointed, it was once more running for training. Even during the Months of Demons if the weather was good enough they always had to run. After breakfast, they checked the weather conditions and then they had to run two laps around the town unless there were large snowflakes falling from the sky, then they would abort running training. According to the saying of His Highness, this exercise was good for the muscles and allowed their bones to thaw so while defending the city walls their movements wouldn’t become stiff and unable to use the pike.

But when the soldiers ran out of Border Town, Van’er immediately felt the difference between this new and the old training program.

At this point, the snow on the field was still far from melting, after three months of uninterrupted snowing, the snow reached up to their knees. Calling it running wasn’t the right word, instead, it was better to call it crawling through the snow. The team suddenly broke into many small groups, after each step they needed a lot of strength to take another step.

There was no doubt that this special training of struggling through the snow was certainly an idea of His Highness. Van’er had already figured out the goal of His Royal Highness. At this moment any protest would become invalid, they were only able to go through with this training until the end.

During the whole morning, they had to struggle through the snow. So when the team returned to the town, Van’er was satisfied that he couldn’t feel his own legs any longer.

The snow which got into their boots had already turned into water, even standing in the sun, most people were still cold and trembling. The huge physical exertion exacerbated the chill, even Iron Axe felt unable to eat. He announced the dissolution of the team, and delayed the lunchtime for thirty minutes so that everyone could dry their boots and replace their pants.

So everyone was very pleased when they later heard that the afternoon training was cancelled.

Of course, they didn’t know that Lightning had supervised the whole field training – this was the little girl’s daily training regime: Learning to precisely control her magic to fly with uniform velocity. When she later reported her gathered information to Roland, the latter nearly fell from his seat.

The total distance traveled throughout the morning was four kilometers.

Chapter 93 Army Framework

A few days after the victory celebration, Roland finally undertook the great farming project.

A constant dripping sound could be heard from the direction of the windows when he was sitting in his office, it sounded as if it was raining non-stop. It was the sound of the melting snow.

When he visited the countryside for New Year's, he laid in front of the window most of the time, watching the long ice prisms which hung under the roof turn transparent and then into droplets, which then fell down. At the moment he hadn't had the time for such leisure. However, writing down plans for the future while simultaneously listening to the voice of earth's recovery was also very pleasurable.

According to the information gathered from the previous years, the snow would need about one week's time to melt, but the road between the Border Town and Longsong Stronghold would at least need one month until it was usable again. It took so much time after the snow melted since the road was built out of mud and also didn't have a drainage system

Roland could already imagine it, if he wanted to defeat Longsong Stronghold, the first thing he needed to do, was to build a road between the two cities which was usable by carriages even during heavy rains.

But now the problem with the highest priority was still the issue of the army's reconstruction. Without a reliable and mighty army, it would be impossible to defeat the forces of the Longsong Stronghold with his outnumbered troops. Transferring the militia into the regular army was only the first step. The specific preparation of establishing the new rules, discipline, reward and punishment system turned out to be a big headache.

Although as a child he had played land battle chess, however, he had already long forgotten all the previous teachings. Roland, after some thought, simply decided to make up his own plans. Anyway, as the creator of the new army, even if he implemented unreasonable things, no one would discover it anyway.

So Border Towns' first compilation for the new army was soon prepared: according to the Army, division, platoon, team, squad, five people for a squad (taking into account that a cannon needed at least five people to operate), ten squads for a team, ten teams for a platoon. As for the number of platoons within a division, he decided to consider it later. In view of the overall battle prowess of the armies during this era, as long as he sent out two or three platoons of soldiers, it should be enough to defeat the vast majority of opponents on the battlefield.

When he decided on the basics for the army framework, Roland took a deep breath.

The rules and regulations that came next were much simpler, in addition to always wearing their uniform, they had to obey the commanding officer, never desert, never betray a comrade and so on. Roland's first rule was to prohibit plundering and harassing.

The problems caused by plundering were numerous, and the negative impact it had on the local inhabitants was so great, that they would need years to recover, if ever. This was also the reason why he had insisted on only using civilians as the members of the military.

When the aristocracy responded to the call for battle of their Lords, the main reason for their obeying wasn't to defeat the enemy, instead, it was for the looting afterwards. Or in other words, the main

reason they followed the call of war, was to plunder the wealth and territory of an enemy, of course, this included also the innocent civilians within that territory.

As for the mercenaries, not to mention bandits, even though they looked steady and fierce, but if you took a closer look, they were just a flag waving in the wind and at the same time robbery was also a major source of their income. So hoping for military discipline from these people was meaningless.

Only an army built up out of civilians wouldn't see other civilians as only lambs to be slaughtered. Of course, relying on discipline and moral restraint alone wasn't enough. After long days in the field, the heart of greed would enlarge with each continued victory. Therefore, the given rewards had to always keep up with the greed, only in this way could he prevent looting and other illegal behavior.

In order to make the reward grand enough, Roland decided to offer the greatest reward of all – receiving their own territory. As long as they achieved great merits during battle, they could get their own territory. Roland had many unclaimed territories, like this, the land between Border Town and Longsong Stronghold could slowly be reclaimed.

Since more than 90% of all land belonged to members of the aristocracy, such a reward was absolutely very appealing. Once they had their own property, these people would be closely attached to his side, and in case there was someone who wanted to overthrow him, they would show the strongest possible resistance to protect their benefactor and with this protect their own land as well.

After all, humankind wasn't driven by words and whips, but by their own benefits. Putting it another way, as long as he could continuously fulfill the basic interests of the people under his rule, there would be no one who could shake his dominance.

Unlike a traditional fief, Roland will grant them an area between a few acres and up to a dozen acres. The territory could be used to build their own residences, and they could purchase serfs or hire farmers to take care of their fields, but they weren't allowed to set up their own industry. In contrast, the rewarded territory for a knight is close to two thousand acres, an area equivalent to a small village. The above-mentioned industry income was used to provide the knight and his attendant's for their war necessities, for example, it was needed to purchase their own weapons, armors and horses.

Being awarded such a small area of land wasn't of much interest to the aristocracy and as such wouldn't encounter much resistance, but it would also weakened the feeling of independence for the people on the battlefield. In Roland's view, it was just like paying a retirement pension, which would ensure that the soldiers had a stable income even after retirement.

At the same time, in order to strengthen the centralization of power, and to avoid that the thought that "servant's servant is not my servant," would occur, he would only grant them the ownership of the territory but no autonomy. In other words, the land was still under the jurisdiction of the laws, regulations, and systems in the Lord's area. In a sense, they would become the foundation for the future generations of farmers.

After he had written down the concept for the reward system, Roland took a break and stretched his body. Then finally he could start thinking about a field within his own area of expertise – R&D weapons.

With the increasing speed of flintlock manufacturing, continuing to use spearman to protect the gunners seemed to be a waste of manpower, so the latter needed the ability to fight independently in melee combat.

There was a very easy solution to this problem, that was, adding a bayonet to the flintlock. Roland didn't expect his own men to take the initiative and engage in close range combat, instead they should only have the ability to defend themselves in case the power of the gun wasn't able to completely destroy the enemy's courage and they started a desperate attack.

