

Witch 941

Chapter 941: Baring his Soul

Appen suddenly froze.

In other words, that accident years ago was a lie specifically set up by Earl Quinn to cover up the fact that his daughter became a witch?

Andrea was a demonic Fallen one all along...

He never knew...

But the fact remained that the ones who murdered his father and brought destruction to his kingdom were indeed witches. If it weren't for their unimaginable abilities, the current situation would be totally different.

His wish to avenge his father... was it wrong?

The two thoughts were colliding in Appen's mind, bringing him an unbearable headache.

"Your rule ends now." Earl Quinn came forward. "No matter what, the Kingdom of Dawn must not continue to act according to your will. The witches will get their deserved recognition and obtain the same status and rights as the common people. They will be able to walk the streets freely, hold official positions, claim inheritances from their families, and even govern this kingdom." He paused for a moment and looked at Andrea. "As for you—"

"What, do you intend to kill a member of the royal family?" Appen glared at him with a ferocious scowl. "Did you forget your oath to your ancestors? Did you forget my family name?! Answer me, Horford Quinn!"

His sharp questioning made everyone who was present retreat a step in fear—except for Andrea and the God's Punishment Witches.

"I am a direct descendant of the royal house of Moya and the one and only heir! Even if I am no longer a king, you will carry the title of Kingslayer from now on!" he shouted, "The order of the Kingdom of Dawn will be destroyed by you and the great noble families will never trust you again!"

"I won't kill you," Horford sighed, "If my family wasn't at stake, I would have never chosen to act like this. But you need to swear to leave the Kingdom of Dawn forever and never come back. This way, you can take whoever you want with you and leave the king's city. The only alternative is that I imprison you in the castle's dungeon, just like what you did to the eldest son of the Luoxi family."

"Is this decision supported by all three big families?"

"The Tokat family doesn't have any objections." Earl Tokat touched his chest.

"The Luoxi family agrees as well." Earl Luoxi continued.

"We aren't as cold-hearted as you," Oro Tokat said, "Fortunately, your order was one step too late, or else..."

"Enough," Otto interrupted him, "Say no more."

"Such a group of considerate people. But when faced with the huge differences in power, how long will you be able to sustain such a ridiculous friendship?" Appen gazed at the nobles in the hall coldly and thought for a long time before saying, "I choose the first option."

He could not let himself be imprisoned in a place where he might never see daylight again. As long as he was alive, he would always be a member of the royalty of the Kingdom of Dawn. Whether it was the Kingdom of Wolfheart or the Kingdom of Everwinter, he would still be treated according to his status. Leaving was preferable to being held in a cage. And it was impossible to guarantee that neither Horford Quinn nor the King of Graycastle would ever make a mistake. So once a dispute eventually arose, the nobles from the other territories would definitely remember his existence.

"Then... please take an oath." Earl Quinn nodded.

Once Appen Moya finished his oath in the name of the ancestors, the matter was finally resolved. But only Andrea noticed that when the guards escorted the King of Dawn out of the hall, Elena, who was supporting her, had a cold smile on her face.

While leaving the castle, Otto suddenly called Andrea from behind, "Andr... Miss Quinn...thank you for saving my life. Mister Hill told me in general about what happened in Neverwinter City."

She smiled and asked, "Why are you being so formal with your savior and once childhood friend?"

"No... I'm just—" Otto was struck speechless for a moment, his eyes revealing a somewhat happy expression.

"Then call her big sister!" Oro came forward and grabbed his neck. "Don't forget who the leader among the four of us was back then, unless of course, you want to take her position!"

"Oro!" Otto struck the latter's chest with his elbow.

"Ahem, fine, I'm just joking around because you were too tense..." Oro acted as if he was hurt. "It's been so long since we last met. Today, the Flower of Glow is back with us, we must have a good gathering tonight. How about at our usual old place?"

"The Silver Antler Tavern?" Andrea raised her eyebrows. "That place still exists?"

"It is, after all, a Luoxi family business. It won't close so easily. The manager is quite incapable though."

"Hey—"

"I don't have a problem."

"Then it's decided. I'll leave you two alone for now. I have somewhere to be." Oro waved.

"An, Andrea..." Otto took a deep breath. "I want to talk to you in private."

Even though he didn't know why his old friend was willing to let go of such a chance to catch up with Andrea, for him this was an extremely rare opportunity.

He did not want to borrow Oro's words anymore to tell her that he had missed her. And he could feel the difference in Andrea's attitude from the time they met in Neverwinter city. Even though it seemed like she was still in conflict with her identity as a lady of the Quinn family, at least she did not treat her childhood friends as strangers. This was obvious from the way she had smiled before.

"..." Andrea thought for a moment and then nodded. "Let's go to the courtyard."

Otto felt his heart suddenly beating faster.

The person supporting her did not follow them, so the two of them, one behind another, walked into the courtyard.

"Are... are you alright?" Looking at the witch's back, which was shaking as she was walking, Otto wanted to but did not dare to help her. These kinds of gestures had been so common back when they were children.

"This is just a side-effect of excessive use of magic power, it's not really harmful to the body. Actually, we all have to go through this in order to improve our magic capacity. I'll be back to normal in two days so don't worry," Andrea said while shrugging her arms, "It's just the two of us now, what would you like to talk about?"

Otto bit his lips. "Do you still remember what I told you in Neverwinter city? That Oro would go to your grave every year and leave flowers..."

"I remember."

"In fact, there's one more thing that I didn't tell you..." He took a deep breath. "I also did the same every year—because I couldn't forget you. Back at the dungeon, when I heard you saying 'I am here', I almost can't describe the feeling of joy that I felt in my heart. At that moment, I decided that no matter what, I have to say this to you. Andrea, can you stay here?"

Andrea didn't seem surprised. She only smiled and said, "Thank you, but you are too late."

"What do you mean by too late..."

"I already have someone I want to always stay beside, so... I won't be staying in the City of Glow." She replied seriously in a soft and quick manner, "If you had asked me ten years ago, maybe I would have agreed."

Otto's heart sank. "Is it His Majesty Roland? If you mean him, then he's definitely a better choice than me..."

"I would never compete against Nightingale," Andrea interrupted him, "I am her most trusted ally."

"Huh?"

"Um, no, nevermind..." She coughed twice. "Well, it's not what you think. Otto, witches can't continue the family bloodline and in fact, I don't want to be restricted by the rules of nobility. Ten years is a long time. I'm no longer the Flower of Glow that you used to know. It's better like this, do you understand?"

Otto opened his mouth and was about to say "I'm willing to give up everything about the nobility", but there was an invisible force that stopped him before he could.

He was also not a capricious child anymore, who could just avoid taking any responsibilities.

It would be the greatest disappointment for his father and sister Belinda.

In the end, Otto could only watch as Andrea's back disappeared through the courtyard's entrance.

Chapter 942: Only A Mortal

Two days later.

Palace of the City of Glow.

"You're leaving today? Can't you stay here a little longer?" Horford Quinn, with mixed feelings in his heart, looked at Andrea, who had come to bid him farewell. "Otto and the others must also want to spend a bit more time with you."

"It's been a long time since I left Neverwinter city, and there are people waiting for me there," Andrea said frankly. "Today is the day that the old regime of the Kingdom of Dawn will be replaced by the new one. Considering their identity as their families' heirs, they shouldn't be wasting time on banquets and games. Since we are friends, meeting once is enough already."

"She has indeed changed," Earl thought to himself.

She has matured.

"About the subsequent negotiations with Graycastle... Do you have any suggestions?"

"I don't know much about government affairs—in Neverwinter city, the ones who are responsible for them aren't the nobles but rather freemen, after passing some kind of examination. If you want to know more details, you'd better talk to Hill Fawkes. He has always been in contact with the Western Region." Andrea paused for a moment. "If you want my advice, don't make the same mistake as Appen."

Horford revealed a wry smile. "Continuing to resist Graycastle even after personally experiencing the power that Roland Wimbledon possesses, that would be quite stupid."

