

Witch 911

Chapter 911: The Gleaming Star of Doom

Four days later, Roland had assembled all the leading staff that was campaigning Hermes and the Northern region. An emergency meeting was held in the First Army's campground within the suburbs of the Holy City.

Despite everyone feeling the great urgency of the meeting, no one panicked. Both the General Staff and the military officers of the Western campaign were making conjectures as to whether His Majesty had had new plans in mind. The murmuring of the discussion did not cease until the king entered the tent with a long face.

"I call a meeting, to those present." Roland tapped the desk. "We must return to Neverwinter at once."

A commotion between the staff instantly broke out after this curt announcement.

Ever since Roland had first received the encrypted letter, he had his doubts. The source of this information was questionable at best. Although the news was shocking, there was not a single shred of solid evidence corroborating Lorgar Burnflame's statement. There weren't even any details about when and how she encountered these demons. The threat of an entire demon army couldn't be ignored, however their whereabouts are still unknown and there would still be unrest in this region if the current operation changed dramatically. Roland remained hesitant.

Waiting a few days however, Roland received no shortage of rattled animal messengers that directly flew from the Western region. There must be no doubt a state of emergency has been declared in Neverwinter.

The letters confirmed this. He had details about Lorgar's injuries, the demon in delirium and the problems extended to internal conflict with the arrival of Sleeping Island witches. These letters should have been arriving at his desk chronologically, where the most recent mail should have been the last to reach him. The reality however, was a complete reverse.

The messages that had the most urgency also used some of the largest birds. As a consequence, he had received the most recent encrypted mail first.

After reading all the letters, Roland had developed a rough idea of what had happened. He had learned from the third encrypted letter that Lorgar had actually used Lightning's map to locate Taquila ruins, intending to train herself and improve her combat skills by fighting demons and large demonic beasts.

After talking to Lightning, he had confirmed the validity of the news.

And at the same time showed a favorable impression towards the wolf girl's persistence.

Roland wondered if he had been too harsh on her when they first met.

Fortunately, Lorgar had survived with the help of Nightfall's Seed of Symbiosis. With the statements Lorgar has given. If he returned to Neverwinter in late autumn, his enemies would have already established themselves on the Barbarian Land.

This is indeed a great piece of intelligence. Roland thought she even deserved a Special Award for the Service of Neverwinter. Maybe he should also fulfill her dream of becoming a top-notch warrior and equip her with a full set of heavy weapons. That sort of support would further her combat development immensely.

"That's the situation we're in now." Roland relayed the key information of the encrypted letters to the people on the floor and surveyed the audience gravely. "We have to suspend our current plans in this region. As of today, all companies should start making preparations for a retreat. I'll withdraw first and restore the situation in Neverwinter as fast as possible."

Tensions in the room increased dramatically. Most of the people on the floor had heard about demons and knew full well that they were the biggest enemies to the entirety of Graycastle and a threat to mankind. Despite being knowledgeable about the rumors, none of them actually faced a demon. The leading staff was not quite sure on how deal with the current situation and the whole tent fell deadly silent.

Roland understood that the news caught everyone off guard, they needed time to adjust to the matter at hand.

After quite a long silence, one of the officers of the General Staff, Sir Eltek, raised his hand. "Your Majesty, can we trust the information we're getting?"

"It isn't easy to forge Soraya's mark or Honey's animal messenger," Roland answered positively. "Although I haven't double checked yet, I think we can treat the situation as a special case because after all, it isn't easy to handle matters with demons."

"True... but what about matters with the Kingdom of Dawn?" The Duke of Evernight asked the most important question.

"We'll save him for sure. Graycastle won't abandon any of its allies." Roland cast a glance at Andrea who looked pretty worried. "The King of Dawn will have to pay for what he's done. The wrath of Wimbledon might be late, but it'll come sure enough. I'll make other arrangements, however the First Army won't be involved."

Nobody raised objections after seeing Roland's determination. The general staff was thus ordered to draft a proposal for the troops.

The First Army was familiar with an emergency operation. The troops knew the objective at hand. They could launch an attack and retreat in an orderly manner. Therefore, Roland wasn't too worried that he's leaving control.

The secondary city hall in the Northern Region supervised by Duke Kant would be responsible for the provision of supplies and allocate staff to the new and old Holy Cities. Isabella, together with the New Committee of Nuns and the garrison in the Northern Region, would stay behind until the transfer was completed so that the dregs of the church would not have the opportunity to resurge. The Hermes Plateau had been thus, successfully annexed to Roland's territory.

As to the New Committee named by Roland. He had it had been instilled with a new doctrine of ideas that pushed for loyalty towards him and ease pressure off the witches. Roland believed he would leave

the assessment of the organization to the future and decide whether it could replace the previous church and function as a tool of political propaganda to help with his ruling at some point later. His current top priority was to re-establish the order in the Holy City so that it would not be a deserted land before the arrival of the Battle of Divine Will.

These policies had indeed been more or less implemented before he had received the encrypted letters. Now he just had to expedite the process. The only thing he needed to do now was to continue the war against the Kingdom of Dawn, but with different means.

After the meeting, Roland asked Andrea to stay.

"Without the support of the First Army, we'll need a change of plan." He went straight to the point.

"Please don't worry. Princess Tilly and the witches from Sleeping Island will make sure nothing happens to Neverwinter." The blonde witch comforted him, although she looked a little apprehensive. "You've done your best. You don't need to force yourself if you really can't."

"You're wrong..." Roland shook his head. "Without the First Army, we can opt for another solution I had in mind. Do you think Appen Moya's castle and knights can save him if I aim for his head? And, if we forego the open battle, we can even probably save Otto Luoxi as well. If this goes to plan, we can overthrow the king and take control of the region much quicker than we had originally anticipated."

"Faster?" Andrea was confused. "Are you planning to..."

"I am." Roland curled up his lips. "It won't be easy to persuade them, for they're now so close to having their final confrontation with their lifetime enemies, the demons." Roland paused for a moment. "50 God Punishment Witches are as powerful as 50 Extraordinaries. You can never underestimate them even in the age of the Union. Nobody but I can stop their effectiveness in a battle. Neither God's Stones of Retaliation nor the swords of knights can effectively protect them. Appen is living on borrowed time."

Chapter 912: Chapter 912 An Idealist (I)

"Dealing with The King of Dawn never posed a real problem for me. The real problem lies in maintaining order in the Kingdom of Dawn. You should know very well that it isn't our intention to pick another Moya, or a person who favors the royal family as the subsequent sovereign." Roland looked directly into Andrea's eyes and continued, "I thought my interference would justify this political movement, but now I'm afraid the three families have to come forward and take over from here."

It was pretty obvious that someone had to be there to clean up the mess after Appen Moya fell from power. As the reputation of the King of Graycastle and his impregnable First Army was a powerful deterrent to all the nobles, even if Earl Quinn did become the regent of the kingdom, the nobles would naturally believe he was the puppet controlled by the Wimbledon Family.

Under the new plan, an intervention from Graycastle had become impossible. Since the God's Punishment Witches were not politically involved, Roland had to carry out his plan in the name of the three families; otherwise, the diplomatic battle would turn into a revengeful assassination, which Roland wanted to avoid.

The new plan would bring the Quinn Family both upsides sides and downsides. The downside of it was that the Quinns would become the target of criticism, whereas the upside was the potential increase in their reputation and prestige. If Earl Quinn could take this opportunity and successfully exercise control over the City of Glow, he would have a chance to elevate himself from regent to the new King of Dawn. It was definitely a trade that would bring more benefits than harm to Earl Quinn, especially considering his actual personal qualities and influence over the region.

Andrea quickly understood the key implications after a ponderous moment. "But then you'll... gain little from this new plan."

"Better than Appen continuing to plot against me. At least, it can save Otto's life." Roland did not approve or deny. "Like I said earlier in the meeting, I won't abandon anyone who has made a contribution to Graycastle that easily."

"I see..." The anxious look on Andrea's face gave way to a look of gratitude. "Miss Edith is right. You're truly a kind king."

"Wh-what?" Roland was taken by surprise. "Edith Kant? What did she say?"

"Well, she predicted that you would save Lord Otto before we marched for the war. In fact, I probably wouldn't have decided so quickly if the Pearl of the Northern Region hadn't advised me to do so."

Really?