A weapon like a bayonet wasn't so difficult to manufacture, describing it in easy to understand words, it was just a sharp cone, and in the case of further improving the killing effectiveness, he could also add a blood groove into it. The key part was the connection between the bayonet and the gun, the first bayonet was a blade which was connected to a thin wooden pole, which could be directly put into the barrel of the gun. The advantage of this construction was that it was quite simple, the disadvantage was also very obvious, if the bayonet was used the gun was unable to fire, and in addition, if it was used to stab someone, it could happen that the bayonet would become stuck in the enemy's body.

So Roland intended to produce the improved second generation bayonet – the casing type bayonet. The bayonet had an iron casing added to the blade's handle. The inner casing diameter was slightly larger than the grooved barrel.

One only needed to weld a piece of iron with a hole on top of the barrel. After plugging the bayonet on top of the barrel and inserting a filling into the hole, it would become fixed. The blade had a triangular form, with three sharp blades, if pierced into the body it wouldn't fall off, and it would also leave a difficult to heal wound.

After the installation of the bayonet, the bayonet would be slightly longer than the barrel, and so also complicate the loading process, but compared to a folding bayonet, it was much simpler for mass production. As long as there was a sample, any blacksmith was able to reproduce it.

But to enable the bayonet to play an important part in a battle, it was important to train the soldiers in how to use it.

But Roland naturally didn't know anything about it. Fortunately, he remembered that his Chief Knight had once boasted, that he was able to use any weapon. So he just had to find him and get him to teach the others how to fight with a bayonet.

TN: For more information about bayonets. They seemed to fall off all the time

Chapter 94 Destruction doesn't need a reason

The artillery production was also advancing steadily, the second round of production for the cannons had already entered the drilling phase, while the third round was still at the material collection phase.

If he is lucky, Roland could have a gorgeous lineup of four 12-pounders after a month. There was no doubt of his superiority in terms of firepower. But the question now was how could he turn this advantage into a winning situation, and Roland was still striving for an answer to this.

Before he'd crossed over he was just working as a mechanical dog, and just like for most of the other people in that world, his understanding of war had only come from history, movies and games. If it was

just a battle with cold weapons, he could have handed over the command to Carter and Iron Axe. But this battle wasn't the same as those two had previously fought, there was no one who would be able to understand these new hot weapons better than himself.

That being the case, he could only gather the knowledge they had and build his own plans on that foundation in addition to his knowledge from a later era.

In order to ensure his victory, Roland let Lightning travel every day between Border Town and Longsong Stronghold. On one hand to observe the road's conditions, and on the other hand because he needed to accurately calculate the distance. Roland believed that the victory in war was built on a foundation of previous gathered information and calculations. Whether it was a tactical development, or the deduction of each stage of a battle, receiving victory in a battle was inseparably linked to these two points.

Roland once more took the one-meter long iron pipes and the one hundred meter long hemp ropes he'd made for determining the firing range of his cannons. Then he went to the artillery testing area west of Border Town and measured with them a distance of one kilometer. Then he let Lightning fly this distance so that she would always do it in the same amount of time.

When she had skillfully remembered exactly how much magic to use, Roland began to measure the distance between the Longsong Stronghold and Border town. Using a sundial to measure the time that was needed for a round-trip, he had calculated the distance between the two places was around fifty-five kilometers.

Of course, this was the linear distance between two points. In fact, if traveling by land, you would need to take two big bends in order to avoid crossing over the foothill of the Impassable Mountain Range. So in the case that the Duke choose to attack by land, he would need at least three days to reach Border Town.

With Lightning as a Scout, Roland would be able to have always have a clear idea where the enemy was and what he had to do.

Within the range of two kilometers to the west of Border Town, he had inserted many signal flags to signal the distance, so if the enemy entered this area his artillery could quickly adjust the muzzle angle without the need of firing a test shot.

Now he began to worry what to do if the other party didn't start an attack.

At this moment, a knocking sound came from the door.

Nightingale, who had been lying all the time on the couch, chewing dried fish slices, vanished. Seeing this, Roland coughed twice, and said, "Come in."

The door opened and his assistant minister Barov stepped in, "Your Highness, a member of the aristocracy of Longsong Stronghold want to see you."

"Who?" asked Roland only to directly ask once again, "Did they send that ambassador again?"

"No, not the ambassador," Barov shook his head, "It is one of the nobles who left before the beginning of the Months of Demons, Baron Cornelius, who's came back now."

Roland had to think a moment until he remembered that indeed there were nobles living in Border Town that had escaped to the stronghold. But now they dare to come back? They immediately return when spring starts. Doesn't they respect the royal law? "Why does he want to see me?"

"During the construction of the wall, his house was demolished," said the assistant to the treasurer. "If you don't want to receive him, I could send him out."

Roland wanted to take him up on his offer, but then he changed his mind, "Let the Baron wait for me in the parlor."

Maybe through him, Roland could put some pressure on Longsong Stronghold, at least this was something he would like to happen.

After dawdling for around half an hour, Roland leisurely entered the parlor. After arriving he saw a man with a very round belly impatiently waiting beside the long table. While the man restlessly walked up and down, the additional layers of meat on his face swayed in accordance with his steps. Seeing that His Highness had finally appeared, the Baron stopped his walking and reluctantly went through the royal greeting ceremony.

"Sit down," Roland went to the table and placed himself in his seat. According to his usual habits, even if it wasn't time for dinner, he would let his kitchen at least prepare a dessert, but today he did not even let them prepare tea.

"Your Highness, Prince," murmured Cornelius, and started speaking even before he sat, "How could you let that stupid stonemason take my house apart? That was still a good house. From the parapet, the logs used for the roof beam column was also of the best quality. When I had it built, I had to spend more than one hundred... no, one hundred and fifty gold royals!" While speaking he agitatedly waved with his hands.

One hundred and fifty, hearing this Roland had to use a lot of strength to suppress his laughter. If it was still the Prince from before, when looking through the old memories, maybe I really would have believed that. But now... "You mean the house located the furthest to the west?"

"Well," said Cornelius while nodding, "It was the grand mansion, second only to Baron Simon's."

"It's such a pity, that it was located too close to the wall, and had hindered the passage of my men," Roland said, after stopping for a moment then he continued, "but the Town Hall had already decided on the compensation.

"How much...?"

Roland stretched out two fingers, "Twenty gold royals."

"That's too little! Your Royal Highness..." shouted Cornelius while spraying spittle everywhere. Eventually, he calmed down. Then he took out his handkerchief and wiped the sweat from his forehead. "Well, twenty, twenty gold royals, where should I go get the money?"

"Get?" Roland put on a puzzled look. "The money has already been paid to the owner of the house."

"What? Wait, wait... I am the owner of that mansion!"

"It's not you. It's Blair, the captain of my second militia."

"Who is that?" the Baron asked once more in a loud voice, "Your Highness, you are mistaken, I am the Master of the House!"

"But I didn't see you during the winter," Roland picked up his brow, "How then can that house be yours?"

"Of course I wasn't there; I went back to the Longsong Stronghold. Who would stay in this god forsaken place, this place is only able to be used as a feeding ground for the demonic beast?!"

"So you want to say you fled because you feared the demonic beasts. And you still have the face to call yourself a Lord?" asked Roland.

"I, uh..." the Baron was suddenly stunned and didn't know how to reply.

"Guards," Roland clapped his hands, and immediately two guards came into the parlor, holding Cornelius between them.

"We're in the Palace Hallo, what do you mean with this!?"