"It's not only about that..." Andrea shook her head. "The upcoming Battle of Divine Will concerns the fate of all of humanity, so any infighting between us would only accelerate our destruction—no matter whether it's Graycastle or the Kingdom of Dawn, none of us can survive alone in this upcoming calamity. So you have to keep in mind what will be more beneficial for our families."

"It's in our best interests to survive." Horford quickly understood the meaning of his daughter's words.

"As for our hope to survive, it now lies entirely with His Majesty Roland." She waved her hands and said, "So maintain order in the Kingdom of Dawn and cooperate together with Graycastle to get through the Battle of Divine Will. That is my only advice."

Earl Quinn nodded slowly. "...I understand."

Just as Andrea turned around, he stopped her once again.

"I..."

"You don't need to see me off, there are still many things you have to do today. And you don't need to worry about my safety, the God's Punishment Witches will be coming back with me to Neverwinter," she said without turning around.

"No, I wanted to say... I'm sorry, my dear daughter." When he said those words, Horford suddenly felt a lot older, but his heart felt like it was relieved of a great burden. In fact, he had so much more to say. Such as how sending her away at that time was indeed for the sake of the family but it was also to protect her. Or how much he regretted not discussing that issue with his wife. If he had a chance to choose again, he probably wouldn't have acted as harshly as he had. And finally, how happy he felt when he found out from Otto that she still alive and well...

However, Earl Quinn understood that the damage was already done. No matter what he said now, it would only sound like an excuse, nothing more than made-up words. This was the price of his decision. Andrea had now become so mature, he couldn't act too badly in front of her.

Without saying anything else, the old earl closed his eyes.

"Well... I'll be going then."

His daughter's steps slowly faded away and finally disappeared from his ears. Though he did not hear the word 'Father' that he yearned so much for, at the same time, he could feel that her attitude was not as cold as before. At least, she no longer addressed him as Lord Earl.

This was acceptable too, he thought. After all, this is just a temporary goodbye. They would have the chance to meet again in the future.

Time heals all wounds.

His decision ten years ago had made him lose so much.

But Horford Quinn was determined to use the same amount of time to redeem himself.

Leaving Whitewave Bay, the ship entered the sea.

Appen put down the map in his hands and looked out from the porthole.

This route was one of the main commercial routes to the Wavelight Port of the Kingdom of Wolfheart. From time to time, one could see merchant ships coming and going. Occasionally, some fishermen's boats would approach them trying to sell some fresh fish and vegetables.

If he was still the king, the ships sailing around him should have been three-masted galleons flying the imperial flags, and if he wished to eat some fresh food, he would be naturally served by his maids.

Those damn traitors were to blame for everything!

It had been a week since he was brought down from his throne. During this time, he could not stop thinking about the day of his fateful return. Even if he couldn't do anything to the King of Graycastle, he would never let the three big families enjoy his city and the fruits of their rebellion.

After careful consideration, Appen finally chose his first destination—the Thousand Blade Fort of the Kingdom of Wolfheart. That place was right next to the borders of the Kingdom of Dawn, and it was rumored that its Lord had blood relations with the nobility of the Kingdom of Dawn. So he would not be too harsh on the Moya family. But most importantly, due to the close relations between the nobles residing in both the kingdoms, if his identity was ever to be needed, then they would be able to easily contact him.

Those Lords were always conspiring against each other, but at the end of the day, everyone only cared for their own benefits. Since he was no longer the ruler of the City of Glow, their interests would not be in conflict.

Furthermore, his lineage could actually come in handy for achieving their new interests.

For the sake of revenge, Appen decided to suppress his feelings of chagrin for now. When the time was right, he would make everyone who underestimated him pay dearly!

Thinking about that, he started to cheer up. At the same time, he felt a sense of hunger.

It would be nice to have some fruits now as the ships on this route would become more scarce as they left the Kingdom of Dawn's coasts. He had just heard the sound of a fishing boat docking with his boat.

Appen shook the thin string on his table, which was connected to a bell outside. Whenever it rang, the maid would have to come in.

Yet, there was no response from the outside this time.

His eyebrows were instantly raised.

He could not believe that he had fallen so low that even his maid would dare to be lazy. He felt the urge to murder someone rising.

Fine, because of her negligence she could serve as an example. Among his group of followers, other than the Moya family members and his loyal knights, the rest of them really needed to be taught a lesson.

He had to let them know that even on a ship, as long they were in his presence, they had to act like they were in the palace.

Appen exited the room but found no one outside. Not only the maids but even the sailors, his guards, the slaves... nobody was left. The cabin was strangely silent, and the only thing that could be heard were the waves crashing against the ship.

He suddenly felt a cold sweat running down his spine.

Something was wrong!

Was he abandoned? No... that was impossible. Even if the mercenaries and the servants wanted to leave, his loyal knights that were trained by his family would have definitely stopped them. Not to mention there should have been at least some noise due to a dispute!

Appen decided to climb out of the hold onto to the deck to have a look. There should still be some sailors there no matter what. Just as he was about to turn around, he saw a bloodstained dagger being pointed at his neck.

The one holding the dagger was an extremely ugly woman, but with eyes as bright as stars.

Appen instantly realized that she did not belong to the ship crew. He would have noticed a person with such distinguishing features.

She must be an intruder!

"Who sent you? Do you know what are you doing, lowlife? I am the King of Dawn, the Moya family's—"

His voice suddenly stopped.

He realized he could no longer breathe through his throat, it was clogged by the gushing blood. A striking pain starting from his neck spread down his chest and a coldness swept through his body, taking away all of his strength.

As he fell down, he only heard a whisper above his head.

"Well, you are only a mortal after all."

Chapter 943: The Spread Blackflame

"All clear?"

While looking at Zoey, who was walking down the deck, Elena asked.

"Yes, it took some time." Zoey wiped the fresh blood on her face. "Luckily it's all cleared now."

"What are we going to do next?" Betty asked, shrugging, "Write a report to His Majesty, Roland?"

"Leave it to Elena. I'm not good at summarizing. After all, His Majesty didn't take it very seriously. He only told us to maintain the stability of the situation with whatever necessary means. Just write Appen as a man who resisted change and was full of evil intentions. Such a person is better off dead."

"That's the truth," Betty said as if she thought this over already. "If he had no evil intentions, why would he choose a border town nearest to the Kingdom of Dawn?"

"His Majesty may not take it seriously, but we can't do the same." Elena cleared her throat. "I'll lay out all the details about the cause and effect, and the analysis basis, including what you just said—just like a record of a meeting in the City Hall."

"I bet you just want to get His Majesty's compliment to win a few more visits to his Dream World." Zooley rolled her eyes and said.

"Wha-what did you say!"

"Really? Why didn't I think of that..." Betty looked at Elena with excitement. "Can you teach me how to write an official report?"

"Um... let's see." Elena coughed drily. "Let's get the work done first."

"Right." Zooley put away her mocking look. "But don't put what we've just said in your report."

"I know." Elena looked at the other end of the deck and waved at a few men in black robes. "Come here."

The lead man, supported by another two men by their hands, walked to the witches and bowed. "Lady Oracle, what can I do for you?"

"Since you were willing to follow me here, it means you're fully prepared, right?" Elena asked seriously.

The old man was none other than the founder of "Black Money," the legendary merchant of City of Glow, Banach Lothar. Although the God's Punishment Witches were incomparable in terms of combat capacity, they still needed the assistance of common people in such a matter as intercepting Appen on the sea and making sure his death could not be traced back to Graycastle.

To a common person, regicide was an unimaginable crime, especially when it was to terminate the whole royal bloodline. Ridiculous as it was, even wealth, no matter how enormous it was, was no match for such worship of descent, which was shown from Banach's shivering shoulders. Nevertheless, he still managed to make a move, indicating his ambition abundantly clear.

"Yes... I'm willing to serve you."

"Take it easy." Elena patted his shoulder with satisfaction. "In the deities' eyes, the identities of common people are meaningless. What's the big deal about a king? It's nothing but a title. Tell me, what do you plan to do next?"