Roland managed to keep a straight face while nodding nonchalantly. "Well, since you've made up your mind, I'll write a letter to Earl Quinn detailing the operation procedure and alliance with Graycastle. Also, although most people would make the right choice under such circumstances, I want his consent to be guaranteed. Therefore, I need you to go to the City of Glow with the God's Punishment Witches to make sure he does what I told, and follows operation procedure. To be completely honest, I trust you not your father, so I have to ask you to hang in there for a bit longer. Once the problem is solved, you can come back to Neverwinter with the witches."

Relieved, Andrea once again exuded her dignity as a noble. She lifted her skirt and dipped in a curtsy. "I certainly cannot turn down your request, after all, you've done so much for us already. Also, I have a letter for Princess Tilly and hope you can forward it to her."

"Naturally." Roland agreed smilingly.

After Andrea withdrew, Nightingale frowned. "What the heck is she doing?"

"Are you talking about Edith?" Roland stroked his chin. "Um... they probably brought up that matter during a chat. After all, both of them were present at the pre-operation meeting. What, you didn't think she would view me as a nice person?"

"I don't think she'd say anything good about you even if you were the best man in the world." Nightingale shrugged. "She doesn't seem like the sort of person who talks about things like kindness..."

Roland was about to say something in reply when the guards outside the tent suddenly lifted the curtain and reported to him. "Your Majesty, Lady Edith Kant requests to see you."

Oh-ho, things are becoming a little interesting now.

He exchanged a look with Nightingale before instructing the guard. "Send her in."

"As you wish, Your Majesty!"

The Pearl of the Northern Region performed a bow unceremoniously after she entered the tent. "Your Majesty, I wish for you to change your plan and stop interfering with the affairs of the Kingdom of Dawn."

Roland drew his brows together. "You should have brought that up during the meeting if you wanted to say something. Now I've already made the decision, and it would reflect poorly on me if I change it again."

"That's why I come to see you alone after the meeting," Edith said slowly. "You can still carry out your plan but with some small adjustments. In this way, people will think it's due to some unforeseen circumstances that the mission has not been completed as planned. At the same time, you'll still be able to keep to your word."

At these words, Nightingale could not hold back anymore. She revealed herself and confronted Edith directly. "What exactly are you plotting? You asked Andrea to turn to His Majesty for help. Now you want us to stop interfering in the affairs of the Kingdom of Dawn. Don't tell me that there are no conspiracies going on here!"

Normally, people would feel embarrassed or hesitant when someone pointed out their contradictory behaviors, but Edith remained unflappable as if she had known this would happen. "The situation has changed," she answered calmly. "You can detect lies, can't you? So you should know that I'm telling the truth."

"State your reason." Roland was intrigued.

"The unstoppable pincer attack would make your name known to the whole Kingdom of Dawn. Even if Earl Quinn becomes the regent, civilians would know who the real ruler of the country is. When the demons aren't a threat, you can slowly exert your influence over the policies of the Kingdom of Dawn and gradually convert it to your territory. As people fear the powerful First Army, you could have easily achieved this effortlessly. However, your advantage is now gone."

Edith drew up her hair and explained methodically, "The entry of the army of Graycastle to the city and the coup perpetrated by Earl Quinn are two completely different stories. The latter would largely increase the earl's authority in the region. As for whether other nobles would choose to submit to his rule or plot against him? It'll be none of your business."

"Then we just let Appen Moya continue to conspire against Graycastle?" Nightingale questioned.

"Even if Your Majesty doesn't do anything, it would be hard for Appen to keep his throne. At least, he can't call his bannermen anymore. After the battle in the old Holy City, Appen's authority and integrity are being called into question, so he's no longer able to rule the state like he used to. The Kingdom of Dawn will soon descend into chaos." Edith's tone was so flat as if she were merely laying out the facts. "During this political chaos, Earl Quinn still has a chance to win the game of thrones, but his influence will definitely be limited. Moreover, If Otto Luoxi is lucky, he'll survive. Even if he doesn't in the end, Andrea won't blame you because it isn't your 'fault', Your Majesty." She stressed.

Andrea must have also thought about that. That was why she reminded Roland that "you'll gain little from this plan".

Roland knew it very clearly as well. However, he attached greater importance to a reliable ally than personal gains. Even if Earl Quinn would not give him full support, he believed the upcoming Battle of Divine Will would eventually eliminate all the misunderstanding and mistrust between people. When there is an enemy that threatens the very survival of human civilization, the most important thing they should think about is how to jointly eradicate the enemy.

The Pearl of the Northern Region should know what their top priority was, for as far as Roland could tell, she was definitely not a shortsighted person.

If she did let her lust for power cloud her judgment, Roland would be truly disappointed.

Chapter 913: An Idealist (II)

Roland gazed at Edith after disclosing his thoughts. "Do you really think it would be better to leave the Kingdom of Dawn as it is than have it ruled by Earl Quinn?"

Edith looked as if she had already known Roland would ask that. "In fact, I don't think the two choices would be much of difference in a short term. A reliable ally can provide you with resources, people, and assistance in the Battle of Divine Will. You can trust Earl Quinn since you've got his daughter Andrea, but you can't say anything about other nobles."

"She... admitted that?" Roland was now confused, wondering what the "short-term" she referred to meant. He had thought Edith would focus on the untrustworthiness of the nobles to establish her argument.

"On the other hand, if the Kingdom of Dawn sinks into a state of chaos, in order to re-establish order, a war would be inevitable. The Kingdom would definitely be weakened in wartime and the state would inevitably fail. By that time, refugees and deserted lands would be all that is left in the Kingdom of Dawn, just like the Eastern Region and the Southern Territory in Graycastle. You can obtain these lands populations effortlessly, and unlike the first choice, these people would belong to you forever."

"But didn't you just say that an ally can provide not only population but also resources and assistance for the war effort?" Nightingale questioned agitatedly. "How does it make sense to you that one benefit is the same as three? Besides, has it never occurred to you that those refugees would die of hunger or exposure to the elements during relocation?"

Edith instantly shot back. "It seems that three sounds certainly more promising than one, but there's a condition. In order to make full use of the ally's resources, His Majesty would first have to make some investments, for example, a steam engine, Golden Twos and even ammunition and weapons. Without these, the Kingdom of Dawn has nothing to compete against demons with, let alone supporting Graycastle on the battlefield. It's a significant investment, although with quite a high return. However, we can't just ignore such a sumptuous amount of money when we can barely satisfy the need of Neverwinter itself. Therefore, I hold that the benefits of the two plans are approximately the same."

Roland raised his brow. He knew very few people in Graycastle understood risk and reward in investing. Barov, for instance, would definitely refuse to provide his own technologies and products to support a neighboring country.

"Then why do you think leaving the Kingdom of Dawn as it is would be a better option if there's no big difference in gains?"

"Because of witches, Your Majesty." Edith's answer surprised both Roland and Nightingale.

"Witches?" Roland was stunned.

The Pearl of the Northern Region stuck out one finger. "Yes. Please think it over. If witches are no longer persecuted in the new Kingdom of Dawn — or rather, under the influence of Andrea, Earl Quinn starts to follow your example and hire witches to help with the production and construction of the country, newly awakened witches facing no death threats, would stop moving to Graycastle. This is one of the potential losses."

"Second, the Kingdom of Dawn is geographically more advantageous than Graycastle. Witches in the Kingdom of Wolfheart and the Kingdom of Everwinter would move south in the event of demon invasion or persecution from the dregs of the church. However, once the situation in the Kingdom of Dawn is stabilized, will they still move to Graycastle? The answer is no. It's probable that the number of witches in the neighboring countries would exceed that in Graycastle in several decades. I'm actually more concerned about this than the loss of current witches."

"Isn't it good... that everybody lives a happy life? What're you so concerned about?" Nightingale's voice was less provoking than before.

Edith ignored Nightingale but directly looked into Roland's eyes. "Has it ever occurred to you that one, or several witches with incredible abilities, would instantly make one kingdom outstrip another?"

"A witch like Anna?"

"That's right. Anna, Agatha, and Soraya... they all have incredible abilities. The moment you won their support, Neverwinter surpassed the domains of other nobles. This is also why you've achieved such great accomplishments so far." Edith said slowly, "Apart from that, you have a wider breadth of knowledge and greater wisdom than anyone else. As long as you're still the king and no one leaves the Witch Union, few could challenge Graycastle's position, except demons."

Edith paused for a few seconds at these words. "But what about the future in over 100 years when the government of the neighboring countries operates the same way as Graycastle's and when witches are employed in various areas? The knowledge you wrote would inevitably spread to cities and towns outside Neverwinter. By that time, people will study the method of machine manufacturing and learn everything you've taught them... If there's one single awakened witch in the Kingdom of Dawn possessing an irreplaceable ability, Graycastle would probably fall behind!"