"Very simple, you now have two choices," Roland stood up from the seat, freezing Cornelius with his look, "First, you admit that you've wronged, that the house doesn't belong to you. And then I can look at what happened just now as nothing more than a farce. Your second option is admitting that during the Months of Demons, you betrayed your Lord, fleeing from the battle without the permission of your Lord, shamefully escaping to Longsong Stronghold. If you take this option, I will put you in prison for desertion, where you will wait for the day of your hanging. Which one do you choose?"

The sweat pouring from Cornelius' forehead didn't stop, he swallowed in fear, hesitated for a moment before he quivered: "Your Highness, I... I made a mistake, it was not my house.

"So this was all a misunderstanding," Roland shrugged, and then said to the guards, "Send the Baron on his way."

When Cornelius was nearly through the door, the Prince stopped him once more: "Right, when you take your ship back to the Longsong Stronghold can you please deliver a message for me? Tell those... ah, who have maybe the same misunderstanding as yourself, in case they don't want to choose the second option, they don't need to waste their time by coming to Border Town.

"Anything you want, Your Highness," Cornelius said with a forced smile while leaving the room. But the moment he turned around, Roland could see how his counterpart was gnashing his teeth.

Like this, I ought to have created a big enough uproar within Longsong Stronghold, right? Roland thought.

Chapter 95 Meeting

Damn, damn! What a bullshit prince, isn't he the one who was only thrown into this wilderness out of pity! Cornelius ferociously thought, but when he remembered the two guards with their hands at their swords who were walking behind him, he had to temporarily swallow his mouthful of resentments back into his stomach.

When he was finally out of the castle and saw the two guards leaving, the Baron felt relieved.

He pulled out an already wet handkerchief and wiped his forehead. He resolutely spit out a mouth full of spittle. While imagining the spit directly smashing into the Prince's face. Yet this still wasn't enough to release his anger, so he had to stamp repeatedly onto the spit, until his heart was finally comforted.

Just because you were able to block the invasion of the demonic beasts, you think that you are able to face up against Longsong Stronghold? Just carry on being so proud, after all you don't have much time left in which to be so proud!

Cornelius thought that if he hadn't received such reliable information, he would never have dared to come back to Border Town so early. In general, the aristocracy will always return even later than the civilians. After all, mining and hunting was dirty work, it was so hard that the aristocrats would never do them.

Their part was just to supervise the production. And wait until there was enough ore so that it could be transferred. And in their spare time they would go to their hunters' houses, and ask whether they had any suitable high-quality fur to purchase.

But this year the situation was completely differently, Cornelius had heard from the financial director Sir Reynolds that Duke Ryan was ready to drive the 4th Prince out of Border Town – this wasn't a betrayal to the King of Graycastle, no instead they were upholding an order from Timothy Wimbledon, the new King: "Roland Wimbledon is no longer the Lord of Border Town, and if he wants to get re-assigned to a new territory he has to return back to the king's office first."

Duke Ryan had spoken these revolutionary words in front of Sir Reynolds, who had been able to climb up from a position in the City Hall to the position of financial director in only five short years. If they hadn't had a distant relationship as relatives, and if he hadn't sent him two high-quality furs each year, Cornelius would never be able to know what went on in the minds of the people in charge of the west.

"Gaining a new territory after returning to the King" was just an empty statement, even Cornelius knew, that the first Prince without being able to say anything had been sent to the guillotine. So if the 4th Prince went back, would the new king show him mercy?

Without doubt, the west border was under the rule of Duke Ryan, the only question was whether he would wait for the order of King Timothy or if he would act without it. However, when Duke Ryan decided to act, there would be no difference between Roland Wimbledon and a homeless dog.

This was also the reason why Cornelius had rushed to Border Town, the first reason was naturally to get to the furs as early as possible, but his second reason was to put his own house up for sale. The first point he thought was a very smart idea, while in the previous years the civilians fled to the Longsong Stronghold to take refuge, their inventory was naturally empty, so early in the year. But this year they had stayed the whole time in Border Town, surely there were some goods he would receive, right? So not only could he make a small fortune, but he could also offer Reynolds some familial piety.

The second point was that Cornelius had asked Reynold to give him a place within the City Hall, although it was just busy work, but it was still better than living in this damned poor place. And since he wouldn't need his house any longer, he should sell it as soon as possible. Who knows when Duke Ryan would start his attack, maybe this unruly mercenary would raid and burn his house, giving him a big loss.

But he never imagined that the house wasn't burned down by mercenaries, but instead it was directly removed by the 4th Prince. When the Baron thought once more about this fact, he gritted his teeth in anger, it was one of my best houses ah! Although one hundred and fifty gold royals were an exaggeration, but it had at least a value of thirty gold royals.

In order to get the money early, he had even bent his back, and had reluctantly accepted twenty gold royals, but then His Highness even treated him in such a crazy way! Instead of giving him his coins, he was even threatened by defection. Doesn't he know that each year to the beginning of the Months of Demons, all the nobles evacuated towards Longsong Stronghold?

Wait a minute... Cornelius suddenly slowed down, there seemed to be something wrong. Although he had previously heard of the 4th Prince bad character, the Prince was always acting without thinking, he even maliciously molested Baron Simon's wife directly after he had arrived at Border Town. Afterwards this became a private joke for a long time. But today, the impression he received from the Prince didn't match with what he knew. The Prince had never become angry nor did he act shamelessly, instead it was Cornelius himself who had shown bad character and acted completely without rhyme or reason. During the whole talk, the other side had constantly spoken in the same tone.

So why had he become so scared, even having obediently giving up his own house? If he had said that the house was his own, would the Prince really have killed him, or not?

Right... Cornelius couldn't help himself from shuddering, sweat on his forehead shrinking back. Now, in retrospect, when he'd faced the prince, he'd had the illusion that he was instead talking with Duke Ryan.

The Baron shook his head hard, trying to search through these unpleasant memory at the back of his mind. Anyway, the 4th Prince will only be proud for a few days longer. Soon Duke Ryan will bring Border Town back under his rule, and then His Highness Roland Wimbledon will also be escorted back to Graycastle, I will have a good laugh at him then. Perhaps those twenty gold royals were lost, but in the end Duke Ryan will still seek out revenge for myself.

Stopping his thinking here, he was finally able to relax again. Since he had received some high-quality pieces of fur, and he didn't need to sell his house any longer, he could simply sail back to Longsong Stronghold now. Delivering the message to "the member of the aristocracy who had the same misunderstanding," simply has to be a great act. When I return to Longsong Stronghold, I have to imitate it as good as possible, so that everyone knows what a bluff looks like.

When he finally left the castle area, walking down the road to the harbor, Cornelius passed a woman who was wearing a hood.

Originally, there was nothing strange about it, after all the townspeople were coming and going all the time, but the woman was all dressed up. Maybe she was a young lady or an upper-class woman, on her way seeing the Prince. But when a gust of wind blew up the corner of her hood, Cornelius felt his heart jump, and he couldn't catch his breath.

God, that's what a woman should look like, with rare green long hair, even just revealing a part of her face for a moment, was enough to get me stunned. Even if the King in Graycastle called for the princesses of other aristocracy he wouldn't see someone like her, so how is it possible that someone so beautiful is in Border Town?

He turned around, wanting to catch up with her, seeing what she would do, only to discover that she was walking straight into the direction of the castle.

Is this the kind of woman the Prince has access to? The Baron hesitated a bit longer, but in the end he gave up. He just really didn't want to have anything to do with the 4th Prince, such a wicked person should be left for Duke Ryan to clear up, I still have to get back to Longsong Stronghold.