Banach eased up a bit. "Among the three plans, I'm in favor of the first. I think to disguise it as a shipwreck is the safest method. Each year, along this route, dozens of ships sink for various reasons like a rainstorm, tsunami, stranding, etc. What's more, on the sea along the borderline, there'll be a rainstorm two days later. We only need to drive the ship further into the sea and dig a hole in its bottom. Nobody will know what exactly happened."

He gasped and added, "As for disguising it as a pirate robbery or noble's revenge, I think they aren't unreasonable. Although we could divert people's suspicion to certain targets, false facts won't hold under intense investigation after all. Even if people fail to find any trace, those nobles could just produce some flaws by themselves."

"So for the shipwreck, you can make all the clues vanish?" Zooley asked coldly.

"Yes, my Lady," Banach said with a determination. "Even the sailors I brought with me will disappear with the ship. They are the silent warriors raised by Black Money to clean things up. There is no way the information will leak out."

"Silent warriors?" Elena looked at the two servants beside him. "Are those two among them?"

"Yes. They can't hear, nor speak, and need to be given specific gestures to be commanded. That's why they're called silent warriors."

"They must have paid a hell of a price..." Elena knew how troublesome it was to train a deaf-mute into a warrior. At best, the success rate was only one out of ten, given that the trainees were actually in fairly good conditions. But how did an underground Chamber of Commerce find so many well-conditioned deaf-mutes? They probably chose well-conditioned men then turned them into deaf-mutes with medicine.

Of course, she did not care how common people treated other common people. Even in the era of the Union, they had never stopped bullying people weaker than them.

"This time I took 50 silent warriors with me, who take orders from nobody but me. They're more than enough to take care of those sailors. So this plan is perfectly safe." Banach said while bowing.

"Alright, just do it." Elena looked at Zoey and Betty. "But I have one more thing for you to do."

The old businessman swallowed his own saliva. "As long as it's in my ability, I'll spare no effort."

If it were only to create an "accident", she did not have to conceal it from His Majesty Roland, but the following order was not from Roland but Pasha.

"It's simple. 'Black Money' has made contact with the new King of the Kingdom of Dawn, Horford Quinn. On the one hand, the Chamber of Commerce will continue to appear supporting him, on the other hand, you need to input as many as informants as you can into his new regime to observe the Quinn Family's acts and moves. Do you understand?"

"But... isn't he the puppet supported by you?" Banach asked confusedly.

"Just in case. After all, common people have a short and fragile determination. When the real challenge comes, who can guarantee the puppet will behave as loyal as he should?" Elena paused. "Besides, it's not reliable to rely on one family to manage the Kingdom of Dawn. I hope your 'Black Money' can be a part of it."

If a person had always yearned for power, he would be extremely exhilarated at such a hint, yet Banach did not show much of joy. He asked worriedly, "This is a long-term plan and I'm able to do this, but, as you know, my physical condition..."

Elena took out two bottles from behind her and handed them over to the old man. "Take them. Drink them when you don't feel well. But remember, don't drink them within the month of each other. With another six bottles of this, your body will meet the basic criteria for modification."

Excitement filled with Banach's eyes. He anxiously took over the bottles and put them into his pockets carefully. Deeply bowing, he said in excitement, "I guarantee the success of the mission!"

"Work hard. When it's done, we'll turn you into an immortal." Elena said softly.

Chapter 944: The New Witch Group Part I

Roland felt relieved while he received the message that the rescue mission had succeeded.

Although they failed to take control of the Kingdom of Dawn as a conqueror, after a little deviation from their original plan, the neighboring country at least overthrew the Moya Family's rule and basically maintained stability. Before the Quinn Family could thoroughly gain a firm foothold, it would remain Graycastle's most faithful ally.

Besides, Andrea was also in Neverwinter. If everything went smoothly, the alliance with the Kingdom of Dawn could at least last until the next generation.

Roland did not believe the third Battle of Divine Will would last for a century.

Andrea, along with the other God's Punishment Witches in the expedition, was estimated to return to the Western Region in about a month. Roland intended to make use of this time to make a sound plan for Graycastle's future development.

After all, with the destruction of Timothy's remnants, the counterforce had temporarily disappeared and the kingdom was integrated in name. Although it would take some time before the secondary City Halls in the various cities to take effect and make Graycastle a highly efficient authoritarian country, he could already start to prepare for it. When the time came, the strength of Graycastle would enjoy an unprecedented leap, lifting it to a whole different level from the other three countries.

The key point in his development plan was to put the witches' abilities into full play.

After all, they were the reason for Neverwinter's high productivity.

Within half a month after Anna's return, the city had enjoyed a series of changes, with the most prominent ones happening in the castle. His mahogany desk was double its former size; on the desk were over 10 wind-up telephones connecting with the Witch Building office, the City Hall, the barracks, the Third Border City, Longsong Stronghold, and so on. In case of emergencies, the guards did not have to run to deliver messages anymore.

Furthermore, the first public telephone appeared in the central square, connecting the city with Misty Forest. It extended with the building of railways and satisfied the workers' demand to communicate with their families as they could not meet face to face over a long period of time.

Of course, the fare for using this telephone was time-based, and the number of people to use it was limited and application must be made in advance. If one found it pricey, one could choose to use carrier pigeons or railways to deliver their messages. Thanks to the popularization of preliminary education, text-based communication in Neverwinter had become increasingly popular.

In charge of the operation of these systems was the Ministry of Communications, a newly established department in the City Hall.

Its work covered every link of the delivery process, from taking care of carrier pigeons to providing home delivery, as a result, its subdivisions instantly grew to a colossal size which was only second to the Ministry of Construction. It offered about a thousand jobs and almost all the newly graduated Neverwinter civilians were taken in.

Through this department, Roland could vaguely see the silhouette of a future large group.

That was merely the result of Anna's own ability.

After solving the problem of demon's attack, Roland put most of his efforts on the statistics work of the witches' abilities from Sleeping Island.

With the arrival of the second batch of migrants, 96 witches had joined the Sleeping Spell. To test their abilities alone was stressful enough for Wendy and Scroll. Besides, not all witches were cooperative, which made the first step of data collecting quite difficult. Luckily, with Tilly's prestige and Wendy's conciliation, the registration work was more or less finished smoothly.

The black notebook in front of Roland was the result of the preliminary examinations of all the witches' abilities.

He had read it over and over in the past few days and figured out the uses of most of the witches' abilities.

Now he felt that the former way of classifying the witches' abilities as intensifying, summoning, and attaching magic type was too rough and unfit for expressing their usages directly. Hence, he reclassified the witches by their work assignments. For example, witches good at processing were classified as manufacturing type; witches who were pro animals were classified as the cultivating type; witches whose abilities had not found a usage were put under the type of undetermined. Thus the City Hall could clearly see the number of witches which could be employed for production work.

Besides, this batch of witches had shown Roland how drastically different their abilities could be.

Although they were all Awakeneds, some of them could make flowers bloom from a crack in a stone and some could create big and tall Magic Servants. It was no wonder the Union could not withstand a long term war, because if a combat witch died, it would take years before the role she played could be replaced.

Obviously, the most reliable arrangement for a witch was to put her in a factory.

Among the list of nearly 100 witches, Roland put special emphasis on four of them.

They were No. 26 Darkcloud, No. 43 Azima, No. 44 Doris, and No. 89 Slimwrist.

Darkcloud's ability was to dye. She could dye any object she laid her hands on into any color she wanted it to be, without changing its original nature.

Theoretically, it was an ability of attaching magic. Its effective time was limited, its consumption was closely related to the target's size, and its effect was free from the influence of God's Stone of Retaliation. But Darkcloud's dyeing ability was so powerful that its effective time was strikingly long. This was probably because the change of color barely affected the object and she only needed to use a little

bit of magic power for the dyeing effect to last for years. In other words, if Darkcloud exhausted her magic power, the dyeing effect could last for a century.