"That's im—" Nightingale immediately attempted to refute Edith's theory, but she swallowed her words halfway.

"Plus, you now largely rely on various magic powers such as Anna's ability to carry out your construction and development plan. Can you guarantee, however, that Anna's power is the farthest a witch can go?"

Edith stressed each syllable with due strength. "If a new witch possesses a more ingenious ability than Anna, will the future King of Dawn still view Graycastle as his ally?"

Roland almost wanted to applaud her speech.

Edith was not focusing on immediate gains but was actually envisioning a scenario in the distant future. Ordinary people may only foresee changes in a few years' time, but Edith was picturing what would happen a century later!

Furthermore, Roland somehow sensed an upcoming explosion of technological innovations in her speech. As a person who had learned about the history of the industrial revolution, Roland knew very well that major technological changes expedited over the past few hundred years. It took apes thousands of years to learn how to make fire, but it took only a decade for human beings to enter the Information Age from the Steam Age. A person living in the modern society might experience technological changes that would otherwise take thousands of years in the past.

Now, the presence of witches might further shorten the interval between each technological change, and the emergence of one or two powerful witches might bring a new technological revolution. Edith was right. If Anna had awakened in the City of Glow, Roland would have no idea how far he could go.

Roland could almost foresee what the future would look like when the members of the Witch Union gradually entered their years of decrepitude while new powerful witches appeared in the Kingdom of Dawn. This was also the reason Edith insisted on leaving the Kingdom of Dawn as it was if Roland was not able to get full control over it.

Roland believed if he were a lord born in this world, he would have definitely been convinced by Edith just now. All kings wanted their kingdoms to endure through time, and for their descendants to perpetuate their glory. They would never create a rival that would potentially pose a threat to their own country.

Roland could still change his mind and abandon Otto to his fate. To do that, he just needed to break his promise and deceive Andrea.

However, he was not that kind of person.

It wasn't the country that Roland really cared about.

He did not care about what his kingdom would look like after his death. Compared with an everlasting kingdom, he was more interested in the advancement of the entire human race. No matter who his successor was, Roland did not have an obligation to assist him in ruling the state. His life goal in this world was to improve the standard of living in Graycastle and take it to the next level while at the same time unveiling the mystery of the Battle of Divine Will.

As for which of the four kingdoms was the strongest? He would leave the choice to people living here.

Last but not least, he wanted to stick to his principles of being an honest and righteous man. He realized that he could never easily break his words for personal gains, nor could he lie in negotiations. His instant resistance to Edith's proposal made him understand that he would never truly become an outstanding politician.

"An excellent argument." Roland looked at Edith with satisfaction. "However, I won't take my words back."

"Your Majesty..." Edith was surprised.

"I know what you want to say. You want to say that a wise king should always seek the best interests of his country and that it's normal to cheat." Roland interrupted Edith. "But there are rulers in this world other than kings..."

"Other... rulers?" Edith echoed in confusion.

"That's right. For example, an idealist."

Chapter 914: Anna's Prediction

After taking care of the affairs regarding the Kingdom of Dawn, Roland returned to his mansion deep down the campsite.

The manor, which consisted of several attached two-story stone houses, a huge front yard, and a backyard, used to belong to a wealthy merchant. Since its original owner went missing during the Hermes riot, Roland used it as his temporary residence.

When he entered the master bedroom, he found Anna sitting at his desk reading the book he had retrieved from the Dream World. The sunlight that fell through the window blazed off her bangs and gilded her pale face with a rim of gold.

"Is the meeting over?" Hearing his footsteps, Anna turned around and asked him happily.

"Yes, I told them everything they should know. Nana and the others will take off first thing in the morning."

"Have a foot bath first." Anna rose and put a water basin on the stool next to the bed. She then helped Roland take off his shoes and socks. The boots Roland wore on the plateau were made of sturdy leather, quickly giving him sore, smelly feet. Therefore, the first thing Roland did after work was to take a foot bath and put on a pair of light, soft shoes. At first, he insisted on doing it himself, but Anna was determined to help and refused to take no for an answer.

"How's the temperature?" Anna put her Blackfire into the water and let it sink to the bottom.

"Maybe a little hotter than this... Ah, that's perfect." Feeling the warmth wash over his feet, Roland sighed deeply.

Apart from heating up the water, the Blackfire could also turn into a rollerball to massage the back of his feet and soles. It would then cover his feet and dry off the water residue.

This is such a pampered life.

"What about you?" Anna sat down next to him. "Are you leaving with Nana?"

"No, but Sylvie is. Her monitoring ability is irreplaceable for the garrison." Roland held Anna's hands. "My return would certainly ease their minds, but they have to learn to solve problems without me. Besides, the main force of the First Army is not ready so I would be of little use. Once Maggie transports Nana and Sylvie, she'll transport us."

Since Hummingbird's ability did not apply to living beings, Maggie could only take around two people on her back at a time. The maximum number of people depended on the weight of each individual. Lightning could also carry one passenger, but she would fly much lower when loaded, almost touching the tips of the trees. Her service was thus considered not very safe for a long-haul flight but could serve as an alternative in the event of an emergency.

It was a long trip from Hermes to Neverwinter. Even if Maggie continued to fly after the sunset without taking a break to search for food, it would take nearly three days to cover the distance. Roland had no choice but to gradually transport witches based on how urgent their tasks were needed.

Fortunately, the troops would slowly advance toward the south along the inland river, which would shorten the wait time for the transportation services.

"If only there were a faster commute." Anna looked up. "For example, a machine that soars through the sky."

"That isn't easy, unless —" Roland was about to say that it was impossible to build a real aircraft without an internal combustion engine when an idea suddenly flashed across his mind. He instantly withdrew his previous remark and said something else instead. "Hang on, that's probably doable."

"How?" Anna's lake-blue eyes flickered with excitement.

"By using Wendy's and Mystery Moon's abilities," Roland answered meditatively. "If it's an aircraft with the purpose of transportation, it might work if we combine their abilities!"

Roland was actually inspired by Maggie's bombing plan. If he did not pursue generalization and mass production, a lot of witches' abilities could actually replace machines.

After three years of research and development, he had successfully obtained light aluminum materials in Neverwinter and had also established an Arithmetic Academy capable of performing large-scale computing. Together with a central carrier used to verify computing results, there was a significant chance that he could build a glider that required little or no power.

The most important part of this attempt was Wendy's control of the wind and an electric motor that powered Dawn I.

Simply speaking, an aircraft can fly because its engine produces thrust that pushes the plane forward. In the meantime, a pressure differential created by the airflow on the upper and lower surfaces of the airplane wings generated a lifting force.

Due to the limitations of the current technologies in Neverwinter, the electric motor presently in use was not powerful enough to lift a plane. However, Wendy's wind could provide a lifting force to the aircraft by directly creating an "air pressure differential" beneath the wings. In that case, the electric motor would only need to provide a horizontal thrust force. In the same way, in which Lightning had

adjusted the direction of bombs in the air, Wendy was required to apply moderate force to help the plane take off.

"To enhance the flight's duration, the glider's wings should be as long as possible." Roland became increasingly excited as he recollected what a glider looked like in modern society. "But to maximize the lifting force before its takeoff, the aircraft must have a wide wing to fully embrace Wendy's wind control area. Also..."

A regular, well-designed glider, relied on hot airflow to increase its flight altitude and enhance its flight duration. Roland's unique glider, however, would be supplied continuously with upward airflow generated by the witches. This meant that the aircraft could operate as long as Roland wanted to, provided that the magic power didn't run out.

In other words, once a runway was built at the destination, the aircraft could transport at least 10 people at a time. Even the slowest glider could reach a speed of more than 200 kilometers per hour, which was three times faster than Maggie in the form a Devilbeast. With such a glider, they could reach any city in Graycastle within a day.

Needless to say, it would be a slow and time-consuming process to manufacture the prototype and train the pilot. Even if he started the project now, by the time the glider was launched, the witches and the First Army would have already arrived at Neverwinter.

Nevertheless, the idea of inventing a glider exhilarated both Roland and Anna, who dwelled on this subject for quite a while. For human beings who came from and returned to the earth, flying was their biggest ambition. Unlike a lame hydrogen balloon, a glider allowed people to truly soar the sky.

Edith gave Roland wise advice on ruling the kingdom, whereas Anna shared his thoughts and ideas on new technologies and innovations. She was the only person capable of having a conversation with him on such an academic level.