Arriving at the pier, he entered his own single-masted clipper. The boatmen pulled at the sail, and the boat quickly left the pier, sailing in the direction of Longsong Stronghold.

On the way back, while sitting in the sun, Cornelius saw quite the spectacle.

About five miles away from Border Town in a field of snow, a large group of people entered his field of vision – they were all wearing the same brown leather armor, and a long wooden pikes on their back. Forming a long line, they slowly marched through the snow. Although he was separated from them by a small forest so that he couldn't clearly see everything, he was still sure that there was at least one hundred people.

Those are... the farmers the 4th Prince used to confront the demonic beasts?

In the early months of the year, when the snow still covered the roads, it was absolutely difficult to walk in the snow, Cornelius couldn't even imagine it. But the group of people were still moving down the road, and it even looked as if the snow was at least one foot deep, this wasn't a small matter...

He wanted to laugh at the ridiculous sight, only to discover that he was unable to. A feeling of doubt unconsciously arose in his heart, the knights under Duke Ryan's command, would they also be able to do this?

Chapter 96 Leaves

Leaves saw that there were people busy everywhere; she had never thought that she would ever return to a town in the secular world.

After crossing the border of Border Town, one story brick buildings which were covered in dust appeared one after another in front of her. Even though it was only half a year since she had fled into the Impassable Mountain Range, she still felt like she had just stepped into another world.

The Months of Demons just came to an end, so after passing the winter the townsfolk were short on food and clothing, and the complexion of their bodies should be very bad, at least this was what Leaves remembered when she had crossed the slums of Silver City and her journey to the West – everywhere where people who died from the cold or from hunger. And if they were living they still walked as if they were already corpses. With an empty gaze and a slow and unsteady movement.

But here, most people she saw were full of vitality, some were even drying fishes at the entryways of their houses'; some had climbed on top of their roofs to repair damaged tiles; other young men were carrying hoes and hammers. They talked and smiled to each other while walking to the north of the town. To prevent other people from trying to talk to her, Leaves pulled her hat down, as far as possible.

The castle stood at a very striking area, it was placed at the southwest corner on top of a hillside. There was no plants around her, so if she wanted to sneak into the castle it was quite difficult. Hiding herself in the trunk of a tree would be okay, but letting it stand up and walk would be too much.

For a witch, she really wasn't good at hiding her body. So after carefully considering her options, Leaves thought that rather than hiding herself, she wanted to walk openly into the castle.

If Nightingale didn't lie to her, then even if she entered through the main entrance she wouldn't face any problems.

And in case Nightingale deceived her, deceived the Witch Cooperation Association, she was also self-confident enough that she would be able to flee from the two guards at the entry.

Of course, there was also the worst case scenario, that Nightingale had betrayed everyone and there weren't any witches working for the prince. If that was the case she would in all likelihood die. As a top fighting witch, very few people would be able to escape if Nightingale wanted to kill them, she was probably even stronger than Cara. If they fought each other, it wasn't certain who would win.

Leaves had already prepared herself for the worst case. If she was unable to come back, Scroll would take over the position as Mentor and lead her last sisters into their future – no matter where their destination laid, no matter where at which place they ended, no one knew the answer.

She slowly walked up the hill, coming close to the castle's gate. And was soon noticed by the guards, who put their hands on the hilt of their swords, and one loudly snapped: "This is the Prince's Palace, it's no place for you, you should quickly go back!" He paused, and then added, "If there is something important you have to report, go straight to the left and follow the street until you reach the Town's Hall, there are people who will receive you."

Leaves took a deep breath, then she took off her hood. Not surprisingly, she saw a surprised look on their faces. When she saw that the other side had recovered their feelings, she bluntly said: "I am a witch."

At the moment she said the sentence, she almost expected the other side to draw their swords. Yet the two guards just stared at each other, there was no ordinary man who could hide their feeling of disgust when they heard she was a witch, but their faces showed only curiosity. One of them even asked with interest, "You are a witch? What ability do you have?"

Hearing their response Leaves heart begun to beat faster, she was almost unable to hold her excitement back from breaking out. While trying to keep her voice calm she said: "I want to see Nightingale, Anna or Nana would also be okay."

In Nightingale's story, the witches were frequent visitors to the castle. The prince didn't restrict their freedom, only acting as their guardian, even letting them come and go as they pleased... But if Nightingale's story wasn't true, the guards surely had never heard of their names.

One guard turned to his partner, the one who had previously spoken out loud, patted his shoulder and said. "You will keep her here, and I'm going to inform His Royal Highness."

Leaves watched him walk through the gate, soon disappearing in the direction of the garden.

While waiting for what would happen now, she thought about the probabilities. In the end, would Nightingale greet her like a sister, or were the guards at this moment surrounding her, or would she be attacked by a blade out of the shadow?

She found herself in a strange contradiction, obviously, she wanted to believe in Nightingale, but the closer she came to the answer, the more afraid she became of the thought to get disappointed. Maybe Nightingale was a secret agent? The Names of Anna and Nana weren't made up by her, right? or...

For her, the time had never passed slower than at this moment! Every heartbeat was like a hundred years for her, for her, it was a very long time that she had to wait until her destiny was decided.

In the end, she didn't know how long or how short the moment was she had to wait until she heard Nightingale's voice – as if in a trance, she was unable to do anything, only asking herself if she heard it right.

A familiar figure emerged from the gate, bounced over and reached Leaves side almost at the same time as her voice. The next moment she was already wrapped in a warm hug.

"Leaves, welcome home!"

*

"This is my spare uniform, for the moment you can wear it," said Nightingale who rummaged through her cupboard. "Here is the jacket, shoes... well, here is also a nightgown and bath towel."

"Why are you in such a hurry," Wendy shook her head with a smile on her face. "You only have to wait until His Highness is up, then she will get everything."

Seeing how busy Nightingale was to help her, Leaves' eyes became warm. She took a deep breath, trying to suppress her tears.

From the beginning Nightingale had never lied to them, there really existed a prince who treated witches nicely.

"Do you want to take a bath first?" asked Nightingale and placed the towel and bathrobe directly beside her. "At the moment His Royal Highness is taking a nap, when he finally wakes up he will gladly receive you. Right, were you able to find the Holy Mountain? How did you and the other sisters fare?"

When this sentence was spoken, Leaves line of sight became suddenly blurred, unable to bear it any longer, she wrapped her arms around Nightingale, releasing the long suppressed pain inside her heart.

After having cried for a long time Nightingale's chest had already become wet from the tears, but at least Leaves was finally able to calm down.

Then she began to tell them what had happened after their last meeting, telling them form all the suffering they had to bear. When it came to the point where her sisters were buried in the wild, she felt how Nightingale took her hand and squeezed it.

When Leaves' story came to its end, Wendy's look became very heavy, "I had never expected that Cara would bring the Witch Cooperation Association to its end... From the forty-two sisters only seven people... It was also my inescapable responsibility if I hadn't stood firmly on Nightingale side..."

“It wasn’t your fault,” said the Nightingale sadly. “No one can predict the future; now the important part is to decide what to do next.” She looked at Leaves, “You said there were six other sisters who survived, where are they now?”

“They are at the entrance to the canyon waiting for a message from me. We previously made an appointment, if I’m unable to come back, Scroll will lead them away from here, maybe to the extreme south, perhaps even crossing the sea...”