But the size of the object still mattered. She could not, like what Hummingbird did, release her ability in an instant and reduce its effective time, so if she ran into a large object beyond the upper limit of her magic power, her ability would not take effect. Things like changing color of the sea in one breath would be impossible for her.

In fact, according to Wendy's test, Darkcloud could affect an area with the length and width of two arms-length, roughly 1.5 square meters.

To Roland, such an area was big enough.

After all, an object could be divided and combined.

In a manner of speaking, Darkcloud's ability filled in a gap in Neverwinter—the dyeing technology. In the current era, the dyeing method mainly depended on extracting colors from nature, which in later ages would be a big selling point. But the truth was the performance of colors extracted from nature was terrible—too many impurities, fading easily, poor oxidation resistance, and too few varieties. As a result, only nobles could afford colorful clothes, and the colors mostly came from embedded gold and silver threads.

Dyes had a broad usage. Apart from the traditional textile industry, other areas like education, printing, chemical, and biology all needed them. To some extent, Darkcloud could reduce the burden on Soraya's shoulders, which basically made her a great jack of all trades.

But witches No.43 and No.44 gave Roland a headache.

Azima and Doris were the kind of witches, according to Wendy, who were unwilling to cooperate. In the initial meeting, they had expressed their dissatisfaction about Tilly and wished to leave Neverwinter as soon as possible. Although this plan was temporarily put off by Scroll, the crack still existed. Whether the two wanted to be recruited and devoted to work remained unknown.

Unfortunately, their abilities were very peculiar—Azima's ability was "Source Tracing", although unique, yet not irreplaceable. But Doris's ability of "demonification" enabled Roland to see the possibility of using magic power on a large scale.

Chapter 945: The New Witch Group Part II

Simply speaking, Azima's ability could trace an entire object through a piece of it, or through a microelement to trace its concentrated spot.

Undoubtedly, for a Sleeping Island witch, this was a type of survival ability. For example, holding a drop of fresh water, Azima could find a creek or a lake; or judging from the kernel of a fruit from an animal's feces, she could estimate the fruit tree's location and size.

Due to the contribution her ability made to the team, quite a few Eastern Region witches gathered together under her leadership and made a tight group out of themselves.

In Roland's eyes, Source Tracing was undoubtedly the best way for discovering natural resources, whose general purposes were even broader than Sylvie's Eye of Magic.

The logic was simple. When Sylvie looked through the ground, her magic power consumption would drastically increase and her perception of distance would greatly decrease. She was totally qualified for marking ore beds in the North Slope Mine area, but perceiving mineral veins deeply buried was beyond her ability. Even for resources in superficial layers, she could barely tell their category or scale. She could only tell something was underground, but not what it was.

Roland did not worry about Azima in this aspect. She could not only know a single resource's exact location, but also its reserve. If her ability could be combined with Lucia's ability of purification, Roland might be able to mark the entire periodic table of elements on the map of Graycastle.

When Roland learned geology, what impressed him the most was a colorful national map marked with resources. Now that Graycastle had united under his banner, he should aim at broadening his raw material sources to the entire country, or even to the Kingdom of Dawn, the Fertile Plains, etc.

Even if Azima was unwilling to help, it was not disastrous to Neverwinter. After all, the resources were not going anywhere. Given enough time, he could eventually succeed in his goal.

Yet Doris's enchantment ability was not the same.

Since he lacked good observing methods, Roland's research on magic power did not have a good start, which left the witches as his only source to harness magic powers.

Enchantment was an incredible ability.

In her notebook, Wendy described as the ability attach magic power to a dead object to recycle, thus greatly slowing down the object's exhaustion process and makes it look lifelike.

Roland had reservations about her ability description. He knew it was only the witches' customary expression that a dead object could not have magic power. Under most circumstances, this rule applied, with only one exception—the God's Stone of Retaliation.

The joint experiment carried out by Isabella and Agatha showed that God's Stone did have magic power, or... it at least had the ability to attract magic power, which was originally exclusive to the Awakened. When Isabella smoothed the area under the disturbance of a God's Stone, she could see extremely tiny magic power residues on its surface, although for only a few seconds. Throughout the entire process, no third party had injected more magic power into it, so those magic power residues must belong to the God's Stone itself.

In another word, unlike what he had expected, the God's Stone of Retaliation did not have high-density magic power which could disable other magic powers. But it did have magic power, only the amount was very little. As to how it isolated the effects of magic powers was to be discovered. One thing he could be sure of was that "magic power was incompatible with dead objects" was not entirely true.

Considering a God's Stone could soon become a common stone after Isabella's adjustment, Agatha made a bold speculation: The magic power of the God's Stone of Retaliation would keep on running out, but it would also constantly absorb new magic powers as a living entity did, which formed a magic power circulation. Just like sand on a beach, which absorbed heat from sunlight and raised its

temperature during the day and released the heat at night. This could explain why Isabella could completely alter the nature of a God's Stone without interfering with its structure.

Agatha also believed that Isabella "killed" the God's Stone.

Wendy's description was obviously made based on Agatha's conclusion.

Roland did not mind it. He still believed that the mineral vein of God's Stones was indeed dead objects. Whether an object could take in or push out magic power was not connected with whether it was dead or alive. The reason that they could not explain its working theory was that they knew too little, much like before the invention of the microscope, mankind knew nothing about the microworld.

In his eyes, enchantment was, in a manner of speaking, a kind of "conversion to God's Stone".

Of course, disregarding the theory, this ability was undoubtedly effective. According to the tests, it could take effects on targets as Magic Stones, Sigils, objects of enchantment, etc. Magic powers injected into them could be supplemented by itself, and create a circulation.

For instance, when Dawn I was fully injected with magic power, it could generate electricity for five consecutive days, but when Mystery Moon held Broken Sword, Dawn I's working time could be prolonged by 10 more days. No matter what, the magic power injected in the bronze stick was constantly running away and would not stay forever in an enchanted object.

That meant even if Mystery Moon's magic power could reach the same level as Anna's, it could only sustain a few more Dawn I at the same time. It could barely satisfy the needs for the factory's illumination and the equipment's operation, let alone be put to use on a larger scale.

And a Dawn I enchanted by Doris could absorb the ubiquitous magic powers to compensate for its magic power consumption, therefore keeping the magnetic poles working. Although its loss and gain of magic power were not entirely equal, the improvement was still astonishing for a short-term enchantment.

It meant Mystery Moon could be relieved from the maintenance work of energy charging and become an energy manufacturer.

It also meant that, besides the factories, many other places could get stable electricity supply.

At the same time, many enchantment abilities, which were originally of little value, would gain purpose.

Additionally, Agatha and Isabella could get a pile of test targets similar to God's Stones, which would greatly help their research on magic power.

As for the issues with enchantments, such as taking too long to take effect, low efficiency, magic power circulation could be broken off by God's Stones, etc, were nothing compared to the ability itself.

So no matter what, Roland needed to keep such a witch.

After thinking it over, he felt the only strategy that could work was the sugarcoated-bullet.

—after all, in the art of tempting people, he had found no one who could do better than himself.

As for the last witch, No.89 Slimwrist, she was just like her name.

She was the daughter of a jeweler and was born to be good at carving. She not only had slim wrists but also flexible fingers which enabled her to carve complex patterns. After her awakening, her gift was greatly improved. Not only could she carve much faster, but could also carve on anything.

On first glance, Anna could easily do that with her Blackfire, but she was a genius who had gone through two revolutions. Even in the Union, she was among the top Senior Witches, a completely different level than Slimwrist.

What Roland liked about Slimwrist was that she could take some workload off of Anna. Besides, there could never be too many precision manufacture practitioners. Back on the Sleeping Island, she could only be a top craftswoman polishing jewelry for nobles, but in Neverwinter, she could propel the advancement of society together with the other witches.

Chapter 946: The Payment Problem

Roland closed the notebook and gently sighed.

The arrival of numerous Sleeping Island witches would undoubtedly instill the industry of Neverwinter with immeasurable vitality, yet... a few intractable problems lied in front of him,

with the toughest one being the issue of payment.