"By the way," Anna carefully organized and put away the sketch of the glider and meeting notes, "was there any good news during the meeting? You haven't looked as relaxed as today ever since you received the letters from Neverwinter."

"Well, sort of." Roland curled up his lips into a smile and told her about his conversation with the Pearl of the Northern Region briefly.

When Anna heard Edith's reasoning, she could not help bursting into laughter.

"What's wrong?" Roland asked curiously.

"I want to say that she's overconfident in our learning ability. To understand everything you've taught us? I'm having a difficult time learning advanced mathematics, let alone physics and chemistry..." Anna grimaced. "I feel like I'll never completely understand the orange book even if you give me another 100 years."

"Haha." Roland laughed. "There are many similar books in the Dream World."

"And I don't think the future will turn out the way she thinks."

"Really? What do you think will happen?"

"She thinks it's better to let the Kingdom of Dawn sink into chaos if you aren't able to secure a dominant position on the continent through a flanking attack. However, I, believe there's more than one way to win people's respect. When you lead us to fight against demons and eliminate all those fearsome enemies who invade our kingdom, you'll be treated with reverence, an honor that no other king can possibly attain," Anna said in a serious tone. "When you eradicate the church and win the Battle of Divine Will, the witches would all remember your great services and the Taquila witches would also be proud of you. Your name will be found in every book you've written, and you'd be permanently associated with the knowledge you've brought to the masses. You'll not only become a part of our history but will also be remembered by everybody in present time. You would enjoy such high prestige that the lords from other kingdoms would come to seek your protection and request to be under your jurisdiction. Nobody would challenge your authority because those who betrayed you have already provided an illustration of what happens when they commit treason. In the foreseeable future, there would probably be only one kingdom, with its territory reaching to the Fertile Plains, where mankind is vigorously reviving the glory of the human race..." Anna paused for a second and then asked, "Is there anything wrong with my prediction?"

Chapter 915: To the End of the World

"Of course there isn't." Roland poked her forehead affectionately. "On the contrary, I feel it's exactly something you'd dream."

"Why are you so happy about what Edith said then?" Anna asked in bewilderment.

"I'm not happy about her prediction. History itself has a lot of variables and possibilities," Roland replied smilingly. "It's already hard to learn from the past, let alone to predict the future. For instance, we may survive the third Battle of Divine Will but suffer a miserable defeat in the fourth one 100 years from now. Another option is that the enemies lurking at the bottom of the ocean are too powerful for us to conquer them, causing us to be exterminated from Earth's surface... By that time, we don't even know whether the human race could persevere, not to mention the continuity of our kingdom."

"Hmm... this is something you typical for you to think about," Anna commented, mimicking Roland's tone. "What makes you so happy then?"

"Her vision on things." Roland spread out his hands. "When she said something like that, she became a governmental officer rather than a regular noble with a title."

"A governmental... officer?" Anna tried to repeat the mouthful word.

"Correct. She wasn't speaking as an official from the Northern Region but as one who governs the entirety of Graycastle. She's making policies based on the direction the entire kingdom is heading toward, which is a rare and invaluable quality for people born in this era. It's something that even Barov fails to pay attention to. As a City Hall director, he always weighs pros and cons from the perspective of Neverwinter."

It was indeed a game changer. From the beginning, Edith Kant, as an ordinary noble in the Northern Region, had been assisting the ruler in governing the state, while at the same time seeking benefits for her own local region. It was the most common mindset among local nobles. Only the territory granted to

their family was what truly belonged to the noble, causing them to place their own benefits over that of the king, although they had pledged alliance to the monarchy.

"Another thing is her attitude toward witches." Roland went on, "It's foresightful of her to associate witches with technological revolutions and then incorporate their abilities into the development strategy."

Roland knew it was entirely different to blindly follow an order than to understand the reason behind it. Although he had developed the idea of "science and technology constitute a primary productive force and witches are the best driving force" in his book, most City Hall officials did not really see the significance of treating witches fairly. They did so merely because it was the king's order. The public did not understand the rationale behind it either. They gradually accepted witches because of the convenience the latter brought to them. Their mutual relationship was, as a matter of fact, as delicate and fragile as a thin thread that could easily snap off upon a conflict or a misfortune. Only when people fully recognized the absolute necessity of witches would they engage more deeply.

In fact, Roland was more pleased with the shift of Edith's attitude toward witches than the change in her political mindset. With the centralization of power and the diminish of feudal rights, more officials would eventually accept the concept of unity. However, it would probably take a much longer time for them to grasp the nature of the witches' abilities.

Having said that, Edith was not perfect. Although she was more insightful of the future than most people, she failed to see some other possibilities besides the continued dominance of the Kingdom of Graycastle. Her thoughts and ideology were still primarily bound by the era.

Nevertheless, Edith was, after all, a young woman about the same age as Nightingale. It was thus healthy for her to have an ambition of building an everlasting empire. Roland was curious what kind of governor she would become in 20 or 30 years when she had been imbued with all sorts of modern concepts and ideas Roland was currently striving to advertise.

After hearing Roland's explanation, Anna tilted her head and asked, "Since the future is unpredictable and you don't care about what Graycastle would look like after your death, what are you planning to do if we survive the Battle of Divine Will?"

"You already know, don't you?" Roland looked into her azure eyes.

They had discussed their future several times when they had been cuddling in bed. Roland intended to visit the Land of Dawn across the Fertile Plains and even take a look at the demons' territory. He also planned to cross the Sealine and reach the other end of the ocean. Apart from that, he wanted to unveil the mystery of the deities and learn the truth of the world. To this end, Roland would use every resource available and force not only residents in the Kingdom of Graycastle but every single person on the continent to contribute to his entrepreneurial undertaking. Anyone who attempted to stop him would be viewed as his enemy.

"Remember to take me with you." Anna grinned. "I don't want to miss the adventure."

"Of course. I'll definitely take you wherever I go, even to the end of the world." Roland pressed a kiss to her lips.

Neverwinter and the Third Border City.

Tilly stood captivated before the magic core, watching its every movement. Its outer frame dilated and contracted as the magic power rose and declined, like blue sea water as if the core was breathing. At the center of the pyramid flickered a yellow light orb. Like a gemstone washed and polished by tidal waves, the orb got Tilly's full attention.

As long as the orb was illuminating, the Five-Colored Stone would be fine.

"If you feel tired, go take a rest." Pasha's voice suddenly popped up in her head. In the meantime, Tilly heard a rustle behind her. "If I notice something, I'll let you know immediately."

Tilly turned around and found a huge blob drop down from the ceiling. Although all the Senior Witches looked the same after their conversion, she could somehow tell them apart after staying with them for a few days.

"I'm not tired. It's been just five days..." Tilly yawned at these words. "... I'm a bit drowsy, that's all."

"When I still felt sensations, there was no difference between those two." Pasha swayed her tentacle. "Don't worry. The Magic Stone is intact, which means that the witches are still safe. If they do encounter demons, they will break the stone."

Tilly also knew that, but she could not find peace in her mind. She regretted staying behind and felt a little annoyed at the fact that she had been persuaded by Ashes' silly argument.

Technically, the operation should not be too dangerous, all the selected witches were excellent combatants who had participated in the battle against the church. The way they insinuated themselves into demons' lair would also be pretty much the same as that they had attacked the church at Fjords — Lotus would be responsible for creating an underground shelter, and Orbit would dig a short passage for the rest of them to travel in between two locations. With this method, the enemies would only be able to find an enclosed cave beneath the earth even if they saw something out of character.

The key lay in the final step. To expand the visual field of the phantom instrument, they should break the magic stone somewhere with a relatively high altitude. Tilly had planned to locate the spot with the Stone of Flight herself, but Ashes took over her job.

Tilly had confirmed through the few maneuvers before the operation that it was highly unlikely for demons to spot her if she took action at night. However, Ashes insisted that a leader should not put herself in danger. As a result, she was left behind with the magic core, unable to do anything.

Chapter 916: A Second Trip to the Ruin

"... I used to be like you." Pasha suddenly broke the silence. "Every time my friends went to war, I would wait at the city gate. The Union even built a high tower there for people to rest. They would know immediately if someone came back."

"Are you talking about Taquila?" Tilly asked.

"Yes, but after a few years, nobody but the garrison visited there. Do you know why?"

"..." Tilly did not reply but she already knew the possible answer.

"Because all we got was disappointment and grieve in the end." Pasha put her tentacle on Tilly's shoulder. "Witches are connected through magic power. Our bond is much stronger than blood. Once we get to know each other, everyone would become our sister, no matter if she was an ordinary combat witch or a member of the Blessed Army. However, the intimate relationship also generated negative emotions on the tower. It was frustrating to see bodies be sent back from the front on the day of return. When our outer defensive line gradually shrank and nobody needed to depart for war, the Union ordered the high tower to be torn down."