“Then we will have to go to the canyon and get them,” said Nightingale excited. “I’ll leave now. Wendy will stay here and take care of you.”

“Wait a minute, what will you do if they don’t believe you? Leaves will have to go with you, just call Lightning to follow along. At the moment she should be training for her flight towards Longsong Stronghold. Take some horses with you, like this, our sisters can ride the last part of their road.” Wendy carefully urged.

“But His Highness... isn’t he still sleeping?” Leaves became stunned, “Don’t you need to get his approval first?”

“Rest assured,” said Nightingale reassuringly, “If His Royal Highness knew about this, I am afraid he would have gone crazy from waiting.”

Chapter 97 New Witches, New Abilities (Part 1)

When Roland walked into the office, he was surprised to discover that the one waiting for him wasn’t Nightingale, but Wendy.

“What happened?” He poured himself a cup of warm water, “Where’s Nightingale?”

“She went to meet our sisters.”

“Are you,” Roland, having raised his cup, ready to drink, suddenly felt that something was wrong, “Wait a minute. What sisters?”

“Our sisters from the Witch Cooperation Association, they’ve come to Border Town,” Wendy replied.

“Aren’t they still busy looking for the Holy Mountain?”

He jumped to his feet. “How many people are there? The one that wanted to kill Nightingale... I seem to remember she was called Cara, is she also coming?”

“No, your Highness... they were unable to find the Holy Mountain. When they finally managed to enter the wildlands, they were attacked by terrible monsters, ultimately only seven sisters survived.” Wendy reported what Leaves had told her, then she bowed to apologize, “You were still napping, please forgive us for deciding that Nightingale and Lightning should go and pick them up.”

“No,” Roland said while waving his hand in refusal, “You already know that I won’t blame you for what you decided. What are their abilities?”

“This I don’t know, but Leaves told us that they don’t belong to the fighting type of witch, perhaps...” Wendy hesitated, “They aren’t of much use to you.”

Non-fighting type? Roland's heart was suddenly full of expectations, the God's Stone of Retaliations and the witches small area of effect drawback, actually already limit the fighting capability of the witches by a lot. So production was their strongest field in any case. If there is a witch with the ability to produce plastics, I would be able to solve the problems of my rough processing technology. I could directly step into the mechanical production era; If they have a witch with an electrical ability with them, she would be able to turn the night into day for Border Town. If the next King took a witch as his bride, they would be able to lead us to the pinnacle of life. They could leading us to achieve 'Deng Xiaoping's' four modernizations. Just thinking about these possibilities makes me already totally excited.

"Your Highness, if you don't need them..." Perhaps the silence was too long for Wendy, that she began to worry and so whispered.

"No, how could that be possible," Roland said , not letting her speak one word more, "As many witches as arrive, is as many I will accept."

Around sunset, Nightingale returned smoothly with the last from the sisters from the Witch Cooperation Association. Roland, who was already waiting for them, had prepared a sumptuous dinner in the Castle Grand Hall, trying to wash away the memories of the hardships they had encountered during their travels.

The witches were obviously very hungry, but it was their first time dining in such a grand environment, they were all acting very reserved. For many of them, it was the first time seeing a Lord, not to mention that this Lord was even a prince of this country.

Fortunately, in addition to Roland himself, there were also the two local witches Anna and Nana who demonstrated how to act and not to forget there was also the lively Lightning. In the end, they were finally able to let go of their shyness, and start to enjoy the banquet even starting a happy conversation.

Roland was chewing on a slice of bread, at the same time he was also looking on with high spirit at the quite different styled women before him. Even with their uniqueness, they could all still be regarded as beautiful women. This was the great gift of magic – even with the technology of the science in the future, those witches wouldn't have the need to use any of it. Even without cosmetic surgery, their appearance was still able to turn every head.

Since Karl still wasn't finished with the construction of the living area for the witches, the only possibility was to place all of them inside of the castle. There were still four rooms vacant on the second floor. So Roland considered changing the single person rooms into double occupancy rooms. After all, those big beds were actually prepared for visiting nobility, it could easily accommodate two people and still have room to spare.

The Prince waited until the end of the dinner and then finally asked the long awaited question – what were their abilities.

Like a wolf herding sheep, Nightingale brought them one after another into the office. There Roland asked all of them specific questions about their life and abilities etc., all things that were comparable with a job interview. He recorded each of their characteristics, he also tested their abilities while being protected by the effect by a God's Stone of Retaliation. When the last interview with the witches was finally completed, he took a deep breath and stretched out his tensed body. If he wasn't afraid that

Nightingale might be directly beside him, eavesdropping, he would have liked to start humming 'Super-Star'.

Although there weren't any witches with the ability of electricity or shaping material, which could have been used to raise the slow modernization speed, but this batch of witches was still able to bring Roland an ample amount of pleasant surprises.

First and most important of them was the witch called Leaves.

He spread all the records he had collected over the table and took hers back into his hands.

Prior to adulthood, Leaves was still only able to speed up the growth of plants and their fruits. But after her day of adulthood her ability had greatly improved, besides her growth control of plants she could now also manipulate them.

The first ability could be used to improve the quality of fruits and seeds, increase yield, and also increase their herbal effects. Her ability also had possibility of altering a plant's characteristics and traits.

According to her explanation, if she put her magic into a plant, she was able to grow green leaves on a dead branch. While if she put her magic into weeds she could wrap them around her enemies' feet and doing so entrap them. But the most remarkable thing was that she was able to integrate herself into a tree.

However, the bigger the plant, the more magic she had to spend to manipulate it. So she preferred using weeds during combat as it showed a faster effect while having a lower cost.

The range at which she was able to cast her power, even through physical materials (such as earth), was around five meters.

There was no doubt that the witch whose ability resembled her name and whose green hair also her appearance, would be a good helper to improve the agriculture. So her importance to Roland was self-evident – industrialization required a large population, and if there was a large number of people it also needed an adequate supply of food to support the population. This was achievable through either self-producing or through trade. If they used the former possibility and the production wasn't efficient enough, most of their human resources would have to go work in the fields. The second point was very difficult to achieve because of this era's ability to transport goods.

Now that he was able lay his hands on a Druid, Roland hoped to use only a few farmers to feed a large number of the industrial population, and with this accelerate the process of industrialization in his territory.

Therefore, in the future, he would let her practice improving the quality of wheat and barley seeds so that they would deliver a larger yield. As long as she only improved them by at least a little, it would still greatly help to improve his territory overall and raise the upper limit for the population. In addition, Roland had heard that the Fjords also had some unique types of food. According to Lightning's description, it sounded like they had both potatoes and corn. If these rumors were true, then introducing those two plants as crops should become one of his highest priorities. After all, wheat itself wasn't a high-yielding crop.

Roland carefully wrote down the future practice plan, and then put Leave's data aside, and then he drew the second piece of paper from the table.

The second witch he had interviewed was named Scroll, she was also the oldest witch within the seven survivors, this year she was close to forty years old.

This was a really rare age for a witch. The older they became, the harder it was to resist the demonic bite. But when she described her ability to him, Roland could immediately understand why she had been able to reach that age.

Her primary ability was having a much better memory than the ordinary person. Her memory has become so good, that she could almost be regarded as already unable to forget anything. On her day of adulthood, she had also gotten a very interesting branch to her ability: She could read books and for a short period of time create a copy of it, because of this, Roland named her ability "the illusion of a book."