Those witches belonged to Sleeping Spell. Theoretically, they were under the leadership of Tilly, so whether they were willing to be employed was totally up to themselves. Although Tilly's attitude toward him had greatly improved, it was still hard for him to back up his former promise and make use of his connection with Tilly to propel the witches forward.

That was to say the position planning in the notebook was only his own intentions for the witches. To what extent those intentions could be realized was dependent on the number of witches who were willing to join in the tides of production.

To instill them with slogans like "labor is glorious" or "labor changes fate" would bring little effect, yet to boast the idea of "fighting for our homeland" seemed less meaningful. After all, to them, the only place which could be called their home was Sleeping Island.

Roland believed that anyone would fall in love with this city and take it as his or her home after living here for a few years, but it was not the right time yet—naturally, a newcomer would be cautious and suspicious of a strange, new place. He could not wait for a few years to pass before developing the industry, so he had to offer intriguing payment.

Simply speaking, there must be a desire that propelled them to work.

Prior to this, Roland had asked Tilly about the witches' payment. In Sleeping Island, the bounty service the witches offered to the Fjords merchants or explorers were quite costly, most of which cost between tens to hundreds of gold royals. Although Tilly used that money for basic living materials, the witches still got paid according to a primitive quota allocation system. They lived a fairly poor life, but it did not mean they had not seen much money.

Besides, nowadays 30% of the profits made from the Chaos Drink trade was at Tilly's disposal. It was predictable that she would take a small portion of it to improve the witches' living standard. In other words, even if a witch who chose not to work would not starve to death and could live a better life than the one on the island.

So a few extra gold royals might not be enough to get their interest.

Besides the low payment, there could be the issue of comparison. Most of the witches in the Witch Union were paid with one to three gold royals per month. Why would the outsiders get better paid? Even if Roland raise their payment as well, there could also be a criticism. Some witches might ask "our payments have been kept at the same level for almost two years, why do we get a raise as soon as the Sleeping Island witches arrived? Do senior witches like us have to depend on the newbies to get a salary raise?"

Even though the union members would not put it that way, Roland would rather not take that path.

At this thought, he could not help but look at the girl resting on the lounge chair reading a picture-story book—Nightingale.

Nightingale must have felt his gaze and turned over to ask, "What's wrong?"

A perfect curve.

"No, now is not the time." Roland cleared his throat and asked, "How long have you been here?"

"Two years, 11 months, and 26 days." Nightingale sat up. "Why do you ask?"

So precise?

"If I remember correctly, your primary payment was two gold royals a month, right?"

"Ah, at the time," Nightingale showed an ambiguous smile and said, "that would be right. It was twice as Anna's payment. At first, I even refused it. Later under your repeated appeal, I, sort of, reluctantly agreed to be your guard."

"What appeal? You, after seeing Anna pass through her Day of Adulthood peacefully, went back to stop Cara but ended up having a falling out with her, then decided to stay!" Roland rolled his eyes internally. "But during your stay, have you felt that what you gain is not proportional to what you give, and at any point considered to leave?"

"What did you say?" The smile on her face froze and was replaced by a hint of anxiety. "Why...why would I leave?"

"No, it was just a figure of speech," realizing what he said could be easily misinterpreted, he hurriedly corrected himself. "The emphasis is the former half of my words. Are there witches who feel their payment is too low?"

After confirming that Roland was serious, Nightingale sighed in relief and flashed before his desk. "How is that possible? One gold royal is already half a year's income for a common person. We're not working harder than those workers, so our payment being 'out of proportion' is also out of the question. Besides,

even if we get a large amount of money, we wouldn't know how to spend it. After all, we don't need to worry about making a living, which was out of our imagination in the old days."

"Perhaps not every witch thinks so..."

"Why not!?! If you don't believe me, you can ask Wendy," Nightingale said confidently. "She knows our fellow witches better than I do."

"Alright," Roland shrugged and said, "I need her opinion on another matter anyway."

"What matter?" Nightingale asked curiously.

"It's a secret, but soon you'll know," Roland answered with a smile.

...

"Your Majesty, I've never thought that!" Unexpectedly, Wendy's response was even more intense. "Even without payment, I'd have done my best to build this place. I used to say that Neverwinter is the new Holy Mountain to the witches, and the other sisters are also serving you with the same expectation! If the City Hall is in a shortage of money, I'd like to give you the gold royals I've saved."

"Um... alright, I'm only collecting opinions." Suddenly, Roland felt very touched by her remarks. Touching his nose, he turned away his head and asked, "Is there anything you want in particular?"

"This..." Wendy was startled, and Nightingale began to quickly blink to her. "If you must ask, I feel... that... perhaps... if each one of us could get one more bottle of Chaos Drinks every month... that'll be great."

"Do you agree?" Roland looked at Nightingale.

"Is this some sort of wishing game?" Nightingale gently smiled. "Since we're asked to freely express our wishes, I think two more bottles would be better."

"No doubt." He then had a rough framework of the reform of the witches' payment.

If there were things more valuable than money, it would be the things that money could not buy. Evelyn's Complex Wine House was often visited by some witches, but its high pricing kept most of the witches out. They turned to the cheaper fruit wine—not because they could not afford visiting Evelyn's wine house, but their consumption stopped them from spending a large amount of gold royals on such luxuries.

Besides, the Chaos Drinks sold in the wine house were all old varieties. Their low sales made it very hard to replace the inventory, and their freshness could not be compared with the new products released each month.

What if I just change the Chaos Drinks from a welfare item to a special item to be purchased?

One can call it a points system or a dual currency system. But to entice the witches to work by rewarding them with something gold royals can't buy, won't it make the work itself more attractive? At the same time, it could perfectly avoid the witches' sense of unevenness brought by raising the payment.

Besides the Chaos Drinks, Roland had many more ideas for special items that could be purchased, which could maintain their own attractiveness and at the same time not to be imitated by any other companies.

Want it? Work hard!

Chapter 947: Return of the Eastern Front Army

After solving the payment problem, Roland planned to break through another wall on the road of development.

This was to formulate standard units.

The universal education in Neverwinter had taken millimeter, centimeter, meter, kilometer, and some other distance units into the textbook, replacing the original distance units such as inch, foot, yard, and so on. So far, it was quite effective. The measuring instruments produced according to the new units, due to their high precision, had been universally acknowledged in construction and industrial production departments.

The benchmark prototype for centimeter, namely an iron bar as wide as Roland's nail, was stored in the study of the castle.

What he wanted to do next was integrate the other units and popularize them in the entire Kingdom of Graycastle.

The reason that he waited for long to do so was that the early levels of production and education did not urgently require new units, and the technique for the units' popularization was not mature enough.

After all, to merely have standards was meaningless. If they could not be produced by measuring instruments, people could not use them in practical life.

For now, none of these things were a problem anymore.

For example, he defined the volume of a vessel of one cubic decimeter as one liter, the weight of one cubic decimeter of water as one kilogram, and a one-meter long pendulum's swing at a period of one second... Hummingbird could precisely replicate the vessels for one kilogram and the pendulum could be used for time. With the prototypes and models, factories in Neverwinter could produce numerous replicas.

Or Anna would have to take care of all the production of measuring equipment, which was a waste of time and effort.

When the industrial technology reached a certain level, the popularization of more precise measuring units would become inevitable and smooth.

Roland did not worry that those standards might not be "pure" enough. In fact, those prototypes in human history had always been under improvement with the advancement of times.

...

Three days later, Iron Axe, leading the Eastern Front Army, finally returned to Neverwinter. Arriving with him was Echo, who had spent almost half a year in the Port of Clearwater.

Looking at the two Mojins reporting into him in front of his desk, Roland was overwhelmed with emotions. The two of them had been exiled criminals—one of them with a concealed identity and hunted for a living in Border Town; the other was sold as a slave and lived a dangerous life. But now, they had become indispensable members of Neverwinter.