"Are you trying to say that it's unnecessary to wait for them?"

"Quite the opposite. I want to say that the fact that you're still longing for their return means that you haven't truly lost something," Pasha said in a slow and gentle tone. "I hope you'll never turn into someone like me, who views sacrifice as the new norm."

"I have lost a lot of things. I made many decisions when I left the palace for Sleeping Island. A lot of them were decisions of loss and gain, and I had to abandon some of my closest friends... As long as I choose the right path, I won't hesitate. But there's someone who is different. There's always one or two people that hold a special place in my heart, who always make me restless." Tilly held the stone ring of Lightning in her hand tighter. It was no problem for her to control the two Magic Stones alternatively, but Ashes could not even fly a straight line with the two Stones. Therefore, she had to keep the ring to herself.

Nevertheless, Tilly did not reveal her thoughts but simply nodded slightly. "Thank you."

"You're welcome. I'll go check how the digging of defensive line at the border is going. There's a room with a bed near the entrance to the hall. You can sleep there if you want."

"Got it."

After Pasha headed back the way she had come, Tilly suddenly had a cold feeling around her palm.

She spread out her hand and found one corner of the magic stone fixed by the ring had come off. The fragment sank into her flesh and left a tiny bead of blood on her hand.

...

"It's been five days. Why haven't we seen the ruins yet?" Lotus grumbled. "It's so boring hiding underground all day."

"How do I know? In any case, I'll go wherever your tunnel is heading." A girl with braided hair shrugged. She threw a piece of dried meat into the air and then opened her mouth. With a flash of blue light, the dried meat disappeared and her cheeks puffed up. "Yum... So it isn't a lie. Life in Neverwinter is indeed luxurious. Even their rations are so delicious."

"T-tunnel? Do you think I'm a mole?"

"Pretty much."

"Um... you'd better go easy on the food." Iffy sighed. "I don't want to return with an empty stomach."

"I don't want to be lectured by a witch from the Bloodfang Association." The girl jerked her head away from Iffy. "I've heard that you once conspired against Princess Tilly. If I were her, I wouldn't even share wheat cakes with you, let alone dried meat."

Iffy rolled her eyes.

"Enough." Ashes cut in with a resigned look. "It wasn't their fault in joining the Bloodfang Association. If Tilly heard you say this, she would definitely give you a good lesson."

"Oh... well." Hearing Princess Tilly's name, the witch finally became quiet.

"This is another witch who is too hyper for her own good." Ashes thought to herself while breathing out a sigh. This witch, who took particular attention to her appearance, was called Orbit. Despite her flamboyant style, she played an indispensable role in this operation.

Orbit's ability was incredible. Before she had become of age, she could create an invisible passage connecting two locations. The passage could not be detected by the naked eye and it covered no distance. In other words, she could transfer herself from one place to another within a blink of an eye. If there was something like a wall or a door in-between the two places, Orbit would act as if it didn't exist. As long as she continuously applied her ability, the passage would remain open.

Nonetheless, her magic power could only affect an area within a radius of 15 meters. If she was the entrance of the passage, this number would drop to around 7.

After she had entered her adulthood, Orbit had obtained a derivative skill called "Magic Mark" that largely increased the practicality and the coverage of the passage. The passage would be visible to a person marked by Orbit, whereas one without a mark could not stop Orbit from moving around even if he knew where the passage was.

There were also certain dangers with this ability. For example, Orbit could withdraw her ability when a marked enemy was just halfway through the passage. The enemy's body would then be snapped in half and appear in two separate locations when the passageway was sealed.

Tilly thus proposed that Lotus and Orbit should work together to open a secret tunnel with an invisible exit so that the enemies could not locate the witches even if they found the hole. By the time the demons realized there were many similar tunnels, the witches would already be several miles away. Hence, the operation plan was, technically, absolutely safe.

Using the stone tower where Agatha had initially been found as their starting point, they left Misty Forest and headed to the northeast. As the forest close to Neverwinter was completely under Leaf's control, they did not need to worry about any threats from hybrid demonic beasts.

However, Ashes soon found a practical problem they had not anticipated during their maneuver and that was navigation. During the trip, they had only needed to cover a distance of a few kilometers. Yet when this number increased by dozens of times, it became very hard to determine which direction they were exactly heading to. Although they would use stars for orientation, nobody knew whether they were on the right track.

"How about checking the map Lorgar brought back?" Lotus turned to Ashes for advice. "Perhaps we can find a couple of landmarks that would help us navigate. Then we would know how far we were from the ruin."

Ashes nodded, although her hopes were not high.

On the map were some bird nests, beehives and bears' caves, which offered them few clues as to where they were. Perhaps only Lightning and Maggie could read the map and find the right direction.

"Shhh!" Iffy suddenly gestured at them to keep quiet.

The three of them instantly fell silent.

Soon, they heard pattering of heavy footsteps overhead. The shuffling sound indicated there were at least four or five people. Since hybrid demonic beasts rarely acted in groups, they were most likely the patrol team of demons.

The footsteps soon faded away. It was obvious that the enemies did not notice someone was hiding beneath the earth.

This was the second time today.

The attack of the wolf girl apparently had alarmed the demons a great deal.

After all the demons scurried off, Iffy let out a sigh of relief. "Well, at least that tells us that we're in the right direction."

"But the problem is that we can't see the ruin of the city and thus can't place the light curtain at the right spot." Lotus shook her head. "In order to use the phantom instrument as an alarming device, we have to put the light curtain five or six miles to the southwest of the ruin. This way, the Taquila witches would see Devilbeasts when they fly toward the Western Region."

After pondering for a while, Ashes made the final decision. "We'll march for another night. I'll go up and check where the Taquila ruins lay at dusk tomorrow."

Chapter 917: Ashes' Plan

"Ashes, the demons aren't blind!" Iffy quickly refuted Ashes' suggestion. "As soon as you see Taquila by the setting sun you'll be immediately spotted! There's no place to hide in the sky. Do you want to expose yourself with no way to fight back?"

"Iffy is right, it's too risky of a move." Lotus added. "Lady Tilly told us that the Stone of Flight only lets you fly up and down and not laterally. Once you're discovered by them, you can't escape. Can't we at least do this at night?"

Ashes felt incredibly touched by all their comments, especially the one coming from Iffy. Just a year ago, she was at her neck when she was with the Bloodfang association and the leader of the association, Heidi Morgan, had been plotting to kill her and Tilly. If Tilly had not insisted on tolerating the Bloodfang Association, she would have waged war against them long before. Ashes had never expected Iffy to start

showing concern for her since she thought that rift between Sleeping Island and Bloodfang Association would never be completely healed.

Ashes suddenly felt that she and Iffy were on the same team now.

She was happy to see these changes happening. Ashes understood that teamwork was what was needed to go forward.

"But I can't see anything in the darkness of the night. Taquila must be covered in vines by now and I also can't find the ruins if there's no light around. I think early dusk is the best time," Ashes insisted. "And maybe we didn't go astray and the ruins are just behind some big tree or by a low hill. All I have to do is to fly up and crush the Magic Stone in my hand."

"But what if some flying demon nearby spots you?" Lotus knitted her eyebrows. "You'll only be able to use, at most, 10% of your strength in the air right?"

"Don't worry. I've already figured out a strategy to handle these problems," Ashes calmly explained while holding three fingers up. "Depending on the situation, I'll use one of three different plans."

"Oh?" Orbit came closer curiously. "You sound like Lady Tilly now."

"Really? How do these plans of your work?" Lotus also appeared to be intrigued.

"Listen to me carefully, the only enemies who can discover me must be some Mad Demons riding flying Devilbeasts, so I came up with three different situations. A different plan if one, two or more than that come to attack me."

"Oh my..." Lotus felt helpless and covered her forehead.

"Bahaha, you really plan to get caught?" Iffy broke into a chuckle.

"Hey, don't interrupt. Let me finish talking about my strategy and then you can comment."

"If I were Maggie, I would raise both flags in favor for you." Orbit said with seriousness. "Now I know why she enjoys taking part in your plans now."

...

In the end, Ashes managed to get everyone to hear her out.

After hearing Ashes' strategy, the witches agreed on her plan since none of them could think of a better one. In Lotus' view, although the three situations Ashes talked about in the beginning sounded a little absurd, her countermeasures were unexpectedly good. In Iffy's eyes, Ashes' plan was just based on her animalistic intuition and accumulated fighting experience.