Since she used her main ability almost all the time, Scroll could easily pass each Day of Awakening. This was also the reason, why even though she came from a very poor family, she was still so knowledgeable... This ability greatly enhanced her learning ability, especially for exercises where someone would need to remember important texts. Casting her branch magic was very taxing for her body, how long she could create a copy of a book was dependant on how much mana she had remaining within her body, usually it was enough for one to two hours.

Obviously, Scroll was a natural born teacher. If in the future he wanted to increase the standard of education, she was a teacher who could teach nearly anything. Well... as for now, Roland thought, her ability didn't offer much to practice, so he simply put her file to the side while thinking: when I have some leisure time, I can write some primary math and primary physics problems down to teach her. So that when the time is ripe, she will be able to enlighten the education sector.

TN: Information to the Four Modernizations

Chapter 98 New Witches, New Abilities (Part 2)

The name of the third witch was Hummingbird, she was a witch that had a small size, just like her nickname depicted. When asked to perform her ability she had acted much more cautiously than the other witches had. It was just in this year that she had become an adult, had symmetrical dimples on her cheeks and very delicate features with a waxy soft voice, summing it up she was cute.

Her ability was to "lighten an object". When she put her magic into an object, it's weight would be greatly reduced. According to her description, the weight would almost become close to zero. Roland let Hummingbird give him a live demonstration with her own cup, seemingly letting it float in the air – in other words, its weight was about equal to the air. Of course, in this era in the eyes of the people, the air had no weight.

It seemed it was due to her ability, that the Witch Cooperation Association was able to cross the Impassable Mountain Range. With the help of this young witch, the bags could be filled up with the wheat and dried fish and were still easily to carry. Like this, only a few people had been needed to carry a lot of materials, which had significantly reduced the trouble with logistic.

Although Hummingbird had already become an adult, but she still hadn't developed any branch magic. To cast her magic, she needs to be in contact with her target, in addition the target wasn't allowed to be a living entity. The bulkier the object, the more time would need to transform its weight and the more magic she would consume. However, once the conversion was completed, it would last for several hours.

This capability looked to be very suitable for the transportation industry, and it also had some promising uses in the upcoming war. But there were still just too many unknown elements, so her ability still needed to be more researched before that.

Thinking all this through, Roland wrote at the bottom of her parchment: Learning to control the needed magic output, by training with stones of different weights, so that in the end she can precisely determine the effective time of her magic.

After finishing the first three training programs, he ordered his attendant to light another candle, making the room brighter. But even with this, in the waving orange candlelight, the reading and writing became much more tiring to his eyes.

Roland yawned and took the parchment with information concerning the fourth witch.

The fourth witch had a rare surname, with her full name she was called Soraya Zoen. She belonged to a merchant family from Graycastle and had brown short coils and a pair of slender eyes. On top of her nose she had a small freckle which didn't destroy her beauty, instead, it gave her a unique touch of youthful vitality.

She was nineteen years old and her ability was also a very special. After all, she was able to paint a picture of everything she saw or could imagine. In addition, with her "Magic Pen", which was her branch ability, she was able to draw without any paint on any paper and it would be just like creating a photo-realistic image.

Her ability which was just like a camera, had endless possibilities and as for her training, he would just let her draw some paintings every day.

Afterwards, he pulled out the next parchment.

The fifth witch was called Echo and was a woman from the extreme south. She was tall, had brown skin and her eyes and nose had the typical southern features, giving her a very exotic look. According to her story, after her awakening, she was able to imitate any animal's call and after her day of adulthood her calls had only gotten more wonderful and charming. She didn't develop any branch ability.

Roland decided to name her ability "Magic Sound", as for the long time uses he had no idea, even for practice possibilities... she should just roar at the top of her voice as much as she wants.

The sixth witch who came in to be interviewed was Lily, who was only sixteen years old. She had two ponytails and a delicate doll-like face, without showing any facial expressions while sitting in front of Roland. Her ability was to prevent food from rotting, and even though her awakening had only been one year ago, she was still the witch with the most important role in the Witch Cooperation Association – without any food preservation, a lot of food would have become inedible during their journey. Lily together with Hummingbird would be a good addition to his logistic force.

As for how she kept the food fresh, whether she was killing the bacteria or had any other means was still to be confirmed. Roland decided to let her practice on all kinds of meat and fruits, and that she should also confirm her magic power's – time of duration ratio.

He rubbed his tingling neck and put the information about the six witches on a pile and set them to the side. Now there was only one last piece of information on his table.

After Leaves, she was the next surprise for Roland.

Seventh Witch: Mystery Moon.

She was very nervous when she walked into the office, Nightingale even had to come in to comfort her for a while. Nightingale later whispered to Roland the specific reason why she was so nervous, into his ear.

Even so her ability was still a mystery, yet it was known as the worst ability within the Witch Cooperation Association. It could even be said to be useless, since it was also easily accomplished by human labor. Coupled with often being blamed by Cara, she has become very timid, and now she feared that if Roland also thought that she was useless, he would ban her from Border Town.

Her main ability was to magnetize an object, before she reached her adulthood she was only able to magnetize metallic objects but afterwards she was able to magnetize any object she was able to put her hands on. She also didn't have any known branch ability and the magnetizing process was also extremely slow. According to her story, it would take her half a day to magnetize a square stone block the size of about half a foot.

This ability wasn't of much use to the Witch Cooperation Association. A magnet wasn't new to them, every huge vessel sailing across the seas was equipped with a six-point compass, so they could easily identify their direction. On the contrary, her magnetized objects were causing problems, for example a metallic pot which was lightened by Hummingbird flew always in the direction of her magnetized objects, in the end Cara even banned her from using her power.

But for Roland, this taciturn girl was simply a priceless gift.

She was also the reason why he wanted to hum 'Super-Star' – was there anything more appropriate than the lyrics of, "You are electric, You are light"?

Magnetolectric, electromagnetism, was knowledge that any science and technology dog would know about. He thanked Faraday, Gauss, Ampere and Maxwell whole heartedly. With electricity, there also was light. Perhaps it wouldn't take him much longer, until he will be able to show Border Town a new miracle.

A witch who was forbidden from using power and was still able to survive the demonic bite, showed that her self-esteem wasn't so fragile. At least her desire to live on, was much stronger than of most other people. Roland was secretly overjoyed that she only joined the Witch Cooperation Association less than a year ago, or else over the years she would most likely have become a living ruin under Cara's rule.

With much enthusiasm he wrote: In the following days, Mystery Moon will magnetized a variety of items as training, and determine the relationship between the consumption of her magic and the size she magnetize.

With the addition of these seven new witches, Roland witch-lineup had increased to twelve. After seeing so many examples, Roland got a general understanding of magic. Their traditional classification of combat and non-combat type wasn't reasonable, Roland instead preferred to divide them by the characteristics of their magic abilities. Summarizing it, the witch's ability can basically be divided into three categories.

The first category was the self-strengthening type. This type of ability seemed to be very rare, so far only Scroll seems to belong to this category. Even under the effect of God's Stone of Retaliations, she still wouldn't lose her extraordinary memory.

The second type was the summoning type. Anna, Nightingale, Nana, Lightning, Wendy, Leaves, Soraya, Echo and Lily all fell into this category. Its characteristic was that the magic could be summoned outside of their body – yet the area of effect was only about five-meter or less. Witches that fell under this category were the witches who were the most suppressed by God's Stone of Retaliation, once they stepped into its suppression zone, any magical effect would disappear. However, in the case that the power was used before it was blocked, the result was permanent and irreversible.