Having shouldered the heavy responsibility of commanding an army all by himself and working busily for months, Iron Axe showed no trace of fatigue, but rather appeared perfectly fine. His gestures and expressions exuded the qualities of a senior general. Echo had changed more dramatically. The influence her slavery life had faded away and her blue-grey eyes radiated confidence. Her temperament matched better with her status as the chief of Osha.

It seems experience can indeed change a person.

Echo's report was quite simple. The Wildflame Clan stuck to the agreement and the first batch of migrants had been stationed at the Port of Clearwater. Affected by the choice of the first clan in Iron Sand City, a few relatively smaller clans came up to her and expressed their wishes of serving the chief. The entire plan was carried out quite smoothly. After receiving all the people from those clans, the emigrant population in the Port of Clearwater was estimated to reach 30,000 at the end of the year, a number which could compare favorably with that of the old king's city.

She also brought a letter from Spear, the ruler of Fallen Dragon Ridge. Without reading it, Roland was sure it was a request for more labor and food.

"Spear said that as she was only a manager of a small manor, she lacked the experience of taking care of so many people, and she was quite bruised and battered." Echo said, imitating Spear's tone, "Although the skilled hands in the City Hall were good at work, according to their suggestions, there had to be two to three hundred more clerks to help those migrants settle down. If Your Majesty doesn't kindly take more care of her, she said she had the impulse to shrug off her burden and run off to Neverwinter to become a common witch."

Roland could not help, but laugh. "Who said a common witch is idle. Soraya and Leaf will be watching you. How could you be worthy of such a useful ability as magic power channel if you don't exhaust it every day?" Roland thought to himself. "I see. I'll dispatch her more officials from the next batch after they had been approved. You must be tired after this mission. Rest for a few days."

"Yes." Echo bowed and then asked, full of expectation, "Your Majesty, have you been... composing recently?"

"Um...have you learned all the other songs?"

"Yes... they all have good effects, especially when inspiring people," Echo replied with a smile. "When I'm confused, I often sing the songs you taught me. If not for those songs, I might not have lasted till this day."

It seems to coordinate relationships among the clans and maintaining order in the Southern Territory isn't as easy as she reported. It's just she bears the difficulties and setbacks all by herself.

"I see," Roland said slowly. "I'll have someone write down the new songs and send them to your room."

Echo bowed deeply. "Great. Thank you."

No matter how bad he was at composing, he could always rummage through the Dream World. After all, he could never refuse such a request.

After Echo left, Roland looked at Iron Axe.

"It's been a hard task."

"It's okay, Your Majesty," Iron Axe bowed and said hurriedly. "It's an honor to fight for you. I don't find it hard, on the contrary, I enjoy it."

"Really?" Roland smiled, without giving his opinions. "What happened to the nobles who escaped to Seawindshire? You didn't burn them, did you?"

"I wanted to, but they ran too fast," Iron Axe said seriously. "After the First Army finished clearing Valencia and arrived at Seawindshire, the suburb had become a piece of wasteland. Other than that, several granaries in the downtown area caught on fire. Obviously, the nobles would rather ruin the city than hand it over to you in one piece."

"That must have been the last revenge from the rebel king's remnants," Roland thought to himself. "If the Eastern Front Army hadn't had sufficient preparations and the dozens of cement carriers that kept on transporting supplies day and night, this battle would have stopped there because the hungry city dwellers would have robbed from the First Army. As soon as the army suppressed them with violence, restoring order would be out of the question."

"Where did they escape to?"

"Some went to Fjords, others went to the other three kingdoms," Iron Axe said with regret.

"Unfortunately the First Army was not equipped with ships, otherwise there was no way I'd let them go."

"Don't worry. As long as they dare to use their original family names, I'll clear them away sooner or later," Roland said slowly. At least the batch that fled to the Kingdom of Dawn were none better than flies throwing themselves into the net. They probably were Timothy's last loyal followers. Roland did not worry that they might come back. The reason he wanted to remove them once and for all was that they gave him a headache.

After inquiring about the rehabilitative measures in the Eastern Region, Roland suddenly remembered something he had doubted awhile ago.

"Right, and luring the nobles to prison then setting it on fire... did you come up with this idea?"

Iron Axe's expression instantly froze.

Chapter 948: Unexpected Punishment

"Your Majesty, I..."

To Roland's surprise, the latter did not immediately divulge his reply as he would normally do, and seemed somewhat hesitant. It was rare to see the First Army's commander-in-chief behaving like this.

Roland had simply asked the question casually, but he now grew in interest. He had expected Iron Axe to get worked up over this - after all, the punishment for complete responsibility in the matter could include death by burning or hanging. He was, however, curious because the latter had not violated his orders in any reasonable sense, and thus there was surely another explanation for the latter's uncertainty.

However, he did not press on with his charge, and instead leaned back in his chair awaiting the Mojin's reply.

After much contemplation, Iron Axe suddenly knelt down and replied, "No, Your Majesty... though it was Miss Edith who planned the elimination of the enemy's nobles, it was I who carried out the plan, and thus I'm wholly responsible."

"Edith?" Roland was taken aback. "Could this have been planned by the Adviser Department?" Having not seen anything related to this in the submitted proposal, he wondered if this was arranged in secret.

On second thought, he realized why the latter was being hesitant.

In the present era of mercenaries, any military-related affair was considered to be the exclusive concern of the lord, and was extremely sensitive to intervention from outsiders. If the matter took place in another noble's territory, the clandestine agitator would certainly be punished. Iron Axe appeared diffident because he did not want to implicate Edith, yet had no intention to lie.

"From my understanding, you handled the affairs on the Eastern Front very well. The city hall will soon determine your reward amount based on the battle results. You may go for now."

Iron Axe was stunned. "Your Majesty, you won't punish me?"

Roland could not help laughing. "Why? What have you done wrong?"

"Um..."

"My orders were to purge the rebels in the Eastern Region and bring those cities under my rule. You were entitled to act according to circumstances," Roland explained. "If you listened in on two of your soldiers having a strategy discussion in the barracks and decided to adopt their ideas, do I have to punish you and these two soldiers? Edith is a member of the Adviser Department after all, and it's normal for her to have thoughts on strategy."

"So... Your Majesty, you don't think either of us did any wrong in this matter?" Iron Axe lifted his head.

"I didn't say so." Roland shrugged his shoulders. "Just because you're fine doesn't mean that Edith won't have anything to answer for, but that has nothing to do with you. Go back and have a good rest."

Iron Axe opened his mouth as if he was about to say something, but instead he just stared on and decided to obey orders. "Yes, Your Majesty."

After the commander-in-chief of the First Army left, Roland immediately got on the hotline to the city hall. "Inform Edith to come to the castle."

Less than 10 minutes later, the Pearl of the Northern Region arrived at the doorstep of his office.

"Your Majesty, I'm responsible for this matter," Edith spoke without prompt. "I'll accept whatever punishment you impose."

Roland looked at her amusedly. "I haven't opened my mouth and you already know what I'm going to say?"

"When the Eastern Front Army returned to Neverwinter, the first person you would summon was certain to be Iron Axe. If he hadn't reported to you the burning of the nobles, I doubt you would summon me this soon."

"It's always easy to talk to smart people." Roland thought. Her frank manner even made him feel that she was a loyal subordinate who was being wronged.

However, at times, the smarter the person, the more prone they are to getting trapped in a self-created cul-de-sac.

"From the start, it was I who asked him to do this. It simply isn't his style to dupe the nobles together and pass it off as a fire scene. That aside, since you feel that you're responsible, where do you think the problem lies in?"

"I arranged to meet the First Army commander in an unofficial setting without asking for your permission..."

"Wrong." Roland swiftly interrupted her. "Your problem's that you violated the Adviser Department's rules, which state that any battle plan must be recorded on paper and submitted to me for review."

Edith had clearly not expected him to say this, and her eyes widened involuntarily. "Your Majesty?"

"Is that not so?"

"But...", she said with a puzzled look, "this operation was carried out in Your Majesty's name. Won't the other officials see it as something you did?"

"You're not wrong." Roland smiled slightly. "Is there an issue with that?"