After another day of traveling underground, the light coming through the vent began to dim. At first, the white clouds seemed to be hazed with a fiery red and then they gradually melted into the evening sky. Obviously, the sun was now going down over the Fertile Plains and it was the time for them to act.

Orbit patted Ashes' back and gave her a Magic Mark. It was a light blue spot above her head and looked like a shimmering puddle which made the witches feel as if they were standing underwater and looking up at the blue sky through the intermittent ripples.

Ashes knew that this was not the real scene outside, but just how the magic corridor looked.

After confirming that there was no demon patrol team around, she nodded to the other three witches and injected her magic power into the ring. An indescribable feeling came over her afterward. She felt as if an extra arm or leg was growing out on her body. Tilly described this process as getting invisible wings.

It was difficult for a person who was born with no flying ability to suddenly control these wings like how birds soar through the sky. Among the Sleeping Island witches, Tilly was the only one who uses the Stone of Flight with ease.

Ashes closed her eyes, imagined herself flapping the wings, and jumped!

After a moment, the absolute silence of the underground space was replaced by a variety of sounds. She felt the fresh air blowing across her face and heard a rustle of leaves ringing beside her ears. She also heard birds tweeting, buzzing insects, and the whistling sound of the evening breeze which caressed her cheeks.

She opened her eyes and saw everything clearly. Everything on the ground quickly shrunk and the exit of the magic corridor was now just a tiny spot of light.

She had to admit that it was quite an experience worth trying once in a while.

Ashes controlled her excitement and gazed to the north, where Taquila should be, however Ashes' heart quickly sank.

As Ashes looked at everything ahead of her, she did not find anything that looked like a ruin let alone the skeleton monster mentioned by the Wolf Girl. She found nothing except some shrubs and meadows crimsoned by the setting sun.

Did we head in a completely wrong direction?

She wanted to find the Impassable Mountain Range to help determine her location. However, when she turned around, she was stunned by the sight of massive monsters that crouched among the jungle in the southeast a few hundred meters away. Those huge things were obviously manufactured by demons and the broken walls of the Taquila ruins stood right below them!

The witches had thought that they had not yet arrived at the ruins, but now Ashes realized that they had already passed the ruins due to their accumulated deviations!

If the witches drew a line from where they had started their journey to Taquila and where they were now, it would only be a few degrees between. However, in reality, such a small deviation could determine whether their location was in the front of or behind the Taquila ruins when they arrived.

Ashes hesitated. If I go back now and ask the team to turn around and head south, it'll take us at least two or three days to arrive at Taquila. However, if I flew towards the ruins at the same speed as I flew up, I'd only need less than half a day to fly to the ruins to locate the place and return to the team. The only problem is that I'm only able to fly vertically. I've never tried to fly horizontally.

What should I do?

Before Ashes made a decision, a burst of dull horn sounds blared from Taquila.

A dozen Devilbeast on the back of a skeleton monster leaped up and flew toward her! Meanwhile, numerous Mad Demons emerged out of the earth around the ruins and closely surrounded the Holy City of Taquila.

"Well, it seems they're quite vigilant and there's obviously more than three of them. This is much worse than I imagined" Ashes thought.

She took out the Five-Colored Stone and crushed it without any hesitation and flew directly towards the ground.

For any warrior, the most important ability was to act appropriately according to the situation. She intended to capture the enemy alive if there was only one Devilbeast, eliminate all of them if there were two and retreat if the number of enemies numbered higher. She was never afraid to fight that many demons however she wouldn't be able to defeat them all before more reinforcements came and endanger her whole team.

As for the current situation, it was way too risky to fly to the Taquila ruins. She had to crumble the stone now even though she did not get to an ideal position.

She was not as talented as Tilly who could control the invisible wings like using her own arms, but she had her own way of making flight faster.

Ashes needed to inject more magic power into the Magic Stone.

As the magic power grew in the stone, Ashes felt that the invisible wings on her back gradually swelled to the limit and each imaginary flapping of them could cause a howling gale. She descended sharply from the sky at a speed which was almost three or four times faster than when she flew up.

Under such circumstances, even the precise spear throwers of the Mad Demons couldn't hit her.

The only problem was that inertia was too great to overcome at such extremely fast speeds. Because of the limited depth of the Magic Corridor, Lotus could only create an empty hole, which was at most as deep as five or six meters. Within such a short distance, she could hardly stop the downward momentum by herself.

All Ashes could do was to put some faith in her teammates.

After several seconds of falling, Ashes saw a small blue light appearing on the ground. That's the Magic Corridor.

She folded her hands and put them on her head while tightening the muscles all over her body.

The moment she penetrated straight into the magic corridor, she saw several purple lights emerge out of the air and firmly grasp her. It was Iffy's Magic Cage!

In an instant, the cage stopped her from falling rapidly, and when she completely stopped, she found that there was just an arm's length between her head and the bottom of the hole.

"You're really heavy," said Iffy, her hands clutching the cage. She shrugged and added, "Now, do you know where we are?"

"Of course, but let's not discuss about this right now." Ashes looked at Orbit. "Retreat to the Misty Forest right now. The demons are coming!"

Chapter 918: The Only Definite Thing

...

Three days had passed. Tilly was walking around anxiously until she saw the four witches when her mind was finally put at ease. Judging from their dirty faces and forced smiles, she could easily tell that their trip must have been filled with accidents and risks. Fortunately, they were safe and lucky enough to escape from the demon army after being discovered by them.

Tilly was about to say some words of comfort, but after seeing Ashes' unapologetic face, she became upset and began to reprimand the Extraordinary, albeit slyly.

"I've never expected that a person who boasted of experiencing hundreds of battles in the wilderness would get lost," Princess Tilly satirized. "Tell me how you managed to get from Hermes to kings city and not just wander into the Southernmost Region? This is unlike what you've shown me."

"Uhh... well there were so many church people chasing me at that time. Everytime I was lost, I would catch one of them and have him tell me where the correct direction was," Ashes shrugged. "And we didn't deviate too far away from the planned route this time. At least, we could still see the Taquila ruins. If the demon army hadn't gone into action, I would have been able to see..."

"Without adequate Red Mist, they'll never send out all their troops. We sent you to gather information about the enemy since we need to guard against the Devilbeasts' surprise attacks. But when you crushed the Magic Stone, we could only see the demon army from behind and at a very bad angle!"

"Everyone is back safe and sound. It's the ideal outcome. Besides, the angle isn't that bad," Pasha interjected. "His Majesty Roland has sent back the first batch of witches from the north and Sylvie was among them. With her, our scouting ability will be greatly improved. And we've seen the enemy's rear, which will help us to judge the scale of the enemy's main force and reinforcements. You can go back and have had a good rest first."

"Oh? We got messages from the Northern Region?" Ashes raised her eyebrows and asked.

"Yeah, lucky for you, if these messages didn't come you wouldn't have easily gotten away with this." Tilly snorted. "Well... Excuse me, I have to go now!"

"Wait." Ashes looked at Pasha with a vague smile and then hurriedly caught up with Tilly.

"Is there anything else you want to tell me?"

"No, nothing, let's just head back." Ashes twitched her mouth and said.

After they returned to the Witch Building, Ashes wrapped her arms around Tilly from behind when the princess closed the door.

"I'm so sorry, I worried you and-"

"Did Pasha tell you to do this?" Tilly asked without turning around.

"Uhh, how'd you know?" Ashes was slightly startled.

"I clearly see it on your face." She broke away from Ashes' arms. "I'm guessing that Pasha told you that I didn't have any good rest these past few days and that I've stayed around the magic core most of the time. She must have told you to forgive my bad mood and to try your best to comfort me since I'm exhausted."

"Amazing... to think you could guess all of that," Ashes stood astonished.

"So, could you apologize to me first?" Tilly turned around.

"What? No." The Extraordinary shook her head.

"No?" Tilly glared. "So, you think it's right to worry me?"

"There should be no problem, you're not in any danger. And that's all I need for a decision."

"Ashes, you don't understand." Tilly was furious. "Any risk can be calculated, measured and evaded. The person who performs the task is also included in the calculation. If the person isn't good at the task, even a perfect plan will be ruined. Do you understand? If it was me, the situation would never become so dangerous!"

"Calculate, measure, evade... You sound more and more like Roland Wimbledon now." Ash shrugged and said.

"Don't divert the topic." Princess Tilly remained unmoved. "Isn't it true?"