The third type was the attaching magic type. This belonged to Hummingbird and Mystery Moon. Their magic was displayed by direct contact with their target, the conversion process was also very slow, and the consumption of magic was quite large, and it could always be interrupted by God's Stone of Retaliation. However, once the conversion was completed, the added properties became inherent properties, which were effective even within the suppressive area of the God's Stone of Retaliation. How long the enchantment took effect depended on the amount of magic power used and the objects' size.

Most probably this is also the reason why the God's Stone of Retaliation is unable to suppress the rampaging magic during the demonic bite, he thought, God's Stone of Retaliation doesn't affect the converging magic or the inner magical flow, it only affects magic during the processing time. Described in layman's terms, it only affects outside powers and no inside powers.

Roland put the quill down and rubbed his eyes. No matter what, he was going to have a busy future.

Chapter 99 Night talk

The witches were unable to sleep at this time, after having suffered for so long, they still couldn't believe that they were so welcomed by the Prince. There were no fetters and no guards, the Prince even allowed everyone to live within the castle, sleeping in such spacious rooms.

Wendy had already guessed that her sisters would feel uneasy, so she together with Nightingale had went to collect all of their sisters and meet in one room. There they sat on the ground in a circle, happily chatting and calming their emotions.

This is the manner that a leader should have, Leaves thought to herself, if it were Cara, who was absolutely scrupulous, she would never have noticed their condition, or even if she had noticed, she wouldn't see a reason to comfort her sisters.

"Sister Wendy, His Royal Highness... what shall we do?" Hummingbird asked timidly. "Our abilities are much worse than what you and Sister Nightingale can offer."

This caused a feeling of resonance within her other sisters, who nodded to support her.

Wendy seeing this began to laugh, "Let me think, well... the first thing you all should do is to practice your ability."

"Practice our ability?" Soraya asked hesitantly, "Does His Royal Highness want me to draw portraits of him all day long?"

"Probably," Wendy patted Mystery Moon's head. "You too, even if Cara forbade you to use your ability in the camp, His Highness doesn't. Instead, he even encourages you to use and discover your own ability."

"But my ability brings problems to our sisters," said Mystery in a very low voice.

"Even if that is the case you still need to practice," said Wendy categorically. "It's to save your lives."

"What does life and death have to do with training our abilities?" Leaves couldn't help herself from asking.

"Yes, the witches with His Highness method were able to safely survive the Day of Awakening," Nightingale interjected before Wendy could answer. "From now on, we can bid farewell to the demonic bite, all of us sisters can easily pass the Day of Awakening."

All the witches were now staring at Nightingale, and for the moment they couldn't believe what they heard. "Are you speaking about what happened to Miss Anna?" Scroll asked in astonishment, "but last time you didn't tell us how she was able to accomplish it."

"Yes, at that time it was still only His Highness speculation, but in the meantime, it was also Nana's Day of awakening – all day long she wasn't hurt."

"Then this method is..." Scroll couldn't speak any further, it was just too unbelievable.

"As long as we can consume all of our magic power daily," Nightingale continued to explain, "I'm able to see how the magic power within your bodies changes, due to regular usage, your body is able to adapt to the magic and your magic reserves will also increase – while at the same time the suffering during the demonic bite will also be reduced. When it is close to your Day of Awakening, as long as you consume all your magic and keep your magic reserves empty, the demonic bite won't cause your body any harm."

"I think everyone can even faintly feel it," Wendy added, "While we were always chased by the church, we always hid in the furthest parts of town, not daring to use our abilities. So every winter we lost many sisters. But this year, while living in the camp in the Impassable Mountain Range, besides for Ari and Ami everyone else was able to safely live through the Day of Awakening."

Thinking about this, Leaves took a deep breath, when she had encountered the demonic bite while traveling through the wilderness, its duration was exceptionally short. "In other words, the Holy Mountain is not a piece of land..."

"Yes, the Holy Mountain isn't a place," Wendy nodded. "As long as we can accept ourselves as what we are, not thinking of ourselves as the devil's subordinate, and when no longer hide our abilities, we are our own Holy Mountain."

“Wendy had even asked His Highness if he allowed her to go to the Witch Cooperation Association camp when the Months of the Demons had ended, to tell you the news.” Nightingale looked at Wendy and softly said, “Like this, even if you hadn’t found the Holy Mountain, you could still live freely within the mountains.”

“Since everyone is here now, it is unnecessary to mention this,” Wendy smiled and shook her head, “It isn’t important if you are needed by His Highness or not. Even if it’s only for the reason to keep yourself safe, you need to practice every day.”

“If this is really the key to release us from the demonic bite, can it be that other witches were already aware of this?” Scroll asked and after thinking for a moment, she answered her own question “We weren’t the first Witch-Society. The Kingdom of Dawn and the Wolfheart Kingdom had already their own societies. We even sent them letters inviting them to accompany us on our search for the Holy Mountain, but we never received any reply from them.

Leaves gently sighed, she had the same thought but didn’t say it. Since Cara found the ancient book in the ruins at the eastern border of the Kingdom of Graycastle, she firmly believed in the Holy Mountain and took us all with her on her endeavor. At this point, the society started their long march into the exile, almost across the entire kingdom. During the journey, we meet many new sisters, but we also lost a lot of them. If from the beginning we had hidden ourselves within the ruins, would we have found the key?

“We can try to contact the witches hiding in other cities,” suggested Nightingale, “this was His Highness plan anyway. He wanted to let other witches know of this safe haven by releasing rumors. Like this, it would surely greatly release their worry.

“In the end, I still don’t understand the point why His Highness should accept all of us witches?” asked Echo, clearly confused. The southern witch had clearly suffered worse than most of the other witches. First, she was sold by her own people to a businessman of the Port of Clearwater, who then took her all the way to the capital selling her once again to the King. She was forced to learn the royal etiquette and how to dance. She even had to learn how to skillfully please a man. If it weren’t for the Witch Cooperation Association who rescued her, she would probably already have been sold for an exorbitantly high price to the hands of a Duke or Minister. Until now, her speech had still her own southern accent.

“Maybe he is just the same like those who previously wanted to buy you,” said Lily with a sneer, “Men are...”

“Don’t talk about things you don’t understand, Lily,” said Nightingale resolute and clearly unhappy. “His Highness, Lord Roland, is clearly different from all those you spoke about, after all, some of us are already living here for quite a while.”

“Let’s end it here for today,” decided Wendy and said while still wearing her kind smile, “It’s already late, so everyone should go back to their rooms and try to get some sleep. Even if your ability really isn’t useful to His Highness, he still said that what he wants is for all of you to be able to live a life in Border Town that is as normal as possible. If you want to know what His Highness will ask you tomorrow, it is,” here she deliberately paused for a moment, “I want you to accept this contract.”

After Scroll and Leaves had finally returned to their own room and closed their door, the former said: "It's getting late we should sleep now."

"Well." Even before His Highness had asked about her ability, he had already arranged a room for her and Scroll together. Even so, he had said that this was only a temporary arrangement, and if the construction within the town was finished she could get her own room. But in her view, this bed was spacious enough for three people, so it wasn't really a problem.