"Actually..." Like Iron Axe earlier, Edith displayed a rarely-seen look of confusion. "They may be rebels, but... they're also nobles. To other nobles, your actions could..."

"I know what you're saying." Roland shrugged. "But if I'm not able to handle the backlash, do you think you can?"

"I..."

"Relax, it's fine. Let me ask you, do you think it's right for me to scapegoat my subordinates when an issue arises?"

"Scapegoat?"

"Ahem, that means to shirk my responsibilities," Roland explained. "This matter was clearly done on behalf of the Kingdom of Graycastle, yet you face death instead of glory. If I feel justified to approve of that, do you think those officials will remain wholly loyal to me?"

Edith kept quiet.

"As the king, I'm the most suitable person to take responsibility. Only this way will the subordinates be able to work without burden. This is also why I have to review the Adviser Department's final plans, in case it's something I'm not well-versed in, understand?"

After quite a while, the Pearl of the Northern Region finally nodded and replied, "I was too self-important."

"For violating the rules, your contributions towards this double offensive shan't be recognized, which would otherwise have got you a promotion." Roland took a sip of his tea. "This matter shall now be closed. You may go now."

"Yes, Your Majesty. Please allow me to take my leave." Edith bowed respectfully.

"So... what you did was all for nothing?" Cole Kant carefully placed a plate of honey-glazed mushrooms in front of Edith and watched as she viciously stuck her fork into the mushroom slices. "Your colleagues were all able to obtain promotion, but not you?"

"Yes, only me." She munched loudly on the brownish Bird Beak Mushrooms as if to vent her discontent upon the dinner. "Listen to what His Majesty had to say, 'If I'm not able to handle the backlash, do you think you can?' It was so unbearable that I need an outlet right now. Of course, I wouldn't have done what I did if His Majesty was more like my father. But knowing that he wouldn't ignore this, I felt that it wouldn't be a bad investment and that the risks were manageable. Yet, he dismissed everything I did in a few sentences, and even griped that I think too much. Is it really so naive to be an idealist?"

"Uh... Elder Sister, are you angry?" Cole wiped the sweat off his forehead.

"What, you can't tell?" Edith glowered at him.

The latter shrunk his neck hastily. This was the first time he saw his elder sister display such an expression during a non-ceremonial occasion. Having lived together for more than 10 years, Cole was familiar with her great love for power. If, as she put it, she had just lost an opportunity for promotion, it would be normal for her to be annoyed or disappointed. But... her expression informed him otherwise. It seemed more like a... strange smile mixed with anger.

Unless he misunderstood, this sort of grumble was usually called pouting.

"Gosh... ", as he thought about this, Cole could not help letting out a shudder. Who knew that the Pearl of the Northern Region, who's usually a face of indifference or cunning affection, could smile displeasably? And, unlike during the banquet when it was deliberate, she seemed to be completely unaware of her present expression. Was this really the Edith Kant he knew?

"Uh?" Having not received a reply for some time, Edith sharply squinted her eyes.

Cole suddenly felt the hair on his back raise. "No, there's no doubt she's my sister." "I just think... maybe His Majesty has his own considerations?"

"As he wishes." Edith placed the last mushroom in her mouth. "I just wonder how far an idealist can go. But..."

"What?" Cole faintly sensed a bad premonition.

"But my unhappiness is real." Edith perked her thin lips. "You shall be my punching bag in the meantime."

Chapter 949: The Future of Witches

The new Sleeping Spell was not just a single building, but a residential district of nearly 7000 square meters.

As a key construction zone, it was not only equipped with water and heat supply, but the buildings were four-story frame houses that utilized the fully-tested concrete-pouring technology. The interior plan was exactly the same as that of the Witch Building.

Apart from that, Roland also established in the middle of the neighborhood a two-story conference hall for the Sleeping Island witches to organize activities.

On the first night that migrants arrived in Neverwinter, their welcome banquet was conducted here. And now, half a month later, the hall was once again packed full of witches.

Under the gaze of the audience, Tilly walked on to the podium and announced the recruitment order from Roland Wimbledon, as well as a brand-new salary system.

"... Work arrangements will be like this. 30% of the revenue brought in by witches shall be granted to the Sleeping Spell. This money will be used to improve everyone's lives, expand the scale of the district, and for other necessities," she spoke fervently with a slight smile. "It may seem, on first impression, that I've been undercut by my elder brother. After all, you may know that when we were in Sleeping Island, we collected all of the commission paid by the Fjords' merchants, but in reality, they took the opportunity to put forth several conditions, such as making sure we purchased their grains and products at high prices, and thus the money we obtained at the end of the day was heavily reduced. There aren't as many strings attached over here."

"This amount that Roland is offering will certainly exceed our income in Sleeping Island. Plus, the work will generally require nothing except magic power, and there won't be any excursions to dangerous places. Hence, our work lives will be much easier. On comparison, it's clear that I didn't get undercut, and I can even be said to be the one taking advantage instead."

Her words induced soft bursts of laughter from the listening crowd.

"But!" Tilly abruptly raised her voice. "There's more reward which I haven't mentioned. In the past, no matter how much money we received from the Fjords' merchants, the money had to be pooled because of how destitute Sleeping Spell was. In the end, the only things handed out to everyone were bread, cotton, and other such common things."

"But now, everyone will receive substantial rewards and not a bunch of intangible numbers. It'll be up to each person to decide how these rewards are used. Please open the envelopes on your tables now."

Molly had long noticed the envelope marked with a Graycastle High Tower stamp but had held off from touching it. She wasted no time tearing it open at the instant Lady Tilly made the request.

"Is this... Gwent, the new card game?" Shadow, who was sat beside Molly, bent her head over curiously.

"Take a look at your own." Molly turned her body sideways to block the latter's sight.

"Gee."

The envelope contained a palm-size paper which could not be any more glossy on appearance, yet that felt uneven on touch. Although it could be bent easily, it did not leave creases like normal paper.

Molly knew she liked the paper from her first sight of it.

It was, quite simply, a work of art.

Although it was much alike the Gwent cards which were popular within the Witch Union, she could tell the difference between them. It was extremely exquisite in design; the patterns on it were not just gorgeous and colorful, but also highly intricate, as if the lines were drawn using threads of hair. More than simply filling up space, they formed a variety of images and words.

For instance, on the front side of the paper was a High Tower and Spears emblem, while the rear side displayed a high mountain being shone on by the rising sun. Under each image were written the captions "Issued by the Graycastle Royalty" and "For exclusive use by witches", while the four corners of the paper were inscribed with three "10"s and an unknown symbol.

The thing that Molly was fond of was that the images on both sides would reflect golden light when the paper was rotated slightly, as if the patterns were lined with gold.

"Uh... I guess it isn't a Gwent card." Shadow had also discovered the paper's uniqueness. "I remember that the numbers on the cards were all on the same side."

"Is this a gift from His Majesty Roland?"

"But Lady Tilly clearly said that this is a reward."

"Oh... yours is the same as mine?" Orbit came over from the other side of the hall and joined in the conversation.

"Everyone's should be the same."

"What does this symbol mean?"

"Not sure, but I seem to have seen it somewhere..."

A flurry of whispering voices emerged in the conference hall. The witches were all fascinated by these lovely pieces of paper they had just obtained. It was only when Lady Tilly began to speak again that the discussions abated.

"The thing you're holding is called a note. It has the same function as coins, the difference being that this type of note is only given to witches and can only be used by witches."

"Lady Tilly, you mean that it's a gold royal made of paper?" Someone asked.

"You may understand it that way. But it can be used to buy certain things which are hard to purchase with gold royals." Tilly nodded. "For example, the 10 yuan note that everyone's holding can be used to obtain a full bottle of Chaos Drink or five servings of strawberry ice cream in the Castle District."

Molly began to salivate irresistibly.

She still fondly remembered the few types of delicacy she tasted at the welcome banquet; they were above anything she had ever imagined. In particular, the latter's rich pink color, soft texture, and luscious flavor seemed to bring together the finest descriptions she could conceive of. When compared to it, the salty fish soup of the Fjord Islands could not even be called food.