"But there's always risk. And I want to be the one to take it, even if accidents are likely to happen. After all, I've already had countless accidents in my life." Ashes, who was much taller than the princess, bent forward and put her hands on Tilly's shoulders so that their eyes were level. "Listen, I have a very good reason to not apologize to you. Now that we've decided to stay here to fight demons, I'll have to take more chances to risk my life and go to dangerous places. One day, I may be unable come back and I don't want to owe you lots of apologies."

"Hey, don't pull this on me!"

"Listen to me please, Tilly," Ashes said seriously. "I'm not as talented as your brother and it's too difficult for me to think about things like the future of witches. so taking risks is the only thing I'm good at. If you're determined to return to the Sleeping Island now, I'll immediately promise you that I'll never let you worry about me, but I can't guarantee that here. I would never ask you to apologize to me if you make me worried."

Tilly was speechless. She looked into Ashes' golden eyes and felt that this black-haired witch in front of her seemed to be more reliable than ever before.

No, Ashes is talking nonsense. Tilly denied it in her heart.

"Ahem," she turned her head aside and said. "I guess I can forget about this incident for now, but you have to tell me about the whole thing later. Now go take a shower. You stink."

"Alright." Ashes breathed a sigh of relief. "Do you want to take a bath together with me?"

"No, not now!" Tilly grumbled.

Tilly watched the Extraordinary leave and then lifted her right hand to check a tiny wound.

On her right palm, there was a spot which was pricked by a ring. It was already healed, but the pain was still fresh in her memory.

Fortunately, the worst didn't happen.

Perhaps, I'm thinking too much.

...

When Lorgar woke up from her long slumber, she felt an incredibly comfortable sensation in her body. It felt as if she was soaking herself in a warm spring and was completely free of dizziness and pain.

Yes, I remember now. It was Nana Pine. The Wolf Girl vaguely recalled something had happened before her sleep. Nana had run into her bedroom while panting. The lovely, little girl had probably got back in a hurry without any rest. The first sentence she heard from Nana was "Have a good sleep now. You'll be alright when you wake up." She also remembered that she had seen her friends from the exploration group, who had uttered many words besides her bed. However her mind went blank when she tried to remember what they said back then.

The feeling of Nana's magic power flowing through her body was so wonderful that she had forgotten almost everything.

"So I'm fully recovered now? I should express my thanks to Nana," Lorgar thought.

Unexpectedly, after she opened her eyes, the first person she saw was a gray-haired man.

She was stunned. "Great... chief?"

"It's me." Roland nodded. "How do you feel now?"

"I... don't know how to describe it." She tried to move her finger. It was still clumsy, but she managed. "I think I'm fine. How long have I slept? Where's Nana? And...what are you doing with your hand..."

"Oh, this? I just thought that they looked interesting, I hope you don't mind." Roland stopped touching Lorgar's wolf ears and took his hand back. "I've been curious about how they feel like. Do you feel... well, ticklish when I touched them."

"No, they're just ears," Lorgar was surprised and said. "You can touch them if you want. I'm fine with it if you don't mind them."

With these words, the Wolf Girl wiggled her long ears.

"I'm done with it for now." He coughed twice and continued. "You've slept for about three days. This is a normal duration since you were severely wounded. Of course, you would still recover if you didn't take this long sleep. But in that case, you would feel extremely tired and uncomfortable during the recovery process."

Lorgar was slightly surprised. "Do you mean I've slept for three days in a row?"

"Yes. If Nightfall didn't stop the Symbiosis, you would've slept for longer." Roland smiled. "Your body woke you up. After you get up, you'll feel hungry soon."

"Oh, yes, Miss Nightfall. I have to go to thank her and the other witches." The Wolf Girl wanted to get up, but Roland gently pressed her down in her bed.

"Don't rush. Take your time to deal with these things," Roland said with a smile. "But before that, on behalf of the City of Neverwinter, I have to thank you. You did a good job, Lorgar Burnflame. Neverwinter will reward you."

Chapter 919: Repay the Great Chief's Kindness

"Now will you admit that I'm qualified to fight the demons?" Lorgar felt refreshed all of a sudden.

"I've never denied your ability to fight against them. In fact, even an ordinary woman who's unable to tie up a chicken will end up being involved in this mighty war, albeit behind the main defensive line." Roland reiterated his concern. "I only objected to your desire to fight them by yourself. If the Sleeping Island witches had come any later, without Nightfall's Seed of Symbiosis, you would have been buried in the Western Zone Cemetery by now."

"But if I hadn't gone that deep into the Barbarian Lands, Neverwinter would never have received the news about the incoming demon army," Lorgar retorted.

"I can reward you for a good result but I still wouldn't ever approve of your wrong behavior because of it." Roland shook his head. "What I'm happiest about in your actions this time is your bringing the message back to Neverwinter instead of fighting the enemies alone in the Barbarian Lands. Even if you were to ask me this same question again, I would give you the exact same answer. No, I don't want you to go to fight the demons by yourself. I'll ask the sentries to step up vigilance from now on, in the case that you might someday come back to the city more dead than alive."

"What?"

"This is the great chief's command!" Roland remained unmoved. "Let's talk about your reward first."

"Well..." Lorgar found that the look on the great chief's face was far more serious now than when he had been touching her ears. "That's fine."

"There are three types of rewards. You may choose between gold royals, Chaos Drinks, or a piece of equipment custom-made for you."

"The first two choices are easy to understand, but what's the last one? Is it some kind of iron claw or steel tusk for me to use in my wolf form? I had previously considered obtaining this kind of weapon back in the Wildflame clan. However, when I transform back into a girl, these weapons that are inconvenient to carry will become a burden for me." Lorgar thought to herself.

She raised this question to Roland.

"I don't have a specific design for the weapon in mind right now, but I can tell you that it'll be a mighty firearm that can dramatically improve your combat capability," Roland explained. "Ashes told me that you could transform selective parts of your body into their wolf form while in your human form, and that in this half-animal form you would have half of the strength of a God's Punishment Warrior. Since this equipment is specifically designed for the God's Punishment Witches, I think it'll also suit you."

This firearm mentioned by Roland reminded her of the fierce weapons used by the First Army to destroy the oasis watchdog. She remembered that Lightning also had such a weapon. It was indeed powerful, but it also depended on the operator's skill. More importantly, she knew that it used a very special kind of "bolt" that could only be produced by Neverwinter. She believed that the great chief would never give her any of these "bolts", as he would never allow her to leave the city on her own. Without these "bolts", this firearm could only be placed at home as a showpiece and would not give her much help.

After all, it was just a weapon. Compared to this external force, she had more faith in her own teeth and claws.

After a little thought, Lorgar said, "Can I choose to join the Witch Union?"

This choice was completely beyond Roland's expectations. He was surprised and replied, "Yes, you can, but earlier you told me that..."

"I changed my mind." The wolf girl wagged her tail. "Both the gold royals and the Chaos Drinks will be used up one day and I've no other special skills besides my fighting ability, so I think I'd better join the Witch Union. As a member of the Union, I'll get gold royals and free drinks every month, right?"

"Well... yes, that's right."

"In addition, I've promised Lightning and Maggie that I'll explore all of the Barbarian Lands together with them. Since both of them are members of the Witch Union, it'll be more convenient for me to take action with them after I join the Union. Under such circumstances, you wouldn't stop me from going deep into the wasteland, right?"

"Ahem, you're technically right, but you still need to place your own safety as your most important priority."

"Then this is the reward I want," said Lorgar. "I'm sorry I rejected your kindness before."

"Well, it's up to you." Roland laid out his hands and shrugged.

"Now, do I need to sign a contract?" she asked with a solemn face.

"Of course, Wendy will tell you everything later." Roland stood up. "I'll ask the kitchen to send you something to eat. Have a good rest first. You'll have many chances in the future to thank Nana and the other witches."

Having seen Roland leave the room, Lorgar's ears drooped and she lay back down on the bed.

There was one thing that she had kept a secret from Roland.

It was the genuine reason why Lorgar finally decided join the Witch Union. She had not been attracted by the free drinks and the gold royals.

As a Mojin, she was more convinced by facts than words. From the very beginning, she had doubted Roland's promise to the Mojin people and had refused to trust a nobleman from a northern kingdom. She had believed that she would one day return to the Wildflame clan and become Roland's enemy again when he ultimately betrayed the Mojin. Besides, Roland's comments during their first meeting had indeed irritated her. She had never anticipated that he would show any concern for a Divine Lady of a Mojin clan. Even though the conflict between the Mojin people and the northern king had already been resolved, her suspicion of him still remained.