She took off her coat, got under the quilt and was immediately wrapped by an indescribable soft and comfortable feeling. After feeling so much pleasure from finally having a comfortable bed to sleep in, Leaves couldn't help herself and began to happily croon while burying her head into the pillow. After a long time, she softly asked: "Do you blame Cara for what we had to face?"

Scroll kept silent for a very long time, then she sighed and finally spoke, "No one can predict the future, no matter what she later did, at least at the beginning she really wanted to find a home for us witches. Where we could live in peace, without having to have anything bad in our minds. But this is all is of no importance, you should sleep now, child."

With this she closed her eyes and murmured, "Good night."

Chapter 100 The Ancient Book and the traces it gives (Part 1)

Just as Wendy had said, the next morning directly after breakfast a maid came and brought them to Roland's office. There the Prince handed them a fine piece of parchment. Taking into account that some of the witches were illiterate, Scroll read its contents to them. Followed by them signing it with their fingerprint.

Roland knew that it was hard for them to understand the meaning of each line written in the contract, but this wasn't important, after some time they would begin to understand what he wanted from them. He also knew, even if this was a slave contract, they would still have put their signature under it. But Roland didn't think that it was good to lose his principles just to get some small benefits. Since they chose to follow this road, we have to look to where it is leading them to. At the moment everything he made was the laying of a foundation to form a positive cycle for the future. A long-term investment which should end in a win-win situation for both sides.

After receiving the signed documents, Roland gave out the training plan he had developed yesterday evening, and explained to each of them personally what they should do. When he had finished this he called Leaves, Scroll, and Soraya back into his office.

After closing the door, Nightingale showed a royal salute, startling her sisters.

"I've been thinking all night long about the story I've heard yesterday from Wendy," Roland opened the curtains, letting bright sunlight flood into the room. "She said you had encountered a terrible monster and only seven of you were able to survive. Even your Witch Cooperation Association Mentor, Cara, died within the wilderness. So I want to know what you have encountered, was it a mixed species or a demonic beasts?"

Leaves was the first to speak: "They weren't demonic beasts, they were Devils coming from behind of the Gate of Hell. They possessed a tall body and were able to ride on demonic beasts, they were also able to use magic, just..." She hesitated for a moment, "Just like us."

"They were Devil's?" Roland frowned, turning his view to Soraya, "Were you also present at the scene?"

The spoken to nodded hesitantly.

"You can draw the scene, right?" asked Roland and gave her a piece of paper.

Soraya closed her eyes, remembering the painful memory, but regardless she still took the paper and went to the table.

Following this, she began to fully display her ability, taking her magic pen in hand. The pen started to release colorful light, which flew from her hand directly onto the paper. A lifelike picture gradually took form on the paper, and during the whole drawing process Soraya never opened her eyes once.

When Roland stepped near the table, he discovered that the picture's imagery looked very realistic – no, he had to correct himself, this wasn't a painting, but an image taken from a real-life scene. Her ability was just like a camera, reproducing the genocide in the wild from a first-person perspective.

When she had completed the painting, Soraya's forehead was covered in sweat, clearly indicating that the memory was a nightmare to her.

Nightingale, went to the table too, taking a look and asked, "Are these the Devils you had encountered?"

"Yes, those are," Leaves pointed to the nearest one from the perspective the picture was taken, "The Devil wearing metal gloves, was able to summon lightning attacks, while the other one was unusually strong, he could throw a spear several times faster than an arrow shot from a bow. More than a dozen sisters died under their hands. But they weren't able to use their special attack the whole time, it was in such a moment of recharging when I was able to kill them."

"You were able to kill them on your own?" Roland asked.

"Cara's magic snake had ripped open Ironhand's pipe, and he eventually died from that wound. I used the same method, to kill the other one with a crossbow. The pipe seems to store some red gas, and if the gas leaks out they die."

Well, this thing seems to resemble an oxygen tank, how is it possible for creatures in the wild to have something like this? Roland asked himself in confusion. But directly saying that they have to be aliens, is a little too premature. Looking at their clothes, they are patched together out of pieces of leather and animal skins. This shows that their level of civilization can't be much further developed than ours is.

Whether it was by using magic or technology, that they were able to cross to other planets, already shows their strength – while the people on earth are still fighting against each other all the time.

Of course, we cannot rule out the point, that it's just an innate skill of an exotic civilization. Roland thought, for now, the important point is to remember, that "The Devil" is not an invincible enemy, they can be killed.

“In addition to the Devil, we also saw a city floating in the sky,” Leaves added, “No matter how far we moved into its direction, it always stayed just in front of us. Lightning has mentioned something similar to it in her stories, I think she called it a mirage.”

“Can you also draw a picture of the city?” Roland asked in Soraya’s direction.

She nodded, summoned her pen once more, and begun to paint a city floating in the sky just as Leaves had said

Roland viewed the picture carefully, but he was unable to get much information from the vague scenery. Even if the city displayed in the picture really is only a mirage, it still means that somewhere within the wildlands there has to be the real one. There seemed to be red clouds above the city, maybe this is the gas that is needed by the Devils. This explanation is much more reasonable than thinking about aliens, after all, the vast wide lands behind the Impassable Mountain Range is a complete mystery zone, where for a long time no one had set their feet into, so detecting a new race isn’t too surprising.

“I heard from Nightingale and Wendy that Cara decided to look for the Holy Mountain after she read about it in an ancient book,” Roland asked. “Scroll, have you also read the book?”

Scroll hesitated for a moment but then she answered. “Cara didn’t allow anyone to read the book, but... I have still seen a little, but the text was quite messy yet... also incredible.”

“Can you make a copy of it and show me?”

“The text written in the book isn’t true, Your Royal Highness, that the Holy Mountain doesn’t exist confirmed this,” she sighed, but still raised her right hand, “I hope you won’t get confused by the book’s content.”

Suddenly a book out of golden light appeared midair, the book flipped open and its sides turned with an incredible speed, when the book came to its end, it fell directly into Scroll’s hands. “Your Highness, I hope you are the only person who will read it. I don’t want to see any of my sisters become like Cara.”

Roland took the book out Scroll’s hands and comforted her, “I got it.”

When the other witches left the office, Nightingale quietly appeared sitting on the couch. She had lifted up her robe, as usual, and placed both her feet on the table and chewed happily on a dried fish.

“You don’t want to see it?” Roland with a smile on his face, asked.

With a scoffing voice, she answered. “I’m not interested in anything that lunatic loved to look at.”

Roland shook his head, sat himself back behind the table and carefully opened the book. The pages felt just as if the book has become a reality.

Just like Scroll had said, most of the content was messed up. It seemed as if the text wasn’t written in the common language, at least the grammar wasn’t the same. Within the book a blood moon was mentioned, as well as a huge stone gate, but nowhere did he find any trace of the Holy City. In fact, apart from some words he was occasional able to understand, the meaning of many other words wasn’t clear for him. Most of the Book’s content he just couldn’t read – in the end his summary was: Even if I knew every word, I’m not sure if I would be able to understand it completely. I’m not sure if it is because of the short peek Scroll was only able to take, or if the book was just recorded this way.

Rolland skipped through the long passages, jumping straight to the end. Even so, the book was quite thick, it had very little content and most of its sides were blank. But when he turned to the last page, he suddenly saw a readable text. The previous neat writing became illegible, as it had been written down in a hurry, but the content was understandable and cleared many questions.

The first sentence still written in neat handwriting was “We have failed. Mortals cannot overcome the Devil.”