And now, this beautiful piece of paper could be used to redeem a whopping five portions of the delicacy she could never forget.

Judging from the fervent reaction of the crowd, she was not the only one who was hugely excited about this.

"And, of course, there'll be more than just food to redeem, such as things to wear and use. Any new goods produced in Neverwinter will be first available in the Castle District's shops." Tilly continued aloud. "To put it simply, notes will be your reward for responding to this recruitment drive. The amount that you receive will also be adjusted according to your number of working hours. I should, however, point out that it isn't a living necessity. Even those who choose not to work will be well looked after. It can more accurately be seen as a prize that adds a little extra to life. Thus, whether or not to accept recruitment shall be left to each one of you to decide."

Surprisingly, a boisterous discussion did not ensue. All of the witches continued to place their attention on Lady Tilly, perhaps knowing that their leader had more to say.

"But, my sisters, this matter isn't only about enjoyment." Tilly slowed her tone. "Remember the unfair treatment we faced after our awakenings? At that time, most of us had the same thought - that it would be good enough for there to be a place where witches may live together with normal people."

After a short pause, she continued in an assertive tone. "So, this concerns the future of all our sisters. There won't be a better opportunity to allow more people to understand us."

Chapter 950: The Art of Persuasion

Molly nodded her head heartfully.

In the past month, she had been deeply touched by the Neverwinter citizens' attitude towards witches. They acted neither overly familiar nor discriminatory, and instead seemed a mix of curiosity and accustomedness.

While strolling around the Harbor District a few days prior, she saw a fierce gust of wind blow down a pile of empty wooden crates on the pier. Her subconscious reaction was to summon her magic servant to catch the falling crates. Instead of screaming and fleeing, the working crowd expressed their great interest in the transparent and legless giant.

This was an experience Molly never had before. Even the migrants on Sleeping Island had never been so close to witches. Although they abided by Her Highness Tilly's command on the surface, they still considered witches to be a different species from themselves. The customary practice of most Fjord islanders was to maintain a respectful distance - only the explorers and some merchants did not mind the powers that the witches possessed.

This was not to mention how terrible the situation was on the continent where the Church had had deep influence.

The first time Lotus brought home news from the Western Region, Molly only half-believed it. Only when she personally came over did she discover that Lotus' stories merely scratched the surface.

Now, she felt a glimmer of envy seeing Lotus leading a large number of people up and down the tall buildings, Evelyn running a perpetually bustling tavern, and Candle, who used to be seen as useless, being warmly welcomed by the factory workers.

It was only because Molly did not want to disturb Her Highness Tilly that she had not actively sought employment.

She was never one to remain idle, even when in Sleeping Island.

"And, let's not forget that we still have the biggest enemy to take care of - the demons." Tilly looked around the audience. "All of you already know what the Battle of Divine Will means - even the Church of Hermes is nothing compared to them, and therefore, work shouldn't only be for your own enjoyment. Every note represents your contribution to Neverwinter and the entire human world. This brings glory to the witches as a whole because through this, we can prove to the world that witches are an indispensable and decisive part of the human race!" She raised her right hand with her fist clenched. "Sisters who accept recruitment, please walk up on stage now..."

...

"Out of 86 jobs, 69 have received responses. This is a fairly good result." Tilly handed the name list to Wendy after the meeting was over. "And most of the non-repliers are just hesitant. I believe that more will accept recruitment after some time."

"It's more than just fairly good," Wendy quipped excitedly, "This is way beyond His Majesty's expectation."

"Oh?" Tilly seemed curious. "How many did he guess?"

Wendy laughed and extended three fingers.

"30?" Tilly became somewhat peeved. "He belittles the Sleeping Spell way too much."

"Rather than saying that he underestimated the witches' enthusiasm, you can claim credit for it." Wendy dropped her smile and bowed earnestly towards Tilly. "Your Highness, your last statement wasn't necessary."

If it was a normal recruitment talk, 30 people might already have been an optimistic prediction. It was Tilly's rhetoric about working for the sake of all sisters and bringing glory to witches which moved the majority of the crowd. As the former custodian of the Witch Cooperation Association, Wendy naturally understood what her compatriots most lacked in aside from a stable home: recognition from other people.

After all, having lived as normal people for more than 10 years of their lives, it was not easy for them to cut clean from their past.

"The way I spoke during the meeting was also for my own sake." Tilly smiled and shook her head. "Roland has allowed me to see a wide range of interesting things and understand what an incredible city this is. If we lose the Battle of Divine Will, all of these will disappear, and thus I have to put in effort so that I'll be able to see more wonderful stuff. It's wise to cuddle together for warmth before doomsday winter arrives, right?"

"... Your Highness is right." Wendy began to laugh.

"It's a pity that not everyone agrees with me." Tilly shrugged her shoulders resignedly. "Like the Eastern Region witches, who may never accept recruitment even until the end."

"Your Highness, you mean the small group led by Azima?" Wendy asked puzzledly. "If she doesn't get along with you, why did she go with you to the Fjords?"

"It didn't start out this way." Tilly let out a sigh. "Before they arrived in Sleeping Island, they'd already become acquainted with Bloodfang Association. The latter assisted them many times to fight off the church's chasing army during the escape, and therefore Azima and her people came to trust Heidi Morgan. This was nothing at first, but later on, when tensions broke out between Bloodfang Association and Sleeping Spell, our relationship fractured."

"So that's what happened..."

"And when I fought against Heidi without informing everyone, I incurred even more of Azima's disgust. I thus consented when they asked to leave Sleeping Island on Sleeping Beauty." Tilly continued slowly. "In fact, if Scroll hadn't dissuaded them, they probably wouldn't have remained in Neverwinter."

"That's not your fault," Wendy said consolingly. "Heidi Morgan deserved it for deceiving the Wolfheart witches."

"But she'd certainly helped Azima." Tilly seemed disinterested in pondering any further over this issue. "If I was in their place, I would probably be peeved as well. They aren't bad people at heart."

"Oh..." Wendy remained silent for a brief moment. "I may have a way of persuading them, but..."

"But what...?"

"It may cause them to break away from Sleeping Spell."

"That'll be no different from how it is now." Tilly replied without any misgivings. "If your idea can benefit Roland and them, go ahead."

"Is this... really okay?" Doris revealed a worried look upon returning to her residential building. "We've already offended Lady Tilly. If we refuse the lord's employment this time and thus further displease her, we might..."

These words received agreement from several other Eastern Region witches.

"I think Doris is right. Roland Wimbledon isn't a typical lord, and is currently the king of Graycastle. Even if we manage to return to the Eastern Region, it's also his territory."

"Plus we aren't combat witches. If they use force against us, we won't have any ability to resist."

"Come on. Even if we fight, how can we beat a lunatic like Ashes? I dare bet that she has long disliked us."

"Actually... I feel that the Witch Union has treated us pretty well."

"Forget about it. They'll certainly side with the king over this. It would be good enough of them if they don't help His Majesty to arrest us."

"Hold your tongues." Azima cut short the ongoing arguments. "Roland Wimbledon would never use hard methods, or else the image he has built up would be completely undone. If we accept the recruitment order, what would all our earlier persistence be for? We'll be forced to rely on Sleeping Spell in the end. To outsiders, we'll be no different from the other witches."

She said these words with some reservation. In all honesty, the Witch Union had, for the past half a month, provided them with assistance instead of the expected oppression, and treated them as equals. The witch named Wendy even came several times to discuss this matter with her. In fact, Wendy's friendly attitude caused her to feel a long-lost sense of home.

However, Azima knew that she had to continue acting indifferent. She forebode that once she relented, it would become difficult to pull away from the Sleeping Spell ever after.

Right at this moment, someone knocked on the main door of the building.

"Who's it?" She turned her head with some annoyance.

"It's me, Wendy." A familiarly gentle and calm voice was heard from outside. "Miss Azima, I have something to discuss with you."