However, her opinion of him had begun to change.

During the Symbiosis period, the Witch Union kept telling her that she only needed to hold on a little longer to get Nana's treatment, since they had already sent a number of letters to appeal to Roland Wimbledon for help. Back then, she would never have expected that the great chief, busy recovering his territory, would send Miss Nana back from the Northern Region of Graycastle only for her sake.

In Lorgar's memory, it was an exceptionally long journey from Iron Sand City to the Endless Cape, and Roland's kingdom was several times larger than the Southernmost Region. Given that, she had suspected that it would take at least one or two months for Nana to return to Neverwinter.

However, the great chief had sent Nana back in time. Surprisingly, despite being a healer of great importance to the army, she had turned out to be the first witch to be sent back from the north. With this in mind, Lorgar found that it was hard to doubt Roland's sincerity.

Even Maggie had to fly for three days to take a round trip between the Northern Region and Neverwinter. If the great chief did tell her the truth, that meant Nana had come to her rescue the moment she had arrived at the city. Such kindness would make any warrior in the Southernmost Region willingly take an oath of allegiance to the lord.

Lorgar could hardly be regarded as a professional warrior, but she was a pure Mojin.

Faced with the facts, she wondered, "Why not believe in the great chief more?"

...

Roland left the bedroom and went downstairs to the reception hall on the first floor.

The guards at the gate opened the door, and all the people inside the hall stood up simultaneously at the sight of the king.

Before he arrived back at the Western Region, Lightning had brought his convening order back to Neverwinter. He steadily stepped into the crowded hall while taking a glance at everyone assembled before him.

There were more than 50 people here, including the City Hall department heads, the commander of the Garrison of the First Army, the representatives of the Witch Union and Sleeping Spell, the governor of the Longsong district, and the Senior Witches of Taquila. They wore various kinds of facial expressions. Some seemed to be bewildered by the unknown enemy and some showed unmasked hatred towards the demons, while most of them looked solemn and serious.

The war was close at hand, no matter whether they were prepared or not.

Chapter 920: The War Plan

After Roland took a seat, the people in the hall bowed before sitting down.

Under his leadership, the small and remote Border Town had rapidly developed into a major city. Roland could clearly see that he had become a spiritual leader in the eyes of the conference participants. He had never felt anything like this when he had given lectures to students at a primary school or when he explained his designs to his clients. All the people who attended this meeting were not only listening but also preparing.

They were always ready to execute his plans and orders.

He had a sense of achievement from seeing his administration bear fruit. Three years ago, only a few people in the castle had served him wholeheartedly whilst all the local nobles had ridiculed him. Now, however, he had a splendid team to assist him.

He went straight to the point. "Neverwinter can't allow demons to take root on the Fertile Plains, especially somewhere so close to our border. Although the enemy came a little earlier than expected, we've also made rapid progress recently. We've recovered the lost regions and can now focus on fighting the demons." He paused to glance around and said word by word. "Our next goal is driving the demons out of the Taquila ruins. We must do our utmost to achieve this goal. Do you have any questions?"

"No, Your Majesty!"

Everyone responded in unison.

Even Barov who usually preached against wars did not raise any objection since he was aware of the fact that most refugees came to the Western Region for the good order, capable king and safe environment. If the demons set up a base at Taquila and then kept harassing Neverwinter, the people would be terrified and even flee the city. Without enough population, City Hall could no longer sustain the development of Neverwinter. He learned this lesson from the decline of the Eastern and Southern Regions.

"So let's talk about our war plan and policies now. Any department can share their ideas."

"Your Majesty, I think the top priority is relocating the industries in the north of the city as soon as possible." Barov was the first one to stand up and reply. "The people outside the city wall are the ones most vulnerable in the face of the demon invaders. Even when we finish constructing the new wall to protect the people, the flocks of sheep and herds of cattle will still hinder our troop deployment in the north. It's just like what happened when the whole city was placed under the strictest martial law." He paused to eye Wendy. "Due to the alert, the city gates remained closed, which blocked the transportation of wheat seeds and forest resources. Fortunately, City Hall had done everything in its power to minimize the impact."

Roland had already learned this from the previous reports. As Barov mentioned it again, he could not help looking at Wendy. Surprisingly, she seemed peaceful and undisturbed. He thought she must have meant it when she said that she would take full responsibility.

"Not everything in the north can be relocated. We can use paddle steamers to carry wheat seeds, mushrooms, and other resources into the city via the Redwater River. However, we can't move the North Slope Mine to another place. Additionally, it'll cost us a lot to rebuild the Furnace Area." Roland decided after a moment of pondering. "We should increase our vigilance over the mine region so that we'll be able to fight back when the Devilbeasts attack. As for the alert, I need to elaborate on this issue. When the city is under martial law, we need to evacuate the idle personnel on the streets and in the market, but all the factories must resume production and keep working from today onward until I give a new order."

"I see... I'll make a list of the properties and business we can relocate, and report back to you." Barov immediately changed his tone since he realized that Roland did not want to place blame on Wendy.

"By the way, please include land-use planning in your report." Roland knocked on the map behind him. "Now that the threat in the Great Snow Mountain has been ruled out, all the area in the west can be used. With the help of Leaf, Misty Forest can serve as a natural barrier protecting our left flank."

On the map, the Barbarian Land could be divided into three parts. From left to right, they were: Misty Forest, Neverwinter grassland and the Impassable Mountain Range. Misty Forest looked like an inverted triangle, occupying almost half of the Barbarian Land with its vertex located at the snow mountain of the Western Region. The Redwater River that originated in the mountain and flowed through the border area of Neverwinter could be considered one side of the triangle whilst another side started from the vertex and headed to the Dragonspine Mountains in the north. This triangle formed a large buffer zone for the city.

At present, Leaf could cover the entire western section of the Redwater River and thus provided a safety net for the concrete boat platoons to transport coal and forest resources back to the city.

Aware of the situation there, Barov readily accepted Roland's request. "Yes, Your Majesty."

"Your Majesty, I think we need to tell the public about the demons' origin as soon as possible," Wendy said. "Otherwise, our people will easily get panicked when seeing them suddenly. As you usually say, propaganda job is the most vital part of our administration. If we don't work to control the public opinion, some evil-minded people may take advantage of the people's fear."

"I agree," Alethea who appeared on the light curtain added. "Although common people have limited personal ability, together they can form a noteworthy strength. Fear resembles a whip. Most of the time, it's daunting, but it can also be used as a driving force for us if we handle it properly."

The early appearance of the demons disrupted Roland's original propaganda plan which was scheduled for after the unification of Graycastle and his enthronization ceremony. He thus chose to leave this problem to Barov. "You decide the content and the propaganda means by yourself. Remember to make sure that all the subjects understand that demons are enemies of the whole humanity and that we'll fight against them till death. Meanwhile, you should emphasize that in the face of guns and cannons, demons are nothing different from demonic beasts, no matter how hideous they look."

"As for the rumor mongers and troublemakers," Roland sneered and looked at the two police chiefs, Vader and Rene Medde, "I think I don't need to tell you what to do with them."

They hastened to nod. "Of course, Your Majesty."

Once Neverwinter finished discussing the wartime order and the related policies, Pasha raised a question which was likewise the greatest concern for everyone. "How are you going to attack the demons near the Taquila ruins?"

"The safest way is to set up artillery positions near it to destroy the demons' Red Mist supply equipment." Roland measured roughly on the map with his fingers. "Now our Longsong Cannon can hit targets 10 kilometers away. After some adjustment, it'll shoot even farther. Without Red Mist, the demons in the ruins will quickly die."

Roland did not brag about his weapons at all. Considering the operational convenience and the limited transportation capacity, he had not adopted 152mm caliber for the first generation Longsong Cannons. As a result, they could not match an ideal cannon whose caliber was 152mm in many respects. However, he was able to quickly convert them by enlarging their chambers and using separate-loading ammunition instead of fixed ammunition. By doing so, their range would be remarkably increased even if the other parts of the cannons, such as the barrels and wheels, remained unchanged.

"Got it. Your Majesty, the Taquila witches are willing to fight this battle for you."

Taquila survivors were undoubtedly the most aggressive ones in the Battle of Divine Will. They would take the lead without any hesitation when combating demons.

"But, I still need to solve a few key problems to implement that plan." Roland shook his head. "Without adequate preparation, it's hard for us to gain a foothold when faced with an attack from the demons." He retracted his hand and flicked his finger at the spot of the North Slope Mine. "The first issue is how to solve the transportation problem."